What Counts as Religion in Sociology?
What Counts as Religion in Sociology?
The problem of religiosity in sociological methodology

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Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing critical discussion within the sociology of religion by focusing on the seldom considered perspective of methodology. As such, it consists of a theoretical part that problematizes the ways in which religion has been analyzed, and an empirical part that develops how religiosity can be approached in sociological studies. The thesis seeks, in other words, to contribute to how sociologists analyze religion, and addresses a research problem that has gained new relevance in the aftermath of criticism of the secularization paradigm. In the theoretical part, the assumptions underlying the ways in which religion is studied are revisited, as is the impact that these have had as far as the empirical study of religion is concerned in one of the countries often assumed to be secularized – i.e. Sweden. The empirical part of the thesis is comprised of three studies based on the latest European Value Survey, qualitative interviews and the Blogosphere on religion-related content (n=220000 blog posts). The results from these studies are used to reconsider the religious-mainstream, the “package”-like assumptions often made about affiliation, belief and practice, as well as the fact that the study of religiosity tends to be relegated to the periphery of the imagination of sociologists of religion. The thesis proposes that if we want to study religion in a lay people sensitive way we cannot continue to overlook their understandings of the sacred, the ways in which they regard their own religiosity, and the fact that their affiliation, belief and practice do not necessarily fit the expectations of established ways of analyzing religion.

Keywords: sociology of religion, theory and method, religious affiliation, religious beliefs, religious practice, religious mainstream, sacred, religiosity, spirituality, secularization, Sweden

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To Johan, Julius and Holly
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Sometimes in life we are given an opportunity to choose the best from two worlds. Such an opportunity was given to me some years ago when I was working as a research assistant and administrator for collecting church statistics at the Church of Sweden's research department. I was given this position after studying history and sociology of religion at Uppsala University. At work I remember that I quickly realized that we were asking a number of questions in our standard questionnaires that did not really make sense to the people who were supposed to answer them. Many phone calls from people feeling puzzled about how to fill in our questionnaires made me think along such lines. For sure, I thought, if people do not understand the questions in the way in which they were intended to be understood, then that must be a problem for the conclusions we make based on the answers we get. Work provided me with an opportunity to study these matters more systematically. The Church of Sweden Education, Research and Cultural Board, at this time chaired by Britas-Lennart Eriksson and convened by Associate Prof. Anne-Louise Eriksson, funded doctoral projects. I applied for one of these doctoral project grants and was very happy to hear that my application was approved for funding. The typical candidate for this grant (that very generously allowed for funding for the whole doctoral period) was an ordained priest who wished to pursue her or his studies in theology. To the best of my knowledge, I'm the only one who has received this grant for writing a thesis in the social sciences. This is how I got to bring two worlds together.

For the project that I was about to embark on this background meant that I had the advantage of discussing my topic - what to actually make of how religion is measured - with some of the most esteemed scholars within my field. Initially, Prof. Thorleif Pettersson (Uppsala University) was very important for the way which I chose to approach my research topic. Pettersson, being a member of the steering committee of the World Value Survey project, was very experienced in how to conduct large scale, cross-national survey investigations. Also, from the very beginning of this project, I had the opportunity to talk about the topics I was interested in with Prof. Grace Davie (Exeter University). She gave me insights into what religion means in a comparative perspective and advised me never to view Sweden in isolation but as a part of a bigger picture. As a research assistant I was also asked to participate in a study intended to follow up on Prof. Paul Heelas (Erasmus University) and Prof. Linda Woodhead’s (Lancaster University) Kendal
project on the growth of alternative spirituality. In conversation with Paul and Linda, complexity was added to my questions about how religion is measured. In addition to these people there were an active research milieu in Uppsala were people such as Prof. Mia Lövheim (Uppsala University) and Associate Prof. Jonas Bromander (Church of Sweden) participated.

The second world - if I may use that expression - that my doctoral project gave me the opportunity to draw insights from was the Department of Sociology at Uppsala University. Compared with the research milieu I was participating in prior to being accepted as a doctoral student at the department of sociology, this department was much bigger. Here, too, I found that many of the researchers and my fellow doctoral students were glad to discuss all matters relating to sociology and this gave me a broader frame of reference for how topics specific to the sociology of religion might be perceived from the perspective of mainstream sociology. I am therefore grateful to all the researchers, doctoral students and undergraduate students that I have been able to talk to about my research topic.

With this background, the doctoral thesis I began to work with soon proved to be about a broad topic that didn't fit the traditional format of a doctoral thesis. The problem was that I did not realize that this was the case. The person who insightfully recognized the character of what I was doing and helped me turn my scattered argumentation and diverse empirical studies into a dissertation is my main supervisor, Prof. Sandra Torres (Uppsala University). Sandra has, in a brilliant way, been there for me as I tried to take on the art of writing academic English. I am honored and delighted that she has done this for me and my most sincere thanks goes out to her for this work.

My doctoral project has also been supported by my two supplementary supervisors: Prof. Jørgen Straarup (Södertörn University College) and Prof. Sverker Sikström (Lund University). I’m grateful for the way in which Jørgen has shared with me his knowledge in the history and theory of our joint discipline, the sociology of religion. With Jørgen’s help several misunderstandings of theory and factual errors were avoided. I would like to thank Sverker for helping me with the analyses in Chapter 6, which are based on Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA). Sverker has shared with me many of the statistical applications of LSA that he has developed and I’m very glad for all the help I have received.

I am also very grateful for all support Prof. Grace Davie (Exeter University) has given me throughout the years I worked with issues related to the sociology of religion. Grace and I met when she visited Uppsala University in 2000 and we have remained in contact about minor and major aspects of academic life (even before I started the doctoral program in sociology). She supported some of my most crucial decisions in the work with this thesis and for that I would like to express my gratitude. Moreover, words cannot express how happy I am that Grace took the time to read the whole manuscript
for the final seminar, providing me with some invaluable recommendations for how to revise the text into a thesis. The final seminar provided insights for how to revise the thesis thanks to the work of Philip K. Creswell who read the manuscript and acted as an opponent together with Grace.

Prior to the final seminar, Prof. Anders Bäckström (Uppsala University), Prof. Curt Dahlgren (Lund University) and Associate Prof. Anders Sjöborg (Uppsala University) had read and provided insightful comments on Chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis. Even earlier than this, I have had many opportunities to discuss my work at the higher seminar in Sociology of Religion, chaired by Prof. Mia Löveheim (Uppsala University). I would like to thank the regular participants of this seminar that (in alphabetical order and without titles) are: Marta Axner, Maxmilian Broberg, Anders Bäckstöm, Maria Klingenberg, Maria Liljas, Jonas Lindberg, Evelina Lundmark, Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon, Vanja Mosbach, Oriol Poveda, Anders Sjöborg, Josephine Sundqvist, Johan Wejryd and Anneli Winell. Also, there is a broader community of researchers with an interest in the sociology of religion that meet more occasionally, sometimes in Uppsala and, during my time as a doctoral student, sometimes in Lund. Regular participants (in alphabetical order and without titles) at these occasions have been: Tomas Axelsson, Curt Dahlgren, Göran Gustafsson, Anders Lundberg, Magdalena Nordin and Jørgen Straarup. All these people have provided me with insightful comments for how to proceed with my work.

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In the beginning of this project, I was helped by Prof. Thorleif Pettersson (Uppsala University) who unfortunately no longer is with us. Among other things, Thorleif inspired me to use semantic based methods to supplement survey data. He was of the opinion that something semantic was needed as a supplement to survey results in order for us to gain a fuller understanding of what survey results mean. Towards the end of this project, in a period crucial for the finalizing of this project, Prof. Mattias Gardell (Uppsala University) has expressed a similar support for paying attention to semantics. I am very glad for this support, which has meant a lot to me.

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Last but not least, I want to give a great, big thank you to my family and friends – you are the best! Thanks to my parents, my sister and brother (and families). Thanks for giving of your time when I most needed it. Many thanks, as well, to my family-in-law. Especially, thanks to all the girls – Mathilde, Ingrid, Sigrid – who have entered the family during the time it took for me to write this thesis. Great lazy summers lay ahead of us all, I’m sure. Without great friends nothing is possible! I would like to thank Jenny Brännström and her family and Ulrik Ågren for being patient with me and giving me opportunities to think about other things than work.

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on her book practically all the time. Thank you all for giving me the privilege to do everything but writing when at home! This book is dedicated to you.

Erika Willander
Uppsala in August, 2014
Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................. 15
  The aim and objectives of the thesis .......................................................... 23
  Outline of the thesis .................................................................................. 24

Chapter 2: Revisiting a Research Practice ....................................................... 27
  The debate on how to define religion ....................................................... 31
  Case in point: ‘Religion in Dimensions’ .................................................. 38
  Contemporary research orientations ......................................................... 48
  ‘Assessing religion’: On salient characteristics of a research orientation ............................................................................................ 50
  ‘Assessing spirituality’: An alternative research orientation? ............. 58
  Religion and Spirituality: On shared assumptions ............................... 63
  Problematizing a research practice and its assumptions ...................... 65

Chapter 3: Revisiting a Research Site ........................................................... 67
  Researching Sweden: the first 100 years (1880-1980) .................................. 71
  Berndt Gustafsson and the notion of “folk religion” .................................. 81
  Sweden in new comparative perspectives (1990-2013) ............................. 88
  New cross-national comparisons ........................................................... 90
  New conceptual comparisons .............................................................. 95
  New historical comparisons ...............................................................100
  Problematizing an implementation of a research practice ...................... 107

Chapter 4: Reconsidering the ‘Religious Mainstream’ .................................. 111
  Continuity and change in patterns of religious affiliation, practice and belief.......................................................................................................115
  Trends in affiliation 1982--2010 .......................................................... 117
  Trends in practice 1982--2010 ........................................................... 120
  Trends in beliefs 1982--2010 ............................................................. 123
  On mainstreams and margins: new ways of understanding ................. 125
  On mainstream and marginal beliefs .................................................... 131
  Towards making sense of disparate tendencies: Implications for reconsidering the ‘religious mainstream’ ..................................................... 139

Chapter 5: Reconsidering the ‘Religious Sacred’ ....................................... 143
  The procedure of theorizing despite an established research practice.... 146
  Choosing a sample – a case of ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’ . 147
Imagine that you are asked to fill in a survey questionnaire exploring people’s values and beliefs. This scenario is quite likely since people’s values and beliefs have been regularly surveyed since the 1980s in projects covering up to 90 percent of the world’s population.¹ After answering a number of questions you are asked the following:

Which of the following statements comes closest to your beliefs?²
a) There is a personal God.
b) There is some sort of spirit or life force.
c) I don’t really know what to think.
d) I don’t really think that there is any sort of spirit, God or life force.

For this question, you are asked to pick one of the predefined statements about your beliefs. The reason why you are asked to pick one statement is that the researchers who wrote this survey questionnaire expected the statements to be clearly distinct (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013). Furthermore, they expected the statements to investigate a key difference between religion and non-religion (cf., Harding et al. 1986). This means that the predefined statements above are invested with some very specific expectations concerning what people are meant to think of when picking one of the statements as their answer. To be precise, the statement about “a personal God” is assumed to stand for a transcendent description of the sacred in which the sacred exists in another world, beyond this world. By contrast, the statement “there is some spirit or life force” is taken to refer to an immanent description of the sacred for which the sacred is perceived to be a holistic entity, present in everything and everyone. There is also a statement that leaves the sacred

¹ These figures come from the largest cross-national survey project on values and beliefs, namely, the World Value Survey (WVS). Information on this project’s coverage and number of participants is found at the website http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp.
² This question comes from the European Value Study (EVS) which is a cross-national large-N survey project collected in four waves since 1981 in Europe. For graphical overviews of European results see: http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/evs/research/themes/religion/. The exact survey questionnaire is also used globally by the World Value Survey (WVS). Comparable survey questions are also found in other large-N and longitudinal survey projects used for statistics on religion, for example, the European Social Survey (ESS), Gallup and International Social Survey Project (ISSP). These comparable questions are outlined, compared and discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
undescribed and a statement which represents rejection of beliefs related to “spirit, God or life force”. Taken together this means that regardless of what the statements above made you think of, they are meant to evoke your principal standpoint on how the sacred is described.

To be precise, to make your choice between the predefined statements, you are expected to think about how the supernatural relates to the natural and to humans. Thus, the focus is the coherent images of these relations provided by belief systems. Furthermore, the belief system of your choice should be one that you learned during your “formative years” (e.g. Inglehart 2006). Accordingly, the statements are not intended to make you think about how questions concerning God and beliefs are typically discussed around you – neither among your family and friends nor in the general media flow. That is to say, the statements are not intended to be about what is near at hand or present for people. They are not even about your own moral principles, but about what religion - generically defined - presumably would expect you to believe to count you as an adherent.

If the predefined statements did not make you think of belief systems or differences in describing the sacred at all, the chances are that you are not alone. In fact, as Voas (2009) has shown, about half of the European population answer survey questions, such as the one discussed here, in ways which lead sociologists to describe the respondents as neither fully religious nor fully non-religious. One explanation for this is that the standard ways of analyzing religion are ill-equipped to analyze religion outside Christian (and American) congregations (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013). Accordingly, this criticism suggests that there exist systematic differences between what the survey questions and the survey answers are taken to stand for. It is this gap - between academic expectations of religion and non-academic yet widespread understandings of the same - which the current thesis sets out to bridge.

It is against this background that the present thesis can be described as an attempt to come to terms with some methodological assumptions currently underlying the sociological study of religion. At present, the congregation-centered way of studying religion through survey questions has been in use for more than 30 years (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013). Moreover, the usage of survey questions such as the one about a “personal God” has been translated to surveys worldwide and answered by several hundred thousand people (e.g. Inglehart 2006). To do this, persistent criticisms of the assumptions supporting today’s conventional way of analyzing religion (see, for example, Means 1970; Shiner 1967; Shils 1957; Robertson 1970) have been over-

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3 The typical meanings of these statements will be discussed further in Chapter 2. For future reference the typical meanings referred to here are derived from Glock and Stark (1965) and the interpretation of their operationalization was performed by Harding et al. (1986) for the analysis of the first wave of the EVS data.
looked. Therefore, it can be argued that the problem under discussion is old but not yet solved and that there is arguably a need to come to terms with some often criticized assumptions.

It should be clearly stated that the present attempt to come to terms with methodological assumptions is not restricted to a discussion about specific wordings of specific survey questions. On the contrary, and as discussed at more length in Chapter 2, several comparable survey questions have been used to distinguish between different belief systems (e.g. religious and non-religious). Moreover, the answers to these survey questions about beliefs have been combined with answers to other questions since the established way of studying religion tends to understand the phenomenon called religion as multidimensional (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Simply focusing on one survey question at the detailed level of its specific wording would therefore not be a sufficient analytical strategy if the intention is to come to terms with more conceptually and less technically oriented assumptions within the sociological study of religion.

Furthermore, the greater part of the critical discussion on the current way of conducting research has focused on identifying problems within the sociology of religion (e.g. Beckford 2003; Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013; Smith 2008). Underneath this broad tendency of identifying problems in current research lies a more specific tendency related to the topic under discussion. Because the identified problems within the sociology of religion tend to be associated with the use of survey methodology (i.e. Wuthnow 2011) it is concluded that quantitative methods in general perform poorly when used to address the methodological problems taken to exist within the field. Because of this specific tendency in the recent discussion related to the topic of this thesis, it should be emphasized that the present thesis does not exclude the use of quantitative methods. Quite the opposite, the analysis presented in Chapter 4 is based on the exact same survey question as the one used to open this introduction. In addition, Chapter 6 presents a new statistical method that is used in order to systematically identify the most typical discussions, topics and questions associated with religion today. Accordingly, the critical examination of how religion typically has been analyzed through surveys is not intended to be a criticism of survey methodology in general. Instead, the focus is on assumptions underlying specific methodological problems within the sociological study of religion. By working with (instead of against) quantitative methods and/or survey methodology, the present thesis is intended to contribute to the ongoing critical reflection within the sociology of religion with results from a seldom considered perspective.

Taken together, the present focus on the underlying assumptions for the sociological study of religion, calls for a conceptual starting point that admittedly differs from the conventional standards. Survey questions, such as the one discussed in this introduction, have been used to categorize people as either religious or non-religious. As already suggested in this introduction and
further elaborated in Chapter 2, these categories of individuals correspond with definitions of religion and different forms of non-religion as belief systems. From this perspective it makes sense to explain religion by beliefs, and treat acceptance of a transcendent description of the sacred as religion, an immanent description of the sacred as alternative religion, and rejection of the same descriptions of the sacred as non-religion. This difference between belief systems, however, does not convey any discrepancies between religion at a belief system level and its adherents. This is why, in order to empirically observe and conceptually discuss such discrepancies, a distinction between religion and religiosity is advocated in this thesis. Simmel (1955) wrote insightfully about such differences between religions’ meanings of the sacred and the meanings which people tended to associate with the sacred. Moreover, in line with Laerman’s 2006 observation, Simmel’s distinction between religion and religiosity has not been widely used in the sociology of religion. Therefore, applying Simmel’s distinction between religion and religiosity would differ from the current conventions in sociology of religion.

Specifically, Simmel (1955) understands religiosity to be the subjective root of religion. By comparison, religion is understood by Simmel as an abstract unity, similar to a society or state. Religion, society and state, so to speak, stand above individuals as abstract and remote orders of unity. Religion, in Simmel’s (1955) opinion, “is the purest form of unity in society, raised above all concrete individualities” (ibid: 13). Because society and therefore also religion existed before and will exist after any single individual, the content religion defines as sacred may appear predefined and fixed, remote and abstracted into principles detached from the unique lives of individuals. In contrast to religion, Simmel writes about religiosity as something that is continually reshaped and, therefore, unfinished. It is linked to subjective feelings of what people, here and now, recognize to be of religious character. The usefulness of Simmel’s distinction is inherited in his prediction that the relation between religion and religiosity change over time and between societies. In times and places where religion is so abstract that it does not relate to a concrete level of people’s individual lives, then religion and religiosity will be separated. In principle, this also means that the opposite can be the case. That is, the same elements are described as religious by religion and religiosity. Under such conditions there is no discrepancy between the belief system level of religion and the way the sacred is described by people. In modern times, Simmel (1955) holds that such a perfect match between religion and religiosity is, nevertheless, an unlikely empirical phenomenon.

The analytical advantage of distinguishing religion from religiosity can, perhaps, be further explained with reference to ordinary dictionaries. According to the Oxford Dictionary⁴, for example, the words ‘religion’ and

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‘religiosity’ are both nouns, while the word ‘religious’ is both a noun and an adjective. This means that ‘the religious’ as an adjective can be used for studying the inside of both religion and religiosity as defined by Simmel (1955). To be more precise, there are a range of things which can, in principle, be recognized as the religious for religion and religiosity. However, all these things are subject to processes of selection. This means that some things are referred to as religious while others are not. For religion as an abstract unity, the process of selection may, for example, be visible in sacred texts and the way these are interpreted and preached by representatives of religious organizations. Broadly speaking, religion may in this way be thought of as Catholicism and Protestantism and the local versions of these traditions. For religiosity, the process of selection might be observable in recurring patterns of that which people typically draw attention to as having religious meaning to them in communication with others. One example of religiosity may therefore be the way in which acceptance of religious dogma is typically discussed in everyday life. If, for example, religious people and non-religious people alike try to avoid being labeled as “dogmatic”, as Wuthnow’s (2012) study on the topic suggests, this has implications for how the religious is discussed. Under such circumstances, expressing belief while avoiding being labeled dogmatic may be part of the culturally meaningful inside of religiosity.

The culturally meaningful inside of religion and religiosity will be discussed in this thesis in terms of ‘cultural meaning’. Based on the writings of Alexander (2003, 2011) it is suggested that studying ‘cultural meaning’ has a value, because it is the aspects of the religious which people actually talk about which they also act upon and hold to be meaningful explanations for what is happening in the world and to themselves. The aspects of the ‘religious’ which are invested with ‘cultural meaning’ do not need to be either historically or theologically correct to be socially relevant. This is how; the analytical starting point of ‘cultural meaning’ may also support empirical observations suitable for a critical discussion of taken for granted research assumptions.

5 This definition of cultural meaning draws loosely on Alexander’s (2003, 2011) cultural sociology. Alexander (2011) explains that all social processes have an inside that holds “cultural power”. Consider, for example, Alexander’s (2011) example with the revolution in Egypt during the Arab spring. According to Alexander, an array of social facts can, in principle, explain the revolution. However, that all these social facts potentially can explain the revolution does not mean that all of them will be chosen as legitimate explanations by the people experiencing the revolution. Alexander (2011) clarifies: “social facts do not speak. It is the representations of the social facts that do the talking” (ibid: 3). Furthermore, it is the explanations which get talked about that therefore are invested with “cultural power”. These selected explanations become representations that are collective in nature. It is this type of collective representation achieved by communication between individuals loosely sharing experiences of a historical process which is referred to as ‘cultural’ in this thesis.
Starting with a distinction between religion and religiosity, even the sacred can be treated as a sociological concept. That is, the ‘cultural meanings’ of the ‘religious’ sacred can be studied in the same manner as, for example, ‘religious’ participation in church services such as baptisms or funerals. What matters for the analytical approach used here is whether or not attention is drawn to the phenomenon in question being ‘religious’. For the example of baptism, it is ‘religious’ in a ‘cultural meaning’ for the parents of the child if they draw attention to the baptism as ‘religious’. Wuthnow (1994) explains that when the research subject is the sacred, this type of logic has proved to be controversial. This is because in most Western religious teachings, the sacred is beyond the control of humans. Accordingly, the sacred is taken to stand above all forms of human interference and is not, in any way, dependent on the way in which people talk about the sacred. However, as Beckford (2003) clarified, notwithstanding the aspects of the sacred which cannot be studied by the methods available in sociology, the sacred also has a cultural aspect to it. In line with Beckford’s (2003) reasoning, the present thesis makes no claims to study any aspect of the sacred beyond the ‘cultural meanings’ available to sociological methodology.

The usefulness of the Simmelian approach for distinguishing religion from religiosity can also be described in line with Mills’ ([1959]/2000) ambition and idea of evoking the “sociological imagination”. According to Mills, the “sociological imagination” is needed because “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (ibid: 3). It is this duality of social reality which constitutes sociology’s most pressing challenge yet also its most promising opportunity. To understand how this duality affects them, people do not need more facts or skills reasons Mills, but:

What they need or feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what might be happening within themselves. (Mills [1959]/2000:5)

In Mills’ vision the “sociological imagination” was to be accomplished by overcoming the gap caused by sociologists’ tendency to either do “grand theory” or “abstracted empiricism”. In the case of the former, theory should not be so abstract and remote that it loses its connection with empirical observations. Mills’ ([1959]/2000) prime example of excessive use of “grand theory” was the American functionalist school of thought exemplified by Parsons’ theorizing (ibid: 27-35). The opposite pole of “grand theory” was “abstracted empiricism”. The danger of “abstracted empiricism” arises when investigations start with the scientific method and end with nothing but the scientific method. Mills claimed that when “abstracted empiricism” becomes the dominant research practice in any sociological field of inquiry or re-
search milieu, it will create a huge pile of facts that are irrelevant to theoretically grounded research questions.

Simmel’s (1955) distinction between religion and religiosity relates to Mills’ promise of the “sociological imagination” because it makes it possible to describe the problem at hand as something which occurs when very abstract theory is used to underpin a very practical and statistically oriented research practice. For Simmel (1955), the distinction between religion and religiosity was useful for interpreting religious change. The content of individuals’ religiosity can overlap with the content that religious traditions or organizations define as religion. Simmel stipulated that under conditions of overlap, religion will hold a strong position in society. By contrast, however, if the two differ and there is a gap between religion and religiosity, religion will not be supported by religiosity. Under conditions of difference, religion would almost be a hollow institution, lacking the support or understanding of people. For the purposes of this thesis, this means that religiosity would be difficult to grasp or interpret from the point of religion’s expectations. Moreover, in Simmel’s (1955) view, religion and religiosity are likely to differ when religion is filled with abstract content, without reference to everyday language and thought. That is, much as “grand theory” cannot be used to inform “lucid summations of what is going on” (Mills [1959]/2000) because it is overly abstracted theory, religion may not be the most useful analytical tool for understanding religiosity if overly abstracted. Simmel (1955) applied this general principle to diagnose the social reality he observed. In this thesis, however, the principle that religion and religiosity are likely to differ when religion is filled with abstract content is applied to the methodological focus of this thesis.

At this stage of this introduction something should be said about how this thesis attempts to come to terms with methodological assumptions in a way which will contribute to an already ongoing discussion about methodology within the sociology of religion (e.g. Beckford 2003; Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013). One part of this contribution rests on the continued use of quantitative methods that Wuthnow (2011), for example, has criticized for not bridging already identified gaps between theory and method within the sociology of religion. Concretely, this will take the form of a new analysis and interpretation of the EVS data in Chapter 4 and the introduction of a new method (Latent Semantic Analysis) for the sociological study of religion in Chapter 6. This new method will be used for identifying the most typical themes associated with religion, spirituality and the sacred in the wide-ranging communication found in the Blogosphere.

Another part of this contribution is intended to come from the choice of empirical case. All empirical material analyzed in this thesis has been collected in Sweden. In the context under discussion here, Sweden is an extreme case in at least two ways. Similar to the sociology of religion in Scandinavia in general, Beckford (2006) notes that in Sweden: “it seems that the balance
between empirical investigation and theoretical thinking is weighted towards the former” (ibid: 5). This observation inspires Beckford to conclude that the sociology of religion in Sweden might be described as a case of what Mills’ ([1959]/2000) referred to as “abstracted empiricism”. In addition, since no conscious attempt was made to establish “a particular school of thought in the sociology of religion in Sweden” (Gustafsson, G 2005:149), Beckford suspects that this domestic milieu was left to use Anglo-American concepts to interpret local findings. These specificities connected with the sociology of religion in Sweden imply that Swedish data has not been used to deliberately carve out in what ways the Anglo-American assumptions fit and do not fit the results from Sweden as a research site. Because of this, the results from Sweden have not previously been synthesized in a way which deliberately compares these findings with the assumptions used in the standard ways of analyzing religion within the sociology of religion.

Sweden has also been portrayed as an extreme case in terms of how people living in Sweden answer surveys on beliefs and values (e.g. Inglehart and Barker 2000; Heelas 2007; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Returning to the survey question mentioned at the beginning it can be noticed that if you were living in Sweden and you received the EVS survey questionnaire you would probably lean towards answering “There is some sort of spirit or life force”. Since the first collection wave of EVS data, about half of the people living in Sweden have answered in this way. In addition, approximately 20 percent have answered that they “Don’t really know what to think”. This leaves about 30 percent of the respondents answering in accordance with what the researchers who wrote the questions expected of the “religious” and the “non-religious”, namely: “There is a personal God” (religious) and “I don’t really think that there is any sort of spirit, God or life force” (non-religious). Since, on average, about half of the population fall into the category of neither fully religious nor fully non-religious in Europe (Voas 2009), these figures from Sweden are relatively high. The majority of answers – 70 percent of the population – fall into that sliding scale of (almost) non-religion. Therefore, the results suggest that there might be exceptionally high rates of what Voas (2009) perceives as fuzzy (almost) non-religion in this country. The great extent of this behavior, taken to be deviant or paradoxical by many observers of cross-national data, makes Sweden an extreme empirical case for the topic discussed here.

Before going into the presentations of the studies conducted for this thesis, it might be useful to note that the method-developing aspect of this thesis is intended to be an attempt to engage with some basic yet unsettled issues within sociology in general. Specifically, this concerns how to empirically study social aspects of human life and use this information to inform and

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6 This is why Chapter 3 is based on an extensive review of empirical results from Sweden and the frames of references used to interpret these results.
develop social theory. In line with Mills ([1959]/2000), discussed earlier, the methodological balancing act includes both carrying out empirical research without letting methodological techniques set the research agenda and the art of constructing sociological concepts without losing track of how theory reasons with empirical findings. This methodological exploration is called for as present day sociology is faced with some extraordinary methodological challenges. As pointed out by the extensive reviews (e.g. Price 2011; Groves 2011) published in Public Opinion Quarterly looking back on 75 years of public opinion research using polls: at the same time as the willingness to answer surveys is declining rapidly, we are facing new possibilities to retrieve information relevant to social scientific research through the massive information generated on the Internet. Following Mills, the task of this thesis can be described as an inquiry into how to deal with these changed conditions for empirical sociological research without letting new methodological techniques set the research agenda. That entails both reconsidering the use of surveys and employing new techniques for empirical inquiry. Furthermore, in the spirit of Mills’ call for “sociological imagination”, this means critically discussing how we can use the information retrieved by empirical methods to advance sociological theories. With this said, attention will now be turned to the aims and objectives of the thesis.

The aim and objectives of the thesis

This thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing critical discussion within the sociology of religion (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Davie 2013; Smilde and May 2010; Smith et al. 2013; Wuthnow 2011) by focusing on a seldom considered perspective of methodology.

Accordingly, the objectives of this thesis are:

I To problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies.

II To develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies.

7 There are, of course, differences between studying opinions and religion at individual level using surveys. Nevertheless, restrictions set by the methodological technique (i.e. survey research) are an area where the two topics considerably overlap and, thus, the methodological restrictions can be discussed as one, regardless of the differences in the object of study. The differences (and the many parallels) between the operationalization of public opinions and religion at individual level measured as a value-orientation will also be further addressed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
The present aim is justified on two grounds. First, the problem addressed has persistently been identified as troublesome and continues to inspire its critics to write on its consequences (e.g. Smith et al. 2013). Many of the first identified problematic aspects, such as the excessive focus on church-oriented religion leaving religion outside congregations under-researched (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Luckmann [1967]/1974), have not been addressed in ways that have altered the standard ways of analyzing religion. Second, although the problem is not new it has renewed relevance. This relevance is due to the more general turn in the sociological debate which, following Berger (1999), Casanova (1994; 2006) and Hadden (1987), among others, has started to question the adequacy of explaining the state of religion with secularization theories. Instead of settling the debate with a new paradigm replacing secularization theories, the sociology of religion has entered a stage which Smilde and May call “critical paradigmatic reflection” (ibid:1). A major part of this reflection is the critical discussion about methodology (e.g. Beckford 2003; Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013; Wuthnow 2011). However, there is a tendency within this discussion to either settle for identifying the methodological problems at hand or to equate quantitative methods with the methodological problem under discussion in ways that suggest that quantitative approaches are especially ill-equipped for moving forward. This is problematic because, as Bruce (2011a) points out, most sociological theories about religion are about large-scale social change in need of being investigated with quantitative methods. Therefore, the studies to be presented in the thesis contribute to an ongoing discussion by providing methodological development using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches for empirical observation and analysis. The contribution is intended to come from using seldom utilized or new methods for research as well as proposing an alternative and hopefully complementary conceptual frame of reference highlighting a related yet distinct aspect of religion, namely religiosity.

Outline of the thesis

The studies to be presented can be divided into three parts. The key word for the first part is ‘revisit’ and it includes Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. In Chapter 2 the topic is referred to as the currently established research practice. In line with comprehensive reviews of Beckford (1990), Dobbelare (2000) and Robertson (1970) the established research practice at issue was identified with the efforts of a largely American-based research milieu active from the 1940s-1950s up until the 1970s. In this chapter, the established research practice is discussed as ‘Religion in Dimensions’ after Glock and Stark’s (1965) well-known operationalization presented in their book Religion and Society in Tension. Although the strengths and weaknesses of how the identified research practice chooses to define and operationalize religion have
been critically discussed before (e.g. Robertson 1970), the more methodologically-oriented reviews have not included more recent research orientations rooted in the established research practice. Therefore, the chapter contributes with a systematization of the most recent consequences of a time-worn research practice. In this way, it also provides a new interpretative lens through which the underlying assumptions behind the expectations of current research can be understood.

Sweden is one of the domestic research milieus in Europe which introduced the research standards from the US with the first collection of the European Value System Study Group-data (EVSSG) back in 1982. The introduction of a new research standard brought about a change in how religion was analyzed in this country. That is, individual expressions of religion in the form of religious affiliation, belief and practice were already on the research agenda before the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was imported. Against this backdrop, Chapter 3 revisits Sweden as a research site in two interrelated ways. First, it summarizes the long lines of affiliation, belief and practice found in research publications typically only published in Swedish. Secondly, it synthesizes the research rationales, assumptions and ideas used to interpret and place the results from the empirical investigations in a context. In this way, the chapter provides a review of literature that previously was very seldom reviewed for English-speaking readers. Moreover, it provides a synthesis of a research milieu which, according to G. Gustafsson (2005) never developed a theoretical school of its own.

The chapters in the second part of the thesis consist of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The keyword for these chapters is ‘reconsider’ since they set out to ‘reconsider’ assumptions, taken to be central, underpinning the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. For Chapter 4 the assumptions in question underlie the use of the term ‘religious mainstream’. In this chapter, it is argued that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ suggest that the term “mainstream” be understood in line with how religion relates to secular institutions. In contrast, it is argued in Chapter 4 that ‘mainstream’ might also refer to what is typical and common in a country. This new conceptual approach to the ‘religious mainstream’ is used for analyzing EVS data collected in Sweden from 1982-2010.

In Chapter 5 the reconsiderations continue, and this time assumptions concerning the ‘religious sacred’ are in focus. When revisiting the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ in Chapter 2 and the research site of Sweden in Chapter 3, the claim that the ‘religious sacred’ needs to be a description of a transcendent reality in order to be recognized as ‘religious’ was repeatedly found. Chapter 5 offers a reconsideration of this assumption from the starting point of what people of different affiliation, experience and attitudes to religion and alternative spirituality themselves highlight as the legitimate ‘religious sacred’. The data material used for this empirical analysis
are interviews, collected within a project aimed at comparing the extent of religion and alternative spirituality in Sweden.

The third part of this thesis is headed by the keyword ‘explore’ and uses new method for analyzing what words typically stand for in our everyday communication. Since the words “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” were found to carry key assumptions for the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ these words were chosen for the analysis in Chapter 6. The new method developed to accomplish the analysis is based on Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) (e.g. Landauer et al. 2007), a method that will be used to explore what “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” might stand for in the Blogosphere written in Swedish from 1998-2009. The data material in this chapter consists of almost a quarter of a million blog posts with religion-related content. In other words, the analysis presented in Chapter 6 continues the critical reconsideration of what the ‘religious sacred’ might stand for, and maps a previously unexplored and wide-ranging territory to do so.

The three parts headed by the keywords ‘revisit’, ‘reconsider’ and ‘explore’ are finally brought together in a concluding discussion. In this discussion the main empirical findings from Chapter 2-6 are summarized. After that, the concluding discussion addresses some of the implications which the thesis’ results arguably bring to the fore. The first implication concerns the analytical value of ‘cultural meanings’ in the study of religion while the second concerns the theoretical fruitfulness embedded in the study of the sacred; a fruitfulness that remain relatively unexplored.
Chapter 2: Revisiting a Research Practice

In 1981 a group of European scholars launched a social survey aimed at exploring the basic human values underlying European social and political institutions. Fourteen European countries participated in the survey together with the United States and Canada. To begin with, this survey was named after the research group launching it: the European Value System Study Group (EVSSG). Later, when this survey was repeated in even more countries, the name was abbreviated into the European Value Study (EVS). About this time, the EVS data became the empirical foundation for an even bigger survey project surveying basic human values, namely the World Value Survey (WVS). In order to expand the number of countries participating in the EVS survey and repeat the study over time, the research strategy has been to use the same questionnaire. By using the same questionnaire, answers could be compared over time and, by translating the core questionnaire into local languages, cross-cultural comparisons were made possible. Today, these projects span more than 30 years of data from 97 countries. According to the WVS website, the projects EVS and WVS cover almost 90 per cent of the world’s population. Accordingly, these projects provide the sociological study of religion with a considerable amount of data on religion world-wide (e.g. Gorski and Altmünder 2008).

Given that the same core questionnaire has been used over time there have been no changes in the ways that religion is operationalized in these surveys. Therefore, it can be imagined that the principal assumptions supporting the operationalization of religion back in 1981 are still relevant for research conducted today. Surprisingly, however, very little was written by the researchers involved in the EVSSG project about why they decided to operationalize religion in the ways they did. For example, in the report by Harding et al. (1986) on the first EVSSG study there is only a loose reference to the largely American-based discussion on operationalizing religion as a multidimensional phenomenon. This reference is hereafter commented by suggesting that operationalizing religion as a multidimensional phenomenon means taking an empirical rather than theoretical stance in the study of religion.

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8 A short version of the principles supporting the EVS and WVS research designs are found at: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp (2014-08-02).
9 The same research design based on replicating surveys in order to achieve longitudinal data is also used by other large-N survey projects like the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) and the European Social Survey (ESS).
religion since the “relationship [of discrete aspects of religion] is not self-evident but needs to be demonstrated” (1986:33). This perspective sat well with the EVSSG’s more general approach for choosing specific ways to operationalize social indicators. That is, the ESSVG project aimed to be an empirical project, describing broad features of values in Europe without commitment to a previously defined theory or causality (cf., Harding et al. 1986: x-xv). More recently, leading scholars within the EVS project such as Arts and Halman (2013) have questioned the early EVS claims of an empirical stance. They claim that the forefathers expected values to constitute systems. More specifically the founders of the EVS “expected people to cherish either a system of traditional Christian values or a competing system of modern secular values” (ibid: 2). When the results of the EVS-wave refuted this expectation, theory groups were established to find new explanations for the empirical findings of the EVS.

The consequences of the EVS project’s historical background can be described as follows. Consider the difference between a sociological explanation and a sociological interpretation. While explanations focus on why religion is increasing or declining or why certain groups of people become religious or not, the sociological interpretation of religion is concerned with the assumptions, perspectives and ways of analyzing the main objective, in this case religious phenomenon (cf., Robertson 1970:2). This difference is outlined in order to put the following observation into words: the EVS project has changed the way religion is explained but not the way it is interpreted. This is problematic because, as a number of leading scholars sociology of religion have pointed out (e.g. Beckford 2003; Gorski and Altinordu 2008; McGuire 2008; Smith et al. 2013; Smith 2008) the conventionally used interpretations of religion seem to be Christo-centric, skewed, misleading and even a source for distorting the empirical observation of religion.

Generally put, this chapter aims to address the second objective of this thesis - to problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies. Specifically, in this chapter, this involves laying bare the basic assumptions supporting the operationalization of religion in projects like the EVS\(^\text{10}\) and discussing the present day consequences of these assumptions. This means that focus is on uncovering a research practice. Here, a research practice means shared ideas about what constitutes justified ways of doing research. Uncovering a research practice is not the same as trying to find a useful definition of religion for empirical studies (such as the ones presented in chapters 4-6 in this dissertation). Rather, this chapter is intended to make visible assumptions, rationales and inner logics invested in a set of definitions and operationalizations used for the study of religion. Thus, this focus on the interpretative side of a research practice is taken because it

\(^{10}\) For an overview of studies based on surveys collected in Sweden which is the empirical context for this dissertation, see Chapter 3.
As already indicated, the research practice scrutinized here appeared before 1981 (the year when the first wave of EVS data was collected). Thus, the literature reviewed does not reveal new assumptions or rationales but casts new light on established ones. In order to accomplish a coherent discussion of established and therefore often used assumptions, examples are mostly chosen from publications based on the EVS and WVS projects. This choice was also made because Chapter 4 in this thesis provides an analysis of the most recent wave of EVS data. The research practice in question, however, has underpinned many more projects than the EVS and WVS projects.

The time-period for the formative years of the research practice seems to be from the Second World War to the 1970s. This period has continually been discussed as a distinguishable and prominent era forming the research practice within the sociology of religion (e.g. Beckford 1990; Borowik 2011; Bruce 2011a). Accordingly, giving emphasis to this period’s formative character is certainly not a new phenomenon. Take, for example, Glock and Hammond’s (1973) edited volume with contributions from some of the most well-known sociologists with an interest in religion. Parsons, who is co-author of what has been described as the Bible of functional analysis (i.e. Parsons and Shils ed. 1954) and Eisenstadt, whose concept on “multiple modernities” (i.e. Eisenstadt 2000) continue to inspire much contemporary social scientific thinkers on religion, were among the contributors. The volume was entitled Beyond the classics? and attempted to answer the question of whether or not the past decades’ (1940/50s-1970s) research interest in religion had contributed to the sociological study of religion in such a way that it could be thought of as a move beyond the works of Durkheim, Simmel, Troeltsch and Weber. In addition to Glock and Hammond’s volume there were a number of review articles and edited books with a similar goal: to evaluate that which was perceived to be a renewed interest in the sociology of religion from the time after the Second World War (e.g. Demerath and Roof 1976; Luckmann [1967]/1974; Shiner 1967). There were even reviews written in the 1970s (e.g. Hadden and Heenan 1970) that predicted that the sociological study of religion was heading toward a future of diminished production. Later reviews, such as those conducted by Borowik (2011), Gorski and Altinordu (2008) have continued to highlight the period from the Second World War until the 1970s as a distinct era that influenced the way in which research was conducted for the decades to come.11

11 Following Warner (1993) it has been argued that the sociology of religion gone through three phases in terms of paradigms. In the old paradigm, secularization theories were the default model of explanation. By contrast, in the paradigm that peaked in the 1990s, rational choice theories took secularization theories place as the default explanation of religion in society. After this paradigm Smilde and May (2010) argue that the sociology of religion entered a state of “paradigmatic reflection”. That is to say, no single explanation has been
Furthermore, the research practice analyzed was located in an American research milieu. The identification of the origin of the research practice in question was based on previous extensive reviews of the discipline sociology of religion (e.g. Beckford 1990; Dobbelare 2000) which conclude that the American milieu can be seen as distinct from the European milieus. The empiricism developed within this American milieu seemed to have been an important influence on the empirically-oriented branch of the European research on religion (e.g. Beckford 1990; Dobbelare 2000; Robertson 1970). One part of the European branch was the EVSSG project that developed into the influential EVS and WVS projects.

For these reasons, the research practice to be problematized here will henceforth be discussed in terms of ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This term resonates well with the word-use in specific seminal publications (e.g. Fukuyama 1961; Glock and Stark 1965, 1968; Lenski 1963; ) which the reviews written on the Second World War American research milieu specifically singled out as influential. Most markedly, the reviews (e.g. Finner 1970; Roof 1979; Shiner 1967) singled out the publication of Glock and Stark (1965) Religion and Society in Tension. This book was widely read (e.g. Finner 1970; Roof 1979) as it provided a solution to a research problem which at the time of its publication was perceived as acute, namely how to investigate religion in several dimensions in surveys. Prior to Glock and Stark’s influential publication, religion was typically researched one variable at a time (e.g. Finner 1970; Glock and Stark 1968). One example is asking people if they considered themselves to be Protestant, Catholic or Jewish12 without asking if they attended services or accepted the creed of these religious traditions. This type of research design was perceived as unsatisfactory for a complex social phenomenon like religion. Given the prominence of Glock and Stark’s (1965) publication (which prior to its publication in 1965 flourished in the form of separate articles), it will be specifically analyzed in this chapter. It is also Glock and Stark’s multidimensional approach to religion which has inspired the term which henceforth will be used to refer to the research practice in focus, namely ‘Religion in Dimensions’13.

given paradigmatic status within the discipline. For the periodization advocated here, it is of importance that the topic is the interpretation of religion and not the explanation of the same phenomenon (e.g. under which conditions will religion increase or decline). In other words, the interpretation of religion and how religion is analyzed has largely remained the same through the constant use of surveys such as the EVS and the WVS even though the explanation of religion has changed over time.

