Reconsidering Theoretical Approaches to New Religious Movements and their Surrounding Phenomena

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Note of Thanks

This dissertation wouldn't have been completed without the help and motivation of my colleagues, friends, and family, who constantly pushed me over the last few years. Of them, I feel it is necessary to mention some by name. First, of course, I want to thank my supervisor, András Máté-Tóth, who provided me with all the creative liberty I could dream of, alongside an abundance of inspiration and professional rigor. I'm incredibly thankful for your sometimes strict 'reorientations.' Your words kept me close to the original 'red thread of thought' we agreed on in my first year. I'm incredibly grateful you took me under your wing after that less-than-optimal entry discussion five years ago. I'm similarly thankful for all the assistance I received this past half a year from my Italian colleagues at CESNUR. The research period in Torino was a life-changing experience, and I hope to return to this fantastic research center soon. I also owe to all members and representatives of the NRMs I have encountered in these past years. Furthermore, I need to mention two scholars who significantly impacted my studies and early career: Carole Cusack and Donald Westbrook. My dear colleagues, your personal insights, immense knowledge, academic dedication, and open-mindedness showed me how high the bar is and how far I still need to go. Last but certainly not least, I'm grateful for all the patience, interest, and inspiration I received from my family and my wife. Thank you for enduring all my struggles and constantly supporting and reminding me to stay motivated when I lost my drive. With your help, I have learned that any obstacle can be overcome with appropriate time, planning, and dedication.

Dedication

Between my departmental and doctoral defense, I have lost a colleague who played a key role in realizing this work. As such, I wish to dedicate my dissertation to the memory of the former director of CESNUR, PierLuigi Zoccatelli (1965-2024).

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Setting Course

Over the last sixty years, the field of new religions studies has made tremendous strides in establishing itself as a recognized academic specialization. The abundance of thematical research (Beckford & Richardson, 1983, pp. 11–135; Bromley & Robbins, 1993, pp. 107–125), several handbooks and encyclopedias (Chryssides, 2001; Hammer & Rothstein, 2012; Lewis, 2004; Woodhead, 2001), comprehensive thematical volumes and series about the NRMs and related phenomena[1] all contributed to this process, further fueling an already steady production of case studies, reviews, critical- and debate articles in dedicated journals[2] and other professional channels.[3] The field has also demonstrated intensive global involvement (Lucas & Robbins, 2004) with ever more active academic discourse about novel approaches of individual scholars (Gallagher, 2007, pp. 273–290), findings of international research groups, and integration of theories from supplementary sciences (Antes et al., 2005; Aupers & Houtman, 2010; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Besides the extensive scholarly research – and in the past three decades, even university curricula[4] striving to tackle modern-, postmodern-, contemporary-, or emergent religiosity's developing paradigms and surrounding elements, such as "conspirituality" (Butter & Knight, 2020; Dyrendal et al., 2019; Piraino et al., 2022), new social movements with religious ferment (Cnaan & Milofsky, 2018), alternative- and New Age movements and

[1] Just a few of these endeavors without any particular order: Cresswell and Wilson (2012); Dawson (2001); Laycock (2022); Lucas and Robbins (2004); Saliba (2003, 2007)

[2] Such as *Nova Religio*, Equinox's *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, *Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies*, *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, *The Journal of CESNUR*, etc.

[3] Specialized events, such as the CESNUR and ISSNR conferences, the INFORM seminars, and specialized workshops at certain universities (such as Baylor University, Sidney University, the University of Turin, and the King's College in London just to name a few).

[4] Just a few universities, without any particular order, offering study tracks or dedicated programs for studying new religiosity and surrogate issues: University of Sidney, University of California, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Linköping University, Baylor University, Virginia Commonwealth University, East Tennessee State University, Syracuse University, Wilfrid Laurier University, The University of Findlay, University of Kansas, University of Washington, and last but not least the University of Szeged, which is the only university that offers such courses with the highest professional standards in Hungary.

contemporary spirituality (Gallagher & Ashcraft, 2006; Luck, 2016; Urban, 2015) – there are several academic- and non-governmental organizations whose purpose is to inform, educate, and aid lawmakers, public figures, and journalists seeking further information about these complex phenomena. Such prominent centers of excellence, like the UK-based Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM),[5] the *Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni* (CESNUR)[6] in Torino, Italy, the Berlin-based *Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* (EZW)[7] or the Marburg-based Religi*onswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst e.V.* (REMID)[8] function not just as bridges between academia and political- or public institutions, but as valuable and credible sources of information for concerned individuals from the general population, who have encountered with such peculiar movements. Furthermore, with the subject's refusal to "break up and disappear" or "dissolve over time" – as some early scholars might have presumed – the topic and questions concerning new religiosity remain an essential and abundant source for researchers. Stepping into the 24th year of this new millennium, scholars are still called to observe and analyze these intriguing formations and provide novel perspectives for understanding their functions, place, and significance in our contemporary society. This dissertation aims to join to such novel approaches and meaningfully contribute to Hungarian and international scholarship. By applying Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach to new religiosity and its surrounding phenomena, I aim to integrate Smart's invaluable perspectives into the field of new religions studies.[9] Moreover, by

[5] https://inform.ac/ Accessed: 2023.09.12.
[6] https://www.cesnur.org/ Accessed: 2023.09.12.
[7] https://www.ezw-berlin.de/ Accessed: 2023.09.12.
[8] https://www.remid.de Accessed: 2023.09.12.
[9] As Ursula King notes in the Encyclopedia of Religion, Ninian Smart (1927– 2001) is one of the most influential scholars of religion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (King (2005, pp. 8442–8445)). Born in a Scottish scholarly dynasty, Smart quickly followed in his parent's footsteps in academia, although in quite a different field. He joined the British Army Intelligence Corps (1945–1948), during which he studied Cantonese and familiarized himself with Eastern religious traditions at the School of Oriental and African Studies,

modifying and improving Smart's system – where it is required – I strive to incorporate new religiosity into phenomenology of religions' field of interest more intensely. My aim with this effort is to highlight the phenomenological and structural similarities between 'new' and the so-called 'traditional' religiosity and point out that the two subjects, which are most frequently separated in the scholarship, might not be so different from each other under the lens of Smart's phenomenological seven dimensions of religion.

Introduction – The Structure and Aims of the Dissertation

Before discussing the structure of the dissertation, it is necessary to overview a series of paradigms to advance to the subject at hand, which is integrating new religiosity into Smart's phenomenological framework. By revisiting these paradigms and landmark debates about new religions studies – such as the early terminological and definitional issues, the incorporation- and parallel isolation of particular methodologies, the early transdisciplinary initiatives, and the field's interconnected history with both anti-cultism and cultic studies – I will adequately set the frameworks in which my research has commenced almost five years ago. The guiding principles articulated in the first chapter will be essential for me to arrive at the dissertation's second half. This part will introduce a revised framework based on the life work of the well-

University of London. After the Second World War, he joined Queen's College in Oxford and combined his knowledge with expertise in classics, ancient history, and philosophy. During his academic career, he taught at several esteemed institutions, such as the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1952–1956), the King's College, London University (1956–1961), Birmingham University (1961–1967), Lancaster University (1967-1982), University of California, Santa Barbara (1976-1998). Over the span of his prolific career, he published several of his lecture series (Smart (1968, 1981, 1987, 2016)) and created paradigm-setting works (Smart (1973, 1976, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2009)). During his time at Lancaster University, he first introduced a new approach: "a phenomenologically grounded, multidisciplinary, cross-cultural approach to the comparative study of religious traditions ancient and modern, what he later called the study of 'worldviews' and 'ideologies.'" (King (2005, p. 8443)). His approach and significance cannot be better described but with the following quotation from Christopher Buck: "the study of religion is necessarily "polymethodic" – whereby linguistic, historical, and philosophical approaches are complemented by methods drawn from the social sciences and psychology. One of, if not the greatest of, his [Smart's] contributions was his multidimensional framework of analysis for the study of religion" (Buck (2018, p. 274)).

established Scottish scholar Ninian Smart. Here, a modified version of his phenomenological framework will be utilized as a 'seven-lensed binocular' or 'microscope' (depending on the scope of my examination) through which I will examine numerous different yet structurally similar objects. The seven-lensed 'tool' I borrowed and modified from Smart will show a more detailed and dynamic image of the subject at hand, contemporary new religiosity, and the meaning systems in which these new formations exist. Utilizing this versatile tool allows me to expand the previously closed disciplinary horizons and invite the results of sub-disciplines that may not have had the opportunity to engage in dialogue about new religiosity. By incorporating Smart's seven-directional angle while preserving valuable prior achievements, I aim to improve the general understanding of what "lived religiosity" – whether it is new or not (Melton, 1997) – might be in the contemporary age. Moreover, with this approach, I will also have a chance to shed light on how those movements, the scholarship usually refers to under the umbrella term of new religious movements (or NRMs) may change and develop over time through the effects of global consumer pluralism, rapid technological innovation, cultural exchange, and internal organic developments (such as aging, schisms, internal power struggles, the death of previous leadership, etc.).

To allocate appropriate attention to all these issues, I have sectioned my dissertation into four major chapters and several brief outlooks – each discussing the same issues from different angles and with disparate focus. While smaller outlooks about surrounding issues will be beneficial for understanding the 'bigger picture,' the four major chapters (respectively titled "Introduction," "Transdisciplinary Perspectives," "Adaptation," and "Dynamic Utilization") will discuss the interconnected theories about the settings and possible methods of approaching contemporary new religiosity from a wider, transdisciplinary and cross-cultural angle. At the end of each major chapter, I will reflect on what I crossed through while outlining significant statements and reflecting on the issues I have intentionally left out from my examination.

The first significant chapter will explore new religiosity's emergence from a historical, philosophical, and socio-cultural angle. In these parts, I will elaborate on numerous theoretical pillars on which this dissertation stands. The first examination will utilize a primarily historical angle, dissecting the settings of the crisis of prior- and the emergence of new 'meaning systems' in contemporary societies, with a special focus on the 1960s United States (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 9–28; Rochford Jr., 2007, pp. 159–186). I initiate my dissertation from this starting point of crisis and interpret the coping mechanisms against the emerging 'spiritual homelessness' (Berger et al., 1974, pp. 163–180) – a unique trait of the acceleratingly developing postmodern globalizing society. The section that follows will conduct a theoretical investigation about 'intensity' in new religiosity. Here, I will argue that most NRMs and surrounding phenomena offer novel and more effective cultural- and ontological-orienting complexes for those involved in battling against the loss of former identity components and meanings – which were hollowed out or became valueless in the postmodern reality. In my interpretation, these new complexes may serve as more flexible yet stable replacers – or, in some cases, temporal placeholders – for previous similar structures that have either become voided or turned into overly institutionalized and, therefore, rigid structures in traditional and historical religiosity. Based on this notion, I will state my first key argument: by fulfilling particular socio-economical needs, new religious movements have successfully found their place in the "*religious marketplace*" (Bainbridge, 2003, pp. 89–124; Olson et al., 2020, pp. 227–246), eventually allowing them to establish a stable basis in most democratic societies.[10]

[10] Restrictive or biased state policies regularly hinder these processes; thus, the success of NRMs is closely connected to political structures. In liberal democracies, where religious freedom and freedom of expression are not limited (or only minimally restricted), NRMs may thrive, while in illiberal democracies (such as in Hungary, Serbia, etc.) or dictatorships (Russia, Belarus, China), their presence and activity could be severely limited. Nevertheless, even in liberal democracies, specific state policies and institutions – like the sect-filters in Germany or the MIVILUDES in France – may create an unbalanced playing field for NRMs compared to established churches.

In the second major chapter, I will discuss the basis of the proposed open methodological framework. Utilizing Ninian Smart's seven-dimensional system (also known as the "dual model") (Smart, 1996, 1998, pp. 10–22), I will observe and analyze different religiosity components in a temporally and locally ambivalent sphere. This 'phenomenological Petry-dish' approach – which is based on Smart's concept, discussed in the Dimensions of the Sacred – allows scholars to position themselves more effectively on a non-judgmental basis and include debated or unclearly designated formations that analogously utilize the primary structures of conventionally – and in this regard quite restrictively – defined religiosity.[11]

Here, I will take a brief detour to revisit a recurring shortcoming of the academic study of religions: the issue that scholars cannot define concisely and comprehensively the academic study of religions' general subject, religion and religiosity. It should be noted that in this dissertation, I will not aim to take a stance or devise any type of all-encompassing definition in this question. Heeding Danièle Hervieu-Léger's words (Hervieu-Léger, 1987, pp. 11–30, 1998, pp. 33–34), I shan't even attempt one such endeavor, as it had been attempted by a lineage of scholars, without any case-closing results. Instead, I will follow Smart's beaten path, overstep the arduous task of defining religion, and focus only on the practical and functional aspects of the observed phenomena itself. Utilizing this pragmatic approach allows me to arrive at my subject at hand – new and alternative religiosity, including all of its surrounding phenomena – without excessive sidetracking and observe it as it is without limiting my examination's scope by placing them into narrowed – faulty, and inherently limiting – categorical 'cages.'

[11] It is necessary to note that in his later works (Smart (2000)), Smart separated a political dimension from the social and ethical one to highlight the connections between global politics and religion. In my dissertation, however, I chose to follow the seven-angled distinction, as this version – at least for my inquiries – was more comprehensive and detail-rich than the one he published in *Worldviews.* Nevertheless, in the future, I will consider overviewing and dissecting this mode of study as well, but for this paper, I will limit my inquiries to the seven-dimensional approach.

In his works, Smart only discussed historical religiosity and social movements (Smart, 1981, 1996, 1998, 2000).[12] Based on his approach – especially on his systematic findings in the *Dimensions of the Sacred* – I will strive to further expand his model to contemporary and emergent religiosity. By modifying the dual model to host NRMs, quasi-, and para-religiosity, I will present a transdisciplinary framework that allows the examination of most contemporary religious phenomena. A transdisciplinary approach in this regard is necessary, as the discussion about NRMs has already permeated numerous disconnected scholarly fields, whose results shall not be disregarded by other fields but rather incorporated and synthesized. Parallelly integrating these findings creates meaningful intercourse between disciplines and offers ways to counterbalance any shortcomings of utilizing disciplinarily specific – and because of this, in certain cases limited – research methodologies.

The model I'm presenting aims to achieve transdisciplinary interaction from the functionalist basis of the academic study of religions. As my subject – new religiosity and its meaning systems – is so vast and varied, it is hard (if possible) to grasp efficiently from a substantive perspective. Therefore, I will not approach it first from this limited 'substance-seeking' viewpoint. I don't see myself as one who is in a position to decide what exact substance elements are of value here. Instead, I will focus my attention on the manifestations and mechanisms of religiosity. Staying away from substantive questions, such as defining the essence of religion (in this case, new religiosity), defining the 'holy' in the contemporary age, I can avoid stepping and drowning in swamps of indescribable or uncertain terms, unanswerable questions, issues of faith and conviction and, maybe most troublingly, personal (culturally and literarily determined) value interpretations.

[12] There may be one exception to this claim: in a collection edited by Eileen Barker, Smart briefly reflected on new religiosity in East Asian contexts. See: Smart (1982, pp. 140–155)

My approach can be labeled as a 'mixed positions' viewpoint. Examining a number of interconnected phenomena from 'above' (discussing the phenomenon in its entirety, seeing how it functions), from the 'outside' (keeping a necessary distance, maintaining the essential value neutrality), and from the 'inside' (utilizing others' eyes from the 'inside' to enhance my understanding) allows me to see and outline the comparable elements between various phenomena under the sphere of new religiosity. This approach can be described as a dynamic phenomenological, comparative study from a functionalist viewpoint, emphasizing similarities rather than differences. As an added benefit, my perspective will also shed light on two crucial – yet regularly disregarded – aspects of the entirety of the scholarship. First, I will illustrate that the academic study of religions isn't – and should not be – as fragmented as one tends to think. Second, after seeing the vast array of similarities that certainly outweigh the differences, I will also state that there isn't really anything new about new religiosity besides these formations' relatively young age and their rapid development, which can be accredited more to the *Zeitgeist* they are birthed and not the movements themselves. This fact is essential to realize that today's age isn't that different from other historical periods for a functionalist scholar of religions. As Barker phrases:

> "Two and a half millennia ago, a young man abandoned his wife and young son, found the path to enlightenment, and became the focus of a new religion that has around 300 million followers today. Two millennia ago, a young artisan told his disciples they had to be prepared to sever all ties with their families if they wanted to follow him; he became the focus of considerable vilification by the elders of the local religion and was, by popular demand; put to death by the powers that were ruling at that time. […] Roughly half a millennium later, another new religion was asking its followers to submit and surrender to God, to the faith and to the practice revealed by a young man who had visions and heard voices whereby God told him to preach

> against the prevailing religious practices. […] there is nothing new about new religions. They have been around for years. In some times and places they have been more visible than in other times and places. There have been periods when people have been particularly likely to turn to new ideas and hopes – when, for example, there has been some kind of social change due to economic disruption, colonial invasions, technological, political or cultural upheaval." (Barker, 1998, pp. 10–12)

In the last chapter, my dissertation will present case examinations to illustrate the usability of the proposed model and complement my previous theoretical statements. Leading scholars have already sufficiently explored each subject in the past decades. My explorations will, therefore, only offer nominal – yet still valuable – contributions to these already abundant productions by placing Smart's overlay on them. Each study will approach its subject from a particular novel or under-researched angle, illustrating the scalability and versatility of the detailed seven-dimensional mode of study. The opening exploration critically analyzes event religiosity and the quasi-religious functions of secular events—musical and subcultural festivals — arguing that these have the capacity to provide similar extraordinary experiences for the involved that conventional religiosity offers for others. In my second exploration, I will step outside the academically accepted borders of new religions studies and discuss quasi-religiosity's new frontiers as religious structures, with a specific focus on conspiracy theories. Through this last case study, I will point out that in the postmodern and post-truth world, even marginal societal formations and groups may attain religious-like functionalities. Therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, these should be considered part of research interest for scholars of religion. To prove this statement, I will point out that for the involved, these alternative movements, events, or communities offer similar channels of *meaning*, *intensity*, and *security* that new religiosity and functioning established religiosity create for its followers.

Reaching the end of this work, I will systematize my findings, evaluate the realizability of Smart's improved model, and articulate further leading perspectives for using this modified framework. Reflecting on future possibilities of religiosity from a functionalist perspective, I will also look at the possible limitations, challenges, and unexplored themes that could be brought up against functionalism and my proposed model. In an effort to appropriately frame my research, I will close my dissertation with the same opening argument, stating that my subject – new and alternative religiosity – isn't so different from other religions. Therefore, it should be studied accordingly: with methodological agnosticism, value-neutral vocabulary, careful, transdisciplinary scholarly inquiry, and a focus on inductive understanding of the observed reality as it presents itself.

Methodological Considerations

With this dissertation, I aim to join – or at least contribute – to a still-developing yet already abundant scholarly lineage on new religiosity. Hungarian academia contains exceptional scholars – sociologists, theologians, anthropologists and ethnologists, historians, psychologists, archivists, and many more – who all have contributed to a broader-than-usual academic perspective about new religious movements and emergent religiosity in their own fields. Over the past forty years – and especially since the regime changes – these researchers established an interdisciplinary (with certain conditions, one could argue that even transdisciplinary) basis of the local scholarship.[13] Of them, I'll only name a handful to illustrate the sheer abundance of academic output: András Máté-Tóth,[14] Attila Farkas, Attila Jakab,[15] Attila László

[13] I will return to these terms in the following subchapter in more detail.
[14] Máté-Tóth (2013); Máté-Tóth and Juhász (2007); Máté-Tóth and Nagy (2008, 2011, 2016, 2017)
[15] Fazekas et al. (2017)

Hubbes,[16] Attila Molnár, Csaba Fazekas,[17] Éva Petrás, Gábor Dániel Nagy,[18] Gellért Gyetvay, Győző Lugosi,[19] István- and Kinga Povedák,[20] István Kamarás,[21] Jenő Szigeti[22], Judit Kis-Halas,[23] Koppány László Csáji,[24] Miklós Tomka,[25] Péter Török,[26] Réka Szilárdi,[27] Rita Hegedűs, Szabolcs Szita, Tamás Szilágyi,[28] Zoltán Rajki, Zsuzsanna Bögre,[29] and Zsuzsa Horváth.[30] Using my predecessor's results as a firm basis and supplementing them with the abundant international scholarship, I will attempt to meaningfully contribute to the Hungarian academic discourse about new religiosity's place and open a new – more functionally and phenomenologically angled – path to approaching this complex subject.

Transdisciplinary Scope

In my dissertation, I combine various themes and utilize disparate methods from complementary sciences to contribute to the Hungarian Mode 2 transition in the field of the academic study of religions (Gibbons et al., 1994, pp. 1–34). In this regard, I consider Mode 1's multidisciplinarity a "successivity of sciences" where there is a "processing order" of singular sciences without any meaningful interaction or interplay between various theories. Examples of this can be found in the philosophy of religions, where the range of utilized methods and ideas are strictly limited to the particular field, and scholars don't necessarily consider

[16] Attila and István (2018); Hubbes and Povedák (2015)
[17] Fazekas (2022)
[18] Máté-Tóth and Nagy (2011, 2019)
[19] Á. Lugosi et al. (cop. 1998); G. Lugosi (2017)
[20] Barna et al. (2014); Kapaló and Povedák (2022); K. Povedák (2019); I. Povedák (2019, 2021); I. Povedák and Szilárdi (2014)
[21] Kamarás (-, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2003, 2010)
[22] Rajki and Szigeti (2012); Szigeti (1981)
[23] Kis-Halas (2005, 2012, 2019, 2020)
[24] Csáji (2012, 2015, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022)
[25] Tomka (2005, 2011)
[26] Török (2004, 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2017, 2018)
[27] Szilárdi and Heidl (2017); Szilárdi and Szilágyi (2007)
[28] Szilágyi (2012, 2022)
[29] Bögre (2016, 2017a, 2017b)
[30] Horváth (1995)

integrating ‘external’ methods into their investigations, such as interviews, survey methods, participative fieldwork, or media analysis, which could be considered ‘applied science’ or ‘practice’. This limited spectrum inevitably leads to a constrained research scope that isolates the field over time, preventing meaningful innovation or reflection on changes in surrounding reality. Another trait of Mode 1 is *interdisciplinarity*, characterized by a “coexistence of sciences,” referring to the marginal convergence between paradigmatically different disciplines, typically on common peripheries of research. However, the interaction between the partaking fields is restricted to the respective intersections; therefore, real innovation or approximation cannot be achieved or even hoped for.

To reach Mode 2’s transdisciplinarity (described foremost by applied knowledge production and methodological heterogeneity), one must make a foundational shift in the scientific approach and demolish disciplinary borders that otherwise keep scholars away from each other and the subject at hand. Preferring pragmatic, applied methods and problem-oriented research themes, rather than pinpointing certain subjects for examination, is a necessary first step for achieving this phase. Such a process revises the base terminology of sciences, detaching it from previous debates and possible misinterpretation. In the academic study of religions, and especially new religions studies, certain initiatives have already been conducted, such as the usage of the term ‘new religious movements’ instead of ‘cult’ and ‘sect’ or using ‘new social movements’ instead of ‘protest movements’ or ‘demonstrations. The new vocabulary allows for more meaningful interaction and exchange with other fields involved. It also integrates other fields’ similarly understandable and universally articulated findings into the academic study of religions’ investigations.

Initial Guiding Principles

Before moving on, I also need to set some guiding principles. First, it is imperative to acknowledge that this dissertation pertains solely to the academic study of religions and does

not fall within the realm of theological- or congregational religious studies. Because of this, my examination will not reflect on the truthfulness or validity of any of the teachings or views of the discussed examples (Szilárdi & Máté-Tóth, 2022, p. 1191). Although I realize that no observer could leave behind one's background altogether (Robbins & Robertson, 1991, pp. 2019–2224) – should these be cultural, political, religious, or even language biases, effects of parental education, prior encounters with the subject, limited literary background, (etc.). Nevertheless, my proposed model aims to grasp its subjects with utmost objectivity and neutrality while maintaining constant self-reflection. Leaving out the questions of faith and focusing on religiosity's more tangible, or at least comprehendible and describable elements means that I don't consider it my duty to evaluate the merits or worth of any analyzed religious traditions or forms of religiosity. Instead, I pragmatically accept their existence and focus on their functions, mechanisms, and effects in the community and the religiously attuned individual.

Based on these statements and in harmony with Martin's and Wiebe's notions (L. H. Martin & Wiebe, 2012, pp. 588–597), I consider my field of research and interest an autonomous field of science. As such, the academic study of religions is a sui generis field of science: it shall not and will not concern itself with serving or criticizing secular or religious ideologies and worldviews. Its legitimacy and its statements' credibility do not come from transcendent source(s) – consonantly, such sources and statements don't mean any value when articulating scientific conclusions. Its results are exclusively from empirical research, and such findings cannot be replaced or replicated by any other non-academic discipline dealing with religion and religiosity. In this sense, the academic study of religions' tools, methodologies, and focus differs from other fields dealing with religion. This is why this field's results are essential for the comprehension and construction (Barker, 1995b, pp. 287–289) of humanity's perception of the surrounding reality on systematic levels.

Furthermore, the field's primary subject is human behavior (L. H. Martin & Wiebe, 2012, pp. 588–589). Therefore, the academic study of religions shall disregard any thought experiments on whether there is such a thing as 'religion on its own' without the necessary interconnected structures provided by the partaking humans and the containing – and maintaining – society with a tangible and living culture. (L. H. Martin & Wiebe, 2012, pp. 588–594). Underlining that humanity, as "*homo religious*" (Leeming, 2014, pp. 827–830), is religious by its very own anthropological nature, I also paradigmatically disregard thought experiments about non-religious societies, as there has been no culture or civilization in the entirety of human history that could have developed or attained longevity (by any historical measure) without entirely dismissing the foundational structures provided by and rooted in notions of religiosity. Taking this statement one step further alongside Milton Yinger's notes, I also consider this paradigm valid for the case of our contemporary world. Thus, I reject any radical secularists', Marxists', or atheists' concepts about an envisioned postmodern future where religiosity and the structures it provides do not exist anymore. Instead, I agree with Yinger concerning the future of religion:

> "[…] religion is – and seems likely to remain – an inevitable part of human life. Although the ways of struggling with these ultimate problems [such as the cognitive refusal of accepting death, the failure to achieve one's goals in life, the hostility against each other, etc.] are enormously diverse and seem destined for continuous change, the problems themselves are universal. A society that did not furnish its members with beliefs and practices that gave them a means of dealing with these ultimate problems would have to struggle with an enormous burden of tragedy unallayed and hostility unrestrained – if indeed it could survive at all." (Yinger, 1970, p. 8)

Alongside the abovementioned notions, I also reject the concept that religion is a residual placeholder, which societal structures will eventually replace (Dunlap, 1970, 1946, p. 321).

This view entirely misses the focal functionality of religiosity in humanity's continuous development. Any thought experiment based on this view would yield half-true findings. It is more beneficial to view religiosity as a complex of meaning systems – a sort of 'cultural compass'– allowing individuals to orient themselves in an ever-changing and progressively more alien world. By constantly expanding and incorporating new means, religiosity will remain essential in holding together segments of humanity by carrying the same "peak load of human emotional need" that Yinger mentions (Yinger, 1970, p. 7). Malinowski also shares these notions and emphasizes that religiosity is "that which always remains" and which cannot be replaced or artificially removed by technological innovation, cultural change, or brute political force (Malinowski, 1977, p. 34). As such an impervious structure, instead of disappearing it will transfer – one could say 'contaminate' – some of its functions onto other spheres in the contemporary world.

To conclude this introductory segment, it is beneficial to form a handful of call statements based on which I shall progress. First, I must establish sufficiently stable methodological, contextual, and terminological foundations – based on the works of prior scholars – before discussing complex issues and showing initiative for innovation. Second, my contribution to the field aims to further progress the Mode 2 transition. To achieve this, I will not only theorize about possible methods of studying new religious movements but also offer and (to a limited extent) test one such framework. Third, I will progress further by leaving out (for now at least) the questions of whether transdisciplinarity is the peak form of scientific approaches, as such thought experiment would be of no value for now.

Outlook on Objectivity

Due to the subject's particularly sensitive nature and its connections to theology, congregational religious studies, and even personal beliefs, it is helpful to clarify my position as a young scholar of new religions. Those who discuss contemporary religiosity face an early challenge in acknowledging and – to their best efforts – overcoming some inherited perspectives

of one's own religious, cultural, and societal bias. It has been proven that it is impossible to leave behind one's subjective viewpoints (Richardson, 1991b, pp. 305–318). However, by realizing my limitations, I will aim for reasonable levels of neutrality and objectivity in my investigations. By acknowledging my biases, I can more successfully keep myself from the two radical endpoints of NRM-related discussions: direct animosity towards the entirety of what's under the NRM umbrella and the so-called 'cult apologeticism' (Chryssides, 2021, pp. 64–83). Neither of these extremities is beneficial for the academic study of new religions. Apparent animosity prevents reflexive comparative value-neutral examinations of these subjects by denying the necessity of such efforts and arbitrarily removing the elusive 'religion' category of these movements. *Ex-cathedra,* declaring that new religious movements can only be regarded as either deviant and exploitive cults, sects, or, most recently, high control groups is an unacceptable scholarly standpoint that leads nowhere and results only in agitative literature. Furthermore, authors of this endpoint tend to designate the collective of NRMs as 'coercive movements,' 'monetary exploitation systems,' complemented exclusively with negative terms such as 'mental manipulation,' 'radicalism,' 'self-alienation,' and, of course, 'brainwashing,' further distancing the possibility of objectively and value-neutrally conducted research.

Nevertheless, the other endpoint of this spectrum is also detrimental to academic investigations. A too sympathetic and even apologetic scholarly orientation may (intentionally or accidentally) easily overlook the harmful elements and systematic problems that are equally present in NRMs, as they are prevalent in any other religious formations. Refusing to acknowledge the necessity of investigations about possible power abuse, exploitation, illegalities, or unethical and inhumane practices under the claims of being either 'overblown,' 'disproven,' or even political conspiracies against particular NRMs results in a similar lack of objectivity, that led to the academic delays in discussing the very same problems in established churches. Straying too close to either endpoint reduces any researcher's required objectivity and yields either limited or distorted

conclusions. Without the goal of upholding objectivity in the entirety of research, our inquiries are valueless. They can even become harmful to the researched ones, the containing society, and even academia. Furthermore, even the discussions about objectivity, apologeticism, and anti-cultism are key sources for understanding NRMs. Excluding these – i.e., the debates about whether prior apologetic or cultic studies works are worthy of scholarly analysis – from our scope, instead of overviewing the reasons and mechanisms behind them, denies the discipline of numerous important topics and uproots the specialization from its lineage, preventing the much-needed continuous self-reflection. Only by exploring these – sometimes sensitive and problematic – elements can one find ways for acceptable introspection. The late Thomas Robbins articulates these thoughts in an even more direct way:

> "There may be various conceptions or definitions of 'objectivity.' Still, it can easily be demonstrated that objectivity in terms of neutrality often does not seem to be required to legitimate an expert's work. Consider the hated Ku Klux Klan. Who are popularly considered to be the legitimate experts on the KKK? Are they not researchers such as the crusading lawyer Morris Dees and persons associated with organizations such as Klanwatch? Is not the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) widely viewed as a legitimate—perhaps the premier—source of expertise on authoritarian racist, anti-Semite, and neofascist groups? Similarly the media have long conferred the mantle of expert-in-behalf-of-the-public-interest on (anticult) 'cultwatchers' and 'cult experts' and particularly persons associated with the former Cult Awareness Network (CAN). Scholars who have been critical of CAN and 'anticult' constructions of reality are often labeled 'cult apologists.' […] The underlying dynamic is that when certain groups are widely perceived as known malefactors or public 'enemies,' crusaders against such groups become accepted as the authentic, most objective, and exclusive repositories of legitimate expertise. Investigators with conflicting perspectives are

> shunted aside as naive and fatuous and even denounced as highly suspect and subversive. In such a climate many commentators will question the objectivity of writers and scholars who defend stigmatized movements but not the objectivity of those who attack them. Are crusading "countersubversive" experts objective? Are they accurate?" (Robbins, 1998, pp. 26–28)

As Robbins notes, any researcher investigating NRMs, new social movements, or surrounding phenomena must 'balance on a knife's edge.' However, even this careful treading sometimes is interpreted as 'too inclusive' or even 'cult apologetics.' At this point – before even the conception of any such thoughts about my work – I'm compelled to refute such possible notions. Although it shouldn't pose any problem from an academic perspective, I also need to clarify that I'm not affiliated with any of the analyzed movements, nor am I against them. My convictions are my own, and I do not transfer any of these views into my research. I don't consider it my duty to defend any analyzed subjects, nor am I a critic of NRMs and surrounding movements. I pragmatically accept their presence and overall activity in our contemporary society – which no one can deny. Similarly, I do not wish to discuss *why* these subjects should or shouldn't be considered religious movements, as my focus is on *how* they (would) function as one when placed under the seven lenses of Smart. In this regard, my objectivity is guided by maintaining an adequate professional distance from my subjects. I'm formulating my conclusions in an objective, detached, and value-free manner, using the value-neutral language of studies on new religions. The modified Smartian open functionalist model complements this carefulness as it already incorporates cross-cultural vocabulary and offers ways of shedding light on religiosity's innate morphological similarities. As my chosen framework, the dual model affirms comparative opportunities between radically different contemporary 'meaning provider' formations, focusing on the functional, morphological similarities of the analyzed movements.

The Problem of Definitions in the Academic Study of Religions

Before exploring the historical settings of my main topic, it is necessary to briefly reflect on a long-prevailing (and maybe even unsolvable) problem in the field of academic study of religions. Namely, the inability to create a finite and comprehensive definition of what religion and religiosity *really is*. It is well known that numerous attempts were made over the last one-and-a-half century to define these, utilizing toolkits provided by many distinct disciplines (Platvoet, 1999, pp. 245–267). More than a century ago, in 1909, James H. Leuba compiled 48 contextually valid and utilizable yet different definitions for religion in his article published in *The Monist* (Leuba, 1909, pp. 27–35). If I were to attempt to do a similar compilation in 2023, I would be unquestionably met with definitions that are by orders of magnitudes more than 'just' 48. Nevertheless, even Leuba's 115-year-old findings are enough to prove the futility of chasing the idea of a singular, strict, and concise definition of religion and religiosity. This fluid concept changes and constantly slips our grasp when approaching it with different disciplines' toolkits. Milton Yinger – one of the most prominent authors of the second half of the 20th and 21st centuries – came to similar conclusions, stressing that the basis of this problem lies within the human condition. He emphasized that categorical thinking distorts our perception, focus, and findings when discussing the term 'religion:'

> "Many studies of religion stumble on the first hurdle: the problem of definition […]. A related difficulty stems from the fact that some people divide the phenomena of the world into sharply distinct categories, mistaking the labels they attach to things and events for those things and the events themselves. […] religion-nonreligion is a continuum; we must recognize that there are some patterns that are marginally religious, according to any criteria that one may select." (Yinger, 1970, pp. 3–7)

Yinger points out that by dividing our perception of reality alongside inherently faulty, rigid, and predetermined structures, we arbitrarily create nonexistent divisions in an otherwise homogenous continuum. Through these divisions, we wrongfully limit our scope of examination to only one particular segment of the observable interconnected total, which leads us to either limited knowledge or, at worst, untrue conclusions. To avoid these issues, Yinger recommends approaching the observable reality from an eagle's perspective (the previously mentioned 'above' viewpoint). Instead of using definitions as barriers, struggling to contain their supposed subjects, we should interpret them as primal tools. Realizing that these have severely limited capabilities in their current form allows us to leave them behind after a certain point in our examination. After this, we may revisit prior conclusions and overstep the limitations these rudimental tools carved out:

> "Definitions, then, are tools; they are to some degree arbitrary; they lay stress on similarities within a delimited area and on the differences outside it, thus giving emphasis to one aspect of reality. They are abstract, which is to say that they are oversimplifications. In dealing with a subject, so complex and concerned with such broad range of data as religion, a topic approached for many different purposes, we must relinquish the idea that there is any one definition that is correct and satisfactory for all." (Yinger, 1970, p. 4)

Definitions as Mirrors?

Indeed, an all-encompassing definition of religion might not be achievable in the academic study of religions, as the subject constantly changes its forms and properties. Hence, religiosity can have varying meanings and functions depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. It may have different connotations in the context of individuals, small communities, greater religious congregations, the public sphere, and broader societal- or cross-cultural settings. Similarly, as societal structures affect it, religiosity can also reshape itself, showing a

new face depending on which discipline examines it. Inspecting from historical-, sociological-, philosophical positions, or with more 'practical' disciplines' toolkits – such as law studies, medical sciences, etc.– (Antes et al., 2005), the aggregate compressed into the term 'religion' may behave quite differently. Furthermore, as the partaking disciplines advance and develop over time – innovating and overcoming established paradigms through new means and methods – their statements also become subjects of change. This continuous flow of never-really-settling knowledge creation reflects the subject one wishes to understand, which – like the utilized approaches – evolves, changes, and reacts to the surrounding environment. If for nothing more, this mirror-like dynamism between chasing a hypothetical silhouette of a singular – or at least concise – definition for religion and its real essence – constantly slipping out of one's grasp – shows the subject's true nature of limitlessness. These reflections, which one can see in the forms of countless definitions – all accurate and valuable – show the inquirer that the primary subject of the academic study of religions has plentiful faces. Taking a step further, one realizes that the attempts to define religion are nothing more than partially successful efforts to grasp essential parts of the *human condition*: seeking reasons and rational answers for ultimate existential problems, such as the reasons for death, purposelessness, and loneliness in the universe, or the cognitive disturbance in comprehending one's own existence.

Instead of trying to find a solution for these issues without certainty of closure – or even seeking comfort in some half-baked definitions – I have chosen to follow Weber's (Weber, 1993, pp. 1–3) and Geertz's (Geertz, 1971, pp. 1–4) path, and overstep the problem of defining religion, and leave this problem for a separate, future research:

> "The comparative study of religion has always been plagued by this peculiar embarrassment: the elusiveness of its subject matter. The problem is not one of constructing definitions of religion. We have had quite enough of those; their very number is a symptom of our malaise. It is a matter of discovering just what sorts of beliefs and practices

> support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions. Our problem, and it grows worse by the day, is not to define religion but to find it." (Geertz, 1971, pp. 1–2)
>
> "It is not possible to define religion, to say what it 'is,' at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study. The 'essence' of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social action. The external courses of religious behavior are so diverse that an understanding of this behavior can only be achieved from the viewpoint of the subjective experiences, notion, and purposes of the individuals concerned – in short, from the viewpoint of the religious behavior's 'meaning.'" (Weber, 1993, pp. 1–3)

Approaching the Subject

As summarized in the prior chapter, an abundance of disciplines are involved in the research of NRMs, each offering unique and valuable contributions. However, to introduce the topic of new religiosity in socio-cultural contexts, there is no better approach than to follow Geertz's recommendation of actually "finding it" rather than aiming to define it first. Thus, the following chapter will focus on historical turning points and socio-cultural developments in which new religious movements emerged *en masse* in the second half of the 20th century. Complemented with crucial terms such as *meaning systems*, *spiritual alienation*, *intensity*, and *security*, I will reflect on established sociological theories – focusing on *secularism*, *religious market theory*, and the *culture of individualism*. After this, the following chapter will discuss the early years of New Religions Studies (NRS), elaborating on the various approaches of partaking disciplines and their interplays. Lastly, I will discuss the necessity of the term 'new religious movements', comparing it to its predecessors, the infamous "sect," and "cult" terminology. I will elaborate on how this term affected societal and scholarly discussions about the complex phenomena and what other terminological challenges await researchers while researching new religiosity today.

From Hopefulness to Identity

Most contemporary scholars date and locate the emergence of new religious movements around the second half of the 1950s and the early ‘60s in the United States (Barker, 1995a; Beckford, 1986; Dawson, 2007; Gallagher, 2004; Needleman, 1970). Overviewing this historical period’s turning points is advisable for outlining the ongoing changes in the American sociopsychological (and economic) environment, through which I will point out key components behind the new religious emergence.

As a starting point, I will look at the idealistic beginnings of the decade, outlined by John F. Kennedy’s famous public speeches. Kennedy’s talks resonated well with the era’s emotions and spirit when he spoke about a new generation passing the torch (January 20th, 1961), about American values, and later about bringing a man to the Moon and back (May 25th, 1961); more so, about love-power in connection to the Vietnam war (November 11th, 1961) and the escalating problems rooted in social-, racial- and gender inequality. He emphasized that the US is an idealist nation where everyone shall and will have open and equal chances for happiness and prosperity (June 10th, 1963). This idealist notion was also prevalent in the US’s global self-representation, depicting the federation as a powerful and resourceful entity in world politics. A unified nation which aims to maintain or restore the liberty of man worldwide if needed (September 14th, 1960). Such notions captured the spirit of this era, resonating exceptionally well with the youth of the 1960s, who shared Kennedy’s vision of a prosperous, bright, and hopeful future (Tipton, 1982, pp. 6–24) and wanted to actively contribute toward this dream (Sweeney, 2000, pp. 9–12).

However, the reality of a shattered world between West and East quickly overshadowed the idealist dreams. As Cold War tensions reached new peaks in the mid-60s (Sweeney, 2000, pp. 14–25), the future the youth of the ‘60s hoped for seemed ever further away. This was even more devastating after the series of assassinations of public figures famous for promoting

progressive ideas, such as John-[31] (November 22nd, 1963) and Robert F. Kennedy (June 6th, 1963), Malcolm X (February 21st,1965) and Martin Luther King (April 4th, 1968). Meanwhile, the constant angst was further increased by the escalating global arms race, bringing forth history's most destructive weapons. Among these, I need to mention the Russian Federation's infamous Tsar Bomb on October 30th, 1961, and the noxious concoction of napalm used by US forces during the Vietnam War after 1965. Most of these new weapons were live tested on faraway lands from the US population and on proxy battlegrounds; meanwhile, other threats loomed much closer: below sea levels or within hidden underground rocket silos, promising unimaginable destruction and even total annihilation (Wuthnow, 1988, pp. 35–54).

Parallel to this, for the first time in history, modern media was also able to document the daily reality of US-involved proxy wars around the world, bringing the atrocities and images of destruction to the living rooms of US citizens (Hallin, 1986, pp. 103–114). Compared to print media, modern report-based television recontextualized the previous macro imagery of state news on deployment rates and the vague military reports about the progress in the Vietnam War. The regular 'close-ups' about the everyday horrors of the war, the short segments of the life quality of soldiers in base camps, and the in-depth reports (both radio, print, and television) about the local Vietnamese civil population's suffering have all made major contributions to completely reconceptualizing earlier 'eagle eye perspectives.' After seeing their lives in an active warzone, prior supporters of the Vietnam War had started to disregard the distancing state language of the 'Vietcong' and connected on an emotional level with fellow humans struggling in a warzone. This process has also brought about a change in the public perception

[31] His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-69), successfully passed some of JFK's ideas under the Great Society program. However, these did not solve the nation's problems with racial discrimination and poverty and instead further fueled public unrest.

of US involvement in this war, as the role of the invader has gradually shifted from the North Vietnamese to the supposedly 'peace-keeping' US forces. (Hallin, 1986, pp. 106–126) Meanwhile, the halt in social equality movements by the second half of the decade further fueled the disillusion and growing social tensions:

> "The declaration 'all men are created equal' rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South and the big cities of the North while the proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo." (Sweeney, 2000, p. 11)

The separation of reality and self-representation generated new types of social movements. These initiatives were not only supported by the oppressed but by the majority of the era's youth – including many from well-established and consolidated backgrounds (Roszak, 1969, pp. 2–5). These developing new social movements gained wider social support as the promised equality and open chances seemed to stray further each day (Zald, 1996, pp. 261–275).[32] In some cases, where these civil demonstrations for equal chances in education and prospects in the occupational market have escalated into an all-out riot series. These were especially prevalent after the loss of charismatic figures promoting (mostly) peaceful ways (JFK, MLK, MX, etc.).[33] With previously suppressed tensions and emotions erupting, the image of the abundant and prosperous American dream was no longer maintainable. The wave of disillusion – enhanced by political and economic problems caused by the generational gap and the ideological break between the Great Generation of the World Wars and the Flower Youth of

[32] Free Speech Movement (1964), University of Michigan teach-in (1965), anti-war marches in San Francisco, California, and New York (1967), Democratic Convention (1968), draft board vandalisms (1968-1971), L.A. Student Walkouts (1968), Woodstock and Harlem concert series (1969), etc.

[33] Harlem (1964), Watts (1965), the long, hot summer of 1967 (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Newark, etc.), Washington (1968), etc.

the Korean- and Vietnam Wars – resulted in the emergence of most of today's countermovements and radical anti-institutional subcultures (Roszak, 1969, pp. 42–84).

The crumbling of the ordinary citizen's preconception about the American ideal (Bellah, 1975, pp. 4–18; Bellah & Glock, 2018, pp. 333–353) eventually also led to the loosening of societal cohesive forces. Social institutions and political concepts, which formerly provided meaning, security, and identity for almost every citizen (Rosenheck & Fontana, 1998, pp. 225–243), were severely disrupted. This was especially true with the 1972 Watergate scandal, which permanently undermined the remaining public trust in the American political system (McLeod et al., 1977, pp. 3–22). Although Robert Bellah notes that these kinds of disruptions[34] are not unique in the entirety of American history, he also stresses that the period between the 1960s and the '70s stands out with its settings and long-lasting, irreversible effects:

> "The disturbances and outbursts in America in the 1960s were hardly unique in modern history. Indeed, in a century where irrationalities and horrors of all sorts – mass executions, mass imprisonments, wars of annihilations, revolutions, rebellions, depressions – have been common, the events of that decade in America might even be overlooked. But it is precisely the significance of that decade that the irrationalities and horrors of modern history were borne in upon Americans so seriously that for the first time, mass disaffection from the common understandings of American culture and society to occur. Far more serious than any of the startling events of the

[34] Although I have not discussed this question separately in this dissertation, it is worth noting that the early 1970s also saw a massive economic phenomenon known as stagflation (1973-1975). The Great Depression brought about high inflation and uneven economic growth, which was exacerbated by increasing crude oil prices and rising unemployment rates in most states. This economic downturn fueled growing political distrust, as the erosion of buying power led to a visible decline in the quality of life for most American families. The economic downturn and the decline in quality of life were further aggravated by the substantial and contentious engagement of the US in the Vietnam War, the financial burdens associated with sustaining the failing Great Society program, and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreement.

> decade was the massive erosion of the legitimacy of American institutions – business, government, education, the churches, the family – that set in particularly among young people and the continues, if public opinion polls are to be believed, in the 1970s even hen overt protest had become less frequent. […]. The promise of early fulfillment, which seemed so tangible in America, operated to mute our native critics an prevent mass disaffection, at least for a long time. But in the decade of the sixties for many, not only of the deprived but of the most privileged, that promise had begun to run out." (Bellah & Glock, 2018, pp. 333–334)

Bellah points out that until the 1960s, the two key providers of meaning – biblical religion[35] and utilitarian individualism[36] – were kept in balance, each benefiting from the other while counterbalancing each other's possible harmful effects. However, this fragile balance was disrupted during the societal upheaval, leading the two components to rapidly undermine each other. With the loss of societal stability and trust, biblical religion's "charity" and "conscience" focused tenets had no chance to counterbalance utilitarian individualism's emphasis on private interest maximization (Bellah & Glock, 2018, p. 335). In the almost unregulated and acceleratingly expanding 'free-for-all' market-capitalist economy of the late 1960s and 1970s, religion's orientation similarly changed towards self-interest, leaving behind considerations of "virtue," "charity," – and, most importantly–, "community." This led utilitarian individualism to lose its only anchoring point – "morality" – against processes of rapid modernization and

[35] In Bellah's interpretation, biblical religion is rooted in Puritanism. Puritanism believed that people were in a living covenant with God and that they were God's chosen. In this system, objective reality is revealed by God through the collective of the chosen. (See: Ibid)

[36] Utilitarian individualism, as Bellah states, is rooted in the skeptical strains of Greek philosophy and pragmatic rationality but most substantially shaped by the ideas of Tomas Hobbes. In this framework, the basis of human motivation is self-interest. The community is, therefore, a neutral zone where individuals may maximally exploit the available resources for maximum self-interest.

pluralism, paving the way to unethical and exploitive social and work conditions, further fueling the already escalating disaffection processes in the US.

A Cascading Meaning Crisis

Berger and Luckmann also connect this problem to the crisis of meanings rooted in modernity's perception of reality. In these contexts, processes of pluralism and concerns about the truthfulness in mono-narrative systems undermine society's common meanings and create an environment where anything and everything can be both true and untrue at the same time, without any certainty:

> "Modern pluralism undermines this common sense of 'knowledge.' The world, society, life and personal identity are called ever more into question. They may be subject to multiple interpretations and each interpretation defines its own perspectives of possible action. No interpretation, no range of possible actions can any longer be accepted as the only true and unquestionably right one. Individuals are thus frequently faced with the question whether they should not have lived their lives in a completely different manner than they have hitherto. This is experienced on the one hand as a great liberation, as an opening of new horizons and possibilities of life, leading out of the confines of the old, unquestioned mode of existence. The same process is, however, often experienced as oppressive (often by the same people) – as a pressure on individuals to repeatedly make sense of the new and the unfamiliar in their realities. […] the majority of people feel insecure and lost in a confusing world full of possibilities of interpretation of which some are linked to alternative ways of life." (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 40–41)

Berger and Luckmann note that plurality is – in this regard – detrimental to social cohesion as it creates an uncertain and unstable reality for everyone who happens to live in times of rapid social change:

> "Pluralism not only permits to make choices (job, husband or wife, religion, party), it forces one to do so […]. One can no longer choose not to choose: it has become impossible to close ones eyes to the fact that a decision that one makes could also have been made differently." (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 44–45)

Uncertainty is another vital element in the context of this disruption, as it catalyzed the accelerating meaning crisis. According to Berger and Luckmann, modernization's plurality brings forth such uncertain settings that the individual – who's constantly forced to make uncertain decisions – can no longer understand which choices would be beneficial and which would be detrimental for him. With it, his inherited values and meanings, "taken-for-granted" from the previous homogenous and mono-narrative environments, also cease to fulfill their functions, giving way to an overall societal meaning crisis. At this point, nothing more is left than to ask what exactly happens when we 'pull out the rug of reality and meanings under society's feet?'

> "The taken-for-granted resides in the realm of unquestioned, secure knowledge. The loss of the taken-for-granted unsettles this realm: I know less and less. Instead, I have a range of opinions. Some of these opinions condense into something that one might call belief. These are opinions for which I am prepared to make sacrifices in the limit, even today; to sacrifice my life, but probably no longer unquestioningly. […] Unquestioned, secure knowledge dissolves into a no longer very compelling aggregate of loosely connected opinions. Firm interpretations of reality become hypotheses. Convictions become matters of taste. Commandments become suggestions." (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 45–46)

Smart adds one more aspect that should be essential to consider when discussing a cascading meaning crisis: humanity's centrality in the world – as a last bastion of one's significance in all that surrounds – has also been finally toppled by accelerating scientific advancements:

> "Since the development of the Hubble telescope, we have seen the universe expand; we have seen galaxies multiply almost infinitely; and we have seen distances extend beyond the reach of our imagination. Because we have also digested during the last hundred years or more the impact of evolutionary theory, we are beginning to grow accustomed to the thought that there may be life in other galaxies, perhaps even in our own. Meanwhile the numbers are ever more overwhelming, increasing the likelihood that there is life elsewhere in the cosmos. If there is, we shall probably never encounter it, so in one way, it does not concern us. Nevertheless it does concern us spiritually, mainly because belief in the uniqueness of this planet is the last stirring of the axis mundi. We are not at the center. […]" (Smart, 1996, p. 53)

Compared to the 19th century's scientific advancements, where similar concerns also arose, one key element made a significant difference. For the first time in its history, humanity had achieved the formerly unimaginable feat of leaving Earth (1961) and conquering other stellar bodies (1969), making the possibility of encountering other lifeforms beyond our planet – and with that shaking humanity's centrality in existence – more realistic than at any other time.

The Effects of Disruption

With such transgression against the mediating structures of society and the very significance of humanity's uniqueness, a series of societal function disturbances followed. Manifesting a lack of faith in conventional social institutions, disaffection to previously homogenizing notions such as nation, tradition, and family, enhanced by a growing distrust in the secular state and its bureaucratic institutions (raising concerns of the political and electoral system; questioning the competency of leadership; losing trust in social security, justice system and education, etc.), most

turned towards the last remaining familiar and authoritative meaning-providing institution: religion. More precisely, established churches and denominations as the last channels of mono-narrative and unquestionable truths and meanings in a rapidly alienating world.

It is a widely accepted paradigm in the field of the academic study of religions that crisis periods – wars, famines, economic breakdowns, societal self-representation crises, etc.) increase religious interest and involvement, alongside the significance of these institutions' contributions in upholding the otherwise overburdened social structure (Cnaan & Daniel Heist, 2018, pp. 391–403; Irving Hexham & Karla O. Poewe, 2003, pp. 126–148). Through charity, these institutions may fill in specific gaps in the spheres of social security while also providing a stable (in Western contexts, typically mono-narrative) moral basis for their followers' elongated suffering in periods of uncertainty. This observation is valid in contemporary and historical European (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63) and American contexts (Bellah & Glock, 2018, pp. 334–336). However, those who searched for security and reassurance amidst the ongoing crisis of meaning in the 1960s and '70s weren't necessarily satisfied with the solutions of established churches and denominations. Due to their deep social embedment, these institutions lacked the necessary flexibilities and innovative capacities to tackle the emerging multi-faceted systematic crisis (Beckford, 1986, p. 78). I also need to underline one element that kept most established religious institutions away from fulfilling the necessary placeholder functionalities in the crumbling and rapidly fragmenting societal period (Bruce, 1996, pp. 43–47): the disruption of biblical religiosity affected the social positions of most Christian churches and denominations. Instead of counterbalancing the effects, churches fell prey to the ongoing process, as their innovative rigidity and slow reactions further fueled the feelings of disillusion and angst, gradually hollowing out any remaining meanings they provided, similar to the case of state-provided social institutions. According to Robert S. Ellwood, this breakdown of traditional meaning-providing and societal cohesive systems irreparably disrupted the previously

dominant myths of American uniqueness (Ellwood, 1994, pp. 22–33). Ellwood describes the early 1960s American identity with the following quote:

> "The Sixties tacitly accepted the post-World War II and Cold War-era assumptions that the United States was a nation uniquely powerful, uniquely affluent, and possessed of a uniquely moralistic heritage and self-image […]" (Ellwood, 1994, p. 23)

This disruption resulted in a twofold effect. First, it gave way to a deep "anthropological denial" (Dawson, 1998, pp. 133–136), rejecting the undesired trajectories history had taken by the early 1970s. With it, factual reality collided with the envisioned promises of a projected – yet by that time obviously untrue – authoritative, unique, morally unshakable, and prosperous self-image. The second effect of the disruption – that undermined all former grand narratives – was an overarching societal cognitive dissonance, or in other words, a sort of "spiritual homelessness" (Berger et al., 1974, pp. 163–180). This absolute destruction of one's cultural orientating and meaning systems took a toll on crucial individual and collective identity components. Alienated and frustrated citizens lost their capabilities to orient in a rapidly changing, ever-stranger world. Former, well-known social structures became either utterly different (families became limiting frameworks, historical heritage became a burden to be left behind and forgotten, political ideologies turned to something to be ashamed of, etc.) or were emptied of their core functionalities, effectively turning into hollow, valueless, and dysfunctional shells. Churches could no longer fulfill their spiritual functions; the social security system became a trap for those who lost their livelihood; education no longer prepared the youth for adulthood; higher education became a monetary scheme (etc.). These processes are illustrated in Glock's 1976 findings about the significance of free will and personal autonomy related to social change. According to Glock, the diffusion of former deterministic scientific and social perspectives has undermined traditional ethics and created a moral crisis in the US. Reflected in the protests since the 1960s, one can see the ferment of this "crisis of meanings," generating a

"search for new forms and structures of meaning" (Glock & Bellah, 1976, pp. 311–312). Like Glock, Bellah also interprets emerging NRMs of the early 1970s as "successor movements" to the revolts of the 1960s against the failing system of utilitarian individualism. In his interpretation, new religious movements aimed to reinstate a new basis for instrumental values in the nation's shaken and shattered moral culture (Bellah & Glock, 2018, p. 77).

These societal changes, alongside a growing, unresolvable distrust towards the surrounding world, combined with the fact that traditional institutions were unable to keep up and offer appropriate new or strengthened grand narratives, created an overwhelming and (up until a point) unsatisfied demand on the religious- and spiritual market for more efficient solutions, which could tackle this loss of grasp over one's surrounding reality (Stievermann et al., 2015, pp. 124–154). In a later chapter, I will elaborate on the significance of religious market theory in understanding this shift; however, it is necessary to point out the exact needs that emerged from anthropological denial, spiritual homelessness, and the crisis of meanings.

Intensity and Individuality in New Religiosity

Individuals affected by the breakdown of prior meaning systems originated predominantly from the youth of the mid-'60s and early- '70. Actively involved in everyday political discourses, sympathizing with (or at least being open to) alternative or innovative ideas and ideologies, these alienated one's needs manifested in a set of combined demands for more-than-mundane meanings. The most important of these elements was the requirement for (one or more) structure(s) offering intense experiences of *security* and *belonging*. As the ever-changing world hollowed out the meanings of prior identity-stabilizing structures, this new demand aimed to reinstate something into the void in these spheres. New institutions – religious and spiritual movements – were called to offer a sense of seclusion, serving the involved with a protective 'bubble.' The demand for more intense feelings of security is easily understandable, especially considering the instability of the discussed period and the rampant value and

meaning crisis. Parallel to these, there was also a significant emphasis on *individuality*, stressing the notion of not losing one's authentic self to the masses. This desire acted as a counterbalance against the uncalled effects of community-building and kept the individual from being 'consumed' by the collective. This attitude is closely connected to one of the core contexts of the era, the culture of individualism (Motak, 2009, pp. 149–161), which I will discuss in the later chapter titled "Culture of Individualism."

Following this, fitting what market theory dictates, the new sum of spiritual suppliers emerged in the late '60s and early '70s, offering several 'products' for the aforementioned 'market needs' in the forms of emergent religiosity and new social- and religious movements. These new formations were adaptive enough to swiftly cope with the ongoing value crisis – offering new or inspired grand narratives and alternative or innovative ways of believing and belonging once again. These new formations battled successfully with the cascading meaning crisis, offering their meanings in articulated and socially isolated settings. Most of the movements of the late 1960s were, therefore, to some extent communitarian movements (such as the OSHO with Rajneeshpuram, the Branch Davidians with the Waco compound, the various Jesus Movement Communes nationwide, the Siloh Commune in Costa Mesa, the Twelve Tribes settlement in Island Pond). Within enclosed borders, their intensively projected and experienced values and meanings effectively created a 'world within the world' – a new *cosmos* in Eliade's words (Eliade, 1959, pp. 29–32). This ensured that their meanings remained mono-narrative (or at least the dominant) for their followers (Coulthard, 2023, pp. 9–26; Miller, 1999, pp. 92–128). Concerning the emergence of such formations, Brian Wilson (Wilson, 1976, pp. 83–89) emphasizes that in this context, NRMs and surrounding formations can be viewed by scholars as early developing forms of potential religious institutions. These new formations appear when the institutional framework of religiosity breaks down in societies and former systems cannot innovate themselves in time or achieve stability to maintain their hegemony. Rodney Stark and

William Bainbridge (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, 19–39) also mention this mechanism, implying that NRMs are natural and beneficial products of a functioning religious economy that affirms pluralism and healthy competition in the spiritual marketplace. Nevertheless, one such 'healthy competition' can only manifest within the liberal environments of market capitalist societies, where the state and its administration won't necessarily intervene, trying to control the aforementioned 'spiritual economy.' In illiberal regimes, new meaning providers have a much more significant headwind as the state utilizes unbalanced policies to maintain the hegemony of established and more cooperative churches, even if such institutes cannot sufficiently provide meanings and certainty for the alienated.

Ways of Coping

Looking at new formations as solution initiatives for the symptoms generated by the upheaval period – including new and alternative religiosity, new social movements, quasi-religiosity, spiritual individualism, (etc.) – one can find distinct coping strategies against the ongoing crisis. In my dissertation, I will outline five, each focusing on different aspects and employing other means and methods to offer the followers the desired senses of *meaning*, *intensity*, and *security*.

The strategy of *returning* opens ways of revisiting and strengthening the meanings of well-known traditional social and/or religious constructs. Essentially, 'doubling down' on these means that movements utilizing this approach form strong connections to existing prior – not necessarily efficient – meaning-providing systems. Inheriting their visage of authority and social functionalities instead of establishing new structures, exploring outwards, or provoking internal change also means that the ways and opportunities for innovation were severely limited for movements utilizing this strategy. However, their familiarity allows such strategists to develop more rapidly, as the path is already beaten for them to a certain point. Moreover, the

primary method these movements apply is ‘fundamentalizing’ the meanings conveyed by their original structures in a countercultural manner. According to Robert Wuthnow, this approach contributed to (and still fuels) the emergence of new-wave traditionalism, puritanism, and neo-conservativism in Western societies (Wuthnow, 1978, pp. 117–144). Using call phrases such as ‘rampant moral decay of the postmodern age’ and ‘loss of traditional values’ to rally new affiliates who happened to be disillusioned with society’s trajectories (in other words, experiencing *anthropological denial*), movements utilizing this strategy may establish themselves quickly in crisis periods and found potential affiliates in their inspirational basis.

Another strategy is the *reforming* approach: a targeted adaptation or improvement of already socially- and culturally embedded institutions. Creating inventive offshoots, new communities choosing this strategy may retain a sense of original authority and pre-established frameworks. Still, they can also be open to introducing more resourceful and innovative solutions in battling spiritual homelessness in the apparent meaning crisis. Proving to be more versatile in their recruitment than their parent movements (and movements exclusively utilizing the *returning* strategy), one may find utilizers of this approach among certain mega-churches (Hunt, 2019, pp. 5–10), neo-Pentecostal movements at reformed- and free church congregations.

The third utilizable method is an active and aimed romanticization, in other terms, *reinvention* or reintroduction of selected, idealized, and simplified historical social-, cultural-, or religious concepts. Movements choosing this strategy make use of a sense of ‘nostalgia’ to form completely new meaning systems. As an extremely powerful conveyer of authority rooted in history and localized (sometimes appropriated) cultural heritage (Snook, 2015, pp. 48–52), nostalgia, and romantic historical thought may efficiently establish a sense of authority and legitimacy for the involved. Connecting themselves to a (mainly) pseudo-historical lineage, providing strong identity components, cultural-orientational meanings, and seemingly authentic self-verification channels, movements that utilize the *reinvention*

approach may offer a way to reposition and reconnect with one's own (or appropriated) lineage and heritage in a rapidly changing and uprooting world. These simplified meaning systems may manifest a basis for exclusivist pride but, at the same time, have the capacity to open up new forms of interaction between previously disparate cultural complexes. Perfect examples of utilizers of this strategy would be indigenous new religious formations and regional native faith movements, including neopaganism, Wicca, and various syncretic neo- and urban shaman groups (Drury, 2009, pp. 13–81).

One of the most exciting strategies, however, is the *reorienting* method. Manifesting primarily on individual levels by attaining a 'seeker' attitude (Lofland & Stark, 1965, pp. 862–875), utilizers of this approach gain the opportunity to search for new – yet seemingly familiar – individualized meaning systems and solutions. Finding these typically outside of their former socio-cultural matrix, the incorporation of simultaneously novel yet still familiar components proves to be an effective channel in affirming personalized coping methods against the sense of spiritual homelessness. Most followers of neo-Vedic movements utilize this adaptive strategy. Rallying around charismatic leaders (gurus, prophets, mystics, teachers, wise men or women, shamans, healers, incarnations, and visionaries), they find a new center(s), real living *axis mundi* for their cultural orientational system. These individuals may base their identities (partially or entirely) on pre-established meaning systems developed by and centered around said charismatic leaders (Wallis, 1982, pp. 25–27).

Lastly, the *redefining* strategy offers ways to reshape one's perception of the world completely. Starting with the abolishment of terms like religion and religiosity, sacred and profane, ritual purity and taboos, everyday and ritual practices, (etc.) this strategy offers a 'blank canvas' on which individuals may formulate their own ideas, definitions or even non-definitions, creating an unstructured, entirely new, and highly individualizable network of ideas and meanings. In practical reality, these strategies manifest as intersections between religiosity,

spiritual attunement, and other surrogate spheres. These may be (without a comprehensive list) fandom and pop culture (Cusack & Kosnác, 2017, pp. 1–13), subcultural movements (Nemes, 2023b, pp. 79–101), bricolage religiosity (Altglas, 2014, pp. 474–493), atheism, and non-religiosity (as a religious system) (J. M. Smith & Halligan, 2021, pp. 85–110), event religiosity (S. Heidl, 2017, pp. 133–157), quasi-religious formations, or even conspiracy beliefs (Nemes, 2023a). Foundationally, these utilizers of the *redefining* strategy find solutions outside of the conventionally defined forms of religion, with the new structures effectively fulfilling the same purposes as former religious institutions. The added merits for utilizers of the *redefining* strategy are the personalizability of meanings on individual levels and the never-before-seen freedom for experimentation and expression of individual uniqueness (in some cases, even against the collective aspects of religiosity).

Each of these five strategies offers various ways to tackle spiritual homelessness and the crisis of meaning. By creating more emphasized, completely new, reinvented, redefined, or reshaped vantage points and seeking answers for everlasting existential questions, such as 'Who am I,' 'What is my purpose,' and 'Where do I belong,' these strategies may produce stable and intensive subsystems of believing and belonging (with at least minimal) formal structures. While the *returning* and *reforming* strategies emphasize belonging, *reorienting* and *redefining* allow a more liberal, individual interpretation of belief. *Reinventing* could be positioned in the middle of this imaginary spectrum, placing equal amounts of emphasis on articulating belonging and expressing intensive personal beliefs. In each of these strategies, the answers for *believing* provide a source for self-verification and navigation in an alien world. Meanwhile, frameworks for *belonging* stabilize the individuals' attained meaning systems, preventing further alienation and functioning as placeholders for the crumbling surrounding macrostructures that previously provided these meanings for the individual.

Theoretical Settings of New Religious Emergence

After overcoming the initial historical and societal 'eagle perspectives' about the NRM emergence, I have arrived at this dissertation's first resting point. Looking back, I will now make up for some questions I intentionally avoided, overstepped, or neglected and overview the key findings of this first segment.

I have discussed how external conditions and societal stress create an unstable and uncertain environment in which formerly stable mono-narrative meanings become either valueless or hollowed out. I pointed out that this process leads individuals – affected by both the value crisis and the crisis of meanings – to question the very basis of their existence and doubt the validity of their life choices, including religious and spiritual decisions. Moreover, I have pointed out that traditional institutions in these situations aren't sufficient coping mechanism providers, as they lack the necessary flexible capacities to provide feelings of stability and certainty for the affected. Their positions in society are shaken, as those who feel the stress start to search for alternatives and experiment with reinstating their meanings through other channels that may provide these in an intense manner. There is a variety (the introduced five strategies) of how these can be achieved. However, their common denominators are the reinstated feelings of *intensity*, *meaning*, and *security*, and the two key elements each aims to strengthen: *believing* and *belonging*.

Moving further, I will tackle some previously overstepped or neglected issues. First, I will overview and contextualize the secularization debate and the barriers it poses in my context. After this, I will introduce the religious market theory by Stark and Bainbridge to outline the mechanisms of a changing spiritual environment and the emergence of a 'free-for-all' religious market economy. To complement this market-theorist approach, I will also reflect on the culture of individualism with the guidance of Dominika Motak and Danièle Hervieu-Léger's comments. Here, I will underline the significance of individuality in postmodernity's conditions

and its general opposition to collectivism's 'part-of-the-masse' notion. As my focus is limited, I will not immerse myself too deeply into these issues and leave some promising leads for the future. Questions of pluralism on systematic levels, the paradigm of secularism (meaning, the political ideology, not to be confused by secularization's condition and social process), the criticism of the market theorist approach, and issues of collective identity will not be explicitly addressed. Instead, I will focus on my 'red thread,' leading out of this complex maze of theories and reality perceptions. This way, I will arrive at the term "new religious movements" to examine its contexts and history. My aim here will be to find where the Smartian dual model can be introduced to the examined complex and explore how this framework may aid the scholarly understanding of this complex new religiosity.

Religiosity Remains, Even Against Secularization

From its original contexts examining the 20th century's social conditions, later to its reinvention, discussing the effects of rapid modernization in the 21st century, the concept of secularization (not to be confused with secularism, the political ideology) has been formulated and reformulated multitudes of times since its inception. Each of these attempts were based on a highly debatable idea: with continuous scientific progress, technological innovation, and industrialization, religion, which has historically provided frameworks and explanations for natural phenomena, functioning as a unifying meaning system, would fail to fulfill its social-cohesive and meaning providing functionalities and eventually cease to exist. As I'm currently discussing new and emergent religiosity – a key subject of the academic study of religions today–, I can confidently conclude that substantial elements of this theory have not stood well in the trials of history over the past 60 years. Still, examining this theory's developments in the light of new religiosity is beneficial to grasp how this idea and its critique shaped the scholarly debate about religiosity's place, significance, and general understanding in the contemporary world.

In my opinion, Max Weber's understanding is a fitting starting point[37] for overviewing this theory. Weber drew attention to the fact that although Western societies became more rationalized and "disenchanted" from religion by the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Swatos & Christiano, 1999, pp. 211–214; Weber, 2020, 13-20; 35-38; 50-53). However, he underlined that although religion seemingly becomes "devalued" in modern societies, it isn't in the process of vanishing from social reality.[38] With Thomas Luckmann's additions to this and the dissection of social mechanisms in modern secular tendencies, the discipline of religions studies saw a much-needed renewal of Weber and Tönnes's original framework (Luckmann, 2022). In Luckmann's opinion, religiosity in secularized societies became more "privatized" and "marginalized" – retreating into its remaining social spheres – rather than disappearing entirely. Luckmann's findings are an essential marker of an ongoing shift in the social and scholarly perception of religiosity. Pointing out that in contemporary societies, religious institutions (in a sociological sense) can no longer be exclusively found in traditional societal (i.e., public) spheres – leading to some assumptions of a supposed religious decline. However, this couldn't be further away from social reality, as religiosity's structures remained – even strengthened – in some spheres. Drawing attention to this dynamism, Bryan Wilson raised the legitimate question of whether the field of the academic study of religions should widen its perspectives when researching postmodern religiosity. Wilson noted that in the 1960s, "there is a religious response to the changing social order" as new forms of religiosity such as "ecumenicalism,

[37] Ferdinand Tönnes is widely recognized for his contributions to the secularization theory. However, it is more appropriate to commence my analysis with Weber. His differentiation between sects and churches established the foundation for early NRS and still continues to influence modern discourses, causing mostly semantic confusion.

[38] Freud et al. (1989), Feuerbach (1989), Marx and Stone (1904) regarded religion as a mere illusion, which will naturally be left behind as rationality and science find the answers of modernity. As religion is still a prevalent element of contemporary societies, I can state, that their understandings of religion's significance were inherently flawed, as they missed the anthropological necessity of religiosity and its essential role in maintaining the condition of *homo religious.*

denominationalism," and "sectarianism" (Wilson, 2016, pp. 3–15) emerged from the margins and outskirts of conventional religious environments.

In his work, *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger pointed out yet another exciting mechanism that further complicated the case of secularization (Berger, 1990, 1967). Besides his general statements connecting the processes of secularization to capitalism (emphasizing the latter's loosening effects on the relations between the rational postmodern individual and the *transcendent*), Berger also highlighted the significance of pluralism. For him, religious pluralism was rooted in the detectable crisis of mono-narrative credibility. He considered this "a social-structural correlate of the secularization of consciousness" (Berger, 1990, 1967, p. 147). Stressing that secularization does not only undermine the dominant religious narratives but also creates multiple parallel – sometimes even opposing or intertwined – new ones through its processes, Berger stated that in pluralistic societies, religion would not only have to compete within its own environment against other contenders but outside it as well with similar meaning-providing secular structures: nationalism, individualism, collectivism, radical political and social thought, and many more. He underlined that these secular meaning providers have emerged from the (post-)modern thought's individualistic orientation and a post-truth reality. Their presence in the meaning-providing market – a sphere that was historically exclusive to religiosity – showed that the functions fulfilled by religiosity are gradually opening up in correlation to the crisis of prior mono-narratives provided by formerly dominant institutes. Gaining ground in other spheres, these new meaning-providers can be interpreted – once again, from a functionalist scholar's perspective – as post-modernity's new forms of religiosity, or at least as quasi-religiosity.

Andrew Greeley – an impactful critic of the secularization idea – formulated similar conclusions, stating that although "basic human religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed very notably since the late Ice Age" (Greeley, 1972, 1–3), the emergence of new and alternative religiosity since the early 60s proves that religiosity is, in fact,

not in decline, but quite the opposite (Greeley, 1972, pp. 14–16). Nevertheless, even Greeley noted that religiosity has somewhat changed over the last century – becoming a choice rather than a societal imperative and leaving behind certain governing spheres – he also stressed that its significance as a persistent marker of the human condition (i.e., "*homo religious*" (Leeuw, et al., 2001)) still remains and will remain a crucial anthropological element of the human condition in the future. In this statement, we can almost hear the echoes of Malinowski, pointing out that religion is "that which always remains" (Malinowski, 1977, p. 34).

Grace Davie's findings further nuanced the secularization theory, correlating the supposed decline in church attendance rates in the UK with the detectable presence of inherent religiosity and religious needs (i.e., "believing without belonging" (Davie, 1990, 1994)). Even Bryan Wilson – who proposed a redefinition of the secularization theory in 1998 (Laermans et al., 1998, pp. 45–67) – corrected some of his former statements, emphasizing that it is not religiosity that is in a seeming decline of significance, but the traditional forms of religious institutions in the societal sphere, which can be due to their inflexibility and lack of innovation when facing the crisis of prior meanings.

Still, some of the secularization theory's general notions[39] are valuable, with the condition that one interprets these in their appropriate intellectual contexts. As such, it is unquestionable that with the technological revolution, social developments, and historical progress of the past century, society overcame some of its prior concepts of various supernatural and

[39] It is crucial to note that Berger's take on the secularization theory has received substantial criticism since its inception (such as from Hans Joas, Ulrich Beck, Grace Davie, and Danièle Hervieu-Léger), and his statements have changed accordingly after the reception of these (Berger (1999); Berger et al. (2008)). In his later works, he emphasized that the theory of an inevitable decline of religiosity parallel with technological innovation, rooted in notions from the Enlightenment, is no longer a maintainable scholarly position. Instead, he proposed a more pluralistic approach to contemporary religious trends, focusing more on the 'fragmentation' or multiplication of religious phenomena. Inspired by José Casanova (Casanova (1994, pp. 11–40, 2011, pp. 54–74)) and Alfred Schutz (Schutz et al. (1973, pp. 50–58)), he paralleled this new concept with empirical evidence about individualizing and pluralizing global religious economies and the 'multiple realities' these may manifest in the contemporary world (Berger (2014)).

transcendent actors in the world – effectively "disenchanting" reality (using Weber's terminology) from religiosity's notions and detaching it from the overarching cultural orienting systems religiosity provides. However, it is precisely this process, complemented by an accelerating change and technological advancement – which is the most prevalent marker of the late 20th and early 21st centuries – that resulted in a never-seen mass alienation and loss of meaning in the Western world. Manifesting as a crisis of meanings, the affected alienated individuals – struck with feelings of the previously discussed anthropological denial and spiritual homelessness – yearn for ways to counter the unwanted effects of secularization. From now on, I interpret alienation as a process of losing former ties to the *transcendent* through rapid societal and technological innovation and effectively becoming lost in this new, alien world. New and emergent religious movements or alternative social movements can be viewed – in this context – as flexible, early-developing forms of new meaning systems, offering more adequate answers or protective frameworks in these circumstances. In this context, Wilson raises a legitimate criticism – pointing out that NRMs and NSMs are statistically marginal movements compared to what he defines as "world religions" (Laermans et al., 1998, pp. 52–56). However, I would argue that the multiplicity and diversity of these movements prove my point. In rapid technological developmental and societal upheaval periods, religiosity *is*, *was*, and *will be* the most effective meaning-providing structure. Hence, even in the postmodern world – described with accelerating change and the disassembly of foundational unshakable truths (i.e., post-truth (McIntyre, 2018)) – the perseverance and significance of religiosity is unquestionable. As such, scholarly inquiry must focus on the new forms religiosity may attain in these new settings and examine how these expand beyond the conventionally accepted borders of religion, 'contaminating' (Douglas, 2003, pp. 8–36) other spheres and creating new 'products' in a so-called "religious marketplace."

Consuming Religions - Demand and Supply on the Contemporary Religious Marketplace

Introduced by Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, pp. 39–68, 1987), the "religious market theory" – also known as the "religious economy theory" or the "rational choice theory" (L. A. Young, 2016, XI-3) – strived to grasp the shift in the religious attitudes of postmodernity in a more comprehensive way. This theory depicts religiosity as part of a broader 'economic' system in society in which 'supply' is presented in the forms of religious establishments and their services. At the same time, 'demand' varies according to the degrees of overall and particular needs for individual solutions to complex questions and practical issues with religious ferment.

Reflecting on statements of the secularization paradigm – scrutinizing it for its highly Eurocentric applicability and ignorance towards various cross-cultural trends (such as Islam fundamentalism in the Middle East and Middle Asia, neo-protestant revivalism in the United States, and the emergence of politicized religion in Eastern Central Europe, etc.) – this socio-economic model established itself through utilizing four theoretical understandings. First, it underlined that religiosity is a natural and inherent trait of humanity that cannot be wholly separated or left out (Leeuw, et al., 2001, p. 42). Second, it interpreted religion as a compensator – effectively a network of coping systems (or *meaning systems* in my current terminology) – which functions by offering systematized answers for existential, ontological, and practical questions. Third, as the abovementioned subject are unanswerable with certainty, the market theory dictates that there will always be a constant demand for transcendent meanings in society: individuals under stress necessarily turn towards coping mechanisms to find (quasi-)resolutions or at least reconciliation in their disarray. Of the many coping mechanisms, religiosity provides the longest-lasting reconciliation the most efficiently.

Stark and Bainbridge also note that the theoretical basis of market theory is not a static concept. It constantly evolves through three distinct phases: a (*a*) *decline* – where established religious participation fades due to various factors, such as dysfunctionality, outdatedness, or non-utilizable answers; a (*b*) *revival* – where alternatives and new religious formations fill the generated market gap with a wide range of meaning systems, emerging after the decline of former religious institutions. These new formations offer new, generally more practical, or individuum-centered coping methods, which former institutions couldn't provide due to their already cemented nature. In the cases of such 'cemented' forms, the established character of religious traditions functions as a barrier that prevents innovation and adequate response to the changing 'demand' on the 'market.' Finally, this leads to the third phase of a (*c*) *renewal* – where religious participation is yet again heightened for a given period as a consequence of expanding 'supply' in the market, in which every potential follower may find a more fitting solution – or in economic terminology 'product.' However – as per the mechanisms of any economy– this renewal is yet again followed by an apparent decline when religiosity's slowly institutionalizing newer forms gradually lose their less efficiency, creating a new 'demand' and restarting the entire cycle.

This three-stage constant fluctuation is also closely connected to the degrees of religious pluralism. Berger (Berger, 1990, 1967) believed that religious pluralism negatively affected religiosity and religious participation; however, Stark and Bainbridge argued that a wider array of religious traditions in the same social environment would result in the exact opposite. They emphasized that heavily regulated – or even monopolistic – religious environments reduce consumer participation in a similar way as it happens with the economy of non-market capitalist systems (Chaves & Cann, 1992; Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 12). By reducing the potential 'consumers' (i.e., religiously attuned individuals or religious seekers) access to a narrower palette of 'services' and 'products' (i.e., appropriate meaning systems), the limited

range creates parallelly lower chances of finding a fitting meaning system, inevitably decreasing the market's drive. This is a rational thought: when no product fits us perfectly, we don't buy anything from that particular store. In the case of religiosity, these mechanisms work alongside the same principles. When the range and forms of experiencing the *Other* are restricted only to inefficient or unfitting forms, we don't feel called to participate and stay out entirely. Laurence R. Iannaccone states that religious monopolies in this regard eventually "impede religious markets just as they [i.e., governmental policies] do secular ones" (Iannaccone, 1991, pp. 156–177). In pluralist religious environments, where any forms of religiosity may exist and compete with each other by offering better (i.e., more individually fitting and efficient) services, the consumers may demand to be satiated more frequently and intensively. This generates interest and an increased market drive for a growing populous of potential consumers seeking efficient products and solutions in the expanding market. This model above was tried and tested by Stark and Finkle's 1988 study, in which they pinpointed visible correlations between highly pluralistic environments – such as the urbanized regions and greater cities in the US – and maintained high levels of religious participation or spiritual interest (Finke & Stark, 1988, pp. 41–49). Contrary to what former concepts stated, religiosity in these environments wasn't in decline but quite the opposite:

> "Contrary to the pleas of the clergy and the pronouncements of social scientists, the city is surprisingly sacred, and pluralism is friend, not foe, to religious mobilization. […] the city not only offers easy access to churches, it also offers a variety of churches, all competing for adherents. Some sociologists have suggested that the competition of an open religious economy will undermine all forms of religious commitment, but we have argued that this competition has facilitated religious mobilization. The results support our argument. Both religious diversity and the presence of Catholics increased the rate of adherence in a city. Not only did each factor

have a direct effect on the rate of adherence, they also had indirect effects by increasing the evangelical efforts of Protestant Sunday schools. Thus, a natural consequence of an open religious economy is a religious pluralism that forces each religious body to appeal successfully to some segment of the religious market, or to slide into oblivion." (Finke & Stark, 1988, p. 47)

Needless to say, some consider this theory overly "reductionist"[40] (Verweij et al., 1997, p. 321) and ignorant of some exemptions (such as Poland's high percentage of practicing Catholic affiliation[41]). However, it is best to none when examining postmodern, market-capitalist, and, most importantly, highly individualized consumer societies' religious trends on a global scale (François, 2020, pp. 160–162).

Culture of Individualism

The culture of individualism is yet another perspective I need to introduce to approach the new religious environment appropriately. Emilé Durkheim defines individualism as "the cult of which he [the individual] is at once both object and follower" (Durkheim, 1982, p. 9). Connected to this, Dominika Motak points out a contemporary "tectonic shift in the sacred landscape." According to her, this is generated by postmodernity's individualization: the disruption and disillusion in grand, all-encompassing prior metanarratives (Motak, 2009, p. 130).

[40] It is imperative that I mention Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta's related work in their book titled *Religion and Modernity. An International Comparison* (Pollack and Rosta (2017, 287-339; 391-412)). Their findings underlined that the market theory approach might have a flawed basis in particular cases, such as in Italy, Poland, Germany, and Russia. However, at the same time, they have also delivered several case studies where the theory might be verifiable (USA, Brazil, South Korea).

[41] Even this statement can be the subject of debate when inspecting the Catholic affiliation rates in younger generations (in the 20s-30s age groups). However, I will not discuss these as they are not the focus of my research and as there are already excellently written investigations, such as Gauthier (2022); Gautier (1997); Mandes and Rogaczewska (2013). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that religiosity – as a cultural-anthropological constant – may manifest in a plethora of forms, depending on the discussed sociocultural environment. In this regard, it may show a completely different face in the religiously more attended United States – where expressing religious thought and one's religion are considered publicly discussable questions – and more withdrawn or even secular societies, such as France, Czechia, or the previously mentioned Poland.

As Motak posits, individualization is humanity's genuine counter-reaction to the failing of prior meaning systems. Aiming to 'return to something sacred,' the individual seeks solace from the disruption on an existential-ontological basis, struggling to find something unshakeable. Something that may provide comfort in an acceleratingly more uprooted, alien, and distanced world.

> "[Thus, individualization is] a reaction to the pluralization of world-views which has shaken the foundations of socially generated ontological security and brought about a situation of generalized uncertainty […] After the fiasco of the twentieth century lay ideologies, disgraced by the totalitarian systems, modernity gave up constructing all-encompassing world-views. […] We are no longer creating 'grand narratives,' but only telling Kiplinguesque 'just-so stories.'" (Motak, 2009, pp. 130–131)

Hervieu-Léger adds two elements to this observation, elaborating on the symptoms of the process. She sees individualization as "an increasingly clear-cut dislocation between the 'fear of shortage' and the aspiration to happiness, which is now labeled 'self-realization,' 'fulfilling one's potential,' 'personal access to 'wisdom,' 'balance,' 'inner peace'" (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63). Connected to this, she states that technological revolutions undermined "what entire civilizations have for thousands of years considered to be imperatives inevitably imposed upon humans by the dictates of the natural world […]." Humanity reached a point in history when the rules of nature "are now increasingly perceived as a set of mechanisms that can be manipulated, broken down, reorganized and modified. Nature has ceased to be an order, in either sense of the word: nature is perceived less and less as a world governed by immutable, eternal principles and is consequently less and less able to impose its rules on humans" (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63).

Therefore, with modernization and technological revolution, humanity overcame and conquered nature, enforcing its own rules on it. However, the meanings of traditional structures – rooted in nature's undeniable dominion and humanity's "creatureliness" (Smart, 1996, p. 42)

– were also disrupted in this process. As postmodernity demolished "the foundations of the religious civilizations incorporating this view of nature" (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63), the change has also made the world feel more "illegible, fragmentary, changeable and contingent." (Motak, 2009, p. 131). In these settings, individuals seek – and eventually find – new bases for existential and ontological stability. Instead of pursuing permanence and overarching grand narratives, postmodern individuals must embrace the fluidity of surrounding reality and establish their adaptive identities accordingly. Leaving behind former rigid structures of religious practice, they turn towards their own needs before anything else:

> "There remains nothing that man may love and honour in common, apart from himself. This is why man has become a god for men, and it is why he can no longer turn to other gods without being untrue to himself." (Motak, 2009, p. 131)

This radical change also affects individuals' relations to institutionalized or established religiosity. In this regard, Hervieu-Léger underlines that:

> "[…] major religions are less and less 'codes of meaning' imposed on individuals from above, and less and less 'natural communities' within which individuals inherit their religious identity through generations. In [post-]modern societies, […] religious identity is increasingly a matter of personal choice. Individuals make their own choice of religious allegiance—often after a long spiritual journey […] moving away from the model of the 'practicing' believer, who receives his religious identity from the community to which he belongs from childhood, and within which he complies with rules of religious observance set by the institution responsible for the transmission of faith." (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63)

According to Hubert Knoblauc, the decreasing interest in institutionalized religiosity and growing attention towards individualized models generates distinct forms of religious individualization: "individual syncretism" (compiling a 'personal religiosity' from existing systems),

"searching" (instead of settling with one form of religiosity, constantly switching and transitioning), and "pluralism" (simultaneously harboring multiple, separate religious or spiritual beliefs) (Knoblauch, 1999, pp. 201–202). Each approach allows more liberal experimentations for the individual, affirming a 'do-it-yourself' or 'bricolage' form of religiosity. Building this highly personalized and individually fitting religious or spiritual structure takes up the meaning-providing functions of previous failing societal macrostructures (Altglas, 2014, pp. 474–493). The process also brings forth the so-called "culture of individualism" by removing the 'middleman' between the individual and the *transcendent* and offering a looser framework for self-expression, fulfillment, and experimentation. Steve Lucas summarizes perfectly that the culture of individualism is a general characteristic of contemporary religiosity, which is based on "the view that the individual believer does not need intermediaries, that he has the primary responsibility for his own spiritual destiny, that he has the right and the duty to come to his own relationships with his God in his own way and by his own effort" (Lukes, 2006, p. 94).

By claiming – or rather reclaiming (depending on one's interpretation) – the active agent's role in transcendent communications, the individual finally finds a desired 'fluid stability' and 'shapeable certainty' and establishes his existential-ontological basis on these principles. These oxymorons become the new call words for postmodern individuality and reshape how religiosity functions in personal and communal settings. Affecting both worldviews, social structures, and the forms and limitations of religiosity itself, this "tectonic shift" is the single most significant change in postmodernity's setting that changes every aspect of life and perception of reality. Needless to say, this isn't a novel finding. Even Durkheim reflects on it when he states that man becomes both the worshipper and the object of worship. With it, he destroys former structures and rebuilds a new one based on the only unmovable object he can find in the entirety of existence and the only thing he cannot and will not dare to doubt: *himself alone* (Durkheim, 1982, p. 9). This, however, raises a concern: how does this "paradigm change"

(Kuhn, 1996, pp. 77–92) affect religiosity's manifestations? To answer this, it is best to take a step back and inspect the concept of religiosity in postmodern settings.

Religiosity in the Postmodern Age – Widening the Scope

Hervieu-Léger and Motak's take on the culture of individualism is essential in capturing the contemporary attitudes toward religiosity (Hervieu-Léger, 2006; Motak, 2009). However, their model misses the opportunity to reflect on crucial changes in religiosity's 'more nuanced' embodiments. As in later chapters, I will discuss certain subjects that – to some – could seem categorically not religious; I feel it is necessary to briefly reflect on my viewpoint that lays down some legitimacy for such examinations. I will argue that for some, religiosity's previous frameworks were so limiting that with the arrival of postmodernity and its destruction of prior structures, they eventually found new meanings in other non-traditional narratives. These may manifest (without any particular order) in the spheres of subcultures (Nemes, 2023b), conspiracy theories (Nemes, 2023a; Piraino et al., 2022), fiction and fandom (Bickerdike, 2016; Cusack et al., 2019), or even in sports (Cusack, 2023) and non-religion (J. M. Smith & Halligan, 2021, pp. 85–110). This raises the scholarly necessity to inspect such forms as either religious, quasi-religious, or para-religious subsystems and incorporate these into academic investigations when discussing contemporary postmodern meaning providers.

To verify my viewpoint on this issue, it is best to place my subject under the lens of postmodernity. I will not spend too much time on the definition of the term or on debating whether we live in the postmodern era (Lambert, 1999, pp. 36–307), as there have been numerous volumes and study collections on this issue (Heelas et al., 1998; Lyon, 2000; Sim, 2001) and there are scholars whose entire academic production revolves around such questions (Lyotard, 1984). Nevertheless, it is beneficial to outline a handful of elements that are

focal points for my postmodern argument. György Mészáros describes postmodernity with the following statements:[42]

> "The modern age, linked to the idea of the Renaissance and proclaiming renewal in contrast to the old, seems to have reached the point of 'burning out.' […] social processes are moving in a post-industrial direction: new forms of technology and information are replacing productivity with reproduction. […] We do not act but rather make things act and operate them for their own merits. […] Uncertainty and meaninglessness are the keywords of this 'new world.' Derrida calls this the displacement of meaning(s), the slipping and dissolving into 'infinity.' […] The Weberian Protestant and Puritan (typically modern) ethics lose relevance, while the ideas of progress and rationality are being eroded. According to many thinkers, the narratives that produced comprehensive explanations of a unified worldview are over." (Mészáros, 2003, pp. 4–5)

Yves Lambert, in his 1999 study, outlines similar key elements, stating that the "hallmark of postmodernity" will be the "disqualification of 'great narratives': great religions, great ideologies (nationalism, Communism, fascism), and the ideology of endless progress." This is followed by "the detraditionalization of the life-world, the anti-authoritarian revolt, hedonism, new social movements, and above all, individualization […] [then a] selective return to certain traditions, once modernity has prevailed over tradition, or for the repeated claim to local identities, which is a reaction against globalization" (Lambert, 1999, pp. 306–307). Reading Lambert's thoughts from 1999, one cannot doubt that we are in an age that eerily resembles these postmodern traits.