12 Following Herberg (1960) who concluded that 68 percent of Americans were Protestant, 23 percent Catholic, 4 percent Jewish and the remaining 5 percent had no religion; the predefined answers in surveys were often set to only Protestant, Catholic and Jew.

13 The usage of the term “dimensions” has two layers of meaning because of its dependency on Glock and Stark’s (1965) multidimensional approach to religion. The first layer of the term “dimensions” relates to theoretical concepts (e.g. value-dimensions, dimensions of religion). The second relates to the outcomes of factor analysis, often referred to as “dimensions”. In this way, the term “dimensions” has summative qualities taken to be suitable for this attempt to derive a concept from an analysis.
To accomplish a critical review of a research practice a literature review was carried out inspired by what Booth et al. (2012) call meta-narrative approaches (cf., ibid: 139-140). The meta-narrative approach involves analyses focused on making sense of diverse publications through applying historical and philosophical perspectives. In this way the assumptions and rationale of a research practice are examined, keeping simple questions in mind such as: “How did they [the researchers] conceptualize the problem? What theories did they use to link the problem with potential causes and impacts? What methods did they define as ‘rigorous’ and ‘valid’? What instruments did they use?” (i.e. ibid: 139).

Posing this type of question to the critically reviewed literature, an analysis was made of the “conventional practice” at different stages of the research process. That is, the analysis covered detailed analysis of specific survey questions (for example the question concerning a “personal God” mentioned in the introduction), the use of specific analytical techniques (such as factor analysis or regression models) and issues raised by how these practical research tasks were understood and put into a theoretical context. Just like Booth et al. (2012) recommends, the details were made visible by focusing on that which the identified American research milieu took to be “rigorous methods” and therefore used for analysis. Throughout the analysis the attention to detail serves the purpose of informing more general lines of thought concerning the research practice in question as a whole. This also means that detailed examples of questionnaire-wordings are given to expose underlying assumptions and not, as sometimes is the task, to suggest new questionnaire wordings.

The chapter is outlined as follows: It starts with a review of one of the most extensive and intense debates within the sociological study of religion, namely how to define religion. It then makes use of a “case in point”, namely Glock and Stark’s (1965) Religion and Society in Tension which presents one of the most well-known operationalizations of religion. The legacy of Glock and Stark and the research practice that followed their publication is finally discussed as two separate contemporary research orientations - assessing the extent of religion and spirituality. Finally, this chapter is brought to an end with some reflections problematizing a dominate research practice and its blind spots.

The debate on how to define religion

The classical writings of Durkheim ([1912]/2001) and Weber ([1922]/1971; [1934]/1979) advise sociologists to begin an inquiry on religion by clearly defining the object of study. For many sociologists occupied with the statistical measurement of religion a clear and sufficiently precise definition of religion was (and still is) regarded necessary for any analysis intended to
draw valid sociological conclusions (e.g. Bruce 2011b, Dobbelaere 2011; Glock and Stark 1965; Roof 1979). Thus, the definitional debate reviewed here aimed in part to define religion in ways that would make hypotheses possible to test statistically (cf., Beckford 2003: 5-6). For the establishment of a research practice an operational definition was a requirement; thus, the lack of consensus concerning how to define religion generated a vast quantity of literature on definitional issues (e.g. Beckford 1990; McKinnon 2002; Turner 1991).

Even though the scope of this critical review is limited to the time from the Second World War to the 1970s there are numerous textbooks, articles and other forms of publication which analyze, to varying levels of detail, the extensive debate on how to best define religion for sociological analysis. Therefore, I have chosen to present the general discussion through Dobbelaere’s (2011) quite recent review on the decades of debate. The more general tendencies are presented through Dobbelaere (2011) and more recent publications are used in order to show that the definition debate is still ongoing and relevant to the field of sociology of religion. Specific examples of reasoning will, as often as possible, be taken from older publications that founders of longitudinal survey projects like the EVS and WVS projects actually may have read before operationalizing religion. These older examples are intended to exemplify the tone of the debate and its focus in terms of issues and arguments. Importantly, also, the examples from reviews, books and articles between the 1940s/1950s and the 1970s are the primary source of literature for this review.

Dobbelaere, widely recognized for his conceptualization of secularization in three levels - micro, meso and macro (e.g. Dobbelaere [1981]/2002) - starts by outlining the two types of definitions of religion which are most prevalent in sociology of religion textbooks. These are identified as substantive definitions which seek to describe religion (what religion is), and functional definitions which focus on the consequences of religion (what religion does). Both types may be derived from Durkheim’s classical definition (here presented with Dobbelaere’s comments indicated in the original by KD):

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden (the substantive component, KD) – beliefs and practices which unite to one single moral community called a church (the functional component, KD), and all those who adhere to it. (Dobbelaere 2011: 192)

14 The debate on how to define religion had other purposes too, such as developing and clarifying interpretations of classical sociological theory (e.g. Parsons 1966; Wilson 1982). However, the present focus is on the methodological side of this definitional debate and includes the interpretation of religion. As a consequence, conclusions from the literature about inconsistencies in classical theory are not among the focal points.
Dobbelaere (2011) chose to name the first part of Durkheim’s definition characteristic as substantial definitions of religion. Substantial definitions, he holds, tend to be formulated under claims of universalism and seek to describe the “essence” of religion, and define that as the “sacred”. In this way, Dobbelaere clarifies, religion becomes centered upon the “sacred” which, in turn, becomes an antonym to the “profane”. In addition, he tells us, the binary relation between the “sacred” and the “profane” can only be expressed in principle terms. An example of these expressions in principle terms can be found in Durkheim’s description of the “sacred” as the “things set apart and forbidden”, quoted above, which requires the “profane” to be the embedded and commonplace. The second half of Durkheim’s definition is the one that Dobbelaere names as the functional part (i.e. what religion does) as he sees the formation of churches and communities as a consequence of religion.

Although Dobbelaere’s division of Durkheim’s definition of religion into substantive and functional components elegantly shows how the debate on how to best define religion grew out of Durkheim’s work, the components could also have been placed elsewhere. For example, Yinger’s (1957) much used functional definition of religion reads: “Religion, then, can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with… ultimate problems of human life” (ibid: 9). In Yinger’s functional definition of religion the focus is on a system of beliefs and practices, which are components that according to Dobbelaere should be seen as substantive components. Thus, Yinger’s (1957) functional definition overlaps with that which Dobbelaere (2011) chooses to name as the traits of “substantive definitions”.

The entanglements of “substantive” and “functional” definitional strategies continue, as criticisms of functional definitions tend to focus on systems of beliefs. We may exemplify this tendency with Berger ([1969]/1990; 1974) who as an advocate of substantive definitions comments on Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) functional definition called “invisible religion”. At the end of The Sacred Canopy Berger ([1969]/1990) devotes a section to giving his opinion on functional definitions of religion. Berger stresses that a definition first and foremost should be useful for the investigation at hand. Functional definitions, he argues, may become too broad to be useful. Later, in 1974, Berger revises and sharpens his critical position towards functional definitions of religion. The more oppositional position is taken because of the ways in which functional definitions are used in empirical investigation, and is not an extended critique of these definitions’ underlying principles. Functional definitions, Berger writes: “are likely to include such meaning-complexes as nationalism, or revolutionary faiths, or the mobility ethos, or any other “life-styles” with their appropriate cogitative and normative legislations” (Berger 1974: 128). Because definitions focus intellectual attention, functional definitions underpin the search for commonalities between these systems of beliefs and practices and others which by the adherents them-
selves are considered to be religious. For Berger (1974) substantive definitions:

Include only such meanings and meaning-complexes as refer to transcendent entities in the conventional sense – God, gods, supernatural beings and worlds, or metaempirical entities as, say, the ma’at of the ancient Egyptians or the Hindu law of karma. (Berger 1974: 128)

To focus attention on commonalities between these two types of systems of belief (the ones with and the ones without a supernatural referent) will eventually, fears Berger (1974), “provide quasi-scientific legitimizations for secular world views” (ibid: 128). Therefore, Berger (1974) advocates substantive definitions that define the “sacred” with reference to a supernatural entity or that which is beyond this empirical world. Transcendent descriptions of the “sacred” come across as conventional for Berger. Dobbelaere (2011) can be read as in agreement with Berger as he argues that understanding the “sacred” as a supernatural God is in line with a Western socio-cultural context and, thus, in his view is the valid definition of religion in Europe.

Put differently, systems of meaning, also called world-views or belief systems, are at the center of both functional and substantive definitional strategies. Examples of belief systems are Christianity, Hinduism and Communism which are all coherent systems of meaning that are formulated in principle terms. Accordingly, the major point for comparison - the “sacred” - is assumed to be expressed in principle terms. Since the two definitional strategies share an emphasis on the importance of “belief systems” for definitions of religion, the real cleavage between the two seems to be content-related. Scholars advocating a substantive definitional strategy seem to prefer descriptions of the “sacred” of transcendent nature (i.e. the sacred is outside this world). In contrast, scholars favoring functional definitions hold that the nature of the “sacred” could take immanent forms (i.e. the sacred can be within this world and uphold holistic relationships between the natural and the supernatural).

In addition there is another assumption that quite often underpins the definitional strategies in focus here. Let me illustrate this assumption by using Bruce’s (2011b) article Defining Religion: A Practical Approach in which he defends substantive definitions of religion with a universal claim that applies well beyond the borders of Europe. Bruce argues that a minimalist substantive definition of religion is empirically sound and exemplifies his reasoning for this conclusion in the following way:

Just how much common ground is there in the way which people of different times and place view the religious? Provided one is content with a minimalist version of religion, there seems to be a great deal of it. The ancient Greek
warrior making offerings to his God before battle, the medieval knight promising to build a monastery if God gives him victory in his crusade, and the modern Protestant businessman praying for God to bless his new factory all engage in recognizable similar activities and, if time-travel ever allowed them to meet, we would imagine them to be mutually intelligible. (Bruce 2011b:113)

In this quote, Bruce makes it clear that he is interested in a generic definition of religion. In other words, he intends to pin down the common denominators between the warrior, the knight and the businessman that are “recognizable” to Bruce as a researcher equipped with an array of binary concepts (such as the sacred versus the profane, the transcendent versus the immanent et cetera). Moreover, as Bruce stresses that these men would understand each other, it can be imagined that the activities they are engaged in are also “recognizable” to their communities in general. In other words, the activities which these men are engaged in need to be “recognizable” as two things at once: as components in line with social theory and as activities recognized by collectives. Taken together, the sociological definitions seek to describe the generic components of these recognizable aspects of religion.

According to Dobbelaere (2011) one reason why sociological definitions focus on generic aspects of religion is scholarly ambitions of separating the analytical definition of religion from the everyday understandings of religion. The argument goes something like this: the definition of religion should be grounded in observation of social life but that does not mean that everything that people themselves talk about as religious should be taken at face value to be religion. An emphasis on separation between the analytical term and the everyday usages of the same term, however, raise problems concerning who has the authority to decide what belief system should count as a sociologically acceptable religion. Who has the authority to decide what description of the “sacred” is a description of a supernatural “sacred” and what description is not? What instances in a society can provide an understanding of the “sacred” in a system of other doctrines in a way that the community around them will recognize? These are not easy questions to settle since it is well-known that the history of what should count as religion is long and bloody (cf., McGuire 2008). If Bruce’s warrior, knight and businessman are considered, it can be visualized how his definitional strategy

It can also be underlined that as an example of support for a universal substantive definition of religion several aspects of Bruce’s (2011b) exemplification are noteworthy, despite some of them being the consequence of mere coincidence. It can be noted that the ancient Greek warrior, the medieval knight and the Protestant businessman are all most likely men, living privileged lives in their societies which all are located in Europe. Therefore, the examples are all located in a specific place and, it can be added, are all examples of people capable of speaking from privileged positions. Therefore, these are not examples that represent universality in any way.
neglects the struggle between different ways of understanding religion. Bruce’s example draws attention to that which might be common between these imaginative men. That is, the focus is on the recognizable and officially accepted and not on what would matter to these men, that which they would themselves draw attention to, or, for that matter, those differences that these men would fight each other over. Generic sociological definitions can therefore be said to focus on an abstracted version of religious beliefs that are not necessarily the versions of these beliefs that these men would use to explain their actions.

Bringing this discussion of the definitional debate on religion to an end, the following observations can be emphasized. The definition debate was a scholarly dispute but, surprisingly, with many strands of mutual agreement. For example, despite the principle difference between functional definitions focus on what religion does and the substantive focus on what religion is, there seems to be an agreement that religion constitutes a “belief system”. Religion should further be defined generically. Thus, religion was perceived as a general term, a common name for a range of things considered to be religious by the researchers. Disagreements between proponents of functional and substantive definitions of religion only begin when the discussion is turned towards the description of the center of the presumed “belief systems”. So, the difference between these definitional strategies appears to be about what descriptions of the “sacred” are valid as a description of the “religious sacred”. While functional definitional strategies acknowledge descriptions of the “sacred” as something within this world, or as something holistic bringing the natural and supernatural together (i.e. immanent descriptions of the sacred), the substantive definitional strategies favor descriptions of the “sacred” as something supernatural located beyond humans in another world (i.e. transcendent descriptions of the sacred).

After going through the functional and substantive approaches for defining religion it seems to me that, peculiarly enough, the criticism of functional definitions does not follow the more general critique of functionalism. In short, it seems that functionalism too strongly assumed that social structures form individuals (cf., Robertson and Turner 1989: 544-545) and that functionalism was constructed on a theoretical level so abstract that it could not be used for empirical studies (e.g. Mills [1959]/2000). The persistent critique instead stresses that functional definitions allow too many descriptions of the “sacred” to be the functional equivalents of a transcendent “sacred”. Following Beckford (2000) it seems reasonable that the functional definitions were not criticized because the Second World War American research milieu had accepted as a default mode a mainstream structural-functionalist school of thought inspired by Parsons. Furthermore, since this research milieu was relatively isolated and perceived as self-contained (with its own conferences, journals and research centers) (e.g. Hadden and Heenan 1970; Smith et al.
2013) it provided fertile ground for developing research practices accepted among the active researchers (e.g. Glock 2009).

Moreover, as Shiner (1967) note, the sociological study of religion in the period discussed does not really subject its notion of religion to empirical analysis. That is, there is no sociological interpretation of religion as an analytical subject. Shiner (1967) writes:

> most definitions of the essence of religion, even when they have been crude to combinations of practice and belief, have assumed there exists an entity called religion. (ibid: 217)

Siding with the argument now popularly ascribed to Asad (1993), Shiner goes on to state that the concept of religion is a relatively late development resulting from the European Enlightenment. In the 1960s, Shiner notes, numerous Christian theologians did not refer to Christian beliefs as a religion and this resistance is also to be found among Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim thinkers. Overlooking the representatives of organized religion’s own understandings of their tradition in this sense may be problematic because the substantive definitions portrayed above call upon empirically grounded convention to legitimize their definitions. Moreover, as Shiner (1967) notes, the focus on a polarity between sacred and profane systems of beliefs and practices has also blurred the variation of religious traditions. Especially liberal forms of religious tradition, that do not expect their adherents to accept doctrinal systems of beliefs, are not included when religion is defined as the sacred versus the profane. Instead, Shiner observes, liberal traditions tend to be ignored by the empirical research on religion.

Nonetheless, the bewildering consensus between proponents of functional and substantive definitions of religion on almost everything but the description of the “sacred” may suggest that certain assumptions taken from structural-functionalist theorizing were simply taken for granted. Such assumptions include expectation of congruence between cultural, structural and personal systems when defining “religion” (e.g. Fenn 1970). More recently, Chaves (2010) has argued that the expectations of congruence are suspicious since years of sociological and psychological studies have shown that “religious ideas and practices generally are fragmented, compartmentalized,

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16 Drawing on insights provided by post-colonial thinking Asad (1993) depicts a genealogy of religion where those in power decide what should be recognized as religion and not. Hence, the category “religion” is invested with uneven power structures and the categorization of affiliations, beliefs and practices as religion or “not religion” is a reproduction of these power structures. Masuzawa (2005) takes the use of the term “world religions” as an example of reproduction of such power structures. Masuzawa suggests that when religion is modeled after Western versions of Christianity and then generalized to the world (i.e. “world religions”) the Christian heritage serves to preserve dichotomies separating the West from other regions of the world. Therefore, scholars inspired by Asad (1993) are usually cautious when using the term “religion” and tend to avoid strictly defining it.
loosely connected, and context dependent” (ibid: 2). Chaves (2010) calls such assumptions and expectations of congruence “the religious congruency fallacy” (ibid: 2) and states that this type of congruence cannot be taken for granted.

Despite the overlaps between the functional (what religion does) and the substantive (what religion is) definitional strategies and the fact that the debate on definitions has by no means been settled (e.g. Bruce 2011b; Borowik 2011), it is commonly assumed that large-N surveys predominantly use substantive definitions (e.g. Evans and Evans 2008; Gustafsson G. 2005; Hervieu-Léger 1999). In contrast to this popularly held notion of a choice between two definitional strategies, the next section of this chapter will continue to show how bits and pieces from both definitional strategies are used when analyzing religion.

**Case in point: ‘Religion in Dimensions’**

In parallel with the definition debate on how to best define “religion”, attempts were made to operationalize religion for survey methods (e.g. Roof 1979). The latter discussion was not a scholarly dispute in the same manner as the definition debate. Instead of heated debate, the reviews of the time-period from the Second World War to the 1970s single out seminal works on operationalization (e.g. Fukuyama 1961; Lenski 1963; Glock 1962; Glock and Stark 1965; 1968). Of the publications mentioned as influential, Glock and Stark’s (1965) publication *Religion and Society in Tension* was singled out most markedly. Partly, this was because the studies by, for instance, Fukuyama (1961) and Lenski (1963) were empirical while Glock and Stark (1965) drew on the results of these empirical studies, discussed in length the operationalization of religion in principal terms, and provided empirical results of their own (cf., Roof 1979). Partly, the influence of Glock and Stark (1965) was dependent on the fact that the chapters in their book had previously been published in the form of widely-read articles (cf., Finner 1970).

There were also other reasons that Glock and Stark’s (1965) book can be seen as a case in point for a still persistent research practice. At the time of its publication it solved a research problem which was perceived to be pressing, namely how to research religion in a multidimensional way (e.g. Roof 1979). Prior to Glock and Stark’s publication, religion was usually studied one item at a time (for example by asking people if they were Protestant, Catholic or Jewish17). To investigate religion by asking several questions was therefore perceived as a more suitable research design for a complex phenomenon like religion (e.g. Roof 1979; Robertson 1970). Commitment to

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Glock and Stark (1968:xiii) name the three alternatives Protestant, Catholic and Jewish in the same order as Herberg’s (1960) study which suggested that the American religious affiliations ordered after size were Protestant, Catholic and Jewish.
religion, Glock and Stark (1965) argued, can be expressed through attendance at religious services, membership of religious organizations but also in ways which people accepted religious doctrines, knew about religious teachings and were prepared to act upon their beliefs in everyday life. Moreover, Robertson (1970) notes, it was at the time unclear how definitions of religion (either functional or substantive) related to single measurements of religion (e.g. religious affiliation or religious practice). To operationalize religion in so-called dimensions, he continues, made it possible to study the internal relations between single measurements and, thus, provided a data-driven base for analyzing religion.

Furthermore, with the operationalization of religion in so-called dimensions it also became possible to use the new and upcoming statistical technique known as factor analysis for survey analysis (e.g. Finner 1970). As Beckford (1990) and Robertson (1970) both emphasized, the use of factor analysis made the search for dimensions a practical research task. To establish which dimensions investigated the underlying quality of religion became an ad hoc decision and the concept of religiosity was therefore the result of what factor analyses result added together (cf., ibid: 52-53).

This practical take on operationalizing religion became fashionable, remembers Glock (2009), because at the time survey research was conducted as a service to (mainly) Protestant churches. Hadden and Heenan’s (1970) review, which includes a critical examination of the research groups that worked throughout the upswing of sociology of religion between the 1940s-1970s, confirms Glock’s memories. The research conducted in this period, Hadden and Heenan (1970) holds, was largely placed outside the universities in church-financed private research centers. These centers mainly focused on applied research and used the existing practically oriented operationalizations of religion to do so. The results of these empirical studies were thereafter discussed in specific conferences and published in special journals affiliated with the former. As a consequence, the sociology of religion became a fairly isolated sub-discipline of sociology (e.g. Beckford 1990) where, presumably, people knew each other and knew about the agreed way of doing research. Taken together, these are the reasons why Glock and Stark’s (1965) publication can be seen as a “case in point” for the beginning of a widely used way of doing research. This is also why Glock and Stark’s publication serves as a distinctive example of the research practice hereby alluded to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

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As has been shown so far, Glock and Stark (1965) set out to operationalize religion at a time when the most pressing issue was whether or not the “sacred” was defined as a supernatural entity or not. This issue was wrapped up in a tendency to define religion in terms of a “system of beliefs”. The sets of beliefs included in these systems were most often derived from the expectations traditional religions can have on their adherents. Moreover, the defi-
nition debate on how to define religion included a tendency to start from the work of Durkheim ([1912]/2001).

For their operationalization of religion, Glock and Stark (1965) start by defining religion using Durkheim’s ([1912]/2001) definition of religion. According to Glock and Stark, Durkheim’s definition had been improved by the conceptual work done by Parsons (1951), Yinger (1957) and Nottingham (1954), among others. Taking their work into account, Durkheim’s definition was abbreviated as follows:

Religion, or what societies hold to be sacred, comprises an institutionalized system of symbols, beliefs, values, and practices focused on the question of ultimate meanings. (Glock and Stark 1965:4)

In this quote, Glock and Stark start their generalization of Durkheim’s definition of religion by equating or placing religion on a par with “what societies hold to be sacred”. The “sacred”, writes Glock and Stark, is however defined as something that “provide, or symbolize, solutions to questions of ultimate meaning” (ibid: 5, italics in original). Expressed very briefly, “ultimate meanings” are in their view rationales for the existential questions that humans ponder upon such as the meaning of life and death. While Glock and Stark’s focus on solutions shows their adherence to a functional analysis of human behavior, their research can be seen to focus on the outcome of social processes and not the social processes in themselves.

Moreover, as it is a source of many misunderstandings, it should be clearly stated that by “institutionalized”, Glock and Stark refer to a property of groups which is stable enough that “it will be maintained even though the personnel of this group continues to change” (1965:4). By using this definition, Glock and Stark distinguish “institutions” and that which is “institutionalized” from organizations and individuals. We may use North’s (1993) analogy of a football game to clarify this difference. In an amended form, North depicts institutions as the rules of a football game, the teams as organizations, and the players as the individuals. All involved in this game of football are aware that the rules of the game set the conditions for the game; however, some teams might be known to challenge the rules while other teams play fair. And the same might be said about individual players. If we apply this analogy to the religious context it is perhaps evident that a church organization with a certain set of personnel might challenge as well as “play along” with the institutionalized system of beliefs and practices. In a similar manner, individuals may challenge or “play along” with the institutions and that which is institutionalized. For the proceeding discussion on Glock and Stark’s crucial terms “ultimate meaning” and “the sacred”, these distinctions between the institution and the institutionalized, on one side, and particular religious organizations and their representatives, on the other side, are worth keeping in mind since they set the level of abstraction for their theoretical
constructs. The term “institutionalized religion” was not, as often used (e.g. Shiner 1967), applied to history-specific churches, their organization and visible services, notwithstanding how much in the majority a particular church is in a specific time and place. Following Glock and Stark it is the long-lasting, cross-cultural generic elements of religion which are defined as “institutionalized religion”.

In order to understand Glock and Stark’s take on “institutionalized religion”, one also needs to keep in mind that they stress that some (but not necessary all) systems of belief focus on questions of “ultimate meanings” that are incompatible with each other. One system becomes incompatible with another system if it aims to address reality in general. Glock and Stark exemplify such incompatible systems with the “isms” of Communism and Catholicism. These “isms”, Glock and Stark argue by drawing on the work of Berger ([1969]/1990), provide a total interpretation of reality including an interpretation of alternative “isms”. The incomparability of these all-embracing “isms” is crucial for Glock and Stark (1965) as they maintain that these broad perspectives contain dominant qualities for social action (cf., ibid: 7). As such the all-embracing “isms” provide guiding principles, a philosophy of life, for people to understand their surroundings. It is also these systems at an abstract level which provide the “sacred” with meaning content. Accordingly, Glock and Stark (1965) do not focus on all possible institutions but on the institutions which all-embracing “isms” or world-view ideologies may generate. What are overlooked in this line of reasoning are, for example, the institutions resulting from the shared memories of people living within a socio-cultural context (cf., Hervieu-Léger 1999). Such memories of how to behave towards the “sacred” may result in institutions in the form of house rules (cf., ibid:90) which people intervening in a socio-cultural context come to terms with when expressing their “religiosity” or understand religion.

In one way, Glock and Stark’s generalization of Durkheim’s definition of religion can be understood as a full circle: it starts with religion being what a society holds to be sacred and then returns to “ultimate meanings” being that which abstract systems of ideas hold to be sacred. The contour of this circle is painted with very broad brush strokes at a high level of generalization as the “sacred” is defined at the very abstract level. Thus, they define religion using a combination of functional and substantive definitional strategies. Their attention to complete systems of belief focused on questions of “ultimate meanings” at the level of all-embracing traditions, ideologies or “isms” suggests inspiration from functional definitional strategies. However, the attention given to whether these descriptions of the “sacred” or “ultimate meanings” stressed a transcendent description of the “sacred” or not.

Glock and Stark (1965) admit that it cannot be assumed that all ideologies are the property of people. According to them, it is the ideologies that people act in accordance with that can meaningfully be called institutions (in a reli-
gious or a secular sense). Even though it is the ideologies that people make their own that matters, it is evident throughout their book that it is understandings of ideologies provided by “isms” which social scientists should focus on. Accordingly, Glock and Stark define religiosity to be ‘religion at an individual level’ studied through individuals’ commitment to the beliefs and practices which religious or secular “isms” have formulated.

Having established what constitutes religion, Glock and Stark (1965) make their definition concrete by specifying religion in five dimensions. These dimensions (shown in table format in table 2.1) were called the “experiential”, “ideological”, “ritualistic”, “intellectual” and “consequential” dimension (ibid: 19-21). Taken together, they argue that these dimensions include “the many and diverse manifestations of religiosity prescribed by the different religions of the world” (ibid: 20). This claim of universality is very grand. It is supported by what Glock (1962) called the “expectations of traditional religion” (ibid: 108). In practice, however, examples of expectations do not come from all religions of the world but predominantly from Christian and, even more specifically, mainland American Protestant settings (e.g. Glock 2009). So, although “institutionalized religion” was understood as that which was present before and remained after the specific personnel of a church, the American churches during the 1950s may have served as a model for ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Specifically, observations of these churches may have provided the stipulated dimensions with content. The concrete content of these dimensions is presented in table format in table 2.1, below.

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18 One study is frequently quoted in support of Glock & Stark’s theory construction is Kluckhohn’s (1954) contribution to Parsons and Shils’s (1954) *Towards a General Theory of Action*. In this work, Kluckhohn addresses what he perceives as the red herring in poll research for investigating values, which is that people do not tell the truth when answering surveys, and truth is needed for positive knowledge based on facts. Kluckhohn argues that belief statements are in one sense truths as they are subjected to processes of internalization and, therefore, belief- and value statements should be equally legitimate objects of study as other forms of human behavior given the positivistic philosophy of science. After establishing beliefs and values as legitimate objects of social scientific study, Kluckhohn (1954) goes on to argue that “It should be possible to construct in general terms the views of a given group regarding the structure of the universe, the relations of man to the universe (both natural and supernatural), and the relations of man to man” (ibid: 410). It is in this vein that it should be possible to identify the general values and beliefs that Glock and Stark aspired to operationalize with their multidimensional approach to analyzing religion.
Table 2.1. Glock and Stark (1965) Religion in Five Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>Experiences of the Divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>Acceptance of belief doctrines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualistic</td>
<td>Habits of practice and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Knowledge about belief doctrines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequential</td>
<td>Effects of the first four dimensions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 2.1 shows, Glock and Stark stipulate the existence of five different dimensions that together investigate the latent construct of religion. The first dimension, called the “experiential dimension”, covers aspects of experiencing Divine presence, an aspect of religiosity that can be understood as an emotional one. Next, the “ideological dimension” relates to a religious person’s acceptance of certain beliefs. This is, for example, the beliefs that warrant the existence of the Divine. For Christendom, Glock and Stark stipulate these warranting beliefs to be:

Belief in God, in Christ and his miracles, in the virgin birth and so on and, those who accept these beliefs are, in effect, not only accepting the existence of a God but of a personal God. (Glock and Stark 1965:24)

The beliefs in question in this “ideological dimension” are, in other words, placed within larger schemata defined by Christianity. It is the acceptance of “religion’s” belief system at an individual level that is in focus. Apart from warranting beliefs, the individual may also accept purposive beliefs (about the meaning of life) and implementing beliefs (about ethics and the proper conduct towards God and fellow men). It is these beliefs that the ideological dimension was intended to investigate. The perspective of a tradition’s expectations of its adherents is visible in the description of the “ritualistic dimension” that is stipulated to encompass practices expected of religious adherents, such as worship and participation in other activities. The expectation is set by the providers of these activities and by the traditions at an even more overarching level of abstractness. Moreover, the “intellectual dimension” is about literacy and being informed and knowledgeable about religious teachings. Finally, the “consequential dimension” has to do with the effects of the other four dimensions on the secular society (ibid 1965:20-21). Accordingly, the expectations of religion are set by actual, existing churches (that organize activities and teach certain creeds) which Glock and Stark state are affirmed and, thus, institutionalized into worldwide religious traditions. Viewed from this perspective, the operationalization underpinning ‘Religion in Dimensions’ seems to be reflecting its time and place rather than being universally applicable to a phenomenon called religion.
Glock and Stark (1965) had a somewhat different take on why their operationalization might lack global validity. They admitted that, of course, there are variations in the expectations of religious commitment between different organizations. However, by using a full definition of religion that covers several separate aspects of expectations (e.g. thoughts and behavior), variation could be accounted for in the analysis through a multidimensional analytical strategy. As a result, a valid measurement of the amount of religion in a region could be assessed. Glock and Stark’s (1968) own study American Piety: Patterns of Religious Commitment demonstrates practically this standpoint that coverage fosters grand claims of generalization.

Surprisingly, however, Glock and Stark (1968) sidestepped the rule of measuring religion in as many dimensions as possible in their own study. Considering four out of five dimensions was considered enough to accomplish an analysis of the extent of religion in the US. The fifth dimension was left out because it was perceived to be somewhat controversial. Glock and Stark (1968) contemplated the problem that it was impossible to pin down whether the consequential dimension was a part of a religious commitment or followed a religious commitment (cf., 1968: 16). If it only followed a religious commitment it could be dropped when the analysis focused on religious commitment as such. That is, the consequential dimension was not necessarily perceived as important for their claim on generalization.

One consequence which becomes visible when the numbers of dimensions are reduced is the order of the dimensions. Without the fifth dimension it was only the “ritualistic dimension” that related to behavior and not to aspects of religious beliefs. In their study from 1968 this is clearly visible as the names of the dimensions and the order in which the dimensions are presented are changed compared with previous publications. The first dimension is now called Beliefs (previously the “ideological dimension”), the second Practice (previously the “ritualistic dimensions”), the third Knowledge (previously the “intellectual dimension”) and, the fourth, Experience (previously the “experiential dimension”). According to Glock and Stark (1968) the changes in name were due to the confusion that the previous and more abstract names had caused (cf., ibid: 14). However, changing the wording and the order of the dimensions (so that the dimension of accepting Beliefs was now placed first in the row of dimensions) shows how belief-centered the dimensions of religion were.

When commenting on the matter of the centrality of beliefs in the 1965 publication, Glock and Stark hold that the “ideological dimension” (acceptance of religious beliefs) explains the experiential, ritualistic and intellectual dimensions. Especially, they point out that the commitment to religious beliefs is measured through the ritualistic dimension and, thus, by habits such as regular attendance at religious services and prayer. Consequently, the operationalization of religion as a multidimensional phenomenon was easily reduced to acceptance or non-acceptance of specific descriptions of
the “sacred” (e.g. the transcendent sacred outside this world versus the immanent transcendence inside this world). The other dimensions investigated commitment to the specified descriptions of the “sacred”. Strong commitment to belief in the “sacred” was accordingly multidimensional, whereas weak commitment was one-dimensional or belief without commitment measured through the other dimensions. This means that even though Glock and Stark justified their claim for universality on their ability to cast a wide net by asking several survey questions, the acceptance of a transcendent “sacred” was considered decisive. Thus, in practice, religion was equated with beliefs and a transcendent description of the “sacred”.

After explaining why our focus should be on what societies and “isms” hold to be “sacred”, Glock and Stark (1965) argue that their theoretical construct of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ can be added to another set of relevant theoretical constructs, namely values and value orientations. Both of these concepts have been the subject of intensive academic debate for decades (for early critical perspectives, see for example Converse 1964; Shils 1957).

According to Glock and Stark, the concepts of beliefs and values are often confused (for details see, 1965:172-173). Beliefs, they write: “constitute statements about the true nature of things” (ibid:173). Values, by contrast, can be defined as a preference for something believed or as statements about what “ought to be” (ibid:7). In addition, Glock and Stark define the concept of norms as prescribed ways of behaving. Following these definitions the terms might be distinguished in the following way: “Norms deal with means, values with ends and beliefs with their rationale” (ibid:173). Beliefs, or more exactly systems of beliefs, are thus to be understood as the context which gives values their logical coherency. In other words, beliefs explain values. Thus, beliefs can be understood as that which comes before values. If values are “the basic principles or orientations which guide attitudes and behavior” (Esmer and Pettersson 2006:107), then beliefs precede these principles and orientations.

Adding the concept of value orientation (e.g. Kluckhohn 1954), Glock and Stark (1965) increases the level of abstraction with a conglomerate of beliefs, values and norms et cetera. Glock and Stark define value orientation to mean,

[…] those over-arching and sacred systems of symbols, beliefs, values, and practices concerning ultimate meanings which men shape to interpret their world. (Glock and Stark 1965:9)

With this definition Glock and Stark (1965) introduce an interpretation which makes their definition of value orientations suitable for research on religion. They claim that the most common manifestations of value orientations are religions. Accordingly, in Glock and Stark’s view, the concept of value orientation is at an even more general level than the abstract concept of
religion. This is also how value orientations can take secular forms. Assigning themselves to this very high level of abstraction they once again make the issues of beliefs and descriptions of the “sacred” the discriminating factors for what is and what is not religion. It is the description of the “sacred” as a supernatural God which makes value orientation a religion. Non-religious, or humanist, value orientations will, from Glock and Stark’s viewpoint, hold immanent descriptions of the “sacred”.

Summing up Glock and Stark’s discussion of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ a controversial issue is how they understand the “sacred”. On the one hand, they follow a functionalist strategy for defining religion and hold the “sacred” to be “ultimate meanings”. Critics of functionalist definitional strategies (e.g. Berger 1974) have argued that identifying the “sacred” as “ultimate meanings” is too inclusive since the source and nature of “ultimate meanings” may not be transcendent. Glock and Stark agree with these critics as they specify the religious “sacred” to be a belief in a “personal God”. As alluded to earlier, the operationalization of a “personal God” includes a number of aspects in Glock and Stark’s terminology, such as acceptance of doctrines (in the plural) and the description of the “sacred” as transcendent. Consequently, there is a mix of strategies for defining religion underpinning their reasoning.

For example, instead of straightforwardly using substantive definitions, functional strategies for analyzing religion are visible in the way religion is conceptualized as a full institution and an autonomous sphere of social life focused on “ultimate meanings” of life. Moreover, functional strategies focus attention on the task of finding functional equivalents to religion. Glock and Stark mention communism as an example of a functional equivalent to religion. In contrast to the functional influences, there are also traces of substantive definitional strategies. Examples of such traces are the attempt to generalize empirical descriptions into generic statements about religion and fixing the definition of the ‘religious sacred’ on a transcendent description of reality.

The somewhat perplexing treatment of the “sacred” continues in the hierarchical way in which Glock and Stark seem to order their dimensions of religion. The claim of universalism is in their view supported by observation of the expectations that the religions they consider traditional have on adherents (cf., Glock 1962: 108; Glock and Stark 1965:20). Because their operationalization covers several separate expressions of these expectations - categorized into dimensions - universal comprehensiveness is dependent on a broad coverage of religious commitment. Nonetheless, like Glock and Stark’s (1968) own study is an example of, the dimensions of religion could be reduced as long as the dimension representing beliefs and acceptance of a “personal God” was kept. The dimension of belief may therefore be taken to be central to religion. In their reasoning, the dimensions left after reduction still make up a valid operationalization (cf., ibid: 14). Given these complexi-
ties, it can be argued that Glock and Stark undermine their own claim for universal inclusiveness. If the claim of universality is based on multidimensionality, reducing the number of dimensions used for operationalization to four instead of five comes across as inconsistent with that claim.

One more consequence is that religion investigated in line with what religions expect of their adherents is not necessarily the same as that which individuals themselves highlight as the religious (cf., Simmel 1955). For Glock and Stark, religiosity was defined as commitment to ‘religion at an individual level’. Accordingly, it seems like Glock and Stark's understanding starts from a perspective very different to religiosity in a Simmelian sense. In short, that religiosity gains its meaning by that which people draw attention to as the religious. Shils (1957) critical comment can be used to sum up some of the most pressing implications of ignoring religiosity and only studying ‘religion at an individual level’. In his 1957 article, Shils, who together with Parsons edited the very influential book _Towards a General Theory of Action_, called attention to the fact that “belief system of a society can be lived up to only partially, fragmentally, intermittently and only in approximate way” (ibid: 130). According to Shils (1957), this is because people are usually not theologians or philosophers “with a coherent image of cosmos and society” (ibid: 130). Shils makes it perfectly clear that the explanation for this does not lie in people’s stupidity. People are simply more interested in that which is near at hand and, moreover, they are social beings affected by their social contexts. He argues that neglecting that people use what lies close to them for understanding the world is not realistic and gives an “incorrect view of the relations between theory and research” (ibid: 144). On this (over-)use of theories, Shils writes:

> Sociologists must cease to look upon them [theories] as finished products, waiting to be applied, _in toto_, in an orderly and systematic way. They must be taken as general guides and not specific directives. They must be brought into operationalization only on the basis of a feeling of personal intimacy.

(Shils 1957:145)

This involves using theories based on a sense of fitness and appropriateness rather than formal testing, concludes Shils. Beckford (2003) makes a similar point when he suggests that theories that provide researchers with fixed and testable hypotheses have been overused in the sociological study of religion. What are missing, Beckford proposes, are theories which guide researchers’ interests towards particular research sites. Before making an attempt to empirically make use of softer theories (i.e. Chapter 4-6), the present day consequences of operationalizing ‘Religion in Dimensions’ will be outlined.
Contemporary research orientations

Almost 50 years has passed since Glock and Stark operationalized ‘Religion in Dimensions’, and during this time their operationalization and the research practice it represents has been widely used. Examples of usage are the European survey study EVS and the global survey study WVS. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the EVS and the WVS have used the same questions on religion ever since the first data-collection wave took place. This means that these surveys still rely on the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ research practice for analyzing religion. In what follows, the consequences of relying on the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ research practice will be critically discussed by using contemporary examples.

Because it is assumptions, perspectives and ways of analyzing religious phenomena which are analyzed the analysis is not at the detailed level of question wordings. In fact, the various ways which surveys have investigated the “sacred” as a “personal God” can be used as an illustration of how the different forms of research projects share assumptions but not specific measurements. In table 2.2, some very different question wordings intended to investigate belief in a “personal God” are displayed. When the answers to the questions in table 2.2 are analyzed, the results obtained are all shortened to the term “personal God” in tables produced for publication of results. However, for the individual answering these questions there is of course a great difference between “Do you personally believe in God?” (Gallup)\(^\text{19}\) and “There is a personal God” (EVS). The longer question chosen by ISSP seems to mix descriptions of God (i.e. “I don’t believe in a Personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power or Spirit) with how certain the interviewee is that there is a God (e.g. “I find myself believing in God some of the time but not in others”, “While I have my doubts, I feel I do believe in God”). The God in these latter statements might be a “personal God” or a God described otherwise. The point is that the research practice is not on the level of specific question wordings but assumptions about the underlying quality that these diverse questions are taken to measure.

\(^{19}\) The wording used by Gallup is found at http://www.gallup.com/poll/147887/americans-continue-believe-god.aspx (2013-11-15).
Table 2.2 *Examples of survey questions studying belief in a “Personal God”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>EVS/WVS</th>
<th>Gallup</th>
<th>ISSP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>There is a personal God</td>
<td>a) Yes</td>
<td>a) I don’t believe in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>There is some sort of spirit or life force</td>
<td>c) No</td>
<td>b) I don’t know whether there is a God and I don’t believe there is any way of finding out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>I really don’t know what to think</td>
<td></td>
<td>c) I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>I don’t really think that there is any sort of spirit, God or life force</td>
<td></td>
<td>d) I find myself believing in God some of the time but not in others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God.
In what follows, diverse question wordings (like the ones displayed in table 2.2) are viewed as variations of a common practice. From this research practice, the two contemporary research orientations can be identified.

‘Assessing religion’: On salient characteristics of a research orientation

The contemporary research orientation, here discussed as ‘assessing the extent of religion’, brings together some typical examples of measuring the extent to which people in different regions accept religious beliefs and practices at an individual level. In order to exemplify the contemporary research orientation, three publications have been selected for in-depth analysis. These are: Halman and Draulans (2006) *How secular is Europe?* Norris and Inglehart (2004) *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, and Voas (2009) *The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe*. While the first two publications use the EVS and the WVS data, the third uses data collected within the European Social Survey (ESS). Accordingly, Halman and Draulans (2006) and Norris and Inglehart (2006) represent contemporary use of the EVS/WVS projects while Voas (2009) shows that the research practice in question is not bound to only one survey study.

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Halman and Draulans (2006) use two (see table 2.3) of Glock and Stark’s five dimensions, the “ideological” (i.e. belief) and the “ritualistic” (i.e. practice) to operationalize religion. They considered adding religious affiliation as a separate dimension but because membership in the Nordic Lutheran former state churches appeared to them to be an act of solidarity towards the state without religious value, they decided to treat religious affiliation as something independent of religion. Religion was also assumed to be affected by age, education, gender and value orientation (i.e. post-materialism favoring personal freedom and self-fulfillment). That is to say, age, education, gender, value orientation and affiliation in Lutheran churches would explain the extent of religious beliefs and practices.