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[42] Although the original paragraph from Mészáros is in Hungarian, I took the liberty of providing a reliable translation. While I don't possess a certified translator degree, I'm hopeful that my translation doesn't compromise the integrity of his central argument.

Additionally, Jean-François Lyotard outlines similar traits in his book *The Postmodern Condition - A Report on Knowledge*. He states that the postmodern existence is essentially "as incredulity towards metanarratives," which is a result of progress in the sciences, leading to "the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation; most notably, the crisis of meta-physical philosophy" (Lyotard, 1984, pp. xxiv–xxv). Lyotard points out that the construction of truth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries' metanarratives were based mostly on the rationality and steadiness of the Enlightenment. These notions, however, have imploded with the emergence of a postmodern age. Accelerated by consumerism and globalization, technological innovation, and a never-seen communicational- and informational exchange, the answers to what is consid-ered 'truth' (meaning-providing in my terminology) are no longer monopolized by one set of stable metanarratives (McIntyre, 2018, 1-17; 123-151). On the contrary, there are several in the postmodern age, each competing with the other rather than synthesizing. This is reflected in the never-seen scientific and social production, accelerated by previously unthinkable innovation, which constantly bombards any remaining stable elements of traditional world perception. Caught in such a drift of new concepts and paradigm-demolishing innovations, it isn't surprising that societal attitudes toward religiosity (as one of the last remaining meaning-providing systems) change accordingly. Nevertheless, these rapid changes also affect the structures of religiosity. With it, religion loses its atemporality and becomes a commodity to be chosen according to the given individual's needs and preferences. It slowly becomes a part of a loose set of various lim-ited narrative(s), among which one may find secular ideas, fictitious narratives, non-religion, anti-religion, and other meaning-providing complexes. This process, however, does not bring a supposed decline of religion, as many secularists would presume (Bruce, 2002; D. A. Martin, 1969; Sheedy, 2022; van der Tol & Gorski, 2022). On the contrary, religiosity is transformed under the pressure of these new rules and "produces secularization as well as new religious forms,

in particular: worldliness, dehierarchization of the human and the divine, self-spirituality, para-scientificity, pluralism, and mobility" (Lambert, 1999, p. 303).

These new rules reshape the embodiments of religiosity as its mechanisms are transplanted into other (seemingly non-religious) meaning systems, offering familiar notions of *belonging*, *believing*, and *security* on new channels.[43] These new forms have comparable new 'rituals,' narratives, social structures, and materiality, generating a wider palette for self-expression, as well as new ways for producing intense experiences morphologically similar to the discussed transcendent encounters. Furthermore, they may create similarly structured frameworks for a sense of morality and ownable identities, reestablishing the partakers' self-image and repositioning them in the surrounding world by providing complex meanings similar to what previous traditional religious institutions offered.

To conclude, in the postmodern age, religiosity does not disappear; instead, it reshapes itself and takes up new, strange forms, contaminating formerly 'secular' spheres and offering similar complex meanings through the conquered new channels. Humanity does not leave behind its inherent – anthropological constant – sense of religiosity in the dawn of postmodernity, as without it, the human condition – with all of its uncertainties and existential dread – wouldn't be maintainable. The new nuanced forms of meaning providers – of which the most evident

[43] Another possible result of this process is what the scholarship refers to as aesthetic transcendence (Freeman (2018)). Not to be confused with Kant's similar term of transcendental aesthetics, the term aesthetic transcendence refers to the phenomenon of being pushed into an extraordinary mode of existence, invoked by observing either mundane or artistic elements of life. I will not cover these phenomena extensively in my dissertation; however, it is worth noting that inspired observation – whether it is conscious, religious, or unconscious profane – has the capacity to evoke intense similar experiences that the scholarship associates with experiencing the "wholly Other." As such, entering Saint Peter's Cathedral for the first time instinctively prompts feelings of creatureliness and insignificance in the presence of something much grander even in the case of an agnostic. In a similar way, walking through a series of Japanese torii gates invokes feelings of liminality, even for culturally external individuals. Nevertheless, such experiences are not exclusive to religious settings, as aesthetic transcendence can also be experienced in 'profane' contexts. The emotional response to seeing the curvature of the earth from a plane and observing the grandeur of natural formations may invoke similar emotions of *Otherness*.

are new religious movements – are visible signs that religiosity is undoubtedly an inherently human trait, and without it, humanity would not only lose one of its essential 'cultural navigational tools' but part of itself as well. As such, the postmodern paradigm's perspectives show us that investigations about contemporary religiosity must be a continuous effort. One must consider expanding the conventionally accepted scope of religions studies and incorporate some – preferably most – of these strange, new embodiments of human religiosity. Through this, the academic study of religions, could take a step closer to understanding religion and religiosity in the context of how essential these structures are in contemporary globalized, postmodern societies.

Verdict on Pluralism, Individuality, and the Crisis of Meanings

I have explored the contemporary condition from four interconnected angles in the previous four subchapters. Starting from an economical approach, I have discussed religiosity's dynamism on a spiritual 'market' with its particular forms of supply and demand. I have explored the background of these demands from the perspective of a change in human perception. More precisely, I have discussed how humanity lost the substantive elements of its traditional meanings; what kind of systematic crisis has emerged from said loss of meanings; and how individuals got ahold of the last remaining certainty in their lives – themselves – from which they have started to rebuild a new perceived reality, utilizing new religiosity's building blocks.

At this point, I have arrived at a clearing in this maze of theories, from which I can finally look back at this interconnected situation. My question is: how do I evaluate such a tectonic shift in meanings? The processes that postmodernity brought are – in a sense – inevitable, meaning that these changes could not have been avoided. They are all connected to human- and technological advancement. Reestablishing meaning for the individual is a similarly organic and natural process. One can also speculate that the new conditions I have discussed may affirm more intense involvement and active participation. Individuals leave (or are forced

to leave) the taken-for-granted meanings to regain their forfeited agency. With it, they find *real* meanings in their lives. However, accepting that these processes dissolve former systems, and create a society-wide crisis is also a necessary realization. Pluralism, in this regard, establishes an environment where choice is no longer a privilege – or in Berger and Luckmann's words "you don't have the option to decide whether you want to choose or not." Instead, choosing and active agency over one's life becomes an imperative in almost every aspect 'you must always choose whether you like it or not' (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 44–45).

To some, this imperative is a horror in itself. They are used to the convention, familiar with the "taken-for-granted" meanings. They find solace in certainty, familiarity and easily maintainable traditions. To them, the new rules of postmodernity's plurality and individualism are the possible worst outcomes of historical, human, and technological advancement, as they lose the safety of inherited meanings. To others, however, these new rules are a blessing: their burdens of prior heritage and inexpressible religious feelings in rigid structures are lifted. Liberated from such cemented hollowness, they are now free to seek and experiment with reestablishing a 'new existence' outlined by *their* take on *intensity, security, and belonging*. With it, they redraw the borders of religiosity, try countless new forms of self-expression and create one of the greatest challenges for scholars who aim to understand these. In the following chapters, I will discuss the case of this second attitude type and focus on their new meaning systems, that new and alternative religiosity manifests and in which plurality, individuality, and agency redefine the known meanings of *intensity, security, and belonging.*

New Religions Studies – A Multifaceted Discipline and a Contested Field

> "During the twentieth century, the West has experienced a phenomenon it has not encountered since the reign of Constantine: the growth of and significant visible presence of a variety of non-Christian and non-orthodox Christian bodies competing for the religious allegiance of the public. This growth of so many religious

alternatives is forcing the West into a new situation in which the still dominant Christian religion must share its centuries-old hegemony in a new pluralistic religious environment" (Melton, 1997, pp. 594–617).

J. Gordon Melton's contribution to the 1997 *New Handbook of Living Religions* shows that by the mid-90s, most of the academia had accepted the undeniable presence of NRMs and realized the necessity of researching these – most definitely living – new religions. By 1997, the specialized field of new religions studies (NRS) had almost forty years to steadily carve out its own path and deal with a number of initial issues. The designation as 'specialization' rather than an autonomous field comes from the notions of Michael Ashcraft, who underlines the specialization's transdisciplinary traits. As he posits:

"The field of NRM studies is a specialization. It constantly breaks apart and recombines elements of disciplines to form its own structure. Its origins are rooted first and foremost in the sociology of religion, itself a major specialization within sociology, and secondarily in religious studies, a combination of two disciplinary families: the humanities and the social sciences. Like the sociology of religion, the field of NRM studies has as its object of study the social formations and processes that can be measured and evaluated scientifically. Like religious studies, the field of NRM studies approaches all religious phenomena as instances of the same general principles regarding religious behavior, community, and belief." (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 8)

Underlining the transdisciplinary nature of this field of inquiry, complemented with a description of the three mechanisms (analysis – breaking phenomena apart into their elements; synthesis – recombining them into functioning systems; and interpretation – detailing how these mechanisms operate individually and as a whole) Ashcraft also provided a blueprint for the constant reinvention and re-articulation of prior claims in reflections of knowledge:

> "Neither disciplines nor specializations remain static. They constantly change as new information and insights compel scholars to re-think and re-articulate knowledge. In the social sciences, specializations are especially important. They indicate that cross-fertilization is occurring among scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds." (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 8)

Looking at the development of this specialization, one can see that the NRS had conversed intensely with its surrounding and parent disciplines since its earliest formative years. Its first proto-scholar generation in the late 1930s – most of whom had close connections to Protestant Christianity or Catholicism – were able to find ways to introduce the examined movements of mostly Christian fringe (Christian Science, Spiritualism, Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Theosophy) to the scholarly discussions (Atkins, 2014; Bach, 1961; E. T. Clark, 1937; Fauset, 1971). With history's passing and the ongoing scientific developments during the second half of the 20th century, the first specialized generation of scholars – coincidently by the 1960s – were able to uproot this particularly Christian direction of academic inquiry from its congregational basis.[44] Educated and working in social sciences – primarily within sociology and anthropology of religions – these 'secular' researchers[45] were the first ones to observe the close relations between the to-be new and emergent

[44] Nevertheless, one segment of the forming field mainly remained mostly within these congregational settings. From these settings, they have established a parallel specialized subdiscipline: Cultic Studies. Scholars such as John G. Clark Jr., Richard Delgado, Ron Enroth, Stephen Kent, Margaret Singer, Steven Hassan, and others continued to use historically and culturally weighted terms, such as "sect" and "cult." Similarly, their works' primary focus shifted to the harmful elements of new religiosity. Similarly, their scope of interest expanded over time, now discussing certain non-religious formations, political movements, and subcultures under the same "cult" label.

Other noteworthy names in this field of inquiry are Arthur Dole, Linda Dubrow-Marshall, Steve K. D. Eichel, William Goldberg, Lorna Goldberg, David Halperin, Janja Lalich, Michael Langone, Richard Ofshe, Marcia Rudin, Alan Scheflin, Lita Linzer Schwartz, Daniel Shaw, Dennis Tourish, Louis Jolyon West, and Doni Whittsett.

[45] In this case, I'm referring to them to differentiate these authors from the previously mentioned "proto-scholars of NRS" who were closely affiliated with certain mainstream congregations. Compared to them, the new generation established itself on non-congregational grounds in an effort to strengthen its value-neutral standpoint when making impactful exclusive statements.

religiosity (in the early formative years still referred to as cults and sects) and the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s, which had been gaining wind by that time. This founder generation of the specialization had the opportunity to explore the earliest ferment of the social upheaval period while it was still happening in the field of religiosity. Gaining invaluable insights from first-generational members, observing the formative years of the later-to-be-worldwide new religious movements, megachurches, and even those movements whose history later ended in tragedy (People's Temple, Branch Davidians, etc.), their activity set into motion the foundation process of this unique specialization. Anson S. Shupe, David G. Bromley, Dick Anthony, Eileen Barker, George D. Chryssides, James A. Beckford, J. Gordon Melton, James T. Richardson, John A. Saliba, Robert S. Ellwood, Rodney Stark, Susan J. Palmer, Timothy Miller, Thomas Robbins, and of course, William Sims Bainbridge and Roy Wallis are just a handful of the names from this pioneering era. Coincidentally, their generation happened to be the very first to take certain promising young researchers under their wings, significantly contributing to the longevity of the still-developing specialization, while establishing numerous higher educational institutes and research centers. Pointing out the vast research possibilities, they mentored the current leading generation of scholars. Among them, we may find prominent scholars such as Catherine Wessinger, Dorota Hall, Eugene V. Gallagher, Henrik Bogdan, James R. Lewis, Jeffrey Kaplan, Lorne L. Dawson, Massimo Introvigne, Michael Ashcraft, and Stuart A. Wright.[46] In the past decades, they were followed by the most recent, already-established generation of young scholars, who – as is usual with any discipline – had the chance to specialize and work with a narrower focus. Examining specific movements or offshoots of the new religious emergence, Benjamin Zeller,

[46] Also, Bron Taylor, Douglas E. Cowan, Elisabeth Arweck, Jean Rosenfeld, John Simmons, Phillip Charles Lucas, Scott Lowe, Rebecca Moore, Olav Hammer, Mikael Rothstein and my respected consultant at CESNUR, PierLuigi Zoccattelli.

Cathy Gutierrez, Dansac Yael, Donald Westbrook, Elijah Siegler, Jenny Butler, Holly Folk, Hugh Urban, Megan Goodwin, and many more produced – and still produce – an abundance of specialized literature.[47] The overall production of this long lineage of scholars shows an abundance of possible ways to approach the NRM paradigm. Moreover, with the newest generation of young scholars, it is evident that the topic of NRMs remains relevant today. New movements form continuously, older ones reform or reinvent themselves, while other movements interact with each other (fusing and splitting, borrowing elements from each other, etc.). Certain movements may even dissolve or strengthen their positions after repeated collisions with the 'external' world. Raising questions about proselytizing presence, the forms of social contributions, FoRB limitation, and civil lawsuits, these movements continuously interact with their containing environment. Similarly, after an internal crisis – typically with the death of the founder and charismatic figure, internal strife within the movement, or under political pressure (etc.) – certain movements may take up newer forms and challenge the already produced scholarship by entirely dismissing former statements. Each of these interactions is worthy of scholarly inquiry, as these expand the field's understanding of how new movements function as living and lived religions around the world (Fisher, 2017, p. 515).

Each mentioned generation contributed to certain aspects of these questions with specific methodologies, research aims, and scope (Nemes & Máté-Tóth, 2022, pp. 145–161). By doing so, they shaped the specialization's development. However, instead of investigating each approach (which would take an entire chapter), in this section, I will diversify the scholarly production according to the utilized methods and scope. To achieve this, I make use of Michael Ashcraft's differentiation, who outlined three types of NRS works (Ashcraft, 2018, pp. 45–47).

[47] Moreover, Marie Dallam, Dawn Hutchinson, Jeremy Rapport, Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, Christian Giudice, Stefano Bigliardi, and many more.

First is the group of 'micro studies:' subject-specific research, in which scholars focus on one specific religion or movement in its own contexts and scale (Bårdsen Tøllefsen & Giudice, 2017; Chidester, 2003) or discuss particular issues within the context of one group or movement (Feraro, 2014; Robbins & Anthony, 1972). These analytical works enrich the developing body of knowledge and serve as the basis for later comprehensive initiatives. As analytical pieces (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 45), these prior studies '*disassemble*' their subjects, inspecting their inner mechanisms and pointing out unique, subject-specific traits. After '*reassembling*,' another group of works produces narrative accounts on the subjects of inquiry, detailing how the components mentioned above interact in the same system. These works focus on the entirety of the subject, describing the dynamic aspects of the movement. In simpler words, they "capture NRMs in motion." Building on these two types of prior works – aiming for a more comprehensive understanding – works of 'synthesis' offer comparative and systematic outlooks. By choosing a more thematical approach rather than focusing on one movement, community, or phenomenon (Heelas, 1996; Strmiska, 2005; Woodhead, 2001), these efforts recontextualize previous findings within broader societal frameworks, establishing the field's initial paradigms and overarching scientific consensus (Enstedt, 2020; Harvey, 2011; Rocha, 2020). Furthermore, these works define the legitimate scope and limitations of valid scholarly interest by selecting viable conceptual or methodological tools. They are responsible for current definitional approaches and terminologies and use categorical classifications for the entirety of the NRM phenomena (Beckford, 1978; J. R. Hall, 1988; Introvigne, 2018; Poling & Kenney, 1986). Familiarizing with all three types of works allows one to simultaneously understand new religiosity and grasp their mechanisms to see how each 'gear' moves within individually and how these contribute to the system's motions.

By contextualizing the settings in which new religiosity emerges, I have already overviewed some key points from works of 'synthesis.' However, the first two aspects are still

ahead. Later, when I discuss particular Smartian dimensions, I will examine the mentioned 'stripped-down gears' of new religiosity in a static position. Meanwhile, the closing illustrative case studies can be understood as observing the motions of a 'rebuilt' model, functioning as a whole again. By the time I arrive here, I will familiarize the reader with how each gear, bolt, and screw functions from the 'disassembled' model. Furthermore, discussing their purpose and significance in the complex mechanism will allow me to effectively illustrate the nuanced interplay between the components and verify my statements taken from works of 'synthesis.'

However, before reaching this model, I still need to overview the positions, status, and prior contributions of involved disciplines. Their results are tools I use to 'disassemble' and later 'reassemble' the providers of new meaning systems: new religious movements and their surrounding formations. In the following subchapter, I will guide the reader through the positions and relationships of participating fields. At the end of this path, I will arrive at the term new religious movements, from which I will finally start my examinations by using the 'seven-lensed tool' I borrowed from Ninian Smart.

Positioning Some of the Partaking Disciplines

Academic production always revolves around the works of great forefathers. New challengers may only hope to contribute to the already cemented paradigms – stabilizing them – or reform these to some limited extent. Even in those exceptional cases where prior paradigms are refuted and overthrown, the priors' position remains as new theories raise these onto the prestigious shelves of disciplinary developmental history. As such, the significance and production of prior scholars – of which the academic study of religions has quite an abundance – defines contemporary scholarly attitudes and research trajectories. This seemingly evident observation is vital in understanding the background of some of the major scholarly disagreements among the numerous fields, dealing with the subject of new religious movements in a broader sense.

As an interdisciplinary specialization, the studies of new religions have a strong connection to both social sciences and humanities. From this, the field inherits not one but many disciplines' viewpoints and history – even if some contradict each other. Pre-defined by the very research methods, utilized conceptual and theoretical tools – as well as by factors beyond academia, such as received external support, individual motivations, prior experiences, regional specificities, legal and practical settings – and most importantly, by overall scholarly reception, the vantage points of involved disciplines may vary significantly. From these angles, NRMs may show utterly different faces. To some, these movements may seem like genuine forms of innovation in an undersaturated market. To others, they are nothing more than splinter movements, separating temporarily from established traditions, inevitably reintegrating when their lifespan reaches its end. Again, to others, these may seem like exploitative movements, prying on vulnerable or distressed individuals who can be easily manipulated and controlled. The exciting aspect of NRS is that each of these statements can be true simultaneously when discussing a particular movement exclusively from one discipline's angle and completely disregarding others' viewpoints. At the same time, when combining numerous angles, the supposed exploitation may show a different face. Similarly, longevity or schismatic tendencies can be better understood by using multiple parallel disciplines' toolkits.

J. Gordon Melton notes the necessity of using numerous parallel disciplines' results. He stresses that this particular specialization requires a stable interdisciplinary empirical basis (Melton, 2007, pp. 36–40). He finds this stability in the parallel usage of three disciplines: history's investigations, cultural anthropology's thematic 'deep dives,' and sociology's empirical structuralizing efforts. He states that for the specialization of NRS, these works should be considered primary resources and suggests that further research should only be conducted based on the preliminary findings of these fields. The reason behind emphasizing these three particular disciplines lies within their sufficiently value-neutral

viewpoints – which is essential when discussing highly debated societal components, such as minority religious movements – and the accordingly neutral academic language. He affirms that these works may increase the credibility of successive secondary inquiries – if conducted correctly. In this question, he shares the notions of his colleague, James T. Richardson (Richardson & Introvigne, 2007, pp. 92–100). Richardson, however, notes that there are specific disciplines where a value-neutral standpoint might not be so easily achievable – if achievable at all – due to the particular field's history, social functions, and political (mis)utilization. As an example, he mentions psychology, pointing out the discipline's problematic background with cultivating the deprogramming paradigm and their active partaking in the reprogramming efforts of former POWs during the Indochina (especially Vietnam) wars (Nemes & Máté-Tóth, 2022, pp. 146–148). He draws attention to the persisting semi-scientific – or even out loud pseudoscientific – yet still paradigmatized vantage points of contemporary psychology (Hassan, 2000, 2019). Here – he stresses – the utilization of dated methods and terminologies aiming to verify the withdrawal of legal-adult status for particular NRM-affiliated individuals (E. A. Young, 2012), the forced medical treatments, and the deprogramming initiatives from so-called 'cultic indoctrination' (Shupe & Darnell, 2003) may still linger. Richardson also underlines the position that in the case of misused disciplines, the value-neutral standpoint is essentially unachievable. In these instances, the problem shall not necessarily be searched for in the used arguments, as these can be refuted on academic channels. The real issue here is the still-persisting biased language: agitating, sensationalist phrases such as "radicalization," "deviance," "destructive indoctrination," "brainwashing," "mind control," "mental manipulation," "extremism," "fundamentalist radicalism" (etc.) undermine the credibility of any movement, even before any thorough investigation. Furthermore, to some from a general background, the usage of such terms in academic settings may feel like confirmation of their concerns. These can stir overall

societal angst, ill-intended mobilization, and even moral panics (Introvigne, 2000, pp. 47–59), all of which can be used to pass targeted legislative decisions against specific movements on the religious fringe. Of course, in democratic societies, the chance of these events occurring is relatively marginal, as religious freedom and freedom of choice and expression are maintained as indisputable rights. However, the problem is: what happens in illiberal regimes and dictatorships, where these rights can – and will – be trampled when political interests shift against such movements (Barker, 2023, pp. 3–11)? Even more of a concern is that the effects of restrictive legislative decisions may create examples in these cases. These may generate international response and raise unfounded concerns, even in democratic societies, while the already passed illiberal – and typically restrictive – legislative decision may be used as a template for preemptive action (Introvigne, 2023. 02. 01.).

The Relationship Between Social Discourse and Terminology

At the end of his book *Religious Studies - The Making of a Discipline*, Walter H. Capps argues that a common task of all disciplines concerned with religiosity is objective description and analysis, which ultimately serves the very understanding of how the respective cultures and societies function (Capps, 1995, pp. 331–349). [48] Each partaking discipline must contribute to the condition that guarantees a peaceful discourse about religions and, simultaneously, creates an

[48] It is important to acknowledge that certain New Religious Movements (NRMs), such as the Family, ISKCON, Faith Church, Latter Day Saints, Church Universal and Triumphant, Scientology, OSHO, and many others, have a significant impact on public discourse regarding their presence in society. The way these movements are perceived varies greatly and can even shift towards extremes in times of turbulent change or unexpected events. As scholars of religion, our duty in such situations is not to take a side in these debates or make moral conclusions but rather to provide objective empirical data and acceptable vocabulary that public figures, decision-makers, and opinion leaders can use to initiate these debates. Furthermore, as scholars, it is our obligation to follow these debates and ensure that they are conducted in an orderly manner. Finally, in addition to these professional and impartial viewpoints, I must note that our own field should not focus on moralizing these issues but instead aim to understand how these marginal, strange, and sometimes scary-looking formations function within our society. Following their functioning closely is the concrete goal of NRS as this – and only this – approach can yield impartial and objective knowledge about what religion might be and how it functions as the most impactful part of human life and the human condition.

adequately tolerant environment where exclusive claims can be stated and can be confronted without being unduly intruded upon by rhetoric of apologeticism, agitation, or misinterpretation.[49]

As such, when researching NRMs, scholars must arm themselves with sufficient methodological agnosticism, preferring an empirically based objective discourse and aiming to guide the resolution of social tensions rather than heightening these. Scientific language has significant formative power in this question: its misinterpretation may result in moral panics, anti-cultist misuse (Richardson & Introvigne, 2007), or apologetics, sweeping serious problems 'under the rug' (Bird, 1979). However, the correct usage of a value-neutral language has the potential to reduce internal social tensions and correct the overall societal image of certain contemporary religious formations, which otherwise would be a target of social, political, or even legal pressure based on the misuse of terms, or the miscomprehension of the witnessed phenomenon (Török, 2010a, pp. 5–15). It is also important to realize that each religious phenomenon has its specific internal linguistic toolbox, which – when used appropriately – allows a more exhaustive observation of the mechanisms and effects of the subject matter. Incorporating these language compositions into the scholarly vocabulary is similarly essential, as without them, one cannot efficiently reach and interact with the subject at hand and would 'lose important details in the translation.'

[49] This standpoint is reasonably understandable through Foucault's theory of discursive reality construction (Foucault (2005, pp. 50–74, 2013)) and Geertz's theory of interpretation (Geertz (Basi Books [1973, 196; 304–323)). Furthermore, this theoretical framework also fits well for the reality construction of new religious movements by using an exclusive multi-layered vocabulary, carrying distinct meanings for the involved. In this regard, social scientists Harrison White and Ann Mische (Mische and White (1998, 695;717)) also note that stronger social networks – should these be of majority groups or minority movements – and the discourse they create internally and externally presuppose each other. As such, discourses create a unique medium in which the subject of the discourse manifests.

The Development of the Research Language – From *Sect* and *Cult* to NRMs

Based on prior works, in Europe, the "sect", while in America, the "cult" terminologies were most regularly utilized until the early 1980s (Ashcraft, 2018, pp. 17–37). These terms, rooted in the ideas of Kant and Hegel, affected Weber and Troeltsch's early "church/sect dichotomy" (Troeltsch, 1992; Weber et al., 1930/2001) and formed the basis for Niebuhr's "denomination/church/sect" model (Niebuhr, 2005). With such history, it shouldn't be surprising that this terminology was passed down to Liston Pope (Pope, 1971) Thomas Francis O'Dea (O'Dea, 1975) and Benton Johnson (B. Johnson, 1957), from whom the earliest 'proto-NRM researchers', such as Gaius Glenn Atkins (Atkins, 1971), Charles Samuel Braden (Braden, 1936, 1949, 1979), Marcus Bach (Bach, 1961), Elmer T. Clark (E. T. Clark, 1937), and Arthur Huff Fauset (Fauset, 1971) inherited these. As mostly theologians and sociologists – actively reacting to the Evangelical shift in congregational rhetoric (W. Martin & Zacharias, 2003; van Baalen, 1962) – these early researchers realized the significance of new religious movements. However, they have not yet seen it necessary to implement a new terminology for the subject. Nevertheless, even O'Dea and Johnson have scrutinized the terminological basis of their contemporaries', pointing out that it is based on highly debatable ideas from the 19th century, and it would undoubtedly require substantial reconsideration by the mid-20th century (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 20).

Regardless, the "church/sect (/cult)" framework remained stable substantially longer than these authors could have anticipated. As Ashcraft notes, "In the 1970s, ghosts of Weber and Durkheim [still] continued to linger" (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 50). Even though by the 1970s, the terminology was unquestionably inadequate – as terms of "cult" and "sect" carried unwanted semantical-historical legacy and already significant negative societal associations – many scholars were hesitant to leave these frameworks behind. Instead, they attempted to reinterpret them, further complicating the already vastly oversized 'baggage' of connotations these terms carried (Glock, 1973; Wilson, 1970, 1976, 1978). Stark and Bainbridge point out

the drawbacks of using such historically and culturally overweighed concepts (Stark & Bainbridge, 1979). Beside the fact that these terms' semantical heritage immensely complicates scholarly work – constantly raising the requirement to reflect back-and-forth between current and century-old literature, clarifying which usage the author refers to – these terms also carried negative undertones, paving the way to social marginalization. For NRM followers, such disadvantageous labeling could lead to hostility at communal levels and discrimination in individual cases (Richardson & Introvigne, 2001). These terms had the chance of inflicting long-lasting collective scars not just on the religious individual it labeled 'cultist' or 'sectarian,' but on the concerned community and society as well (Wessinger, 2022. 09. 13.).

In this case, the problems caused by such 'lingering' associative terms also created unwanted associations between established smaller denominations (typically referred to as "sects" in Europe, without the derogative 'baggage'), such as the Anabaptists or the New Apostolic Church in France, Germany, and Belgium. These centuries-old minority churches were prominent actors in European history with relatively high social acceptance and used the "sect" term as their own. However, after involuntarily sharing this label with decades-old formations like the Church Universal and Triumphant, Scientology, and ISKCON (Chryssides, 2023, pp. 71–85), the affected minority churches (here, I could rightfully utilize Niebuhr's "denomination" term) were rightfully concerned with possible social stigmas. Complicating things even further, legislators had also encountered problems, as the terms "sect" and "cult" weren't sufficiently clear from legal standpoints.

Empirical disciplines have also struggled to extract these historically burdened and culturally embedded concepts from their vocabulary. With it, harmonious demands emerged from all concerned spheres (both the academia, legislature, and congregational currents) to distinguish between forms of new religiosity and established minority churches with local or regional historical heritage. For these reasons, the scholarly decision was made that new movements require

a separate 'label.'[50] This new label was called to function upon value-neutral foundations and ought to be disconnected from previous semantical lineages (Kirkham, 2017, pp. 101–115).

Here, I also need to mention the emergence of cultic studies. A discipline heralded by prominent figures such as Theodore (Ted) Patrick (Patrick & Dulack, 1976), Robert Jay Lifton (Lifton, 2019), John G. Clark (J. G. Clark, 1981), Richard Delgado (Delgado, 1977), Margaret Singer (Singer, 1979; Singer & Lalich, 2003), Marzia R. Rudin (Rudin & Rudin, 1980), Lorna and William Goldberg (Goldberg & Goldberg, 1982), compelled the scholars of new religiosity to introduce a value-neutral and objective basis for the developing field before cultic studies could overwhelm it and dominate it with their rules and vocabulary.

From this initiative,[51] the term "new religious movements," promoted by Eileen Barker[52] and other renowned scholars (Arweck, 2006; Barker, 1982), gained significant support, as it sufficiently fulfilled every attribute such a term might require. It was expansive and general enough to cover the vast majority of the spectrum of new religions, including immensely different movements, such as "well-known groups as the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, as well as older new religions like the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Theosophical Society and such divergent groups as, for example, the Sufis, the

[50] In the following subchapter I will reflect on the terminological components of this new 'label' in a more detailed way. However, before doing so, it is imperative to first outline frontiers through which cultic studies per-proxy contributed to the introduction and ground gaining of the value neutral term "new religious movements."

[51] Others have proposed similar possible terms, such as Günter Kehrer's "non-church religious groups" designation, the (Ger.) "*Jugendreligionen"* in earlier German scholarship, and many more besides the already mentioned iterations of the "cult" and "sect" designations.

[52] Concerning the term's invention, I must mention a parallel trajectory. In the late 1950s, Harry Thomsen and H. Neill McFarland published a series of studies examining the religious effervescence of the post-World War II. Japan. In these studies (McFarland (1970); Thomsen (1978, 1963)), the authors noted that there was a significant spike in interest in new forms of alternative religiosity in Japan during the Meiji era, which resurfaced after Japan's American occupation and the opening toward the West. In their cultural-anthropological titles, these authors labeled the re-emerging movements "*shin shūkyō,*" which can be roughly translated as new religions. Later, Rober S. Elwood mentioned these authors in his book, titled *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Ellwood and Partin (1988)) and noted these two authors' contributions to the coining of a new term specific for the increasing interest in alternative and new forms of religiosity, which by the 1970s was globally detected by scholars of religion.

Vedanta Societies, the Healing Tao, Tenrikyo, Wicca, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Radha Soami Beas, and the Nation of Islam" (Melton, 2007, p. 30).

Second, it was general enough not to stress any common characteristics such movements might have. Melton notes in this regard:

> "[…] as our knowledge of new religions has expanded, we have come to realize that no single characteristic or set of characteristics are shared by all new religions (that is, by all the groups that have been called cults) and that any effort to define them by such a set of characteristics admits of too many exceptions" (Melton, 2007, pp. 31–32).

Third, the term NRM also reflected these movements' relations with other established religions without missing the criteria of overall value neutrality:

> "Recognizing the roots of individual new religions contextualizes them within the massive movement of the world's religions to the West, while making clear that some grasp of the modern diffusion of the world's religions is needed to appreciate the seemingly sudden emergence of 'new' religions in a Western context" (Melton, 2007, pp. 31–32).

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the clear distinction between cultic studies and NRS was ever more visible. The former continued to use the previous, overweighed terminologies with little to no flexibility and focused on individual cases. Meanwhile, NRS – with the introduction of a new terminology – discussed the phenomenon more on group- or collective levels (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 135). The significance of this difference in scope and scale is shown by NRS's rapid ground-gaining and the incorporation of sociology's newest theories. Testing these – such as the rational choice theory, market theory, various behavioral scientific models, social exchange model, (etc.) meant that the field has achieved general scholarly acceptance and established its legitimacy within the sphere of empirical studies (Bainbridge, 1978, 1997; Jelen,

2003). Through this expansion, NRS also pushed out the majority of cultic scholars from secular education to congregational universities, where they continued to use previous terminology. In such conditions, cultic studies work adopted religious terms and eventually established the foundations on which the coming anti-cultist movements' rhetoric of early 1990 was founded (Shupe, 1980; Shupe & Bromley, 1994; Shupe et al., 1984).

Outlook on the Interactions of Cultic Studies and New Religions Studies from the Perspective of Terminology

Here, I need to take a quick detour and reflect on the language components of reformed cultic studies and the quasi-scientific basis of anti-cultism. Bromley and Shupe mention that a back-and-forth dynamism between ACMs (anti-cultist movements) and NRMs recontextualized a plethora of terminologies, opening up frontiers, both old and new ("brainwashing," "coercive movements," "moral panics," and most recently, "high control-" or "high demand groups"). These conflicts and the involved social movements shaped the targeted new religious formations and the ACMs as well. NRS specialists were left to wonder about the intensity of similar meanings detected in certain ACMs, such as the American Family Foundation or the Cult Awareness Network. They pointed out that by creating unquestionable and total narratives, these anti-cult movements effectively turned into the very things they opposed. They became new 'quasi-religions.' Having similar strong viewpoints of the so-called 'others'; rallying around charismatic leaders or authority figures with specific 'knowledge' of said 'others'; demonizing new religious movements; having similar regular events and self-development programs as the opposed; and offering 'salvation' to those whom they saw as misguided, influenced, or controlled ACMs got to a point, where NRS scholars could have legitimately examine them as 'sort-of-new-religions'. (Bromley & Shupe, 1981; Bromley et al., 1979; Shupe & Bromley, 1994). One such example of scholarly production was published by Bromley and

Shupe, who introduced a three-phase model examining the 'evolution' of AMCs,[53] that showed similarities to the developments of early NRMs.

Academic investigations about the paradigms of cultic studies, like brainwashing and mental manipulation, have also become a necessary topic for NRS. Partly to refute them, but more importantly, to retain NRS's dominance in the academic sphere. Scholars like Barker, Melton, Bromley, Richardson, Introvigne, Zablocki, and many others confronted the claims of anti-cultists and cultic studies scholars, dissecting their theories of mental manipulation, brainwashing, and 'cultic mind control' (Barker, 1984; Introvigne, 2022a, 2022b; Richardson, 1991a; Richardson & Introvigne, 2001; E. A. Young, 2012; Zablocki, 1997).

Zablocki even tried to reconcile the two fields by establishing a nominal common ground – unfortunately, without any significant breakthrough (Robbins & Zablocki, 2001; Zablocki, 1997). Cultic studies scholars weren't keen on 'slaughtering the goose that lays their golden eggs,' while NRS researchers categorically rejected any idea of being associated with any of the mentioned paradigms. As such, cultic studies became isolated, while NRS disassembled most base tenets of the brainwashing argument.[54] In the end, Richardson and Kilbourne (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1986, pp. 258–266) cemented the production of ACMs in the academic sphere as "a rhetorical means of isolating and demonizing cults," which could have ended the debate. They stressed that the "emphasis was not on the actual practice and

[53] This model is fascinating, as it shows visible resemblances of early NRM developmental models. Distinguishing between a *formative stage* (with organizational fluidity and unarticulated callings), an *expansion stage* (with new *en masse* involvement, the formation of a loose umbrella organization, and struggling with wider societal acceptance as a legitimate formation), and an *institutional stage* (with established and recognized bureaucratic systems and social capital), Shupe and Bromley pointed out the structural similarities in institutionalization, however, they didn't underline the qualifications for success and longevity in the cases of ACMs.

[54] A starting point of this process was Thomas Szasz's statement claiming that brainwashing and mental manipulation are nothing more than metaphors without any real empirical case studies backing these concepts. He also argued that the prior classification system of mental illnesses needs a major overhaul and a critical step back from invalidated theoretical elements (Szasz (1974, pp. 181–199))

consequences of brainwashing, but on the social meaning enveloping brainwashing as a very powerful trope" (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 144; Bromley & Richardson, 1983, p. 32).

The last collision between cultic studies and NRS occurred between 1980 and 1994 during the so-called "Great Satanic Panic" (Victor, 1993). The publishing of *Michelle Remembers* by Laurence Pazder (Pazder et al., 1980) brought back the brainwashing concept in novel contexts, giving cultic studies and anti-cultism new allies among concerned Christian parents who believed the series of fabricated testimonies of Michelle Smith. The erupting moral panic[55] created a unique and extremely lucrative market for cultic studies scholars and anti-cultists, who quickly capitalized on the opportunity by producing sums of titles tailored for highly religious individuals. (Frederickson, 1988; Larson, 1989; Lyons, 1989, 1988; Sakheim & Devine, 1992; Terry, 1987). These, mostly zealous Christians – whose identity was based on strict and textual biblical interpretations (here one can see the application of the previously introduced return strategy) – were eager to finally find 'scientific' verification for their theories about SRA (Satanic Ritual Abductions). Even though the base paradigms for these works were overthrown and refuted years prior, this period provided a second wind for cultic studies to regain some of their positions. By reintroducing concepts of mental manipulation and brainwashing in the contexts of Satanism and hidden occult activity in the United States – meanwhile targeting other

[55] According to Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, moral panics are a form of widespread (often irrational) fear, implying that someone or something threatens a community's values, safety, or interests. Sensationalist media typically fuel these fears and can force out political or legislative actions. Moreover, moral panics generally are aimed towards one marginalized segment of society, differing in race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and subcultural interest. Stigmatizing these and creating a scapegoat, or "folk devils," these public mass movements, based on false or exaggerated perceptions or information that exceeds the factual threat to society, further reinforcing already established stereotypes, exacerbating differences and divisions. Cohen elaborates on how these mass panics unfold. At first, a condition, episode, person, or group of individuals emerges to be defined as a threat to societal values and interests. In this phase, the attention is on the behavior (either real or imagined) of the scapegoat. These reports essentially strip these folk devils of any favorable characteristics. By exclusively applying negative traits, sensationalist media creates a non-associable evil persona. The demonization of said folk devils then quickly raises societal awareness. It provides an opportunity to fuel public hysteria further, often resulting in the passing of overly vindictive and unnecessary legislation. It serves to justify the agendas of those in power and authority, stabilizing their position. Cohen (2011, 1-21; 201-234)

marginalized subcultural groups, like Dungeons and Dragons role players, sexual minorities, and, of course, the expanding heavy metal scene of the 1980s– cultic scholars reestablished their credibility in a certain segment of society. A significant marker of this period was the appearance of Julia Holland (president of one of the most prominent anti-cultist movements worldwide, the Cult Awareness Network) at the Society for the Study of Multiple Personality Disorder and Dissociation's 1986 international MPD[56] conference. As Introvigne underlines, her attendance was an essential marker of a shift in the narrative of cultic studies:

> "From the first meeting on, there were routine references to Satanist cults, and in 1986 a leader of the anti-cult organization Cult Awareness Network, Julia Holland, was invited to the Society's annual conference, held again in Chicago. This episode marked the beginning of a regular cooperation between mpd therapists and the anti-cult movement. Holland took the stories of satanic abuse, which according to participants in that congress emerged from twenty-five percent of their patients, and offered an interpretation according to the anti-cult model of 'programming' and brainwashing. […] The anti-cult movement saw in the therapists an opportunity to expand its activities to the area of Satanism, of which it knew very little. It also discovered that mpd and Satanic abuse were particularly attractive to the media. Survivors of Satanic abuse started appearing in talk shows, and told their stories in widely read volumes." (Introvigne, 2016, p. 380)

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, numerous volumes were published about SRA and brainwashing (targeting new and minority religions in several instances[57]). Most cultic studies scholars, however, were careful when discussing (or investigating) any of the panic's core

[56] Abbreviation for multiple personality disorder

[57] One such example was the Utah Satanic Abuse Scare of 1985, which is discussed in-depth by Massimo Introvigne in his book *Satanism - A Social History* Introvigne (2016, 384–402)

elements: the supposed ritual abuse, minor abductions, and sexual deviance. Instead, they continued to exclusively promote 'therapeutic methods' to those who were seen as affected by such atrocities (Sakheim & Devine, 1992).

By the mid-1990s, this sudden surge of interest subsided alongside the short-lived interest in brainwashing. A significant catalyst for this change from the scholarly side was the allowance of SRA 'researchers' to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion's (SSSR) yearly conferences between 1989 and 1992, during which no significant breakthrough or any major finding was presented (Best et al., 2017, 19-75; 95-107;191-205;). This was a major difference between cultic studies and NRS in this period. While the former completely immersed itself in semi-plausible ideas, supporting nonexistent theories for SRA with fabricated proof, the latter kept a critical distance from the subject and, with this approach, maintained its credibility and significance, even with the decrease of interest in the mid-1990s (especially after the shift of attention to the Branch Davidian tragedy in 1993). The last 'nail in the coffin' of the anti-cult rhetoric and cultic studies was the international dissolution of the Cult Awareness Network. Ashcraft perfectly summarizes these last years:

> "The other reason that scholars in NRM studies no longer devoted their attention to the anticult was because they moved on, and they did so because, by the early 1990s, the anticult movement was no longer able to generate widespread public support." (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 152)

He mentions the implosion of CAN after Rick Alan Ross's fiasco with a forced deprogramming of Jason Scott (a Pentecostal Church affiliate). Scott later pressed charges against Ross and the CAN for unlawful imprisonment, forced deprogramming, negligence, conspiracy,

and deprival of his civil rights and religious liberties (Shupe & Darnell, 2006, pp. 180–185).[58] Supported by the Church of Scientology's lawyers and their collected previous information from similar cases, the CAN was forced into bankruptcy.

> "For many scholars on NRM studies, the CAN case 'brought to an end (at least in North America) the cult wars' […] The field experienced a profound turning which continues to the present." (Ashcraft, 2018, p. 152).

With this, cultic studies have lost one of its most prominent supporter and platform for a long time.[59] Excluded from most academia as *persona non grata*, cultic scholars either reinvented themselves and attempted to gain positions in NRS or slipped into academic obscurity with dated terminology, unusable methodology, and unimpactful, underutilized case studies. Their places were taken by NRS scholars, who, however, had to confront the effects of the following years' NRM-related tragedies[60] and the changes these brought for the field, which required one more reconsideration of the validity of value-neutral terms and the previously harshly refuted and ridiculed paradigms.

The Term 'New Religious Movements'

If for nothing more, the overviewed series of collisions between cultic studies and NRS can underline one thing: the prior history, disciplinary background, and utilized terms predetermine one's perceptions of an examined phenomenon, sometimes making it harder (if

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[58] For the documentation of the verdict, see United States Western District of Washington (Seattle) CASE NO. C94-0079C Dated: November 29th, 1995.

[59] In the last two decades, successor movements took up the functions of CAN and incorporated new rhetorical elements (investigating aspects of political radicalization, conspiracy beliefs, and various NRMs they deem as potentially harmful). Most important of these are the US-based *International Cultic Studies Association* (successor movement of the American Family Foundation), the *Family, Action, Information, Rescue* (FAIR), the *Cult Information Centre* (CIC), and the *Reachout Trust* in the UK. In France, the *Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme* (FECRIS) and the *Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires* (MIVILUDES) are the most active ACMs today.

[60] Waco siege, the Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple groups suicides, the Aum Shinrikyo nerve-gas attacks in Tokyo, the Kanungu massacre in Uganda, etc.)

possible) to arrive at objective and valid conclusions. Biased or ill-intended terminologies and methods, in this regard, can lead one further away from objectivity and verifiable statements (Saliba, 2018, pp. 1–11). Therefore, I believe these historically and disciplinarily weighed terms shall be exchanged and left behind, as these – once again as rudimental early tools – have reached their limits and now only carry the risks of misinterpretation and agitation. Barker similarly stresses these notions: "There are, moreover, numerous vested interests, both religious and secular, that make any drawing of precise boundaries a contentious and risky exercise." (Barker, 1995a, pp. 146–147). By exercising critical distancing and introducing new tools for examinations, disciplines concerned with NRMs may establish new, 'sharper' and more efficient – yet still rudimental – tools with which they can progress for a while until these new terms lose their edge (Kuhn, 1996, pp. 52–77; Yinger, 1970, p. 4). This, however, does not mean that we shall cast *damnatio memoriae* on formerly used terms. These remain the crucial discourse elements – and thus building blocks – of NRS, on which, after passing them, the currently utilized terminologies and methodologies may find their basis.