To justify their decision to operationalize religion in two dimensions, Halman and Draulans (2006) quote Glock and Stark and claim that: “Each religion has some set of beliefs which adherents are expected to ratify” (ibid: 271). Because of this, they argue, “religious beliefs” can be measured by asking respondents to describe if one thinks religion is important in one’s own life, if one is a religious person, if one accepts religious doctrines, if one thinks that God is important and if one gets strength and comfort from religion (see, table 2.3). They further support their decision of these specific survey items with reference to the result of a factor analysis. Similarly, the dimension “religious practice” is according to Halman and Draulans (2006) in line with Glock and Stark’s reasoning that: “acts of worship and devotion,
the things that people do to carry out their religious commitment” (2006: 271, italics in original). Also in agreement with Glock and Stark’s reasoning, Halman and Draulans assume religious practices confirm the strength of religious beliefs. This type of reasoning seems to suggest that if beliefs are not followed up by religious practices the beliefs are not that strong or important. In detail (showed in table 2.3) the dimension “religious practices” included in this case the items frequency of attending religious services, frequency of prayer or moment of contemplation and participation in religious voluntary organizations. Again, the decision to include these items was justified by the results of a factor analysis. Thus, Halman and Draulans (2006) can be believed to follow Glock and Stark (1968) in assuming that the number of dimensions may be reduced while wide-ranging claim of generalization is kept. This is done even though the Glock and Stark’s (1965) original claim for universalism was dependent on multidimensionality as the previous practice of studying religion one dimension at the time was considered too limited.

Table 2.3. Halman and Draulans (2006) Religious Beliefs and Religious Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>Self-described importance of religion in life, describing oneself as a religious person, belief in religious doctrines (God, life after death, Hell, Heaven, sin), importance of God and strength and comfort received from religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Practices</td>
<td>Frequency of attending religious services, frequency of prayer, moments of contemplation, participation in religious voluntary organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the mix of items chosen to investigate “religious beliefs” seems to fall under Glock and Stark’s “ideological dimension”. However, in addition, there are items which seem to belong to the “consequential dimension” (e.g. self-described importance to religion and describes oneself as a religious person) the “consequential dimension” and the “experimental dimension” (e.g. receives strength and comfort from religion). In a similar fashion Halman and Draulans (2006) dimension “religious practice” includes items from Glock and Stark’s “ritualistic dimension” but, also, the “consequential dimension”. Participation in religious voluntary organizations can be viewed as mainly belonging to the “consequential dimension”. This use of several items can be seen as an example of an enduring trait of using several survey items to solve issues of how well each item actually investigates the religion of interest. Furthermore, this can perhaps also be seen as an example
of (over-)use of factor analysis which the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ regarded to be a rigorous method for deciding the number and content of dimensions ad hoc (cf., Robertson 1970; Roof 1979).

Glock and Stark did not explicitly discuss affiliation in terms of membership of different religious organizations (perhaps partly because, as in their publication of 1968, the population investigated were members of congregations and not representative samples of the US population). In Halman and Draulans’ (2006) article, religious affiliation in the form of membership is treated as something which would have a (negative) influence on the extent of religious beliefs and practices. Norris and Inglehart (2004) - whose book Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide we now turn to - also treat religious affiliation as something that causes more or less religious beliefs and practices. In their reasoning, religious affiliation in the form of living in a country with Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Hindu religious culture affects religious beliefs (cf., 2004: 15).

In detail, Norris and Inglehart (2004) operationalize religion into the three indicators – Religious participation, values and beliefs (see table 2.4). Apart from adding the indicator of religious values, Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) “Indicators of Religiosity” (table 2.4) roughly correspond with Halman and Draulans’ (2006) (table 2.3) two dimensions “religious belief” and “religious practices”. However, Norris and Inglehart (2004) use a more narrow understanding of “religious belief” since they only include items that are intended to investigate acceptance of religious doctrines (such as belief in Heaven and Hell). The consequence of using a fixed (and Christian) set of beliefs in this matter is a research design where the extent of religious beliefs is measured as an effect of affiliation. Type of religious beliefs – with their varied content and attitudes towards accepting doctrine – was not measured. Since the scope of their analysis is worldwide, one can easily think of exceptions to the rule that affiliation causes the extent of belief is misleading. One such example is the Buddhist belief in Karma, which does not necessarily fit the Christian notions of life after death in the form of belief in Heaven and Hell. With the proposed research design, rejecting Christian beliefs because one is affiliated with Buddhism would generate the result of low rates of religious beliefs. Norris and Inglehart (2004), nevertheless, claim that their operationalization is supported by the fact that religion is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be measured one item at a time (cf., ibid: 42). Therefore, it can be said that their claim of generalization rests on multidimensionality, just like Glock and Stark (1965). In Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) usage it becomes visible that multidimensionality, if based on Christian-influenced survey items, may not support a world-wide generalization of religion.

20 It can be argued that Halman and Draulans measure some features of religious affiliation in their dimension “religious beliefs”. Specifically, the item “describing oneself as a religious person” can be seen as an indicator of religious affiliation (see, table 2.3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Participation</td>
<td>Frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of private prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Values</td>
<td>Self-described importance of God respective religion in respondent’s life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>Belief in religious doctrines (Heaven, Hell; Life after death, people have a soul)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hereafter, and similar to Glock and Stark (1965), Norris and Inglehart (2004) add theories of values and value orientations to the operationalization of religion. In what Norris and Inglehart call “indicators for religiosity” (see table 2.4) one indicator is “religious values”, including self-described importance of God respectively religion in the respondent’s life. Their incorporation of “religious values” measured in this way can be contextualized as follows.

In a series of publications (e.g. Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart 1977; 2006; Inglehart and Welzel 2005) two overarching value dimensions were derived from the WVS material (see, figure 1, page 54). The first value orientation goes from traditional to secular-rational values (e.g. the y-axis, figure 1). To have a traditional value orientation involves emphasizing belief in Christian articles of faith, attending church regularly and having great confidence in the country’s churches. Moreover, people in the traditional value orientation category hold that God is very important in one’s life, that children need to learn obedience and religious faith rather than independence and determination, have the opinion that abortion is never justifiable, have a strong sense of national pride and value respect for authority. In other words, the indicators “religious beliefs”, “religious values” and “religious practice” comprise items that previously were used to define a traditional value orientation. By contrast, to have a secular-rational value orientation means taking the opposite stand in these issues (cf., Inglehart 2006: 119-120). Thus, as researchers such as Haller (2002) have pointed out, the value orientation that Inglehart calls traditional vs. secular-rational seems to correspond with a religious vs. non-religious value orientation.

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21 Examples of Christian doctrines of faith are “belief in Heaven” and “belief in Hell” (Inglehart 2006: 119).
Inglehart adds a second value orientation which goes from survival values to self-expression values (see, the x-axis, figure 1). This second value orientation can be said to add complexity to Haller’s (2002) argument that the traditional is the religious. In Inglehart’s terminology, survival values consist of giving priority to physical and economic security over quality of life and self-expression, respondents that are not happy, homosexuality is never justifiable, respondent have not signed a petition and express that people cannot be trusted (i.e. Inglehart 2006: 118). Inglehart (1971; 1977; 2006) has repeatedly shown that the survival value orientation is predominantly found in countries scoring low on welfare or economic scales (such as BNP per capita). By contrast, self-expression values emphasize the opposite and are found in rich countries with extensive welfare regimes such as Sweden.
upper right corner of figure 1). This is interesting because in Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) research design it is suggested that differences in human security (e.g. human development, economic equality, education and health care) have an impact on “religious values” (cf. ibid: 15). Affiliation, in addition, is held to have an impact on extent of religious beliefs and practices. Taken together, this seems to indicate that assumptions about religion are very much embedded in these theoretical/empirical constructs called value orientations. This embedding was previously shown to be present in Glock and Stark’s (1965) reasoning documented earlier in this chapter.

When Norris and Inglehart (2004) merge religion to be value orientations and value orientation to be religion they fix religion as conservative in its moral outlook. Consider, for example, Inglehart’s (1984) reasoning on the relationship between religion and conservatism. Inglehart writes:

> The unifying element holding this [the traditional] value system together, seems to be the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, coupled with a belief that these Commandments reflect the will of an omnipotent God. If one accepts that belief, it is mandatory that one adheres to the entire system (Inglehart 1984:11, quoted in Pettersson 1988a:35-36)

From Inglehart’s way of reasoning, it is clear that the traditional value orientation is bound up with obedience and collective rights to dictate the general will for individuals. Congruence is expected between the abstract level of what religions expect from their followers and the expressions of religious commitment. Religion, then, cannot be anything but conservative and authoritative. In line with this, Norris and Inglehart (2004) argue that religion is fixed in a traditional value orientation and is equated with the avocation of rigid, predictable rules. Beliefs in a higher power, which for Christianity would be a “personal God” in their view, are indispensable for the traditional value orientation of a higher power which will ensure that things work out according to the plan of the universe (for details see, Norris and Inglehart 2004:18-20).

To equate religion with traditional value orientation is nevertheless misleading since the mirror image of the traditional – the secular-rational – also has its historical roots in religious beliefs. This is shown in the way that “religious affiliation” is treated as an independent variable with effects on religious beliefs and practices. Norris and Inglehart (2004) refer to Weber’s analysis of Protestantism becoming the creed of capitalism (and losing its

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22 For the argument here, it is of importance that a belief in a “personal God” following Glock and Stark’s (1965) terminology is equal to accepting Christianity’s warranting beliefs expressed in a number of doctrines such as belief in “Heaven and Hell” and belief in “the virgin birth”. Consequently, a “personal God” can be investigated by the latent construct of a number of doctrines besides investigating belief in a “personal God” by asking “Do you believe in a Personal God?”
“religious” root) and predict that generation after generation growing up in secure circumstances will leave the religious component of the “sacred” behind and solemnly focus upon the values that religious teachings promote. Religious beliefs and, especially the description of the “sacred”, may thus still be understood to provide a rationale for values and value orientations, only now, it is the beliefs of the past which constitute this rationale. In other words, in the research design of Norris and Inglehart (2004) some religious traditions (e.g. Protestantism) seem not to be religious at all and actually promote secularity.

Finally, Inglehart’s (2006) work also emphasizes that religion and value orientations are properties of humans which they acquire in their “formative period” in life and are, thereafter, fairly stable throughout life (e.g. Inglehart 2006). This means that beliefs are seen as coherent and stable properties of individuals, a claim of coherency that, for example, Shils (1957) holds to be incorrect. In addition, when religion is something which individuals gain in their formative years and something which is dependent on the security in the country they are born, commitment to religion becomes very fixed. Religion is assumed not to change over the course of a lifetime and local variations or liberal religious traditions are overlooked as sources for change and variation in religiosity.

The ways in which Halman and Draulans (2006) and Norris and Inglehart (2004) put forward their interpretation of religion are not isolated to analyses based on the EVS/WVS data. In Voas’ (2009) article *The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe*, religion is operationalized in three aspects – affiliation, belief and practice based on ESS data. As shown in table 2.5, below, Voas uses items on current and past identification with a religion to measure “religious affiliation”; frequency of attendance at religious services and frequency of private prayer to measure “religious practices”; and self-reported religiosity and importance of religion in the respondent’s life to measure “religious beliefs”(ibid: 156).

Table 2.5. Voas (2009) Coverage of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects Covered</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Current or past identification with a religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>Frequency of attendance at religious services, frequency of private prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Self-reported religiosity, Importance of religion in respondent’s life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The content of these items (displayed in table 2.5) differs slightly from the content ascribed to the dimensions of Glock and Stark. Most notably, the aspect of beliefs in Voas’ research design does not investigate acceptance of specific belief statements but “self-reported religiosity” and “importance of
religion in the respondent’s life”. Voas explains the choice of items studying “religion” as follows:

While the questions “how religious would you say that you are?” and “how important is religion in your life? do not measure religion directly, it seems likely that there is a strong association between these variables and strength of belief. (Voas 2009: 156)

So, put bluntly, Voas supposes that describing oneself as religious indicates that one is willing to accept religious doctrines like a transcendent description of the “sacred”. Following the rationale that can be ascribed to Glock and Stark (1965), Voas bases his argument on assumptions about what religions ought to expect from their adherents. If this assumption is not convincing enough, he seems to suggest that sociologists should check for statistical associations between variables. In other words, the use of statistical analysis such as factor analysis is assumed to reveal whether or not describing oneself as religious also indicates the acceptance of a transcendent “sacred” without actually asking this question. Voas (2009) comments on the variables displayed in table 2.5 by writing:

We may conjecture that all six of these variables can be treated as observed indicators of a single underlying quality of religiosity. If so, then it would make sense to combine them into a scale measure of a latent attribute. Because each individual variable captures the quality we want to measure only imperfectly, a scale that draws on all of them collectively should be more valid and reliable than any one of them separately. (Voas 2009: 157)

While Voas’ reasoning fits very well with standard ways of analyzing survey data, the outcome of combining the dimensions of “religion at an individual level” into one theoretical construct reflects a research practice. By combining separate survey items into a scale intended to investigate a latent quality of religion, the assumed multidimensionality of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ permitting its self-claimed universalism prevails.

Looking at the contemporary research orientation ‘assessing the extent of religion’ as a whole there seem to be recurrent assumptions and perspectives underpinning the way religion is analyzed. First, the claim of wide-ranging generalization is justified by the capability of simultaneously analyzing several items at once, analyzing religion through factor analysis. As Voas’ (2009) argumentation shows, in these instances quantity compensates for quality and the validity of single measurements. In addition, Halman and Draulans’ (2006) way of operationalizing religion shows that the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ rationale for claiming wide-ranging generalization can be called for even though the number of dimensions is greatly reduced. A combination of “religious beliefs” and “religious practices” seems to cover the
essentials in such a way that the need for other dimensions is ruled out. Between belief and practice there is also hierarchically ordered and religious beliefs are taken to be more central for religion than religious practice.

Furthermore, notions of value orientations seem to be perceived as religion and vice versa in this contemporary research orientation. At times this complexity results in a contradiction of terms. For example, Halman and Draulans (2006) assume that the value orientation post-materialist values (which Inglehart (2006) calls the self-expressive value orientation) cause religion to decline. At the same time, Inglehart (2006) and Norris and Inglehart (2004) assume can be equated with the traditional value orientation (which emphases the opposite values compared with the secular-rational value orientation). However, if a secular-rational value orientation is taken to cause a low extent of religion, it cannot also be the “religion” it is expected to have a diminishing effect on. To say the least, there seem to be circular elements in this way of analyzing religion. Nonetheless, understanding religion as a value orientation also brings with it straightforward assumptions of coherence between religious doctrines and individual expressions of religiosity. This congruence is assumed to be fairly stable since the individual’s religion is also assumed to be a property acquired in the individual’s “formative years”. As a result, religion does not change over the life course. Among other things, these assumptions about stability narrow the analysis of religious change into an analysis of the extent of religion from one generation to the next.

Going over the results of Halman and Draulans (2006), Norris and Inglehart (2004) and Voas (2009) the following can be noticed. Halman and Draulans (2006) discover that due to the fact that their dimensions of religion do not generate the expected result, nuances or changes in the way in which secularization is understood are called for. Norris and Inglehart (2004) struggle with the finding that even though countries score low on their measurements for religion, a large proportion of the population in these countries seems to think about the meaning of life (ibid: 74-75). This, they hold, is an unexpected result. Covering religion through the aspects of affiliation, practices and beliefs, Voas (2009) finds that about half of the European population is neither religious nor fully non-religious. This result alone should suggest that throwing together many items on religion in order to compensate for the validity problems of each single item comes at a high price. That is, it seems as if about half of the European population falls outside of the interpretative frame of reference that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ offers.

‘Assessing spirituality’: An alternative research orientation?

Within the research practice here called ‘Religion in Dimensions’, there have always been arguments that convey assumptions about what can be de-
scribed as the gray-areas in-between orthodoxy (religion in the form of accepting a transcendent “sacred”) and non-religion that reject beliefs in a transcendent “sacred”. In fact, the debate about how to define religion in either functional ways accepting immanent and inner-worldly, holistic descriptions of the “sacred”, or substantive ways favoring a transcendent description of the “sacred” is concerned with these gray areas. However, the gray areas are not only about the description of the “sacred”. After going through how religion can be operationalized in dimensions, Glock (1962) commented on the issue as follows:

Until now we have analyzed belief largely under the framework which defines religion in traditional ways. However, religion may also be conceptualized in other ways. One alternative, implicit in what has just been said, is to conceptualize religion in terms of individual’s concern with discovering the meaning and purpose of life and the beliefs he adopts to resolve that concern. Believers would then be represented by all those who experienced this concern and resolved it. Those who have the concern but who have not resolved it may be thought of as seekers. Non-believers would be those for whom this concern does not even exist. (Glock 1962: 102-103)

Put differently, the gray areas concern indifference to religious solutions of the meaning of life problem. It maps a terrain of individual prerogative which, Glock (1962) suggests, is not traditional religion but possibly alternative religion. Moreover, Glock’s reasoning seems to suggest that the gray areas represent the importance of existential questions in individuals’ lives. If humans ponder about the meaning of life and death by themselves, without accepting church doctrines, this is something separate and in opposition to religion. However, based on the quote above, he seems to question whether such existential thoughts can be very important in individuals’ lives.

Two other arguments also recur within the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. First, as Glock and Stark (1965) suggest, the non-believers discussed above could possibly be divided into the agnostics and the atheists. That is, a difference should be drawn between those who openly reject belief in God (i.e. the atheists) and those who according to them: “contend that the question of belief is beyond his ability to decide” (ibid: 25). Glock and Stark consider this to be a task for future research as the numbers of atheists and agnostics are too small to make reliable distinctions. Second, adding to the tasks for future research, Glock and Stark suggest that the “seekers” discussed above can be illustrated with: “the American occult milieu, which consists of occasional audiences for lectures, books, magazines” (ibid:14). This world of “seekers”, they suggest, is not a proper group but a “loose-consensus collectivity” that, nevertheless, is formal enough, to constitute a value-orientation of its own. As a value-orientation the occult milieu is religious in nature. Adding these amendments together, Glock and Stark seem
simultaneously to suggest that the alternatives to religion constitute conscious reactions of religious content (e.g. agnostic, atheist) and emerge from the world of the occult. Thus, as summarized by Glock and Wuthnow (1979) the categories used for comparison with strong commitment to religion may be the nominally religious (who has a weak commitment to religion), the non-religious (who openly reject religious beliefs) and the alternative religious (who draw on recourses for belief outside the established churches). Accordingly, similar to the assumptions underpinning the acceptance of a “personal God” (discussed on page 43), several assumptions in fact underpinned what the opposite poles of religion might be.

Because there is a mix of assumptions in play here, there have been numerous attempts to name the gray areas characterizing an individual prerogative in questions of faith that may reflect the occult world of “seekers”, concerns with broad existential questions and, as a result, possibly non-transcendent descriptions of the “sacred”. Some examples are “Implicit Religion” (Bailey 1998), “Invisible religion” (Luckmann [1967]/1974), “Un-churched spirituality” (Hamberg 2011), “Post-Christian Spirituality” (Houtman and Auspers 2007) or “Spiritualities of Life” (Woodhead and Heelas 2000; Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Since the 1970s there has also been an enduring assumption within the sociological study of religion that groups of the gray area discussed above are increasing in Europe (e.g. Dobbelaere and Riis 2002; Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

In order to systematically document the extent of these forms of religiosity, henceforth called “alternative spirituality”, the European survey study Religious and Moral Pluralism (RAMP) was carried out at the end of the 1990s (cf., Dobbelaere and Riis 2002). The RAMP study was the extension of the EVS project that was chosen to exemplify the previous contemporary research orientation ‘assessing the extent of religion’. Therefore, studies based on the RAMP data seem appropriate to use in order to exemplify the research orientation discussed as ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. It is noteworthy that this research orientation, too, goes beyond the analysis of one project. Instead of being isolated to the RAMP study, the questions discussed below are also found in the projects discussed as examples of the research orientation ‘assessing the extent of religion’.

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Two aims of the RAMP project are of interest here: the attempt to develop survey questions which would better investigate “alternative spirituality” and, thus, to estimate the extent of alternative spirituality at an individual level in Europe. Because the taxonomies put forward by Heelas (1996), Woodhead and Heelas (2000) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005) on religion and spirituality have been used to analyze the RAMP data (e.g. Heelas 2007; Houtman and Auspers 2007; Heelas and Houtman 2009) these taxonomies will be presented as a backdrop for the analyses of the RAMP data to be discussed.
Woodhead and Heelas’ (2000) taxonomy of religion and spirituality was from the beginning a conceptual distinction between three forms of religion cum spirituality. It included “religions of difference”, “religions of humanity” and “spiritualties of life”. In Woodhead and Heelas’ taxonomy the basic assumption for religion (i.e. “religions of difference”) is to uphold a difference between this world and the world beyond. That is, acceptance of a transcendent description of the “sacred”. There is a subversion of this basic version, “religions of humanity”, that recognizes a difference between the natural and the supernatural but advocates a more equal relationship between the natural and supernatural than the “religions of difference”. Spirituality outside Christian traditions (i.e. “spiritualties of life”) upholds that this world and whatever might be beyond this world are united in a holistic understanding of humans’ relation to nature and the universe. In other words, the pivotal characteristic of “spiritualties of life” is a belief in an immanent description of the “sacred”. In view of that, their taxonomy can be viewed as a generic endeavor which builds on assumptions about the importance of the “sacred” also found in Glock and Stark’s (1965) reasoning.

For the first empirical test of their taxonomy, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) reduced the three forms of religion and spirituality into two forms. These were called “religion of difference” and “spiritualties of life” and were assumed to be widely divergent. In the former case, the description of the “sacred” as a transcendent reality was assumed to be provided by Christian churches while, in the latter case, the description of the “sacred” as an immanent and holistic reality was assumed to be taught by providers of holistic well-being services. The result of this theoretical operation is neatly separated systems of beliefs which are stipulated to be mutually exclusive, rival forms of religion and spirituality (cf., Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Accordingly, I argue that the Heelas and Woodhead (2005) taxonomy can be understood as a form of ‘spirituality in dimensions’ and it is presented in this way in table 2.6.

Table 2.6. Heelas and Woodhead’s (2005) Taxonomy on Religion and Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Content “Religion”</th>
<th>Content “Spirituality”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Churches, religious self-description</td>
<td>Holistic milieu, spiritual self-description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Personal God</td>
<td>God within/Power/Life Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Church attendance, Prayer</td>
<td>Holistic activities, Meditation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is observable in table 2.6, the difference between religion and spirituality can be understood in the dimensions Affiliation, Belief and Practice. “Reli-
“Religion” is assumed to correspond with membership of churches and with a Christian identity. In contrast to “religion”, “spirituality” is stipulated to be rooted in the holistic milieu, for example, being a paying member of some group or a regular attendee. Another example of spiritual affiliation was taken to be identification with a spiritual, but not religious self-description. For this taxonomy splitting “religion” from “spirituality”, the dimension of affiliation is tightly intertwined with the dimension of practice as the holistic milieu is organized around pay per use practice. The dimension of belief, nevertheless, had been given priority from the beginning. Therefore, differences in beliefs were taken to explain differences in affiliation and practice.

From the beginning, the EVS study included the answer “There is some sort of spirit or life force” (see, table 2.1 in the beginning of this chapter) that was expected to investigate “alternative spirituality”. However, as Harding et al. (1986) conclude, this statement was not favored by people outside churches. Instead, the description “there is a personal God” was chosen by people living in countries with a catholic heritage, and “there is some sort of spirit or life force” was favored in Protestant-influenced countries (cf., ibid: 48-49). Therefore, in the focused survey on Religious and Moral Pluralism (RAMP) the statements investigating different descriptions of the “sacred” were altered in order to create measurements for assessing the extent of alternative spirituality in Europe. In detail, the original answer “there is a personal God” was altered to “I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship” which means that the technical term “personal God” was dropped. The immanent “sacred” originally investigated in the statement “there is some sort of spirit or life force” was altered to “I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force”. Through the use of the term “impersonal” in this latter statement, the negative version of the technical term “personal God” was added in this answer. So, knowledge about the theological concept “personal God” was still required of the person answering the survey in order to fully understand the difference between the survey statements. In addition, there was an alternative phrased as follows: “I believe that God is within each person, rather than something out there”, which was assumed to constitute a mid-category in-between the “personal God” and the “impersonal Spirit or life force” (i.e. Barker 2004). Finally, there were the alternatives “I don’t believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force” and “I really don’t know what to believe” (e.g. Gustafsson and Pettersson 2000). The new, modified survey answers were, similar to their forerunners, bound up with assumptions about a “personal God” and its assumed counter positions. Thus, it can be said to have used the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework as a default mode, and the structure of affiliation, belief and practice to which “spirituality” was an alternative.

The result of the RAMP study did not meet expectations as the “God is within each person, rather than something out there” answer was much more popular than expected. For example, in Portugal, 39 percent of the popula-
tion ticked that they believed in a “God within” while only 26 percent believed in a “personal God”. In Great Britain 37 percent of the population believed in a “God within” while 23 percent said that they believed in a “personal God”. Finally, the greatest difference was found in Sweden where 36 percent believed in a “God within” but only 18 percent believed in a “personal God” (cf., Heelas and Houtman 2009: 86).

Interpreting these findings, Heelas and Houtman (2009) outline three explanatory hypotheses (see also, Houtman et al. 2012). The result may suggest a spiritual revolution of alternative belief (most strikingly in Sweden), the presence of changed (and weakened) versions of Christianity, or may show the difference between saliency and indifference, certainty and doubt. That is, the third explanation is that the result somehow represents the differences between the identities of atheist, agnostic and believer (cf., ibid: 92). With these three explanations, Heelas and Houtman (2009) touch upon several of the overlapping assumptions invested in the “gray areas” within the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework. These assumptions include a combination of stressing the description of the “sacred” as the difference between religion and its counterparts (spiritual as well as non-religious). When statements about the “sacred” does not work distinguishable and group identifiers, additional theories concerning the saliency of religion and spirituality are added. This combination of assumptions seems to run along two axes, from strength and saliency to weakness and indifference and from a Christian-oriented description of the “sacred” to a New Religious Movement oriented description of the “sacred”. Taken as a whole, one question is assumed to foster two different kinds of group affiliation (e.g. atheist, agnostic or believer cum Christian, New Religious Movement or none of these).

Religion and Spirituality: On shared assumptions

The two identified contemporary research orientations discussed so far share assumptions which show that they depend on the same research practice. These assumptions will function as a backdrop for the empirical analyses in chapters 4-6. Therefore, the assumptions will be presented here in an abbreviated version in order to clarify general principles which will recur in what is to follow.

The centrality of different descriptions of the “sacred” is perhaps the most notable. Both strands of research recognize that religion at the end of the day is an acceptance of a transcendent “sacred”. In comparison, spirituality is defined by its hesitation to describe the “sacred” as transcendent in favor of holistic, omnipresent descriptions of the “sacred”. Consequently, religion is, in analytical terms, also conceptualized as the default mode of which spirituality actively resists.

Furthermore, the research orientations similarly seem to assume that religion and spirituality are multidimensional and can be measured through
some combination of affiliation, belief and practice. There is, so to speak, ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and ‘Spirituality in Dimensions’. Given the prominence given to the descriptions of the “sacred” found within the dimension of belief, this dimension is understood to be the marker of difference. The other dimensions, affiliation and practice, explain the dimensions of belief and investigate commitment to organizations and traditions. This is important because without an organization or a tradition there would be no providers for a coherent system of belief which both descriptions of the “sacred” are assumed to be parts of. When the “sacred” is part of a world view, Woodhead and Heelas (2000), argue that the holistic is a consistent outlook on how the “sacred” relates to the natural and humankind. In this way, the understanding of a world view comes very close to Glock and Stark’s (1965) notion of a value orientation as a full institution. It is the world views which provide a full explanation of the meanings of life which are in question, in other words, full institutions in the form of “isms”, theologies or ideologies. One consequence of this way of reasoning is that individuals are assumed to follow the expectations of organizations and traditions – even for spirituality, in which a main mantra is to follow your unique path in life by listening to yourself. This might come across as a contradiction in terms but if a collective assume that everyone should decide for themselves, this individually-oriented behavior has a collective side. Viewed from the perspective that it is organization and traditions that give the “sacred” content, both religion and spirituality are understood as individuals’ adherence to a collective level. At stake here is a form of ‘religion at an individual level’ and ‘spirituality at an individual level’.

There are, nevertheless also differences between what the research orientations and that which is expected from religion and spirituality. Via its dependency on value research, ‘Religion in Dimensions’ tends to portray religion as something bound up with a conservative and authoritative outlook on moral and social relations (i.e. Inglehart 2006). Furthermore, religion is assumed to be the stable property of an individual, given to individuals during their “formative years” and constant thereafter. Accordingly, religion does not change over the life span. Neither, really, is religion assumed to be influenced by the ongoing cultural context, the zeitgeist.

Spirituality, in contrast, is less invested with assumptions of a collective prerogative in matters of faith, and spiritual people are assumed to choose their own beliefs. The complex side of this is that the assumed individual prerogative also feeds into assumptions about spirituality being a weaker commitment with less influence on social life. For these reasons, measurements of spirituality are taken to investigate both affiliation to a continuum ranging from Christian, via New Religious Movements to none of these, and a continuum ranging from believer, via agnostic to atheist. This creates complexity when results are analyzed.
In conclusion the two research orientations seem heavily dependent on descriptions of the “sacred”. It seems to be the source of similarities and differences between religion and spirituality. Given this centrality of the “sacred”, it is puzzling that the content used to describe the “sacred” is so persistently derived from "isms" or belief systems. As Shiner (1967) emphasized, this tendency suggests that the central concepts are not analytical concepts but a priori concepts assumed to exist “out there”.

Problematizing a research practice and its assumptions

This chapter presents a critical review on a research practice. The research practice in question was located in an American research milieu that published articles between the 1940s/1950s and the 1970s. The work of this research milieu has continued to inform how religion and spirituality are analyzed through the continued use of the survey questions in longitudinal large-N survey projects (such as the EVS and the WVS). It is against this background that the first objective of the thesis (i.e. to problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies) was formulated.

In brief, the research practice analyzed was found to understand religion in principle as transcendent descriptions of the “sacred”. Thus, similar to Lynch’s (2012) observation, religion is equated with an ontological approach to the “sacred” as something which exists out there but cannot be the object of social scientific study. Accordingly, the ways people express belief or disbelief in the “sacred” have been overlooked. It is as if religion has been analyzed in a cultural vacuum, where people are mute when it comes to their own religion (cf., Wuthnow 2011). Spirituality is understood in the same way but with the important difference that spirituality favors alternatives to the transcendent description of the “sacred” expressed as belief in a “personal God”. A persistent focus was found on how the “sacred” was described but without any empirical resonance with how people express themselves when talking about the “sacred”. The analytical focus of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was therefore understood as ‘religion at an individual level’ measured through commitment and congruence with coherent belief systems at a remote and abstract level. The tendency described as ‘religion at an individual level’ is one reason why the empirical studies presented in chapters 4-6 of this thesis are focused on providing empirically-grounded nuances in matters of how the “sacred” is understood by people and not belief systems or churches.

Many of the large-N surveys using the research practice of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ collect data in countries where different versions of Christianity and new religious movements are not the only religious or spiritual outlooks that exists. Strikingly, therefore, the research practice of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ fails to nuance the religious and spiritual diversity. In all sense of the
words, this is a blind spot in the research practice in question which has serious consequences. However, addressing this task by finding a new, more inclusive yet generic, definition of religion is beyond the scope of this thesis. Basically, this is because such an attempt would mean continuing along the conventional research practice instead of finding new ways to supplement a body of knowledge.

Consider, for example, the starting point of Glock and Stark (1965) whose work was chosen as a ‘case in point’ for the research practice in question. They start by quoting Simmel:

Thus far, no one has been able to offer a definition which, without vagueness and yet with sufficient comprehensiveness, has told once and for all what religion is in its essence, in that which is common alike to the religion of Christians and South Sea islanders, to Buddhism and Mexican idolatry
(Simmel 1955:1)

Much ink, Glock and Stark continue, had already at their time of writing been spilled on attempts to follow up Simmel’s call for a generic and universal definition of religion. However, the close context of Simmel’s words suggests that a generic and universal definition was not what Simmel was advocating with the famous words quoted above. In the sentence before the famous quote above, Simmel (1955) wrote:

The ambiguity which surrounds the origin and nature of religion will never be removed so long as we insist upon treating the problem as one for which a single word will be the “open sesame”
(Simmel 1955:1)

The thought which Simmel presents in this quote can be interpreted as a call for nuanced and shaded generalizations of a problem that too often is depicted in black and white. From here, Simmel moves on to draw a distinction between religion and religiosity as alluded to in the introduction to this thesis. If religion is assumed to be the most abstract principles that unite a society, reasons Simmel, then there will be gaps between this abstract notion of religion and people’s religiosity. This conclusion is dependent on an understanding of religiosity as that which people subjectively draws attention to and understands to be the religious. Within the research practice that has been critically discussed up until now, the notion of religion was made very abstract and overarching. Thus, alternative paths for conducting research would ideally pay attention to the general patterns of religiosity, understood as that which people tend to subjectively drawn attention to as religious.
Chapter 3: Revisiting a Research Site

The research practice, of which Glock and Stark’s (1965) multidimensional operationalization of religion is a case in point, became conventional practice because it was perceived as an innovation (e.g. Roof 1979). Earlier, the extent of religion had been measured one measurement at a time. This method of analysis was not considered rigorous enough for a complex phenomenon like religion. Thus, in the United States Glock and Stark (1965) solved an identified problem and an old area of research took on a new standard for doing research.

In this chapter the consequences of importing the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ to a research site outside the United States will be problematized. In other words, the chapter addresses the first objective of the thesis, namely - to problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies. The chapter is focused geographically on Sweden where proponents of the research practice mentioned earlier found unexpected forms of religion and non-religion (e.g. Halman and Draulans 2006; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Zuckerman 2008). More specifically, results on religion from Sweden show that very few people (less than four percent of the population) attend services on a regular basis (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004). However, the majority of the population (i.e. 68 percent in 2012) are still members of the former state church. In addition about eight percent of Swedish people are members of other congregations or religious organizations24. However, the high membership numbers are not supported by acceptance of a supernatural God, investigated as beliefs in a “personal God”. In fact, the EVS/WVS data used by Halman and Draulans (2006) show that only 16 percent of the population in Sweden believes in a “personal God”. The rest do not completely reject the possibility of something beyond this world and the most commonly expressed belief is “some sort of spirit or life force” (54 percent of the population). Only 14 percent of the population in Sweden claim to be without beliefs in anything supernatural or spiritually “sacred”. Based on the assumptions underpinning the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ research practice, these statistics are unex-

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24 These statistics on membership are the official numbers presented on the Church of Sweden’s webpage www.svenskakyrkan.se and on the official website for the Swedish government bureau for state financed payments to the religious organizations in Sweden www.sst.a.se.
pected because belief in a “personal God” was taken to explain church membership (cf., Glock and Stark 1965). As suggested in the previous chapter, the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework suggested that membership without belief in a “personal God” is a deviant case of (non-)religion. Thus, the statistics under discussion have inspired questions like Zuckerman’s (2008) “Is Sweden a society without God?” and Inglehart and Baker’s (2000) “Is Sweden the prime example of advanced secularization and, thus, the cutting edge of cultural change?” Taken together, these questions concerning religion in Sweden are based on the absence of specific beliefs which means that the beliefs which people in Sweden actually hold have been overlooked.

In view of this, the present focus on the import, implementation and consequences of a research practice, the analysis in this chapter is based on literature using data collected in Sweden. Specifically, the review constitutes an analysis of what people do in terms of at least one of the three dimensions of religion: affiliation, belief and practice. Appendix A, pages 261-268, provides a full description in table format of the literature included for analysis. All in all, the review covers 293 research publications published between the years 1897 and 2013. This period of almost 120 years spans from the first known empirical study conducted in Sweden to the present day. The literature was selected by a combination of search techniques such as archival research, careful readings of publication lists produced by private research centers and database searches. Specifically, the integrating search engine of

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25 According to Gustafsson, G. (2005) dissertations within the discipline sociology of religion in Sweden tend to provide fairly short background descriptions (cf., ibid: 149). Thus, in a local perspective the more comprehensive review conducted here is called for since it contributes a historical contextualization of the domestic research milieu in Sweden.

26 The data collection for the review in this chapter was conducted at the beginning of 2013. Publications published from the autumn 2013 or later are therefore not included in the present analysis.

27 In Sweden, the sociology of religion has been organized in two private research centers over the years. First, between the years 1962-1990, there was a private research institute in Stockholm called Religionssociologiska Institutet, [the Institute for Sociology of Religion]. This institute published three research journals which have all been considered for this review. After going through the three journals, only two were found to publish articles of interest for the current review. These were Dokumentation 2000 [Documentation 2000] (1972-1980) a journal publishing research aiming to predict the role of religion in Sweden at the year 2000 and Religionssociologiska Instituts Forskningsrapporter, [Research Papers from the Institute for Sociology of Religion] (1962-1990) which published papers on research of article length. The third series of publication called Smärre meddelanden [Smaller notes] (1962-1985) published short notes on empirical findings in the form of commented tables. These very short texts were not considered for this review. This means that from the entire publication list of 600 publications that can be linked to the Institute for Sociology of Religion (i.e. Gustafsson, G. 2013) a subsample was used for this analysis. Second, from 1990 onwards, the Church of Sweden hosted a research center with an interest in the sociology of religion. Between the years 1986–1993 this center published a journal called Religion och Samhälle, [Religion and Society]. After this, the journal changed and took the form of recurrent special issues of the journal Tro och tanke, [Belief and Thought]. Since 2001, however, no specific journal in Sweden has been
Uppsala University Library was used, employing the search terms “religious* Sweden” and “religion* Sweden” in both Swedish and English. In addition to this, the databases for official statistics in Sweden (available from the end of the 19th century) were screened for relevant information. Since much of the literature found was written in Swedish and had not previously been the object of systematic reviews published in English, the present review is intended to provide a deeper context for empirical findings from Sweden. The chosen mix of literature is intended to provide a new and deeper context of the patterns on religion in Sweden. This review aspires to contribute to the critical discussion about how to develop the sociological study of religion beyond its current state of Christo-centrism and neglect of religion outside congregations (e.g. Beckford 2003; Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013).

The present sample of literature is intended to be a fairly comprehensive one, within a specific niche. This niche is defined by the following criteria. First, the focus is on what individuals do in terms of religious affiliation, beliefs and practices. This means that the review covers studies which analyze empirical observations of individuals and not organizations, changes in religious interpretation, law etc. Second, the niche in focus can be described as concerned with common forms of individual expression of religion; that is, either manifested by a majority of individuals living in Sweden, or studied from the perspective of the common rather than the specific. Concretely, this means that local studies carried out to understand a particular geographical area are not included, while local studies conducted with the intent to draw general (theoretical) conclusions are included in this review. Moreover, studies of minority religions in Sweden are included if the study in question addresses the country as a whole. Third, the niche comprises studies focused on expressions of religion among individuals living in Sweden and does not include studies in which religion is one explanation of various phenomena (such as voting behavior or attitudes to multiculturalism).

The sample in the present review covers publications reporting empirical findings of studies conducted by the authors, as well as publications that have not conducted any empirical observations of their own. That is to say, the latter are publications that put forward reinterpretations of data or draw conclusions by using data first published by someone else. The intended implication of this coverage is that the specific empirical findings from Sweden are placed within broader theoretical frameworks that are used to understand these findings (such as secularization theories, market theories and theories about a spiritual revolution of alternative spirituality). For example, Martin’s (1978) Towards a General Theory of Secularization is included in the review because he explicitly analyzes individual data collected in Swe-
den. Martin, however, did not collect the material himself. His study is included because it sheds light on how findings from Sweden have been interpreted and understood in a comparative perspective. Of course, such identification of the broader theoretical framework and research debate may include more studies than the ones selected for this review. Nevertheless, and with a view to the new and deeper context provided by previously rarely reviewed studies in Swedish, the coverage of literature using previously collected data was chosen for the analysis.

This review was carried out with the intention to contribute a synthesis of previous research in terms of comparisons and contrast over time between schools of thoughts. Similar to the analysis presented in Chapter 2, the analysis to be presented here makes use of Booth et al’s (2012) meta-narrative approach for doing literature reviews (cf., ibid 139-140). Put briefly, the analytical approach involves making sense of a diverse set of literature in a pragmatic way. This is done in order to illustrate how similar findings can become conflicting if conceptualizations differ.

The chapter is supplemented with an Appendix (Appendix A, pages 261-268) covering all the publications included for analysis presented in chronological order. This appendix is provided in order to make it transparent and clear how the research reviewed was synthesized and thereafter presented under the three headings: *Researching Sweden: the first 100 years (1880-1980), Berndt Gustafsson and the notion of “folk religion”, Sweden in new comparative perspectives (1990-2013).* The information provided in Appendix A supports the choice of time-periods (1880-1980 and 1990-2013) by showing that prior to the 1990s the discussion on results from Sweden was largely a domestic one. Column III, which shows if the publication was written in English or not, verifies this conclusion. Moreover, in Column IV, called *Cross-national comparisons*, it is observable that cross-national comparisons became popular sometime around the 1980s-1990s which further strengthens the idea that the material analyzed can be divided into two periods (e.g. 1880-1980 and 1990-2013). Looking at the list of authors presented in Column I, it is observable that Berndt Gustafsson was by far the most productive researcher towards the end of the earlier period discussed here. His contribution to the field of research reviewed here was immense and serves as a conceptual contrast to the largely American research practice that would set the standards after him. Because of the impact of Berndt Gustafsson’s conceptualizations on the domestic discussion, his notion of “folk religion” has been given its own section in this chapter, in-between the presentation of the early period (1880’s-1980’s) and the late period (1990’s-2013).

Two more observations can be made from Appendix A which sets the stage for what is to follow in this chapter. First, as is shown in Column V called *Quantitative Approach*, the research site of Sweden has been dominated by quantitative approaches to the study of religion, expressed by indi-
ividuals as religious affiliation, belief or practice. All studies marked with X in Column V made use of a quantitative approach for research. In addition, the last column of Appendix A (Column VI, Empirical focus) shows whether or not religion was researched as a multidimensional phenomenon. In the international discussion (see, Chapter 2, page 38-39) it was claimed that the establishment of Glock and Stark’s (1965) operationalization of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ rested on a research front in which religion was measured one dimension at a time. That is, studies would only focus on affiliation, belief or practice. In the Swedish context, this was not the case (see Column XI). Instead, religion was measured as a multidimensional phenomenon even before the introduction of the research practice referred to here as Religions in Dimensions, and the reasons for this will be discussed under the final heading of this chapter - Sweden in new comparative perspectives (1990-2013).