Based on this statement, I also believe that the scholarship must always remind itself that its currently utilized terminologies and paradigms are not here to stay and shall never be considered 'timeless tools' but instead as efficient and available equipment that the scholarship will leave behind at a certain point. New religious movements, as one such term, already has several issues and problems that future researchers must consider and circumnavigate. Saliba underlines some of these, pointing out that Barker's proposed term had been problematic since its inception. The most important of these problems for him is that the term can carry three simultaneous meanings, depending on who uses it and in which contexts the term is utilized (Foucault, 2005, pp. 50–74, 2013; Geertz, Basi Books [1973, pp. 304–323).

Saliba notes that the term can be used by 'insiders' – practitioners and affiliates of NRMs, as in Foucault's terminology, a discursive 'self-description.' In these settings, NRM affiliates

make use of the term's delineating aspects, separating their movement from other types of established religiosities and similar meaning-providers of the religious market. For them, this complex term primarily carries divisive and positive undertones. It creates a separate field, which cuts them off from other – 'outdated' or 'hollow'– structures, verifying their uniqueness and emphasizing their sense of greater efficiency or newer ways for reaching spiritual goals: enlightenment, self-fulfillment, communication with the *transcendent* or a higher state of existence.

Meanwhile, this same term is also utilized by 'outsiders' – non-academics, anti-cultists, members, and leaders of other religious congregations, as well as by those who otherwise are not necessarily aware of the multifaceted meanings behind NRM. Usage in these settings regularly carries a negative or at least disapproving connotation. Inherited from previously discussed "cult" and "sect" terminologies, in these contexts, new religiosity is interpreted here as a deviant, schismatic, potentially harmful, or dangerous offspring of particular strands of traditional religiosity or as a completely alien 'invasive' formation, lacking any right to exist in the given social environment. Questioning their legitimacy, as well as misinterpreting the 'religious' aspect's meanings, this usage, unfortunately, inherits some previous ACM discussions and reintroduces these in a new terminological environment, further tangling the already convoluted back-and-forth references between lingering refuted paradigms about to new and emergent religiosity.

Finally, the term can be used by secular scholars of religions, who are aware of the term's details, historical development, and inherent limitations. These utilizers of the new term usually aim to improve society's general understanding of the complex phenomena and take steps to find the following 'rudimental tool,' which can further progress the field after leaving behind the currently used and battered equipment (Saliba, 2018, pp. 1–11). In this dissertation, I will strive to use the term in this third mode – aiming to contribute to general understanding and exploring segments of its undefined borders. As such, I am compelled to take a detour to explore the multi-layered meanings of the three terminological components of NRM and

progress only after I have outlined its usage in my vocabulary, including the necessary reflection on its limitations and challenges.

New in Many Ways

The term "new religious movements" is a fusion of three overly distilled, seemingly simple, and straightforward paradigm-setting components, 'New,' 'Religious,' and 'Movement(s).'[61] However, as I will illustrate, each component is intertwined by a series of debates, hinting at future problems about the designation.

The first component suggests that NRMs are recent phenomena (Chryssides, 1994, pp. i–xxvii). However, Chryssides points out that even this seemingly most simple and straightforward component can be a subject of debate:

> "If NRMs are defined in terms of their age, the Mormons are not so new any longer, whereas the URC is in fact the youngest of the groups I have listed, and hence ought logically to count as an NRM." (Chryssides, 1994, pp. i–iii)

He underlines that the historical viewpoint can – to some extent – be of good use. Peter Clarke's examinations[62] (Clarke, 1987, p. 5), Eileen Barker's additions[63] (Barker, 1995a, p. 9), as well as Melton's and Moore's "postwar" prefixes (Melton & Moore, 1982) – to mention just a few of the most impactful authors who discussed the multifaceted meanings of the term – all point out that the 'new' component is mainly a temporal distinguisher between religiosities before and after the Second World War.

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[61] Other terms, such as new religiosity, emergent religiosity, alternative religiosity, (etc.) are also applicable. However, these may carry different contextual meanings. For this reason, utilizing the NRM designation is the best approach when discussing the subject in general contexts.

[62] "[…] those new religions that have emerged in Britain since 1945."

[63] "The term new religious movement (NRM) is used to cover a disparate collection of organizations, most of which have emerged in their present form since the 1950s, and most of which offer some kind of answer to questions of a fundamental religious, spiritual or philosophical nature."

On these statements, Chryssides notes that, in some instances, the temporal limitation won't necessarily fit the observed reality. Movements like the Jehovah's Witnesses or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (a.k.a. Mormons) have more than a century of acknowledged and already well-researched history (Bergman, 1984; Chryssides, 2008, 2022; Fazekas et al., 2017; Stark & Neilson, 2005). These relatively early exceptions point out an underlying trait of the term "new religious movements." Namely, although its subjects may seem alike in the given framework, there is still great variety under the umbrella term used to refer to such movements collectively. Therefore, when making any exclusive statement about new religiosity as a whole, one shall be prepared to face at least a nominal number of exceptions, which undermine every attempt for systematic overview and collective statements. Quoting once again Melton:

> "[…] our knowledge of new religions has expanded, we have come to realize that no single characteristic or set of characteristics are shared by all new religions (that is, by all the groups that have been called cults) and that any effort to define them by such a set of characteristics admits of too many exceptions." (Melton, 2007, p. 32)

I can also outline another aspect of 'newness': the lack of prior local presence or cultural acknowledgment. Religious movements appearing in cultural environments where they didn't have any prior societal embeddedness are, therefore, 'new' in a sense. They take positions on the cultural fringe and offer a sense of novelty in the religious market. In this question, I also need to oppose some of Chryssides's ideas. In his understanding, new religious movements are 'recent' by their new inception and not by their fresh appearance in the given cultural environment. Because of this, Chryssides excludes the emergence of Western strands of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism (Chryssides, 1994, pp. iii–x), and he only considers reformed, charismatic, and fundamentalist strands of these as subjects of interest for NRS (such as

ISKCON, Soka Gakkai, etc.). [64] However, in my understanding, it is necessary to realize that even historical religions with hundreds or thousands of years of history may manifest in different forms when placed in alien cultural settings. For example, Unitarians have a deeply rooted history in the Carpathian Basin, reaching back even to the 16th century. However, in American or Western European settings, where these same religious movements don't have such historical presence, they are placed in the same category as the 'imported' American megachurches, neo-Pentecostal movements, and free-church congregations. Another example can be the collective of Vedic religions, which are determined by the frameworks of the caste system. A lack of these original cultural settings outside India effectively uproots the religious tradition. With it, any such movements – including those with centuries or even millennia of heritage – must reinvent themselves in the new settings and form (or even reform) in a way that is determined by the containing (and sometimes constraining) social environment. Therefore, 'newness' can come both (or either) from recent inception or alien settings. In the latter's case, representatives and actors from mainstream cultural-, religious-, or historical strands may contextualize the emerging movements as something new. In fact, they are new to them, as there hasn't been any elongated interaction with such traditions in the given socio-cultural environment. In these cases, new formations may also encounter difficulties in securing positions of acceptance and stability, as mainstream society typically reacts to them by 'giving a little of side-eye.'

[64] Chryssides notes this problem, bringing the example of ISKCON: "Not only does ISKCON claim to be the world's oldest religious tradition, stemming from the ancient Vedic tradition, but it now has a large following of those who are Hindu by birth and is accepted by the National Council of Hindu Temples in the UK. There are of course many problems in defining what is 'mainstream' in such a set of traditions as diverse as those that comprise the Hindu religions, and in which there is no tightly defined hierarchy to establish orthodoxy and orthopraxy. However, I believe that there are certain aspects of ISKCON that mark it out from traditional Hinduism as found in Western society." Chryssides (1994, pp. iii–x)

> "Unlike the older and more established religions, new religions have few allies in the dominant social system. […] Because of their cultural and social alienation, new religions have become the object of concern by a number of watchdog, cult-awareness, and Christian counter-cult groups. […] Such watchdog groups further illustrate the fringe status of new religions" (Melton, 2007, p. 33).

Chryssides also mentions several occurrences of unpleasant reactions in new environments from the United Kingdom's recent history:

> "[…] when the Unification Church applied for membership of various national Councils of Christian Churches, it was consistently turned down, and the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons would not particularly wish to be part of mainstream Christianity […]. Similarly, the Soka Gakkai is often regarded as an inauthentic form of Buddhism amongst Buddhists more widely" (Chryssides, 1994, pp. iii–x).

The aspect of 'newness' also has a third – fairly unresearched and underemphasized – side. Namely, the fact that most new religions are still in their developing phase – both in the organizational sense and in their relations with the external world. Their form is not fixed or stabilized by any means, and any observation at a certain point might not be accurate for extended periods. This means that scholars need to constantly review their observations and statements about particular movements and update any statements they see as outdated or invalid over time. Examples of the necessity of this constant revision can be found in the strand of so-called millenarian movements (a subcategory of NRMs). In these cases, the death of a charismatic leader or a series of failed prophecies might catalyze total restructuring in the movement and can overthrow several prior observations. (Festinger et al., 1956, 3-33; 193-219)

Finally, I also need to underline that these movements are 'new' in the sense that they are 'young' generation-vise. Persisting NRMs typically only have 2-3 distinct generations by 2024 (of course, with the exceptions of the previously mentioned historical new religious

movements). In these settings, the generational changes are more impactful on the entirety of the movement. Moreover, with a limited populous and uncomplete age tree, their longevity is still uncertain: preserving the movement's growth might not be the highest priority for the members and the leadership in certain cases. (Rochford Jr., 1997, pp. 101–118)

> "New religions, as minority religions, also tend to be relatively unstable over time. They have greater difficulty holding the second generation, and even into the third and fourth generations, they must pay considerable attention to recruiting new members if they are to survive. Thus, while the social profile of new religions changes over time, the groups continue to differ from the larger mainstream religions" (Melton, 2007, pp. 33–34)

In conclusion, 'newness' in new religious movements doesn't exclusively refer to a temporal difference. It also refers to varying *local* conditions, ongoing and possibly *unconcluded internal developments*, and a *lack of overall lineage of generations*. In this regard, the synonym of *emergent religiosity* may be an excellent parallel guiding tool that illuminates the many possible interpretations of this 'newness.' The characteristics of *emergence* more efficiently emphasize the sense of overall novelty and relatively fresh appearance.[65] Furthermore, it contains a sense of dynamism, pointing out these movements' unconcluded and ever-changing nature.

> "Of the hundreds of new religions, most are still in their first generation and as such share a set of common attributes. […] New religions generally represent innovation rather than continuation of previous tradition, […] they have far more members

[65] There is yet another undiscussed issue concerning 'newness,' which I intentionally avoided in this dissertation. Namely, *how long* does the scholarship consider these religions new? I will not answer this rhetorical question concisely, as this could overinflate my research. However, an adequate starting point would be these movements' acceptance (or at least tolerance) in given socio-cultural environments. In this regard, Neo-Pentecostalism may be a more accepted form of religiosity – and thus not necessarily considered as a new religion – in the United States than in Eastern Europe. In a similar manner, the various guru movements may grow deeper roots for societal acceptance in Southeast Asia than in the United States or Western Europe.

who converted to the faith than grew up in it. These characteristics alone identify new religions as a distinctive group of religions that are both interesting and deserving of further scrutiny." (Melton, 2007, pp. 33–34)

Religious… How?

In a prior chapter, I have already reflected on the problems of terms such as *religion* and *religiosity.* Arriving at the second component of NRM, I must realize that the component 'religious' unfortunately inherits these challenges. Some of these issues have already been addressed in the chapter "The Problem of Definitions in the Academic Study of Religions." Therefore, I will not repeat these points but rather add further details in the context of my narrower focus (the term NRM), which will undoubtedly be helpful. To do this, I will circumnavigate the term 'religious' from an *internal* and an *external* side.

First, I attain an internal viewpoint. From this perspective, there are particular movements – that my specialization classifies as NRMs – who intentionally avoid the abovementioned labels of religion and religiosity, emphasizing their division from traditional religiosity's similar institutions. As Péter Török summarizes:[66]

"The situation is further complicated by the fact that some groups, which, despite all gaps and inaccuracies in the literature, are classified as new religious movements, yet do not consider themselves religions. For example, Transcendental Meditation (TM) in the US state of New Jersey has fought in court – unsuccessfully – to prove that their meditation practice is not a religious rite and what they teach is a relatively ideologically neutral technique that should be taught in public schools. Some movements, such as the Brahma Kumaris, call themselves more of a spiritual or

[66] Given that the original quote by Török is in Hungarian, I took the liberty of providing a reliable translation of the relevant paragraph.

> educational movement. The Ananda Marga movement, on the other hand, is explicitly 'anti-religion' because its members believe that religions draw artificial boundaries to divide humanity. Therefore, they prefer to call themselves socio-spiritual institutions. According to the followers of Forum and Exegesis, religion is concerned with dogmas and empty rituals, and their movements certainly transcend these, so they cannot be considered religions. One group of the so-called UFO religions, the Raelian Movement International, considers itself an 'atheistic religion.'" (Török, 2010a, p. 8)

As Török points out, the 'religion' and 'religious' designation can sometimes be problematic from the internal perspectives of particular NRMs. To preserve their projected separation from other movements and meaning providers – as well as to refute any unwanted association with established structures, enforced societal order, meaning-hollowness, and loss of individuality (etc.) –, these movements make use of other, opposing labels such as 'not religious,' 'non-religion,' or explicitly 'anti-religion' in order to outline their uniqueness.[67]

Approaching this issue from an *external* angle, I need to reflect on how the surrounding social and legal environment may further complicate this already fuzzy image. As the legal definitions and frameworks for *social movements*, *NGOs*, *religions*, *denominations*, and *churches* carry vastly different meanings than the similar definitions in social sciences and humanities – the former mostly depending on the given legal system, the particular nation (or in some cases even within regions), while the latter are based on established scholarly

[67] I had the privilege of witnessing one such occurrence at the 2024 CESNUR conference at Bordeaux. In the closing session discussing South African new religious movements, Palesa Hloele (representative of the African Hidden Voices Research Institute) took extra time in her presentation to stress that their movement is not a religion or a form of religiosity but rather an indigenous form of spiritualism. Intentionally avoiding the religion and religious label – in her instance – was an effort to decolonize her vocabulary and semantically separate her movement from other similar movements in South Africa while maintaining its credibility as an indigenous movement.

paradigms –, the mentioned legal subcategories' rooms for maneuver can also affect how 'religious' is interpreted in the case of NRMs. The enforced legal frameworks – which can also be subjects of change in any society through new laws and legislatures – may benefit some NRMs. Meanwhile, they can also pose impassable legal barriers that endanger the longevity of other movements. In these conditions, it may occur that a specific new religious movement – which happens to be entirely against the 'religious' designation – will be forced into the legal category of religion in order to preserve itself and attain state protection or social benefits (or at least to avoid unnecessary administrative and financial burdens). One such example could be the Icelandic Ásatrúarfélagið. This neopagan movement attained church status in Iceland in 1973 to further pursue their societal contributions (of which religious services were just a marginal part at that time). However, achieving church status also 'squeezed' them into state enforced administrative and hierarchical frameworks, which were designed for Christian congregations and did not fit the movement's vision. This enforced structure permanently altered the movement's leadership, resulting in a twofold internal structure: one, enforced by the legal and administrative system and another genuine to the movement itself.[68] On the other side of this very same issue, there are new religious movements that actively aim to attain 'religion' or 'religious' status in society; however, legal requirements – or other variables, such as political ill-intent, anti-cult activism, etc. – prevent the achievement of these goals. In such cases, the 'religious' aspects of these movements are typically overemphasized, and their structure will reshape itself in a fitting way that highlights the similarities between established religions and their movement. This is done in an effort to establish credibility and a basis for attaining such a prestigious and possibly more protected status. (Lucas, 2004, pp. 289–296)

[68] For more on this, see Nemes (2024)

Fortunately, these legal perspectives will only play a minor role in my examinations. Thus, I won't pay attention to lawmakers' ideas of what constitutes a religion and what isn't, as even they are uncertain, which is shown in the opposing and constantly changing legal frameworks. Nevertheless, I hope that with this brief overview, I have shed light on the fact that the second component of the term "NRM" also has many parallel meanings, depending on the observers' perspective, the given environments' enforced frameworks, and the particular movement's primary self-definition and longevity goals.

The Movement Aspect

The last component of this umbrella term, 'movement,' has three crucial aspects that I must reflect on. In sociological understanding, the term 'movement' is a group of people within a society or a community, loosely affiliated with nominal institutional systems, oriented towards one (or numerous) articulated common goal(s) (Cnaan & Milofsky, 2018, pp. 3–25). In this interpretation, the 'movement' designation offers ways to open up some of the limitations that the 'religious' component creates. Moreover, the 'movement' phrasing is more appropriate as it doesn't necessarily imply higher levels of structuredness – like the term 'organizations*'* – which is, in fact, only valid in the case of a smaller proportion of NRMs. This component also divides its subject from other terms like 'groups' or 'communities,' which would underemphasize the significance of movements reaching a global involvement (ISKCON, OSHO, Family International, Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) or greater internal cohesion, or common physical presence. 'Movement' also creates a clear division between cultic studies' and ACMs' prior terms. Based on these notions, one may understand why the field has not settled with 'new religious sects,' 'new cults,' or simply with 'new religious groups' or 'new religious communities.' The formers are inherently derogative, while the latter two can quickly become subjects of misinterpretation or merge with other subjects of similar disciplines. As such, the '*movement'* designation serves as a disciplinarily, socially, and politically indifferent

cornerstone of this three-part rudimental tool. One that doesn't erase prior terms but instead reflects on them, pointing out prior limitations and carving out NRM term's distinct – however, not even closely fitting – category.

Second, the 'movement' designation reflects the connections of NRMs to the youth and social movements of the 1960s and the following countercultural revolts. These have shared roots in society's gradual alienation and disillusionment in the post-WWII world and in unfulfilled promises and broken dreams. With an intertwining history and common terms, the scholarship is constantly reminded that these movements shall always be examined as a collective symptom of the same period and social changes. (Clarke & Sutherland, 1988, pp. 149–154; Thomas et al., 2023, pp. 42–51).

> "Historical study supports the claim that times of social and cultural disjuncture are indeed periods of crisis and major change […]. They are also of spiritual ferment, political activism, and communal experimentation […]" (Aidala, 1985, p. 289)

Finally, the phrasing 'movement' points out another critical aspect of the subject that remains regularly ignored. Similar to the 'newness,' it indicates that new religions are still in motion and constantly changing (Chryssides, 1994, pp. i–xxvii). Reacting to societal pressure (Aidala, 1985), political decisions (Lucas & Robbins, 2004), internal challenges, strife, failure to deliver the promises (Festinger et al., 1956; Miller, 1991) as well as organic developments, such as the aging or the appearance of a younger generation (Kermani, 2013; Rochford Jr., 2001). The unique motion of these religious forms – to some extent – could be considered a universal trait in any NRMs. New religions more easily incorporate new elements or leave behind certain practices and views. They can rapidly reinvent their structure to fit best the movement's needs and offer the most effective and simplistic ways of tackling any upcoming or ongoing internal crises. This adaptivity, which can be considered rapid compared to other

established religions, is yet another – possibly universal– common denominator of new religious movements.

As seen, elements of the term "new religious movement" carry several meanings. While it connects the numerous formations under an umbrella, it also contains subtle meanings and future pitfalls with chances of overgeneralization. Moreover, the term links new religiosity to its contemporaries: new social movements, counterculturalism, and social revolt. It also brings up memories of the discipline's developments and prior challenges, not allowing it to be forgotten and returned to. Most importantly, however, it reminds scholars that their utilized terms – just as the subjects they refer to – are still in their formative years; their developments have not yet been concluded. It calls researchers to look at it critically and realize its limitations, and – as it is still a rudimental tool – leave it to rest when they have reached the discipline's new developmental phase.

With this closing note and reminder, I have finally arrived at the second part of the dissertation. Until this point, I have discussed social and economic conditions in which new religiosity has emerged. I have elaborated on the reasons behind an apparent meaning crisis and a society-wide upheaval. Furthermore, I reflected on forming what the scholarship calls today "new religions studies." Establishing its roots, as well as the discipline's heated debates and parallel development with cultic studies, allowed me to reach a meaningful conclusion, which – as history is my witness – was forgotten by some. Namely, the academic study of religions is *sui generis*, a unique, originally interdisciplinary field that doesn't serve religious or secular agendas. Instead, it strives to expand the understanding of religiosity to eventually show a polished mirror from which we can finally see a less distorted image of the human condition.

Moving further, I will introduce a model that tries to join and meaningfully contribute to this process. First, a subchapter will introduce the presented model and the method of using Smart's 'seven-lensed glasses.' This is followed by a concise summary of how the model functions. This segment will continue with the promised 'deconstruction' of the model, exploring

each dimension on its own. After familiarizing the reader with each component of these dimensions, I will progress and 'reconstruct' this tool and place all seven lenses – in other words, Smart's dimensions – on various subjects. But let's not run ahead of us, as first, the dual model's general details await to be discussed.

Adapting Ninian Smart's Dual Model to New Religiosity

About the Dual Model

The issues explored in the previous chapters call for a dynamic interpretive framework. One that doesn't get stuck on the first hurdle – defining religion – and promises at least some nominal chances to strengthen the first chapter's synthetic conclusions (Capps, 1995, pp. 267–331). I believe Smart's pragmatic seven-dimensional approach – which I will refer to as 'seven-lensed glasses' could fit these initial criteria. Walter H. Capps notes the fruitful prospects of Smart's multidimensional model and underlines that this approach could yield a more overarching and comprehensive picture. Comparing it to other similar initiatives, Capps states:

> "The most straightforward of comprehensive and systematic attempts to compare and contrast the major religious traditions of the world according to criteria proposed by phenomenology of religion is Ninian Smart's […] it is specific, detailed, and, most importantly, self-possessed […] Unlike Max Weber […], Smart does not arrive at the religious traditions after engaging in complex theoretical analyses of the components of larger sociocultural ideological stances. […] Unlike Talcott Parsons, Smart does not turn to religious traditions to illustrate how patterns of social integration work. And, unlike Joachim Wach, he can specify an approach to religion's multidimensionality which argues for more than that religions should be approached in a multidimensional way." (Capps, 1995, Chapter: Ninian Smart: Religion as Multidimensional Organism pp. 267-331)

As Capps underlines that Smart's dual model oversteps the early debates of defining religion and challenges the ways of a priori limiting the range of legitimate subjects. Instead, it focuses on a more expansive array of interconnected phenomena, with the goal of highlighting common dynamics and morphological similarities. Looking at new religious phenomena through Smart's 'seven-lenses,' one may articulate similar valid and objective observations in the contexts of postmodernity. Connecting the functional mechanisms and dynamisms of the new meaning systems to historical ones sets a more systematic point of view and allows the articulation of general statements about the atemporal elements of human religiosity. Furthermore, as Smart' mode of study oversteps the tedious early defining attempts, his approach also aligns with Hervieu-Léger's recommendations, who questions the necessity of establishing any concise definitions and even doubts the possibility of achieving one in such a complex and multifaceted question as in the subject of religion and religiosity is (Hervieu-Léger, 1987, pp. 11–30).

I will also illustrate (in the forthcoming case studies) that this model thrives well even outside of the conventional settings of religiosity. It easily accommodates the variables of the postmodern and even post-truth paradigms (McIntyre, 2018, pp. 1–17).[69] Moreover, it is sufficiently open and flexible to discuss the fragmentation of previous overarching meaning systems, the effects of globalization, consumerism (Jenkins et al., 2013, pp. 47–84), and even the disruption caused by the technological revolution of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Therefore, it allows inquirers to investigate seemingly secular meaning providers as quasi- or para-religious systems within the same frameworks as religion and religiosity. In the following chapters, I will interpret Smart's

[69] In these contexts, ideological echo chambers, subcultural identity, quasi-religiosity, fandom, conspiracies, and even certain 'secular' communal phenomena provide the same forms meanings. (Such as intensive individual experiences of something far greater, senses of security, shared beliefs and rituals, a solid sense of belonging, etc.).

model and outline how contemporary (not exclusively religious) reality is constructed within his frameworks. (Cheong & Campbell, 2022, 2–4; Dawson & Cowan, 2010, pp. 23–37).

Compared to other similar models – such as the "intrinsic-extrinsic" dichotomy of Gordon Allport (Allport & Ross, 1967, pp. 432–443) or the "five-dimensional" model by Charles Y. Glock (Stark & Glock, 1974) – Smart's multi-angled approach could lead to more nuanced understandings. Glock's deconstructive model only utilizes five (Glock & Stark, 1965) or four dimensions (depending on the edition) of "belief, practice, experience, knowledge, and consequences" (the last one was removed in 1974) (Stark & Glock, 1974). This model, based primarily on American Census data, unfortunately, overlooks the intricate mechanisms of minority movements' microsocial interactions, their subtle rituality, and their all-encompassing materiality. However, this is understandable, as Glock's model focused on conservative churches' religious identity from economic, psychic, social, and organismic sides.[70] Not necessarily considering social and religious plurality or new and emergent religiosity forms, this model utilized strict working definitions based on majority statistical interpretations. Therefore, it puts the emphasis more on the society-encompassing "cohesive organizing principles" (Capps, 1995, pp. 320–323) rather than on the fragmentation of these and the emergence of new – not necessarily overarching – meanings. In my explorations, such a limited approach that still seeks comprehensive metanarratives and enclosed definitions is unfortunately not viable. In paradigms set in the first half of my dissertation – of which one key takeaway was the establishment of postmodern reality, where notions of a common ground gradually dissolve – definitions and

[70] Nevertheless, Glock's model is still valuable as it recognizes the structural shifts in traditional religiosity, affirming "that ideology and social structure are intimately related, and that changes in one cannot occur without changes in the other." Capps (1995, p. 322) In his understanding, these shifts include specific terms, such as 'god' and 'man.' Asking what constitutes the essence of these terms and how they relate to each other, this model is undoubtedly valuable in understanding mainstream conservative (predominantly Christian) ideological shifts.

terms based on generalizing and limiting consensus can no longer be considered as efficient. Especially not in the cases when I discuss and analyze movements that evidently seek solutions outside grand metanarratives and strive to combat the disruption of reality and the hollowing of prior meanings with new eco-chambers through the utilization of 'micronarratives.' In such cases, Glock's model would need to reconsider its fivefold basis and redefine its concept of *belief*. Similarly, it would need to consider the plurality behind a more pragmatic and result-oriented *practice* in new religiosity. Moreover, it would need to reinvent its frameworks concerning the meanings of *experience,* as it is more internalized and individualized than before. Furthermore, it would be forced to leave behind its established notions of *cohesivity*, realizing that *knowledge* is no longer monopolized by the majority meaning providers. To sum up this very brief critical examination, for my investigations, Glock's model would be too limiting, and with it, I couldn't tackle efficiently the challenges new religiosity holds.

Similarly, Allport's dichotomic intrinsic and extrinsic approach would not be sufficient for this purpose, as the model fails to grasp and outline the nuanced interplay within new meaning systems. Although it can be helpful to outline the *directions* of specific religious attitudes (Allport & Ross, 1967, pp. 432–443) – which even Smart's model struggles with due to its complexity – these benefits are greatly overweighed by the drawbacks of contextual voids and oversimplifications. Furthermore, because my focus and interest are not exclusively limited to these 'communications,' I have to choose the model that gives me the broadest conceptual toolkit. The ideal model should use a complex and multi-angled approach, where the interplay between elements of religiosity remains open while the number of categories (or differentiated aspects of religiosity) is at its highest. Moreover, the optimal model should not pose any excessive constraints by creating unnecessary borders – such as the a priori definition for religion – to keep my perspectives open. Smart's seven-dimensional tool sufficiently passes all these requirements. It is an all-encompassing framework through which I can "understand how it

[i.e., religion and religiosity] functions and vivifies the human spirit." The framework is essentially a multi-layered "morphology of religion" that can sufficiently host theoretical and practical examinations. "It explores and articulates the 'grammar of symbols' – the modes and forms in which religion manifests itself. (Smart, 1996, pp. 1–3).

Dual Model as a Cross-Cultural, Dynamic, Phenomenological Framework

Before immersing myself in the mechanisms and details of the seven dimensions, I must clarify a handful of easily misunderstood terms in Smart's vocabulary. As mentioned, Smart's framework is a cross-cultural, dynamic, phenomenological morphology of religion that primely utilizes a functionalist approach. Such a concise summary, however, requires explanation, as Ninian Smart interprets each term differently. To lift these interpretational 'fog,' I will discuss what each element means in Smart's understanding, starting with the term 'phenomenology':

> "The word 'phenomenology' derives from the philosophical tradition of Husserl. But comparative religionists use it in a different way from philosophers […]. Among religionists it means the use of epochē or suspension of belief, together with the use of empathy, in entering into the experiences and intentions of religious participants […]. This implies that, in describing the way people behave, we do not use, so far as we can avoid them, alien categories to evoke the nature of their acts and to understand those acts […]. In this sense phenomenology is the attitude of informed empathy. It tries to bring out what religious acts mean to the actors." (Smart, 1996, p. 2)

First, I need to elaborate on the alternative name, the "dual model." This title refers to the study's double-layered structure, consisting of a historical and a parahistorical strata. Smart considers the narrative & mythical, doctrinal & philosophical, and ethical & legal dimensions as "historical" layers (discussed later in detail). He underlines that scholars who only examine these aspects may refrain from immersing themselves in the particular religious

tradition and could remain strictly 'outside' when discussing them. Nevertheless, relying solely on sacred literature and officiated texts has plenty of limitations. To sufficiently counterbalance these shortcomings, Smart also recommends incorporating perspectives, which he collectively calls "parahistorical dimensions." Consisting of the ritual & practical, emotional & experiential, social & institutional, and material & artistic dimensions (the last one articulated as distinct only after 1998 (Smart, 1998)), this secondary layer contains the channels of the most important religious mechanisms in any given religion. Concerning these, he also stresses that a cultural-anthropological approach with a practical 'immersion' is necessary to adequately explore these parahistorical aspects. Reaching this point, scholars can no longer 'keep their gloves clean' and stay at a safe distance from the examined phenomena. They need to take up a nominal *emic perspective* – while maintaining a scholarly perspective – and descend from their ivory towers into the 'muck' of living and lived religions. They need to similarly see, feel, and experience aspects of religiosity and examine these from up close among the practitioners. Exploring such elements not just from *above* and *outside* but from *inside* with anthropological methods allows a more nuanced understanding and makes up for the shortcomings and possible misunderstandings of systematizing and theorizing efforts.[71] Smart underlines that in optimal settings, these approaches (historical and parahistorical, with all their respective scopes and methodologies) shall be carried out parallelly in research, as this ensures that each inquiry benefits from the others' findings:

> "Since the study of man is, in an important sense, participatory – for one has to enter into men's intentions, beliefs, myths, and desires in order to understand why they act as they do – it is fatal if cultures, including our own, are described merely

[71] It is essential to note here that an anthropological approach doesn't compromise the base tenets of religion studies, such as the critical, value-neutral, and objective viewpoint. On the contrary, these additional angles refine and correct (if necessary) the distanced and sometimes misinterpreting findings of sociology and history.

externally without entering into dialogue with them. This is the basis of my earlier argument that even the historical treatment of religion is essentially vivified by a parahistorical dialogue with its ideas." (Smart, 1968, pp. 104–105)

Second, I need to note that in my dissertation, I will not use "phenomenology" in its conventional Husserlian meaning. Instead, I will align my perspective with Smart's abovementioned quotation, which allows me to utilize his model most efficiently. Concerning the state of phenomenology, Smart also notes that conventionally interpreted phenomenology tends to be more "synchronic" and "static" in its methodology. Conventional phenomenology, therefore, tends to emphasize the notion that any given type of phenomenon can be reduced to a core "essence" (Smart, 1996, p. 7). However, in the question of religiosities and worldviews – or meaning systems as my broader framework – these concepts might be more challenging to distill into such "essences." To overstep this reductionist pitfall, Smart recommends a more flexible "dynamic" interpretation that sufficiently inherits the dialectic interchanges between particular aspects of religiosity, what Smart calls dimensions.

"Do new religions tend to get institutionalized in certain ways? And, if so, what other effects does this have? Do certain forms of religious experience release creative or organizational behavior in their recipients? And so on. If we can discern patterns, that is what I call dynamic phenomenology […] By dialectical phenomenology I mean more particularly the relationship between different dimensions of religion and worldviews. In general we can say about any system or scheme that one element in it is in principle affected by all others. An organism functions as a whole, so that an injury to one part affects the whole to a greater or lesser degree. […] We can therefore see items in this field in the context of the scheme in which they are embedded […]" (Smart, 1996, pp. 8–9)

Smart also stresses that this framework is a "cross-cultural" mode of study based on his phenomenological principles, which are based on morphological and theoretical parallels, aiming to understand what religion means for the involved. This, however, raises the question: what constitutes "cross-cultural" in his context? As he posits, it refers to the fulfillment of value neutrality, achieved by incorporating new terms into the general vocabulary of the academic study of religions. These new elements – such as bhakti (devotion), dhyana (meditation), and li (appropriate behavior) – don't necessarily originate from Christianity or mainstream Western culture. Smart mentions that the incorporation of these more descriptive yet culturally external elements (from a Westerner's standpoint, at least) helps scholars to 'uproot' themselves from their inherited cultural basis and examine one's own and others' worldviews from a more balanced viewpoint. Smart states that keeping equal distances from any culture while also tapping into their vocabularies may offer a deeper understanding and appreciation of morphological similarities (and differences) in overall human religiosity:

> "Sometimes distinctions and nuances are clearer and richer in other languages than English. There may be differing ways of carving up the territory. Sometimes this may justify us in creating neologisms. In the West it has often been assumed that God and gods are normal: a system is either theistic or polytheistic. But what about the Theravada? Its Ultimate is not God or the gods, but nirvana. Should we then see Christianity and Judaism as major non-nirvanistic religions? […] In affirming that phenomenology should be conducted on a cross-cultural basis, I am saying two things: that its findings should make use of cross-cultural terminology and sensitivity; and that there should be no assumption of the priority of one tradition as the norm. This is where informed empathy has another role, in creating the sensitivity to allow me (a Westerner, a Scot, a male, an Episcopalian, albeit with Buddhist leanings) to enter into other cultures' attitudes." (Smart, 1996, p. 4)

Furthermore, one such approach may allow critical reflection on some overly paradigmatized viewpoints. To understand this goal, Smart raises an example: the Theravadin monk's experiences, who achieves religious experiences through meditation, cannot really be understood with Rudolf Otto's "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" (Otto, 1950 (1977)). For the monk, the religious experience is internalized and doesn't contain any of the intense elements of shaking and trembling when facing something that can be labeled as "das Ganz Andree."

> "Otto's famous book […] on the holy delineates an important strand of religious experience which is for him the central one. His formula for describing the holy as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans is an apt one, and I shall make extensive use of it. But it does not seem aptly to cover experience in the Theravadin case, where practice focuses on concentration; which in turn aims at a kind of purified consciousness. The ascent of the jhānas (stages of meditation) grows ever more subtle […], culminating in the realization of certain formulae such as 'There is nothing.' There is no creature-feeling, or sense of awe, or fascination with any phenomenological object. […] the numinous experience postulates an Other. There is no reason at all why there should not be more than one sort of basic experience in religion. I take Otto's to be one of them. But his desire to make it universally central rests perhaps on an essentialist yearning." (Smart, 1996, p. 29)

Smart also reflects on the problems of overemphasizing Western, colonialist, and theistic viewpoints when discussing religions. In this regard, he raises a significant concern: what happens when we encounter a movement that oversteps (or sidesteps) the concerns of God or gods? In these cases, the terms polytheism, monotheism, pantheism, and animism might not be sufficient for the phenomenon and would call for a revision in the used nomenclature.

> "Western authors have tended to think of religions as monotheistic or polytheistic or animistic or whatever. But in the case of non-theistic religions the occurrence of

> gods is by no means the most important thing about them: the gods are incidentals sucked into the doctrinal scheme with a certain cosmology. There are modem Buddhists who essentially dispense with the gods, seeing them as mythological accretions. If one seeks an encapsulating name, one might call such belief-systems 'transpolytheistic' […] What 'transpolytheistic' means is that there are many gods, but the higher goal transcends them" (Smart, 1996, p. 34).

Fortunately, Smart's model uses a cross-cultural and trans-local vocabulary. Incorporating terms from non-Western cultures creates a more stable and diverse terminological palette and allows a more dynamic basis for the aimed morphological comparison. Moreover, the fine-tuning of observation – through the incorporated new terms – recontextualizes any remaining voids in the model. Through this, the seemingly empty dimensions gain new scholarly understandings: the lack of mythical narratives or a coherent social system is interpreted as a new form of religiosity rather than an 'error' in analysis or a 'faulty' movement, lacking something in those aspects.

The Dynamisms of Smart's Dimensions (in a Very Concise Way)

Smart states that any form of religion – including developing ones with only a few years of presence and established traditions with centuries of history – forms and functions alongside the same principal mechanisms. They all provide meanings – existential, ontological, and complex practical for everyday life – through established and (to a certain extent) commonly agreed channels of authority. The authority in question is most typically connected to a transcendent, enlightened, hidden, or occult source and offers quasi-solution(s) to spiritual homelessness, anthropological denial, and loss of meanings through distinct mechanisms (in the case of new religiosity; these are elaborated in the "Ways of Coping" chapter). Smart also underlines that exploring these universal aspects is essential for scholars of religion, as these are the common, overarching traits of human religiosity:

> "There are reasons why I think the particularist stance is unconvincing. First, extreme cross-cultural particularism is not in general altogether plausible, since human beings have many likenesses both physiological and psychological that lead one to expect overlaps of religiosity. One may add that this point implies that religion is a 'natural' product of humankind despite the great variations of particular religions. Second, one can begin to indicate reasons for variations in descriptions of inner events because such apprehensions are embedded in major contextual differences." (Smart, 1996, p. 168)

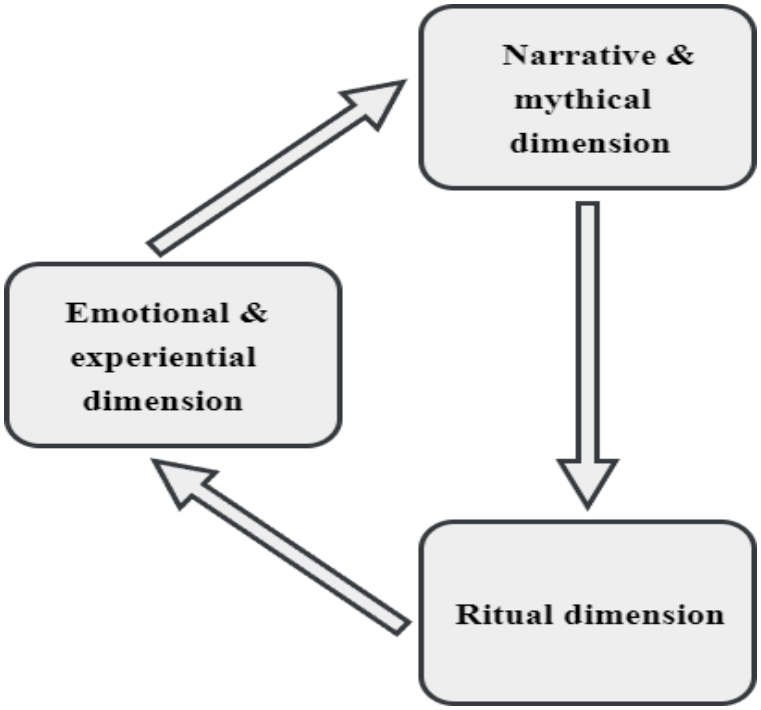
Stripping down what Smart refers to as 'cultural variables' highlights the principal mechanisms through which religion functions and develops. Based on this model, such developmental mechanisms consist of two distinct stages (Smart, 1996, 1998), and which holds his model's primary dynamism. Dissecting these allows its user to highlight concrete stages of any religious development and outline how each aspect of religiosity builds upon the other and how these cross-joints between distinct dimensions strengthen the entire religious system.

The first cycle starts from the emotional & experiential dimension with a spontaneous religious encounter (as an anomaly). Here, the individual experiences the ultimate truth of something *transcendent* or the *Other*. This experience is complemented by a mixture of feelings including, but not limited to, *tranquility, wonder, and awe* –known altogether as "*bhakti*" (Smart, 1996, p. 42). Smart also incorporates the feelings described by Otto and Eliade: being subjected to something incomprehensively greater (*creature-feeling* or, in more universal phrasing, *feelings of ultimacy*), shaking from being in the presence of these ultimate truths (*mysterium tremendum*, *majestas*, and *energy)*, while almost being consumed by the vastness of the encounter ("fascinans") (Eliade, 1959, pp. 8–29; Otto, 1950 (1977), pp. 6–35).

Based on these experiences, the religiously attuned individual (*homo religious*) then creates stories – and, most importantly, shares these stories with others in a narrative form –

generating substance for a manifesting narrative & mythical dimension. These stories carry reports of the encounter and serve as overarching narratives about the surrounding world. Interpreting reality alongside spatial and temporal demarcation lines, these tales formulate the barriers between the sacred and profane – or the taboo and allowed– and establish how and when these liminal spheres have been penetrated by whom (Eliade, 1959, pp. 29–50). These tales also affect how the same transgressive actions can (and will) be replicated later in ritualized settings. However, before discussing these, it is imperative to mention one other mechanism of this phase. Namely, narratives may also convey unique meanings and information about the unknowable or uncertain elements of life, such as one's place in the surrounding world and in all of existence, the borders of the physical plane, and what comes after. These are the effective arrangements of *lokas* or world systems (Smart, 1996, p. 51)). Providing several interpretative layers, these narratives cannot be reduced to a sum of statements: such myths not only establish a complex universe but also form the mimetic basis for social dynamics, hierarchies, reality perceptions, and family structures – effectively mirroring the universe. Furthermore, narratives determine how a given community experiences, interprets and reacts to a changing reality. Contextualizing the regular controllable (everyday actions, prayer, offering, etc.) and transgressive uncontrollable events (tragedies, wars, and famines, etc.), as well as liminal occasions connected to natural human life (birth, reaching maturity, choosing or leaving a companion, dying, etc.) determines how a given individual and community creates a social and material system around themselves.

Telling such stories also generates a desire in the other religiously attuned to access these ultimate truths and gain similar first-hand experiences of the *Other*. This drive brings about the creation of rituals (with it, the subject of the ritual & practical dimension). By reenacting the conditions, processes, and events told in myths – enclosing these within a series of taboos and sacrificial procedures in the hands of specialists – individuals gain similar intense new experiences, supplementing the emotional & experiential dimension with a secondary layer of experiences. This starts the process again and expands to the narrative and ritual dimensions, creating a never-really-settling flow of substance connected to religiosity. As the two (or more) experiential layers fuse and intertwine, they fuel the formation of a new, living religion.

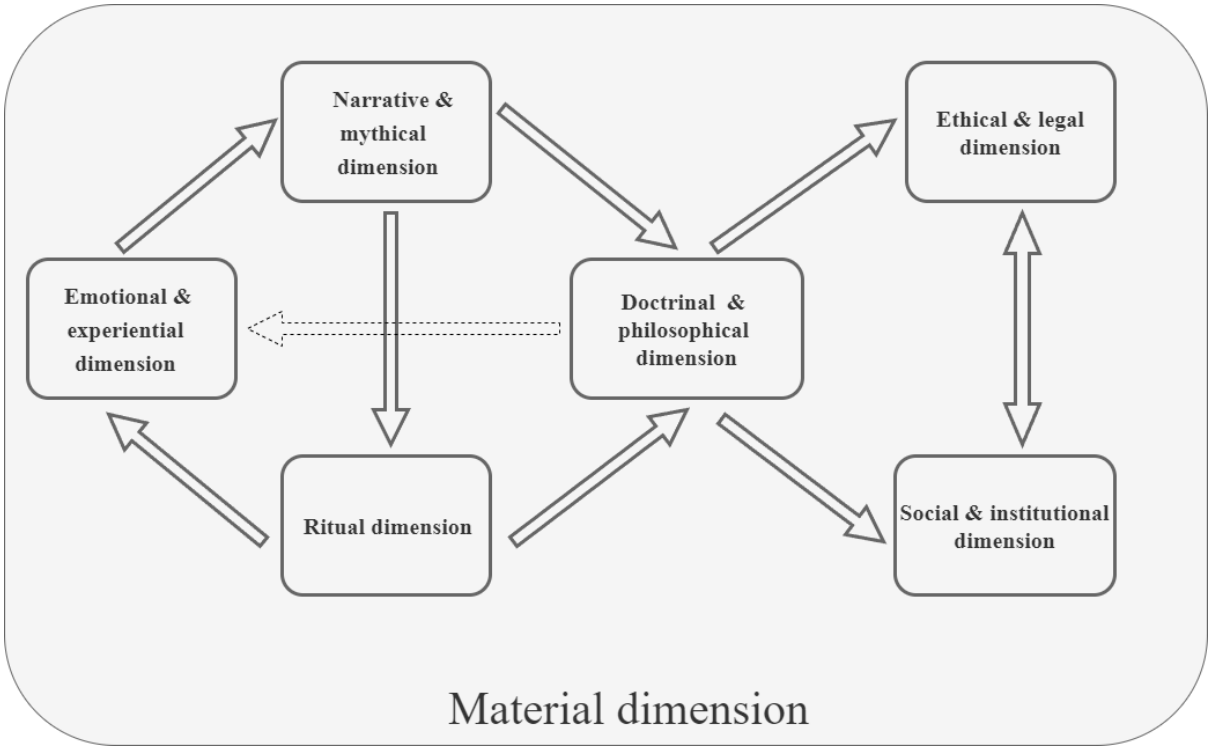


1. Figure – The first 'cycle' of Smart's model

New experiences always create new stories. Sharing stories strengthens communal cohesion and projects the formation of a social dimension through a common worldview. These new stories are also revered by others who wish to experience such encounters. Therefore, these narrative accounts provide a source for rituals, establishing newer experiences and starting the cycle once again. This looping three-stage interaction of gaining extraordinary

experiences, telling stories about them, and later trying to relive them serves as the first stage of Smart's model (see 1. Figure above[72]).