Researching Sweden: the first 100 years (1880-1980)

The first study included in this review is Rundgren’s (1897) study on church attendance. When the data for this study was collected in the 1880s, individuals’ religion in Sweden was strictly regulated by law. One with Rundgren contemporary handbooks for Swedish citizens was written by Stjenstedt (1903). It shows that adherents of the state church were obliged to learn the Lutheran creed provided by compulsory and confessional schooling. This obligation basically included all Swedish citizens since it was in principle not allowed to leave the state church. For Church of Sweden adherents, exceptions were made for a handful of Christian congregations, approved by the king. Leaving the state church while at the same time, not entering one of these congregations was not permitted. This means that a secular citizenship was not possible. Moreover, adherents to the state church were not allowed to convert to any other religions besides Christianity. For these reasons it can be argued that basically everyone living in Sweden was obliged to acknowledge the Protestant faith. Even attendance at catechetical meetings was obligatory. At these meetings, the attendees were graded by the priest according to how much of Luther’s Little Catechism they knew by heart and their literacy in terms of reading comprehension (cf., Nilsdotter 1993:16-17). The punishment for not attending these meetings could be financial or one of the state church disciplining methods (such as being obliged to attend the church service while sitting on the so-called “pliktpall” - a specific stool of shame (cf., Nilsdotter 1993: 14). These old forms of church-based disciplining methods were lawful in Sweden until 1917.

28 Historians like Jarlert (2001) have emphasized that even though the attendance at catechetical meetings was obligatory up until 1888, the old forms of meetings were practically abandoned in many part of Sweden before the formal law was changed.
In the 1880s only about 20 years had passed since the laws propitiating people to gather to read the Bible without priestly presence. Deserting the state church faith in this manner was punished with exile from the country. These strict laws, together with the religious revival throughout the 19th century, were factors behind the great emigration of about 1.3 million Swedes (e.g. Statistics Sweden). For purposes of comparison, it can be noted that 1.3 million Swedish citizens was equivalent to about 20 percent of the Swedish population in the 1920s, when the great emigration ended. Most of the religious emigrants were members of Christian congregations opposing the state church and their new home was usually the United States of America.

Against this backdrop – which depicts Sweden as a very religious nation – it is somewhat surprising that Rundgren (1897) found that about 17 percent of the Swedish population attended church services on Sundays (cf., Rundgren 1897:65). Later studies (e.g. Gustafsson, G. 1995; 2001) have underlined that Rundgren’s estimates cannot be fully trusted since they were based on the state church Bishops’ educated guesses and not first-hand on observation. Consequently, the figures could have been even lower than 17 percent. It is noteworthy that Rundgren (1897) found that the low level of attendance was not thought of as the result of a sudden decline. In its place, the state church bishops providing Rundgren with his estimates suggested that a low level of church attendance had existed for quite some time.

Rundgren (1897) did not estimate when church attendance started to drop or when, if ever, regular church attendance was a practice of the majority. Also, there are no comprehensive sources of church attendance prior to Rundgren’s study (Gustafsson, G. 1995; Pettersson 1988b). In the church statistics-oriented church history written by Berndt Gustafsson (1957b) a hypothesis is put forward stating that church attendance dropped from around the 1820s. Gustafsson (1957b) explained the drop by referring to a reform on farming the land in Sweden at this time. Prior to this reform the village-houses were in most parts of Sweden built close together and villages’ slots of land were divided into small parts that the farmers tilled together.

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29 Figures on the population of Sweden are found at Statistic Sweden’s official home page in English: http://scb.se/en_/  
30 Rundgren (1897) reports on regional differences. In the greater Stockholm area, together with Uppsala, Västerås, Strängnäs and Kalmar (all regions in the mid-east of Sweden) about 10 percent of the population visited churches on Sundays. In the south-west of Sweden the numbers were higher and reached an estimated 25 percent of the population (cf., ibid: 67). In total, however, Rundgren estimates a mean of 17 percent of the population that attended church on any given Sunday.  
31 Church attendance was most likely not recorded in the otherwise quite comprehensive ecclesial records kept in Sweden from the 17th century onwards since church attendance was not an individual obligation. In the church law from 1686 it is written that the father of the house of every household should see to it that the members of the household attended services regularly (but more seldom than weekly). This was written as a collective obligation and not – like the attendance of catechetical meetings – an individual obligation (cf., Gustafsson, B. 1957b). Consequently, no records were kept.
In 1827 a process of moving the houses apart was begun because each household was given its own slot of land to work. In Gustafsson’s (1957b) view the separation of houses weakened the social control on church attendance whereupon the custom started to decline (see also, Bäckström 1999:19-20). From an international perspective the declining rate of church attendance from the beginning of the 19th century was early (e.g. Bruce 2011a; Warner 2010). However, since no exact data exists, it might be the case that weekly attendance was never a practice of the majority in Sweden (cf., B. Gustafsson 1968b). If so, commitment to religion might have been expressed in other ways.

In comparison to the question concerning when church attendance started to drop, it is fairly well-established that since the 1880s there have not been any dramatic increases in church attendance. In fact, Lövgren and Rodhe’s (1911) subsequent study on church attendance at the beginning of the 20th century confirmed low levels of church attendance. Despite the possibility of considerable regional differences, they estimated general weekly attendance to be within the range of 5-15 percent of the whole Swedish population (Lövgren and Rodhe 1911:75). As far as their results go, it can be said that church attendance was a habit of a small minority and not a practice of the majority. In 1927, similar presumptions about empty churches would lead to a rigorous head-count conducted by the national newspaper Dagens Nyheter (DN). The result was published on the 4th of January (1928) when the paper headlined that no more than 5.3 percent of the Swedish population attended the Sunday services of the state church. This figure had been acquired by a head-count performed at all Sunday services in all state churches in Sweden during the month of November 1927.

The DN’s study is the first which later research (e.g. Gustafsson G. 2001) considers to be reliable. One consequence of this was that the same technique - a head-count of every person present in church on a particular weekend in November - has been repeated numerous times (e.g. B. Gustafsson 1962a and then Ejerfeldt 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988; Ejerfeldt and Skog 1986; Jacobsen and Åberg 1992; Skog 1986a, 1986b, 1991a, 1991b, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2010; Åberg 1992, 1993). Viewed as a whole, these head-counts show that church attendance never peaked after the 1880s, but remained a habit of a small minority. While some of these head-counts aimed to map the congregations of the immigrants in Sweden (e.g. Ståhl 1972) others aimed to provide comparable figures on attendance at free churches (e.g. Skog 2010, Åberg 1993). In addition to these recurrent head-counts the Church of Sweden also collected head-count-based statistics on church attendance from the year 1970 onwards (e.g. Gustafsson G. 1995). The two forms of data-collection - the DN methodology and the Church of Sweden head-counts – complement each other. While the former provides an estimate for an ordinary weekend when no special holidays are celebrated, the latter gives an estimate of the total number of church visits per year. This
means that the total estimate does not distinguish when attendance took place over the year and, accordingly, the Church of Sweden statistics do not allow for calculations of weekly averages (cf., Pettersson 1988b; Willander 2009b). Taken together, the head-counts show that church attendance has dropped even further, so religious practice has not become more popular over time. Accordingly it seems that staying home on Sundays was praxis at a time when Sweden regulated religion strictly and, thereafter, continued to be the normal practice of the majority.

The freedom from attending church can be juxtaposed with the obligations to learn church doctrines and, as a consequence, take a personal stance in favor of these beliefs (cf., Stjenstedt 1903:5-9). At the turn of the 20th century, parents in Sweden were obliged to teach children the word of God. Generally, this meant providing for children so they could attend school and be taught a Swedish translation of Luther’s Large Catechism (e.g. Cöster 2008). This meant that, for example, the core texts of Luther’s Small Catechism - the 10 commandments, the creed and the Lord’s Prayer – were to be memorized and known by heart. The goal seemed to be that everyone should be able to answer the question about belief with: “I believe in God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth” which is the first part of the creed in Luther’s Small Catechism. The pedagogy to learn central passages by heart was assumed to follow Luther’s reasoning about giving children the meaning of life and an ability to express this meaning (cf., Aurelius 2011: 15-18). That is, it was not enough to know these words but, as records of the catechistical meetings dating from the 17th century and onwards show, people were required to show that they understood the meaning of what they memorized (cf., Nilsdotter 1993). This focus on obligatory religious education was kept until the 1960s when compulsory schools were made non-confessional through political policy. Confessional training was further supported by the laws against heresy and the laws which regulated religious freedom. According to Stjenstedt (1903) these laws were perhaps not always used but, as an example, he mentions that Hjalmar Branting, who later became the prime minister of Sweden as leader of the Social Democratic party, was fined in 1888 for rejecting the existence of God. Specifically, religious freedom was restricted in order to protect the creed of the state church and the feelings of those who adhered to the state church (ibid 1903: 25). At the turn of the 19th century adherents to the state church included practically all citizens living in Sweden. The details of the restrictions against heresy were noteworthy. In addition to spelling out that God and the words of God, his sacraments or the church

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32 The shift from confessional to non-confessional schooling in the 1960s seems to have been a political decision in opposition to the will of the people. Hatje (2013) shows that a petition against non-confessional schooling was signed by more than two million Swedes. Accordingly, for a long time there was widespread support for confessional schooling in Sweden.
services were not allowed to be publically ridiculed, the law-text stated that transgressing this law would be determined by whether or not the heresy in question stirred up public annoyance. Translated into English the law-text read:

Anyone who, by blaspheming God or by criticizing or ridiculing the holy words of God or his sacraments, stirs up public annoyance, should be punished by up to one year of imprisonment or be fined.  

In one sense, the law protecting the Lutheran faith was simultaneously a protection of the state church’s prerogative in issues of religious interpretation and a protection of the Swedish people’s interpretation of the same. As Pettersson (2009) has shown, these types of law against heresy were valid up until the 1970s in Sweden and regulated what it was possible to say in public about God and the Lutheran creed. Until the present day the act for religious freedom states that everyone should be free to practice their religion as long as this practice does “not disturb the peace of society or cause public annoyance”.

Thus, as Gardell (2010) emphasized, the governance of religion in Sweden is bound up with an effort to achieve consensus in how to relate to the religious. Accordingly, it does not seem far-fetched to imagine that this legally supported process towards consensus on religious matters favors conformity towards that which is perceived to be the mainstream and the normal.

Viewed from the perspective of the research practice which assumed that religions have certain expectations of their adherents (cf., Glock and Stark 1965: 20) the religious history of Sweden is filled with obligations regarding religious commitment. However, the obligations were not equally distributed between affiliation, belief and practices. Instead, emphasis was placed on affiliation and beliefs. Concerning beliefs, for example, Swedes had to know the meaning of a “personal God” since the creed in Luther’s Small Catechism describes a God in the person of: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The creed also emphasizes the personhood of God as an Almighty God who is capable of creation. In this creed, God is arguably described as supernatural in nature and beyond the control of humans. Early studies on the reception of the Small Catechism (e.g. Pleijel 1939; 1944; 1951) suggest that the widespread knowledge of its content had wide-ranging consequences for Swedes’ world views. Pleijel’s (1970) put forward that apart from religious beliefs, Luther’s Small Catechism taught people a patriarchal societal order in which

33 In Swedish the law-text reads: “Hvar som genom att häda Gud eller genom att lasta eller gäcka Guds heliga ord och sakramenten åstadkommer allmän förargelse, straffas med fängelse i högst ett år eller böter” Stjenstedt (1903:25).

34 In Swedish the current law text the word use is: ”Envar äger rätt att utöva sin religion såvitt han icke därigenom stör samhällets lugn eller åstadkommer allmän förargelse” SNF 51:680 § 1.
women, children and servants were expected to follow the command of the head of the family. According to this research, by these teachings Swedes were socialized into accepting church doctrines and subordinating themselves to them.

In the 1930s the first survey study was conducted that asked people if they believed in a “personal God”. Fogelklou (1934) summed up its results in a book called *The thoughts and beliefs of Swedish Popular Movements*. The study was not a representative sample of the whole population living in Sweden at the time but an extensive sample (n=872) of people training to become leaders in the popular movements. It is also to the future leaders of the popular movements for a number of professions (such as, farmers and industrial workers) and the free churches which Fogelklou (1934) generalizes her findings (cf., ibid:11). According to G. Gustafsson (2005), several within this group of future leaders advanced and held leading positions in Sweden (cf., ibid: 137). Fogelklou (1934) found that she could not describe the current state of religious education and beliefs in tables if one has asked people whether or not they believe in a “personal God”. The theologically conceptualized question “Do you believe in a personal God?” did not generate a simple yes/no answer. Fogelklou (1934) puts forward that one reason for this is that the word “personal” was understood very differently. While some of those who answered the questionnaire expressed feelings of restriction to an understanding God in personal terms, others took God’s personhood to be the greatest level of spiritual reality (cf., ibid:12). Moreover, some of the interviewed wrote on the questionnaire that they rejected beliefs in a “personal God” but believed in an “ordinary God” described as almighty, transcendent and as described in church doctrines. In all these instances, answers concerning belief in a “personal God” were derived from written comments and not the expected yes/no answers.

Based on this written information Fogelklou (1934) underlined that a substantial proportion of her population believed in a divine principle or a higher being which was transcendent but not necessarily a “personal God”. In other words, Fogelklou (1934) found that many of those who later were to be found in powerful positions in Sweden believed in some sort of divine principle, were reluctant to tick a box stating that they believed in a “personal God” but, at the same time, expressed belief in an “ordinary God” of a transcendent nature. So, Fogelklou’s (1934) study provide an explanation for why people living in Sweden would rather answer “I believe in some sort of spirit or life force” than “I believe in a personal God” in a survey. Her explanation differs, however, from the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ which in the previous chapter was suggested to assume that this description of the “sacred” originates from alternative spirituality and/or was a sign of weak commitment to ultimate meanings of life. Fogelklou’s (1934)  

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35 In Swedish the title is: *Vad man tror och tänker i svenska folkrörelser*
explanation can be taken to be a domestic way of expressing belief in a God. This domestic way of expressing belief was also a result of active reflection and interpretation of Christian teachings and not a blank rejection of these teachings.

Later, in the 1940s, Stoltz (1949) published results used today to prove the decline of belief in God in Sweden (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004; Gustafsson, G. 1997). According to Stoltz (1949) 80 percent of the population believed in God. However, beliefs which according to Stoltz were stricter and stressed the serious side of religiousness yielded lower response rates. As an example he mentions the question “Do you believe in an afterlife?”36, to which approximately 50 percent of the population responded in the affirmative (cf., ibid 1949:28). In the light of Glock and Stark’s (1965) idea that belief in a “personal God” is an acceptance of a system of doctrinal beliefs, Stoltz’s finding seems to suggest that some doctrines were accepted while others were not.

The first studies on religious beliefs in Sweden thus show a somewhat complex picture. On the one hand, a majority of the Swedes seem to believe in God, regardless of how she/he/it is described. Fogelclou’s (1934) analysis may suggest that there is some form of common consensus concerning what God is understood to be. From this perspective, the “ordinary” God seems to be transcendent and exist in a world beyond this world. On the other hand, however, this God does not seem to be incorporated in the system of beliefs expected by researchers and churches. For example, as Stoltz (1949) commented, people believe in God but only one out of two believe in life after death. This does not follow the creed of the churches, he seems to suggest, because they would expect people to both believe in God and in an afterlife.

During the 1980s – when the kind of research reviewed here had been around for about 100 years – Hamberg (1988, 1989) conducted a survey which showed that almost two thirds of the Swedish population referred to themselves as “Christian in my own way” (i.e. Hamberg 1989:9). According to Hamberg (1989), the most common reason for choosing this self-description was because one did not think of oneself as someone who accepted all church doctrines. Hamberg (1989) took these answers to imply an individualized and therefore weak affiliation with the churches in Sweden and thus considered them evidence of an advanced state of secularization (ibid 1989:17-32). An alternative interpretation of Hamberg’s results may emphasize that it has been common for a long time to accept some religious beliefs in Sweden but not all (see, for example results published by Fogelklou 1934; Stoltz 1949). Going back even further, to the time of the political debates around the 1860s resulting in a liberalization of many obligations of religion; the historian, public intellectual and leading religious liberal Erik Gustaf Geijer described the Swedish liberal position as follows:

36 In Swedish: “Tror du på ett liv efter detta?” (Stoltz 1949:28)
I am not a churched Christian and not even a Bible Christian yet I am Christian enough to find strength and comfort in both the Bible and the Church. In short, I am Christian in my own way.\footnote{The Swedish text reads: "Jag är varken en kyrkokristen eller ens en bibelkristen, ehuru så mycket av en kristen, att jag kan finna uppbyggelse i både bibel och kyrka. Korterligen, jag är en kristen på min egen hand" (Geijer, quoted in Jarlert 2001:142).}

Church historian Jarlert (2001) holds that Geijer’s position on this issue greatly influenced public intellectuals in Sweden during the latter half of the 19th century. This position towards religion became known as “personlighetsreligion” which can be translated as ‘religion according to my personality’. Thus, it can be concluded that the stance in favor of individual prerogative in matters of religious belief has been established in Sweden for quite some time. The choices to be made were, nevertheless, limited as a result of confessional schooling and laws against public heresy which prohibited people to publically express beliefs that contradicted the state church creed.

One study which shows the complexities caused by the combination of religious obligation and tendencies in favor of individual prerogative for ordinary people in Sweden is Måwe (1958) Studies of the social control in the region of Östmark. Måwe’s study was limited in geographical generalization but aimed to explain the majority forms of religiosity and make theoretical generalizations from the empirical work conducted. Måwe analyses the attitudes to certain ecclesial customs (i.e. baptism, confirmation and church attendance) from the perspective of Segerstedt’s straightforward observation: “Uniform behavior is, of course, a result of social control” (Segerstedt 1948:5 quoted in Måwe 1958:256). In the case of Östmark, religious authorities had since the beginning of the 18th century established a non-law-enforced autonomous social control. Specifically, this meant that religious authorities focused on socialization through education and did not enforce power by physical or economic punishments (cf., 1958:14, 98). In other words, although church authorities held the power to enforce certain religious behavior by punishments, they chose to influence the peoples’ religious behavior through confessional education.

Måwe (1958) puts forward the view that the strategy for social control through education was visible in the reasons given for participating in baptisms and confirmations. Religious explanations, such as the child’s relationship to Christ and the community of the Church (ibid: 257) and the young person’s right to receive Holy Communion (ibid: 270) were given by more than 90 percent of the population. In contrast to these traditional religious reasons justifying the rites of passage, few in Östmark attended church services on a regular basis.

\footnote{In Swedish Måwe’s (1958) title is: Studier i den sociala kontrollen i Östmark. Östmark is a rural region in the upper western part of Sweden, in Jämtland.}
To resolve these inconsistencies, Måwe uses interview material. Based on this material, Måwe characterizes Östmark as a region where people believe in God without any influences of “fritänkare” [“free thinkers”, a collective term used for an organized anti-religious movement]. By contrast to belief in Christian doctrine, however, church attendance was considered unfashionable in Östmark. Male interviewees even stressed how church attendance was considered feminine and that men attending church were mocked with scornful remarks (ibid: 282-287). Accordingly, Måwe concludes that the patterns of selective high participation in rites of passage but low participation in Sunday services were a result of social control (cf., ibid:288).

In the perspective of the data on church attendance and beliefs described so far, Måwe’s study shows how both customs of practice (e.g. rites of passage) and non-practice (e.g. Sunday church attendance) were dependent on social norms and a specific cultural context. Moreover, what was believed was dependent on the confessional schooling the state church provided. This confessional schooling stressed the importance of every individual’s obligation to learn the word of God (e.g. Aurelius 2011; Cöster 2008). Thus, the individual responsibility of personal commitment in matters of religious beliefs may have been part of an actively implemented social norm. Although a contradiction in terms, the result of this might be seen as an obligatory freedom to personally choose religious beliefs.

Before summing up the research which was conducted under the 100 years which span from Rundgren’s data collection in the 1880s to the 1980s, studies on religious affiliation should be mentioned. As shown in Chapter 2, the standardized way of measuring religion today involves the three dimensions of affiliation, belief and practice (see, for example Voas 2009). In Sweden, affiliation was heavily regulated during 70 of the 100 years between the 1880s and the 1980s. Up until the first of January 1952, adherents of the state church were not allowed to leave this church. The few exceptions to this legal obligation to remain an adherent to the state church were those who converted to other Christian churches accepted by the king. A secular, non-religious citizenship was not an option. On the first of January 1952 the new act of religious freedom came into force (cf., Sundström 1952:164-166). It then became possible to leave the state church by informing the church authorities. If the church authorities were not informed, the individual automatically remained a member of the state church. Newborns were also automatically signed in since children of parents of whom at least one was a member of the state church automatically became members of the state church. This automatic affiliation process of children remained in practice until 1995 when baptism became the base for membership in the state church. This means that the default mode for the 100 years reviewed was
people living in Sweden was members of the state church. In detail, 90 percent of the population was members at the end of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{39} There is some scholarly dispute concerning whether the monopoly of the state church can be taken as grounds for describing Sweden as a religiously homogenous country. One criticism of the homogenous description may stress that from the days of King Gustav the III (who ruled during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century) individuals with non-Christian faiths moving to Sweden had been allowed to establish congregations. The borders of Sweden have also shifted throughout history. Thus, Svanberg and Tydén (1992) holds, at times when Sweden held rights to land taken by military occupation – a greater plurality of religions was to be found within the temporarily extended borders of Sweden. In the 1880s, Sweden was no longer in possession of much land in Europe. In 1905 (when the union between the two Lutheran countries Sweden and Norway was abandoned) Sweden has established its current borders. Thus, for the time frame reviewed here, religious plurality did not take the form of extensive diversity in terms of affiliation.\textsuperscript{40}

Furthermore, during the first decades discussed here, that is between the years 1880-1920, Sweden was a country that people moved from rather than moved to. After that period, moving to Sweden most often meant returning to Sweden. During the period 1945-1972 most people immigrating to Sweden came from other Nordic countries (Lundh 2010:21). This means that it was not until the 1970s that larger groups of people from all around the world began to immigrate to Sweden in larger numbers. For the period 1993-2009, in total 44 percent of the people moving to Sweden came from countries outside Europe (Lundh 2010:21). To give an example of the religious pluralism which followed this immigration, Sander (1993) estimates that about 60 000-65 000 individuals practicing Muslims lived in Sweden in 1991\textsuperscript{41}. In 2012, the Swedish commission for governmental support to faith communities estimated that this figure had increased to about 110 000 practicing Muslims in Sweden\textsuperscript{42}. In addition, it can be mentioned that Lundh (2010) estimates that about 19 percent of the population living in Sweden in 2009 were born outside of Sweden or were children of parents who were born in a foreign country (cf., Lundh 2010:19). Among other things, Lundh’s

\textsuperscript{39} Statistics on church membership were downloaded the 2014-02-27 from www.svenskakyrkan.se.
\textsuperscript{40} It should be noted that substantial number of people may have held double affiliations: adherence to the state church and membership in one of the free congregations. In 1945, that is before the act which allowed state church adherers to leave the state church, Westin (1945) estimates that more than 400 000 people living in Sweden held double affiliations. By the 1990’s Palm (1993) estimates that about 70 percent of those affiliated with the free churches also adhered to the state church.
\textsuperscript{41} Sander (1993) aims to estimate how many of the people with Muslim background can be thought of as religious. His estimate was based on surveys of the mosques in Sweden, and other Muslim organizations. Based on these sources Sander (1993) found that about half - 60 000-65 000 – of the 120 000 living in Sweden were practicing Muslims (cf., ibid:218).
\textsuperscript{42} These numbers were retrieved from: http://www.sst.a.se/
estimation suggests that the number of people who themselves were born or have parents who were born in Muslim countries exceeds the number of Muslims religiously active and participating in Muslim communities.

When considered together, the statistics on religious affiliation do not merely show that the state church was in a monopoly position in terms of number of adherents or members. Due to the long tradition of regulating religious expressions with laws, the state church system was integrated into the Swedish society. Thus, even though authors like Svanberg and Tydén (1992) stress that Sweden never was completely homogenous in terms of culture and religion, it should be clarified that the mix of religions in Sweden was not a mix of equally recognized religions. One form of religion – the state church version of Protestantism – enjoyed a privileged position.

In sum, the trends for religious affiliation, belief and practice seem to have remained remarkably stable from the 1880s to the 1980s in Sweden. This stable pattern has continued even though the social conditions for religious affiliation, belief and practice have changed dramatically. The situation has changed from religion being heavily regulated by laws and obligations in the 1880s to a situation where religion is a fairly voluntary commitment in the 1980s. That is to say, in the 1980s Swedes were free to leave the state church and all laws protecting the state church creed against heresy were repealed. However, people living in Sweden were not completely free to practice diverse forms of religion since even the religious freedom act from 1952 holds that religious practice may not stir up public annoyance. Accordingly, it can be concluded that experiences of the mainstream way of relating to the religious were still supported by law. Moreover, the state church was still the default one in Sweden since children of church members were automatically affiliated, and relatively few state church members chose to leave the state church. Thus, in terms of religious pluralism, Sweden at the end of the 1980s could be characterized as a country where one church enjoyed the privilege of monopoly.

Berndt Gustafsson and the notion of “folk religion”

Publishing towards the end of the 100-year period of research just discussed, Berndt Gustafsson (1920-1975) put forward perhaps the most influential synthesis of the findings on religion in Sweden. Berndt Gustafsson’s importance was partly due to the fact that he started and then directed the Religionssociologiska institutet or, in English, The Sociology of Religion Institute in Stockholm (1962-1990). In addition, he was prominent as a supervisor, examiner, and expert advisor for the government on the church disestablishment issue and a very productive scholar. His successor, Göran Gustafsson (2005), describes Berndt Gustafsson as a generation of sociologists of religion in himself. This description is fitting since some of the most

Apart from his influence on how religion in Sweden can be synthesized and interpreted, Berndt Gustafsson formed the institutional platform for sociology of religion in Sweden. The research institute which he started and directed was a private one, financed by the state church and free churches in Sweden. Its main purpose was to function as support for the churches by providing reliable data and scientific analyses on the religious scene in Sweden. For this task, Gustafsson’s main source of inspiration was the French school of religious sociology founded by le Bras. Following le Bras, Gustafsson’s (1965c) argued that sociological studies should be large-scale and his motto was that: “everything that can be counted, should be counted”.

Gustafsson identified exceptions to this general rule, cases when things actually could not be counted, and for these cases Gustafsson (1965c) used interviews, text-analyses, systematical observations and a range of different semantic analyses to draw sociological conclusions (ibid: 27, see also Skog et al. 1979). The private research institute directed by Gustafsson may therefore be described as mainly intended to support churches with empirical analyses of a statistical character.

The large scale analyses conducted at the Sociology of Religion Institute were, however, not Gustafsson’s own scholarly starting point. Trained as a church historian at Lund University, Gustafsson (1950, 1956) used information in the form of interviews and narratives gathered by church historian Hilding Pleijel and his students. Thus, in a methodological sense, Gustafsson shared an ethnographical approach to conducting investigations with a number of church historians writing at this point in time (e.g. Martling 1958, 1961; Pleijel 1939, 1944, 1951, 1970). This approach involved analyzing religiosity from the perspective of what people were actually doing. In his early publications, Gustafsson uses this approach to discuss aspects of lived religion, ranging from expectations and experiences in connection with rites of passage (1950) to what was considered proper behavior when seated in the church (1956). Accordingly, throughout his publications, Gustafsson stresses the importance of a historically contextualized understanding of religion in Sweden.

43 The latest history of the Sociology of Religion Institute is found in Gustafsson G. (2013). A comprehensive overview of its purpose and achievements is also found in Skog et al. (1979) Berndt Gustafsson. Forskare och visionär. En Minnesskrift. [Berndt Gustafsson. Researcher and Visionary. In Memorian].

44 In Swedish: “allt som kan räknas, skall räknas” (Gustafsson, B 1965c:26).
The initial historical-descriptive approach to religion was, nevertheless, soon merged with conceptual ideas derived from social and behavioral theory. In the work of le Bras, once again, Gustafsson found inspiration. Gustafsson advocates le Bras’ understanding that a religious community is different from other forms of human communities in that the object of a religious community – the transcendent God – is different. With this exception, religious communities are phenomena open to sociological inquiry since they follow the social rules for human interaction and feature the internal possibility for change. Gustafsson (1965c) chose this concept of religion because he could accept it theologically. It is not common among sociologists to choose their conceptual apparatus based on theological reasoning and religious convictions. The typical standpoint of a sociologist - notwithstanding personal commitment - is rather one of “methodological atheism” (cf., Berger [1969]/1990) which derives the analytical concepts from social theory rather than theology. B. Gustafsson (1965c) motivates his choice of definition by arguing that it is methodologically useful. In his line of reasoning it is useful since the theories on religion are constantly shifting and, therefore, there is a lack scholarly consensus on how to define religion. A mutually agreed upon and well-defined concept of religion was in his opinion crucial in order to achieve a cumulative and general knowledge through empirical investigations (cf., ibid: 11).

The aspects of Berndt Gustafsson’s institutional platform at a private research center, with scholarly training as an ethnographically inspired church historian and with an interest in empirically based religious sociology mattered in his interpretation of religion in Sweden. To begin with, his research questions were often of the applied kind. For example, he asked in a publication from the 1960s: can the majority pattern of religious affiliation combined with belief in “something” and participation in the churches’ rites of passage be understood as “anonymous religiosity” (cf., Gustafsson, B, 1966b)? According to Gustafsson, this term - “anonymous religiosity” - was commonly used by clergy to describe a group of church members that clergy hoped remained loyal to the religious tradition in a low-key way. Critics of such applied approaches, such as Gorski and Altinordu (2008), hold that this type of approach is pastoral in character and the questions of

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45 Although the present focus here is on Berndt Gustafsson’s contributions to empirical sociology and not sociological theory, it should be mentioned that he published a number of theoretical articles (e.g. 1967e, 1968b). However, as clarified in his textbook from 1965, in which he declares his standpoint toward the theories of Durkheim, Parsons, Wach and Weber, he favors le Bras’ interpretation of Durkheim. In addition, he is very critical toward Weber because it is limited to the sociology of knowledge and therefore not, according to Gustafsson (1965c) sociology of religion in a “proper sense” (ibid:14). Thus, it can be argued that Gustafsson favors structuralism over social constructivism in terms of theory of knowledge. His reluctance to write about social theories in general seems to be rooted in the standpoint that theory should be useful through being empirically applicable. If theory cannot be applied to data it is not useful, he argues.
concerned church leaders and not necessarily the questions of sociologists. For Gustafsson, the applied perspective was a consequence of his institutional platform which was funded by churches. Dependent on the applied perspective aiming to support the churches, the actual churches present in Sweden from the 1950s to the 1970s became the default model in Gustafsson’s theorizing. This means that Gustafsson’s main research interest – “folk religion” - was conceptualized with the expectations of the present churches as the point of departure. Therefore, in a large number of studies Gustafsson aimed to explain “folk religion’s” relations to the Christian tradition and its organizations (e.g. Gustafsson, B 1958; 1965c; 1966b; 1968d; 1973b;1974b).

By “folk religion” Gustafsson meant religiosity expressed through the high levels of adherence to the state church combined with seasonal church attendance and the participation in church-organized life-cycle rituals (i.e. baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals) (see for example Gustafsson B. 1966b:1). Berndt Gustafsson (1966b) referred to these aspects of “folk religion” as religion as rites of passage\textsuperscript{46}. Later, Göran Gustafsson ([1971]/1997) would describe these aspects of “folk religion” as the dimension of practice within “folk religion”. Göran Gustafsson’s reason for using the dimensional framework seems to be twofold. First, using the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework connected the local interest in “folk religion” to the American and scientifically established research practice (cf., ibid: 22, 172-173). Second, addressing the fact that the domestic understanding of “folk religion” emphasized what was popular and the habit of the majority rather than a trait of the Swedish people, created an opening for Göran Gustafsson to address the problematic term “folk religion”. For this purpose, Göran Gustafsson ([1971]/1997) reminds his readers of the two dichotomies “folk religion” (i.e. religion for a selected people) versus “universal religion” (i.e. religion for everyone) cum “folk religion” (i.e. religion popular among those who are not religious professionals) versus “elite religion” (i.e. the clergy’s religion and the creed represented by churches). Since the behavioral dimension of “folk religion” represents that which is popular but not always liked by the clergy, Göran Gustafsson ([1971]/1997) suggests that Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion” should be understood to be in opposition to “elite religion” (cf., 172-176, see also Gustafsson, G. 1982). Thus, Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion” does not refer to a religion for chosen

\textsuperscript{46} In Swedish: "Förättningsreligiositet" Gustafsson (1966b). The notion “förättningsreligiositet” is a combination of the words church service and sermon (i.e. “förättninng”) and religiosity (i.e. “religiositet”). Because the former word “förättning” implies individual participation in church-provided services the full term “förättningsreligiositet” has been translated into “religion as rites of passage”. In question here is a form of ‘religion at an individual level’ where whether or not the expectations of the churches are fulfilled by individuals is studied. It is therefore not religiosity in the Simmelian sense of what individuals’ call attention to as the religious.
Swedish people as opposed to a universal religion for everyone. Furthermore, and similar to the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and Glock and Stark’s (1965) perspective, Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion” departs from the expectations of the elite. In this sense it conceptualizes commitment to ‘religion at an individual level’ and not religiosity in the sense of what people themselves draws attention to as the religious.

Berndt Gustafsson (1969d) observed that the behavioral dimension of “folk religion” was accompanied by beliefs. Thus, in his conceptualization there was a belief dimension of “folk religion”. The beliefs of “folk religion” were not necessarily beliefs which B. Gustafsson regarded as consistent with a Christian tradition (or, “elite religion”). At first glance, Gustafsson notes in 1969d, what people believe seems paradoxical from a church perspective: most people in Sweden believed in God while few believed that Jesus was God’s son. In other words, people did not believe everything the Christian tradition taught, and the chosen beliefs did not follow a Christian logic. Gustafsson’s explanation was a widespread “folk religion” which followed its own loosely held together system of beliefs. According to Gustafsson (1969d) this system had changed from a belief in “naïve dualism” between God and the Devil to a belief in “naïve monotheism” where a God, or an impersonal force such as destiny, had replaced a fear of the Devil and an afterlife in Hell. For Gustafsson (1969d), it is unclear if the “naïve monotheism” is a Christian belief (ibid: 5-7). One consequence of this conclusion is that Gustafsson draws the line between Christian tradition and “folk religion” by using descriptions of the “sacred”. “Naïve monotheism” - regardless of how transcendent in nature the monotheism in question was - barely passes as a Christian belief in Gustafsson’s interpretation.

In order to measure the beliefs of “folk religion” in Sweden, Gustafsson constructed a scale of belief statements. This scale was put into use in one of the state committee evaluations guiding the government in the matter of disestablishing the state church. Berndt Gustafsson was a member of this state committee. The proposed scale included statements assumed to cover general or generic beliefs about God and to distinguish atheism, agnosticism, and deism from theism47. Contemporary commentators like Heelas and Houtman (2009) view atheism, agnosticism and theism as the typical triad of attitudes towards Christian tradition in Europe. In addition, according to Taylor (2007) it is widespread deism within the Christian tradition that has

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47 Atheism is here understood as the rejection of a belief in God. Agnosticism is understood to mean that there might be a God but humans can never know for certain. Deism is the position of belief in a God who created Heaven and Earth but who does not interfere with the creation on a daily basis. Finally, theism is understood to be belief in one God who created the world (cf., Gustafsson, B. 1963:81). Interpreted in this way, agnosticism, deism and theism overlap with Christian teachings about a transcendent God. Gustafsson (1963) seems to suggest that selecting one out of the three investigated the attitude towards accepting the Christian creed as a whole system of beliefs.
brought about the conditions for belief in the contemporary Western world which can currently be observed (e.g. religious belief is a personal choice chosen from a wide array of religious and secular beliefs). The point which these contemporary observers can be said to jointly make is that atheism, agnosticism, deism and theism are often taken to be interpretations and reactions to Christianity in its own right. Gustafsson (1963) however adds a fifth alternative which he calls “classical Christian creed” 48 (ibid: 81). With this added alternative Gustafsson creates a somewhat unusual scale which goes from atheism via agnosticism, deism and theism to the “Classical Christian creed”.

The background for adding an extra category called “classical Christian creed” is found in a pilot study conducted by Gustafsson in 1966b. In this study, Gustafsson (1966b) constructed a scale that departed from the apostolic confession as it was read every Sunday in the Swedish churches. The belief statements aimed to investigate classical Christian belief in God read: There is a good and almighty personal God, whom humans can turn to for help through prayers49. Looking closely at the wordings of this survey item, it uses the generic term “personal God”, which earlier was mentioned as central for Glock and Stark (1965) and the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. However, the statement describes God as good and as someone whom one can turn to for help. This interpretation of a good and helpful God cannot, however, be claimed to be universal (see, for example, Eliade 1977). Thus, Gustafsson’s (1963) interpretation of a good and helpful “personal God” seems specific in time and place. Moreover, the statement resembles the “naïve monotheism” which Gustafsson earlier held to be popular in Sweden but not really acceptable as the Christian creed. So, the category called “classical Christian creed” in the state commission report appears to be designed to fit the domestic ways of expressing beliefs and, presumably, generate high levels of affirmative answers.

Taken together, Gustafsson’s (1963) scale seem to be intended to investigate several things at once. First, a dichotomy is introduced between those who attend church (and know what is said in church) and those who do not. One outcome of this dichotomy is that the statement probing a “personal God” is written in order to resemble the words used in the churches in Sweden in the 1960s to describe God. The contrasting theistic statement reads: “There is a God, who has created and rules the world”50. This statement also carries with it connotations of a supernatural and Christian God. The two statements clearly overlap and can be Christian answers. The difference that Gustafsson (1963) seeks to reveal seems to be very specific for a local Chris-

48 In Swedish: “klassisk kristen tro” (Gustafsson, B. 1963:81).
49 In Swedish: “Det finns en god och allsmäktig personlig Gud, som människan kan vända sig till med bön om hjälp” (Gustafsson, B. 1963:81).
50 In Swedish: “Det finns en Gud, som skapat och styr världen” (Gustafsson, B. 1963:81).
tian context. Secondly, but equally important to Gustafsson, the analytical terms theism, deism, agnosticism and atheism are used. That is, a dichotomy between Atheism (there is no God) and Theism (there is one God). By using these terms, Gustafsson (1963) appears to translate a local grounded assumption about nuances within folk religious beliefs into generic analytical terms. This is a mixture and use of, on the one hand, locally contextualized analytical terms and, on the other hand, generic analytical terms within one and the same measurement of religion. Despite these layers of interpretation that can be attached to the scale-items, Gustafsson (1963, 1966b) maintains that the scale is sound in a Swedish setting because it provides statistically significant results. Using this scale, Gustafsson (1972a) even predicts that by the year 2000 fewer people will believe in a “personal God” in what he defines as a “religious sense” (ibid: 4). That is to say, the gap between the churches’ interpretation of God and the people’s view of God will increase.

Compared with the two contemporary research orientations assessing the extent of religion and spirituality discussed in Chapter 2, Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion” seems to proceed, yet also differ from these. Similar to the research orientation that assesses the extent of religion, Gustafsson uses a narrow range of dimensions to investigate religion, namely, practice and beliefs. This conceptualization of two dimensions is also a model to understand the alternative in opposition to religion. In contrast to the contemporary research orientations, the opposing alternative is not spirituality but “folk religion”. This means that the alternative, too, is assumed to be dependent on the same religious tradition and share adherence to the same state church. There is, so to speak, a ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and a ‘Folk Religion in Dimensions’ in Gustafsson’s conceptualization. The overarching aim seems to be to interpret the specific pattern of religion in Sweden as a pattern of minimum commitment to the state church or as something which rejects the state church and is a sign of a gap between the religious elite and is therefore the people in Sweden.

Notwithstanding the intent to provide the churches in Sweden with a prognosis, Gustafsson almost never discuss results from Sweden in terms of secularization. One exception is his work Gustafsson, B (1968b) where no less than 17 different meanings of the term secularization are identified. These different meanings are used in two ways. First, a survey was conducted investigating what meanings that clergy usually associated with the term secularization. This survey study showed that a general decline of religion was the most common understanding of secularization. Gustafsson (1968b) thereafter goes on to explain that a general decline of religion in terms of declining practice on an individual level is not plausible in Sweden. Using the early statistics on church attendance collected by the newspaper DN (1928), Gustafsson (1968b) claims that there cannot be a decline if there never was a peak from which a practice can decline. To him, secularization is not a useful analytical tool for sociological methods because of this diver-
sity in meanings. Similar to his position concerning how to define religion, if there is no consensus concerning how secularization should be interpreted, it cannot be used to draw valid sociological conclusions. Gustafsson’s opinion reveals his interest in statistical methods since he holds that only fixed concepts providing clear-cut hypotheses should be used for sociological analysis. In his reasoning, the rules of the statistical methods are given first priority. One consequence of this priority of statistical methods was that mixtures of generic concepts derived from social theory and local concepts derived from historical-descriptive generalizations are used for empirical studies. Even though Gustafsson appears to have favored interpreting findings on religion in Sweden as a form of a widespread “folk religion”, his findings are, due to the mixture of analytical tools used, wide open for further interpretation.

Sweden in new comparative perspectives (1990-2013)

In one sense, sociology is inherently comparative. However, as Smelser (2003) puts forward, the term “comparative sociology” has come to mean the comparison of large scale social units such as nations, cultures or religions. Be that as it may, Smelser continues, every description of the social can be claimed to entail comparison. We may clarify this reasoning by considering the recently outlined example of Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”. If “folk religion” is a description of those who seldom attend church for other reasons than baptisms, weddings or funerals, then the description of “folk religion” refers to a comparative context where people are assumed to vary in terms of how often and why they visit churches. In the example of “folk religion”, comparisons were made between those who visit church regularly and those who have never visited churches.

“Folk religion” was in Berndt Gustafsson’s theorizing something which brought generations of Swedes together. He explained why people living in Sweden adhered to the state church but did not attend church very often by emphasizing how stable and long-lasting this praxis has been in Sweden (e.g. Gustafsson 1957b, 1968b). Accordingly, Gustafsson uses history in order to show consistencies and similarities between now and then. By comparison, Österberg (2009) argues, sociologists often make comparisons with historical times to make contrasts and differences between periods visible. That is, the time here and now can be understood because it differs from what was before. The classical claim of secularization (cf., Bruce 2011a) might serve as an example of when history is used as a differing contrast. In historical times, this claim holds, people used to attend church every Sunday. In present times people have lost faith in the Christian God and therefore church attendance has declined and is destined to decrease even further (cf., ibid: 2-3). For this reason scholars like Stark (1999) have argued that if there is no
historical peak in church attendance there is no secularization. Others, like Sommerville (2002) have responded by arguing that such use of history distorts the understanding of religion. Rates of church attendance cannot be used raw, as if they were born in a cultural vacuum, he argues. To compare historical periods Sommerville (2002) clarifies, the historical-specific context of a religious practice must be taken into account.

Smelser (2003) makes an additional point which is of importance for the range of sociological comparisons to be discussed. Comparative sociology, when, for example, taking on the task of explaining similarities and differences between nations, cultures or religions, has not been generous towards the non-Western world in terms of how comparisons have been made. Smelser (2003) mentions comparative categories like “primitive”, “barbaric”, “traditional” and even “developing” as examples of moral ethnocentrism and oversimplification (cf., ibid: 648). According to Smelser (2003) these types of comparative categories have the Western experience as the point of origin and basis of experience, and yield gross and unappreciative comparisons as a result. As shown in Chapter 2, the sociology of religion has its own history of starting with the Christian experience as its default mode for comparisons. Examples of comparative categories used are “sects”, “cults” and “seekers” – all which in a Christian history have been fought as expressions of heresy or superstitious beliefs in magic. In addition, religions of non-Western origin have been squeezed into the Christian-centered sociological category of religion (e.g. Thalén 2006). Because the American study of the sociology of religion is overly focused on mainland Protestant expressions of religion (e.g. Smith et al. 2013; Bender et al. 2013) and the European branch of sociology of religion is highly influenced by the American approach (e.g. Beckford 1990; Dobbelare 2000) the sociology of religion might have an especially narrow point of departure for comparisons. The point of origin may not even be the Western experience of Protestantism but a time-specific American experience of Protestantism.

Drawing on these clarifications of what comparative perspectives in sociology might mean, it can be argued that the sociological descriptions of religion in Sweden have always been comparative. However, from the 1980s onwards, two new types of comparisons became more common, while a third strand of research added complexity to previously popular categories of comparison. An overview of these changes is provided in Appendix A, column “Cross-national comparisons” on cross-national comparisons, pages 261-268. The first form of comparison used the up and coming large-N, cross-national survey studies like the European Value System Study Group (EVSSG), the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Value Study (EVS), the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) and the World Value Survey (WVS). In these studies, religion in Sweden became a unit for analysis to be compared with other countries, globally. Second, and related to the first form of comparisons, the empirical findings from Sweden were inter-

89
interpreted using new comparative categories. That is, the research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’ in the previous chapter was implemented in order to interpret the findings from the new large-N surveys, and the consequences of these interpretative maneuvers became visible. Third, widespread assumptions about the state church impact on “folk religion” (e.g. Gustafsson 1965c; Pleijel 1970) were challenged by critical historical research. This research problematizes notions such as “individualized religion” and “institutionalized religion” in a Swedish context. Continuing this type of problematization is research on how religious identities are presently negotiated in Sweden. These matters will be discussed under the three headings: New cross-national comparisons, New conceptual comparisons, and New historical comparisons.

New cross-national comparisons

During the first 100 years of research, the findings on religion in Sweden were seldom discussed in comparison with religion in any other countries (see, Appendix A, column “Cross-national comparisons”). There were, of course, exceptions and, the most famous might be Martin (1978) Towards a general theory of Secularization. In comparison with what was soon to become the standard practice, Martin made use of domestically collected data and did not base his study on results from projects such as EVS and WVS. In the Swedish case, the data used was collected by Berndt Gustafsson (cf., Martin 1978:95, 164, 321) and, thus, was first interpreted as “folk religion”.

Martin (1978), like Gustafsson, seeks to give historical explanations of continuance for differences in religion between countries. Specifically, Martin (1978) names the historical process in question as secularization. Thus, with a focus on religious decline he argues that secularization is a patterned process dependent on a country’s specific forms of religious pluralism and religions’ relation to politics. Using a range of descriptions of what pluralism might stand for, Martin (1978) identifies both Great Britain and Sweden as having the state church pattern of monopoly (cf., ibid: 20-23). Because of this similarity between Great Britain and Sweden, difference is only to be found within the range of relations that religion may have with politics and state power. The English-Scandinavian pattern, nevertheless, represents cases where churches are run by the state and take on the character of the state. Martin (1978) however observes that in the Scandinavian case the churches’ adaption to the secular government has been more rapid and extreme than in the English case. He explains this by the tendency of Lutheran teachings towards individualism, which does not promote a united collective stand

51 Among the titles reviewed here Martin’s work is, for example, given priority in Davie (2000); Gustafsson G. (1982); Riis (1993); Straarup (1985); Storm (2009); Zuckerman (2009).
against the state. In Sweden, Martin holds, the bureaucratic centralism of the state propelled the church towards adaption to a social democratic ideology (cf., ibid: 23-24). In Martin’s way of reasoning, this means that the church is secularized in Sweden since it has accepted the secularized state and its politics. His comparison, however, shows more historical similarities than differences and Martin (1978) sums up the similarities between Great Britain and Sweden as follows:

A crown, a state church, a social democratic party, low levels of participation, particularly among the working class, and a national sentiment connected vaguely with the national church and the rites de passage
(Martin 1978:34-35, italics in original)

Whereas Martin (1978) predicts that these shared historical conditions will lead to a situation where Britons practice and believe, the same factors will in the Swedish case lead to a situation which may be characterized by religious practice accompanied by disbelief (cf., ibid: 95). Martin’s explanation for this pattern of religiosity in Sweden is a widespread “folk religion”, which he takes to be typical of Protestant countries. This “folk religion” is characterized by:

Decency, limited reciprocity, and belief in “something” which is often accompanied by a respect for ritual forms of religion but without any great understanding of their meaning. (Martin 1978:155)

So, in similarity with Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”, Martin (1978) suggests a comparison between the group that attend church regularly and the group who do not. This difference in church attendance practice is taken to explain differences in how the Christian doctrines are understood and appreciated. In the quote above, Martin (1978) stresses that it is questionable whether the infrequent attendees understand accept the Christian creed and the belief in a “personal God”. Beliefs in “something” are too vague in this comparison to be a transcendent description of the “sacred”. Accordingly, since this form of “folk religion” is found in Sweden there is advanced secularization in this country. Martin, as well as Gustafsson, thus assumes that elite religion, represented by creed and professionally trained clergy, is to be compared with lay people’s religion. The latter cannot always be understood as fully religious because it is expressed by those who are familiar with a specific religious heritage but are not specialists nor have enough knowledge about religious teachings to fully understand these.

Although Martin’s (1978) study is widely recognized for highlighting the national and historical context for country-specific patterns of religious belief and practices (e.g. Davie 2000; Storm 2009), cross-national comparisons rarely make use of history as a source for similarity. As already discussed in
Chapter 2, the comparative schemata set out by Inglehart (1977, 2006) emphasized differences between generations. In short, religion was conceptualized by Inglehart as a relatively stable property of the individual which the individual required in the “formative years” and thereafter remained loyal to. At the level of comparisons between large scale social constructs, in Inglehart’s case, value orientations, religion was bound up with descriptions such as “traditional”, “authoritative” and “avocation for rigid, predictable rules” predominantly found in non-Western countries with low economic and physical security (see, figure 1, page 54). As a consequence, the points of comparison are changed from church religion contrasted with “folk religion” to religion contrasted with “non-religion”. This leap in generalization involved dropping the use of the historical-specific context to explain the extent of religious belief and practice in favor of letting abstract systems of world views (e.g. Protestantism, Catholicism or Communism) and material factors like Gross National Index perform this task (cf., Norris and Inglehart 2004).

The introduction of Inglehart’s points of comparison were, in the Swedish case, introduced by Pettersson (1988a) *Behind Double Locks: A Study of Small and Slow Value Changes*. In this publication, Pettersson (1988a) analyzes the EVSSG project’s findings from Sweden in a European perspective using Inglehart’s (1977) theory on a silent revolution as a backdrop. In short, Pettersson (1988a) introduces that idea that the living conditions of a generation will determine the values of that specific generation. Consequently, in times of increased welfare, generation after generation will become increasingly post-materialist in their values, entailing an emphasis on self-fulfillment and quality of life instead of giving priority to physical and economic security (cf., ibid: 12-19). Given the extensive welfare regime in Sweden, people living in this country would lose their religious beliefs and, as a result, be less inclined to attend church services.

In Pettersson’s (1988a) study the standardized indicators for ‘Religion in Dimensions’ (cf., Glock and Stark 1965) were set to regular church attendance (the behavioral dimension) and the Christian doctrines on God and the afterlife (the ideological dimension). In addition, Pettersson (1988a) used an indicator intended to probe acceptance of a collective religious identity which was not standard for Glock and Stark (1965, 1968). Equipped with these measurements for assessing the extent of religion, Pettersson (1988a) claimed Sweden and Denmark to be the most secularized countries in Europe. In the Swedish case, the support for this conclusion was that the only half of the population believed in God and very few attended church on a regular basis. Based on these statistics, Pettersson (1988a) concludes that

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52 In Swedish the title read: *Bakom dubbla lås: En studie av små och långsamma värderingsförändringar.* (Pettersson 1988a)

53 Pettersson (1988a) defines monthly to be regular and reports that 13 percent of the population living in Sweden attended church services monthly (ibid: 94).
Sweden is among the world’s most secularized countries, and he refers to: “the low shares of the population who accept Christian beliefs or attend church services regularly” (ibid: 95). It is, accordingly, a fraction of the results which are used to draw conclusions and not the majority pattern of affiliation, beliefs and practice. The description provided by Pettersson of Sweden as one of world’s most secularized countries was thereafter established in a series of publications based on results from the ESSVG, EVS and WVS projects (see for example Inglehart and Barker 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2004).

This description of Sweden was further elaborated by the introduction of a second scale of values which correlated with the materialist vs. post-materialist scale elaborated on in Pettersson’s study. The new scale ran from traditional values which emphasize, among other things, belief in God, and the importance of children learning obedience and a religious faith, strong sense of national pride and respect for authority. At the other end of this scale there were secular-rational values which emphasized values in opposition to the traditional ones (cf. Inglehart 2006:118). When the world’s countries were mapped out in a diagram using the aforementioned scale as the X and Y axis, Sweden was to be found in an extreme position (for an illustration see figure 1, page 54). In this global comparison, Sweden was the country which held the most secular-rational and post-materialist values in the world. These results were interpreted as evidence for the secularizing effects of individualization, industrialization and an increased level of welfare (see Inglehart and Baker 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2004). With this research rationale, comparative categories in terms of social structures, values and economic conditions between countries were emphasized. Sweden was for this purpose viewed as a large scale social unit of comparison, and nuances within this unit were played down to improve the general description. Using this type of comparison, the WVS-based conclusion that Sweden is very secularized has been repeated by, among others, Therborn (e.g. 1995, 2012) and Pettersson (2009).

In parallel with the introduction of cross-national surveys such as the EVS, survey questions in national surveys were changed in line with the standardized measurement derived from Glock and Stark (for examples of questions in use, see Ahlstrand and Gunner ed. 2008, Bromander 2005, 2011; Bräkenhielm ed. 2001; Kallenberg et al. 1996; Lövheim and Bromander ed. 2012, Sjöborg 2013). At the level of question wording, this implied a change from investigating Christian belief by stating: “There is a good and almighty personal God, whom humans can turn to for help through prayers” (i.e. Gustafsson 1963) to stating “I believe in a personal God” (i.e. Pettersson 1988a). According to Göran Gustafsson (2005) this implementation of a research practice was domestically perceived as a practical solution to a seemingly irresolvable theoretical problem (cf., ibid: 152). In his opinion it was a domestic inability to operationalize other definitions of religion in
surveys which caused the rapid and all-inclusive implementation of Glock and Stark’s operationalization ‘Religion in Dimensions’ (cf., ibid: 152). This rapid implementation of a research practice, Göran Gustafsson (2005) observes, was rushed because: “examples of reflections on whether or not the choice of method has had any effect on the result are exceptions rather than the norm” (ibid: 150) within Swedish sociology of religion.

In Chapter 2 it was suggested that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumed that religion involves commitment at an individual level through affiliation (or belonging to religious organizations), belief and practice. Given the rapid implementation of this research practice and its analytical task of describing the general pattern of large scale social units such as countries, scholars in Sweden (e.g. Bäckström 1993) engaged in a debate aimed at finding general descriptive names for religion in Sweden. The focus of this description was the large intermediate group which, from the perspective of ‘Religion in Dimensions’, did not fit the assumptions concerning religion and non-religion (e.g. Voas 2009). Storm (2009) identifies three major interpretations for the large intermediate group in Europe which is neither very religious nor completely unreligious. Drawing on the work of Davie (1994), Storm suggests the group in question can be characterized as “believing without belonging” (Storm 2009:702). This description is supported by the large number of Britons who declare belief in a God but are not members of the British state church (cf., Davie 1994). A second alternative, Storm suggest, is the characterization “believing in belonging” (Storm 2009:703). This characterization has been especially discussed in relation to the Swedish case (e.g., Bäckström 1993, Davie 2000). In these discussions, membership of the former state church has been interpreted in terms of civic identity and not as an expression of religious faith (cf. Bäckström 1993). Others, for example Day (2011), have used the phrase “Believing in Belonging” to indicate that belief is not necessarily expressed as acceptance of doctrine. Instead, people may believe in the church much in the same way as a person may believe in a political party without having specific knowledge of the details of its ideology. Finally, Storm quotes Bruce (2002) and emphasizes that the large intermediate group may simply be uninterested in religion (Storm 2009:702). Expressed in Voas and Crockett’s (2005) terms this assessment would read: “neither believing nor belonging”.

Because of the persistent finding that people in Sweden believe in what the research practice holds to be “alternative”, Heelas (2007) has suggested that Sweden might be among the countries leading a spiritual revolution of alternative beliefs. One may perhaps argue that Heelas introduces a new explanation for the existence of the large group of Swedes who express some sort of belief and belong to an organized religion but do not participate. Using the previously juxtaposed terms of “believing” and “belonging” Heelas’ interpretation could, perhaps, be abbreviated into: Belonging but Believing Something Else.
All in all, the intermediate group which is substantial in the whole of Europe and in Sweden, has been described in the following four ways: “Believing without Belonging”, “Believing in Belonging”, “Neither Believing nor Belonging” and “Belonging but Believing Something Else”. Of these, Sweden has mainly been characterized as “Believing in Belonging”, a description that assumes that membership of the former state church is mainly related with citizenship. “Belonging but Believing Something Else” seems to be the second most popular alternative signaling that Swedes have an immanent or altogether holistic understanding of the “sacred” that is not compatible with their membership of the Church of Sweden. In both these descriptions the high level of beliefs in “some sort of spirit of life force” rather than a “personal God” in Sweden is treated as the decisive factor. When so doing, however, the patterns of religion in Sweden become paradoxical and fixed in the intermediate space between fully religious and fully non-religious populations. In other words, these descriptions are the results of analytical maneuvers dependent on the research practice rationale that religion equals belonging, believing and practicing.

The general patterns conveyed by the comparative studies reviewed so far call for an interim summary. Results from Sweden on religion continue from the 1980s to show that the majority of the population are members of religious organizations while a minority believe in a “personal God” and a small minority attend church regularly. With the new comparative categories focusing on comparisons between countries and between generations, however, this pattern was reinterpreted into non-religion (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004). The former categories of local versions of religion are thus treated as irrelevant for analysis. As a consequence, the high rates of membership together with belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” are taken to represent a paradox that reflects a weak form of religion and an advanced state of secularization.

New conceptual comparisons

The research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was introduced to Sweden with surveys like the EVS and WVS. These surveys promoted research interest in ‘assessing the extent of religion’ and ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’, as discussed in Chapter 2. The interest in these research tasks meant that concepts used for comparison (e.g. Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”) were exchanged for the research practice’s definitions of “religion” and “spirituality”. This shift was propelled by the fact that since the first ESSGV study in 1981, beliefs in an impersonal spirit or life force have been extensive in Sweden (e.g. Pettersson 2009). Houtman and Auspers (2007), for example, show that the proportion of the population of Sweden who believe in an “impersonal spirit of life force” has increased from 41 percent in 1981 to 54 percent in 1999 (cf., ibid: 312-314). This makes the
“alternative spiritual” option the most popular belief alternative in Sweden and something which has increased rather than decreased.

From the 1970s onwards there have been studies (e.g. Ståhl et al. 1972; Sundström 1979; Nordquist 1980) which mapped the presence of cults or new religious movements in Sweden. The dominant perspective, however, was that of Berndt Gustafsson who interpreted the broad unwillingness to accept a doctrinal description of God as “folk religion”. Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion” can be viewed as a form of minimum commitment to the state church. In 1982, however, Pettersson introduced a new interpretation of the pattern characterized by a belief in some sort of divine principle instead of a “personal God”.

Similar to Berndt Gustafsson (1966b), Pettersson (1982) observes that the Church of Sweden clergy talk about “anonymous religion”. People who are religious in an anonymous way may remain (at least that is what the clergy hopes) loyal to the Christian way of life without actually being present in church on Sundays. These people may pray, believe in God and follow the Christian gospel in private without the clergy’s knowledge. In terms of what is observable through survey variables, the clergy’s main interest is in those who are members, believe in “something” or “some sort or spirit or life force”, and commit to these beliefs through private prayer, participation in rites of passage or holidays such as Christmas or Easter. Pettersson (1982) offered a new interpretation for this pattern which differs from the clergy’s interpretation but also from Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”. The pattern in question might be “invisible religion”, Pettersson (1982) suggests, with a reference to Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) seminal publication with the title *The Invisible Religion*.

According to Göran Gustafsson (2005) the decision to use Luckmann’s concept “invisible religion” to re-conceptualize the notion of “folk religion” is far from surprising. In his view, Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) *The Invisible Religion* was compulsory reading for generations of sociologists of religion in Sweden. The general message of Luckmann’s book, in Gustafsson’s (1997) opinion, could be interpreted as follows: “Church-oriented religion” will give way to an “invisible religion” in modern times. This shift will occur because to the modern man a description of the “sacred” is only believable if perceived as authentic by the individual (cf., Gustafsson [1971]/1997, see also, Löwendahl 2005; Pettersson 1982; Sjödin 1987; 2001). Consequently, “church-oriented religion” was to be understood as something different and in opposition to “invisible religion”. This difference was of a new kind compared with the tensions between active and non-active church adherents investigated by Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”. The new points of comparison involved: a presumed conflict between collective and individual prerogative in questions of defining the “sacred” and assumptions about different origins for “church-oriented religion” and “invisible religion”. While the former was assumed to be acquired and pursued in
churches, the latter was assumed to be based on experiences of the New Age movement (or, as sometimes referred to, cults or sects).

In Pettersson’s (1982) take on Luckmann’s theory the emphasis is placed on the idea of structural differentiation. He explains to his readers that religion used to be an overarching institution with power over all other social institutions such family and school. In modern times, religion has become a separate institution alongside and on a par with the others. As a consequence, religion has lost its public influence. This process, also referred to as the privatization of religion, is an aspect of secularization since religious beliefs and practices within the separate institution of religion have no power over the other institutions. Privatized forms of religion are further recognized by their dependency, individual prerogative and subjective authority in matters of religious belief. These aspects of Luckmann’s theory which Pettersson (1982) recapitulates, have been referred to by Shiner (1967) as “Disengagement of society from religion”. Shiner (1967) clarifies that Luckmann combines assumptions about functional differentiation with assumptions of privatization and the existence of separate public and private spheres in order to claim secularization. Using this combination of theories, Luckmann ([1967]/1974) was able to argue that even though the “invisible religion” will outgrow the “church-oriented religion” there will still be secularization. Luckmann’s prediction was that religion would remain in the private sphere and not have an influence outside the family or the specific religious group to which the individual belongs.

Two strands of research followed Pettersson’s (1982) introduction of the term “invisible religion” as a sociological interpretation of the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice in Sweden. The first strand is exemplified by the studies of Hamberg (e.g. 1989; 2003) which, above all, showed that about two thirds of all people living in Sweden referred to themselves as “Christian in my own way”. Hamberg (1989) interprets this group as “privately religious”, which was inspired by Luckmann ([1967]/1974) and Pettersson’s (1982) application of Luckmann’s theory of privatization. She thereby merges an understanding of religion from secularization theory with results which previous research had interpreted as folk religion (cf., Hamberg 1989:6). By using Luckmann’s inspired notion of “privately religious”, Hamberg (1989) argues that the large group in Sweden referring to themselves as “Christian in my own way” are soon to become a fully secularized group representing non-religion. The main reason for this is the emphasis that this group place on the individual prerogative for choosing what to believe. To express belief in what Hamberg (1989, 2003) finds to be “vague” descriptions of the sacred such as “something” or “decency” will not have an impact on the social life. Moreover, since these beliefs in “something” are not followed up by commitment in church services, they will remain privatized and, thus, marginalized in the separate sphere of religion. Thus, the bottom line is that the change from using the term “folk religion” to using
the term “privately religious” opened up for Hamberg’s prediction that the
majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice was a sign of secularization.

The second strand of research is in line with Luckmann’s (1990) later
reflections on the meaning of “invisible religion”. Luckmann (1990) suggests
that individually chosen beliefs constitute a different form of religiosity, and
compares the process of choice with a smorgasbord. With this comparison,
Luckmann suggested that the “invisible religion” had its roots in the New
Age movement. The line between “church-oriented” as strictly top-down
collective and “invisible” religion as bottom-up individual was thereby con-
flated with a line between the Christian tradition and a tradition originating
in the New Age movement. So, similar to the research tradition exemplified
by Glock and Stark’s (1965) operationalization of religion as a multidimen-
sional phenomenon, the “invisible religion” was assumed to originate from
cults, sects or, possibly the New Age movement. Specifically, and as alluded
to earlier, beliefs in “an impersonal spirit or life force” were assumed to in-
vestigate descriptions of the “sacred” characteristic for an alternative spiritual
tradition. In Sweden, several studies have departed from a definition of
“invisible religion” as either alternative spirituality, New Religious Move-
ments or New Age Movements (e.g. Frisk 1993, 1998; Löwendahl 2002,
2005; Sjödin 2001). Moreover, numerous studies have tried to find differ-
ences between a group affiliated with New Religious movements and
churches by using the survey questions on description of the “sacred” in this
Willander 2008, 2009a). The results of these studies show that participants in
New Age inspired milieus favor the belief statement “impersonal spirit or
life force” over the statement “personal God” (cf., Frisk 2000). However,
when the same questions are used to find differences in general population
samples, differences between church practitioners and participants in the
holistic milieu have not been found (e.g. Ahlin 2005; Bromander 2008).

The two strands of research following the reinterpretation of “folk reli-
gion” into “invisible religion” made new use of the notion of individualiza-
tion. For Hamberg, the individual stance in questions of belief was a sign of
privatization and secularization. For Frisk (1998) the individualization
evoked the analogy of the smorgasbord of beliefs rooted in the New Age
movement. This meant that “folk religion” was given a new origin in new
religious movements. With this origin in new religious movements (e.g.
Frisk 1998) the use of history as a point of comparison changed. The majori-
ty pattern of affiliation, belief and practice was no longer to be understood in
relation to long trends of stability but in relation to movements present in
Sweden from the 1960s and onwards. This use of history is somewhat prob-
lematic, because, as Frisk (2007) suggests, the new religious movements
which in the 1980-1990s seemed to be growing rapidly have not been as
visible and expansive in more recent times.
The impact of individualization was also theorized within the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Göran Gustafsson’s ([1971]/1997) work on the impact of individualization on religion explains how the Swedish research milieu interpreted this aspect of the research practice. Gustafsson writes that in the United States, research has shown that the five dimensions the experiential, ideological, ritualistic, intellectual and consequential dimension (cf., Glock and Stark 1965: 19-21) might be in need of a sixth dimension to fully cover all aspects of religion. In his view, the sixth dimension would investigate the social aspect of religion and range from collective prerogative to individual prerogative in questions of religious beliefs and practices. If a sixth dimension of social aspects is added to the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework, this dimension can also be added to the dimensions of “folk religion”. What Gustafsson ([1971]/1997) was suggesting is that the “folk religion” dimension of practice (e.g. seldom and seasonal) and the “folk religion” dimension of belief (e.g. in a naïve monotheism or a vague “something”) could be complemented with this new dimension of social aspects (e.g. individual prerogative in matters of religious beliefs and practices). Thus, Gustafsson ([1971]/1997) merged ideas of the new research practice following Glock and Stark (1965) with Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”. With this operation, he created a local version of research orientation with roots in Glock and Stark’s (1965) framework. This developed notion of “folk religion” can also be said to underpin Gustafsson’s (1985, 1987) support for theories of religious change (which do not predict religion to either increase or decline) instead of theories of secularization (which predict that religion will decline). According to Gustafsson (1985) the future of religion should be treated as an empirical question analyzed simultaneously on several levels (e.g. society, organization, individual) and from several aspects (e.g. beliefs, practice, social aspects). By accomplishing a fusion of the American-based research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and the local framework of “folk religion”, Gustafsson provided something which perhaps can be called a ‘theoretical analogy’. This means that the expectations of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ were added to a local framework without taking account of the differences between these interpretative frames of reference.

It would be foolhardy, of course, to attribute all the new conceptual comparisons to the influence of the research practice called ‘Religion in Dimensions’ alone, since the interest in the majority pattern of religion in Sweden predates the implementation of this research practice by many years. Instead, at issue here are comparative changes occurring when a domestic research milieu tries to translate its findings into a new interpretative schema. In this case, the practical outcome was that the same stable pattern of affiliation, belief and practice was given three different explanations. The low rates of church attendance and beliefs in a “personal God” were interpreted as “private religiosity” and explained by secularization. In addition, the low rates of
church attendance but high rates of beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” were interpreted as “invisible religion” originating from the New Age movements or a belief in magic. Finally, the stable pattern of church attendance was interpreted as “folk religion’s” dimension of practice, the beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” as “naïve monotheism” and, hence, “folk religion’s” dimension of belief.

In one way or another, all these new interpretations rested on assumptions concerning individualization impacts on religion. For the interpretation “private religiosity”, the rejection of doctrinal creed was understood to be decisive for distinguishing the “private religion” from the “church-oriented religion”. Likewise, “invisible religion” understood in terms of an individual prerogative, that underpinned viewing religious and spiritual beliefs as a smorgasbord at the individual’s disposal, was the difference between “alternative spirituality” and “church-oriented religion”. Moreover, it was the individual prerogative which was assumed to strengthen individuals’ desire to attend church only when it was convenient and to choose some Christian teachings and modify these into “naïve monotheism”. Thus, processes of individualism were also taken to be the difference between “folk religion in dimensions” and “church-oriented religion”. Perhaps because of the fusion with the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ which assumed ‘religion at an individual level’ took the form of commitment to a collective level, individualization was not looked upon as the base of institutionalization, the norm which has become taken for granted.

There seem to be three different and far-reaching interpretations of basically the same phenomenon (i.e. the Swedish pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice) that followed the implementations of ‘Religion in Dimensions’. These interpretations were: “private religiosity”, “alternative spirituality” and “folk religion in dimensions”. Compared with Berndt Gustafsson’s previous interpretation documented as “folk religion”, these three new interpretations are explained by different aspects of individualization. Individualization was further understood as a trait of contemporary times and not historical times, which means that the comparisons in the form of similarity with past times were lost. The three interpretations in question were also diverse and incompatible with each other. One consequence of this diversity in interpretation was that since Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”, there has not been one interpretation of the specific pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice in Sweden but many.

New historical comparisons

While the cross-national comparisons, with their new conceptual comparisons, were the type of studies which dominated research in Sweden from the 1980s, there were also alternatives. From this period in time, there are also studies which do not fit the pattern of using quantitative approaches for con-
ducting research (see, column X, Appendix A). The following section is an analysis of the studies that did not fit the dominant pattern. The alternative studies are worthy analysis in their own right since they often engage critically with comparative categories used in the quantitative approaches that were typically used for studying religion in Sweden.

From the 1980s, the historical investigation engaged critically with the previously leading hypothesis of Pleijel concerning the high religious literacy of old times and the acceptance of statuses put forward in Luther’s Catechism (e.g. the farmers, the clergy and the nobles) (see Pleijel 1939; 1970). One side of the criticism addressed the sources of information on which Pleijel drew his conclusions. For example, the inventory lists used to retrieve reading habits may have had some tendencies towards idealization (c.f. Lilja 1996) and the catechism may have been less circulated than the work of Pleijel suggested (cf., Lindmark 1993). Aronsson (1993) even questions if the socialization of Luther’s Small Catechism was a utopia of the elites rather than a widespread mentality of people living in Sweden.

Accordingly, we may speak of a new wave of historical research which did not start from the assumptions of the church’s power to dictate individual religion. Malmstedt (2002) is one of the scholars who can be identified with this new wave of historical research. Specifically, he engages with the issues of general acceptance of church-approved norms. In Sweden, data on church attendance prior to Rundgren’s publication in 1897 are scarce. There are, nevertheless, records at several legal instances with complaints about behavior during church services and a number of church regulations. Malmstedt (2002) compares officially stated church norms with the behavior of the church attendees and paints a picture of a religious Sweden from the late 17th century throughout the 19th century characterized by a persistent gap between the practices of the people and the norms of the church. For example, during this time it was common to be late to church services, to leave before the service was finished, or to walk in and out during it. It was moreover quite common to drink alcohol during a service or vomit or in other ways misbehave as a result of drinking. Church attendees also made a lot of noise when they talked, quarreled over seats in the church, tried to recite biblical texts at a quicker pace than the priest, brought their dogs to the sermon or made a noise when the church guard (responsible for keeping order during the sermon) woke them up by poking them with a stick (cf., ibid:69-71). Thus, even though people perhaps attended church on a regular basis (which there is no data to demonstrate) they did not behave in a church-appropriate fashion.

The behavior of the church attendees is interpreted by Malmstedt as a collective culture rooted in praxis and beliefs of earlier generations. At the core of this collective culture which in part was a legacy of prior Catholic traditions and in part was sustained by the collective character of certain rituals performed by the Lutheran church. It may not have been an easy task for the
Lutheran state church to change the norms, Malmstedt (2002) argues, because the people may have experienced that their behavior was in line with an unbroken line of common conduct (cf., ibid: 159-160). Malmstedt (2002) also notes that new customs were more quickly adopted in the cities than in the countryside. He relates this finding to the recruitment of clergy which, throughout the period, became more and more a profession of the bourgeois and urbanized at the expense of sons of farmers and clergy (cf., ibid: 189). According to Malmstedt (2002) it is therefore reasonable to suggest that the behavior and beliefs of the church attendees on the countryside differed from the clergy’s beliefs and expectations. In his view, the religiosity of lay people in the countryside can be characterized as a religious culture where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane were vague and collective. By contrast, the new form of religious commitment which the clergy tried to impose was characterized by an increased attention to the individual and her intellectual abilities as well as capability for self-control. This new form of individualized religion also stressed a sharper distinction between the sacred and the profane, of which one consequence was quieter behavior during church services (cf., ibid: 175-177).

An issue which Malmstedt’s (2002) study touches upon is the complex relationship between individualization and religion. Lindmark (2003) also addresses this theme by regarding the religious revivalist groups (that grew in number during the 19th century in Sweden) as “communities of interpretation”. As such, the members of these groups shared ideas about how to interpret the Bible. In the specific case of revivalist group in the upper North of Sweden, Lindmark (2003) holds, the freedom of interpretation was seen in conjunction with the state church teachings about the possibility to have a direct relationship with God. That is, a personal relationship with God. Lindmark (2003) argues that these groups’ path to deserting the state church teachings started with the new and more liberal reinterpretations of the state church creed at the beginning of the 19th century. By contrast, these groups were inspired by traditionalism aimed at preserving previous generations’ outlook on life. Thus, Lindmark concludes, the revivalist groups of the upper North show the complexity of individualization processes in relation to religious revivals in countries with a religious monopoly. In one sense, the revivalist groups freed themselves from the state church and established groups of their own based on a collective idea of the individual prerogative to interpret the Bible. However, this individual prerogative was used to refuse liberalization and, in its place, choose a stricter moral outlook and regulation of the everyday conduct of the group members. Thus, in another sense, the outcome of this individualization was collectivization – a group culture where the general will was taken to be the will of all within the group.

One complex theme which this research makes visible is what Sommerville (1992) calls the change from religious culture to religious faith. In itself, Sommerville states, this is a process of individualization of what reli-
igion was taken to mean. In times of religious culture, religious values and controls were embedded in the daily lives of individuals. By contrast, in times of religious faith, the emphasis is on the individual and her commitment to religious beliefs. Proponents of this idea of an individualization of religion, like Gorski (2000), have suggested that the consequence of this individualization is that religion has not declined over time in Europe but changed. If the focus is on changes in elite religion in Sweden, the results which the new wave of historical research demonstrate seem to follow Gorski’s (2000) and Sommerville’s (1992) lines of thought. However, if the lay people of the countryside are the focus of attention, individualized religion seems to have been rejected in favor of the traditions of ancestors, family and local tradition. Thus, from the perspective of the lay people in the countryside, which at the time constituted the vast majority of people living in Sweden, local tradition may have been the institutionalized norm. This type of institutionalization seems to correspond with Hervieu-Léger’s (1999) notion of “traditional institutions” which are governed by the “imperative of continuity” (ibid: 88) that brings the ways of separate generations together instead of setting generations apart or conforming to the will of churches.

Critics of this idea that religion changes are to be found among the proponents of a generic definition of religion (e.g. Bruce 2011b). Assuming that religion remains stable over time, Bruce (2011a; 2011b) argues that there are measurements such as church attendance which may very well serve as a common currency to assess the extent of religion at different times and places. Siding with the perspective of Sommerville (1992) and Gorski (2000), however, the idea that religion changes and goes through its own process of individualization means that comparisons between now and then cannot be made that easily. As Smelser (2003) observes, to compare comparable aspects from different times and places becomes “painstaking labor” as there are no solutions which fit all cases.

Another complex area which the historical research just outlined raises concerns the meaning of individualization as a concept. For Durkheim ([1905]/1984) individualization did not mean a process by which people’s free will was released. Quite the opposite, individualization, similar to its counterparts, is a social system. Individualization is based on a collective agreement stating, for example, that everyone should choose what to believe by themselves. In the study of Malmstedt (2002), people chose to challenge church norms, which from the church’s perspective was to reject the collective tradition. However, he suggests that from the people’s perspective the challenge was dependent on ideas concerning how the ancestors related to the religious. Thus, it was not at all a form of individualization, which evokes Luckmann’s (1991) analogy of a smorgasbord of religious and spiritual beliefs at the individuals’ free disposal. The example which Lindmark (2003) gives can be used to clarify the same point – the choice to reject the state church teachings was dependent on a “community of interpretation”. In
other words, individualization has a collective side to it and cannot be viewed as a general process of freedom from religion. To view religion and individualization as incompatible seems therefore to rely on specific definitions and assumptions of what religion is, such as Norris and Inglehart’s (2004) view that religion always favors strict and predictable rules.

Somewhat unexpectedly, Stark, who together with Glock stood behind what has been called ‘Religion in Dimensions’ (1965), and Hamberg, who deemed the specific pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice in Sweden to wane into secularization (1989, 2003) wrote a reflective article which reinterpreted the history of religion in Sweden along lines that cast new light on what individualization might mean. In detail Stark, Hamberg and Miller (2005) suggest that the mishmash of religious expressions expressed through high levels of affiliation but low levels of practice and acceptance of doctrine presses the question: “Is Sweden in religious decline or religious change?” (2005:14, italics in original). Starting from the standpoint that belief should not be confused with practice (cf., ibid: 3) they paint a broad picture in which belief in Sweden lives on as “privatized, unchurched spirituality” (Stark, Hamberg and Miller 2005:16). To reach this conclusion, however, Stark, Hamberg and Miller (2005) make two noteworthy clarifications. First, they point out that when a phenomena is privatized this refers to a verb and not a noun. This means the distinctive features of privatized spirituality are how it is acquired and pursued. By comparison, issues concerning content and origin are less likely to be distinctive. The idea that privatization is a verb also points at the likelihood of the general understanding of privatized spirituality as relatively well-known within the cultural realm in question. In this case, the cultural realm would be people living in Sweden or, presumably taking part in Swedish culture by speaking Swedish. Thus, relating to their second point of clarification, understanding of the religious which privatized spirituality represents may be derived from multiple known sources such as “folk religion” (cf., ibid:10). “Folk religion” is, in this argument, understood as a:

Popular religious culture originated in organized religions – in classical paganism, tribal religions, Judaism and Christianity, it lived on in decayed and heterodox forms as part of a free-floating folk culture (Stark, Hamberg and Miller 2005:8).

Thus, for the privatized, un-church spirituality in Sweden it matters how people communicate about things which are commonly known. Two studies which have focused on how the religious is constructed in Swedish settings are von Brömssen (2003) and Lövheim (2004). In the first, von Brömssen investigated how the boundary between religious and non-religious was drawn among school children (age 13-15 years) in Sweden. von Brömssen asked which circumstances made these distinctions important, and found that
religion as a category was made significant as a marker of being non-Swedish (cf., ibid: 45). Von Brömssen observed that the young people she had interviewed made use of the religious category to point out that Swedes are not religious while "others" are. In von Brömssen’s words:

In this investigation it is clear that there is a vision among the ethnic Swedes that religion is something “other” groups have but that their own group has abandoned and this vision contributes to the belief that it is the religion of these groups that constitutes the boundaries that make it difficult for ethnic minorities to become integrated within mainstream society. (2003:348)

Thus, the identity of “non-religious” is in von Brömssen’s (2003) analysis important to describe the mainstream position of religiosity in Sweden. This form of non-affiliation is what distinguishes Swedes from the “Other”. Following these lines of reasoning, the Swedish young people von Brömssen (2003) interviewed tended to position their own beliefs in opposition to religion and claimed to have beliefs but not religion.

In the other study mentioned earlier, Lövheim (2004, 2007) studied how young people debating in Swedish in online milieus valued non-affiliation in a similar way. In her material, those identifying as “Christian” or “atheist” were positioned against each other in a debate which revolved around whether or not the Christian religion was legitimate or not. In the online milieu analyzed by Lövheim, the self-proclaimed non-believers were in a power position acquired through frequent participation online and also in an “insider” position. The power of this group was executed by controlling discussions through the reformulation of meaning content, overtly critical comments and irony (cf., Lövheim 2007: 93-94). Lövheim identifies two strategies for avoiding the polarized discussions between the “Christian” and the “atheist” identity: interest in magic or occult religious traditions or the self-description of non-religious (instead of an explicit atheistic self-description). When the youths took on these identities - interested in the occult or non-religious - they were, so to speak, on natural ground and were able to discuss their beliefs with mutual understanding of others’ positions (cf., ibid: 91, 95-96).

Among other things, the aspects of how young people in Sweden talk about religion shown by von Brömssen (2003) and Lövheim (2004, 2007) point at a situation where identities such as “Christian” and “atheist” are made significant as opposite poles. Since religion is positioned as pre-modern, anti-scientific, and infantile (cf. Lövheim 2007:85), not to mention non-Swedish (cf., von Brömssen 2003:348) the young people studied commonly avoided being associated with religion. Even though these studies cannot be generalized to people living in Sweden in general, they place emphasis on the possibility of a complex relationship to the term “religion” within the “privatized, unchurched spirituality” (e.g. Stark, Hamberg and
Miller 2005:16) which might hold “cultural power” in the ‘cultural realm’ discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

In these ways the new historical comparisons make the previous assumption that the church formed people (e.g. Pleijel 1970; Gustafsson, B 1965c) more complex. Not only may people have formed their own views together with their peers, but this process cannot in a simplistic way be understood as individualization. On the one hand, people living in Sweden may have drawn on the cultural heritage provided by the church (like, for example, the teachings on the possibility of a direct relationship with God). This might be understood as an individualizing trait provided by the state church itself which people were obliged to learn and accept. Thus, this individualizing theology was tradition and a legal obligation. However, on the other hand, the possibility of to have a direct relationship with God may also have encouraged “communities of interpretation”, and these may choose to reject individualizing tendencies of the state church theology. This may point at an inherently collective side of individualization.

Since the new wave of historical research shows that the relationship between religion and individualization in Sweden is multifaceted rather than useful for far-reaching and clear cut hypotheses, this research can be used to direct scholarly attention towards specific areas of social life. In conjunction with Beckford (2003), the complexity of individualization shown by these historical studies can be used as, “a looser assemblage of concepts that merely sensitize social scientists to interesting ways of interpreting the social world” (ibid: 11). Specifically, if the views which people form together with their peers enjoy legal support for the expression of “cultural power” (e.g. Alexander 2011), then an interpretation of interest would involve dissecting and synthesizing what people living in Sweden commonly draw attention to as the religious. The sphere of social life in question would neither be within the agency of churches, nor the result of the aggregated whole of people assumed to be self-sufficient subjective individuals. Instead, the sphere of social life in question constitutes people who talk to each other about religion (e.g. Besecke 2005; Wuthnow 2011), that is, the phenomenon this thesis refers to as religiosity. If the contemporary examples (e.g. von Brömssen 2003; Lövheim 2007) concerning how young people talk to each other about religion can be generalized, it may even be the case that “religion” is ascribed to the “Other” in everyday language and thought in Sweden. If this is the case, then the religiosity assumed to be “Swedish” might be assumed to be a non-religious way of believing. This is certainly a harsh judgment which may spur prejudice against people taken to be religious or associated with religion. Continuing this speculation informed by previous research, there is a risk that the religiosity in Sweden may foster a strong dichotomy between “us” and “them”. If so, the views formed by people communicating are not the result of equal communication among peers but from a hierarchical order between “us” and “them”.

106
Problematicizing an implementation of a research practice

This chapter ends by analyzing the consequences of importing the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ to a research site outside the United States. Thus, it addresses the first objective of the thesis: to problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies. Based on this analysis, three tendencies were observed.

First, the main conclusion based on the literature reviewed here is that a specific pattern of affiliation, belief and practice has been persistent for a very long time in Sweden. Specifically, practice in the form of church attendance has persistently been the habit of a small minority since the 1880s (e.g. Rundgren 1897, Gustafsson, G. 2001). By comparison, in principle everyone was affiliated with the state church in the 1880s and, even though it has been possible to leave the Church of Sweden since 1952, a large majority of 90 percent of the population remained members of this church in the 1980s. During this time there has always been some religious plurality in the form of free churches and religious organizations established by immigrants. However, because the Church of Sweden enjoyed a privileged position as a state church, this pluralism was subordinated in the sense that members of free churches were usually also members of the state church. Notwithstanding this monopoly of the state church, people living in Sweden have been reluctant to express beliefs in a “personal God” in surveys. In its place, statements suggesting belief in a divine principle, some sort of spirit or life force or, simply, “something” have been the choice of the majority. Moreover, despite all claims for Sweden’s advanced secularization (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004; Therborn 2012) only a small minority of the population living in Sweden reject the possibility of a God or something spiritual beyond this world (e.g. Pettersson 2009). Therefore, the first tendency observed was that the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice was relatively stable over time in Sweden.