The second stage of this model (see 2. Figure below[73]) follows the development of a religious community.[74] With the introduction of a greater populace, a need emerges for a credential system, validating the legitimate ways and forms of rituals and stabilizing how the stories and religious experiences are interpreted and verified. This forms the basis of a doctrinal & philosophical dimension. Intellectual components, scholarly traditions, theology, and doctrine stabilize the relations between the individual (now a committed member of the forming



2. Figure – The dynamics between Smart's dimensions

[72] The image shows the first self-repeating cycle of Smart's system, which underlines the significance of experiencing the extraordinary, retelling stories about it, and re-enacting – thus reliving – said stories in ritualized contexts, further fueling the substance of the emotional & experiential dimension.

[73] The image outlines the primary (but not exclusive) channels of interactions between each dimension. Furthermore, it shows that each dimension is deeply embedded in physical (and, as the readers will see later, digital) materiality.

[74] Later, I will discuss that from a phenomenological perspective, the same process stages are detectable in the forming other types of meaning systems such as quasi religiosity, ideologies, conspiracy belief, etc. But for now, I will only focus on religiosity and establish Smart's model and its dynamisms.

religious community) and the supernatural or *ultimate*. Cementing accepted – from now on standardized – forms of religious practices, the doctrinal & philosophical dimension also affects the multitude of religious experiences, validating them and 'canonizing' stories and myths told about these experiences. These dynamics fix 'how things are done' and 'why things are done' in a given religious community. Furthermore, this stabilization pauses the creation of new experiences, effectively halting the first cycle of Smart's model for a while (up until an external/internal crisis, disruption in prior narratives and meanings (i.e., a new meaning crisis)).

Doctrines – now fixed subsystems stipulating how the world *shall* be perceived and how things *shall* be done – also form an initial shape of early ethics and legalities, projecting the doctrines' determining power to every aspect of the followers' lives. Categorizing actions and standpoints as morally and legally venerable, acceptable, avoidable, unacceptable, or even taboo and punishable, these new rules – in the forms of moral and legal imperatives, permissions, limits of tolerance, and prohibitions – create the basis of the developing ethical & legal dimension.

Ethics affect how a community perceives itself compared to others outside the given community. Combined with meaning conveyed in doctrines, laws, and familiar narratives, elements of the ethical & legal dimension also form a collective (social) identity. Organized parts of religion (such as churches, monastic orders, or concepts like the Sangha or Umma) establish society's early structures: totemistic tribes and theocratic societies (and in the contemporary age, minority congregations and enclosed religious communities). These contents of the social & institutional dimension further the development of a given religious community and form the foundations of a religious society.

Materiality (material & artistic dimension, the last of Smart's outlined dimensions) is interwoven with all the abovementioned dimensions. It holds all 'physical' or 'touchable' manifestations of religiosity, including sacred architecture (churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, sacred groves, altars, etc.) connecting the material & artistic dimension to the

doctrinal & philosophical one. Similarly, it intersects with the narrative & mythical dimension in subjects such as sacred imagery and physical forms of the divine (in temporally and/or locally limited contexts). The material & artistic dimension also crosses with the social & institutional dimension, as the latter determines the spatial and social rules of a social structure (designating places of worship and burial typically centered and around the peripheries of the given community, creating liminal spaces where the *transcendent* may manifest in physical form without unintentionally 'contaminating' profane spheres with the essence of sacred or the *Other* (Douglas, 2003, pp. 8–36)). The dimensions of materiality and rituality are also deeply interwoven, as the first supplements the second with ritual tools, while the second designates a completely new functionality for materials in religion with sacred equipment for purification, exorcism, or confirmation, including masks and ritual clothing which are used to enact mythical events. By doing so, materiality plays a crucial role in re-establishing the created world and verifying the community's and individuals' place in it. Ritual and civil clothing may signify status, but they also have ritual functions and may designate the degree of connections to the *transcendent*. They are visible warnings of the 'contaminating effect' of the *Other* and its taboos. The dynamics between materiality and rituality, of course, are valid in reverse: rituals also create – sometimes as a secondary output – new sacred material. Think of the eucharistic bread after transfiguration or the produce offering to deities in many neopagan movements. Similarly, the ashes of the dead after the cremation are – in this regard – sacred material. Moreover, remembrances – rosaries, holy water vials or in other cultural contexts, sacred clothing, incense, or even ritual food –are brought home from religious pilgrimage. Opposingly in dynamism, offerings, like the sterling silver Ex Voto Hearts, are left at religious sites as signs of gratuity, sacred vows, or even one's devotion.

Furthermore, the artistic aspect of materiality allows individuals to connect with the experiential & emotional dimensions: religious artists create inspired depictions (idols, statues,

images, sacred architecture, etc.) of the *Other*, directly influencing how religiosity manifests itself and how it is passed down to individuals and between generations. This production indirectly affects the narrative and doctrinal dimensions, too. Moreover, the process actively influences the formation of religious meaning systems. Creativity and self-expression, in this regard, strengthen the individuals' involvement and the community's social cohesion factors.

This concise (and certainly not comprehensive) outlook intended to outline some of the intrinsic connections and basic dynamisms (and most important interchanges) between particular dimensions of Smart's model. It illustrates how the framework functions in general contexts without one particular subject under its 'seven lenses.' In the following subchapters, I will take time to examine each partaking dimension and outline certain traits, which I will further dissect and modify if needed, in order to successfully introduce new and alternative religiosity under these individual lenses. By doing so, I will connect Smart's model to contemporary religious phenomena and test – at this point, only one segment at a time and only in a way that Smart would define as 'static' – whether the framework is adequate to analyze new and alternative religiosity. By doing so, I will establish the empirical basis on which the last chapter's case studies will be conducted – at that point employing all seven dimensions on particular movements and communities in a dynamic and cross-cultural manner, as Smart intended.

Contrary to the structure of the *Dimensions of the Sacred*, I do not follow Smart's order in dimensions (he mentions that he compiled these without any particular order of significance, so there isn't any incentive for me to follow anyway (Smart, 1996, p. 10)) and instead follow the model's dynamic flow, which I have explored briefly above. Therefore, I start with the emotional & experiential dimension, as this is the source of religious experience and the root of religiosity.

Emotional & Experiential Dimension[75]

> "[…] it is obvious that the emotions and experiences of men and women are the food on which the other dimensions of religion feed: ritual without feelings is cold, doctrines without awe or compassion are dry, and myths which do not move hearers are feeble. […] So much of religious practice is soaked in emotions. Without them, the practice would be insincere, mechanical, merely external, not really worth undertaking […] It is […] right to consider experience as one of the formative dimensions of religious experience. It is also reasonable to think of the inner, emotional life as vivifying certain aspects of ritual, narrative and so forth." (Smart, 1998, 14–15; 194-195; 166-167)

From a phenomenological-morphological perspective, Smart differentiates two interconnected strands of religious experience.[76] First is the numinous experience between a subject and some external absolute object. Complemented with feelings of "mysterium tremendum et fascinans," this is promptly grasped by Rudolf Otto (Otto, 1950 (1977)). Here, the subject encounters the articulated and extremized feelings of fear, trembling, uttermost respect, and absolute humility, but also confidence, tranquility, fulfillment, as well as extraordinary levels of bliss, joy, and happiness, all at the same time. These are ineffable and inexplicable experiences, as they absolutely transcend the scales of human existence, meaning the experience oversteps and transgresses the barriers posed by temporality and spatiality. For these reasons, the

[75] I want to emphasize that my approach in this chapter is scholarly, objective, and unbiased. As discussed earlier in "The Relationship Between Social Discourse and Terminology" chapter, my statements and findings are based on Smart's phenomenological-morphological approach and do not include any value judgments. I am, therefore, impartial, neutral, and as objective as possible.

[76] He refers to this dichotomy as the "two-pole theory."

subject(s) of these *mysteria* is beyond speech.[77] He cannot describe the experienced ultimacy with the limited vocabulary of a *creature* and turns towards something that can surpass these limitations with either art or a new – sacred and secret – language.

Meanwhile, a more 'toned down' form of these experiences can be described as *bhakti*, where the immenseness is softened, and a greater emphasis is placed on passive devotion and calm intimacy. Nevertheless, in both cases (*numinous* and *bhakti*) of the *Other*, the variety of feelings is always externally oriented. The religiously attuned individual reaches these experiences and lives through these emotions by asking what lies "out there?" (Smart, 1996, pp. 175–176).

Smart classifies three types of numinous experiences according to their occurrence.

> "First, you can have the [spontaneous and direct] numinous experience; […] second, you can have the vision of the divine [also referred to as divine conversion]; […] third, you can have the continuing disposition to see the divine in the world" (Smart, 1996, p. 179).[78]

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[77] Smart also notes an important dynamism in the numinous experience: being exposed to the absolute and ultimate Other inevitably spurs devotion and awe within the one who experiences it. These feelings manifest worship. The continuous worship further strengthens the feelings related to the ultimate and so on. This mechanism is the root of the first cycle of Smart's model, which I have touched upon in the previous chapter. Smart (1996, pp. 181–182)

[78] Furthermore, Smart notes that visions (sensory or *visio*, auditory or *oraculum*) and dreams play similarly impactful roles within numinous experiences. However, due to their 'removed' nature from the natural order and rules of life (meaning, in dreams and visions, the rules of the universe do not apply), these experiences are connected to both numinous and contemplative strands. Smart overcomes this dilemma by introducing a third strand of 'shamanic' experiences. However, in this dissertation, I will try to modify Smart's model in this regard. Shamanism is a heavily interpreted term in contemporary neopaganism, as it is utilized to describe certain experiences – which in my views are nothing more than either (or both) numinous visions or luminous conversions in Smart's framework. Smart (1996, p. 191). Moreover, Smart mentions that shamanism can be considered a precursor category of all religious experience, as it taps into both contemplative and numinous experiential elements – or, in reverse, these develop from the dilution of shamanistic experiences. As Smart posits: "*From this vantage point we may perhaps conclude that shamanism is a vital early form of spiritual experience which may have helped to develop the twin poles of religious experience as I have described them*." Smart (1996, p. 192)

Compared to the numinous ones, he outlines the second strand of experiences, which are more *contemplative* or "mystical" in their nature.[79] This type "does not postulate an outside Other and which feels the disappearance of the subject-object distinction" (Smart, 1996, p. 167). As Smart phrases, the critical difference between the numinous and contemplative experiences is that in the case of the latter, the individual 'turns inwards' to find extraordinary experiences – typically through isolation, celibacy, or other forms of asceticism –; meanwhile, in the case of the former he encounters these 'externally.' "There is a double initial contrast with the numinous: the latter experience is of an outside Other, the mystical [or contemplative] of an inner non-other." (Smart, 1996, p. 167). Contrary to the numinous experiences, the individual asks a very different question in contemplation. Instead of inquiring about what lies "out there," the individual interacts with what's "within here" (Smart, 1996, pp. 175–176).

Regarding the typology of contemplative experiences, Smart presents a similar tripartite system of a sudden realization or [1] "*contemplative experience*" [or luminous experience]; an enlightenment moment of [2] "*luminous conversion*" and a continuous exposure and gradual revelation of knowledge about ultimacy [3] which he refers to as "*luminous disposition.*"[80] Smart presupposes intense focus behind each of these forms, as they are closely associated with gradual purification through asceticism and rejection of the external and bodily.[81] This is necessary, as on the contemplative path, the individual explores the ultimate 'from within.' To achieve this, he has to reject – or at least momentarily isolate from – any external disruptors

[79] Smart leaves the designation of „mystical" behind at the very start of his inquiry, as it is too heavily weighted with semantical and historical associations. Instead, he opts for the less heavily associated "contemplative experience" phrasing.

[80] Sidenote: the wordplay between *numinous* and l*uminous* experiences is something that brings attention to Smart's unique humor. Nevertheless, this playfulness can sometimes be a bit problematic, especially in vocal lectures, when the presenter has to over-articulate these terms in order to avoid any mishearing.

[81] It is worth noting, that a contemplative path can also be taken through excess. Hedonism and overstimulation – such as sexual excess and the usage of mind-altering substances – serve similar purposes as the flagellations or the chastity belt: through excess, they bring experiential clarity. The body breaks similarly as through asceticism and self-rejection and gives way to the sought ultimate revelations and experiences.

that would obstruct his focus. From a morphological angle, these practices can be interpreted as some degree of asceticism (Smart, 1996, p. 183).

He also mentions that contemplative experiences can be both theistic and non-theistic, as such phenomena don't necessarily postulate a concept of (a) transcendent being(s). For now, however, I will leave this issue unexplored, as it would inevitably lead to the swamps of substantive study of religions.[82] This would overinflate my dictionary and dull the functionalist edge of Smart's framework. So, for now, I conclude with Smart's observations, underlining that contemplative experiences carry a higher sense of self-awareness and wisdom, accompanied by feelings of moderation, balance, and equanimity (Smart, 1996, p. 172).

Smart also designates a middle ground between 'external numinous' and 'internal contemplative' experiences. These are intense and internal experiences of total unity with the cosmos or, as Robert Charles Zaehner phrases, "an experience of Nature in all things or of all things as being one" (Zaehner, 1957/1980, pp. 49–50). Smart appropriately borrows Zaehner's designation for such experiences, labeling them "*panenhenic*." However, he underlines that this is not a standalone third type of experience but rather a fusion of the two: "[it] is not like the numinous experience, and, because it is not interior, it is not like the contemplative case." (Smart, 1996, pp. 169–170). These two strands (and what lies between them) of religious experience are not exclusive to each other and may regularly intertwine and manifest in the same religious tradition to varying degrees:[83]

> "[…] in various kinds of Mahayana Buddhism, bhakti directed towards Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and contemplation conducted as the higher form of spiritual life

[82] Smart similarly stays away from this question for the very same reasons.

[83] Smart delineates between six forms of interactions: "[1] *one exclusively;* [2] *the other exclusively;* [3] *the one dominant;* [4] *the other dominant;* [5] *both equal. And if you like, for completion's sake,* [6] *neither: the person or tradition that has no experience of the beyond is, after all, a vital possibility too.*" Smart (1996, p. 174)

> are both evident" […]; In Taoism both the worship of the supreme gods and the life of harmonizing with the Tao were practiced together. […]; Christianity has traditionally encouraged ways of giving warm expression to the practice of worship. The material dimension is usually geared up with much richness of texture to give the faithful a feeling of bhakti. […] Through such means the practice of bhakti is encouraged, and this surrounds the whole sense of the numinous. Other factors encourage the contemplative: the very appearance of grave monks and nuns who seem to exhibit in their lives a dedication to the contemplative life; retreats and teachings; books on self-awareness and humility; and the air of calm which can pervade the holy cloister." (Smart, 1996, pp. 172–173).

Summarizing the key takeaways: according to Smart, there are two main strands of religious experience: the numinous and the contemplative. These may intertwine to varying degrees and contain a wide range of associated feelings and experience types. However, their common denominator is that each experience is significantly more impactful than others (they are categorically different than 'ordinary' experiences) and causes a change in the individual's perception of reality. They move the influenced and drive a type of effervescence that other everyday experiences – and even overly proceduralized or hollowed-out conventional practices – can never provide. For this reason, extraordinary experiences – both numinous and contemplative – are unique and sought-after phenomena for religiously attuned humans. They open doors to inexplainable and ineffable realities or ultimate truths hidden inside oneself. By partaking in these, such experiences confirm the validity of the individuals' existence and endow them with a range of self-contradictory feelings: both love and fear, completeness and emptiness, simultaneous sensations of totality, and also feelings of utter insignificance. These complementary emotions strengthen the already extraordinary experience of something that is "wholly Other," in Otto's words (Otto, 1950 (1977), p. 22).

Moving further, based on these statements, in the following subchapter, I examine how new religious experiences can be discussed within the overviewed framework of Smart. At this point, I do not connect these to other dimensions and conduct my investigation in a 'static' state. Later in the case studies, however, I make up for these shortcomings and introduce the dynamic viewpoint as the focus of these studies.

New Religiosity Under the Lens of Experiential & Emotional Dimension

> "[…] much of religion as it develops into modern urban living, […] has a keen regard for direct encounters with the divine or ultimate. […] Scriptures compete and become mysteriously entangled, and may seem at a remove from reality. What lies behind them in any event is the experience of the divine. Doctrines often divide unnecessarily and are not easy to judge, especially in relation to experience. So there is a nisus towards the poles of experience - towards the divine, conversion, direct knowledge; or else towards inner truth, pure consciousness awareness." (Smart, 1996, p. 184)

Smart promptly grasps the essence of the postmodern condition with this short quotation. He stresses that as prior religious structures become overburdened and crumble under their own weight, genuine new suppliers emerge, offering extraordinary experiences in new contexts. Therefore, the relevance and examinability of these experiences are already pre-established in Smart's model. In this subchapter, I will outline some of the previous conclusions, and by moving further from these starting points, I will discuss how – and to what degree – new religious experiences can fit into the framework provided by Ninian Smart. First, I will approach the dichotomy of a numinous and contemplative experience in new religiosity.

As discussed in the previous chapters, contemporary meaning systems (and the experiences they provide) emerge to combat the feelings generated by meaning crisis and spiritual homelessness. The latter is a state of emptiness from extraordinary experiences, which – for

the religiously attuned individual – is an unbearable and unnatural state. The *homo religiosus* longs to connect and converse with ultimacy. Its life's purpose is to grow closer to the meanings connected to ultimacy and establish its place in existence through direct connections with the Other. New religiosity's individualized and intensive systems cultivate such extraordinary experiences at a much higher degree with their flexibility, individuum-centered rituality, and strengthened meanings, compared to the competition (traditional religiosity). They encourage the individual to take the role of an active agent in reaching out to the *transcendent*. Compared to traditional religiosity – where the individual has no other option than to utilize the already established religious frameworks and channels – in new religiosity's personally constructed frameworks, the individual may create a more personally attuned meaning system which cultivates a more direct and dynamic interaction with the Other. One can easily find examples for both numinous and contemplative strands of experiences in new religiosity (also for their intersections with subcategories, precursors of bhakti, panenhenic-, shamanic-, and magical experiences). In this subchapter, I will present three such cases and overview how efficiently these may fit into Smart's framework. Furthermore, I will ask whether the framework requires any additions or modifications to host new and alternative religiosity most effectively.

Healing Experience in Scientology

Scientology's auditing can be used as an example of Smart's contemplative experience, which also taps into the shamanic and panenhenic strands. While auditing, the individual goes through a series of contemplative-ascetic procedures – cleaning his body from all harmful physical influences before the experience and completing a series of pre-required (or at least recommended) courses – to reach an adequate state of clarity for these 'more advanced' experiences. Asceticism of this sort is an evident morphological parallel with the contemplative strand.

Auditing aims to 'erase' prior "engrams" – negative marks on the soul concept of Scientology, 'transferred' from prior lives (Lewis, 2016, p. 37). It is initiated by 'turning inwards'

(Smart, 1996, p. 167) through a type of meditation, gradually immersing oneself in the deeper mind while reacting to the auditor's commands (the experience's supervisor and ritual specialist). During this, the individual travels back in time and space to the given event and focuses on living through 'past lives and traumata' (Westbrook, 2022, pp. 8–16) to overcome them with newfound power. From a phenomenological perspective, such a description fits perfectly with what Smart describes as shamanic travel (Smart, 1996, 191; 194). The attuned individual takes up the role of the freshly initiated shaman, led by the auditor – a trained supervisor or mentor who guides him through these experiences and monitors his progress with a piece of equipment they call an "e-meter."[84] During shamanic travel, the individual retreats to his own spiritual world, interacting with 'what's within' (Smart, 1996, 175-167) – "the ego, the id, and the superego" (Smart, 1996, p. 194) Meanwhile, the individual battles with harmful memories and corrects prior damages to become whole again, which can be viewed as a morphological parallel to overcoming the shaman sickness. As the shamanic initiate's sickness becomes dormant, so do the Scientologist individual's incorrect reactions subside during the progress in his studies.[85]

At the end of these experiences, the individual returns to his body – now healed – reaching a state of serenity and tranquil bliss and producing the so-called "floating needle" phenomenon on the e-meter (Dericquebourg, 2017, p. 8). Those who achieve this kind of experience in the "Clear" state (a certain status in Scientology's spiritual enlightenment procedure) tend to mention out-of-body experiences associated with auditing (known as "exterior"), which

[84] The incorporation of ritual equipment is sort of similar to the shaman's tools – musical equipment, totems, and weapons which help the shaman traverse the ethereal plane safely Hoppál (1994, 29–32) –; however, I will not examine these as yet. The analysis of the dynamism between dimensions will be discussed after I introduced each dimension.

[85] Smart framework also allows us to connect these experiences to psychoanalytical currents, explicitly with those of Freud, Jung and Campbell. As he mentions: "[…] there are echoes of shamanism. The psychoanalyst has to suffer through the course of analysis, going into his or her own hells in self-awareness. […] There is first a cosmology, but it is the cosmology of an inner universe - the ego, the id and the superego dance like planets within our depths." Smart (1996, p. 194)

scholars could classify as tapping into panenhenic experiences: emerging from oneself and for a brief moment experiencing "All that is in the cosmos without the constraints of time and the physical body" (Nemes, 2025 (Forthcoming), 11-14 (manuscript pagination))

The active agency of the individual in an intensive and emotionally heated healing process, the trance-like state in which it is achieved, and the preceding exercises of purification and preparation all classify this phenomenon as an extraordinary luminous conversion. For the individual, it brings emotions of clarity, a connection to ultimacy, and a sense of healing or reparation for something that was broken or disrupted. Furthermore, similar to what Smart mentions, the "outside Other" is not necessarily postulated in these instances. The "subject-object" distinction is not essential, as the individual descends within himself, and through a series of mental battles, he emerges to experience 'All that is' like never before.

Shaking from the Numinous at Faith Church

Neo-Pentecostal and Christian-revival movements can be an appropriate setting to discuss *numinous* extraordinary experiences. In this regard, I am fortunate as there are several fieldwork-based research available both in Hungarian and English (Barna et al., 2014; Horváth, 1995; Kamarás, 1994, 2003, 2010; Lange, 2003, 2003; Á. Lugosi et al., cop. 1998). A relatively recent of these had been conducted within one of the most known (or most controversial) Hungarian Pentecostal movements, the Faith Church (Hit Gyülekezete[86]), by Holly Folk in 2017, and later it was published as a fieldwork report in *Nova Religio* (Folk, 2017, pp. 101–116). Her report of a Wednesday night closed-door service focused (among others) on the religious experience of the involved and presented a detailed 'catalog' of

[86] Despite receiving the legal designation of an "established church" in 2011, the Faith Church continues to be perceived as a 'fringe sect' rather than a legitimate church in Hungarian public discourse. This is primarily attributed to the influence of outspoken apostates, such as László Bartus (Bartus (1999, 2020)), as well as the movement's political affiliations correlating the leader Sándor Németh's substantial wealth accumulation and controversial monetary policies.

extraordinary experiences – all associated with the *numinous*. She underlines the presence of the so-called "gifts of the Spirit." Among these, she explicitly discusses the "Laughing Gift" – a type of "'holy laughter' during which participants are overcome by ecstatic worship" (Folk, 2017, p. 102). Moreover, her study brings examples and descriptions of exorcisms, individuals trembling and shaking, as well as examples of speaking in tongues. She also mentions healing with (and by) the Holy Spirit through laying on hands. She notes an overall feeling of orderly fervor among participants of the examined event. Most interestingly, she noted people who – "slain in the spirit" (Folk, 2017, p. 110) – collapsed and started shaking on the floor, as if they were being electrocuted or were having seizures from overstimulation. Examining these – supposedly quite typical – elements, one can easily find parallels with the descriptions of Eliade's and Otto's numinous experiences.

Looking at the noted behaviors by Folk and expressed feelings among the congregation members, the most prevalent emotions associated with the numinous are intense *bliss*, uttermost *joy*, and an uncontrollable – almost hysterical – *happiness*. Secondary senses complement all these: the fear of the experienced *ultimacy*, respect (*majestas*, *fascinans*), and humbling power enforcing total humility (*creature-feeling* or *"creatureliness"* (Smart, 1996, 29; 42)). Altogether, these generate intense and extreme forms of devotion: while standing, the congregates cannot stop trembling and shaking; some collapse on the floor while speaking in tongues or feeling healed from all ailments. The basis of these expressions lies in the ineffable and inexplicable nature of experiencing the *Other*. Such encounters transcend the limits of human existence. The expressions these encounters manifest similarly overstep the conventional and culturally acceptable forms of self-expression: the individual cannot express what he feels and sees; his body cannot contain – nor could it comprehend – these ultimate truths in their entirety. The transcendent experience over-tenses the emotional capacity of the witness, and after a certain point, they inevitably spill out: the individual starts to shake violently, laugh hysterically

and uncontrollably, or runs around in the Faith Hall as one who has just lost his mind. It is also worth noting that these experiences – just like any *numinous* encounter – create a cascading effect in a greater group of congregates: the intensity of experiencing *ultimacy* and seeing others acting out-of-ordinary spurs more intensive devotion in others, further generating new extraordinary experiences up until everyone involved behaves similarly. The hysteric nature of extraordinary experiences and the effects of a mass congregation all fit well and can be easily systematized in Smart's model. They are, by essence, *numinous* experiences that affect all other dimensions of Smart's model. They temporarily suspend conventional ethics, allowing the entry of hysterical (or even deviant) acts. Such extraordinary phenomena also disrupt social rules, as the 'simple' follower gains direct access to the *Other*, which was previously exclusive to trained and ordained specialists.

Asatru Offerings as Bhakti

As a last example, I will make an unconventional interpretation of experiences in neopagan rituals and offerings. Compared to the above-discussed interactions with the *Other* at Faith Church, an Asatru[87] follower's religious experiences may seem more procedural, repetitive, and certainly less intense. Instead of shaking from fear or feeling the *energy* of the *numinous*, the neopagan calmly recognizes the *Other(s)* and offers their due respect in calm devotion (*bhakti*) (Nemes, 2024, 235-259). Smart's term of *bhakti* –used for sacred experiences described by distant passivity and cold intimacy – precisely grasps these. The *transcendent* in these encounters are mostly certainly distant as it only converses with the neopagan practitioner

[87] Asatru is a term used to refer to a loosely connected set of neopagan movements inspired by Northern mythology. Lewis, Strmiska, Gunnell, and von Schnurbein provide more comprehensive descriptions of this multifaceted term. However, for this examination, it is sufficient to outline the fact that Asatru is a Nordic mythology and cultural history-inspired movement connecting to both Western Esotericism and native religious resurgence. Particular groups under this umbrella term may vary greatly, however, their two major strands are universalism and folkism (Gunnell (2015); Lewis (2015); Schnurbein (2016); Strmiska (2000)).

through accepting (or rejecting) his offering. This distance prevents religious fervor and keeps the *energy* of the divine under control. Meanwhile, it also allows a more continuous – yet seemingly one-sided – communication between the devotee and the Other(s). As Smart notes, "[…] bhakti has a certain egalitarian thrust. Partly this is because of its greater 'personalism.' That is, because the Divine interacts with the faithful as a personal being, she or he equally dispenses grace." (Smart, 1996, p. 186)

Contrary to the distanced and seemingly 'cold' settings, the prepared offering is dear to the devotee's heart; giving up on them means a real sacrifice and a genuine sign of devotion and desire towards the *Other(s)*. Burning precious memorandums, placing out delicious food produce, or offering one's own blood are all intimate acts conveying deep emotions. With these, the devotee rejects his own sustenance, throws his memories into the fire, or offers a living part of himself to reach and connect with the *Other(s)*. (Smart, 1996, p. 183). Even the dynamics of these exchanges are – to some extent – 'toned down.' The *transcendent* almost always stays away, although in the eyes of the individual, it accepts the offering. From these experiences, the neopagan does not seek immediate revelation or salvation. Instead, he delivers what's due to the divine to set a good standing and to maintain a routinized interaction with it. Similar to *numinous* experiences, in neopagan bhakti, the individual seeks the *Other(s)* externally. He does not turn to himself or look inwards. Instead, he whispers into the cosmos and asks what – or more precisely, who – lies "out there?" (Smart, 1996, p. 175). The experience in these exchanges is always one-directional: the devotee communicates to the divine; however, the holy stays distant. Nevertheless, these nominal exchanges are sufficient for the devotee, as he seeks only the company and not the activity of *ultimacy* and finds satisfaction and fulfillment even in these one-sided communications.

After exploring each intersection and pole of the religious experience (numinous and contemplative as the two poles; panenhenic as the intersection; shamanic as the anthropological

precursor), I can state that new religious experiences can be effectively placed into Smart's model. As his model's subject is the religiously attuned human – the *homo religiosus* – the framework fits equally well for both established and new religiosity. In some cases, the model may even outline further leading morphological parallels, which can reshape and expand the scholarly discourse about the significance of the religious experience in contemporary life. Through these parallels, self-help activities can be reinterpreted as shamanistic travels; hysterical laughter could be positioned as a symptom of crowd-enhanced overstimulation from the Divine, while silently staring into the fire as a lone neopagan may be reinterpreted as personal *bhakti*. Even in the model's static state, these subtle nuances promise intriguing leads to grasping new religiosity.

Narrative & Mythical Dimension

> "It is characteristic of religions to have stories. On the whole they play a necessary role in the fabric of a tradition […]. One major reason is that memory of the collective past keeps it in being. And that sense of a collective past gives identity to a group, just as memory gives us individual humans an identity. […] Consider someone with Alzheimer's disease […] without memory of who he is and who his dear friends and family are he has lost his identity: he is a body in an empty career, merely an outward successor to the person he once was." (Smart, 1996, p. 132)

Concerning narratives, Smart emphasizes the significance of myths but also notes other forms and conveyers of narratives, such as dramas, jokes, and even fiction.[88] In this chapter, I will explore these from a general standpoint. In the context of this dissertation, I interpret myths using Smart's description (Smart, 1996, pp. 133–136): they are stories that always carry

[88] In Smart's understanding, myth is part of a greater set of items: narrative stories. He stresses that not all stories are myths; however, all myths are essentially stories. Just as stories, myths carry meaning and memory. The significant difference between just-so stories and myths is that the latter can serve as a basis for shared identity and world interpretation. Smart (1996, p. 131).

narrative memory and have the potential to establish unquestioned authority. They affirm *continuity* by strengthening cohesivity through lineage. They designate *values* unaffected by time, connecting them to history's already cemented nature and delivering complex interpretative meanings about the surrounding world (i.e., telling stories of the *cosmos* and its inhabitants). Furthermore, myths clarify subjects of systematic uncertainty by providing stories about 'what lies beyond death,' 'what the reason and goal of earthly suffering are,' or 'where otherworldly forces reside' and how such forces may interfere in mortal lives.

Smart outlines a distinct group of myths that can be labeled as 'myths of origin.' In his framework, these narrative stories establish stability and order: primal chaos becomes separated from creation; an *axis mundi* is designated in the center of the *cosmos*; the movement of the inhabitants of the *cosmos* narrows to restricted paths, creating liminal channels between the sacred and the profane world in these stories (Smart, 1996, p. 134). Myths of origin conclude creation with the slaying of imperfect beasts and chaotic entities. As the primal battle of elements subsides, entities of order and hierarchy take the ruling place of primal and chaotic forces.

These same myths also confirm the centrality of those involved in this immense *cosmos*: their community now lives by the trunk of the *axis mundi,* right under the sacred upper spheres where the Other resides, while below them lies the underworld. This verticality is a general cosmological trait of almost every form of religiosity and complex meaning system [89] in which the Other resides 'up there.' At the same time, restrained chaotic entities lay just over the borders of the *cosmos* or below in the underworld (Smart, 1996, p. 142). Nevertheless, the exact form and locations of the *transcendent* vary according to the given tradition and its utilization of metaphorical or analogous understandings. In this regard, the *Other* may reside in

[89] In certain traditions, like in Tantric Yoga, the *axis mundi* may also manifest internally within the yogi. Such exceptions will be interesting later, as these are another discussable aspect of contemplative experiences.

either a finite or infinite universe; within or outside of the boundaries of the physical world; or even 'beyond' (*transcendence*) or 'behind' (*immanence*) all that is (Smart, 1996, p. 144). Either way, these views shed light on one thing: the universality of the *homo religiosus*' world perception, leaving its marks on the narratives and myths he creates. The religiously attuned always sees himself within a world of verticality, with ones above and below him.[90]

"The stories of the gods help to shape the past, and to throw light on the way the group sees itself" (Smart, 1996, p. 132). Shared deposits of cultural memory (*memes*) establish a collective identity and determine how the surrounding world – including past, present, and future – is (re-)interpreted. One function of myths is reiterating the *illud tempus*, the sacred ' timeless time' of creation (Eliade, 1959, 80–85), allowing the involved to reexperience these in narrative contexts. To achieve this, myths can create 'recurring times' (Eliade, 2018, pp. 112–130) in a ritualized and mythologized year. Dated events (like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost) – Smart calls these "bumps" in annual-calendrical societies' perception of time – create the opportune periods to reenter *illud tempus* (Smart, 1996, p. 147). Correspondingly, myths about *illud tempus* contain something Smart refers to as "*illud spatium*," or sacred spatiality. I had already touched on one side of this issue when I discussed the myths about the vertical and horizontal structuring of the world.

Smart also outlines a second significant group of myths. While myths of origin tap into the past – to the *illud tempus* and the time that followed immediately – the second group of myths reach towards the future. They contain narrative elements about the end days of existence and offer consolation as 'myths of salvation.' They are mostly optimistic stories about a

[90] In most cases, this verticality is also complemented by horizontal segmentation. Alongside the directions of the compass, one may see myths of the cold North (Hyperborea), the scorching South (from where infernal entities emerge), the far East on land, and the end of the world on the West, beyond the sea.

rebuilt world, cleansed of all imperfection and harm. A specific complementary (one may also argue the opposite) set of these myths is what one could call 'myths of decay.' As Smart posits:

> "Many worldviews incorporate some idea of degeneration, since they look back to a golden age from which things degenerated suddenly, as in the Jewish and Christian traditions. After this there may be improvements, with divine intervention helping the world in varying ways." (Smart, 1996, p. 147)

In the case of these, an optimistic recommencing of the mythical cycle is not necessarily guaranteed. Instead, in such instances, total annihilation awaits (one may look to Norse mythology's Ragnarök or Theravada Buddhism's end goal of escaping from the wheel of karma and erasing oneself from the never-ending cycle of reincarnation). These are typically narratives of irreversible and unavoidable occurrences. Such events break the cyclical nature of time, conclude older ones, and set new stories in motion.

Furthermore, Smart emphasizes that the mythical & narrative dimensions' contents cannot be reduced to 'simple stories.' They carry several complex, multi-layered meanings. For example, one can look at the myths of a dual cosmos. In its pre-contextual layer, the sky is depicted as a male (like Uranus or Dyaus Pita), while the earth is described as a female (like Gaia or Prithvi). Built on this duality, the first interpretative layer discusses the background of simple natural phenomena, like the occurrence of rain (Uranus pours rain onto Gaia as they stay distant from each other). Dissecting the same narrative elements further, the same story offers more nuanced narratives about the dynamism between the sexes. The male essence stays distant from the creatures he sires, while the female aspect caresses her children even in death, accepting their broken cadavers into her own body. Consonantly – as a third interpretative layer about the same story of rain explains sexual reproduction in mythical terms:

> "[…] [the male aspect] controls the warmth and the wet, and so is a powerful fecundator from above. It is natural for many peoples therefore to identify the earth

with the female, fecundated by the upper God: supplying the womb, the earth. The rain is like the sperm, falling on and into the earth, which brings forth, mysteriously, the crops and fruits." (Smart, 1996, p. 153)

This last layer connects humanity to the Other by pointing out similarities and followable patterns for the created. Investigating this from the opposite phenomenological angle, one may realize that humanity effectively recreates itself in myths and cosmic narratives. By inserting its habits, questions, social structures, and even the committed atrocities and transgressions to transcendent actors and embodied natural concepts, humanity effectively obliges the Other to take up a form that resembles its observer. Thus, with religious narratives, the creature can be seen as responsible for 'creating' its creator. Realizing this, a researcher with a keen eye may gain valuable information about social structures, personal attitudes, and even socio-psychological traits from observing a culture's or smaller religious community's myths and narratives.

Lastly, I need to dissect one final aspect of myths that Smart unfortunately fails to grasp in the dual model. This missed element is the realization that overarching stories not only determine the individuals' and the communities' self-description and identity but also affect how they may relate to others outside the given homogenous community. Such 'unfortunate ones' happen to be left out of creation and, therefore – at least in a narrative sense – represent an anomaly for the given community. They embody chaos, the unregulated external; something that does not fit into the order of the cosmos and, which poses a threat to existence. As I progress further to discuss new religiosity under this lens, I urge the reader to keep in mind this underemphasized aspect of the narrative & mythical dimension, as this will lead us to understand the active efforts of isolation in certain new religious communities (Carter, 2010, pp. 201–241) and may even shed light on the construction of certain narratives of a post-truth age (McIntyre, 2018).s

New Religiosity Under the Lens of The Narrative & Mythical Dimension

Smart notes several strands that may complicate the inquiries and clear sight into the mythical dimension in (post)modern contexts. Since the late 19th century, critical theorists (most notably scholars of comparative study of religions (McCance, 2005, p. 62), psychology, and socio-psychology y (Dunlap, 1970, 1946, pp. 55–87)) gradually eroded the authority of mythical thinking. Parallel, this dimension also became oversaturated: besides the mono-narrative universal myths, we also have postmodern particularist narratives (histories of nations, stories from subcultures and countercultures) that overwrite and overshadow universal, traditional meanings. Modernization also encourages critical positions regarding grand, unquestionable narratives (discussed in several previous chapters). Pluralism further weakens the universality of classic myths. As Smart describes:

> "[…] pluralism of modern societies takes away some of the normalcy and persuasiveness of the myths of a once dominant religious culture. For all these and other reasons there is in recent times a fading of the 'natural' conviction of the once authoritative narratives. […] There may be a drive by some groups to create their own societies within society […]. Groups seek to restore control over their symbols […] In brief, attempts are sometimes made to create non-pluralistic societies within wider society." (Smart, 1996, p. 137)

(Post)modernity's disruption also affects mythical centrality. Being close to the *axis mundi* is no longer guaranteed, which causes significant changes in contemporary societies' self-perception and self-representation within the cosmos.

> "[…] modem cosmology gets away from the notion that any particular place is the center of the universe. Relatively speaking, every place is equal. This breaks up traditional pictures and casts doubt on claims to unique centrality. It is disturbing

for Christians, for instance, who have seen Christ's life as being at the center." (Smart, 1996, p. 141)

Through these transgressive acts (Palmer & Bromley, 2007, 138–139), the discussed notions of *illud tempus* and *illud spatium* 'flatten.' The "bumps" on the fabric of time and space – designating the presence of transcendence – become less detectable. With it, modernization demythologizes the religiously attuned individual's world, isolating him from sacred time and space. To reconnect, the *homo religiosus* seeks – and finds – new myths, more resistant to the erosive forces of postmodernity. With them, he reestablishes the desired "bumps" on the unnaturally 'flattened' ontological fabric of contemporary existence.

> "[…] NRMs as well as traditional religions can be understood as cultural supplies which offer personal and social identities via different forms of world- and self-interpretation – offers which can be especially relevant or attractive in times of (identity) crises […]. By turning to a religion or a new religious movement, even if only temporarily, the individual can obtain a new understanding of him/herself, a structured system of social relationships, and a sense of continuity and coherence." (Murken & Namini, 2006, p. 295)

Murken and Namini outline these same essential elements of narratives that Smart already outlined: their atemporality and capacity to establish continuity and coherence. From these notions, one can understand the drive of the religiously attuned aiming to (re-)establish a consistent set of new stories in the place of disrupted grand narratives that cannot be so easily disrupted.

In this subchapter, I will stray from my outlined structure of discussing Smart's dimensions individually and then explaining their functionality through 'static' examples. My concern is that the duality of 'myths of origin' and 'future' might not be sufficient for my inquiry. For this reason, I have made the decision to incorporate a more nuanced structure on which I will base my later examinations. This minor improvement, which I'm borrowing from Susan

Palmer and David G. Bromley,[91] will not disturb the overall functionality of the model but rather complement it in places where it lacks structure or detailed sight. The implemented new roster utilizes open types and will expand the framework, clarifying those cases where Smart's description would have been too vague for my examination. To achieve this, first, I will expand on the myths of origin by incorporating stories of separation. Similarly, as a second addition, I will improve the category of myths of the future, renaming it to myths of restoration/salvation to emphasize their underlying common narratives. Lastly, I will introduce a third open subclass, the myths of charisma, to more effectively discuss the mythical elements of living – or recently passed – charismatic figures, prophets, gurus, and 'human deities.' Smart's model in this regard called for major 'updating' (with the help of Bromely and Palmer) as its historical basis overstepped the possibility of living contemporaries as religious founders or revered individuals whose myths are currently 'in the making.'

Revised Type I. – Myths of Origin/Separation

> "New religious creation myths challenge prevailing worldviews and turn upside down conventional notions of 'what is.' These may be original myths accessed through the charismatic founder's revelations or heretical interpretations of myths from traditional religions. Origin/separation myths are particularly important because they communicate original intent and ultimate purpose, and they offer an explanation for the current trials and tribulations faced by humanity. These problems are attributed to a separation from the original state or purpose of creation, analogous to the 'Fall of Man' in Christianity. The myths then offer some means of restoration to humankind's original state, which may involve the destruction of the

[91] Bromley and Palmer establish these dimensions on a prior survey conducted within several new religious movements.

present social order. Revised or alternative origin/separation myths thus issue a direct challenge to bedrock assumptions and premises of the established social order." (Palmer & Bromley, 2007, p. 139)

As Palmer and Bromley state, the first group of myths in new religiosity draws from a sense of separation from an ideal form of existence. From an analytical angle, this can lead back to the disruption of former grand narratives and the emergence of existential crises. As the post-modern condition disrupts the *cosmos*, the new myths – carrying new narratives and meanings – aim to contextualize even the disruption itself. Besides offering a contextual twist on these, they may also hint at the possibility of restoration to an ideal state of existence. As Palmer and Bromley tap into Wallis's tripartite distinction ("world-rejecting," "world-affirming," "world-accommodating religions") (Wallis, 1984, pp. 20–53), I can see a number of distinct narratives through which new religions may strive to reestablish this ideal state of things. One may retreat from the world (creating a *microcosmos* within the *cosmos*) where the community's narratives may thrive exclusively. This was the case with OSHO (Rajneesh) (Carter, 2010) or the Family International (COG) (Borowik, 2023). Others might try to change the world by various means (proselytization, mass missions, altruism, or even acts of aggression and terror), like the Unification Church (Barker, 1984, pp. 70–94) or the Latter-Day Saints (Givens, 2013, pp. 11–24) or the Aum Shinrikyo (Melton & Baumann, 2002, pp. 92–93). Meanwhile, another group of individuals might seek salvation within – accepting the twisted state of the *cosmos* and influencing it to the extent of their own lives, such as in the case of Scientology (Lewis, 2016, pp. 33–53) and many New Age movements (Aupers & Houtman, 2010, pp. 164–166), including Damanhur in Piemonte, Italy (Palmisano & Vanolo, 2019, pp. 9–16). In each case, the underlying narrative is the separation from an ideal, original state of existence to which the committed individual aims to return. The methods of reestablishing this idealized state are laid down in the second group of narratives, the myths of restoration/salvation.

Revised Type II. – Myths of Restoration/Salvation

Restoration myths serve as archetypes – 'recipes' in plain words – for reestablishing a previous or a wished future ideal state of existence. The means of achieving this are rooted in the particular movement's history, practices, and emphasized meanings. All these components are compiled into a narrative 'modern mythical' setting, in which the movement's founder or prominent members reveal the methods of reaching salvation, restoration, enlightenment, or a higher state of being, typically with narratives of conveying messages from 'higher' beings (or in some cases claiming that they are these higher forms of life). In this regard, one can see the reflections of verticality once again as the narratives of salvation descend from 'higher above' and new religiosity offers a more direct and individuum-centered approach to transgress between mythical planes.

In Scientology (Westbrook, 2022, pp. 13–34), there is a dedicated book series on 'elevating' the human potential. Similarly, oral stories about Raël's "transmission ceremonies" to the "Elohim" have similar meanings (Palmer, 2004, pp. 31–57). Repeating these yearly on a designated day connects these activities to the already discussed *illud tempus* element, through which the movement takes small steps toward reestablishing the ideal state of the *cosmos*. Whether this is done externally or rather focusing on what's broken 'within' its inhabitants depends on the particular movement. In the case of the Rajneeshee, the ideal state is already achieved – as Palmer quotes OSHO, "humans are already divine" (Palmer & Bromley, 2007, p. 146). However, this fact needs to be revealed to the followers. Narratives here emphasize the ways of achieving revelation – typically through an awakening experience (state of enlightenment, salvation, or restoration), which has already been achieved by the charismatic leader, whose own mythology (myths of charisma) complements both the previous two interconnected groups of myths and narratives and establishes unquestionable reputation and standing in the movement.

A New Type – Myths of Charisma

> "Charismatic leaders typically are at the center of NRM mythmaking, although the myth construction project is interactive, as it is also shaped in a dynamic fashion by the responses and cues provided by the audience-followers. […]. Because charisma emerges through leaders' prophetic actions, charisma myths in new religions are alive, in the process of being forged around the living prophet or messianic leader. New religious leaders are at once the narrators and the chief protagonists in the stories they fashion; they are the creators of their own mythopoaeic narration. Charisma myths serve to create new charismatic figures that challenge the secular or religious authority of established leaders, saints, and heroes. These myths are a call to the followers for loyalty to the prophet and service to the prophet's dream and mission, which challenge conventional sources of religious authority. Among the most common patterns in charisma myths are one or more revelatory moments through which the charismatic personas of leaders and their supernatural gifts are established, and an escalation of their charismatic claims. These revelations and elevated charismatic claims are institutionalized through movement-sponsored histories and biographies and through charismatic performances that demonstrate the leaders' special status and abilities." (Palmer & Bromley, 2007, p. 143)

Palmer and Bromley perfectly summarize the essence of this new type of myths. A clear improvement to Smart's framework here is the realization that in new religiosity, mythmaking becomes an active and unconcluded process. The continuity, fluidity, and dynamic nature of these again reflect the essence of the movements in question: their myths – just as their developments – are not yet carved in stone. They may change by incorporating new elements, establishing new practices, rituals, – even worldviews – disassembling their own formerly laid-down foundations and overwriting them to varying degrees. Furthermore, compared to Smart's

model, one must also realize that there is a chance that the prophet, charismatic leader, or revered figure might still be alive – or has only passed recently. If the figure is still active, then his/her myths are yet to be concluded. Therefore, the charismatic leader in question has to continuously establish his/her own myths of origination, distancing his/her past self from the now revered figure. He/she has to reflect on the spiritual transformation (which can be concluded or continuous), discussing the narratives of his/her revelation and the mythical journey of becoming the *Other's* bodily vessel (or messenger). Similarly, the leader figure has to establish his/her relations towards the external – designating adversaries and allies – and to the internal – overruling general directives as exceptions, such as the rules for partnership (Palmer, 1996), certain leisure activities (D. P. Johnson, 1979, pp. 315–323) and the direct access to the *Other* in the case of the leader.

As a second note, I also need to underline that in the case of new religiosity, these productions will continue even if the leader passes. Myths of charisma change according to the processes of succession: the charisma will either be inherited by the new leader(s), it may subside for a while to give space to new character-making or may fragment into countless pieces, on which the successive movements base their authority (Miller, 1991, pp. 1–13). In the case of internal power struggles (such as with the Unification Church and its splinter group, the Sanctuary Church, led by Hyung Jin "Saun" Moon (Fefferman, 2016. 07. 05-10.)), the inheritance of charisma would be further complicated with these contradictory new 'parallel' myths, leading to further fragmentation of reality.

In conclusion, Palmer and Bromley's addition to Smart's dimensions was an appropriate improvement and was necessary to investigate new religiosity efficiently within the given framework. These minor fine tunings did not disturb the overall functionality of the model, but rather strengthened the weaknesses of the lens of the narrative & mythical dimension, which is one of the abstract – and therefore more 'fragile' – aspects in the framework. The presented

innovation fits well within the model, especially 'myths of charisma.' It allows a more refined focus on one of the more universal traits of new religiosity – the charismatic authority, emphasized by Barker (Barker, 1998, pp. 10–28); the mechanisms of a developing of dynamic leadership (including exploitation) (Shupe, 1998, 33-49; 101-118; 191-212); and the inheritance of power within relatively new, and still developing meaning systems (Miller, 1991).

Ritual & Practical Dimension

So far, I have explored how extraordinary experiences manifest and what types of emotions surround these phenomena. After that, I have also shed light on *how* the religiously attuned human tells stories about these experiences and *what type* of stories they tell. Now, I will progress further on Smart's outlined path and discuss the *methods* and *conditions* that create the possibility of reliving such extraordinary experiences. With it, in the following subchapter, I will explore rituality and all it encompasses from a phenomenological standpoint. As I progress toward lived religiosity, I will highlight the dynamic patterns and subtle interplay between dimensions. Still, I will try to 'immobilize' the model as much as possible, as it isn't ready to be seen in motion. As such, my focus will remain on the static and dimensionally limited aspects at this point, even if I allow some nominal motion and interaction between the dimensions to better illustrate my arguments at certain points.

In order to maintain my overall scope of meaning systems, I will adapt Smart's working definition (more of a description). As such, I interpret the term ritual as an "act [bodily activity] involving performative uses of language […] [which involves] a formal pattern of behavior [that is] either closely or more loosely followed" (Smart, 1996, p. 72).[92] The performative

[92] Smart places all orderly activity under the category of *li* ("*the right behavior*"). In my examinations, I will start from the smaller category of rituals in an effort to reach the end of this dimension in a reasonable time.

usage of language and physical acts are particularly important, as these postulate a sense of cohesion – typically through repetition and procedurality.[93] Everyone involved must understand the general purpose and meanings of conveyed acts and words during the ritual and follow these "as mutual signals of participation" (Smart, 1996, p. 73). Neither the language nor the acts have any 'excessive' or 'purposeless' parts; everything is part of a greater mechanism. Moreover, as rituals are performative in nature, they usually replay certain narratives or myths. Lastly, rituals incubate a level of organized behavior. Everyone involved must instinctively know their place during the act in order to ensure no transgression or sacrilege is done accidentally. The fixed behavior creates roles for specialists – I will touch on this subject later more extensively in the social & institutional dimension. Meanwhile, the entirety of the rite carries a common meaning and a promise of reaching into the sphere of extraordinary experiences. The 'orderly' nature of rituals – being forms of *li* or orderly behavior – also entails connotations with mimesis: the individual depicts (finds) structural similarities between his life and actions and the meanings the ritual carries. If the *Other* is shown as merciful, so shall the devotee be merciful. If the entity is vengeful, so shall the worshipper be.

Smart classifies two major forms of rites. First are the "*focused rituals*." These are directed explicitly toward the *Other(s)* and seek *numinous* interactions and exchanges. Depending on the agency and range of control, there are three subclasses of these focused rites: (1) magic ("used to control forces in the world on behalf of human goal"), (2) sacrifices, and (3) worship (Smart, 1996, p. 72). Starting from the least 'potent' one, worship is the most significant aspect of established religious rituals (and meaning systems). This category can be

[93] This exact repetition can also be interpreted as a cause for the gradual alienation of the religiously attuned. As he awaits the encounter with the *Other*, all he receives is repetitious mumbling, during which even certain words become inaudible or incomprehensible. This gradual 'degradation' and routinization creates a hollowing of the rituals and a reduced drive for participation.

segmented further into "*pure worship*" (focused ritual activities, where the physical and language acts are exclusive to sacred communication). On the other hand, there is "*life of worship*," during which every act becomes a form of reverence. Think about Max Weber's statement about the hard-working protestant, whose life in itself is a continuous ritual, as he dedicates his work ethic and wealth-gaining to God's grace (Weber et al., 1930/2001, pp. 51–56). One crucial trait of worship is the passivity of the *Other*. It is present during the ritual, as it is called to present itself. However, it doesn't interact with the worshipper besides 'pouring out' into the world and retreating to the sphere of taboo after the ritual has ended.

Sacrifice, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a sort of communication or transaction between the sacrifice maker and the one(s) the sacrifice is targeted toward. The transactional manner is self-evident: one slaughters and burns an entire bull (*holocaustum*), and in exchange, awaits protection, wisdom, insight, or prosperity from those who received the offering. Similarly, as a libation is poured on the ground, the sacrifice maker expects the *transcendent* entities to honor the ritual with their presence. They are called to take part and, in exchange, receive part of the sacrificial offering. Verticality plays a similarly important role here: one can offer sacrifices directed to the *transcendent's* dwelling in the high skies. By burning the offering entirely, thus turning it into fumes, or placing the sacrifice on a mountain to be devoured by birds of prey, the essence of sacrifice is delivered to the otherwise unreachable high dwelling. On the other hand, one may offer sacrifices to earthy or underworldly entities. In these cases, the sacrifice is not burned but buried underground, thrown into a body of water, or placed into sacred woods.

Lastly, magic is the most 'potency-filled' type of focused ritual, during which the individual, as an invoker, may force *control* over aspects of the *transcendent*. In these instances, the original notions of focused ritual – such as the fear of the *transcendent* and its distance from its subjects – are overruled through an increased sense of agency. By saying the entity's name

(true name) – should these be minor deities, natural spirits, demonic forces, or even ancestors – the practitioner claims control over them and enforces his own will over the vast powers of nature they represent. Smart also notes an interesting dynamism as magical rituals may devolve over time – giving up their potency and core meanings of agency – and become forms of worship: "[…] for instance, the Eleusinian rituals, originally designed to promote agricultural fertility (but in so far as they embodied belief in gods they belong to the devic theory of causation, which is not strictly mantric), but which emerge in Graeco-Roman culture as a mystery religion of deep existential purport to the initiates." (Smart, 1996, p. 111)

Concerning focused rituals (the same can be said about later discussed harnessing rituals as well), Smart mentions an effect, which he calls "abolition of time and space" (Smart, 1996, pp. 82–83). Rites of passage, pilgrimages, initiations, and purifications have the capacity to dissolve the ritual's spatial and temporal contexts and manifest others in their place. In this context, one may grasp how one who gets baptized is essentially submerged in the Jordan. Similarly, as the Easter mass concludes and with the cry: 'Jesus Christ is risen today!' the close listener encounters a similar temporal anomaly. Jesus is risen 'right now.' Not two millennia ago, but today, as it is signified by the present tense of "is."[94] Focused rituals have another function, which taps into the magical subcategory. They may enhance and increase – or, contrary – decrease and diminish surrounding natural phenomena. While mourners await the passing of the one who lies on the deathbed, they light a candle to keep away the darkness of death. On Midsummer's Eve, people lit bonfires to strengthen the Sun and extend summer's slowly

[94] Peregrination and pilgrimage can also be interpreted as abolishing space (and sometimes time) through rituals. The pilgrim steps into a 'timeless-time', and by passing through countries and regions, he also achieves spaceless space. During the pilgrimage, he steps out of the profane world and enters one where everyday mundane activities are replaced by contemplation, worship, and devotion. Ultimately, he arrives at a sacred site – out of time and space – from where he finally reenters the profane world. During the pilgrimage, however, he is in *illud tempus* and *illud spatium*. Examples of these are abundant. Think about Mecca during the Hajj or Rome during the Easter period.

shortening warm days. Oppositely, the same actions happen during Midwinter, but with the goals of rekindling the Sun's diminished fire and chasing away darkness. Similar, more mundane ritual examples would be the tapping on the backside of a table when one says something he wishes to happen or the Major League athletes' rites of touching the ground or tapping it with the bat to ensure they hit the baseball.[95]

Concerning rites of passage, I also need to note that these have the capacity to temporarily suspend orderly behavior (*li*). *Festums* and carnivals can dissolve societal order and turn taboos upside-down. During the carnivals of Venice, a King of Fools (jester) is crowned. Meanwhile, the Doge is symbolically stripped of his power.[96] With this act, the ruling folk descends and mixes with the common folk. Wearing masks forms a homogenous mass, as no one can differentiate between a prince and a peasant. Similarly, during Roman Bacchanalias, the taboos of excess, sexuality, and deviance are temporarily overruled.

Nevertheless, all rites of passage are liminal ones. They are in-between two stabilized states of existence: the profane order of taboos and the sacred order or transgression. As such, they can only exist for a limited period, after which a necessary rite of restoration reestablishes natural order. (van Gennep, 2007, 1-15; 266-189). Either way, from a phenomenological perspective, these rites can be interpreted as a subclass of focused rituals. The dissolution of the order itself is 'orderly' and focused. Transgression, taboo, and deviance are, therefore, part of orderly behavior (*li*). These same observations can be said concerning other rites of passage, like those about aging (childbirth, becoming an adult, marriage or divorce and death)

[95] I could call these 'rites of manifesting.' Still, as I discuss new religiosity, I would rather avoid the term 'manifesting' as it is heavily interpreted in new religiosity, and utilize Smart's maybe less heavily associated term of "rites of mantric causation" Smart (1996)

[96] It is worth noting that during medieval times, the end of carnival also meant the end of the king of fools, as he was beheaded to ensure the restoration of order. These types of rituals can be, once again, considered a type of sacrifice, more precisely, as rites of restoration

or about purity and danger (mother's uncleanness, priestly taboos, etc.) (Douglas, 2003, 8-36; 196-221). In each of these cases, the transition is bordered by focus and orderliness, ensuring the success of moving from Category 'A' to Category 'B.' Rituals of focus, therefore, serve another purpose: they give clarity and divide reality alongside clear-cut categorical lines. Transitional states are ritualized to ensure that no anomaly remains. For example, the body of the dead, while lying on the bed, is considered simultaneously as a remaining corporeal mark of the passed human, but also as something that bounds, or 'chains' of the now separated spirit, preventing its transition to the otherworld. Therefore, rites of passage about death ensure that these transitions are conducted in an orderly manner and no uncategorizable and anomalous elements remain.

The second form[97] is what Smart calls "*harnessing rituals*" "[…] in which patterns of behavior are used as part of a process of self-control that seeks attainment of higher states of consciousness" (Smart, 1996, p. 72). While focused rituals are externally oriented practices (aiming to reach the *transcendent* that is 'beyond' oneself), harnessing rituals internalize these. Instead of reaching out, they tap into dhyāna (contemplative practice) and interact with what's "within here." As Smart posits, this kind of "practice causes the individual to rise higher in the hierarchy of inner consciousness in order to achieve a purification which is salvific." (Smart, 1996, p. 123). The internality of such rites also offers a greater chance for transgressions, heresy, and 'contamination' (Douglas, 2003, pp. 8–36). Therefore, the sharing of experiences during these rites is typically limited. The devotee keeps his rituals to himself and internalizes the communication with the *Other* through which he partakes in *mystical* experiences. The

[97] Smart makes a note of the dichotomy, stating that the two forms may tap into each other, even though they do not intertwine: „Although worship and meditation do not in any way entail each other, they do have echoes of each other, allowing a sort of coalescence." Smart (1996, p. 97) Such elements are the meditation's self-sacrifice aspects and contemplation's capacity to abolish the borders between subject and object of worship.

contemplative-mystical parallel here works best. Regarding harnessing rituals, Smart also notes that a designation of 'ritual' might not even be sufficient, as these lack the transactionality that characterizes focused rituals so well. Instead, these internalized rites are formed to focus on union and communion with the *Other*.

Rites of New Religiosity

> "Over the last two or three centuries, there has been in the West a diminution in the complexity of rituals. This is sometimes seen as a sign of secularization. There have been various factors at work. One was the Reformation itself, which set the scene for simplification, and in some cases the dismantling of the calendrical attention to a whole series of church festivals. […] Second, magic declined, as did mantric rites, partly because of advances in scientific thinking and their successful application. Non-mantric technology did a better job. Third, the early 1960s saw aggiomamento among Catholics accompanied by a simplification of ritual and greater directness of expression. Fourth, urbanization meant a demographic shake-up and with it desertion from traditional parishes and ways of life anchored in smaller agglomerations of people. Mobility is an enemy of old customs. The backlash against this breeds a neotraditionalism (such as evangelical Christian revival), but you need emotion to glue together new faith-based communities, and so the emphasis shifts more to the experiential dimension and the phenomenon of being 'born again.'" (Smart, 1996, p. 124).

Smart mentions several crucial changes in the morphology of rituality in (post)modern settings. Concerning rituals, he mentions a shift of focus from procedurality and repetition toward experience and emotion, rooted in individualization and the desire to be involved in sacred communication. This exact process leads to the dissolution of religious specialists – priesthood and intermediaries (not considering charismatic figures who, on the other hand,

ascend and get closer to the sphere of the *Other*) who pose as an obstacle between the individual and the direct transcendence. The disruption of grand narratives – generating the already discussed meaning crisis, and its solution initiatives of *return*, *reformation*, *reinvention*, *reorientation*, or *redefinition* – also affects rituals. These strategies reorganize the dynamics of the experiential and the narrative dimensions (also the doctrinal) and evidently change how new religious rituals are conducted from a morphological standpoint. In the following subchapter, I will explore this issue and examine if Smart's model can host new religiosity's rituals. If needed, I will expand or reorganize the ritual dimension to better accommodate the changes in ritual morphology.

A Forced Communication

It is evident that rapid technological innovation and accelerating history affect human lives on a basic level. These processes change how religious and profane rituals – I'm still utilizing Smart's work description for ritual – are conducted (Beckford, 1986, pp. vii–ix). The rapid change also fragments the surrounding world; most importantly, it disrupts providers of homogeneity, the communities, and established social structures and uproots every meaning emerging from these. In the meantime, postmodernity's settings emphasize the individual's significance and agency in the increasingly alien world (Motak, 2009, p. 131). These conditions change the religiously attuned's attitude toward rituality; he finds no more satisfaction in being a mere observer. He wants to be personally at the center of the ritual, trying to reestablish his reality and meanings by utilizing one of the five discussed strategies. His impatience is understandable, as he has limited time and resources to traverse from the profane and enter *illud tempus* from where he can 'repair his broken world.' The prior structures that allowed him a paced traverse have been demolished. Therefore, in the speeding world that engulfs him, he seeks the most efficient and foolproof ways to reestablish his connection to *transcendence*. He destroys and rejects the concepts of religious specialists and intermediaries. Meanwhile, he

increases his own agency to ensure that all his attempts have the possibility to result in extraordinary personal experiences. Of course, this widens the already existing structural 'cracks' in the body of rituals, and, at a certain point, all 'break apart.' With it, old rites are thrown away, as they cannot fulfill the individual's desire to communicate directly with the *transcendent*. Homogeneity and cohesion (the "general understanding" as Smart phrases) are also struck. In their place rises a new type of personal experience. These new ritual experiences are, by their nature, *lonesome*, *intensive*, and *limited*. They are also *irregular* both in frequency and form. They can no longer provide all-encompassing meanings. Nonetheless, they don't even aim for such a thing. They are limited to the lived and interpreted reality of the individual. New religiosity's rituals, therefore, no longer serve as universal communications. The "act" (the bodily activity of the rite) still remains a phenomenon for scholarly inquiry, and these still utilize "performative language." However, Smart emphasizes that the use of performative language no longer establishes an overall cohesion and, therefore, cannot be viewed as a common "pattern of behavior" anymore (Smart, 1996, p. 72). The witnesses of rites cannot relate to the seen bodily act; they no longer understand their intricate meanings – or, at worst, misinterpret these as something unintended.

The dynamism of rituals also changes. Their function is no longer communicating with the *transcendent*, whether it responds or not. Utilizing Smart's terminology and framework, I can even state that new religiosity's rites are more magical in their nature: they *force the transcendent* to reveal itself and engage with its 'summoners.' With it, every rite must bear the marks of *intensity*, as without it, the whole process would be a 'waste of time.' In this regard, I must fine-tune Smart's model to represent this sense of intensity and force more efficiently. Focused rituals of new religiosity can no longer be regarded as Smart's *bhakti*, as they lack the traits of passivity and distance. Instead, we can view them as 'forced rituals' where the *Other* has no other option than to interact and engage with the follower. Worship demands the presence and attention of the

transcendent instead of passively accepting that it is 'out there.' Similarly, rites of sacrifice transactionalize this interaction, once again forcing the Other to hold up to the end of the bargain. As the most potent form of individual agency over one's reality and notion of *transcendence*, magic binds the *Other(s)* to the practitioner's will, removing even the transactional aspect.

Certain modifications are necessary to Smart's ritual dimension to incorporate the subject of new religiosity effectively. Through these modifications, I remove *bhakti* – carrying devotion and, passivity, and calm acceptance – from the category of focused rituals. The reason behind this change is that new religiosity's focused rituals tend to overrule the agency of the *transcendent*, ignoring the *Other's* willingness to partake in the sacred communication. They oblige it to manifest in given circumstances. In this regard, new religious rituals are rather *forced* (or magical) than focused by their nature. Besides this change, however, Smart's outlined elements of the ritual dimension function well for my inquiries. In new religiosity, I can successfully classify external (*focused* – or, from then on, *forced*) and internal (*harnessing*) rituals. Transcendental meditation practices (Sawyer & Humes, 2023), the Damanhurians' descent to the Underground Temple's Elemental Halls (Palmisano & Pannofino, 2014, pp. 27–50), Asatru followers' symbels (Dijk, 2017, p. 31) or the Jehovah's Witnesses contemplative readings can all be classified as harnessing rituals, as these all aim more for inner purification and salvific notions than for direct communications with an external "*das Ganz Andere*." On the other hand, elements of *pure worship* are also present in certain rituals of new religiosity, such as Pentecostal and charismatic Christian congregations' Sunday gatherings and their dedicated worship events. One can easily find examples of '*life as worship,'* too. Think about the ISCKON member's behavior, who dedicates several years of his life to living and working in the ashram. His every waking moment is entailed by rituality and communication with the sacred. He either cleans the idols in the ashram, serves food to fellow devotees, works outside proselytizing, attends rites, or studies alone. His personal possessions reflect this dedication,

as he owns only the bare necessities and focuses every action of his life toward spiritual enlightenment (Burt, 2023). Furthermore, forced and harnessing rituals of new religiosity regularly tap into each other, just as it happens in traditional religiosity's focused and harnessing rites. A devotee (one who practices 'life as worship') might partake in pure worship and can also meditate on his own (reaching enlightenment and clarity 'from within'). Similarly, magical rituals carry spheres where meditative and passive observing practices may appear organically. Think about the Wiccan, who practices magic and, by doing so, empowers herself and connects her existence to the worshipped feminine forces of nature, which she first finds and recognizes in herself (Feraro, 2014, pp. 34–52).

Ironically, even Smart's greater category of orderly behavior (*li*) can be reinterpreted in postmodern contexts. Smart states that within orderly behavior (and as a subcategory, in rituals), one with a keen eye may find similarities in how contemporary life is transplanted and carried over to the rituals and attitudes toward the *transcendent*. He notes, that in traditional contexts, rites are carried out with *certainty*, *procedurality,* and *repetition* – hinting that the individual has time to contemplate and worship the *Other* on a deeper level and achieve insight or enlightenment in stable conditions. Meanwhile, in postmodernity, rites are primarily conducted *alone* (or 'alone' within the masses) while placing a greater emphasis on *intensity* and on *shorter terminus.* They are also *irregular* and *limited* meaning they may change radically and might occur at undesignated times and in varying meanings. Besides these traits, they also more regularly happen to be rites of passage, enforcing liminality and instability instead of minimizing transitional periods. From these traits, however, I will not draw a strict conclusion, and instead, I will let the reader contemplate what such traits tell us about the contemporary age.

Doctrinal & Philosophical Dimension

> "The fact that religious or philosophical conformity is so vital in so many societies, both ancient and modern, is itself intriguing. It indicates ways in which right

thinking is itself regarded as something which both gives power and is to be enforced by power." (Smart, 1996, p. 66)

Smart describes the doctrinal & philosophical dimension as an intermediatory between the first cycle of experiences-narratives-rituals and the second cycle of ethical-legal and social-institutional aspects. In his model, this dimension serves as a bridge between the historical[98] and parahistocial[99] dimensions, establishing stability, power, and the tools of power in societal settings. As such, it is difficult – if even possible – to discuss it in a 'static' position without inevitably reflecting on its dynamisms with other dimensions. Even its primary mechanisms depict this intermediatory function. Doctrines are concepts that connect narratives to experiences, as they contextualize the latter within orderly behavior (*li*) and rituality and ensure that rites convey the correct narratives and generate the appropriate emotions. Therefore, doctrines define rituality's forms, clarifying why and how these shall be conducted. They also reconcile inevitable contradictions and designate orthodoxy against innovation and heresy. Similarly, doctrinality connects religiosity to scientific worldviews, typically by permeating the latter with dogmatic paradigms. Think about the geocentric concept of the universe in the 17th century, which suppressed Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei's genuine scholarly production and innovation. Moreover, doctrines establish the grounds on which cross-cultural interactions are conducted and determine how new information from these extradogmatic environments can be processed, integrated, or rejected when synthesized within the given meaning system is unachievable.

Based on these, Smart designates six distinct mechanisms through which doctrines and philosophy affect religions. Doctrines' (1) *attitudinal* functions bridge the distance between a

[98] Narrative &Mythical-; Ethical & Legal; Doctrinal & Philosophical dimensions
[99] Emotional & Experiential-; Ritual-; Social & Institutional dimensions

transcendent account and the mundane life. They define how daily reality can be realized as part of a greater system and how the *transcendent* plays a (minor or major) role in it. This function connects the emotional and experiential dimension to doctrines and philosophy. (2) *Descriptive* elements define how the 'profane' surrounding reality and phenomena functions in detail, effectively cementing the perception of these and providing authority for narrative elements. Doctrines also have (3) r*econciliatory* mechanisms, through which meaning systems find ways to incorporate thought from external sources. With it, doctrines offer general stability to the social and institutional dimension. (4) Doctrines and philosophy also have *definitional* functionality, which ensures that the borders of orthodoxy and heresy always remain clear for members of the given community. Obviously, this mechanism connects doctrines to both rituality and narratives. In postmodern contexts (and in modernity as well, according to Smart (Smart, 1996, p. 57)), the most visible functions, however, are the (5) *responsive* mechanisms. These mechanisms can be oriented both internally and externally. Their primary purpose is to react to crises when reconciliation is unachievable. They prevent – or at least try to defer – the inevitable meaning crisis and the dissolution of ethics and laws based on common understanding and cohesion. Lastly, (6) *scientific functions* ensure that religious doctrine and philosophy can also successfully permeate scientific theories and empirical production.

> "The combinations or non-combinations of these kinds of experience help to explain differing patterns of philosophy. Non-theism expresses dhyana without bhakti. Theism expresses bhakti. Theism with a strong emphasis on the ineffable and impersonal side of God combines bhakti and dhyana in some degree of balance; while absolutism or quasi-absolutism with a Lord as lower manifestation shows dhyana to be dominant and bhakti secondary." (Smart, 1996, p. 68)

Smart also underlines that religious experiences determine how one talks about doctrines. Variety creates different doctrinal and philosophical issues, depending on theistic or

non-theistic worldviews, the forms of worship, and the connected feelings these invoke. For a Theravada monk, the *numinous* will not be as vital as it is for a devout Catholic. The opposite is also valid: in the case of Protestantism, one will not regularly encounter many philosophical disputes about panenhenic experiences or dogmas concerning the correct ways of reaching inner enlightenment. Instead, the most prevalent dogmas cement the group's cohesion mainly through extra-social differentiation (a.k.a. *definitional* functions).

Doctrines in New Religiosity

> "There is usually a way in which doctrines emerge as official or dominant, and various methods are used in order to mold public opinion within the community, for example, through controlling appointments in university faculties. But the development of liberal institutions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has eroded such control. […] Other sorts of a religious institutions, such as sects and new religions, show different patterns both of doctrinal creation and of control." (Smart, 1996, pp. 66–67)

Smart mentions that his model might not be flawless in postmodern and new religious contexts. The erosion of authority, complemented by the already explored emphasis on individuality completely reshapes how doctrines and philosophy function in new religiosity and how these should be approached from a scholarly angle. Therefore, I need to review the issues of doctrines and philosophy from a morphological standpoint. Instead of focusing merely on functions, I will outline common spheres from which both new and historical religiosity can be discussed. Rather than getting lost in complex theoretical questions about theism and non-theism and the types of experiences these may host, I will reinterpret Smart's previously outlined six-function approach, outlining their functional basis and expanding it for more comprehensive systematic overviews.

To reach this overarching scope, I recommend reiterating the doctrinal and philosophical dimension's two basic functions, which Smart also outlines: connecting all other dimensions and cementing (or strengthening) their meanings. From this stable point, I outline four strands of doctrines that are similarly present in new and historical religiosity. These altogether determine how doctrines affect individual lives, communal self-image, external relations, and even existential and ontological meanings. Consonantly, these four strands determine how oneself, the *Other*, the community, and elements from extradogmatic environments are discussed in new religiosity's dogmatic dimension.

Doctrines of the self is the category that encompasses philosophical, theological, and dogmatic notions about the individual's intangible aspects. Doctrines about soul concepts, theological statements about life after death and before birth, philosophical paradigms about the connections of the body and soul (if there are such), and other spiritual aspects of man can be placed under this 'umbrella.' These concepts directly connect to *attitudinal* and *definitional* functions. Ideas about one's soul can recontextualize everyday life, bringing the *transcendent* closer. They also serve as a basis for contemplative experiences and inner harnessing thought. Realizing that one is part of something greater (i.e., *attitudinal function*), chosen or selected, creates a drive or determination to change the surrounding reality (i.e., *descriptive function*). This theme is undoubtedly universal in both historical and new religiosity. The blood doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses can be classified as a *doctrine of self*, as it forbids blood transfusion due to the blood-soul connection concept rooted in the Witness mythical narrative. The dogma itself is established through both *attitudinal* mechanisms – stressing the importance of an intimate relationship with God that shouldn't be besmirched with heretical acts of spilling blood – and *descriptive* mechanisms – enforcing the concept that the soul resides within one's blood, which therefore shall not be spilled, given, taken or mixed with others (Melton, 2013, p. 135).

The strand of doctrines of the Other contains all cemented narratives (dogmatic and theological) about the subject of worship – whether it is about an articulated numinous theistic being (or beings) demanding rituals of focus or an undefined transcendence that can be reached (or achieved) through harnessing rites and inner contemplation. This category is established through the combination of d*efinitional* and *descriptive* mechanisms. Stating what are and what aren't acceptable forms of ritual generally stabilizes *transcendent* communication. With these cemented, the gained experiences and the told stories (or narratives) also attain certain stability, ensuring the avoidance of 'heretical' thought and strengthening the particular meaning system's functional cohesion. Nevertheless, in the case of utmost individuality (Motak, 2009, pp. 130–131), doctrines about the relationship between the individual and the *Other* might grow 'shallower roots.' In the case of Wicca, these relations and dogmas depend on a plethora of variables: the particular tradition, the worshipped (personally formed) pantheon (Collado, 2013, pp. 4–7), the form of practice (within a coven or as a solitary practitioner) (Lewis, 1999, 63-64; 224-226)), the available equipment and many more personal preferences (Lewis, 1999, pp. 52–53). In these cases, the dimensional model clearly loses some of its overarching focus. However, it doesn't necessarily fail, as it still functions within the barriers I previously set, but its scope narrows down the practicing individual. In these cases, doctrines about the *Other* will grow closer to doctrines about the self. Meanwhile, the third category (*doctrines of the community*) might disappear entirely. Nevertheless, the *definitional* and *descriptive* functions remain prominent even in individual cases. There, the practitioner sets the rules about an acceptable form of worship. However, the new experiences and narratives he creates of these might change more frequently. He might switch or replace the name of the worshipped deities, shift the focus of rites to another pantheon, integrate new ritual elements, and vary the worship's format – all as an effort to reach a more intensive religious experience. In these cases, the experience generally overrules the doctrine.

Bromley notes this, and by quoting Lorne Dawson's famous phrase, he also stresses that new religiosity emphasizes "experience rather than belief" (Bromley, 2007, p. 12). This shift in attention and importance recontextualizes the term 'heresy' as well, as it removes adaptivity, innovation, and fluidity and reflects these as positive traits rather than transgressive ones. This change points out that scholars of new religions might also need to reinvent their vocabulary, and instead of emphasizing cohesion in new religiosity, they should discuss the comprehensive consistency of self-tailored belief- and dogmatic systems.

Doctrines of the collective is the third category of this four-directional addition to Smart's six-functional doctrinal dimension. This category encompasses concepts and mechanisms dealing with collective identity and worldview elements, explicitly with an inner focus. Collective doctrines strengthen internal cohesion and lay down the credential system for someone to be considered part of the greater group. They define the acceptable forms of civil behavior in public spaces and the ritual functions of every member (typically segmenting the group alongside gender, age, and lineage demarcation lines). Moreover, elements of this category define collective taboos, such as the social concepts associated with the 'polluting' aspects of the sacred (doctrinal basis of priestly positions; the idea of impurity (*kegare*), groups of untouchables (*pariahs*)) (Douglas, 2003, pp. 8–36). The category utilizes two crucial mechanisms. First is the *responsive* function, through which the group ensures appropriate group-level reactions to internal challenges and crises. This function solidifies how individuals with certain social standings contribute to the collective and how they shall be regarded as part of the greater group. Moreover, it clarifies ritual specialists' and profane leaders' roles and basis of authority – connecting their authority to sacred narratives to group-level maintaining rituals. Moreover, these doctrines establish how faith crises and developing grassroots movements within the fold shall be dealt with. Creating a singular concept of a collective identity delineates the group from other collectives, designates heresy, and strengthens the internal reaction to

these innovative influences. The category explicitly taps into the social and institutional dimension, centered around the concepts of homogeneity and authenticity. At the same time, it is directed internally through its second mechanism – the *scientific* function – which ensures that the ruling religious dogma and philosophy successfully permeates the group's 'secular' and practical worldviews. With it, doctrines about the collective are responsible for enforcing and establishing the notions of 'togetherness.' Effectively functioning as a counterweight to individualistic strands, these strengthen the collective identity and dilute individualistic self-expressions within the group. In new religiosity, doctrines about the collective are quite prominent elements, especially within commune movements, charismatic groups, and highly hierarchized formations, in which the collaborative effort is overemphasized while forms of individuality are restricted. Think about the clothing imperatives of Latter-Day Saints and the Mennonites or the lifestyle restrictions of Jehovah's Witnesses. In both cases, doctrines include staying away from any mind-altering substances, behaving modestly at all times, and keeping out political, military, or other 'profane' issues on a communal level (Fazekas et al., 2017, pp. 17–21; Stark & Neilson, 2005, pp. 120–127). Collective doctrinal elements can also be found outside of the Christian fringe, such as ISCKON's similar imperatives for everyday dressing, lifestyle, and communal identity (Kamarás, 1998, pp. 140–246) or Scientology's strict directives concerning the usage of synthetic medicine, painkillers, and psychological treatments (Frisk, 2017, p. 161; Prophet, 2017, p. 241; Westbrook, 2019, p. 76). In summary, doctrines about the collective serve as a group-level homogenizing force and a weakener of the effects of individualization. These counterbalance the doctrines of self and form the basis for the doctrines about the *Other* (by relating to it on individual- and group levels).

(4) The last category of this four-sided addition is the group of doctrines concerned with effects and influences originating outside the meaning-providing community. *Doctrines of the external* deal with any emerging crisis by employing two crucial functions. The

reconciliatory mechanisms ensure the appropriate integration – or correction – of thought when encountering external paradigm- or worldview-altering influences that would otherwise disrupt the homogeneity of thought in the group. Meanwhile, the *responsive* mechanisms take action when reconciliation is unachievable, designating orthodoxy and outlining heresy, deviance, and unacceptable thought and restricting the pursuit of these further within the group. These functions connect the doctrinal & philosophical dimension to the ethical & legal dimension as well. Through it, disregard for the enforced doctrines also gains 'legal' repercussions, further strengthening the community's obedience to the established and cemented internal values and dogmas, typically through deterrence. These functions are rather 'reactive' and 'dynamic.' Their presence in a given community implies intense – and not necessarily reconcilable – cross-cultural clashes and the importance of thought synthesis on these fronts. Therefore, the main aim of the external doctrines – besides ensuring the homogeneity of the community in the face of pluralism and thought exchange – is to maintain and correct the current collective thought in the face of external or unexpected internal disruption. There are numerous examples of such external – dogmatically relevant – cross-cultural processes. Doctrines about 'shunning' in Jehovah's Witnesses is one such concept where reconciliation is unachievable, and, therefore, the movement employs hard responsive and isolator mechanisms. The shunned individual is cast out of the movement: members sever all ties with him until he reforms himself and returns as a committed and fitting group member. (Chryssides, 2022, 39-42; 157-158). Similarly, one may can find examples more on the reconciliatory side, like Heaven's Gate's dogmatic reform after Bonnie Nettles's (a.k.a. Ti) death. The dogmatic reform, caused by an external element (late-detected cancer and earlier than expected passing), forced the movement to reform its worldview and focus more on apocalyptic preparation than before – rejecting sexuality and arranging an orchestrated

suicide at the time of the Hale-Bopp comet's closest passing by in 1997 (Zeller, 2014, pp. 114–153).

Lastly, I need to mention one more aspect of this addition. Every category can intersect in the 'middle' through (5) *doctrines of charisma*. In new religious movements, the charismatic leader's position is ensured through intense dogmatic embeddedness, which connects the leader to internal issues, community-level regulations, external communication and interpretation, and relations with the *Other*. I will reflect on this extensively in the social & institutional dimension; however, it is necessary to stress that dogmas about charisma are a central intersection and common channel between the previously mentioned four categories. This category contains all theological exceptions concerning the leader's absolute position and his unquestionable authority. His statements are strengthened through the exceptional connection to the *Other*. Meanwhile, he is the singular channel that allows the progression (or realization) of the self. His dogmas designate the ideal form of 'togetherness' and delineate how outside of the group shall be regarded (Rochford Jr., 2007, pp. 159–186).

In conclusion, Smart's doctrinal and philosophical dimension's specificities pose a challenge in the case of new religiosity. It is simultaneously too vague – focusing on particular functions and reactions rather than overarching 'general types' – and too specific – examining strictly theistic and non-theistic thought, disregarding new religiosity's form-breaking generalities and, more importantly, the significance of living charismatic leaders. To counterbalance these shortcomings, I introduced a 'four-plus-one-angled' approach, which can function as an orienting framework for Smart's mentioned mechanisms. This added overlay contextualizes the doctrines according to their focus. Doctrines of the self stabilizes the religious individual's self-perception. Doctrines of the Other designates all theological and dogmatic elements about the *transcendent* and its relations to the individual. Doctrines of the community ensures the cohesion of the group, while doctrines out the external stabilizes the basis of cross-cultural

interactions and designate the grounds for communication. Lastly, doctrines of charisma connect all these through the leader's persona, strengthening his position as the unquestionable source of information and absolute authority both in the subject of internally (*Other* & self) and externally (community & external) oriented dogmas.

Ethical & Legal Dimension

> "While a certain autonomy of morals can be detected in a cross-cultural context, since there are notable similarities between different virtues and rules in traditionally unrelated societies, morals are integrated in differing ways into religious traditions. […] This affects the content to some degree, but to a greater degree it affects the motivations given to ordinary people to be good and observant." (Smart, 1996, pp. 197–198)

Smart emphasizes that the unifying trait of ethics and morality – at least in a cross-cultural sense – can be grasped in the single notion of 'being good' and 'being observant.' This means adhering to profane rules (laws) and the sacred directives (doctrines). However, when inspecting ethics, one may encounter an additional realization: the structure and mechanisms of ethics are deeply interwoven with the particular society's dogmatic and ritual systems. Therefore, those who believe in karma will 'be good' for different reasons than those who have doctrines about Hell and Purgatory. These concepts are further complicated by including worldviews, where moral relativism or self-centered thought is more prevalent.

> "In the Confucian tradition metaphysical rewards are unimportant, though self-esteem within society is important. There was debate about whether human beings are naturally good, and the prevalent view was that they are. So the inculcation of virtue turned into an educational project, bringing out the best in the individual and nurturing his good impulses. […] Confucianism appeals to people to follow' the

moral life in order to ensure stability and prosperity in society. The motive in this respect is this-worldly" (Smart, 1996, pp. 198–199)

Besides the universal 'be good' element, Smart mentions several culturally and contextually rooted particularities as well. In Judaism and Islam, religious law (Sharia and Halakha, respectively) is based on theological notions affecting everyday life, rituality, worldliness, and even social structures. Social acts – such as helping the fallen and distributing alms (like in the case of Islam and Mormonism) – can also find their roots in ethics and religious law. Similar imperatives and prohibitions can be associated with ancestry – condemning those who forget to maintain the graves of their predecessors or don't regularly visit these and pay their respects. Connected to ancestry, I must also mention the legal-ethical concepts of succession and inheritance, which similarly have ethical and legal elements in any given society.

Connected to ethics and morality, one may see diverse classifications of ethical branches, such as Christianity's theological virtues, "faith, hope and love," Buddhism's "benevolence or friendliness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), joy in others' joy (*mudita*) and upekkha or equanimity" or Confucianism's *jen*, of "humaneness." (Smart, 1996, 209; 212). These base values determine the preferred and expected course of actions in the lives of individuals and communities when encountering significant issues. One such example is taking one's life by force – whether a fellow human's or an animal's life – which, in certain cultural traditions, establishes the moral basis for a peaceful and withdrawing life with vegetarian diets. On the other hand, certain cultural traditions may allow varying degrees of deterrence or even active aggression connected to the taking of one's life. Islam's minor or lesser jihad – one such example of moral and legal systems – allows and even verifies the usage of force in certain conditions (Shah, 2013, pp. 343–365).

Similarly relevant questions are of the ethical dimension of the issues of sexuality and sexual deviance – such as adultery, polygamy, and exploitation (generally speaking, the

morally acceptable and unacceptable forms of partnerships and sexual acts). Concerning all these, Smart stresses that, besides very general statements, one cannot *really* make any overarching statements, as these vary drastically according to the given culture, doctrines, narrative contexts, societal developments, and demographics, as well as the discussed historical age.

Ethical Generalizations of New Religiosity

With such notions established, one is in a difficult position concerning postmodernity's ethics and legalities. Nevertheless, I believe, that I can make a probable outline regarding the themes of ethics and laws postmodernity may cultivate on a cross-cultural level. Before immersing myself, however, I must first clarify and make contextual additions to Smart's model.

First, concerning my narrower subject, I need to stress that new religiosity is always in a minority position within a more expansive containing society. This fact evidently affects all aspects of new religious life, including the forming of moralities and legalities within a minority group. No movement can completely isolate itself in the postmodern world – as even those who attempt to achieve this unintentionally make a moral statement by isolating themselves, which, on its own, can be dissected and analyzed by scholars of religion. Based on this understanding, I can state that new religious ethics and legal thought always engage in some sort of discourse with the containing society's similar systems in order to ensure the movement's longevity and existence with minimal conflict and external pressure. As a second clarification, I need to reiterate that my subject is *new* religiosity. As such, their 'newness' must also manifest on ethical or moral grounds. New religiosity's ethics challenge the mainstream and conventional-traditional frameworks and, through distinct mechanisms (I will reflect on these in the following paragraphs), manifesting new forms of legalities and moral imperatives. Third, as I discuss ethics and moralities in a globalized, individualistic, pluralistic, and rapidly developing world – which tends to relativize morality–, I need to underline that new religious ethics and

imperatives always inevitably entangle within the contexts and discussions of their contemporary and culturally particular postmodern subjects.

After establishing these three statements, I will outline three types of ethical and legal attitudes based on Roy Wallis's tripartite classification (Wallis, 1984, pp. 20–53). Aligning myself with Wallis's view, I will not focus on generalities or subjects but instead discuss attitudes and relations/reactions to the majority society's equivalent structures. First, I can parallel the *world-rejecting* type of NRMs regarding morality and ethics. This cluster enforces stricter or more emphasized ethical regulations on their followers, as they deem the external society's ethics inadequate, 'corrupted' and 'too liberal,' and even ruinous. The doctrinal aspects and social cohesion are similarly overemphasized with the efforts of strengthening the collective ethics' non-traversable notions. I label these standpoints collectively as (1) *restrictive/conservative ethics*, implying the individuals' limited space for maneuvering regarding ethical issues, and pointing out the overemphasized value assumptions that conquer a more expansive array of issues, including everyday life, internal and external interactions, diet, clothing, behavior, and many more. Jehovah's Witnesses, ISCKON, Pentecostal fundamentalists, charismatic, and 'born-again' Christian churches align with this cluster (among many others), as they tend to emphasize and enforce their own interpretation of correct morality and ethical behavior in a stricter sense. Straying from these general moral standpoints and directives – usually collectively referred to under umbrella terms of nonviolence, charity, ideological harmony, and modesty – most regularly results in some retaliation. This latter can range from personal or public reprimand, denying religious services from the transgressor, obligating various forms of reparative correction, or even shunning, disfellowing, and outright banning the wrongdoer from the movement indefinitely or permanently (Burgess & van der Maas, 2001, 974-977; 1378-1382; 1601-1608; Knox, 2018, 46;181; Rochford Jr., 1989, pp. 162–179).

Similarly, association with ‘externals’ is generally regarded as unfavorable – therefore unethical or potentially corruptive – in most of these movements. The strengthened internal ethical and deterrent institutions generate a much stricter communal basis and cohesion, not necessarily allowing straying from the born-into-faith and community for the involved. (Cusack, 2020, pp. 231–242). Parallel, joining such movements requires more visible self-sacrifices and compromises for the novices (Wright, 2007, pp. 194–196). Furthermore, movements with more restrictive/conservative ethical imperatives may also show more remarkable similarities to established churches, such as mainline Catholicism or hardline Protestantism, as their flexibility and adaptivity to particular challenges are far less than those of the following two clusters and, in some cases, even exceed the two examples above in inflexibility.