Second, the scholarly interpretation of religion in Sweden shifted after the implementation of the research practice documented as Religions in Dimensions in the previous chapter. Prior to the implementation of this research practice, the stable pattern of affiliation, belief and practice was typically interpreted as a domestic version of “folk religion” (e.g. Gustafsson, B. 1966b; 1965c). In the aftermath of the ‘Religion in Dimensions’ framework and terminology, the same pattern was translated into the new interpretations of “private religion” (e.g. Hamberg 1989), “invisible religion” (e.g. Sjölin 1985) and “folk religion in dimensions” (e.g. Gustafsson, G. [1971]/1997). While all these new interpretations brought forward previously not research aspects of religion in Sweden, they also resulted in a research front characterized by incompatible hypotheses and conclusions. For example, is Sweden the ideal case of an advanced state of secularization or is there a spiritual revolution of alternative beliefs in Sweden? These very different claims
about Sweden were made possible because the long lines of stability, important to Berndt Gustafsson’s notion of “folk religion”, were overlooked. For the new comparisons, history was used as a comparative contrast, a way of finding explanatory differences and not similarities with present times. This means that the second tendency observed involves identifying that the interpretation of a stable pattern of affiliation, belief and practice changed with the implementation of the research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

Thirdly and finally, the findings from the literature analyzed in this chapter and displayed in Appendix A were supplemented with information on how the conditions for religion have changed over the last century. That is, it was highlighted that the stability of this specific pattern of affiliation, beliefs and practice was unexpected because during the 100 years in which this pattern has been stable, Swedish society has changed dramatically. In this chapter, glimpses of this change have been given through examples of how the legal conditions of religion have changed the conditions for individuals’ expression of religion in Sweden. This change in conditions was described as a change from a time when certain expressions of religious commitment were obligatory for Swedish citizens, to a time when many of these legal obligations had been liberalized. The word “liberalized” was here deliberately chosen to describe the state of the 1980s instead of words which would signal that all obligations had by that time been done away with. Certainly, in the 1980s expressing commitment to religion in Sweden was in principle voluntary. However, the conditions for relatively far-reaching religious freedom in the 1980s resemble previous laws on obligation. It is the opinion of the imagined majority - the culture of the mainstream - which is the benchmark against which the law measures what is allowed and not allowed. Religious freedom is, so to speak, provided as long as the religious expressions in question do not stir up public annoyance.

Another area where the legal conditions for individuals’ religion in Sweden have changed dramatically is related to the compulsory school system. In the 1880s and up until the 1960s Swedish citizens were obliged to participate in confessional schooling provided by the compulsory schools. Although an analysis of what came after the confessional schooling is beyond the scope of this thesis, it can be mentioned that the non-confessional curriculum on religion depended heavily on the notion of “world religions”\textsuperscript{54}. That is, the idea that all expressions of religiosity in the world can be neatly divided into separate systems of beliefs or religions of the world. This construction of “world religions” has recently been criticized for using Christianity the default model and, as a consequence, underpinning a rationale

\textsuperscript{54} A comprehensive overview of the Swedish school system and its study of religion approaches in English is found in Wanda (2012). For the understanding of religion as “world religions” see especially Wanda (2012: 236-237).
where “we” the Christians living in the West are the model to be compared with “them” the non-Christians of the non-Western world (cf., Masuzawa 2005). This means that even though compulsory school was no longer confessional it may still have preserved a previously present hierarchy between Christianity and other religions. Moreover, since laws protecting the Christian faith against public heresy were kept up until the 1970s (e.g. Pettersson 2009) the ways in which people in Sweden talked about Christianity might have differed from the ways in which they expressed themselves about religions which never enjoyed the privileged position of monopoly. In terms of identified tendencies the changed legal conditions make it visible that the stable trend of affiliation, belief and practice prevailed regardless of the legal changes.

Looking back, this means that actually three tendencies can be claimed to have been observed in this chapter: (1) the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice was relatively stable over time and (2) the interpretation of this stable trend changed with the implementation of the research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’. The third tendency can be viewed in its own right or seen as a process which adds complexity to the first tendency observed. Specifically tendency (3) can be described as an observation that the stable trend of affiliation, belief and practice has prevailed regardless of the change from a time when individuals’ religion was heavily regulated to a time when individuals’ religion was less regulated. Whereas the first and the third tendencies were downplayed as a result of the implementation of the research practice, the second tendency can be viewed as a direct result of implementing the research practice called ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Among other things, this result highlights that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ brought with it an assumption that history should be used as a contrasting example to current times and therefore the long-standing continuity was reinterpreted.

However, even though the implementation of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ brought with it radically new ways of interpreting the stable pattern of affiliation, belief and practice, it shared some assumptions with the research going on prior to its introduction. In detail, research conducted in Sweden already assumed that religion was to be interpreted in line with the expectations of religion (ranging from the local perspective of the state church to the scholarly perspective of religion as a fully functional-structural institution). This was not a new assumption for the domestic research milieu in this country. One instance where this is visible (and has consequences) is for the interpretation of individualization. From the perspective of religion as an organization like the state church or a structural-functional institution, individualization is taken to imply a loss of religion, a break from religion. If this perspective serves as the point of departure it is not likely that individualization is understood as a legitimate way of being religious. Thus, emphasizing the value of individual prerogative in questions
of what to believe - even though this might be the favored option in many parts of the Western world (cf., Hervieu-Léger 2006) - comes across as deviant and incompatible with religion. Admittedly, therefore, a broader scholarly scope is called for which moves beyond the basic assumptions of equating religion with belief systems or the religion of churches and active parishioners or congregations as the comparative category to start from.

Admitting that individual expressions of religiosity have mainly been researched as ‘religion at an individual level’ in the research site of Sweden leaves one question strikingly un-researched: Why is the most popular description of the “sacred” in Sweden “there is some sort of spirit or life force”? If this belief is not promoted by the religions’ belief systems or the churches in Sweden, the extent of this belief cannot fully be determined from the perspective of religions’ expectations. Something else beyond narrowly defined “religion” seems to be the source of significance that causes the rates of affiliation, belief and practice to remain stable. It is to the empirical investigation of this hunch that this thesis will now turn.
Chapter 4: Reconsidering the ‘Religious Mainstream’

The present chapter is the first of a total of three chapters intended to address the second objective of this thesis - to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. In the present chapter a new analysis is presented on the European Value Study (EVS) data for Sweden from the very first data collection wave in 1982 to the last, and fourth, wave of data collection conducted in 2010. The analysis is, in other words, conducted on a type of data which has very often been used in studies inspired by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This means that data retrieved with established methods will be reinterpreted in the analysis to be presented. The choice of data is further justified since the data on religious affiliation, belief and practice from the latest EVS collection wave was not analyzed in the publications reviewed in Chapter 3\(^{55}\). Analyzing the EVS data from 1982, 1990, 1999 and 2010 therefore entails finding out if the trends documented in the previous chapter have been continuing or changing in more recent times.

Since the EVS project was designed to fit the expectations of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ discussed in Chapter 2, the present analysis will use Simmel’s (1955) distinction between religion and religiosity as an analytical starting point, intended to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached. Perhaps most notably this new analytical starting point questions the assumption of studying religion as a commitment to a system of belief and practice at an individual level. Whereas the EVS project presumes that religion explains the religious at an individual level and expects congruence between these analytical levels, the analytical framework proposed here makes no such claim for dependency or congruence between analytical levels. In order to explain what is proposed here, the implications

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\(^{55}\) The 293 publications reviewed in Chapter 3 spanned from the first known study meeting the criteria for selection (Rundgren 1897) to studies published at the time of the collection of literature, which was in March 2013. Since this date, Lundäsen and Trägårdh (2013) have published a book chapter specifically addressing the findings from the 2010 EVS wave collected in Sweden. The main purpose of Lundäsen and Trägårdh’s (2013) book chapter is to find associations between standard measurements on religion and social trust. Thus, Lundäsen and Trägårdh’s book chapter does not present the most current figures on affiliation, belief and practice in Sweden.
of findings presented separately in the previous chapters will now be synthesized into a new whole.

To begin with, two tendencies documented in the previous chapter on the study of religion in Sweden can be recapitulated. A synthesis of the data on religious affiliation, belief and practice made it clear that the majority pattern has been remarkably stable for more than 130 years. Discussed in chronological order based on the time of data collection, the trend of religious practice serves as a starting point because the very first data collection in Sweden concerned religious practice (i.e. Rundgren 1897). In terms of religious practice it is clear that most people living in Sweden do not go to church very often. In fact, they have been staying at home on Sundays for more than a century. Turning to the data on religious affiliation, it is observable that even though people did not go to church on Sundays they remained members of the Church of Sweden. Although religious affiliation is still the pattern which describes the majority, there have recently been changes within the group of religiously affiliated. Up until the 1990s, practically everyone living in Sweden had a formal relation to the Church of Sweden. Today, more and more people are opting out of the former state church at the same time as more and more people with non-Protestant religious affiliations are establishing themselves in this country. Taken together, nevertheless, regardless of this change within the group of religiously affiliated, it is still much more common in Sweden to be a member of a religious organization than to be without religious affiliation. Finally, as far as it possible to tell from the earliest surveys conducted in the 1930s, beliefs in some sort of divinity or similar descriptions have outweighed the blank acceptance of a “personal God” for a long time. This means that the prevailing behavior of people living in Sweden in terms of religious practice, affiliation and belief has been the standard for more than a century.

The stability of people’s religious practice, affiliation and beliefs is noteworthy in relation to the second tendency identified in Chapter 3, i.e. the ways in which patterns of religious affiliation, beliefs and practices are explained and interpreted. From a historical perspective, it appears as if the continually stable trends in the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice were reinterpreted as a result of the implementation of an imported research practice, i.e. ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This research practice changed the largely domestic discussion from interpreting non-attendance in combination with membership as a minimum commitment to the state church to interpreting the same results as an advanced state of secularization. Accordingly, the observed reluctance to describe the sacred in terms of a “personal God” and the habit of seldom attending church on Sunday were taken to stand for a weak religious commitment. This was taken to explain how membership in religious organizations lost its meaning as a sign of religious commitment (e.g. Pettersson 1988a).
Without reference to how the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice had looked in the past, the new era of research based on the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ gave rise to a complex state of affairs. Conclusions became bolder as the situation in Sweden was compared with the situation in other countries. Thus, Sweden was concluded to be one of the world’s most secularized countries (e.g. Inglehart and Baker 2000; Therborn 2012) and the leader of a spiritual revolution (e.g. Heelas 2007). Given the assumptions underpinning these bold conclusions they come across as conflicting predictions since a country cannot, at once, be a leader in the decline of religion and also the leader of a religious revival. Before going into how history can be used to shed light on some blind spots leading up to these contradictory conclusions, some observations on the assumptions underpinning the ways data on affiliation, belief and practice has been collected over time in Sweden will be briefly outlined.

Although the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ changed how the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practices was explained and described, this imported research practice shared some basic assumptions with the ways religion was analyzed in Sweden before the now conventional research practice was introduced. That is to say, religion was taken to explain religiosity. Among other things, this meant that the analytical starting point focused attention on research questions intended to study the extent of individuals’ commitment to a predefined religion. Accordingly, the shared starting point was religions’ expectations of its adherents, which in the Swedish case were mainly understood through the lens of the Church of Sweden’s expectations of its adherents.

A subtle point needs to be clarified at this stage. To start from the expectations of religions is not to say that representatives of churches were given the privilege of formulating research assumptions. Shiner (1967) gives a convincing account of how observations taken to be intuitive in fact were based on the religions of which the researchers had experience. These, taken to be intuitive observations, were thereafter merged with ideas derived from social theory. Observations of religion were therefore conceptualized in line with theoretical ideas originating from social theories about modernization, social differentiation and the role and nature of social institutions. The results of this operation, Shiner (1967) notes, were not always liked or even recognized by representatives of the religions on which the sociologically-oriented researchers had based their conceptualization. A major strand of conflict originated in the researchers’ ambition to define religion generically. This was done in order to meet the standards of the social scientific method (e.g. Glock and Stark 1965); however, at this generic level, religion lost its connection to empirical observations at a historical, specific level.

One implication of using generic categories for research taken to be independent of historical changes is that the only change observable is change in extent. Simply put, this means the rise and fall of religious affiliation, belief
and practice. Changes in, for example, what religious affiliation stands for at one point in time compared with another are therefore overlooked. Equally, differences in what religious affiliation stands for in different country-specific contexts are also overlooked. Because of these shortcomings falling out of the generic ambition of the established ways of studying ‘religion at an individual level’, Chapter 3 was supplemented with information about how the legal regulations on religion changed over time in Sweden. Briefly summed up, the legal regulations changed from heavy regulation with plenty of obligations to a time when more religious freedom was allowed. The exception to this general rule of religious freedom was religious behavior that upset the calm of society. In principle, this means that individuals could follow their own religion as long as it was in line with what the majority in Sweden considered to be normal behavior. In conjunction with the stable trend observed in the majority pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice; however, this change towards religious freedom emphasized that a standard of behavior was preserved even though the legal conditions for this behavior changed dramatically.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the three tendencies observed can be summarized into (1) a pattern of stability that was (2) reinterpreted in the aftermath of implementing the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. In addition it appears as if (3) the stable pattern of affiliation, belief and practice prevailed regardless of the change of the legal conditions for individuals’ expressions of religiosity. Rooting an analytical approach in the above-mentioned tendencies may be useful, because if a sociologist is to release the quality of mind which Mills ([1959/2000) calls the “sociological imagination” (ibid: 5) knowledge about historical changes is indispensable (cf., ibid:151-152).

In what follows, the tendencies observed in Chapter 3 are going to be used to reconsider what the ‘religious mainstream’ may stand for. In a lexical sense, the term “mainstream” refers to: “The ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional”.

By contrast, and as will be explained more thoroughly shortly, the “religious mainstream”, from the belief system-centered perspective of ‘Religion in Dimensions’, focuses on whether or not a belief system is accepted by its surrounding contexts and whether it accepts the surrounding context. If the lexical definition of the “mainstream” is used to understand the stability documented in the majority pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice, this stable pattern of behavior might be taken to stand for the mainstream in its lexical meaning (i.e. meaning, since going to church very occasionally while remaining a member of the Church of Sweden might come

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56 This definition was derived from Oxford Dictionaries found online at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/mainstream?q=mainstream (2014-05-18).
across as normal or conventional in the community of people living in Sweden). This is because this is the habit of most people in this country. Even today, this prevailing behavior might be the standard regardless of how well it fits with a religion’s expectations of its adherents. This is why this particular religious mainstream might not be explained by religion. If so, however, the understanding of the religious mainstream proposed here challenges the assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ which, in short, can be described to give religions a prerogative in defining what is expected to be conventional (the mainstream) and what is not expected to be conventional (the alternative or the rejection of the mainstream). Based on this terminological maneuver of what the mainstream might stand for, it seems reasonable to reconsider the meaning of the mainstream at a research site where the mainstream (as it is defined by the established research practice) only counts for a small minority of the population. This seems especially reasonable given the background that meeting the expectations of religions by attending religious services often seems to have been the habit of a very small minority for a very long time in Sweden.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, under the heading Patterns of continuity and change, the quality of the EVS estimates for religious affiliation and practice will be discussed and data on religious affiliation, practice and belief from the latest data collection conducted in Sweden in 2010 will be presented. The principal implications of the results presented will thereafter be discussed and reconsidered in the section called: On mainstreams and margins: new ways of understanding. The new conceptual understanding of ‘mainstream’ and ‘margins’ will then be used in the analysis of the EVS data. Results from the analyses are presented under the title: Mainstreaming beliefs? Finally, bringing the threads of this chapter together, there is a concluding discussion with the heading: Towards making sense of disparate trends: Implications of reconsidering the religious mainstream.

Continuity and change in patterns of religious affiliation, practice and belief

Attention will now be given to questions regarding whether or not the trends documented in the previous chapter have been continuing or changing in more recent times. This focus is justified since none of the publications reviewed in Chapter 3 used the latest EVS data. Moreover, even though the results from the EVS project are often used for longitudinal purposes (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013; Inglehart 2006) the longitudinal trends for religious affiliation, belief and practice are rarely presented together in a descriptive form for each country participating in this project. This means that the well-
known issue of the EVS project’s struggle with response rates is usually handled by using a weighting procedure to compensate for differences between countries (see, for example Halman and Riis 1999; Halman et al. 2008) rather than local biases within one country. Of course, the EVS project is not the only survey-project which struggles with issues of response rates and, thus, survey quality. As a result, the literature on how to overcome these problems is extensive (e.g. Groves 2006, 2011; Groves and Peytcheva 2008; Peytchev 2013) and the EVS project provides information relevant to a number of known strategies used to improve survey quality. One conclusion derived from this discussion is that non-response bias seldom affects whole samples but does affect the results concerning certain variables within a survey (e.g. Groves and Peytcheva 2008; Peytchev 2013). Therefore, the EVS variables on affiliation, belief and practice will be compared in this section of the chapter and critically discussed in relation to the comparable figures obtained by head-counts. Within the sociological study of religion (e.g. Gorski and Altimor 2008) official statistics in the form of head-counts are often used together with survey data. One reason for this is that survey estimates seem to be biased due to tendencies of over-reporting (mostly in the US, see Chaves and Stevens 2003) or under-reporting (mostly in Europe, see Berger, Davie and Fokkas 2008) levels of activity. By contrast to survey-estimates, therefore, official statistics collected by religious organizations or state authorities can be less biased and, therefore, provide reliable data for comparison.

Before going into the figures derived from the EVS project’s data collection waves in Sweden, the data in itself should be properly introduced. In Chapter 2 (page 27-28) it was mentioned that the EVS project started as a project to investigate people’s general values and beliefs. The research group launching the survey described the project as data-driven and without a pre-defined theory-bound hypothesis (cf., Harding et al. 1986). Later descriptions of the EVS project point of departure (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013) have

57 For the EVS response rates in Sweden, see Appendix B, page 269.

58 There is a persistent habit within social sciences to equate survey quality with response rate (e.g. Groves 2006; Peytchev 2013). Although declining survey quality due to decreased willingness to participate is a problem which journals like Public Opinion Quarterly, Annals for the Political and Social Sciences and Journal for the Royal Statistical Society all take seriously and have recently addressed with special issues (e.g. Druckman and Mathiowetz 2011; Massey and Tourangeau 2013; Singer 2006) there seems to be a common conclusion that survey quality cannot simply be measured by response rates. Groves (2006) for example showed that increasing the response rate by means of incentives or persistent callbacks may yield biases that are as problematic as a low response rate. The general problem that surveys in Western Europe today in general yield response rates of around 40 percent of the sampled population (e.g. Peytchev 2013), cannot be solved with one solution.

59 The EVS project provides detailed accounts of this type of information for the last two collection waves in Sweden (e.g. the 1999 wave and the 2010 wave) (see, http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/). Information concerning the first two waves is sparser and this fact is commented on in table format in Appendix B, page 269.
emphasized that the project’s founding fathers expected people’s values and beliefs to constitute value-orientations at an aggregated level. These value-orientations would furthermore stretch from religious and Christian oriented values to secular and non-religious values. When the results from Europe did not meet these expectations, Arts and Halman (2013) continue, the project expanded to include a theory group which was given the task of explaining why the collected data looked the way it did.

By this time, the EVS project had also expanded geographically. In the first wave, data from ten European countries was collected\(^{60}\). The results from these surveys attracted attention and as a result an intermediate survey-collection was conducted in 26 countries around the world which, as a result, bridged the EVS project with the global World Value Survey (WVS) in terms of the questionnaires used for data collection. Data from Europe – the base of the EVS project – was thereafter collected in the vast majority of the European countries 1990, 1999 and 2010.

From the start, then, comparison for EVS was cross-national. As a consequence, the project set up target samples of approximately 1000 individuals for each participating country (e.g. Arts and Halman 2013). As a glance at Appendix B will show, the goal of interviewing 1000 individuals per country meant increasing the total number of individuals asked to fill in the survey for each wave. Put differently, the response rate for the EVS project has declined and for the figures from Sweden a decline is observable from 80 percent answering the survey in 1982 to 46 percent answering the survey during its last wave collected in 2010. According to a researcher active in the Swedish research milieu (e.g. Gustafsson, B. 1962a; Skog 2001) total head-counts are taken to provide more reliable figures than surveys with low response rates. Therefore, the documented decline in response rate for the EVS survey prompts comparison of the EVS survey estimates on religious affiliation, belief and practice with comparable figures obtained by head-counts and official statistics within this country.

For reasons of clarity and consistency with the analyses presented later in this chapter, figures for affiliation and practice will be presented before the figures for beliefs.

Trends in affiliation 1982--2010

In the EVS questionnaire, affiliation is measured by the question “Do you belong to a religious denomination?” (see also, Inglehart et al. 2004). For this question it is possible to answer yes or no. If the answer is yes, the interviewed person will be asked to specify which denomination. The predefined

\(^{60}\) The history of the EVS project is found at:
answers match the major religious organizations established in the country surveyed. For Sweden, the religious organizations were set to Church of Sweden, Catholic Church, an Orthodox Church or congregation (Russian, Greek or other), any independent church, Protestant (not Church of Sweden), Jewish congregation, Islamic community, Hindu community, Buddhist community or other. As already discussed in Chapter 3, the total proportion of the population who are religiously affiliated in Sweden is difficult to calculate because members of the independent Protestant churches (also called the Free Churches) have tended to remain members of the Church of Sweden. There is accordingly a tendency for double membership (the Free Church and the Church or Sweden) within this substantial subgroup. There are no official records in Sweden which can be used to give an exact figure for this overlap. Moreover, as Skog (1986b) has shown based on extensive research of the year books of the Free Churches, there is a small overlap between these churches. In 1985, Skog estimates that 3.7 percent of the population in Sweden belonged to one of the Free Churches. If this figure is corrected for overlap due to membership of several churches, 3.6 percent of the population were members of the Free Churches (cf., Skog 1986b: 35). In 1990, this figure of the total number of members in the Free Churches had declined to 3.2 percent of the population. The overlap between them, however, remained stable at 0.1 percent of the population (cf., Skog 1991a:170).

With this said, it can be observed that the EVS results from Sweden show a decline in religious affiliation between the years 1982-2010 (see, table 4.1). In 1982 a total of 93 percent of the population stated that they belonged to a religious denomination while this number was only 68 percent of the population in 2010. Based on this EVS data collection, the proportion of members in religious organizations has decreased by 25 percentage points since the year 1982.

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Table 4.1. Religious affiliation in Sweden 1982-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belongs to a religious denomination</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not belong to a religious Denomination</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=954)</td>
<td>(n=1042)</td>
<td>(n=1015)</td>
<td>(n=1148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


If the numbers obtained by the EVS survey are compared with the official records kept by the Church of Sweden, it is noticeable that the 2010 percentage share roughly corresponds with the Church of Sweden’s statistics. In 2010 Church of Sweden reports, 70 percent of the population registered as members (www.svenskakyrkan.se/statistik). This means that even without the official numbers from the minority religions in Sweden, the EVS estimate is lower than the official figures. For 2010, the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities (www.sst.a.se) estimates that about 750000 people living in Sweden were affiliated with the minority religions in this country. Compared with the total population of people living in Sweden in 2010, the 750000 members of minority religions are equal to about eight percent of the population. Added together, the figures from the Church of Sweden and the figures from the Swedish Commission for government support suggest that about 78 percent of the population belonged to a religious organization in 2010. This means that the EVS results from 2010 might be about 10 percent off and biased towards non-affiliation.

Interestingly, since the EVS data on the minority religions adds up to approximately five percent for each year surveyed (see forthcoming table 4.4, page 130), it seems to be members of the Church of Sweden who have chosen not to answer the question about religious affiliation. Of course, from the information presented here, it cannot be ruled out that there is a more general response rate bias underlying this result. That is, the Church of Sweden members choose not to answer the questionnaire at all.

The bias seems to be persistent. The official figures from the Church of Sweden suggest that 92 percent of the population were members in 1982, 89 percent in 1990 and the comparable figure for 1999 was 84 percent of the people living in Sweden. Accordingly, compared with EVS figures in table 4.1, the official Church of Sweden figures roughly correspond or are even higher than the EVS results. This bias exists even before the figures on
membership in minority religions have been added. After adding the figures on membership on minority religions, the gap between official statistics and EVS survey estimates increases, which suggests that the bias is connected with the Church of Sweden members’ underreporting. The tendency among Church of Sweden members to omit their church membership in surveys has been observed several times in domestic surveys (e.g. Bromander 2005; 2011).

Looking at the trend obtained by the EVS material it can be concluded that a majority of people living in Sweden are still affiliated in 2010. The trend is decline but the numbers which EVS data suggests might exaggerate this decline. This means that even though the number of religious organizations has grown over the last 30 years in Sweden and, for example, the Islamic communities have grown considerably, the total proportion of the population who are religiously affiliated is in decline. The majority pattern, nevertheless, is that most people living in Sweden are affiliated with one or another religious organization.

Trends in practice 1982--2010

In contrast to religious affiliation, attending religious services has been very irregular in Sweden for a long time (see, Chapter 3). Even in the first counts conducted in the 1880s (e.g. Rundgren 1897; DN 1928); attending church on Sunday was the practice of a small minority in Sweden. Compared with the large groups staying at home on Sundays, the church attendees were limited in numbers and constituted a marginal group.

As noted in Chapter 3, the marginal group of church attendees was often used as the reference group even though in a minority. One explanation for this is that the counts were carried out by church leaders (e.g. Rundgren 1897; Lövgren and Rodhe 1911) who wanted to respond to popular claims of ongoing secularization with data. The low levels of regular church-attendance were not, as for example visible in Berndt Gustafsson’s (1966b) study, preferred by the churches. By contrast, representatives of churches feared that people living in Sweden would lose their religious faith or convert to other religions if they did not attend church (cf., Lövgren and Rodhe 1911; Sundström 1945). The journalists who conducted the headcount for the national newspaper Dagens Nyheter in 1927 (e.g. DN 1928) also wanted to know to what extent churches were empty on Sundays. The rumor they said, was that almost nobody went to church on Sundays at the beginning of the 20th century. Accordingly, there were hypotheses of irregular church attendance at the same time as the church leaders wanted these hypotheses to be falsified.

Turning attention to the results from EVS for the years 1982-2010 (see, table 4.2) it is observable that the weekly attendance rate is very similar to the rates calculated at the beginning of the 20th century (cf., DN 1928, see
also, Gustafsson, G. 2001). In other words, the marginal group of regular attendees has neither grown nor declined when compared as a proportion of the total population living in Sweden. This is also a persistent pattern observable in the last wave of EVS data from 2010 (see, table 4.2). So, the marginal group which church leaders writing at the beginning of the 20th century wished would increase has instead neither increased nor decreased over more than 100 years. All the same, this small group which fulfills the expectations of churches interpreted through the lens of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ has typically been used as the reference group in the analysis of religion in Sweden (see, Chapter 3).

Table 4.2. Religious practice in Sweden, 1982-2010, percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency, attendance religious services</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonally (on holydays)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=914)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1035)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1134)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There are, nevertheless, changes to be observed in the longitudinal EVS data on religious practice in Sweden. These changes are found in the bottom rows of table 4.2 which reveal that the irregular attendance has become less and less frequent over the studied period. In 1982 the proportion of the population who reported no attendance at all was 38 percent. In 2010 the comparable figure was 54 percent. That is an increase of 16 percent points, which suggests that increasing numbers of people do not attend church at all on Sundays in Sweden.

Like the EVS estimates for religious affiliation, the just reported estimates on religious practice might be biased. However, for the results on religious practice presented in table 4.2 it is difficult to find comparable data in the official records kept by the religious organizations or the authorities. For the Church of Sweden this is because attendance is calculated per year in a way which does not allow for weekly means (cf., Willander 2009b). Therefore, in
this case, the church statistics can only be used to ensure that no sudden up-
turns in church attendance have occurred during the last 40 years. For the
minority religions, the state authorities do not keep any registers comparable
with the ones they have on religious affiliation (e.g. www.sst.a.se)

There is, nevertheless, one study which can be used as a comparison for
the estimates derived from EVS. This is Skog’s (2001) ambitious headcount
of all religious practice in Sweden at the turn of the millennium. There are,
however, two limitations to the ways which Skog’s results can be used for
comparison. First, since Skog only collected the extensive data once in Sep-
tember 1999, her results can only be used as a contrast to the EVS estimates
of 1999. Second, because Skog (2001) selected one weekend for the head
count, her results can only be used for comparing the figures of weekly at-
tendance in 1999. Apart from these restrictions, Skog’s (2001) study match-
es the information obtained by survey estimates by the EVS project with
figures derived from a representative head-count.

The EVS data in table 4.2 suggests that about four percent of the popula-
tion attended religious services weekly in 1999. Compared with the figures
obtained by Skog (2001), the EVS figure of four percent seems to be too
low. Skog reports that the total proportion of the population attending reli-
gious services during the selected weekend was six percent (ibid: 21). Going
into detail, Göran Gustafsson (2001) reveals that out of those in total six
percent only about two percent constitute visits to Church of Sweden ser-
vices (cf., ibid:89). This means that the vast majority of visits observed by
Skog were made by people who belonged to the minority religions in Swe-
den. This distribution in the (un-)commonness of attending religious services
is here taken to further support the idea that the average attitude towards
religious behavior in Sweden is to be a member of the former state church
but to attend this church’s services very seldom.

The results presented in table 4.2 on religious practice therefore seem to
suggest that staying at home on Sundays continues to be the practice of the
vast majority of people living in Sweden. Exceptions are mainly found
among the small but, perhaps, growing proportion of the population which
belongs to the minority religions in Sweden. Apart from this continuity of
not attending religious services regularly, the results reported here suggest
that it has become more common to never attend religious services at all.
Thus, it appears as if practice that used to be rare has become even more
infrequent. Accordingly, one may wonder what has happened to the arena of
church services which religions’ expected to inspire people to interpret the
”sacred” in line with church doctrine. What about the increasing group of
people who never attend church? How do they make up their mind about
what to believe about the “sacred”? The growth of this group that never at-
tends strengthens the argument that something other than sermons inspires
people to describe the “sacred” as “some sort of spirit or life force”.

122
Trends in beliefs 1982--2010

In the EVS questionnaire, religious beliefs in the form of description of the sacred are elicited by the question “Which of the following statements comes closest to your beliefs?” For this question, the predefined answers (mentioned in the introduction of this thesis) are “a) There is a personal God”, “b) There is some sort of spirit or life force”, “c) I don’t really know what to think” and “d) I don’t really think that there is any sort of spirit, God or life force”. These particular statements are dependent on the research practice called ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and discussed in Chapter 2 but, as shown in Chapter 3, comparable questions have been used in surveys in Sweden since the 1930s (i.e. Fogelklou 1934). Although these survey results cannot be used for comparisons in the same way as head counts were used to discuss the EVS estimates for religious affiliation and practice, these older surveys can be used to discuss what might be expected of the EVS results given previous survey findings.

For the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ the statement “personal God” does not seem to correspond with one assumption but several assumptions (cf., Glock and Stark 1965). For example, to accept a “personal God” is to describe the sacred as transcendent, to accept the prerogative of tradition and religious leaders in matters of religious interpretation, to accept doctrines like the virgin birth, and to place the sacred in a larger system of beliefs defined by religious tradition. If people, as in Sweden, reject beliefs in a “personal God”, the multitude of assumptions assigned to this statement makes it difficult to know exactly what assumptions are challenged by the choice of another description of the sacred. However, in practice this has not meant that the researcher has been cautious in their interpretation of what the low share accepting a “personal God” stands for. Among others, Inglehart and Baker (2000), Pettersson (1988a), Therborn (2012) and Zuckerman (2008) suggest that if people do not accept a “personal God” they are irreligious and an advanced state of secularization is observed.

Nonetheless, Fogelklou (1934) concluded that people did not answer that they believed in a “personal God” because a statement such as this is not easily answered by a simple yes or no. Therefore, she suggested, it is not a simple task to make out what hesitation about the term “personal God” means. In her study, some people answered that they did not believe in a “personal God” but the God they said they believed in resembled what a theologian would classify as a transcendent description of the sacred. Others responded that they would rather describe the sacred as some sort of divine principle. Adding all these answers together, refuting the “personal God” alternative in one way or another seemed to be the most common response.

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Given that the “personal God” survey question was rephrased in Sweden with the first EVS survey, the results from EVS for the years 1982–2010 are the only longitudinal figures available with this exact question wording (see, table 4.3). These EVS results seem to suggest that the pattern in the description of beliefs has been stable throughout the surveyed period. In 1982 the most common belief was “some spirit or life force” since 41 percent of the population described their beliefs in this way. Thereafter, this description becomes slightly more popular, and in 2010 in total 46 percent of the population describe the “sacred” as “some spirit or life force”. During the same time, explicit non-belief remains fairly stable. In 1982 about 18 percent state that they do not believe in any “spirit, God or Life force”, in 2010 the comparable figure is 20 percent of the population. A similar stability is found in the group who claim that they do not know what to think. This means that the only change occurring within the documented pattern of how people describe their beliefs in Sweden is from “personal God” to “some spirit or life force”.

Table 4.3. Description of the “sacred” in Sweden 1982-2010, percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of beliefs</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal God</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Spirit of Life force</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what to think</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No spirit, God or Life force</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=901)</td>
<td>(n=997)</td>
<td>(n=985)</td>
<td>(n=1105)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Related to the EVS results on religious affiliation (in decline, see table 4.1) and religious practice (in decline, see table 4.2), the description of beliefs seems relatively stable (see, table 4.3). This means that the relations between religious affiliation, practice and beliefs in the EVS data must have changed. This is due to the fact that two patterns (affiliation and practice) are in decline and one pattern (belief) is not. These changed internal relations will be further investigated in this chapter.

Berndt Gustafsson (1963), for example, posed the questions about a “personal God” with the following wording: “There is a God, who has created and rules the world” and “There is a good and almighty personal God, whom humans can turn to for help through prayers” (ibid: 81).
On mainstreams and margins: new ways of understanding

One implication of the long trend of a stable pattern of the majority’s religious affiliation, beliefs and practice is arguably conceptual. In one way, it can be argued that one implication of the focus of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ on accepting beliefs in a transcendent “sacred” meant that religion was analytically reduced. Beliefs in a transcendent “sacred” were taken to be a trait so general for religion that it was universally applicable (cf., Glock and Stark 1965:20). Since the transcendent description of the “sacred” was also taken to explain individuals’ commitment to religion in terms of affiliation and practice, it was taken by the research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’ to be the most central trait of ‘religion at an individual level’. By this way of reasoning the belief in a “personal God” was treated as the marker for belonging to the religious mainstream, even in cases like Sweden where this belief is unusual.

Belief in a “personal God” has here deliberately been called a marker of the ‘religious mainstream’ instead of simply a marker of religion. As a sociological concept, the term “mainstream” is not very common. It is used in cultural sociology to distinguish the prevailing, or current thought or activity from counter-cultures or sub-cultures actively challenging the ways of the established majority (cf., Hebdige 1979). In the sociology of religion, the use of the term “mainstream” rests upon the assumptions associated with Troeltsch’s ([1912]/1960) church-sect typology which was very popular during sociology of religion’s formative years (1940s-1970s) (cf., Beckford 1973). In line with the Troeltschian approach, church was taken to be “mainstream” in that it embraced the secular institutions of its surroundings. By contrast, the sect was assumed to reject the secular institutions and be in a state of tension with its surrounding society (cf., Johnson 1957, 1963; Wilson 1959).

It seems as if the church-sect typology provided the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ with a view on spirituality as something alternative, in opposition to the “mainstream” (see, for example, Glock 1962). So far in this thesis, this tendency for conceptualizing spirituality as an alternative form of religion has been discussed in terms of the contemporary research orientation ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’ (pages 58-63). Within this research orientation two strands of assumptions were combined. First, alternative spirituality was assumed to be belief-centered in a way similar to religion. Specifically, belief in an immanent sacred was taken to explain affiliation with and practice in organizations categorized as cults, sects, new age spirituality or, more lately, the holistic well-being movement. Compared with religion, however, the description of the sacred was less well defined and it has been a controversial issue whether or not the milieus providing the sacred with content for spirituality are organized enough to encompass a consistent belief system (cf., Heelas 1996). Secondly, alternative spirituality was
also conceptualized along the scale of theist, deist, agnostic or atheist (e.g. Glock and Stark 1965). In other words, alternative spirituality was conceptualized with the help of a typology that emphasized different principal views on the possibility of knowing the source of the sacred, describing the reality of the sacred and in what ways the sacred is present in the world as we know it. In sum, all these assumptions backed the popular claim that beliefs described as “some sort of spirit or life force” were to be found at the opposite pole of the “mainstream” and, therefore, church-oriented description “personal God”. In other words, backed by the church-sect typology, the answer “there is some sort of spirit or life force” was to be considered deviant regardless of how popular this belief was among people in different parts of the world.

If we were to rearrange the script, as Mills ([1959/2000) encourages us to do with his writing on the sociological imagination, and rethink the now established logic in the relations between the ‘religious mainstream’ and the religious periphery, that which is divergent, the majority patterns of behavior could be used as a starting point. Specifically, what is suggested is that the sociological and technical meaning of the ‘religious mainstream’ as church-oriented is reconsidered. In its place, the notion of the “mainstream” is here conceptualized in line with the term’s lexical meaning which clarifies that the “mainstream” relates to what most people do and consider normal. Again, according to the Oxford dictionaries “mainstream” means “The ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional”.  

For this suggested perspective, it can be argued that it is likely that patterns of behavior which the majority of people in a region have been a part of, generation after generation, represent the “mainstream”. That is, what most people actually do is the “mainstream” regardless of whether that behavior fits religions’ expectations or not. Moreover, with this suggested perspective, people’s actions do not become “mainstream” because they are sanctioned by a “church” accepting the secular institutions around it. By contrast, the proposed analytical approach to the “mainstream” starts with the empirical task of demonstrating what behavior has been the behavior of the majority over time.

Seen from this perspective, the first trend observed in Chapter 3, that the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice is relatively stable over time, suggests that the group which is affiliated but not especially active is the ‘religious mainstream’ in Sweden. For the conceptualization suggested here it is the shared experiences of doing something a certain way which is thought of as the base for defining what is ‘mainstream’ or not. Divergence, again for the new understanding proposed here, would be the group which

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64 This definition was derived from Oxford Dictionaries found online at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/mainstream?q=mainstream (2014-05-18).
empirically can be argued to be in the minority for a long time. In other words, the group opposing the mainstream is the group which empirically can be demonstrated to be on the margins.

Equipped with this new understanding of ‘religious mainstream’ and ‘religious margins’, it is possible to create new analytical categories for comparison based on the EVS material. To begin with, since the most common behavior, demonstrated to date back to the 1880s in Chapter 3, is to be a member of the Church of Sweden while seldom attending this church’s services, the people who belong to this group in the EVS material can be discussed in terms of the ‘old mainstream’. This group might be thought of as ‘mainstream’ since it represents the behavior or the majority and, ‘old’ since it represents a behavior which has been around for quite some time. In opposition to the ‘old mainstream’, the long lines of affiliation and practice reveal that there has been a small minority which has regularly attended Church of Sweden services. This group appears to have been in the minority as long as the ‘old mainstream’ has been in the majority and may thus be seen as the ‘old margins’. In the light of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, discussing those who do not attend religious services regularly as ‘mainstream’ and those who do attend regularly as ‘margins’ is a complete rearrangement of the established script. A central point for doing so here is to place emphasis on the possibility that religion may, perhaps, not explain religiosity and that the standards for being religious may have many sources.

Continuing along this line of argument, in which it is suggested that the ‘mainstream’ relates to the majority and the ‘margins’ to the minority, the longitudinal changes in affiliation and practice displayed in table 4.1 (page 119) and table 4.2 (page 121) can be used to create additional new analytical categories. As already mentioned, the longitudinal trends obtained by the EVS data show tendencies of decline for both religious affiliation and practice. Nevertheless, there are differences in the type of decline between these two trends. Specifically, whereas religious affiliation drops in a straight line one member at a time, religious practice thins out in the sense that irregular practice means more and more seldom. Against this backdrop, it can be argued that the majority pattern is changing. The change seems to go from remaining a member of the Church of Sweden but stopping attendance at service completely, to opting out of the Church of Sweden once and for all. Prominent advocators for secularization theory, such as Bruce (2011a), have vigorously voiced the view that these types of tendencies are a sign of a secularization process. Bruce (2011a) writes “if fewer people worship and churches lose influence, the underlying explanation is probably loss of faith or loss of interest” (ibid: 3). For Bruce, this claim is supported by the expectations that Christian traditions have of their adherents. Because both Catholics and Protestants expect their followers to attend church regularly, Bruce argues that figures on church attendance make possible “comparisons over time and place” (Bruce 2011a: 15). However, if, as in this discussion, there
is an intention to reverse the locus of control and suggest that the behavior of the majority has mainstreaming effects even if it’s not in line with what the churches expect or prefer, the declining trends in affiliation and practice can be reinterpreted. Importantly, the result of this conceptual maneuver is not a terminology which can easily be translated in terms of secularization theory. Therefore, it is not a “rebuttal”, to use Bruce’s (2011a) term, of secularization. It is simply a different way of analyzing ‘religion’.

It is against this background and underpinned by the idea that ‘mainstream’ relates to majority behavior that two new categories can be created with the EVS data as their base. First, the group which is still affiliated but no longer attends can be seen as the ‘established mainstream’. This group is suggested to be ‘established’ because it is conceivable that a group which did not attend at all existed prior to 1952 (when opting out of the state church was first allowed). Moreover, in table 4.2 (page 119) it is observable that the group who claim never to attend religious services increases from the 1990s and onwards which means that never attending is a relatively recent habit of the majority. Accordingly, this way of (not) making use of church services is a majority pattern of age (that is, it is established) but not a majority pattern as old as the ‘old mainstream’ pattern of being affiliated and seldom attending. Second, in table 4.1 (page119) on religious affiliation it is observable that the group without religious affiliation is growing substantially. This is a relatively new phenomenon but a phenomenon which, compared with the suggested categories ‘old mainstream’ (i.e. Church of Sweden members that seldom attend) and ‘established mainstream’ (i.e. Church of Sweden members that never attend) is of similar size. With the rationale used here, this means that being without religious affiliation is becoming a majority pattern and, thus this group of people was labelled the ‘new mainstream’. In this case, the group is considered ‘new’ since opting out is a relatively new phenomenon, and ‘mainstream’ because opting out of the Church of Sweden seems to be an ongoing trend.

Last but not least, a fifth category was created based on the EVS data. Throughout the time when the Church of Sweden enjoyed monopoly status as the church with most members and the church was permitted to legislate and thus form the religious obligations in Sweden, there were people who did not belong to the Church of Sweden. Prior to 1952, the only congregations permitted were the ones which the Swedish king had approved. Thereafter, religious pluralism slowly increased and the quite substantial group of Muslims now living in Sweden has grown since the 1990s.65 Taking these facts together, this means that the group that belongs to minority religions in Sweden is not new but has only changed character in recent times. Accord-

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65 The statistics supporting the claim of increased religious pluralism is found at the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities website at www.sst.a.se (2014-05-27).
ingly, it is ‘established’ as it has a long history of being formally recognized as a religious congregation in Sweden. It has thus remained a small minority of the population at large and therefore, given that minority groups here are discussed as ‘margins’, the group that belongs to one of the minority religions in Sweden can be conceptualized as the ‘established margins’.

In table 4.4 below, the suggested categories for comparisons are displayed. This table shows the five new categories for comparison – ‘old mainstream’ and ‘established mainstream’, ‘old margins’ and ‘established margins’ and, finally, ‘new mainstream’. In addition, the table shows how the groups have varied in size over time. In particular, in 1982 the ‘old mainstream’ was the largest group, consisting of almost half of the population. By contrast, in 2010, the largest group was the ‘new mainstream’ with 34 percent of the population. This change in group size over time further supports the idea that being affiliated but seldom attending can be thought of as the ‘old mainstream’ since it seems to be in decline. Not being affiliated at all is the group which most notably grows and can therefore be considered the ‘new mainstream’. The other three groups, ‘established mainstream’ and the two minority groups ‘old margins’ and ‘established margins’ appears, in contrast with the changing groups, to be fairly stable over time.
Table 4.4. Mainstreams and margins in Sweden, 1982-2010, percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old mainstream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, practice occasionally)</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established mainstream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, no practice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old margins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, regular practice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established margins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Member of minority religion in Sweden)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New mainstream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not a member of any religious denomination or community)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Furthermore, since it was mentioned in the discussion of the religious affiliation trend obtained from the EVS material that affiliation in the Church of Sweden might have been under-reported, it can be taken into consideration that there might be response biases affecting the size of the ‘new mainstream’ group. That is, there might be people who in reality are church members but withhold this information when answering the EVS survey. Even if this bias is overlooked, it has to be remembered that the mainstream groups are related. Most likely, individuals in the ‘new mainstream’ have opted out of the former state church and are therefore former members of the Church of Sweden.

In short, a new way of constructing categories for comparison has been outlined. Instead of assuming the package-deal affiliation, belief and practice to be the mainstream, due to reasons of religions’ expectations of their faithful adherents and the assumptions of the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, the term ‘mainstream’ is taken to refer to what most people do. Therefore, three categories based on what today are the most typical ways to behave were constructed: (1) ‘old mainstream’ (Church of Swe-
den member, attends occasionally), (2) ‘established mainstream’ (Church of Sweden member, never attends) and (3) ‘new mainstream’ (not a member of any religious denomination or community). In the results from 2010 (table 4.4), these mainstream groups are demonstrated to be fairly equal in size. In addition, two categories based on what most people persistently do not do were created: (4) ‘old margins’ (Church of Sweden member, attends regularly) and (5) ‘established margins’ (member of minority religion in Sweden). This new set of categories further challenges the established research assumptions by not assuming that religious beliefs explain religious affiliation and practice. Instead, the analysis to be presented sets out to investigate if being part of a mainstream might explain why religious beliefs are described in a certain way.

On mainstream and marginal beliefs

In what follows, the Swedish sample of EVS data from 1982-2010 is going to be reinterpreted through the lens suggested by introducing the new categories for comparisons (e.g. mainstreaks and margins). The logic for creating these categories for comparison was that mainstream refers to that which is in the majority within a population. Recapitulating the findings from EVS for religious beliefs (table 4.3, page 124) it was demonstrated that describing one’s beliefs as “some sort of spirit or life force” was the most common description and this option remained the most popular of the predefined statements for the period surveyed. This finding might reflect a situation where belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” constitutes the mainstream way of expressing beliefs. However, since trends for religious affiliation and religious practice were shown to be in decline, while the trend for religious beliefs remained stable over time, the relation between these trends must somehow have changed over the surveyed period. If the decline of the ‘old mainstream’ (see, table 4.4) is taken into account, for example, it seems unlikely that this group alone maintains the beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force”. This implies that there might be some sort of change between the mainstream groups over time as well as within the mainstream groups over time. In what follows, these changes over time will be briefly described. Hereafter, an analysis focused on the data from the last EVS data collected in Sweden will be presented.

Starting with the relations between the mainstream and margin groups over time (see table 4.5) it is visible that beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” were most common among the ‘old mainstream’ back in 1982. In fact, 60 percent of the population who described their beliefs as “some sort of spirit or life force” in 1982 can be categorized as the ‘old mainstream’ group. After this point, the proportion who describe their beliefs in this way and belong to the ‘old mainstream’ start to decline. In 2010, the proportion
who believe in “some sort of spirit or life force” and are considered to be the ‘old mainstream’ are 37 percent of the population. At the same time, describing one’s belief as “some sort of spirit or life force” is at an increasing rate stated by the group discussed here as ‘new mainstream’. Based on this description some sort of difference appears to have occurred since three percent of those describing their beliefs as “some sort of spirit or life force” belonged to the ‘new mainstream’ in 1982, whereas in total 29 percent of those that can be categorized into this group described their beliefs in this way in 2010. This might mean that people are opting out of churches while maintaining a belief in “some sort of spirit or life force”. However, recalling that the ‘new mainstream’ may have grown out of an ‘old mainstream’, a group which may be thought of as somewhat independent of church expectations, it might not be church affiliation or church practice which explains this belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” but something else.

Table 4.5. Describe belief as “spirit or life force”, percent. Descriptive comparison between the mainstrem and margin groups in Sweden over time, 1982--2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old mainstream</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, practice occasionally)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established mainstream</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, no practice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old margins</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, regular practice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established margins</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Member of minority religion in Sweden)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New mainstream</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Not member of any religious denomination or community)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=354)</td>
<td>(n=452)</td>
<td>(n=535)</td>
<td>(n=499)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before turning to the task of making the relations within the mainstreams and margins over time visible, a point about the margins should be made. In table 4.5 it can be observed that the ‘old margins’ decline a little among the people who believe in “some sort of spirit or life force” while the ‘established margins’ remain at a stable level of a couple of percent. Of course, these groups are minority groups and are therefore expected to have small shares in this table; however, the very small shares displayed in table 4.5 suggests that the option “some sort of spirit or life force” is not the favorite option within these groups.

Now, turning to a description of how the relations within the mainstreams and margins (see, table 4.6) have altered, it is observable that the distribution of beliefs within the ‘new mainstream’ group varies over time. In 1982, three percent of the people described as ‘new mainstream’ answered that they believed in “some sort of spirit or life force”, while in 2010 46 percent of the people now adhering to this group answered in this way. So, in the balance of describing beliefs as “some sort of spirit or life force”, the ‘new mainstream’ seems to have started to tilt towards this description. It is therefore noticeable that the variation between years within the ‘new mainstream’ is greater than the variation observable in all the other mainstream and margin groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Old mainstream</th>
<th>Established mainstream</th>
<th>Old margins</th>
<th>Established margins</th>
<th>New mainstream</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, practice occasionally)</td>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, no practice)</td>
<td>(Church of Sweden member, regular practice)</td>
<td>(Member of religion in minority in Sweden)</td>
<td>(Not member of any religious denomination or community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=814)</td>
<td>(n=520)</td>
<td>(n=108)</td>
<td>(n=49)</td>
<td>(n=349)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The descriptions of the mainstays and the margins in table 4.5 and 4.6 should not be used for deriving statistical conclusions beyond these tables’ descriptive purposes. This is because, remembering the figures reported in table 4.4, it was shown that the ‘new mainstream’ was growing in size over the studied time and, therefore, the relative proportion which this group represents may be caused by this whole group growing in size. In this way, the ‘new mainstream’ is expanding in proportion to the other groups. In order to tend to these changed relations between the mainstays and margin groups, table 4.7 (page 136) provides a detailed view of the mainstays and margins for 2010, only.

When the results in table 4.7 from 2010 are scrutinized separately it is observable that the most popular way of describing belief within the ‘new mainstream’ is to state that there is “some sort of spirit or life force”. To describe one’s belief in this way was chosen by 41 percent of the ‘new mainstream’ group. This proportion is very similar to the numbers for the ‘established mainstream’ and the ‘old margins’. The only group in which describing one’s belief as “some sort of spirit or life force” is more popular is in the group ‘old mainstream’. In total, 61 percent of the ‘old mainstream’ suggested that this belief option was most suitable for describing their beliefs. The percentages documented for each mainstream and margin group were also found to differ statistically ($\chi^2(12, N = 1068) = 297.48, p < .001$). These differences might indicate that the popularity of “some sort of a spirit or a life force” is related to the Church of Sweden because it is popular among all groups which have (or used to have) a relation to the Church of Sweden. By contrast, however, if the differences found were to be interpreted according to the suggested new conceptualization of mainstays and margins, emphasis could be placed on the relation between the mainstays and beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force”. That is, even if people do not attend church at all or choose to opt out of church, they continue describing their beliefs in this way. Accordingly, and in line with the conceptualization suggested for understanding the ‘religious mainstream’ in this analysis, describing one’s belief as “some sort of spirit or life force” might be dependent on something else. That is, it is proposed, how beliefs are expressed might be dependent on how people typically relate to the religious in Sweden typically talk about the sacred.
Table 4.7. *Description of the “sacred” in Sweden 2010, percent. Distribution per mainstream and margin group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Old mainstream (Church of Sweden member, practice occasionally)</th>
<th>Established mainstream (Church of Sweden member, no practice)</th>
<th>Old margins (Church of Sweden member, regular practice)</th>
<th>Established margins (Member of minority religion in Sweden)</th>
<th>New mainstream (Not member of any religious denomination or community)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal God</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Spirit of Life force</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what to think</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No spirit, God or Life force</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking a second look at the table presenting the detailed view of the year 2010 (i.e. table 4.7), it can be noted that option “personal God” is most popular in the marginal groups. Approximately 55 percent of the population in the ‘old margins’ (the group which typically was used as the reference category in the studies reviewed in Chapter 3) choose to describe their beliefs in this way. Thus, not more than every other person within this group fits all of the criteria for being assessed as ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This is because if the “personal God” option is reserved as the only one reflecting acceptance of Christian doctrine (cf., Glock and Stark 1965) then only 55 percent of those who are affiliated and practice actually believe what sociologists of religion expect them to believe.

The expectations of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ therefore fit better to the group here called the ‘established margins’. In this group, 72 percent of the population choose to describe their beliefs in a “personal God” (see, table 4.7). Therefore, it can be stressed, the assumptions of multidimensionality based on the expectations which religions have on their adherents (cf., Glock and Stark 1965) fit the minority religions in Sweden. Since these religions have not been merged with the state power in the same way as the Church of Sweden and because some of these religions are in effect counter-movements to the Church of Sweden, it can be expected that this type of religiosity will have a minor role in affecting how people typically talk about the sacred with each other. However, whether this assumption is correct or not needs, of course, to be addressed empirically and attempts to do so are presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

There might be a problem with the discussion and the results discussed so far. In Inglehart (1977; 2006), results from the EVS sibling WVS are often analyzed with age, in terms of belonging to a specific generation, as a background variable. Inglehart’s (1977, 2006) long-standing hypothesis is that people growing up under increasingly secure conditions (e.g. food, water and shelter is provided together with possibilities to educate oneself and earn an income) stop believing in God. This is why, explains Inglehart and Baker (2000), people living in countries like Sweden, with an extensive welfare system, lose their religious beliefs. In terms of what is discussed here – the stability of affiliation, practice and its influence on how beliefs are expressed – Inglehart’s reasoning stresses that how beliefs are described is explained by what generation you belong to. Older generations, which in the EVS dataset here used are defined to 50 years or older, would, according to Inglehart’s reasoning, believe in a “personal God”. By contrast, younger generations, again defined by the EVS project to be 29 years or younger, would if, Inglehart is correct, dismiss any description of the sacred and answer “no spirit, God or life force”.

137
Table 4.8 Descriptions of the “sacred” in Sweden, 2010, percent. Comparisons between the age groups 29 or younger, 30-49 and 50 or older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>29 years or younger</th>
<th>30-49 years</th>
<th>50 years or older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal God</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Spirit of Life force</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what to think</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No spirit, God or Life force</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=153)</td>
<td>(n=393)</td>
<td>(n=550)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In order to keep generations separate, table 4.8 only displays the data from 2010. If all four collection waves had been used, the people who were 29 or younger back in 1982 would, if the same person had been asked, have been in the age groups 30-49 years or even 50 years and older in the collection wave conducted in 2010. Therefore, only the 2010 data is used for analysis here.

In table 4.8 it is observable that being of the youngest or oldest generation in the material does not seem to affect how you choose to describe your beliefs ($\chi^2(6, N = 1096) = 5.78, p = .45$). As is shown in table 4.8 between 14-16 percent of the population in the different age groups described their beliefs as “personal God”, making this the least frequently chosen option. In contrast to beliefs in a “personal God” the option “some sort of spirit or life force” was the most popular in all the age groups. Finally, as should be mentioned because it is of relevance for Inglehart’s (1977; 2006) claim of change between generations, the option “no spirit, God or life force” was chosen by 23 percent of the people aged 29 years or younger. This percentage is very similar to the percentages for the other age groups and, as already mentioned, there were no statistical differences found between the age groups. In the case of Inglehart’s (1977) hypothesis, it can be emphasized that it is questionable whether the oldest cohort in this material really have been brought up under less secure circumstances as the younger cohorts. Whether or not this is so, however, is a topic that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Taken together, the analyses presented are understood to support the idea that the ‘religious mainstream’, consisting of what most people do in terms of affiliation and practice, may explain how beliefs are expressed. Among the results discussed, the fact that the majority belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” is perhaps to be transferred from the ‘old mainstream’ (in 1982) to almost equal parts of the ‘old-2’, the ‘established-’ and the ‘new
mainstream’ (in 2010) suggests that it is not the active relation to the Church of Sweden which explains how beliefs are expressed (i.e. table 4.5, page 132). Furthermore, since describing one’s belief as “some sort of spirit or life force” to a greater and greater extent is maintained by the ‘new mainstream’ (understood, with the proposed terminology to be people who are not religiously affiliated), there seem to be other grounds for how beliefs are expressed than regular participation in religious services (i.e. table 4.6, page 134). These findings were followed up by two analyses focusing only on the survey results from 2010. First, as presented in table 4.7, it was shown that belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” was the most popular description of belief in the ‘new mainstream’. Thus, the option “no spirit, God or life force” is a less popular option among those who, according to the EVS survey, are not members of any religious denomination. In the analysis performed here, this result was taken to suggest that there is something about how beliefs generally are discussed among those who share an experience of what has been the standard behavior in terms of affiliation and practice over time in Sweden. Second, as presented in table 4.8, this tentative suggestion that how people talk matters for how they express beliefs was further supported by an analysis showing that age only marginally explains how beliefs are expressed.

Towards making sense of disparate tendencies: Implications for reconsidering the ‘religious mainstream’

The current chapter was intended to address the second objective of the thesis, namely, to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. In order to do so, the analysis made use of three tendencies observed in the previous chapter on religion in Sweden. The tendencies were (1) the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice is relatively stable over time, (2) the interpretation of this stable trend changes with the implementation of the research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’, and (3) the stable trend of affiliation, belief and practice prevails regardless of the change from a time when individuals’ religions were heavily regulated to a time when individuals’ religions are less regulated.

Based on the first trend of stability in the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice over time, it was suggested in this chapter that the way the term ‘religious mainstream’ is used in the sociology of religion might be reconsidered. At present, ‘religious mainstream’ typically refers to church-oriented religion as set forth by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, regardless of how common this type of church-oriented religion is in a region. By contrast, it was emphasized in this chapter that the term ‘main-
stream’ can be understood as relating to the behavior of the majority. Accordingly, the chapter provided a new understanding of the ‘religious mainstream’ by using the analytical approach of ‘religiosity’ and, thus, starting with what people typically draw attention to when relating to the ‘religious’. This new understanding of the meaning of ‘religious mainstream’ also implied that the counter-term was defined against that which was observed to be the behavior in minority. In the case of Sweden, the minority behavior, and thus, according to the suggested new way of understanding, the margins, is to express a church-oriented commitment to religion. This means that the new way proposed for conceptualizing ‘mainstream’ and ‘margins’ reverses the established order. “Church-oriented religion”, which previously was assumed to be “mainstream” regardless of how popular is was among people, was reinterpreted as ‘margins’ depending on the observation that very few acted in ways expected to count as “church-oriented religion”.

There were, however, two more tendencies observed in Chapter 3 which both emphasized change over time. The first change detected was in the ways that sociologists studied religion. A tendency was noted to overlook the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice in the aftermath of importing the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. The main reason for this neglect was that the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice observed did not fit this research practice’s expectation that belief in a “personal God” explained the high levels of religious affiliation. As a result, the majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice which had been stable for more than a century was reduced to forms of indifference to the religious. Moreover, it can be argued, based on the results of the present chapter, that equating religion with affiliation, practice and belief in a “personal God” actually defined the minority religions and, historically, in opposition to the Lutheran society, to be the “mainstream religion”. Specifically, this twist to the story was related to the finding that it is only the ‘established margins’ of religions in minority in Sweden that express the commitment to religion expected by the research practice ‘Religions in Dimensions’. This further feeds in to the suspicion that the established research practice applied to the research site of Sweden fails to take notice of the majority pattern of affiliation, beliefs and practice and its implications in this country.

The second change observed in Chapter 3 suggested that the regulation of religion has been liberalized allowing for more religious pluralism and religious freedom. This change may have implied a change from a time when decisions concerning what to believe were centralized to the elites of Sweden, to a time when deciding what to believe was decentralized to the people in general. ExpRESSED differently, this change supports the idea that it matters how people in general talk about their beliefs or the religious sacred. At times, how people talk may correspond with how the clergy talk about these issues, but at other times these two may differ. If Simmel’s (1955) distinction between religion and religiosity is used to clarify the difference this
makes it can be argued that when the same content is described as sacred by representatives of religious organizations and people in general, religion and religiosity overlap and mutually strengthen each other. If the content drawn attention to as religious beliefs or the sacred differ between the representatives and people in general, religion and religiosity correspondingly stand for different descriptions of the sacred.

Hervieu-Léger’s (2006) idea of “minimum creeds” can be used to explain how this type of religious freedom may foster paradoxical tendencies. On the one side of the coin, she notes, situating this discussion in Europe, several European countries including the Scandinavian countries have accepted principles of individual autonomy in issues of belief. As a consequence, individuals are assumed to construct and critically evaluate what they believe in an increasingly independent fashion. For this endeavor, a vast variation of symbolic resources is available via globalized information technology. Despite these tendencies supporting endless variation, Hervieu-Léger (2006) notes that people in contemporary Europe tend to express beliefs in quite coherent ways. Thus, she reasons, on the other side of the coin of unleashing the market of religious symbols into mass consumption is a standardization of symbols. Hervieu-Léger calls these standardized symbols “minimum creeds”, which stem from cultural resources available in Europe and derive from different religious traditions. For example, she suggests a Pentecostal “minimum creed” might be summarized into “God loves you, Jesus saves and you can be healed” (Hervieu-Léger 2006:64). The meaning and importance of these “minimum creeds” are underpinned by the individuals’ dialogues with other peers to whom the individual testifies his or her religious beliefs. This is why, Hervieu-Léger explains, “minimum creed” can be at the center of religious identities, despite these creeds being expressed with a very limited range of words. Perhaps, then, inspired by Hervieu-Leger (2006), the trend towards decentralizing the decision for describing one’s beliefs in Sweden gave rise to a certain sets of “minimum creeds”.

The notion of “minimum creeds” comes arguably close to that which cultural sociological approaches to the study of religion (e.g. Besecke 2005; Edgell 2012; Wuthnow 2011) have argued may solve some of the contemporary problems identified with the methodology within the sociology of religion (e.g. Bender et al. 2013). Following Besecke (2005), people talk about religious beliefs and how to relate to these. Put in a social context, these conversations have taken place in private as well as public settings, in one to one encounters as well as in mass communication. Therefore, she argues, there is a form of “societal communication” in which what is typically taken to be legitimate religious or not is formulated. This type of “societal communication” holds the power to socialize and maintain the ways in which beliefs are expressed. That is, according to Berger (2012), not necessarily what is believed but is how these beliefs are typically expressed.
Against the backdrop of the analyses carried out in this chapter, it might perhaps be suggested that the “societal conversations” are dependent on a patterned process, which, in line with Martin’s (1978) use of the term “pattern process”, would imply that historical developments in a country are of importance. That is to say, the shared experience and memory of how people typically behave in terms of religious affiliation and practice, patterns the process of how religious beliefs are discussed and the way in which certain things but not others are considered as religious. With this suggested, the following chapters will address how beliefs are discussed and what is typically considered as the sacred in Sweden.
Chapter 5: Reconsidering the ‘Religious Sacred’

The present chapter also intends to address the thesis’ second objective - to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. Accordingly, it addresses the same objective as Chapter 4 and takes off from where the previous chapter ended. Specifically, an expansion is offered on the previously made suggestion that something outside congregations influences and maintains how the majority of people living in Sweden express beliefs. In order to address the second objective the chapter presents a new analysis of interviews conducted for the ‘Enköping project’. The reasons for conducting an analysis on that particular interview material can be summarized as follows: the chosen interview material departed from a research design intended to fit the contemporary research orientation discussed in Chapter 2 as ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. In other words, one of the contemporary research orientations that share the basic assumptions of the currently established research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This means that this chapter, too, uses data collected to fit assumptions put forward by ‘Religion in Dimensions’. However, the use of interview data means that a seldom-used form of data is analyzed.

Specially, at issue here are assumptions concerning differences between religion and spirituality as groups of individuals with respect to how the sacred is described at the abstracted and remote level of belief systems. This means that the assumption to be reconsidered here is one of the established research practice’s most enduring and central assumptions about what constitutes the ‘religious sacred’. It is against this background that this chapter will start with a reflection on how to theorize even though the research problem at hand is old and there exists an established practice to study it.

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67 Results from the ‘Enköping project’ have also been published in Ahlstand and Gunner ed. (2008) Guds närmaste stad? Verbum: Stockholm, which is a research report on the project as a whole. Specific results has also been discussed (again in Swedish) in Willander (2009a) Vad är ‘andligt’ i hypotesen om den andliga revolutionen? None of these publications, however, cover the content under discussion here. In addition, the report on the project’s main findings is not published in English and is only available in the Ahlstand and Gunner ed. (2008) anthology in Swedish.
According to Becker (1998) the sociological trade has a number of tricks for how to theorize even though an established research practice exists. To start with, Becker advises, for social matters which are complex, like “religion”, “spirituality”, the “sacred” or, in Becker’s case “ethnicity”, it is important to recognize in what ways these phenomena make a difference to people. It is not always advisable, argues Becker, to imagine that groups differ because of traits which one group has and another has not. For example, it could be that one group is “religious” because they accept a certain way of expressing beliefs, and one group is not “religious” because they describe beliefs in another way. On the contrary, advises Becker, scholarly definitions should be the outcome of the distinctions which people use to categorize “us” from “them”. Becker exemplifies his reasoning with the following quote from Hughes:

An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because people in and people out of it know that that it is one; because both the ins and the outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. Hughes ([1971]/1984:155)

In other words, a group is not “ethnic” because it speaks a language or because its members typically adhere to a specific religion. The group is “ethnic” only so far as the members of the so-called “ethnic” group as well as the non-members recognize that the two are different based on ideas concerning “ethnicity”. Consequently Becker (1998) clarifies that it takes more than members of one “ethnic group” to empirically investigate the meanings of “ethnicity”. Similarly, it should take more than one “religious group” to study the meanings of the “religious”.

For the discussed topic, Becker’s advice may be taken to suggest that group difference might not be observable from the description of the “sacred” derived from a belief system level. Recapitulating the nuts and bolts of the analytical terminology established in Chapter 4, the groups of interest here are the mainstreams and margins defined by the majority or minority behavior respectively in terms of affiliation and practice. To paraphrase Hughes ([1971]/1984:155) quoted above, that means that both the ins of the mainstreams and the out of the mainstreams talk, feel and act as if they were a separate group from the non-mainstream. Since the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ appears to assume that expressing belief in a “personal God” stands for the ‘religious sacred’ it would be of specific conceptual relevance to shed light on whether this understanding of the ‘religious sacred’ is what constitutes the difference between mainstreams and non-mainstreams. Based on the findings from the previous chapter it was shown that, contrary to what is expected based on the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, expressing belief in “some spirit or life force” was popular
among the mainstream groups in Sweden. Therefore, to express belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” might reflect what is taken to stand for the conventional way of how the sacred is described for most people living in Sweden. These descriptions of the sacred need not necessarily center upon the source and nature of the sacred (e.g. whether the sacred is transcendent or immanent) but may place emphasis on other aspects of the sacred. Becker’s (1998) trick of theorizing even though an established research practice exists is made use of to enable an analytical starting point that places an emphasis on what people themselves draw attention to when talking about what the ‘religious sacred’ means for them.

The novelty of using interview data to reconsider what the ‘religious sacred’ might stand for can be supported by the strong tendency documented in Chapter 3 concerning relying on survey data or headcount data to investigate majority patterns of religion in Sweden. This tendency in favor of quantitative approaches implies that considering interview data in its own right is not the standard way of analyzing religion collected at this research site. Considering interview data is justified since it allows for an analysis of what the people interviewed themselves highlight as sacred. No predefined criteria of what to count and not count is needed for the analyses suggested. Because of this, the proposed analyses can focus on the ‘cultural meanings’ of the sacred in the sense in which this concept was discussed in the introduction. To be precise, the analyses can focus on the aspects of the sacred which people talk about as meaningful, regardless of these aspects’ meaningfulness for religion (as a belief system), local religious organizations or researchers.

Nevertheless, there is an obvious restriction as to how the result from an analysis conducted on interview data can be generalized. The present analysis is based on 11 people with different affiliations, and relations to religion and spirituality were analyzed. The results of this small number of interviews can, of course, not be generalized to all people living in Sweden. Conceptually, nevertheless, the result may bring to the fore meaning content overlooked in the assumptions underlying the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. As a consequence, the result of the analysis will be used to problematize assumptions underlying the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ by shedding light on an example of how the sacred can be discussed in Sweden.

The chapter has the following structure. First, issues concerning The procedure of theorizing despite an established research practice will be outlined and discussed. Thereafter, the result of this theorizing procedure will be presented under three separate headings: Conditions of the “sacred”, On

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68 This tendency of typically using quantitative methods to research religion in Sweden is documented in Appendix A, column “Quantitative Approach”, page 261-268, column V called Quantitative Approach.
the origin and nature of the “sacred”, and Paths to knowing the “sacred”. The ways in which these empirical findings conceptually contribute to the assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ will finally be addressed in a discussion called The ‘religious sacred’ from the perspective of religiosity.

The procedure of theorizing despite an established research practice

Earlier, in Chapter 2, Berger (1974) was quoted as claiming that sociological definitions of religion should:

Include only such meanings and meaning-complexes as refers to transcendent entities in the conventional sense – God, gods, supernatural beings and worlds, or metaempirical entities as, say, the ma’at of the ancient Egyptians or the Hindu law of karma. (Berger 1974: 128)

Berger (1974) neither was nor is alone in claiming that definitions of religion depend on a transcendent description of the sacred in line with what belief systems call the ‘religious sacred’. In Chapter 2, Dobbelaere (2011), for example, was made spokesperson for the continued relevance of substantive definitions of religion which can be argued to equate religion with placing emphasis on a difference between this world and the supernatural world where the transcendent sacred reality is taken to exist. Against these strong presumptions about what should and should not count as the ‘religious sacred’ in sociology, the analytical task of reconsidering the ‘religious sacred’ can be described as a balancing act.

The main weight in this balancing act is the assumptions underpinning the way in which the ‘Enköping project’ was conducted. Specifically, these are the assumptions and terminology taken over from the ‘Kendal project’ and Heelas and Woodhead’s (2000, 2005) typologies of “religion” and “spirituality”. The second weight concerns how, exactly, the analysis made sure that the assumptions underpinning the initial project from which the data was retrieved were not reproduced. In this stage, matters of who to talk to and what to analyze from what was said during the interviews are addressed. Finally, the way in which the interviews were analyzed will be briefly discussed.
Choosing a sample – a case of ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’

One of the contemporary research orientations ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’ annotated with the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ (discussed in Chapter 2) focuses on what were perceived to be counterparts to religion. The structure of the counterparts was stipulated to be similar to religion in that it depended on how the sacred was described in terms of man’s relation to the supernatural and the natural. For these descriptions of the sacred, two contrasting principles were stipulated: transcendent descriptions (focusing on the difference between the natural and the supernatural) and immanent (focusing on the similarity between the natural and the supernatural in a holistic manner). Accordingly, data collected using these criteria are comparable with data collected for ‘assessing the extent of religion’, which was the second contemporary research orientation documented in Chapter 2. To compare the extent of religion with the extent of spirituality has also often been the aim of studies (e.g. Dobbelaere and Riis 2002; Heelas and Woodhead 2005) which can be seen as examples of the contemporary research orientation ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’.

Specifically, the interviews analyzed here are from the ‘Enköping project’ (cf., Ahlstrand & Gunner 2008). This project was designed as a follow up study of the British Kendal project published in Heelas and Woodhead’s (2005) The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality. Consequently, the design of the ‘Enköping project’ aimed to follow up the findings of the Kendal project by conducting a comparable “locality study” where all religious and spiritual meeting places were mapped out and compared. In addition, the ‘Enköping project’ sought to critically engage with the terminology put forward by Heelas and Woodhead (2005) by conducting follow-up interviews with people answering a survey sent out to a representative sample of people living in the municipal of Enköping (cf., Ahlstrand, Palmer & Willander 2008:14-16).

Since the ‘Enköping project’ aimed to follow up on the Kendal study, Heelas and Woodhead’s (2005) use of the terms “religion” and “spirituality” influenced the Swedish project and its data collection. The specific terminology used in The Spiritual Revolution (2005) dates back to Woodhead and Heelas’ (2000) Religion in Modern Times which is a widely read book among sociologists of religion working in Sweden. In Religion in Modern Times, Woodhead and Heelas suggest a threefold typology of religions – religions of difference, religions of humanity, and spiritualities of life. These three ideal types were distinguished based on their respective beliefs about the sacred. In the first – “religions of difference” – the sacred was understood as a supernatural entity outside humans. Within this type of religion it was further assumed that there existed a community which gathered regularly in order to commit to the value of understanding the sacred as supernatu-
eral (or different, as the name “religions of difference” suggests). The second, called “religions of humanity” was a type of religion where the sacred was described as supernatural but where the community supporting this understanding of the “sacred” valued a more equal relationship between the sacred, one the one side, and humans and nature, on the other. Observers of the Swedish case (e.g., Ahlin 2005; Pettersson 2009) have paid attention to the fact that this mid-type could be a lucid description of the stance taken by the Church of Sweden in matters of the sacred. This possibility was also addressed by Woodhead and Heelas (2000). Last but not least, the third type, called “spiritualties of life”, was assumed by Woodhead and Heelas (2000) to describe the sacred as a holistic entity present in all life. For this type of religiosity, often referred to as spirituality by Heelas and Woodhead, the community supporting the description of the sacred as holistic was assumed to be more loosely connected in networks, at times related to a business model selling holistic well-being services.

For the empirical study in Kendal these three ideal types of religion and spirituality – “religions of difference”, “religions of humanity” and “spiritualties of life” – were simplified into a dichotomy between religion (i.e. religions of difference) and spirituality (i.e. spiritualties of life). In Heelas and Woodhead (2005) the reason for this simplification is to highlight contrasting examples of religiosity cum spirituality in order to predict growth and decline. However, in this way the mid-type called “religions of humanity” was lost. For the analyses to be performed here this means that the mid-type “religions of humanity” which, according to Woodhead and Heelas (2000) seems to have a bearing on Church of Sweden spirituality, was dropped. However, it also means that the kept dichotomy more closely fit the juxtaposed distinction between “religion” and “spirituality” which seems to be characteristic of the contemporary research orientation ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’.

Against this backdrop, results published on the empirical materials collected in Enköping 2004-2005 have in different ways departed from a distinction of “religion” and “spirituality” as a focal point (e.g., Bromander 2008; Palmer 2008; Willander 2008). In detail, Bromander (2008) suggested that there was no sign of a spiritual revolution in Enköping since results from a survey showed that the self-described identities “religious” and “spiritual” were used interchangeably (cf., Bromander 2008:99-100). Somewhat in contrast, Palmer (2008) detected specific nuances related to “spirituality” which he described in terms of time alone to relax and enjoy life in order to cope with stress (cf., Palmer 2008:288). Nuances similar to the ones Palmer found were also observable for the “spirituality” of the holistic well-being movement in the region (cf., Willander 2008:273-274). Taken together, this means that so far it has not been possible to identify two juxtaposed groups of “religion” and “spirituality” from the Enköping material. Therefore, it can be argued that these previous analyses too, alongside most empirical results
collected in Sweden and documented in Chapter 3, cannot, without overlooking what the majority do in terms of affiliation belief and practice, be interpreted with terminology based on the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

However, for the purposes of the present analysis, it is interesting that the data collection at issue included information on religious affiliation, belief and practices. By this way, comparative categories can be created that are comparable with the new categories of mainstreams and margins proposed in the previous chapter. To be precise, the persons interviewed for the Enköping project can be grouped on the basis of their affiliation, belief and practice. That is, in line with the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, an individual that states a church-affiliation, believes in a “personal God” and attends church services regularly may be categorized into the group “religion”. By contrast, an individual that believes in “some sort of spirit or life force” or describes the sacred in a similar way and engages in holistic health promotion activities regularly may under the same framework be seen as “spiritual”. Shifting the conceptual framework to the mainstreams and margins presented in Chapter 4, people who relate to the religious in ways which have been typical for people living in Sweden for a very long time can be understood as part of the mainstream. That is, people who have a church affiliation but do not attend very often can be stipulated to be the ‘old mainstream’, people with a church affiliation who never attend are ‘established mainstream’, and people who have opted out of the church or have chosen not to belong to any religious organization are the ‘new mainstream’. Margins, in line with the presently proposed terminology, can be seen as Church of Sweden-affiliated people who attend regularly (i.e. ‘old margins’) and the members of other established religious organizations (i.e. ‘established margins) (for a discussion see also pages 125-131, Chapter 4).

Because it is possible for both the established typology (e.g. “religion” vs. “spirituality”) and the proposed conceptualization (e.g. ‘mainstreams’ and margins’) to be generated from the material chosen here, the data provide rare opportunities for comparisons. Especially, it is possible to compare if descriptions of the sacred are related to belief systems (in the plural). Often, data collections on religious affiliation, belief and practice exclude all practice except church practice (cf., Dobbelare and Riis 2002). Therefore, a link between belief and experience of alternative religious movements cannot be established for the analyses. As a consequence, the comparisons which it is typically possible to make concern whether or not a belief is chosen by regular church attendees. All other analyzes preferable for establishing a differ-

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69 Following Heelas (1996) affiliation in alternative forms of religion is typically not understood in terms of membership but practice. This is because the organization of the movement at issue is understood to be more along the lines of ‘pay per view’ than membership in terms of a membership fee, ritual or similar.
ence between the groups discussed are not possible to conduct. By contrast, the material analyzed here does not inherently have that type of limitation of the comparisons just outlined but provides opportunities for more comparisons.

Since the persons interviewed in Enköping were from the same region but of different affiliations and experiences of religion and spirituality, the interviewed can be said to exemplify both the ins and the outs which Hughes ([1971]/1984) referred to in the quote mentioned earlier in this chapter. One implication of this is that it is possible to play with the idea that within this material it is possible to find examples of groups similar to the ones which Becker (1998) advises one should look for in order to theorize even though an established research practice already exists. In this case, a research practice which assumes that “religion” differs from “spirituality” because of something the former group has and the latter group has not – the ‘religious sacred’. Put differently, just the type of assumption which Becker (1998) advises sociologists to avoid.

Specifying a sample - moving beyond descriptions of the sacred

Among the interviewed there were different affiliations and experiences of Christianity and alternative spirituality as well as self-defined atheism and rejection or modification of all these indemnities. In table 5.1 the interviewed are presented with their fictitious names (which will be used

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70 Using the ‘Enköping project’ as a base for finding a dataset to analyze means that there are the following datasets to choose from: 1) a postal survey (n=1045) answered by individuals living in the municipal of Enköping located in mid-Sweden, 2) interview material consisting of n=11 individuals with very different affiliations, attitudes and experiences of religion and spirituality who answered the postal survey, 3) interview material consisting of n=20 individuals whereof eight individuals had answered the survey and 12 individuals either worked for the Church of Sweden as employees or were elected political representatives for this church’s political government. In addition, 4) local mapping followed by a small-n survey conducted among the alternative health practitioners and 5) interview material of n=5 individuals was collected among those who answered this survey. The author of this thesis conducted all interviews, either in a team with Palmer (2008) or alone. At a later stage, Palmer also interviewed two persons who were politically active within the municipal with a separate interview guide. In total, this means that there were five sets of data collected within the project. Although there are similarities between the surveys and interview guides used for collecting this material, there are also substantial differences in the questions asked to generate each set of data (cf., Ahlstrand, Palmer and Willander 2008:14-15). The present analysis makes use of the second dataset described in the list above. That is, the 11 individuals with different affiliations, attitudes and experiences of religion and spirituality who answered the postal survey. This material fulfils the criteria of coverage as it arguably includes people with different relation to “religion” and “spirituality” as well as ‘mainstreams’ and ‘margins’. In addition, it has not been analyzed in its own right before. Palmer (2008) makes use of these interviews but added to them interviews with politically active people. Also, Palmer’s (2008) analysis was on a different subject and focused solemnly on what people understood to be “spirituality”. Therefore, there are no previous analyses which use the exact same material to answer the analytical questions at issue here.
throughout the presentation of the analysis to ensure the interviewed individuals’ anonymity). The table also provides the interviewee’s self-described gender: five female and six male interviewees. In the third column their self-described religious identity is presented. These identity descriptions differed from, for example, Sofia, Gunilla and Lova who all described themselves as spiritual. Sofia also describes herself as Christian and has a long-standing engagement in the holistic milieu in the municipal Enköping. In contrast to Sofia, Gunilla regards herself to be somewhat Christian while Lova rejects a Christian identity. In a similar manner, all of the interviewed individuals make reservations or personal adjustments to how they choose to present themselves (see, table 5.1, column “religious identity”).

Table 5.1. The interviewed individuals presented with fictive names, self-described gender and religious identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictive name</th>
<th>Gender (self-described)</th>
<th>Religious identity (self-described)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spiritual, Christian and takes part in the holistic milieu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunilla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spiritual and somewhat Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lova</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Spiritual but not Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annika</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Atheist but somewhat Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Atheist but not Christian or spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Atheist but not Christian or spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rune</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Christian but not a believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Christian and a believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olle</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>A bit spiritual, religious and Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>A bit spiritual, religious and Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anders</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>A bit spiritual, religious and Christian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the religious self-descriptions are added together there are individuals who call themselves spiritual, individuals who call themselves atheists, individuals who call themselves Christian and individuals who seem most comfortable with describing themselves as in-between spirituality, religion, Christianity and its counterparts. Annika, Martin and Lars all choose to describe themselves as atheists; however, Annika still sees herself as somewhat Christian. By contrast Martin and Lars reject both a Christian and a spiritual identity. Rune and Bertil both regard themselves to be Christian and Bertil claims that for him being a Christian means to be a believer. This, claims Rune, is not necessary for being a Christian. Finally, interviews with Olle, Frida and Anders were included for the analysis as they neither wanted to accept or distance themselves from a Christian, spiritual or religious identity. The analysis will continue to show how these types of reservations or personal adjustments continue to be visible in the ways in which these people relate to practice and beliefs.
This means that the sample included women and men with different affiliations, experiences and, presumably, opinions, on “religion”, “spirituality”, “Christianity” and religious beliefs in the “sacred” as a distinguishing feature between these categories. Compared with what widely read textbooks on qualitative methods recommend (e.g. Silverman 2007; Babbie [1973]/2013) the number of interviews (n=11) might be considered small. However, as underlined by Becker (1998) when discussing “the way which parts of a complicated whole” (ibid: 70) the most important thing when choosing people to interview is to try to reach a “range of variation in some phenomenon” (ibid: 71). In the present case, the “complicated whole” to be theorized about is the place and understanding for the ins and outs of the “religion” and “spirituality” as well as ‘mainstreams’ and ‘margins’. Since the present sample includes a variation of self-described religious identities (e.g. “atheist”, “Christian”, “religious” and “spiritual” and positions in-between) relevant to how the “sacred” has been discussed for the research practice 'Religion in Dimensions', this sample of 11 interviews is considered a suitable starting point for exemplifying how the “sacred” can be discussed.

There is, nevertheless, one more aspect to take into account when specifying one’s sample in order to study a timeworn research problem. Becker (1998) argues that it is not enough to think through who to talk to. There are also choices to be made about selecting what to analyze (ibid: 85-87). In Becker’s view the selection of what to analyze should be based on the chances of finding “negative cases” in the selected material. By “negative cases” Becker seems to mean cases that force the explanatory hypothesis to be widened and, thus, further specified. To find such cases, the researcher is advised to: “identify the case which is likely to upset your thinking and look for it” (ibid: 87, italics in original). Remembering Berger’s (1974) words about “God, gods, supernatural beings” mentioned earlier, it seems to me that the most upsetting suggestion for the research practice’s ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumptions are any form of diversion from these descriptions. Accordingly, the material to be analyzed should include more aspects of the sacred than descriptions of the origin and nature of the sacred, in line with what religions’ belief systems describe to be the correct description.

What is at stake here might, perhaps, be clarified with the philosopher Anderberg’s (2007) distinctions related to belief. Anderberg (2007) holds that there is a difference between “beliefs that something” and “beliefs in something” (ibid: 70). While “beliefs that something” point at a description

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71 It should be noted that the interviews analyzed here (in line with much of the previous research reviewed in Chapter 3) do not include any interviewees who define themselves to be of other religious traditions than the Christian tradition (such as the Muslim tradition or the Jewish tradition). The interviewed are therefore not from all religious traditions established in Sweden.

72 In Swedish: ”tro att något”

73 In Swedish: ”tro på något”
of the nature of what is believed, “beliefs in something” place emphasis on what is valued or what people put their trust into in matters related to the sacred. “Beliefs that something” may in this sense be understood as descriptions of the sacred, which is also the aspect of the sacred which the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ conventionally has focused upon. In contrast to these aspects, “beliefs in something” place emphasis on the collectively defined sacred. In other words, they focus on what people highlight as meaningful markers for their own identity or other groups’ identities. The two forms of belief may at times overlap, and one description of the sacred can be what a society holds to be sacred. When not overlapping, a specific description of the sacred is not what people within a society agree is sacred to them. In these cases, Anderberg’s (2007) dichotomy may clear possible paths for identifying the type of “negative cases” Becker (1998) advises us to find in the content of what is analyzed.