Moving alongside Wallis’s classification, the moral parallel for world *accommodating movements* (Wallis, 1984, pp. 49–53) would be the cluster of (2) *integrative/adoptive ethics.* Movements under this umbrella are more liberal on marginal moral issues and only enforce (or even articulate) moral imperatives on doctrinally or socially relevant questions. The level of control – and with it the degree of communal cohesion – is therefore lower than in the case of movements with restrictive/conservative ethics. Examples of this type could be Scientology or certain strands of neopagan movements, such as Druidry, native neo-shamanism, and folkish Asatru. Of these, the former has a generally universal base morality, with crucial statements on the Eight Dynamics, the rejection of medicinal healing, and psychotherapy. Ethics Officers enforce these, stressing their ethical and moral elements (Westbrook, 2019, pp. 115–116). Moving further on the institutional ladder, these are expanded with notions of confidentiality ethics, ensuring the non-disclosure of ministers, auditors, and course supervisors who happen to access personal and highly confidential data. Meanwhile, the latter examples may have a generally more ‘secular’ ethical system but with additions to the questions of honor, honesty, and loyalty. Concerning neopaganism, Strmiska reasons that “there is no single text giving a

definitive statement of Pagan ethics, but rather many different brief statements and observations scattered across the literature." Therefore, neopagans usually adhere to a less regulated and more generally articulated set of societal and moral norms while expanding these according to their own literacy and personal interests. Nevertheless, one may still delineate distinct elements from shaman directives as ethics – like the importance of secret initiation and the emphasis on humility in the face of more extraordinary natural powers (Csáji, 2014, pp. 80–89). With the acceptance of the Hávamál as an ethical code, similar – yet more articulated – moral guidelines may exist in certain Asatru communities.

> "The single text which contains the fullest discussion of ethical issues is the Eddic poem Hávamál ("The Speech of the High One", i.e. Ódin), a text prominent in Ásastrú ritual life. […] The sense of living a dignified life without any hope of a miraculous salvation is central to the ethics and world-view of the ancient Norse texts, valued in Icelandic culture in a general way and also within Ásatrú, though members are always free to pursue their own interpretations and adaptions." (Strmiska, 2000, p. 21)

Following Wallis's world-affirming type, the third, most liberal cluster is the collective of (3) liberative/dissolving ethics. These absolve the individual from the majority of societal ethics (of course, to some extent), allowing free experimentation of moral issues of self-definition, sexuality, gender, interpersonal relations, harm, abuse, love, and many more. Wicca and Satanism could be perfect examples of these mechanisms under this cluster. In the case of the former, the Gardnerian rede of "An'ye harm none, do what ye will" (taken from Gardner's longer translation from 1959 (Gardner, 1959/2004)) can be considered an all-encompassing minimal directive, beyond which every individual is free to explore and express themselves regarding ethics and morals. This general directive is complemented by the so-called "Rule of Three," implying "whatever one puts out into the world will return threefold" (Cowan &

Bromley, 2015, p. 173). Meanwhile, in the case of Satanism, both morality and ethics are utilized as tools for self-expression, non-conformity, and anti-institutionalism. Moreover, in the case of LaVeyan Satanism, subclasses of "jingoistic nihilism" or "sophomoric moral nihilism" form as reflections – clear anti-theses – of conventional ethics, further strengthening the individualistic and relativistic traits of this cluster (Dyrendal, 2016, 83-85;170-174).

In summary, even though Smart's model doesn't provide a systematic framework regarding ethical, moral, and legalistic issues, one may overcome this problem by utilizing Wallis's tripartite segmentation as inspiration. Based on this integrative effort, I delineate three distinct clusters of ethical attitudes. The basis for differentiation is the collectivist-individualist and the restrictive-liberative dichotomy seen in new religiosity. The two endpoints perfectly encapsulate groups with high moral imperatives and legalistic (deterrent) tools and formations with little to no collective moral or ethical obligations. Meanwhile, under the label of integrative/adoptive ethics or 'in the middle,' one may find a variety of attitudes that tap into the surrounding society's ethical frameworks and modify these to different degrees by integrating new concepts or emphasizing certain elements over others. By reviewing this proposed 'improvement,' I can confidently say that the addition complements the entire model and expands it in a way that is necessary for future systematic-structural comparisons.

Social & Institutional Dimension

Smart introduces the social & institutional dimension by exploring key figures, such as the "priest, the prophet, the contemplative, the healer, the shaman, the guru, the incarnation, the sage, the preacher, the rabbi, the jurist, the imam, the king, the monk, the nun, the hermit, the theologian, the philosopher, the saint, the martyr and the icon maker" (Smart, 1996, p. 215). He associates these with the greater category of *religious specialists*. In his view, these figures can be discussed within various subseries according to their particular roles and functions. Smart further separates these according to four variables and with it creates four series of

specialists. The first of these series is based on the gradient of charisma, under which the *prophet*, *guru*, *sage*, and *contemplative* are placed in the aforementioned decreasing order, which is consonant with the emphasis on charisma associated with these roles. This series overlaps with all of the following ones. (As an example, – he stresses – a prophet can be both a priest or a king in other functions (Smart, 1996, p. 216)). Similar intersections can be found in the other three series, such as the ones based on societal conditions (*preacher, pastor, priest, imam* in this order) or the ones ordered alongside forms of monastic/conventual traditions (*monk/nun, hermit, wanderer, contemplative* in this sequence), or the ones connected to the grade of separation between established religious and secular law (*rabbi, jurist, theologian, teacher* in this order) (Smart, 1996, 219-221; 221-223; 223-228).

Besides these culturally cemented roles (including the roles of *king* and *dictator*/*tyrant* (Smart, 1996, pp. 228–231)) Smart points out more 'elusive' forms, such as incarnations (*avatāra*, *nirmāṇakāya*), ascetics, and magical figures (*shaman*, *healer*). Besides these particularities, he also mentions a variety of social structures based on religious notions, such as the monarchy – a mimetic reflection of monotheistic rule in social structures, correlating the ruler (king) with the singular, personalized *transcendent*. (Smart, 1996, p. 237). Smart segments all these elements under communicational 'meta-systems' (such as the concepts of Christendom and Islam), underlining their 'emptying dynamisms' (disregarding the variety of distinct traditions and their particular social sub-systems). He also frames these within external contexts of colonialism, nationalism, secularism, and pluralism.

New Religiosity's Changing Social Institutions

> "First, there is some erosion of authority, since with the movement of peoples, better education, choices of religious allegiance and so on, people have a more open view of traditional claims. Second, the growth of individualism in Western countries particularly has led to an eclecticism in regard to religion. Such an attitude is

> sometimes referred to as New Age [and new religiosity, however as mentioned, Smart did not reflect on this issue more extensively]. This covers a variety of Eastern religious and other ideas forming a congeries of spiritual notions which may be adopted in their own right or drawn into traditions. In any event, individuals often make up their own religious systems, neglecting dogmas and traditional values, and do not feel the need to adhere to a broader system of values. It is not that such people regard themselves as being non-religious. But they are by no means traditionalists." […] "Indeed, one should extend this observation beyond the priesthood to the pastorate, preachers and so on. It is one of the developing marks of a new religious movement that it begins to consolidate itself through such institutions. The spiritual bureaucracy becomes formalized." (Smart, 1996, 271; 220)

Smart stresses that postmodernity brought about a foundational change in how religions and worldviews function. Chosen faith, personal worldview, and individual belief overtook the positions of (devalued) inherited religious institutions and the taken-for-granted belief systems (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, p. 45). Significant markers of new religiosity – *individuality*, *pluralistic-syncretic values*, new meanings of *intensity*, and reinstated *security* – also shaped the social embodiments of religiosity. With it, Smart's meta-level elements seemingly lose their significance. As Smart posits, "[…] individuals often make up their own religious systems, neglecting dogmas and traditional values, and do not feel the need to adhere to a broader system of values" (Smart, 1996, p. 271). Compared to modernity's prior religious structures, new religious movements don't necessarily aim for systematic and 'humanity-encompassing' meanings, *ecumene*, and homogenous social institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 31–39). Instead, they are satisfied with supplying meanings for their affiliates and creating a 'world within the world' in which their meanings remain dominant and effectively all-encompassing.

This, of course, affects the secondary 'middle' layer of NRMs' social macrostructures. As I'm discussing minority movements, it shouldn't be surprising that new religious movements' macrostructures are appropriately 'scaled down.' Yet in the perspectives of these movements, once can legitimately regard them as 'macro.' These most regularly consist of singular groups or networks of smaller communities. Such networks can be either centralized hierarchically or loosely connected without any strict notions of subordination and superordination. Looking at Scientology, one may find a strictly hierarchic system, with a global center (Flag California) and several hundreds of Orgs (regional and national centers) worldwide, under which is a layer of local missions, civil and charitable organizations and many more. (Cowan, 2009, pp. 54–60). Similar centrality can be found other NRMs, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (with a central Governing Body, national branch offices (Bethels), Remote Translation Offices (RTOs), and local Kingdom Halls, pioneer missions, etc.) (Chryssides, 2022, pp. 69–75) or in the case of Latter-Day Saints (with a central institute of Presidency overseeing the work of the Quorum, the Seventy, the Presiding Bishopric, regional missions, and churches) (Quinn, 1994, pp. 39–76; Stark & Neilson, 2005, p. 125). Opposingly, a loose-network-based system is more typical in movements, where the individual agency has a higher emphasis, and the forces of communal cohesion (ethics, legalities, doctrines, etc.) are consonantly less emphasized. The various New Age and New Thought movements are perfect examples of these, as these usually form only a nominal cooperative 'forum.' Still, besides these, they are most regularly autonomous and vary in internal structures. (A. Berger, 2013, p. 13; Rountree, 2022, p. 253). Moreover, some NRMs do not focus on expanding or creating new communities. In their case, the macrostructures are replaced by more intricate meso- and micro-level internal systems (Miller, 1999, pp. 92–128).

The third 'individual level' consists of the already mentioned religious specialists, most of whom I diversify into the groups of charismatic leader(s) and subordinate specialist(s). In

the case of new religiosity, the former will play a more significant role: charismatic movements (not to be mistaken with charismatic Christianity) tend to centralize doctrinal, ritual, and social power and functions altogether in the hands of the leader, who then delegates certain functions to subordinate specialists. As an example, this was the typical case in Rajneeshpuram, where the leader, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, selected secretaries, task specialists, and spokespeople – like Ma Anand Sheela, David Berry Knapp and Jane Stork, and others – to carry out specific decision-making duties. Compared to followers, these subordinate specialists had more extensive power and functions within the group and, therefore, stood in between the category of follower and charismatic leader. Furthermore, in succession and schism struggles, such specialists – in the case of OSHI, Ma Anand Sheela – gained an even greater position of power, showing scholars the traversability between specialists and charismatic leadership.

Solitary Practitioners as a Theoretical Problem

Lastly, I must mention one more aspect specific to new religiosity: solitary practitioners. Due to the effects of individuality and social alienation (including estrangement from the collective and fragmentation of social frameworks due to postmodernity), certain ones leave social affairs out of their religious life entirely. They practice religiosity how they wish – alone, with personal rituals and intimate connections to – and interpretation of – the *transcendent*, resulting in intensive personal experiences within an unregulated, flexible, non-dogmatic, ritualistic, and ethical framework. In their case, investigations from the perspective of the social dimension encounter a difficulty: how can we contextualize these lone religious practitioners within Smart's model? They are certainly not *followers*, and neither are they *religious leaders*, so to speak. In the meantime, they are not precisely *religious specialists* and certainly not *subordinates* either. This new type is between classes and taps into both the specialists' and the followers' sides. With it, solitary practitioners are morphologically closer to the *hermit* or

contemplative archetype of Smart, as they reject community and prioritize contemplative experiences and personal encounters (or enlightenment) with the *transcendent*.

Therefore, the social & institutional dimension needs a reinterpretation with the introduction of the concept of solitary religiosity. This reinterpretation needs to make sense of the fact, that for the lone practitioner – whether he is part of some social framework when expressing and experiencing religiosity – the institutionalized forms of religiosity remain irrelevant. He rejects the idea of intermediaries between his own interpretation of the *transcendent* and himself. Because of a lack of designated ceremonial roles, his experiences are parallelly less systematized. They can be magical, shamanistic, numinous, contemplative, or panenhenic (a mix of the two). During rites, these types may even shift from and to another. Similarly, his rituals are less cemented: the solitary practitioner may tap into both sacrificial or magical components of focused rituality while striving for inner *dhyana.* As an example, in the case of solitary Wicca, the self-initiation process oversteps all established social structures: the practitioner simultaneously takes up the functions of a follower and a religious specialist. He guides himself through a harnessing ritual (*self-initiation*), tapping into liminal rites' purification and transitory elements. In the meantime, his experiences are more contemplative or panenhenic. As Ethan Doyle White notes, solitary Wiccans "are not initiated into the Craft by a pre-existing Witch, but instead undertake an initiatory ceremony alone, performing what is often termed a self-initiation." Doyle notes that these processes significantly deviate from the social norms of conventional Gardnerian initiation, yet they retain some memory of these:

> "Farrars' example was based firmly on the original Gardnerian rite, but adapted so that it only involved one individual." […] "Rae Beth described a self-initiation rite in which the individual should cast a sacred circle, and then cut a lock of their hair and place it on the altar as an offering to the deities. This was to be followed by a visualization in which the individual travels through a forest to a cave, where they discover

> and dress in sacred robes; awakening from this visualization, the Witch is then instructed to anoint themselves with oil while declaring their oaths to honor the deities, after which they should then consecrate their ritual knife and take communion, toasting the God and Goddess. Other methods eschew this Gardnerian-based model and instead opt for something incredibly simple; one American practitioner was recorded as commenting that to become a Wiccan, one simply has to "say you are a witch three times, and you're a witch.'" (Doyle White, 2016, p. 105).

Pete Jennings notes these same concerning solitary rituality, emphasizing that the goal of simplification in rites is to achieve a more personal experience: "By their very nature, solitary Witches tend to work in simpler, less ritualistic ways than those in covens, although this is a generalization, which has many honorable exceptions." (Jennings, 2002, p. 92). Despite the emphasis on personal experiences, solitary practice also complicates particular – inherently collective (or externally participated) – rites, such as marriage ceremonies and burial rituals.

> "Although Pagans belonging to a specific group will often have their funeral conducted by a fellow member, those who follow a solitary path have had problems with organizing ceremonies such as funerals and handfastings to their liking." (Jennings, 2002, p. 36)

Either way, solitary practice complicates the basic mechanisms of the social & institutional dimension, as neither meta- nor collective-level structures are understandable in such cases. Furthermore, even the individual micro-level is distorted, as the practitioner cannot be classified as a follower or religious specialist alone. Through self-initiation, he is both the subject and object of worship, simultaneously taking up the mantles of specialists, followers, and the even *transcendent* in certain cases:

> "[…] each person is a part of the natural order, each in turn is an expression of the divine and as a result, every individual has the capacity to interact with the flow of

energy that structures the universe, and to place themselves in harmony with the underlying, ordering rhythms of life" (Collado, 2013, p. 4).

Collardo's statement perfectly encapsulates that religiosity *was, is,* and presumably *will be* a universal cultural-anthropological human trait even when discussing it in postmodern and post-truth conditions. The religiously attuned individual will always seek and find ways to encounter and interact with the *Ganz Andere,* and through these acts – without consideration, if these are done as a collective or a solitary practitioner – the individual will position himself in *all that is* and will find stability and certainty in the ever-more-alien surrounding reality.

The Social & Institutional Dimension in New Religiosity

In conclusion, Smart's multi-layered social & institutional dimension is utilizable in the case of new religiosity. However, major revisions are required to emphasize the systematic functionalist perspective and to grasp the subjects' changing dynamics most efficiently.

The first of these revisions is a necessary shift in understanding that new religions (and, as such, new religiosity as well) always, without exception, are in a minority position in any given society. Therefore, their social functions will affect only a marginal segment of the given population. Consequently, meta-level social concepts within NRMs cannot be discussed, with the exceptions of global movements and a few select NRMs that utilize the *return* and *reform* strategy and connect themselves to already existing meta-level social constructs. In other cases, social institutions are appropriately 'scaled down' to the size of the movement. With it, the world 'shrinks' for the involved, where they can find the previously sought stability and taken-for-granted meanings in more intense forms (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 40–49).

The second change comes with the introduction of the concept of a solitary practitioner: lone individuals with active agency who don't fit into Smart's pre-designed categories. The solitary practitioner is neither a *religious specialist* nor a simple *follower*. Moreover, he is certainly not a *charismatic leader* in Smart's terms – as who would he lead besides himself? With

his disregard for social roles, he gains significant agency over forming his own religious views and practices. However, through this, he also loses certain functions rooted in collectivism. Particular rites and liminal phenomena will not be conductible in solitary practice. Due to these reasons, he carves out his very own class within Smart's system, embedded between the roles of *followers* and *specialists*. Although he taps into both – from the *specialist*, he inherits the functions of *hermit* and *contemplative*; from the *follower*, he takes the passive, observant position – at the same time, he separates himself for both articulately. In some instances, he even takes up self-contradicting functions, such as the prophet, king acetic, and healer. The solitary practitioner, therefore, is an anomaly in Smart's framework, which cannot be strictly classified and deserves his own sphere in between.

The third notable addition is that under the lenses of the social & institutional dimension, new religious movements could also be viewed as "social laboratories." Dawson notes, "NRMs are involved in noteworthy experimentation with alternative patterns of sexuality and gender relations, economic and social organization, proselytization and persuasion, and healing and therapy" (Dawson, 2007, p. 121). New religiosity redraws the definitions of social institutions, giving them new traits while interacting with their existing external meanings. For example, nation, collective, and family gain new meanings in new religiosity (Introvigne, 1999, pp. 138–149). This innovative nature underlines the importance of keeping Smart's framework open, allowing inductive examinations of specific mechanisms rather than utilizing strictly pre-designated categories. The inductive methodology offers reconsideration opportunities and valuable additions, which in turn further nuance inquiries of contemporary religiosity. (Dawson, 2007, p. 128).

Material & Artistic Dimension

> "Religion, to quote the website of the journal Material Religion, "happens in material culture." Members of religious groups, depending upon the case in question,

> make images the focal point of devotional practices, congregate in buildings, dance, sing, treat their senses to foodstuffs prepared for religiously significant occasions, and adorn their bodies with various kinds of ornamentation. In other words, religion can be experienced through a wide variety of concrete ways." (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 31)

In the 2024 *Cambridge Elements in New Religious Movements*, Olav Hammer stresses that religiosity (both 'new' and 'old') is inherently material. Buck shares this statement, underlining that "*Art, after all, incarnates the other* [of Smart's] *dimensions in material for*." (Buck, 2018, p. 275). Religion, therefore, without exception, manifests as a series of bodily acts: it involves dancing, singing, meditation, and artistic forms of expressing feelings, knowledge, or attitudes associated with the *transcendent*. All these happen within the context of materiality. Statues are raised to honor deities, sacrifices are made to appease a wrathful god, and offerings are placed to transactionalize the relationship with the Other. Meditative and numinous experiences are achieved when kneeling before a gold-adorned altar. Meanwhile, specialists are utilizing dedicated tools and materials to complement and elevate ritual processes. Dedication is also shown in everyday life. One wears a cross on his neck, another carries a dagger, yet another's body is painted, inked, or surgically altered in a way that represents belonging, devotion, or affiliation. As such, the material dimension – Smart's last 'lens' is an all-encompassing category – surrounding and interacting with all the other dimensions. Smart's examination in the *Dimensions of Sacred* extensively covers this issue; however, in the case of new religiosity, it will require certain clarifications and additions.

Smart approaches the question of materiality by outlining several subject groups. I will classify these into two greater categories and systematize the array of possible items. First is the cluster of materials closely associated with the embodiment of the *transcendent*. Its first subcategory is the natural and artificial depictions and embodiments of the Other (statues, idols,

natural formations and phenomena, etc.). I will not look into these too extensively to maintain my overarching scope. Instead, I underline three opposing concepts which characterize these subjects: (a) *embodiment, (b) depiction,* and (c) *interpretation.* Embodiment refers to the physical manifestation of the sacred as or in an object. Smart posits: "[…] the statue of Visnu in front of me, which has been duly consecrated, actually is Visnu, just as in classical Christianity the bread and wine, duly consecrated, actually are the body and blood of Christ" (Smart, 1996, p. 275). In such cases, the *transcendent* inhabits the material item (or material items) it is associated with and requires various forms of 'tending:' feeding, clothing, sheltering, regular worship, and ritual motions during the ritual year. Opposing this is the concept of *depiction* primarily has artistic qualities, as it is associated with emotion-stirring in the follower rather than physically manifesting the object of worship. Images, photos, paintings, and other forms of creative and decorative depiction (including music, plays, and, more contemporarily, videography and even games) convey meanings of the *transcendent* to varying degrees and offer tangible concepts for followers outside of the sacred – therefore severely limited – ritual contexts. Depictions can be everyday items (such as a cross in a Christian house or a mezuzah in a Jewish household's door), carrying a similar sense of connection to the *transcendent*. This category can be considered the opposite of physical elements of the sacred space (such as the Torah, qiblah, miḥrāb, sacristy, and iconostasis), which are directly connected to the essence of embodiment.

The third mechanism associated with natural and artificial forms is *interpretation*. In aniconic traditions, where any depiction of the *transcendent* is forbidden (such as in the case of Islam and its prohibition on making any visual depiction of Allah or Mohammed, with the exception of the Persian tradition), the artistic expression will find ways to materialize the *transcendent* in more nuanced and less direct forms. Symmetric illustrations, forms of abstraction, and various placeholder items will take the place of the Other in these cases. Smart also

underlines that the orientation of reverence turns, accordingly towards these remaining ‘tangible’ items of worship:

> “[Aniconity] leaves symbolism to the spoken and written word: holy scriptures above all become the means of representing God. This does not by itself diminish the importance of the material dimension. Mosques and synagogues may be elaborate and expensive, and important resources may be put into illuminated manuscripts” (Smart, 1996, p. 277).

The second subclass associated with the embodiment of the transcendent are (1/2) buildings for worship and ritual. This group’s main components are the various forms of temples, shrines, pagodas, sacrificial altars, sacred groves, and ritual halls in which collective and individual religious acts are conducted in an orderly manner. Besides these, in line with Smart, I need to mention places of purification (bathhouses, isolation chambers, bodies of water) associated with providing ritual purity and erasing impurity. Visiting these is considered a prerequirement before entering distinguished places where the *Other* may reside. Furthermore, I also need to mention disparate types of supporting infrastructure associated with religiosity (monasteries, schools, pilgrimage destinations, etc.) as well as storerooms and representational places for valuable offerings (vow- and gratuity offerings, treasuries). The last cluster of this subclass is the relics or remains of revered figures (bones and bodies of saints, memorandums from charismatic leaders, items associated with miracles, etc.). This group intersects with other material subjects: graves, crypts, and burial places. Smart mentions that the final resting place of the deceased is a location associated with a degree of sacred ‘contamination’ (Smart, 1996, p. 277). This statement is also valid in the case of new religiosity, where the resting place of charismatic leaders sometimes merges with the category of the place of worship and ritual, which permanently alters the latter's functions. Instead of places of memory, these will turn

into direct conduits of (and to) the *transcendent*, or, in some cases, may even become worldly manifestations of it (Mickler, 1991, pp. 183–195).

Another aspect of materiality can be discussed under the greater umbrella term of (2) 'items.' This includes ritual materials (artificial forms of the transcendence, intersecting with the places of worship category; status symbols – wearables, ritual tools, and other special equipment such as self-mortification tools (cilicium). Animal and plant sacrifices, items for burning offerings, scents, and oils, as well as religious writings (holy books, associated writings) can also be regarded as a distinct group of sacrificial material. Connected to all this, however, as a separate subject under *items*, I must include (3) personal and bodily elements representing dedication and affiliation. The painted, inked, surgically altered, scarred, and branded body – or as less 'irreversible' forms – religious clothing and hairstyle (such as the *dastar*, *gantra*, and *kirpan* of the Sikh, or the *payot* side-curls of Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism) are just a few of the numerous forms for bodily elements, all within the dimension of materiality.

With such an expansive list, materiality is a key force that keeps Smart's model open and allows meaningful interactions between particular dimensions. The idols and statues – combined with the artistic expressions and the adorned (or oppositely, stripped down and puritanized) – sacred spaces invoke intense feelings toward something incomprehensively greater. The vestments and ritual tools are visual signalers of the authority and social status of charismatic figures and subordinate specialists. The presence of death and decay in ritual acts and artistic depictions of materiality reconciles the participant and invokes a greater sense of appreciation for collectivism, shared values, and worldview. As Smart notes:

> "The material dimension is a reinforcement of ritual, and with that a reinforcement of cosmology. The impressiveness of the institution is registered through vestments, relics, jewels, glittering divinities, glorious statues, soaring buildings.

In effect the material dimension is both congealed ritual and conceptual hardware." (Smart, 1996, p. 288)

Material & Artistic Dimension in New Religiosity

The material dimension is an extensive framework in which most new religious movements can be efficiently discussed. Nevertheless, certain nuancing and recontextualization are required to encompass all elements of new religiosity in the paradigm system I outlined in the first part of this dissertation. Through three brief explorations, I will point out three of these critical issues requiring adjustments in Smart's model. First, I will examine the aspects of individuality through artistic agency. The subject of this exploration will be Damanhur's Underground Temple. Then, I will look into the homogenizing functions of materiality through standard clothing in closed-off communes, like the Rajneeshpuram movement. Last, I will reflect on a frequently ignored issue in new religiosity: the variety of approaches and the necessity of opening the category of *texts* in contemporary new religiosity. These three brief outlooks aim to expand the horizons of how materiality shall be approached and discussed within the contexts of contemporary new and emergent religiosity.

Damanhur's Underground Temple - An Epitome of New Religious Artistic Production

Places of religious worship have increased significance in any religiosity. These are the physical containers of the sacred, as direct channels or rally grounds around which the access for the *transcendent* is its most direct. Building and decorating these in historical contexts was a separate vocation, requiring years of practice and dedication, a certain degree of public recognition, as well as strict rules (both sacred and technical), and rigorous planning. However, the exclusivity of these functions has significantly eroded in new religiosity, similar to other specialists' functions found in institutionalized religiosity. New religious places of worship –

consonantly with their *newness* – create creative spheres and innovation opportunities. In this regard, oversimplified plain walls and almost 'industrial' settings – like in Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations' places of worship – carry the messages of homogeneity and collectivism. Meanwhile, decorated spheres with an overstimulating variety of lights, colors, sounds, and smells offer ways for individual self-expression. For the latter, a perfect example is the Underground Temple of Damanhur in Piemonte, Italy. Massimo Introvigne describes the place's material aspects as follows:

> "For the outside visitor, it is a breath-taking experience, offering – room after room – amazing and unexpected discoveries. The artworks (mainly stained-glass windows, frescoes and mosaics) are reminiscent of Byzantine, Egyptian and Greek models but also of Liberty and Art Deco, all of these styles merged into a unique Damanhur perspective. The main rooms are the Water Room (dedicated to the Mother and the female principle, with a spectacular dolphin mosaic); the Earth Room, with eight huge columns and a bull mosaic, dedicated to the male Principle; the Glass Room with the largest underground dome in the world, made of 60,000 small glass pieces, the site of Damanhur's most important rituals. *I*n addition to the three main rooms, there are apparently never-ending corridors, with stained-glass windows, Egyptian style frescoes many "secret passages" (often unsuspected and astonishing) and smaller rooms for parapsychological and magical experiments. Particularly significant is the Room of Spheres, where big glass spheres are each connected to the always present "self" (i.e.: a metal spiral) […] There are literally miles of corridors, and thousands of statues, windows and paintings. In fact, each member of the community makes with his or her own hands a statue symbolically representing his or her connection with the animal whose name each "citizen" has selected." (Introvigne, 2012, pp. 80–81)

This long item list of Damanhur perfectly exemplifies both aspects of syncretism and intensity I already touched upon. As Introvigne highlights, religious individuals (as they refer to themselves as Damanhurian "citizens") take active in creative activity and in building the Underground Temple. Therefore, this place has unique artistic qualities and characteristics. Compared to conventional religiosity, where only specialists and trained professionals could create and shape sacred spaces, in Damanhur, it is every citizen's right and duty to contribute to these efforts personally. As a result of this activity, the created overstimulating religious environment enables (one could even say invokes) an altered state of mind and an almost trance-like state when entering the Temple. During the Temple's decoration, partakers fused various cultural elements on the walls, creating a unique artistic amalgamation that carries the marks of multiple cultures, ages, styles, and even techniques. In this overly decorated, shining, colorful, thoroughly detailed, uniquely sounding space, the involved could achieve more intense religious experiences and grow closer connections to the community, in which they had made an irreversible and undeniable mark (a.k.a. their own decorations in the Temple). Besides strengthening the community's mythic narrative about the Temple's significance, the artistic activity also offers ways of expressing one's individuality: every 'citizen' is personally depicted and adorned with fitting religious iconography on the walls. Their communal status and life changes are also memorized in the Temple as their illustrations and depictions change with the community's developments. With it, the Temple functions as a secondary narrative conduit, continuously expanding and retelling the myths and stories of Damanhur to those who gain entry to the Underground Temple. However, this individuality does not undermine the collective aspect of artistic production, but quite the opposite. Working together simultaneously on an unfinished project strengthens cohesion and illustrates the diversity and the importance of personal commitment to collective efforts.

Creative expressions of this scale aren't unique in new religiosity. Other examples, such as neopaganism's regular and occasion-specific altar-building or New Age's syncretic materiality entering the living space (fusing elements of various religious traditions and cultural contexts and creating a sort-of bricolage materiality (Altglas, 2014, 479-480; 485-487)), all require scholars to reconsider aspects religious, artistic production (Nelson, 2011, pp. 56–70). Making religious and 'sacred' art in new religious movements is, therefore, no longer a specialist-exclusive activity but an innovative and new form of self-expression and devotion (Capps, 1995, pp. 522–532). Partaking in these activities creates a notion of collective effort. These together establish and strengthen the religious identity, feelings of belonging, and sense of meaningful contribution for the involved, who all connect through internal (mythic) narratives. These (experiences, narratives, and new rituals for devotion) shape the collective memory and strengthen doctrines, ethics, and collective – social – elements. Therefore, in the case of Damanhur, artistic expression intertwines with every aspect of religiosity. Partaking in art shapes the movement, increasing the sense of agency for the involved and adjusting the trajectory of the movement's development. Such interconnected elements cannot be ignored and require particular attention when discussing new religiosity.

The Homogenizing Effect of Common Materiality: Rajneespunam's 'Orange People'

> "Material objects can play a key role in constructing and representing the collective identity of a group […] Prominent members of religious movements may indicate their close relationship to the divine or demonstrate their exceptional degree of piety and saintliness in concrete ways, by wearing emblems and articles of clothing." (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 33)

Hammer notes that clothing and worn garments have a key function in new religiosity's materiality. These establish feelings of '*the collective*,' through which the involved solve their

separateness from the world and others and become once more ‘unified’ in the settings of the movement. This reestablishing process has a particular aspect rooted in narrativity. Communal movements, such as the OSHO (a.k.a. the Rajneespuram movement of Oregon) and ISKCON, connect their unique clothing regulations to historical and seemingly alien cultural settings. These connections strengthen the feelings of collective belonging and establish a desirable image of lineage and heritage. Enforcing a strict garment policy creates cohesion and streamlines communication within the group. Those who wear the same type of clothing are equalized within the group. Leaving behind societal status (both privileges and handicaps) allows them to homogenize more efficiently. Meanwhile, the charismatic leader (and his subordinate specialists) stand out with modified or completely different clothing. This creates a new centralized structure and social order within the movement, based on separating the ‘source of knowledge’ or *transcendence* (the charismatic leader) from the ordinary following. All these, from an external perspective, are even more simple. For an outside observer, the standard clothing shows internal unity and simplifies the detection of the movement in the public space through distinct visual markers:

> “Rajneesh/Osho instituted a style of clothing that was worn by members during much of the 1970s and 1980s and appears to have been his own invention. […] It was so striking that his followers were at the time nicknamed “orange people” because of the hues of their garments. Another defining element of their particular mode of dressing was wearing a necklace with a photograph of Rajneesh attached to it.” (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 40)

Hammer perfectly shows the critical points of homogenous clothing from a material angle. Common garments create cohesion and separation from the ‘external’ and ‘impure.’ Meanwhile, they also serve as a sign of devotion and compliance: the involved surrender their uniqueness to become a part of ‘something ‘greater.’ Worn materiality, therefore, has distinct

internal meanings and external messages. From both perspectives, the emphasized elements are cohesion, equalization within, and separateness from the exterior. Through uniformity, followers find means of reestablishing senses of security, intense religiosity, and new worldviews (or meaning systems) supplementing and maintaining all these.

Texts in New Religiosity

> "New religious movements tend to yield a vast textual output. Some, for instance, publish biographies of their founders […]. Occasionally, leaders will write their own autobiographies […]. In addition to these types of texts, there are histories produced by adherents […]. Periodicals can also be mentioned in this context. […] Other forms of written output include inspirational messages to members, information put together for outsiders and especially for potential recruits, apologetic works defending the truth of the movement's doctrines, instructions for carrying out rituals, and much else besides. In the twenty-first century, more traditional forms of communication are supplemented by new media like websites, blogs, Facebook groups, audio files with lectures, and YouTube videos." (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 43)

Hammer mentions that new religiosity has a more diverse and significantly higher textual output than its predecessors (over the same period). Behind his statement, I need to highlight four key elements. Hammer already noted one of these: the utilization of new media: webpages, Facebook groups, YouTube videos, and most recently, hyper online sites, like TikTok (Hawes, 2021. 06. 27.) change how scholars must discuss texts and textual materiality associated with (not exclusively new) religiosity. I will touch on this issue later, but first, I will outline the other three elements. First, I need to mention how new religiosity relates to and utilizes written, already existing materials. After this, I will examine how new writings come

into existence. As the last key element, I will point out how texts – now interpreted as material objects in a broader context, including digital materials – are treated by new religiosity.

Let's briefly examine new religious texts (including proselytizer, apologetic, and even 'sacred texts'). One may find three interconnected ways these new materials associate with existing religious literature. First, the written materials of new religiosity incorporate recognizable elements from other established religious traditions and textual output (such as 'we are a Christian group that regards the Bible as infallible'). Second, NRMs offer 'innovative' takes and standpoints regarding these already existing texts. Yet, these aren't additions to the core body of the text but rather interpretations and reinterpretations (such as 'contrary to other groups, we have understood the true message of the Bible'). The third mechanism is when already existing bodies of texts are complemented with entirely new (prophetic, revelatory, or 'rediscovered') materials. These new elements are additions to the core body; they expand the material in a way that visibly detaches it from the originating tradition and creates a genuine, new strand of thought. "Many NRMs give existing texts the status of canonical scripture but reuse them in creative ways by producing novel translations and instituting innovative commentarial traditions." (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 43). 'Bible-based' new religious movements, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-Day Saints, utilize each approach (Chryssides, 2022, pp. 41–59; Stark & Neilson, 2005, pp. 30–57). In their texts, one can almost hear the *reinterpretation* strategy discussed in the "Ways of Coping" chapter. Fittingly, this approach offers the same authority and legitimacy-strengthening functions I discussed previously. However, they also carry the already discussed limitations. To counterbalance these, specific new religious movements have written material that is not (directly) connected to the literature of established religious traditions. Instead, they are revelations and records of direct transcendent messages. "New authoritative texts are commonly, within their respective traditions, understood as resulting from communication with a suprahuman source." (Hammer & Swartz,

2024, p. 48). In this sense, the *Book of Mormon* (J. Smith, 1830/2004) or Blavatsky's *Book of Dzyan* (a.k.a. *The Secret Doctrine* (Blavatsky, 1979)) must be regarded as genuine new texts, articulately separated from other traditions and originating from an external *absolute* source. These texts are reminiscent of the *reorientation* and *redefinition* strategies, collectively establishing a new basis for entirely divergent viewpoints on critical questions of life.

Lastly, I need to discuss how texts – as material items – are treated in new religiosity. Generally speaking, religious and associated texts have special treatment: they cannot be stored in just any way or discarded when their time is due. Furthermore, they most certainly cannot be regarded as mundane literature, like any newspaper or fictitious literature. As an example, the Torah and the Qur'an have exclusive rules for storage. Similarly, when damaged or changed, these texts are laid to rest in a dedicated funeral ceremony. Similar attitudes can be detected in the case of 'less sacred' written religious materials: one does not throw away a no longer needed prayer book or a collection of devotional songs. Even regular periodicals of congregations have – less detectable, yet still – specific rules for discarding such materials. One would rather donate these back to the congregation or a library than throw them in the trashcan. Contrary to all these, Hammer stresses that NRM texts don't really have such restrictive sets of 'rules:'

> "In the case of most books disseminated by NRMs or people within the looser cultic milieu, there are no generally shared sets of rules that govern how they are to be treated. They can be unceremoniously dumped in the trash if the owner wishes to do so, a fate that would be practically unthinkable for books central to many of the historically more established religions." (Hammer & Swartz, 2024, p. 51)

Conventional religious textuality has a strict standpoint regarding innovation, translation, correction, and material form. Holy scriptures are *holy* because they are written on a specific type of parchment, with particular characters, and consecrated through distinct rituals. The Torah must be finalized within the synagogue's walls; the Qur'an is only Qur'an if it's written

in Arabic. In any other language, it is considered an interpretation or exegesis, but indeed, not 'the real thing.' In new religiosity, most of these borders are already torn down. Sacred texts can take any form or shape, from softcover books to scanned copies or even blog posts and videos. Nevertheless, there are cases when these barriers and rules remain or even gain excess strength. Wicca's *Book of Shadows* perfectly encapsulates this, as it incorporates both the dissolution of rules and the maintenance of these in a seemingly self-contradictory way. Gardner's original book is considered a written compendium of practical information and doesn't necessarily have any sacred meanings. However, the hand-written version based on this source material – created and decorated by the particular individual – gains the qualities of a holy material. It is highlighted as the centerpiece of a Wiccan's home, typically positioned at the center of the home altar. It cannot be touched by anyone, nor can it be approached directly without consent and certain rites of purification and liminality. It can only be opened by the individual who writes it parallel as his initiation progresses. Furthermore, it is always handwritten and personally decorated. As it is based on the original Book of Shadows, it is essentially a guidebook of practical magical praxis and ritual explorations; however, it also contains unique personally invented rituals that deviate from the original text or even oppose it in particular questions. In this regard, the Wiccan *Book of Shadows* can be interpreted as a traditionalist text (meaning that it retains a sense of 'sacredness'). Meanwhile, it is also flexible, allowing translation, innovation, addition, and deviation from the original version (A. Berger, 2013, p. 65; Urban, 2019, p. 30).

Last, I must reflect on a related issue I already touched upon in my first point. Due to the period (1996) in which the *Dimensions of Sacred* was written, Smart's framework couldn't incorporate 'digital materiality,' one of the most researched contemporary specializations

today.[100] Although the combination of the terms *digital* and *material* seems contradictory, it reflects a vital issue of new religious research. Contemporary and new religious materiality encapsulates physical textuality (tangible forms like print materials, leaflets, posters, etc.) and digital texts (materials in other forms, such as blog posts, videos, audio logs, archived material, particular smartphone applications, games, etc.). New media generates alternative and innovative forms of information exchange in these frontiers. It manifests new forms of sociality (group membership, subscription, following on YouTube and mass media, etc.), new experiences (more intense forms of belonging, meanwhile isolation from physical congregations, etc.), alternative rituality (streamed worship, personal religious 'coaching,' consumer-based religious services, software guided meditations), and new narratives (digital healing, conspiracy theories, AI beliefs and fears). These new frontiers also affect and transform doctrines (introducing elements such as the digital Jesus paradigm) and internal ethics (new types of accepted, tolerated, or rejected forms of online behavior, raising issues about anonymity, etc.). Lastly, they also cultivate a unique form of digital 'materiality' (Bible applications, devotional subscriptions, newsletters, message groups, and online chat boards).

It is a generally accepted paradigm that new religious institutions utilize modern technology better and more frequently than their more established counterparts (Woodhead, 2010, pp. 31–49). Therefore, the discussed 'new materiality' will be more present in new religiosity than in other religions. Examining these – incorporating them under the umbrella term of materiality – is a necessary addition to Smart's model.

[100] Just to mention a handful of inquiries without specific order or significance: Aupers and Houtman (2010); Aupers and Wildt (2022, pp. 235–260); Campbell and Cheong (2022); Campbell and Evolvi (2020, pp. 5–17); Cantwell and Petersen (2020); Howard (2011)

Evaluation of the Dual Model in its 'Static' Form

With the conclusion of the seventh dimension, the time has arrived to review the past main chapter's key statements. In my last review, I summarized the social conditions in which new religious movements have appeared. I examined how different disciplines approach this peculiar subject and how their vocabulary changes the forms and focus of the debate about NRMs. In this previous chapter (titled "Adapting Ninian Smart's Dual Model…"), I moved further along the beaten path and explored the seven dimensions in their 'static' conditions. I also took brief detours at each part and examined whether Smart's framework would fit the case of NRMs. If it was necessary, I reshaped and expanded the available toolkit to maintain the systematizing phenomenological-morphological angle. In this following subchapter, I will reiterate some of my findings about each dimension and outline the path forward.

During my examinations of the emotional & experiential dimension, I have followed Smart's recommendation and divided religious experiences into clusters with *numinous* or *contemplative* ferment, each establishing their roots in the *shamanic* and *magical* experiences. I touched upon their intersections in the panenhenic experience and discussed a specific subcategory of numinous devotion, which I labeled *bhakti*. Furthermore, I classified the experiences based on their occurrence into three possible associated groups: the *numinous* and *luminous experiences,* the *divine* or *luminous conversions,* and the *numinous* or *luminous dispositions*. I ended this chapter with concluding remarks, stating that the experiences of new religiosity are morphologically examinable in Smart's model without significant changes. I illustrated this by interpreting Scientology's auditing as a form of shamanic healing, the Faith Church's Wednesday service as an occasion filled with numinous experiences, and Asatru's silent offerings as a unique form of *bhakti*.

In the narrative & mythical dimension, I encountered my first difficulty: Smart's model adequately grasped historical religiosity's narratives but lacked the specificities brought by

postmodernity. *Illud tempus* and *illud spatium* were effective guidelines in the cases of *myths of origin* and *myths of decay*. Still, these frameworks missed one crucial trait of new religiosity: stories and myths about a charismatic leader. To fill this gap, I adopted Palmer and Bromley's similar phenomenological-morphological framework. I expanded *myths of origin* with notions of *separation*. Similarly, I revised the *myths of decay* to emphasize *restoration* and *salvation*. Last, I added a third type, labeled *myths of charisma*, to better incorporate stories about the charismatic leader and separately discuss the leader's significance in the movement's myths and internal narratives. Despite these changes, I maintained the original mechanisms of Smart: origin and restoration were still connected through *decay*, restoration, and charisma were bound together by *enlightenment*. Additionally, the connection between charisma and separation was strengthened by *revelation*. These modifications did not disturb the entire framework but improved it in numerous ways. The additions allowed me to maintain Smart's valuable multi-layered narrative examinational perspective. Meanwhile, with the introduction of *myths of charisma*, I was now able to frame the myths of lineage, leadership, and inheritance of power within Smart's system and find the basis of an infallible mythical image of the leader in new religious movements. Introducing a dynamic approach allowed me to more effectively grasp changes in myths and narratives. Incorporating the notion that new religious movements are still developing highlighted that myths of new religiosity might not be as cemented as their historical counterparts are and might require continuous examination on a longitudinal scale.

In the ritual dimension, I separated the orderly behavior (*li*) of religiosity into *focused* and *harnessing rituals* based on their orientations (either external or internal). I contextualized these according to their functions related to *illud tempus* and *illud spatium*. I also delineated certain types of ritual behavior, such as *magic*, *sacrifice*, two kinds of *worship*, and *rites of passage.* Besides general statements about these, I also added notes concerning the rituals of new religious movements. I stressed that there is a shift of focus in NRMs from procedurality

and repetition to experience and emotion, which is rooted in processes of individualization and the changing emphasis on one's own agency. Based on these findings, I modified one label of the model, changing the classification of *focused rituals* from a type of *bhakti* to '*forced rituals*' to highlight that the transcendence in most NRMs is gradually stripped of its agency and more obliged to manifest every time for the involved than in traditional religiosity. Besides these changes – rooted in the impatience of postmodern conditions, where the time for religious rites is also severely limited – I concluded that Smart's model contains an adequately expansive workspace for examining new religious rites.

The doctrinal & philosophical lens posed a challenge compared to previous dimensions. Concerning doctrines, even Smart agreed that this aspect is challenging to condense due to the sheer variety of attitudes, religious doctrine, and philosophical thought within this dimension (Smart, 1996, p. 66). However, the combination of Smart's sixfold differentiation (*attitudinal, descriptive, reconciliatory, definitional, responsive, scientific*) and my added overlay of separating doctrines according to their orientation (*self, Other, collective, external, charisma*) was able to pinpoint the nuanced interplay between the various layers of doctrinality and their connecting dynamisms with each other. These additions were beneficial for both contemporary and historical examinations, as they highlighted the charismatic leader's doctrinal importance and designated how such elements determine the thought about *oneself*, *ultimacy*, *community*, and those who do not share the same faith tradition (*others*). These additions, however, did not disturb the framework and retained the focus on the examined subject's (i.e., doctrines) most foundational function: stabilizing the community's religious experiences, shared narratives, and rituality.

Concerning ethics, besides the general 'be good' notion, the multiplicity of ethical and legal contexts was too expansive to apply to new religiosity successfully (where one would have encountered a categorically higher diversity on these fronts). Therefore, I adapted Roy Wallis's

tripartite distinction to achieve a nominal structuredness in this dimension. I created three pairs of standpoints according to the degrees of provided individualistic (i.e., dissolving) interpretation and opposingly collective cohesive (i.e., restrictive) mechanisms. The outlined *restrictive/conservative*, *integrative/adoptive*, and *liberative/dissolving* standpoints functioned well in Smart's model and outlined the general attitudes compared to the containing majority society's values. Concerning this dimension, I have also made a series of remarks, the most important of which was that new religiosity is always in a minority position in postmodern societies.

In the social & institutional dimension, I made similar modifications as in the case of the doctrinal one. I kept Smart's three-layered system of meta-, collective- and individual levels. However, fittingly to the emphasis on individuality in new religiosity, I further detailed the individual level. I introduced the collective concept of *charismatic leaders* to encompass the variety of social figures Smart discussed. Furthermore, I created a group of *subordinate specialists* to bridge between the *follower* and the *leader*. Moreover, I introduced a completely new element – the *solitary practitioner* – who inherits functions from both the leader and the follower. The presence of this figure somewhat disrupted Smart's social dimension. However, incorporating this form was essential in the case of new religiosity. Lastly, I reflected on the significance of innovation in social settings and the "social laboratory" functions of new religiosity (Dawson, 2007, p. 121). Even though certain additions and refinements were required in the social & institutional dimension, Smart's general approach was applicable to NRMs.

Lastly, I explored the material dimension. Based on Smart's views, I delineated certain types of materiality, including locations (places of worship, ritual, purification, supporting infrastructure, and burials) and items (embodiment of the *transcendent* in material form, ritual and sacrificial items, worn material, the body as material, text as material, etc.). However, I further nuanced and refreshed Smart's framework by introducing technological elements to materiality (images, photographs, films, and video sequences), relics and remains, and bodily

marks (circumcision, tattoos, mutilation, scars, tilak markings, etc.). I also explored the individualizing and homogenizing aspects of new religiosity. The former was introduced in the context of artistic production, while the latter was framed within homogenous clothing and visual representation settings. Finally, I also discussed issues of textuality, designating three attitudes towards religious literature: adoption, interpretation, and introduction of new literature. To this differentiation, I integrated elements from digital and new media, further expanding the material dimension's list of subjects. I concluded that new religious movements generally have a more extensive material dimension, which can be structured and contextualized in Smart's system if one implements these modifications and additions.

These static explorations offered adequate insights into every dimension Smart delineated. While para-historical (ritual & practical, emotional & experiential, social & institutional, material & artistic) dimensions required minor nuancing and marginal contemporary additions, – brought mainly by digitalization, individualization, and alienation, that Smart couldn't have implemented historical ones (narrative & mythical, doctrinal & philosophical, ethical & legal) posed greater challenges and required significant additions or reworking in order to maintain the functionalist and morphological-phenomenological scope. Due to these latter's basis – in particular, religious scripture, doctrine, and legal and ethical imperatives – such components are innately connected to particular historical settings. To sever these ties and distance, the framework was necessary to ensure a systematic, value-neutral, and objective standpoint in scholarly inquiry. Nevertheless, with the proposed additions, Smart's model can successfully examine new religious movements and historical movements likewise. The additions offer even greater objectivity and cross-cultural perspectives in the latter's case.

Dynamic Utilization of the Model

Moving further, I must note that in my recent explorations, I intentionally prevented (or suppressed) the interactions between the dimensions. However, every once in a while, these

permeated my description and showed glimpses of how the model functions in *dynamic* settings. Even the fact that I cannot separate these dimensions entirely shows how intertwined particular aspects of religiosity are and how 'lifelike' religious formations (old and new) are under the lenses of the dual model. In this regard, religiosity is similar to human anatomy: one cannot examine just the brain, the capillaries, the digestive system, or muscles alone and hope for comprehensive understanding. These are meant to function (and be studied) together, strengthening each other's mechanisms. With this understanding, the path forward is already paved. In the upcoming chapter, I will explore Smart's dimensions 'in motion' through specific case studies. These case studies are based on my own or joint prior, already published (or forthcoming) research. In each case study, I will overview the particular research's findings and contextualize crucial elements under the seven lenses. By adding an overlay of the dual model, my goal is to illustrate the modified framework's versatile practical realizability and highlight prospects that could make this type of study fruitful in the case of new religions and debated 'religious-like' formations.

Until now, I have established the basis for my examinations and disassembled the working model. Now, I will progress by reassembling this cross-cultural, dynamic, phenomenological mode of study. Utilizing a functionalist approach, I will strive for a transdisciplinary scope and discuss subjects under the seven lenses. In these case studies, prior statements of the dissertation will not be disseminated further. Instead, they will be *applied* to particular topics. Due to this change in my approach, my rhetoric will shift from a philosophical tone to an academic study of religions' one. Moreover, in these studies, I will not explore every subject's traits comprehensively, as several more renowned and knowledgeable scholars have already done this. Therefore, I will only reflect on these and add necessary contextual information if needed. As a *method for studying* new religiosity, the modified Smartian model will be utilized with the following focus. First, rather than inherited religious or cultural worldviews and politicized

ideas, it draws on phenomenological-morphological parallels. Second, its structuredness disallows straying from objectivity. Meanwhile, its language ensures neutrality. Third, its expansive framework offers precise classification and does not press the inquirer to 'force' some aspects into inappropriate pre-designated categories. Moreover, as the dual model highlights the interactions between dimensions, it allows a more nuanced contextualization of particular elements of religiosity. These conditions and focus mean that the dynamic mode of study – compared to the previously discussed other types of studies – may yield a deeper and more detailed understanding while not losing a systematic, cross-cultural scope.

Opening Perspectives – 'Secular' Meaning Systems

In the introductory chapter ("Transdisciplinary Perspectives"), I explored a variety of phenomena connected to postmodernity. I discussed an emerging meaning crisis (Berger & Luckmann, 1995), the effects of secular worldviews (Bruce, 2002), the culture of individualism (Motak, 2009, pp. 149–161), the decline of social cohesion and common narratives (Hervieu-Léger, 2006, pp. 45–63), pluralism (Jelen, 2003), post-truth (McIntyre, 2018) and he commodification of religion (Lofton, 2017). At that point, I also hinted that these crises brought about new types of 'secular' social movements, whose repertoire – at least from a phenomenological-morphological perspective – is similar to those of the new religious movements. Smart reflected on this issue, discussing the 'contaminating' effects of the meaning systems permeating social, cultural, and even political ideologies. Of these new frontiers, he examined nationalism and Marxism (Smart, 1996, pp. 289–299). In the following case study, I will attempt to carry out a similar exploration; however, I will focus more on cultural and subcultural movements rather than strictly political ones, seeking morphological parallels between these and religiosity.

Quasi Religiosities – Festivals and Subcultures[101]

Quasi-religiosity (J. E. Smith, 1994, 121–135) refers to entirely autonomous 'religious-like' complexes that detach themselves from other established religious traditions – although they initially tap into or exist within these and provide essentially the same functionalities (*meaning, intensity, security*) in inherently non-religious contexts. Such elements may manifest in musical subcultures, sports, conspiracy beliefs, and political or social ideologies: Marxism, environmentalism, and, as discussed previously, even in anti-cultism (Brinkerhoff & Jacob, 1987, pp. 77–78; Cusack, 2023, pp. 70–72). These identity providers may develop into (of course, to some extent limited) placeholders, producing religious-like traits and functionalities for the involved (as an example, see (Mészáros, 2003, pp. 32–44)). One can point out morphological parallels by approaching such phenomena from a functionalist perspective. Quasi-priesthood may manifest as performers and DJs at a concert leading and controlling the emotional flow of the audience through music and strict 'ritual' orders. Charismatic pop-culture figures may become 'lesser deities', prophets, kings, and queens in the eyes of their adorers (think about Elvis or the 'cult following' of contemporary Korean K-pop bands' massive follower basis, who hang upon every word of their adored idols). Quasi-rituals, offering a way to experience something utterly alien or "wholly other" (Sarbacker, 2016, pp. 9–13), may also take forms in non-religious settings: at festivals, concerts, civil gatherings, and even brand events. From the emotional dimension's perspective, these carry the same senses of *togetherness*, *awe*, *devotion*, intense life-changing *revelations*, and even a sense of *contemplative immersion* and *healing*.

[101] This case study is a reworked version of an article I published in the Journal of the Korean Academy of New Religions in 2023. See: Nemes (2023b)

One of the most evident manifestations of quasi-religiosity is the collective of 'secular' communal events. Sára Heidl, a fellow Hungarian researcher, coined the term *event religiosity* (S. Heidl, 2017, pp. 133–157; S. E. Heidl, 2024, pp. 32–60) to refer to the "religionesque" elements of these particular gatherings. In her view, contemporary festivals and mass events function as – to some extent limited – religious-like events. She contextualizes the phenomena with the following words:

> "As human relationships weaken to the transcendent within institutionalized religious settings, individuals seek and find new connections at occasional events. A festival is considered an event that can be easily reached while giving intense experiences and helping to take a break from everyday life." (S. Heidl, 2023.)

As Heidl notes, musical, art, and subcultural festivals may take up some of the traditional religiosity's functionalities in certain conditions when the latter cannot provide the sought-after extraordinary experiences and settings. The intertwining elements in these instances are the emphasis on a communal sphere, the importance of private – religious-like or religionesque – experiences, the limited spatiality and temporality, and the usage of symbols as conveyers of complex and powerful meanings. Heidl analyzed the Hungarian Everness Festival, a yearly mindfulness expo dominated by New Age, esoteric, and contemporary syncretic spiritual thought. In her study (S. Heidl, 2017), she concluded that for some, these yearly festival periods offer intense personal religious experiences, a strong, almost "*tribe-like*" sense of community (St John, 2012, pp. 72–101), spiritual fulfillment (Mercadante, 2014, pp. 92–126), and a detachment from the mundane, profane world. These descriptions and experiences can definitely qualify the Everness Festival as a quasi-religious event.

Another morphologically similar phenomenon is the American Burning Man Festival. Established in 1986, this originally countercultural "communal exodus" organized in the Black Rock Desert, Nevada (St John, 2018, pp. 3–21) is a perfect example of temporally and spatially

limited quasi-religiosity. It bears all the markers Heidl emphasizes. It is most certainly an intense and temporally restricted event, carrying a unique sense of community and belonging. The accepted – and to some extent even mandatory – usage of psychedelics and mind-altering substances creates a fertile mental state for spiritual-like experiences, even in those minds who otherwise are devoid of such interests. The importance of material symbols is also evident, with a giant statue (burnt to ash every year) standing in the center of the festival grounds. Black Rock City – the ad-hoc town that forms around the Man every year – consists of several districts, each having specific social functions (living quarters, markets, bartering grounds, gathering grounds, exhibitions, temples, shrines, stage acts, etc.) and internal rules (ethics for consensual encounters, specific rules for involvement in the creative acts, conflict resolution methods specific for Burning Man, etc.). The camp city itself is a miniature society with its own internal structure. Within this structure, there are simple attendees, new burners and regulars (*followers* and *initiates*), volunteers, stage actors, musicians, entertainers (*subordinate specialists*) who are responsible for maintaining the intensity of the multi-day event series, and organizers responsible for the scheduling and initiating of the main events, like the lighting of the Man or the demolishing of the Temple (*charismatic priesthood*).

As mentioned, Black Rock City is built around the giant statue; however, it is open towards the desert – the "Wholly Outer," a wordplay on Rudolf Otto's *das Ganz Andere* or "wholly Other." (Otto, 1950 (1977)). The wordplay itself is intentional on the organizers' end as they encourage attendees to seek out extraordinary experiences (with religious or spiritual ferment) on the festival grounds and beyond the borders of Black Rock City. Between the open desert – or "*Outer Playa*," as Burners refer to it – and Black Rock City lays the "*Playa*," the actual festival grounds (St John, 2020a, pp. 286–313). From a scholarly angle, the *Outer Playa* can easily be labeled as Eliade's *chaos* – beyond the edge of order and society, where both the danger and the extraordinary reside (Eliade, 1959, pp. 23–32). The *Playa* – the *cosmos* in this

Eliadean interpretation – is filled with artistic installations and experiments, each invoking a sense of strangeness or *otherness.*[102] All of these creations continuously penetrate the liminal edges of the camp city and invite the "*Outer"* inside. The placed interactive statues – depicting lovers, deities, natural forces, all in motion and dynamic stances – gain new lives at night with the help of light and laser shows, creating a feeling of motion and presence, as if the statues were living otherworldly creatures from the *Outer Playa* (*chaos*), transgressing the *cosmos* and walking among the Burners in these liminal times (St John, 2020b, pp. 178–194). Festivalgoers also wear unique decorative clothing to express their worldviews, alternative ideals, and personal uniqueness. By doing so, they also cover their 'secular' identities and blend into this colorful flow of oddities, creating a carnivalesque sensation. Their *worn materials* create a vortex of strange colors, enacting otherworldly creatures, while the festival's sounds further catalyze this feeling of something "*wholly other*." The isolation provided by the desert (i.e., Smart's *illud spatium)* and the carnivalesque sense of freedom and strangeness draw similarities to the antique *festums* hosted in sacred groves (*temenos*) or to the carnivals of medieval city-states like Venice. Like at *festums*, during Burning Man – and especially on Burn Night (i.e., *illud tempus*) – attendees may feel as if conventional rules and regulations may cease to apply to them, and for a limited time, new, *unearthly* rules (looser, more individually interpretable –in my modified overlay *liberative/dissolving ethics*) take their place. The liminal phase, created by the carnivalesque *rite de passage* (van Gennep, 2007, 1-15; 65-116), abolishes societal differences and establishes a sense of undivided community without status imbalances or personal privileges for a while.

[102] In the past years, a new recurring installation had also been built exactly on the edge of the Playa and the Outer Playa. This construction – a temple – is made out of scrap items collected throughout the year, and it's dedicated to a changing theme, closely connected to every particular Burn's major theme. About the 2023 Temple, see: https://www.temple2023.com/ Accessed: 2023. 08. 31.

As mentioned, partakers of Burning Man also take up strange roles and odd personalities alongside their attires for the duration of the event, acting as tribesmen, magicians, kings and queens, non-humans, cryptids, strange mystical creatures, gods and goddesses, and many other types of otherworldly creature. In my framework, I can interpret these acts as the individual's transgressive actions of taking up otherwise exclusive roles and behaviors only available to specialists and charismatic leaders. Burners – most of whom unknowingly or instinctively create this environment and participate in these rituals, may genuinely experience religious-like feelings and, for the festival's period, enter their own *illud tempus* and *illud spatium*. Smart's modified frameworks highlight these acts both on individual and communal levels and emphasize Burning Man's temporally and locally limited – quasi-religious – functions. Examining such contemporary non-institutional and ad-hoc religiously functioning phenomena can lead the inquirer further in understanding the inherent anthropological sense of human religiosity and the condition of what the scholarship calls *homo religiosus.*

Conspiracy Beliefs as Quasi Religiosities – The Case of QAnon

My second subject[103] takes a step further and dissolves event religiosity's temporal and spatial limitations, creating a fully developed, quasi-religious system. To approach this, I need first to add some contextual clarifications. First of these is the paradigm of post-truth (McIntyre, 2018). In the past two decades, newfound frontiers have opened for challenging the verification systems of former metanarratives. Among these, one overshines any other competitor: the online sphere, especially mass social media. Through its catalyzing effects (sensationalism, 'trending' effect, the overall ability of mass sharing, formerly unseen connectivity and information transfer),

[103] This case study is a reworked version of an article I published in the Journal of the Korean Academy of New Religions in 2023. See: Nemes (2023a)

combined with the fallacies of checking the truthfulness of the shared information, mass social media platforms have seen an unprecedented surge in fake news, misinformation, and parallel 'truths.' Online eco-chambers cultivate these, and with the chance of physical isolation (especially during COVID-19) and an inability to control the flow of ideas, these alternative 'chosen truths' became the essence of contemporary conspiracy networks. The presence of multiple (even conflicting) 'answers' provides and diversifies an almost unlimited range of alternative 'truths' of which the interested will surely find something 'fitting.' This habitus is reminiscent of both Stark and Bainbridge's market theory and Lofton's concept of consuming religion (and meaning systems) (Jelen, 2003; Lofton, 2017; L. A. Young, 2016). Interpretations of chosen truths thrive in social environments dominated by distrust, division, and general uncertainty. As such, several alternative narrative movements have emerged in these conditions since the early 2010s (parallel to the introduction of the Web 2.0 architecture (Jenkins et al., 2013, pp. 47–84)), of which the most expansive today is the QAnon conspiracy network. This alt-right-based "hyper-real religion" (Argentino, 2022, pp. 257–280) functions alongside quasi-religious mechanisms, offering alternative ultimate answers for existential questions, such as one's place in the world and the reasons behind personal suffering. Meanwhile, it produces grand narratives about contemporary events like wars (Iraq, Iran, Syria, and most recently Ukraine), diseases (most prominently COVID-19), societal strife (public revolts, mandatory actions during social distancing, gun violence, and restriction, etc.), the disintegration of former foundational value systems, as well as economic pressure, migration, and terrorism.

From an academic perspective, there is a multitude of fascinating details to this movement. The "pick-and-choose" or "pick-and-mix" (Altglas, 2014, pp. 481–483) attitude of *bricolage* religiosity allows the involved to efficiently create and/or find frameworks with more significant meanings tailored to their lives. Partaking in these also connects them to a loose yet thriving online (and, in the past years, offline) community. Other parallels with new religious

movements are the aims for a higher or 'hidden' truth, the empowering feeling of being 'chosen,' the various inherent coping mechanisms, the projected image of an all-knowing and unquestionable prophetic leader, and the totalistic 'Us vs. Them' attitude. Conspiracy theories can function as supplementary structures for other (already established) congregations, where these ideas may thrive and spread on even more elevated levels (Vrzal, 2020, pp. 54–58). However, it seems that this particular network attained a sufficient following to exist independently, operating as a competitor to established religions, and effectively becoming a distinct quasi-religion. In certain cases, it can even subordinate established religions, placing these into the surrogate religiosity category (Argentino, 2022, pp. 263–266).[104] For the involved, these conspiracies function more than simple alternative ideas about specific enclosed (typically political) issues and typically affect foundational existential and ontological meanings as well. QAnon conspiracy believers are more likely to reformulate their prior conceptions about reality, the integrity of body and soul, and the adequate power of the individual within- and over society while incorporating new ideas from alternative, personally fitting conspiracy theories (Schaffner, 2020, pp. 1–8). These may manifest as concepts about astral bodies battling over the rulership of the universe during public political debates, the adequate power of exorcism on public and societal institutes, or the synchronous usage of ritual items from different religious traditions, such as the shofar from Judaism, or crystal healing from esotericism and yoga.

The social structure of QAnon (Argentino, 2022, pp. 258–260; Nemes, 2023a, pp. 102–108) depicts a similarly complex network of a charismatic leader ("Q" or "Q Clearance Patriot") and several subordinate specialists (terminally online individuals, also known as "Digital

[104] Behind the emergence of conspiracy theories, one can outline a variety of reasons: a noticeable distrust towards scientific and academic observations, a general discarding attitude towards medical assistance in need, uncritical mass media consumption, and a receptivity for victimization combined with inequality and already existing societal problems. Nemes (2023a, pp. 101–102)

Soldiers" (Hawes, 2021. 06. 27.)) responsible for translating or deciphering the messages of 'Q.' Below them, there is a larger group of following, rallied around secondary charismatic figures (like the Canadian Q Anon Queen (Romana Didulo) or the QAnon Shaman (Jake Angeli)), who provide secondary interpretation of the conveyed 'hidden messages.' Consistent with the individual empowerment of new religiosity, the decryption process itself is not strictly limited to leading figures. Certain followers may also engage in solitary or joint efforts online (in close residences, even in-person meetings) to find personal meanings in the messages. This expansion of interpretational cycles allows the individual to actively engage in the movement, gaining agency and a sense of contributing something greater.

The QAnon conspiracy network manifested a unique narrative dimension: it created a parallel history in which primal powers of the "Awakened" and the "Cabal" battle each other. These stories and myths are told through the usage of unique terms particular to QAnon (*Storm*, *Great Awakening*, coded messages, imageboard posts online, etc.), implying a sense of community and belonging for those who can access and decipher these. Through these alternative metanarratives, the individual (*meaning-seeker*) finds personalized new ontological and existential understandings. The interpretation of this moldable reality offers him legitimacy for his actions and provides a way for narratively re-contextualization of former life events and regrettable past turning points. In the created alternative (*post-truth*) world, the individual (as a *solitary practitioner*) may also attain the role of a *heros* (lat.) or a victim, projecting the reasons for his personal challenges and traumata to a quasi-transcendent enemy (typically condensing this into an image of an all-powerful hidden group with malicious intents such as the Cabal in QAnon mythology), which also connects the phenomena to René Girard's scapegoat-mechanism (Riordan, 2021, pp. 242–256). With QAnon's ability to offer seemingly coherent solutions to cope with personal or systematic problems, the movement's narrative dimension overtakes the functionality of conventional religiosities' and secular worldviews' similar spheres.

For the involved, the movement's metanarrative operates as a foundational framework through which they observe the complexity of the world and act according to the moral and/or ethical imperatives dictated by the movement. Doctrinal elements are either provided through the 'hidden messages' of 'Q' or transplanted from ideas of (typically) Neoprotestant conservative thought. Meanwhile, the ritual dimension manifests in a plethora of ways: (1) online and offline gatherings, during which the 'research' or deciphering process is conducted; (2) rally events and protests (either peaceful or less peaceful, such as Jan 6th, 2021) for specific causes – such as abortion, child trafficking, debating the legitimacy of the current or former leadership, (etc.). The magical elements of these events of worship manifest as "spiritual warfare" (i.e., communal prayers to ward off the Cabal, exorcisms, the blowing of the shofar) or more performance-centered forms, such as the ceremonial flag raisings, or opposing flag burnings, the stylized executions (i.e., hanging dummies presented and decorated as one of the imagined enemies). During these quasi-ritual events, one may also observe the extent of the material dimension. The common iconography, presented simultaneously on shirts, flags, cars, and message boards or as tattoos, strengthens the movement's cohesion and allows the followers to recognize each other outside these events. Among these *bodily materials* (worn, altering, marks, charms), one may also find common stylized elements like quotations of 'Q,' the letter "Q," or the WWG1WGA acronym printed on shirts, placed on flags, and cars. As a mostly American movement, one may also encounter key physical elements and ritual equipment associated with US iconography: modified versions of the US flag, Bibles utilized for exorcism, shofars blown to tear down the walls of the enemy, drawing parallels with Jericho, and many more. There are also 'decryption results' and slogans painted on boards, highlighting some of the most common conspiracy theories. Moreover, one last important material element is mainly used as a performative tool while also bearing an impactful – and most certainly terrifying – message: the visible bearing of high-caliber arms (typically AR15 and AR16 semi-automatic rifles). The

presence of this particular element in the movement points out the connections between militaristic and millennialist ideologies and the QAnon movement, each encouraging 'preparation' and 'readiness,' connecting the witnessed sight to *myths of salvation/restoration* in QAnon's obscure mythical dimension.

Another notable aspect of conspiracy theories (especially concerning QAnon), which connects this phenomenon to the public discussions of the late '80s and early '90s, is the re-emergence of anti-cultist rhetoric. There are already multiple early forms of emotional abuse- and therapeutic support communities for family members, friends, and relatives who consider themselves QAnon cult-casualty victims, as their loved one(s) "had been lost to a cult." These early formations develop similarly to the late 1980s American Family Foundation or the Cult Awareness Network. Each of these organizations was formed by concerned parents in a 'down-side-up' manner to provide assistance, resources, and information for dealing with a seemingly endless palette of "cults" and "cult casualties." One can easily see the parallels between the attitudes of the mentioned ACMs battling movements, such as Scientology, OSHO, or Jehovah's Witnesses, and today's early formations, speaking up and getting together against something quite similar. Today's ACMs (or maybe "anti-new-social-movements (ANSM)) are adopting the terminology of their predecessors, labeling QAnon a "harmful cult" (Hassan, 2019). Such accounts also highlight the destructive potential and deviant elements, as well as firearm safety concerns, the radicalization, and sudden personality shifts of followers strengthened by the organizational structure of cell-level activism. This new generation of ACMs re-invent anti-cultism and moral panic, once again introducing the brainwashing and coercive (re-)programming paradigms. New 'evangelists' of this age-old and dismissed concept attempt to explain how specific individuals' personalities with seemingly consolidated backgrounds may change drastically in less than a year. Successors of Margaret Singer, John G. Clark, and Louis J. West are now opening specialized institutions for their praxis, such as the Freedom of

Mind Resource Center led by Dr. Steven Hassan or the Antidote NGO founded by Diane Benscoter.

The parallel societal reactions, combined with the highlighted elements through Smart's lenses, demonstrate that conspiracy theories can manifest a quasi-religious meaning system around them and may function as temporally and locally unrestricted forms of alternative meaning systems. These fringe phenomena call scholars to reconsider previously established borders about religiosity and keep an open eye on other meaning providers existing parallelly or within a given socio-cultural environment. These new meaning providers utilize the same mechanisms as religions and – as seen through Smart's lenses – offer similar ultimate answers, coping mechanisms, solace, belonging, tranquility, enlightenment, greater purpose, and intense extraordinary experiences like any other more established religions do. They also have common rituals that provide extraordinary experiences and stir strong emotions embedded in a unique mythological and narrative setting. The dogmatic meanings of these stories are stabilized on a movement level; however, they are also flexible, giving opportunities for individual interpretation. The movement's innate societal structure establishes a similar type of morality and ethics alongside general call words, outlining acceptable, tolerable, unacceptable, and even punishable (or, in the conspiracy's case, opposable) forms of behavior. All these are embedded in common materiality: specialized ritual tools (bible, shofar, and even 'sanctified' guns), places of quasi-worship (connected to civil religion's places of reverence (Bellah, 1967)) and a shared iconography (MAGA hats, "Don't tread on me!" stickers and badges, WWGOWGA logos, etc.) are common denominators. Meanwhile, personal (*bodily* and *worn*) materials can individualize all these elements, allowing an even more intense involvement, personal self-representation, and individualization of belief and belonging.

Overview

Reaching the end of this exploration, I will summarize the paths I traversed in the last 200 pages and conclude the issues I discussed.

I started by examining how the unique 'in-between' conditions of the CEE region, discussing the inherited challenges and viewpoints that scholars from various academic backgrounds may have. I intentionally avoided defining religion initially, as such attempts would have limited and distorted the necessary openness of my systematizing morphological model. Concerning this issue, I noted that specific contexts in contemporary societies will always overwrite any universally aimed and enclosed definitions. From this understanding, I set forth with objective, value-neutral, transdisciplinary, open perspectives.

In the introduction, I outlined three ways of examining my subjects: philosophically from *above*, sociologically and historically from the *outside*, and with the toolkit provided by anthropology and contemporary ethnological fieldwork from the *inside*. I used each of these to supplement my original goal of finding a way of studying new religious and surrounding phenomena in a systematic manner, but without walling myself off from innovation and the inclusion of new elements, showing morphological similarity.[105]

To start my examinations, I first approached my subject from *above*. I examined the historical settings behind the crisis of prior meaning systems emerging from the 1960s in the

[105] Needless to say, in this examination, I turned away from numerous issues. Evidently, I didn't discuss any substantive side of our inquiry. Similarly, I did not deal with the evaluation and comparison of different value components of new religiosity. Nor did I indulge myself with thought experiments of nonreligious societies. Other criticisms, such as an America-centric introduction to the NRM paradigm can also be brought up against my concept; however, on this front, historical processes undoubtably verify my angle, as most contemporary NRMs (including the majority of my subjects) originated from the US and from the 1960s. In later chapters, I also overstep debates about political secularism and the criticism of the religious market theory. Evidently, I didn't interpret the secularization paradigm as the root of the discussed meaning crisis, as such interpretations would be oversimplifying and eventually misleading. Instead, I approached this issue from a variety of angles and presented a more detailed, and lifelike image.

United States. Here, I summarized how the disruption of civil religion's base tenets (biblical religiosity and utilitarian individualism) created a systematic meaning crisis in which the "*taken-for-granted*" meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 45–46) and the individual's own centrality in the world (Smart, 1996, p. 53) have been irreparably disrupted (Bellah, 1975, pp. 4–18). Following this path, I outlined a series of symptoms that followed this disruption: a *deep anthropological denial* rejecting the unwanted trajectories of history (Dawson, 1998, pp. 133–136), a type of *spiritual homelessness* of losing one's grasp on an envisioned image of the surrounding world (Berger et al., 1974, pp. 163–180), and a correlating *structural crisis of former meanings*, through which well-known social institutions turned into either utterly different forms or were hollowed out of their core meanings (Bellah & Glock, 2018, pp. 311–312). I also examined the reaction to these, outlining five different coping strategies. I underlined that each strategy aimed to establish new or renewed *intense* forms of *meaning*, *security*, and *belonging* while also providing a place for expressing *individuality* – a new theme in post-modernity's conditions. As part of a 'healthy competition' in the spiritual market, I dissected these coping strategies new religious movements and other meaning providers employed to tackle the effects of spiritual homelessness and the crisis of meanings. I have pointed out that the *return* and *reform* strategies turned backward, while the *reinvent*, *reorient*, and *redefine* methods attempted partial overhauls or complete replacements of former meaning systems.

Following these conclusions, I took a brief detour to explore the developments of secularization, establishing the basis of later case studies with the help of Peter Berger. I outlined that in postmodern pluralistic societies, religion does not only have to compete within its own sphere against other contenders but outside it as well, with similar meaning-providing 'secular' structures, such as nationalism, individualism, collectivism, and radical political- and social thought. Emphasizing this, I also created a theme-specific outline for secularism, stating that, at its core, it is a process of losing former ties to the *transcendent*, primarily as a side-effect of

rapid societal and technological innovation. In these contexts, it was the process that generated a feeling of being lost in a new, alien world that resembled the former, but, somehow, it was devoid of meaning and the well-known cultural navigational 'tools' and 'waypoints.'

Pressing on, I dissected the rational choice theory, outlining its utilizability in these examinations. Supplementing the historical introduction, I incorporated Stark and Bainbridge's theory of a constantly fluctuating religious economy (consisting of a *decline*, a *revival*, a *renewal*, then once again a *decline* stage, starting the cycle all over again). Moreover, I connected this theory to the tectonic shift of the 1960s spiritual marketplace, which still affects today's religiosity trends. Here, I also explained how the individual – by increasing his own agency – became *"both object and follower"* in a new religious environment described by 'fluid stability' and 'shapeable certainty' (Durkheim, 1982, p. 9). Overcoming nature itself was one of my key elements here, based on which I pointed out that humanity was no longer a "*creature*" (Smart, 1996, p. 42) but a lonesome conqueror of nature.

After this, I reconnected to my original line of thought with postmodernity's destruction of prior structures, establishing a type of "*incredulity towards metanarratives"* (Lyotard, 1984, pp. xxiv–xxv), which I labeled a general trait of contemporary thought. Here, I also stressed that in postmodern settings, prior grand narratives could no longer stand, as their positions have been taken by new narratives particular to the individual and not necessarily all-encompassing in their nature. Concluding the exploration from *above*, I stated that the overviewed tectonic shift in meanings and narratives in the 1960s completely changed how the meaning-seeking individuals and collectives approached issues of religiosity, meaning, identity, individuality, and belonging. Moving *outside* of such 'fluid stability,' I pressed on and examined how the academia attempted to find order in such effervescent chaos.

Beginning my examinations from the *outside*, I discussed the interconnected history of NRS with cultic studies and anti-cultism, focusing on their developments, as well as the power

struggles in academia and the general language. I dissected each component of the term 'NRM,' and outlined the necessity and benefits of a new value-neutral umbrella term in the scholarly vocabulary, pinpointing why the new term was better than the previously utilized "cult" and "sect" terminology. Nevertheless, I noted that even this new term is rudimental and faulty, as it still aims to be a collective and enclosed definition. I also mentioned the plethora of problems one such collective term can pose for scholars and ordinary 'users' alike.

Creating a stable theoretical basis in the first chapters, followed by a thorough exploration of general terminology, allowed me to finally reach the point where I could introduce my approach to the field of inquiry. As its first step, I introduced Smart's dual model in general contexts, detailing its benefits compared to other similar methods, like those of Glock or Allport. I noted that Smart's model is a better cross-cultural, dynamic, phenomenological, functionalist *mode of study* and that each of these components is invaluable and indispensable for reaching valid and objective results in the field of academic study of religions.

Moving forward, I examined how the framework's two major groups – historical and parahistorical dimensions – interact and strengthen each other. Understanding that all religions function alongside the same exact principal mechanisms, I outlined the formational phases of religions, starting from extraordinary experiences of religiously attuned individuals (*homo religiosus*). I detailed how experiencing the Other creates a desire to tell overarching stories about the encounter and – based on humanity's inherent religious interest – how these stories create procedural acts for replaying and reliving said vital experiences. I then established that this first 'self-strengthening' cycle brings about the creation of doctrines, connecting the first three dimensions to the later manifesting forms of ethics, social institutions, and shared materiality.

After completing the essential exchanges between dimensions, I disassembled the proposed model and examined every dimensional component individually to better understand their functions and interactions. At these steps, I also questioned whether Smart's components

would be sufficient for my inquiry. To establish a conclusive decision, I tested each dimension individually and corrected, amended, or replaced certain dated or lacking elements of the model while paying close attention to its integrity and scope. These modifications are, therefore, improvements rather than removals or simplifications.

In the emotional & experiential dimension, I followed Smart's classification of numinous and luminous experiences. I pointed out the subclass of bhakti and an intersection of panenhenic experiences. I dissected each experience individually, outlining their differences in orientation (turning either inwards or encountering the Other externally) and duration (experience, conversion, disposition). Supplementing my statements, I presented three brief case examinations to see whether this model would fit new religiosity. In these, I contextualized Scientology's auditioning as shamanic healing, the fulfillment with the Holy Spirit in Faith Church as a numinous experience, and Asatru's offerings as a unique form of bhakti. These explorations led to the assumption that new religious experiences aren't really that different from their more 'historical' counterparts.

Moving on, I approached the narrative & mythical dimension through the greater category of stories. Here, I stated that all myths and narratives have a common function. They establish (or supplement) centrality in the cosmos, affirm *continuity, and* designate *values* unaffected by time. I also added some modifications to Smart's structure to better encompass the variety of narratives in new religiosity (and historical ones, too). First, I fine-tuned myths of origin, renaming them to *myths of origin/separation* to emphasize the depiction of the world, which somehow is 'wrong' and requires reparation to a former- or improvement for a future 'more ideal' state. The ways of achieving this are discussed in *myths of restoration/salvation.* Moreover, to emphasize the 'newness' and the recent emergence of NRMs, I felt it necessary to create a distinct category for stories of charismatic leaders, prophets, and gurus (etc.), which I labeled *myths of charisma*. I connected each of these groups through the narrative dimension's

carrier elements of *decay, enlightenment,* and *revelation*. As I pointed out, each of these dynamics strengthens the other: *myths of separation* describe why the cosmos is in its *decaying* state. At the same time, *salvation* is *revealed* by the *charismatic leader,* who miraculously separated himself/herself from *decay* and now offers *salvation* via his/her way of *enlightenment.* These additions further nuanced the narratives and stories of religions, allowing a more focused examination of the founder's and leader's myths and enlightening how these affect the complex mythological systems of religions, both 'old' and 'new.'

Moving to the ritual & practical dimension, I followed Smart description of rites, labeling these as a series of repetitious and methodical *bodily acts* through which extraordinary experiences are achieved. Interpreting rituals as "*formal pattern*[s] *of behavior*," I noted that these enforce strict rules on bodily actions and have an easily understandable structure, as *li* (orderly behavior). I used Smart's system to differentiate outwards-facing *focused* and inward-facing *harnessing rituals*. In the former, I delineated *magic, sacrifice, worship* (pure worship and life as worship), and *rites of passage*. I agreed that the agency and power dynamisms within these open categories may vary significantly, ranging from simple offerings (not expecting any response) to sacrifices (interpreted as an equal-effort transaction between man and the *Other*), all the way to forcing the *transcendent* to carry out the practitioner's bidding (*magic*). Compared to these historical examples, I made a number of modifications. First, I noted the "diminution in the complexity of rituals" of new religiosity (Smart, 1996, p. 124): a shifting focus from traditional forms of *procedurality* and *repetition* towards individual *experience* and *emotional* ferment. I have also established the roots of dissolution in the roles of priesthood and intermediaries in this change. As a second note, I also mentioned that such a shift affected how the *transcendent* is approached and treated in contemporary religiosity. In new religiosity, the *Other* is always *forced* to reveal itself. Therefore, the previous interpretation of focused rituals as *bhakti* (a distancing and inherently passive type of worship) was no longer maintainable.

Rituals of new religiosity are more *magical* by their nature. Lastly, as a proper conclusion of Smart's first 'cycle,' I realized that I could see ourselves through these reflections on how we conduct our rituals in today's age. As historical rites are carried out with *certainty, procedurality,* and *repetition,* they create more of an orderly and spiritually infused world. Meanwhile, postmodernity's rushing rites are *intense, irregular,* and *lonesome,* hinting at a new (not necessarily better) type of livelihood and spiritual attunement in the contemporary age.

Exploring the doctrinal & philosophical dimension I modified Smart's sixfold approach (*attitudinal, definitional, descriptive, scientific, responsive, reconciliatory*), by adding an overlay to connect these mechanisms in the form of *doctrines of the self, the Other, the collective,* and *the external*. Moreover, connecting all these, I introduced *doctrines of charisma.* I established this differentiation with respect to the two core functions of doctrines: intermediating between other dimensions and strengthening their essential meanings. With the implementation of this overlay, I have also outlined the channels and forms for stabilizing religious self-perception and theological or dogmatic elements about the *Other*. Also, clarifying how certain philosophical and dogmatic concepts create cohesion by cementing the collective identity and stabilizing the ways of external interactions, I noted that each cluster of doctrines flows through the *doctrines of charisma*.

Concerning ethics and legalities, I employed some additional revisions. Smart's approach was either too vague – implying that morality in a cross-cultural sense can be condensed down to the plain notion of "being good" (Smart, 1996, pp. 198–199) – or was overly specific, losing its intended overarching search for common morphological elements. Although Smart wasn't necessarily incorrect with his general notions, I knew that borrowing Wallis's tripartite approach would strengthen the systematic approach. Inspired by this, I introduced restrictive/conservative, integrative/adoptive, and liberative/dissolving ethical standpoints, all compared to a containing majority society. This approach allowed me to differentiate movements

according to their collectivistic or individualistic notions and their restrictive or liberative approaches in regard to ethical and moral dilemmas.

Reaching the social & institutional dimension, I started by examining a greater roster of characters and figures, such as the priest, prophet, contemplative, avatāra, saint, martyr, (etc.). However, even Smart noted that these figures are bound to specific historical contexts. As such, they might not signify the same roles in new contexts of postmodernity, where chosen faith, personal worldviews, and individual beliefs overshine the importance of religious institutions and heritage. These realizations led me to reapproach the content of the social & institutional dimension, attempting to supplement it with a more 'atemporal' tool. Maintaining Smart's meta-, collective- and individual system, I reformed this dimension's structure by moving the centralized and loose hierarchic systems of religious institutions to the collective levels while retaining the conceptual meta-levels' meanings. With this the individual level gained significant enrichment, especially with the introduction of the *follower*, the *subordinate specialist*, the *charismatic leader*, and most impactfully through the entry of the *solitary practitioner*. With this last addition, I also significantly disrupted the social dimension. However, with a closer look, I realized that it fits well within the given model and supplements it with previously severely underattended aspects. First, it allowed me to shed light on the creative "*social laboratory"* functions of social innovations in NRMs (Dawson, 2007, p. 121). It highlighted the significance of individuality and its dynamics with collectivism: the former tries to maintain its separateness, yet it is driven to be part of something greater. This steady back-and-forth dance is another unique trait of contemporary religiosity, which I realized with the help of Smart's overlay.

Last, I explored the extensive material & artistic dimension. The *Dimensions of Sacred* covered these in a highly structured manner: it delineated *buildings* and *container environments* of the *transcendent* or its imprints and fragments in the physical world. I explored these

meticulously by paying close attention to the *embodiment*, *depiction*, and *interpretation* mechanisms. I progressed to discuss material objects associated with religiosity: *ritual clothing*, miscellaneous *worn materials*, *holy books*, associated writings, and even *bodily marks* (scarring, branding, or particular hair and beard styles). After this thorough exploration, I moved away from particularities and looked over these from a systematic angle. I concluded that both adorned and plain walls, rich and Puritan equipment, or even cleanliness and filth have the potential to invoke extraordinary feelings of something incomprehensively greater. I stressed that the specificities of materiality determine the type of religious experiences, as the seen, heard, touched, smelt, and tasted material forms (i.e., sensory experiences) are both primary determiners and providers of the mentioned extraordinary and utterly *Other* experiences. Through this conclusion, I have pinpointed a critical function of materiality: it makes something previously intangible and incomprehensible more tangible and 'digestible' for the involved. I have also illustrated this function in new religiosity in two brief explorations. Damanhur's decorated walls and extensive artistic production illuminated how individuality can be expressed through material production and how the previously discussed social functions dissolve in new religiosity's material front. I touched upon bricolage religiosity while moving toward the homogenizing aspects of materiality. This latter I explored through the case of the 'orange people' of Rajneespunam, where I clarified the effects of homogeneity, dissolving individuality into something safer that resembles the "*taken for granted*" meanings I mentioned in the introduction (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, pp. 45–46). With these two outlooks, I shed light on how materiality's usage is both an individualizing and collectivizing tool.

Finally, I also discussed texts in new religiosity, where I noted more significant differences compared to historical religiosity's similar materials. First, I stated that new religiosity has significantly diverse and higher textual output than its predecessors. Second, I discussed a variety of ways through which NRMs relate to prior texts (incorporation, innovation, addition,

invention). Third, I realized that NRMs' sacred texts are no longer associated with special treatment. Lastly, I added a necessary improvement to Smart's 1996 observations, which he couldn't predict: the significance of digital textuality and materiality that completely reshapes how material elements in NRMs – especially religious texts – are approached and studied.

After concluding the aforementioned 'static' examinations, I explored how the model fares as an overlay for already concluded research in dynamic settings. Taking up the previously mentioned *inside look* led me to the realization that religiosity's borders might be even further out than I expected, as I outlined religious (more precisely quasi-religious) structures and functionalities in subcultures, festivals, and even within conspiracy groups. My exploration of Burning Man allowed me to reconnect to the beginning of the dissertation and once again underline humanity's inherently religious attunement. This concrete example illustrated that even today, certain alienated ones find extraordinary experiences in unconventional settings, reestablishing their own *illud tempus* and *illud spatium* at festivals, concerts and mass events through utilizing the channels of religion, Smart so precisely outlined. Therefore, my original argument – stating that in postmodern contexts, religiosity's meaning-providing functions do not diminish but instead transform and 'contaminate' other spheres – has been once again verified. Furthermore, I have brought concrete proof that the new conditions may even force 'secular' environments to manifest similar carriers of *intensity, meaning, security, belonging* – and, most importantly – ways for expressing *individuality* while being part of something greater.

Concluding remarks

During this dissertation, I made several forward-thinking alterations to Smart's original framework. Although these modifications may raise the question of whether the modified system could still be considered 'Smartian,' I would argue that my contributions have shown that his seven lenses are utilizable in the case of new religiosity and surrounding phenomena. My brief explorations illustrated that the model functions exceptionally well both as a 'static'

and a dynamic mode for study for these subjects. Furthermore, the additions and modifications I employed along the way were able to reopen seemingly concluded prior debates about religiosity's forms, limitations, and place in our contemporary world. As such, I consider this model an efficient way of studying new religiosity and leave the reader to evaluate whether the model is still 'Smartian' or not.

In summary, I believe that I have achieved my initial goal of systematizing the NRM emergence and providing a new, systematic framework in which I can discuss and disseminate the collective phenomena and its particular cases. The most 'valuable' realization from my end, however, was finally achieving a meaningful connection to Barker's notions, who stated that there isn't *really* anything new about new religiosity besides their relatively young age and rapid development (Barker, 1998, pp. 10–12). Smart's multi-dimensional approach clearly proved this and connected me – and I hope the reader as well – back to the beginning steps with Greely, stating that the subject of "human religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed very notably since the late Ice Age." (Greeley, 1972, pp. 1–3). As such, I conclude my dissertation with the same reminder from Eileen Barker, who pointed out that my subject is no different and, as such, shall be studied with the same rigor and passion as any other subject of the academic study of religions:

> "Two and a half millennia ago, a young man abandoned his wife and young son, found the path to enlightenment, […]. Two millennia ago, a young artisan told his disciples they had to be prepared to sever all ties with their families if they wanted to follow him; […] Roughly half a millennium later, another new religion was asking its followers to submit and surrender to God, to the faith and to the practice revealed by a young man who had visions and heard voices whereby God told him to preach against the prevailing religious practices. […] there is nothing new about new religions. They have been around for years." (Barker, 1998, pp. 10–12)

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NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott Nemes Márk a Szegedi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Karának doktorjelöltje ezennel büntetőjogi felelősségem tudatában nyilatkozom és aláírásommal igazolom, hogy

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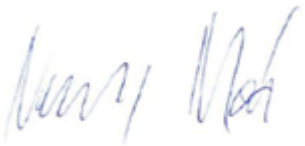
című doktori disszertációm saját, önálló munkám; az abban hivatkozott nyomtatott és elektronikus szakirodalom felhasználása a szerzői jogok nemzetközi szabályainak megfelelően készült.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy doktori disszertáció esetén plágiumnak számít:

- szószerinti idézet közlése idézőjel és hivatkozás megjelölése nélkül;
- tartalmi idézet hivatkozás megjelölése nélkül;
- más publikált gondolatainak saját gondolatként való feltüntetése.

Alulírott kijelentem, hogy a plágium fogalmát megismertem, és tudomásul veszem, hogy plágium esetén szakdolgozatom visszautasításra kerül.

Szeged, 2024 október 20.



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