Anderberg (2007) goes further and clarifies that there is a difference between “beliefs in something” and “believing in someone” (ibid: 70). Here, ‘beliefs in something’ refers to a program or something else which can be defined by its meaning content. An example of “beliefs in something” might be the system of beliefs which the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumed to incorporate the description of the sacred as transcendent. Anderberg (2007) suggests that “Beliefs in someone” refers instead to prioritizing faith in a person prior to what she/he expresses about the sacred. This difference can be seen as the difference between “beliefs in something” as a system of belief or a religious creed while “beliefs in someone” reflects belief in the interpretation of a priest, an imam, a nun or someone else with subjectively recognized religious authority like your mother, your grandmother or your friends. This distinction matters because in the latter case, “belief in someone”, the creed can be changed and reinterpreted in ways which the former case restricts.

The philosophical distinctions of Anderberg (2007) were used to broaden the content that was chosen for analysis. The distinctions were used to make sure that not only descriptions of the source and nature of the sacred were included but also talk which addressed the value of different forms of the sacred. This specification of the interview material to be analyzed was done interpretatively and in close connection with the interview material as such. Put in concrete terms, this means that while statements such as shop-owner Annika’s claim she “believes that” valuable second-hand goods given to charity shops are sold to the private market, this statement is not included even though it contained the words “believes that” at issue for analysis. The type of “belief” which Annika is referring to in this statement is simply not

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74 In Swedish: ”tro på något”
75 In Swedish: ”tro på någon”
76 In Swedish: ”tror att”
the type of statement which is of interest for this analysis. One implication of this is that even though the content to be analyzed was broadened with the support of Anderberg’s distinctions, the material chosen still related to what the interviewed themselves discussed as the ‘religious sacred’. Beliefs related to other topics were simply not included.

A note on the analytical procedure

The selected set of interview extracts were coded and interpreted using a hermeneutical (Gadamer [1973]/2001) approach to understanding. In detail, the hermeneutical interpretation entailed reading the extracts in order to accomplish a thick description of the meaning context which they expressed, and then reading the extracts again as parts of a whole. In line with the terminology chosen for this thesis, patterns that emerge following the outlined analytical strategy can be thought of as the culturally meaningful interior of religiosity. That is to say, the ‘cultural meanings’ the sacred was ascribed in the context analyzed.

Partly, the thick description of the meaning context mentioned above reflected the questions asked in the interviews. These questions revolved around two topics. First, the persons being interviewed were asked questions about what they thought about the present times in which they lived. For example, they were asked what they enjoyed doing in an average week, what made them happy and what they perceived to be worrisome in the local setting but also in the wider context of their contemporary society. Although none of the questions asked were directly related to religious beliefs, the selected interview extracts analyzed in this chapter often come from the answers to these questions. Second, there were a set of questions that concerned how the persons being interviewed understood the terminology used in the survey questionnaire that they had previously completed. Accordingly, the interviewed persons were asked what “religion” and “spirituality” meant to them. If they did not themselves mention differences between “religion” and “spirituality” they were directly asked whether or not they perceived the terms to be different. Thereafter, they were asked if they would describe themselves as “religious” or “spiritual”. The interview guide left it open for people to also answer both “religious” and “spiritual” or reject both self-descriptions in addition to choosing the self-description “religious” or “spiritual”. In addition, the interviewed persons were asked why they chosen their particular the self-description. Some of the extracts chosen for analysis also come from the answers to these questions, since these questions sometimes led to answers about one’s own beliefs. Most notably, from the answers to these questions come the self-descriptions with which the interviewed people are presented with in table 5.1 (see, column called “Religious identity, self-described”). At the more general level of understanding the meaning context
for the interview extracts analyzed, the questions asked served as a point of departure.

Since the material analyzed here was limited, the analysis was conducted intuitively and on the basis of knowing the whole and its relation to the parts. Therefore, the focal points of the analysis as regards what the interviewed drew attention to were found based on close readings and re-readings of the material. Finding these spots of ‘attention’ is the result of an interpretative process and not a predefined fixed rationale.

The chosen analytical procedure resulted in three related yet separate topics found in the interview material. These topics were allowed to inspire the subtitles used for presenting the results. Accordingly, the topics identified can be described as Conditions for the “sacred”, On the origin and nature of the “sacred”, and Paths to knowing the “sacred”. These topics will now be presented and discussed one by one.

**Conditions for the “sacred”**

Even though the number of people interviewed for this analysis was small and the analysis was carried out on a selection of interview extracts from this small quantity of interview material, the statements, discussions and examples of the sacred were preceded and embedded in a specific meaning-context. Although the people interviewed placed their own emphasis somewhat differently in the stories which make up the meaning context, the overlapping similarities were mostly apparent. Taken together, these stories on the meaning context underlined that the interviewees’ own beliefs were not generated in a cultural vacuum. Rather, in the background of these stories on beliefs, were clues to the parts of society and culture that the interviewees’ own beliefs were related to, or an answer to. These stories brought with them nuances about how the present world is understood, including both its possibilities for living a “good life” as well as its risks for unhealthy or unsound ways of life.

It is, then, in the form of the conditions for the sacred which the stories of how the world is understood and what parts of the world relate to the interviewees’ own beliefs are addressed in this analysis. Specifically, at the time of the interview study, the world appeared to be gloomy and full of contradictions by the interviewees. For example, in the local setting, Frida is a nurse who wished to remain nonaligned to self-descriptions such as “Christian”, “spiritual” or “religious”, worries about child obesity and physical inactivity. In her words:

“I believe that it [child obesity and physical in activity] can be explained by the work-load of the parents, the focus on career. Everyone needs to do so
In this quote Frida expresses her worries about the consequences of parents’ life choices. In Frida’s way of reasoning, a focus on career causes stress and shortage of time to spend with children. She suggests that parents do not take their children to the forest as they should to keep the children active. Later in the interview she underlines that another reason children may become overweight as a result of the long working hours of the parents is that the family does not get around to eating regular meals together. As a consequence, working a lot and focusing on working life at the expense of the well-being of one’s children may have consequences in the form of what Frida perceives to be unhealthy or unsound ways of life.

Frida’s way of reasoning was far from unique in these stories, and together the stories make up the meaning context of the interviewees’ own beliefs. Thus, expressions which emphasized stress as the result of lack of time were a recurrent theme in the interview material and a concern of those who worked full-time and part-time, as well as those who at the time of the interview were unemployed or retired. In fact, the emphasis on stress was also a feature which Palmer (2008) observed in his analysis of these interviews. Travelling to Sweden and the middle-sized town Enköping from a recent stay in New York, Palmer expressed that he was taken by surprise by the focus on, and worry about, stress in Enköping. To him, the town-life of Enköping appeared to be a sanctuary from the stressing factors of a buzzy city life with its traffic and work climate. As these stories seem to be so closely intertwined with the beliefs about the sacred upheld by the interviewed people of Enköping, Palmer’s observation should perhaps not be related to the actual pace of town life in Enköping but to people’s perception of their surroundings.

Continuing along the lines of work obligations leading to a stressful life, the interview material also provided nuances to Frida’s suggestion (e.g., people should work less in order to take care of their children). Lars, who calls himself an “atheist” and commutes to Stockholm for his full-time job, claims that focus on work and career generates a specific culture which fixates on “money and material things” in ways that cause excessive consumption. Lars worries about this norm of excessive consumption as it supports a way of life which is not in balance with an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. However, Lars stresses that work is needed to ensure the Swe-

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77 In Swedish: "Jag tror att det kan ha sin grund i att föräldrar jobbar för mycket, att det är mycket karriär som gäller. Man ska hinna med så mycket i sitt liv och barnen blir lite lidande av det. Att man inte hinner vara ute i skogen och göra grejer" (Interview with Frida, a nurse who neither accepts nor rejects the self-descriptions “Christian”, “Religious” and “Spiritual”).

78 In Swedish. “Det fixeras väldigt mycket kring pengar och ting” (Interview with Lars self-described “atheist”).
dish welfare state is able to provide for the needs of its citizens. Olle (who is self-employed and regards himself to be somewhat spiritual) agrees with Lars conserving the importance of work. Olle expresses the view that:

“The problem is that if there are no job opportunities there cannot be a welfare system. And, now we will soon be out of job opportunities in Sweden.”

(Interview with Olle)

In the words of Olle, stress is also caused when people do not work due to lack of job opportunities. He supports his reasoning by pointing out that most of the production industry which used to be based in Sweden is outsourced to other parts of the world.

In more general terms, the meaning context in which different understandings of the sacred were discussed can be described in terms of tensions. On the one hand, the interviewees express worries about the world becoming overly focused on material goals. From their perspective a focus on career and material goals such as big houses, cars and expensive clothes leads to unhealthy spirals of stress and neglect of children’s needs. The interviewed people seem to suggest that people risk ending up in lifestyles involving little physical activity and bad food if they work too much. On the other hand, some of the people interviewed emphasize that work needs to be valued. If job opportunities become scarce, the welfare system is in danger. This could lead to people losing the personal freedoms that the welfare system guarantees. The people underlining these aspects worry about the impact of the world economy and the consequences that global changes may have on Sweden.

The conditions for the sacred described here are not taken to foremost matter at the level of the concrete things which people worry about. The analysis is conducted on only a few interviews, and the specific objectives of these interviews (e.g. child obesity, stress related to working and not working) may vary with the news agenda of media and popular culture. The conditions for the sacred are outlined to make visible the complex relations between the collective and the individual levels in how the world is perceived. Here, the contours of a specific perspective of individual freedom depending on the collective can be said to be observable. The problems identified have a collective side to them. The nurse Frida recognizes, for example, that even though it is the parents’ responsibility to take care of their children, collectively generated pressures like the environment in work-places may hinder parents from tending to their children in good ways. To mention another example, the fulltime working commuter Lars argues that the right and obli-

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79 In Swedish: Problemet är väl att finns det inga jobb finns det ingen välfärd. Och nu har vi snart inga jobb kvar i Sverige” (Interview with Olle who regards himself to be somewhat ”Spiritual”).
gation for work to be foundation of the welfare state at the same time as a career is incompatible with an environmentally-friendly lifestyle. Continuing along these narratives there seems to be a complex set of assumptions here, which, on the one hand, suggest that individuals should act in morally responsible ways but, on the other hand, imply the collective responsibility to make sure that individuals are given the possibility to act responsibly. Put in principle terms, it can be suggested that the collective (which is usually the state in this case) should cater for individuals’ freedom. This is a perspective which sits well with the Swedish governance from historical times to the days of the Swedish welfare state model (cf., Martin 1978; Trädgårdh and Berggren 2008). However, ascribing personal freedom by dependency to the state is not a perspective on individualism which is cross-nationally generalizable. To compare with an American perspective, Trädgårdh and Berggren (2008) claim that individual freedom in that part of the world instead rests upon freedom from the state.

Taken together, this means that the conditions in question here relate to political questions concerning how to prioritize issues concerning the job market, the public sector, the welfare system and public health. In questions of public health, special attention was paid to the risks of stress and a stressful life. In addition, the questions addressed have relevance for how individuals should live their lives. In other words, the conditions concern things which probably matter to people in the form of political opinions and way of life. By contrast to what can be argued to be assumed about the sacred as a description of a supernatural entity, this meaning context does not refer to churches or any form of organized religion. The services or teachings of the holistic milieu (cf., Heelas and Woodhead 2005) are not explicitly mentioned at all. In their place, and on a more abstract level than specific issues of concern, the conditions for the sacred seem to reflect a trust in the welfare state in guaranteeing personal freedom and, thus, a reliance on collective solutions for personal freedom. That is to say, conditions affecting everyone living in Sweden.

On the origin and nature of the “sacred”

In general, the people interviewed used very few words to describe the sacred. The mode that people use to describe their view on the nature of the sacred can be exemplified with some words from Gunilla who described herself as spiritual and to some extent Christian but not at all religious:

“I cannot say if I am really “Christian” or “religious”, but I do believe in something which is not only physical. Well, maybe not a God but that there is
something… that there is goodness in the world… well, it would be hard to live without that, I believe.”

In this interview extract Gunilla uses the description “something” and “goodness in the world” to name the sacred. Both these descriptions are of the kind which previous research (e.g. Hamberg 1989; 1990; 2003) supported by assumptions found in the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ deemed to be too vague to be in line with religious doctrine, and therefore a form of weak private religion. Gunilla nevertheless seems to highlight her belief in “something” that is important for her, and to her sense that life has a meaning. Moreover, she makes a note of her belief in “something” being separate from what she perceives to be Christian and religious. Thus, she distinguishes herself and her belief in “something” from those who she perceive to be “Christian” and “religious” and describes the sacred as something different to “God”. As at the same time she calls herself spiritual and somewhat Christian it can be argued that she is making space for a mid-position – a middle ground between non-belief and an atheist identity on the one side and belief in God and a religious and Christian identity on the other. She also states that belief in “something” for her implies that “body and mind belong together”; an understanding which connects her way of reasoning with the worries of balancing work responsibilities with family duties and a responsibility for one’s own physical health. From Gunilla’s way of reasoning it can be learnt that everyday life needs to sustain the balance between the “body” (physical health) and the “soul” (a stress-free mind).

Gunilla could perhaps be understood in light of the specific perspective on individualism which was visible in the stories on how the world is understood and the problems detected with it discussed before. If attention is paid to how Gunilla, in the quote above, seems to use support from her belief to cope with life and all that comes with it, it can be said that a personal belief is the solution for dealing with collective problems; that is, the problems which the individual cannot solve by herself. In addition to this, Gunilla touches upon an argument which seems to convey that in order for her personal beliefs to support coping with life, they are neither “religion” nor “spirituality”, almost as if her beliefs would lose their coping powers if they were. This too, seems in a complex way to be about a tension between the collective and the individual in matters of prerogative and authority.

It is - similar to the hesitant way in which Gunilla described her belief in “something” as “goodness in the world” as a connection between “body and

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80 In Swedish: “Jag kan inte saga om jag är uttalat Kristen eller religiös, men jag tror på något som inte bara är materiellt. Ja, kanske inte någon Gud men i alla fall att det finns någonting… att det finns en godhet i världen, ja, annars blir det svårt att leva anser jag” (Interview with Gunilla who regards herself as "Spiritual", somewhat "Christian" but not "Religious").

81 In Swedish: "Kropp och själ hör ihop" (Interview with Gunilla who regards herself as "Spiritual", somewhat "Christian" but not "Religious").
soul” – common among the interviewees to describe the sacred while at the same time making reservations. Anders, who neither wanted to accept or distance himself from a Christian, spiritual or religious identity, describes the sacred in terms of “common humanity”\textsuperscript{82} and “a sense for justice”\textsuperscript{83}. He clarifies that his beliefs are not the result of his childhood Sunday school training which he experienced as authoritative and disrespectful. Furthermore, these experiences of being required as a child to accept certain doctrines have made him hesitant to call himself “Christian”. Every human, Anders says “should be free to choose what to believe in”\textsuperscript{84} and this is as important as “every human needs something to believe in”\textsuperscript{85}. Therefore, it can be said that Anders’ belief is important to him; it is his compass in life which connects with the conditions of the sacred discussed above concerning both how to live one’s life and opinions on more general political matters. Moreover, he values his belief as trustworthy and legitimate because he has chosen what to believe in and has not accepted what the Sunday school minister taught him.

Two of the self-defined atheists – Lars and Martin – also describe their beliefs in terms of “something”\textsuperscript{86} which can be experienced in the forest and which reminds humans of living a life in balance with nature respectively a “belief in God”\textsuperscript{87}. While the former belief relates to an acceptance and interest in what Lars perceives to be the beliefs of Indians, the latter is an expression of a belief which matured from what Martin perceived to be the naïve belief of a child to the mature belief of an adult (Martin was in his late 20s at the time of the interview). While Lars calls himself an atheist because he does not believe anything which he thinks is “religious”, Martin calls himself an atheist because he does not want to believe in God and because he sometimes has doubts about God’s existence.

Taken together, the reservations and the short descriptions of the sacred seem suggest tensions between collective identities (for example Christian, religious or spiritual which point towards membership of a group) and one’s own beliefs. It is as if the interviewees whose stories are discussed above try to make room for an identity that is in-between “religion” and “non-religion” and which rejects the naïve acceptance of doctrines of faith and priests’ authority to tell people what to believe. At first glance, the descriptions of the sacred seem to be individually and privately chosen. They are things which

\textsuperscript{82} In Swedish: "Medmänsklighet" (Interview with Anders somewhat "Christian", "Religious" and "Spiritual").

\textsuperscript{83} In Swedish: "Rättspatos" (Interview with Anders somewhat "Christian", "Religious" and "Spiritual").

\textsuperscript{84} In Swedish: "vara fri att välja vad hon eller han tror på” (Interview with Anders somewhat "Christian", "Religious" and "Spiritual").

\textsuperscript{85} In Swedish: "alla människor behöver ha en tro” (Interview with Anders somewhat "Christian", "Religious" and "Spiritual").

\textsuperscript{86} In Swedish: "något” (Interview with Lars, self-defined "atheist").

\textsuperscript{87} In Swedish: "tro på Gud” (Interview with Martin, self-defined "atheist").
exist in this world, like “goodness” or a “sense of justice”. Pursuing the interpretation, the descriptions of the sacred do not necessarily point to something private as they are shared with other people. The “goodness” or “sense of justice” is to be lived and recognized in a social context and therefore it seems relational rather than private and individual.

Since the descriptions of the sacred are expressed in few words, a close meaning context is at times needed to understand in what ways the sacred in question is transcendent or immanent. On the one hand, there are descriptions of the sacred which explicitly underline that “something” might be a “God”. For example Frida, the nurse introduced at the beginning of this presentation, says: “there is something, it may be God or something else”\textsuperscript{88}. Olle, who sees himself as somewhat spiritual, believes in “something which runs our life”\textsuperscript{89} which can be understood as something beyond humans, with agency. On the other hand, there are descriptions of something seemingly immanent, like “absolute honesty”\textsuperscript{90} (Rune, self-described Christian). Rune underlines, however, that the source of “absolute honesty” is a spiritual experience beyond human control. These clarifications of theoretical relevance giving guidance to whether or not the sacred is transcendent in nature are not mentioned in a manner similar to reservations about associating one’s own belief with a collective identity (such as “Christian” or “religious”). Neither do these clarifications seem to be as important as the rejection of naïve acceptance of doctrines of faith and priests’ authority to tell people what to believe.

Scrutinizing the way in which Gunilla, Anders, Lars, Martin and Rune discussed so far in this section the ‘descriptions of the sacred’, it can be argued that they all relate to affiliation and practice in ways which were previously discussed as old, established or new mainstream (see, Chapter 4). Using this as an interpretative lens, it can, very tentatively, be suggested that using very few words to express what one ‘believe that’ exists has something to do with what is perceived as conventional, the mainstream.

There were two interviews in which beliefs in the sacred were outlined at length. This was in the interview with Bertil, a self-described Christian, religious and spiritual person with a commitment to one of the free churches in Enköping, and in the interview with Sofia, a self-described Christian, religious and spiritual person but with an active engagement in the holistic milieu in Enköping. If the conceptual framework suggested in Chapter 4 for the ‘margins’ is expanded to include people active in the holistic milieu, both

\textsuperscript{88} In Swedish: ”det finns någonting, om det är Gud eller vad det är” (Interview with Frida, a nurse who is neither accepts nor rejects the self-descriptions "Christian", “Religious” and “Spiritual”).
\textsuperscript{89} In Swedish: “Någonting som styr tillvaron” (Interview with Olle, regards himself to be somewhat “Spiritual”).
\textsuperscript{90} In Swedish: ”den totala ärligheten” (Interview with Rune who regards himself to be "Christian").
Bertil and Sofia can be thought of as people who relate to the religious and whose spiritual ways are ‘marginal’ to the ‘mainstream’.

Bertil described the sacred in terms of “God”, “Jesus” and “Christ” and he states that “I am a Christian because I believe in Christ as the son of God”. Sofia, by contrast, regards herself to be a Christian because she has a Catholic upbringing and as a teenager she met Jesus. She moreover sees herself as “religious” and “spiritual” and she is actively engaged in the holistic milieu in Enköping through public séances with mediums assumed to be connected with spirits in another realm of reality. Sofia describes the sacred in terms of a gigantic magnetic field which is connected with the human world. As more and more people find enlightenment and become “spiritual”, she reasons, the magnetic field is empowered and this will result in a better world for everyone.

Bertil and Sofia can, in other words, be thought of as belonging to the ‘margins’ in relation to the ‘mainstreams’ discussed at the concrete level of typical pattern of affiliation, belief and practice in Sweden. Even though both Bertil and Sofia accept the collective identities Christian, religious and spiritual, and describe their belief in the sacred as part of a larger system of belief or a program, they still draw attention to the importance of choosing freely what to believe in. Bertil, who at the time of the interview was 72 years old, retells how he only reads from the Bible to his grandchildren when they explicitly ask him to. He also stresses that churches in Sweden have a troublesome past which he characterized by paternalistic behavior. According to Bertil the paternalistic behavior has taken the form of:

“In Swedish: ”Jag är kristen för jag tror på Kristus som Guds son” (Interview with Bertil, selfdescribed ”Christian”, ”Religious” and ”Spiritual”).


91 In Swedish: "Jag är kristen för jag tror på Kristus som Guds son (Interview with Bertil, selfdescribed "Christian", "Religious" and "Spiritual").

to the fact that although he is a “Christian” he does not believe in mandatory confessional teaching or any obligation of that kind.

Similarly, Sofia underlines that although her belief is in line with what she has learned from her engagement in the Holistic milieu she:

“Choose [her spiritual outlook] all by herself, which means something more than those customs which we carry with us without really knowing why”

(Interview with Sofia)

Sofia, then, accentuates that for her, choosing what to believe for oneself makes beliefs more meaningful. Placed next to the interview with Bertil, it is noticeable that Sofia also places emphasis on the possibility of freely choosing to belong to an organization (a church or a spiritual organization) and accepting a broader program of beliefs. This means that even though Bertil and Sofia can be categorized as unusual in terms of religion and spirituality in Sweden, the emphasis on the value of free choice in matters of religious beliefs comes very close to the value of free choice expressed by the *ins* of the ‘mainstream’. Arguably, they both relate to a memory of past times when individual choices in matters of belief were restricted.

Overall, the content which the interviewed refer to when describing the origin or nature of the sacred is very limited. That is to say, the relations that they imagine man has to the natural and supernatural – the key concerns for descriptions of the sacred at a belief system level – are not among the topics elaborated. The content which is referred to, however, cannot self-evidently be categorized as immanent descriptions of the sacred. Instead, the “sacred” is described as something that may come to humans when walking in nature or be something observable in the way in which people treat each other. In both these cases, the sacred described is not a property of the individual but is outside of the individual, and its origin is unknown.

One reason for this might be that there appears to be a topic which overrules the exact description of the sacred and, accordingly, this topic seems to matter very strongly to the interviewed. There appears to be a general intent among the interviewed to distance themselves from a ‘religion’ of the past that expected to be obeyed and that would use punishments on those who refused to obey the will of the church. For the interviews conducted here, of course, it cannot be demonstrated that this memory of what the state church was in historical times is historically correct. For the argument here, nevertheless, such academic confirmation is of little relevance. Of interest here is rather that the memory of such a troublesome past makes people today position themselves against the term ‘religion’. It is as if there is an idea of an ‘other’ religion (existing in historical times or represented by groups differ-

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93 In Swedish: (hon) "valde [sin andliga livsäskådning] själv vilket betyder något mer än de här sederna som vi bär med oss men vi vet inte riktigt varför" (Interview with Sofia)
ing from the people interviewed) that exerts physical, mental and social punishments and influences how people talk about their own beliefs. No-one among those interviewed, whether or not they are active in religion or spirituality, wants to acknowledge that type of ‘other religion’.

Added together, these two tendencies in the data, that is the few words used to describe the sacred together with the strong intent to distance oneself from ‘other religion’, make for a tense situation. This is because, in the examples given here, people seem to make use of a Christian cultural heritage to put into (few) words what they believe. However, they appear to refute the idea that ‘religion’ has anything to do with their beliefs since the term ‘religion’ is bound up with obligation and illegitimate use of power.

Returning to Simmel’s (1955) distinction between religion and religiosity mentioned in Chapter 1, there is not a remote and abstract ‘religion’ which makes the people interviewed draw a line between ‘religion’ and ‘religiosity’. Rather, it is ideas about ‘religion’ being unjust and oppressive which seem to lie behind the difference between ‘religion’ and ‘religiosity’. In this equation, ‘religiosity’ seems to stand for freely choosing what to believe for oneself. One’s own beliefs (which everybody needs to choose) might give the impression of being freely chosen if expressed in one’s own words, rather than the fixed language of a religious creed. Therefore, based on the interviews conducted in the Enköping project, it is meaningful and socially powerful to express oneself briefly in these matters. In this way, ‘religiosity’ differs conceptually from the picture of ‘religion’ which the interviewed live with as well as the definitions and assumptions the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ has invested into the concept ‘religion’.

Paths to knowing the “sacred”

Given the importance placed on beliefs in the sacred being a free choice, as outlined in the previous section of this chapter, it is perhaps not unexpected that the people interviewed talked about how they reached a decision on what to believe; in other words, how the “free choice” on what to believe was made. The following statement from Lova who calls herself “spiritual” but not “religious” or “Christian” serves as a telling example of the type of reasoning that is found in this theme:

“I have always wanted to move into the details and figure things out. I cannot just take something and then believe in it. Some say that I am a very gullible person. That it is possible to say anything to me and I will believe it. But, then, it is in the meeting with other people that I believe them, that they are
not lying. But, then, I cannot believe something without first trying it out and, then, I find it interesting”\textsuperscript{94} (Interview with Lova)

Lova touches upon several aspects of paths to knowing the sacred which stick out in the analysis of the interviews. Similar to others, Lova emphasizes that she thinks about these issues by herself. This type of critical yet personal evaluation was recurrent in the data material. Martin, for example, the self-described “atheist” who believed in “God”, placed emphasis on the critical evaluation which an adult is capable of (but not a child) for judging what is a sound belief or not. Second, Lova (in the interview extract above) stresses that she can believe what other people tell her when she meets them in person. It is the experience of meeting others which makes it possible to evaluate if what they say is true or not, according to Lova. Finally, she adds, she tries everything she believes herself before devoting herself to a specific belief. What, exactly, is part of her practice is not explicit in the interview extract but it can be assumed that she evaluates herself whether the attempt to assess the belief was successful or not. Again, it is possible to compare what Lova says with the views of Martin. In Martin’s way of reasoning the most reliable way of knowing the sacred is through one’s own experience. It is ideal, says Martin, if: “God shows up in person and talks to you”\textsuperscript{95}. According to Martin this type of direct personal experience of the “sacred” is optimal.

The emphasis on personal experience is also related to a positive attitude to trying different practices or activities. For example, Lars (self-described “atheist”) and Anders (self-described as somewhat “Christian”, “religious” and “spiritual”) mention the possibility of experiencing “something” when outdoors in the forest. Anders also underlines that experiences of other people living up to his ideal of a “sense of justice” and “common humanity” (which also were his descriptions of the sacred mentioned before) is a path to personal experiences which assures knowledge about the sacred. In this sense, Anders’ personal experience is dependent on his social context and the relations he experiences. Furthermore, Gunilla and Lova who both accept a “spiritual” identity, suggest that personal experiences generated by meditation may give insights into the “sacred”. Accordingly, it seems that personal experience is regarded as superior to belonging to a religious organization or following a specific program or system of belief. Put differently, experiences

\textsuperscript{94} In Swedish: “Jag har alltid velat gå in i detalj och filura ut. Jag kan inte bara ta nått och sen tro på det. En del säger att jag är en väldigt godtrogna människa. Att man kan säga vad som helst till mig och jag tror på det. Men, då är det i möte med andra människor, att jag tror dem, att de inte ljuger. Men, jag kan inte tro på något utan att först testa det själv och då tycker jag att det är intressant” (Interview with Lova who self-defines as "spiritual" but not "Christian" or "religious").

\textsuperscript{95} In Swedish: "Att Gud i person dyker upp och pratar med en” (Interview with Martin self-described "atheist").
providing an authentic feeling for the individual seem to be prioritized. However, as highlighted by Anders’ example with experiences dependent on people living up to his ideals, what is experienced as authentic is also dependent on the specific social context and the behavior and manners of others. The subjective confirmations of beliefs are therefore not essentially inwardly directed or private in character but dependent on how one’s social surroundings are perceived.

Conceivably, the emphasis on how one knows what description of the sacred to believe in might link to the previous threads of distancing oneself from labels like “religion” and “spirituality”. The same emphasis on how one knows what to believe might also link back to how one’s personally chosen beliefs relate to the problems with the world discussed under the heading ‘conditions of the sacred’. This might be tales of how individual attempts to achieve act as a counterbalance to collective problems. If so, these individual paths to deciding what to believe in are not to be taken lightly but may, perhaps, be seen as examples of what people ‘believe in’ when it comes to the sacred; that is, what is valued and acted upon as a marker between us (the legitimate religious) and the imagined them (the illegitimate religious) of the past. Notably, however, the broader frame of reference for what matters in life discussed as the ‘condition of the sacred’ and the image of the bad ‘religion’ of the past ‘on the origin and nature of the sacred’ relate to aspects of Swedish society which go beyond the borders of the mainstream and the margins. Put in sociological vocabulary, there seem to be overarching structures of society in terms of how welfare is organized, the church’s relation to the state and its view on its mandate within the state-structure, which people make relevant by giving some aspects of these structures ‘cultural meaning’ by drawing attention to them. In line with Alexander’s (2011) discussion on how what is talked about holds ‘cultural power’ as an explanation for people living in the situation referred to in the introduction of this thesis, it can be tentatively suggested that the aspects which get attention hold ‘cultural power’, and therefore hold an explanatory value for how or why people talk about beliefs in the way they do.

The ‘religious sacred’ from the perspective of ‘religiosity’

The present chapter attempted to address the second aim and focused on developing how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. It did so by starting with the individual’s perspective in its own right. So, the chapter starts in contrast with the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ by suggesting that the ‘religious sacred’ not necessarily needs to refer to the God, gods or the supernatural to be counted as ‘religious’. Furthermore, Glock’s (1962) reasoning can be remembered. According to
Glock, belief in ‘something’ is a powerless way of addressing existential issues. Actually, he holds that people who do not accept a creed which can be understood in terms of a belief system do not believe in anything. That is, for him, to believe that ‘something’ exists, or not to have a language for an unseen higher order of transcendence means being without existential concerns. Non-believers are those for whom the concerns about the meaning of life have never existed (cf., Glock 1962: 102-103). Accordingly, two waves of assumptions come to a shore here – the origin and nature of ‘something’ may not be transcendent, and ‘something’ is taken to be an illiterate answer with little impact on the social surroundings of the one who describes the sacred to be ‘something’.

By contrast, the examples given as a result of the analysis presented in this chapter show that describing the “sacred” in few words or a non-specific word such as ”something” actually means something. There are reasons for this choice of words. To believe in ‘something’ rather than the God which churches would have the individual believe in can be understood in terms of a stance against a “religion” of past times, which is perceived to have forced people to believe certain things. There are stories of authoritative priests leading Sunday schools for children, stories about priests refusing to marry people who had not taken communion, and more abstract stories about a past when religion was an obligation. To describe one’s belief as “something”, then, can be interpreted as an act to free oneself from being associated with a “religion” filled with illegitimate obligation.

Compared with Berger’s (1974) criteria concerning transcendence, this way of situating belief that “something” exists, does not reveal much about the nature and origin of the sacred. It rather displays a conscious reluctance to describe the sacred in terms of God, gods or the supernatural because doing so might come across as commitment to the ‘other religion’, the religion of past times which was a ‘religion of obligation’. Compared with Glock’s (1962) reasoning, using few and non-specific words is not a random choice, caused by people not thinking about the meaning of life or other existentially oriented concerns. How beliefs are expressed seems rather to be perceived as a rejection and a way of coming to terms with a past when it was possible to choose only one answer to the question of the meaning of life. Perhaps it can be argued that at the opposite end of religious orthodoxy is religious liberalism and not non-religion, as Glock’s (1962) reasoning seems to convey.

In Chapter 4 it was concluded that expressing beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” is a trait of the ‘mainstreams’ in Sweden. Again, ‘mainstream’ here stands for the majority behavior in terms of religious affiliation and practice over time. This belief that there is “some sort of spirit or life force” might hold several of the reservations and personal adjustments which the people interviewed in this chapter were documented to make. For example, in the words of Gunilla: “I do believe in something which is not only physical” but this belief, she clarifies, is not religious or Christian. Of
course, Gunilla does not use the exact same words as the EVS survey-statement “there is some sort of spirit or life force” but it is imaginable that it fits better with the type of personal reservation she wants to make than any of the other options. The point is, none of the talk captured by the interviews analyzed here which can contribute to an elaborated discussion placing belief systems and their principal standpoints against each other and deriving one’s belief from this comparison. As a result, it might be imagined that the reservation against what is perceived to be the ‘other religion’ of past times influences how beliefs are expressed in non-specific and short words.

Noteworthy, because it brings together the larger trends discussed in this thesis, is that the remembered ‘religion’ of past times appears to date from well beyond the last decades when Sweden became more religiously plural. It is perhaps the memory of the past described in Chapter 3 as a time when religion at an individual level was much regulated. However, like documented in Chapter 3, even though religion was very regulated and associated with obligation back in the late 19th century, the majority of people living in Sweden did not go to church on an average Sunday at that point in time. Therefore, certain aspects of the upsetting past of obligation might be imaginary and operative as a social construction of reality (cf., Berger and Luckmann 1966). Because the origin of this construction is of age, it might further be an institutionalized part of religiosity in Sweden. That is, positioning oneself against obligation in matters of religious beliefs might be an especially strongly embedded default stand when describing one’s belief in personally adjusted yet non-specific words. Moreover, since the ways in which beliefs are described appear to be related to the broader experience of the welfare state, this too might say something about the conventionality of expressing beliefs with a reference to free choice. However, if this analysis is held to be correct, the free choice is not free in a strict sense. That is, if everybody is required to do the same thing, the so-called ‘free choice’ has an element of social control in it. In addition, if the construction of the past is based on something which is taken to have happened before large groups moved to Sweden, the chances are that these groups are excluded from conventions set by the mainstream, which uses this the memory of the past as its point of reference.

‘Religiosity’, then, seems to be constructed against an imagined ‘religion’ of the past. This ‘religion of past times’ is considered to be rigid, paternalistic and plainly cruel to people and unsupportive of their need for personal freedom. This positioning does not seem to leave room for ‘religion’ to change at all. The ‘religion’ - discussed from the perspective of what people subjectively highlight as ‘religious’ - is not, really, ascribed to churches here and now, but to a past which argued should remain the past. Within this situation, the ways in which beliefs are expressed become a matter of choosing sides and joining those who struggle to let memories of past times be just that, memories of the past.
The present chapter also addresses the second objective of this thesis - to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. However, the present chapter differs in comparison with Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, which also addressed the second objective. This chapter provides new interpretations of data, achieved by methods previously not used in the sociology of religion. To be precise, a new method for identifying what terms typically stand for in large sets of text is introduced. That is to say, the proposed method supports the identification of the aspects of a term that are invested with ‘cultural meaning’ and therefore hold cultural power within a ‘cultural realm’ bounded by language and shared memories of the past and present. In the previous chapters (4 and 5) the ‘cultural meaning’ of the religious was juxtaposed against what the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ has taken the terms “mainstream” and “sacred” to stand for in research. The present chapter continues that reconsideration with a focus on the term “sacred”. It does so, however, by exploring previously uncharted territory within the ‘cultural realm’. The territory to be charted has previously been aside because of its size. It is because it explores this territory and its character that the analysis to be presented has relevance to the second objective of this thesis concerning an empirical approach to ‘religiosity’.

In the very first pages of this thesis, it was suggested that a gap exists between questions and answers in the surveys commonly used to assess the extent of religion, worldwide. Rooted in the established research practice referred to as ‘Religion in Dimensions’, religion was primarily defined as religious belief and, religious beliefs were taken to be acceptance of doc-

\[\text{96 For this chapter, statistical help has been provided by Rasmus Bååth, PhD student in cognitive science, department of philosophy, Lund, who computed the semantic space used for analysis. Help has also been provided by Sverker Sikström, professor in psychology, Lund, who wrote the statistical program for performing statistical operations on semantic spaces, and helped me understand this program during the time when I, the author of this thesis, performed the statistical analyses presented in this chapter.}\

\[\text{97 The Swedish word “helig” can be interpreted as both “Holy” and “sacred”. The choice of translating “helig” as “sacred” follows Berger ([1969]/1990) who translated the German word “heilig”, which comes very close to the Swedish word, into “sacred” for his book The Sacred Canopy. In addition and in conjunction with Berger’s use of language, most social theory on religion translated into English seems to use the word “sacred” rather than “holy” (e.g. Durkheim [1912]/2001; Joas 2012).}\]
trines. The identified (Christian) doctrines were theorized to stand for a transcendent description of the sacred which, for purposes of writing survey items, was expressed as a belief in a “personal God”. To say the least, the survey question about the “personal God” was afflicted with a large set of assumptions and expectations. When the results of this question did not follow these expectations, survey projects like the European Value Study (EVS) organized specific theory groups to find new explanations for the results (cf., Arts and Halman 2013). This specific theory group did not, however, approach the problem with the unexpected result from the perspective of how the survey questions were understood by those who answered them (and therefore yielded the unexpected patterns of responses). These circumstances form one reason for why the present chapter is intended to explore what the term “sacred” might stand for in contemporary Sweden. By identifying typical ‘cultural meanings’ of the “sacred”, this chapter provides a basis for comparisons which are to be used for a critical discussion about the expectations attributed to survey items like the EVS question about the “personal God” and hence continue the reconsideration of the ‘religious sacred’ begun in Chapter 5.

One consequence of the emphasis on what people probably associate with certain terms when answering surveys is a discussion on what surveys actually measure. Starting from the very first introduction of survey methodology, critical-minded theorists such as Adorno ([1964]/2011), Blumer (1948) and Bourdieu (1973) have argued that the publics is constituted of collectivities and cannot be treated as a collection of separate individuals. Consider, for example Bourdieu’s (1973) view on why individuals do not act separately as part of the public:

Every opinion survey assumes that everyone can have an opinion; in other words, that producing an opinion is something available to all. (Bourdieu 1973: 149)

In Bourdieu’s reasoning this is a “naïve democratic sentiment” (ibid: 149) and, truth be told, all opinions are not of equal value in a society. Thus, Bourdieu (1973) concludes that public opinion does not exist in the form which the opinion survey methodology would have us believe. However, he continues, this does not rule out the possibility of opinion dispositions formed by “something that can be formulated in discourse with some claim of coherence” (ibid: 157). Following Bourdieu’s reasoning on this issue the intention of the critical stand taken here towards what survey methods actually measure, is not to denounce survey methodology as such, but to critically contribute to the knowledge which is produced by, for example, survey studies such as EVS and its global sister the World Value Survey (WVS).

Stitching these threads together which throughout this thesis point out a gap between questions and answers in the case of surveys on religion, it is
noteworthy that the gap can neither fully be explained by people living in Sweden lacking literacy in religious teachings nor by a widespread indifference towards the religious. The red thread recurring in the preceding chapters’ suggests that the ‘religious mainstream’ can be understood as a form of collectivity based on a shared experience of similar behavior which may produce the form of discourses which underpinned Bourdieu’s (1973) reasoning just quoted. Within these discourses it can be assumed that lines are constantly drawn and maintained between what is taken to be legitimate and not legitimate when relating to the religious. In the case of the ‘religious mainstream’ in Sweden, these lines may be fixed in institutionalized forms since the mainstream pattern of affiliation, belief and practice goes back more than 120 years (see, Chapter 3). Thus, even though the line between legitimate and not legitimate may come across as difficult to express with the terminology available to sociological theory on religion, these lines may still have consequences for social life.

In fact, underlying much of the argumentation in this chapter is the idea that the ‘religious mainstream’, through its long and stable presence in Sweden, has the capacity for dictating how legitimate or not it is to relate to the religious in Sweden. This means that the ‘religious mainstream’ is conceptualized as a powerful part of the cultural realm known to those who communicate in Swedish. Understood in this way, the cultural realm is not a predefined geographical area (since people communicating in Swedish may live in many places) but a communicational sphere of social life.

Perhaps the phenomenon to be subjected to analysis here can be understood by using Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) term “invisible religion”, which depicts the growing form of religion in modern times to be based in individuals’ subjective beliefs about the sacred. Besecke (2005) has offered a new interpretation of Luckmann’s concept, drawing on theoretical insights from cultural sociology. The origin of her theoretical innovation is noteworthy because many of the most vocal yet constructive critics of the contemporary state of sociology of religion draw on the same cultural sociological toolbox (e.g. Bender et al. 2012; Cadge et al 2011; Smilde and May 2010). Besecke (2005) explains that the concept “invisible religion” can be understood as societal communication about the “sacred”. Put differently, the frames of references concerning the “sacred” are produced when people communicate with each other, face to face or through different forms of social and mass media. Using Bourdieu’s (1973) insights it can be added that this type of communication is not an equal communication among peers. Rather, as Berger (2012), among others, suggests, default discourses might hold the power to determine how it is legitimate to relate to the religious in countries such as Sweden.

In order to identify the most typical boundaries for the religious within the ‘cultural realm’ a new method will be introduced in this chapter. This method makes it possible to systematically retrieve contemporary frames of
reference actually used in relation to chosen words. In the preceding chapters, it was shown that the terms “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” are loaded with expectations concerning relatedness. For the research practice called ‘Religion in Dimensions’, religion was equated with the acceptance of a transcendent description of the sacred reality. Building on this assumption, spirituality was equated with the acceptance of an immanent “sacred” reality, preferably expressed using a terminology rooted in the holistic well-being movement (cf., Heelas and Woodhead 2005). As a result of these assumptions about relatedness between terms, the new method introduced here will be used to specify what “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” typically stand for in contemporary communication in Swedish. The result of this analysis will be used as a point of comparison for critically discussing the assumptions that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ has ascribed to ‘religion’.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section explains and discusses the novelty with the method proposed hereby and used. The second section describes and discusses the results obtained by using the new method. Finally, the reflections on the usage of the new method, the findings obtained, and comparisons discussed will be brought together into a concluding discussion.

The procedure for extracting themes of associations

The analytical procedure and statistical method which is discussed under this heading involves several steps. All steps taken were accompanied by choices between different statistical operations, interpretative frameworks, and forms of methodological praxis. Because the analytical procedure appears to be novel to the sociological analysis of religion, the details of all choices may blur the overall understanding of what the analytical procedure is used to accomplish. Therefore, the presentation of the analytical procedure will be introduced by an analogy that hopefully simplifies the nuts and bolts of what is brought about by the chosen procedure. After the analogy, the details of the analytical procedure will be discussed under the four subheadings: Choosing a sample – the Blogosphere and the cultural realm, Specifying a sample – the Blogosphere on religion, Transforming the Blogosphere into a Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) Space and Using semantic contexts to create themes of associations.

The results of the analytical procedure can be understood in line with the game plan of the board games called “Alias” in Europe and “Taboo” in the
US⁹⁸. These board games are examples of word association games in which the players explain words to each other. The game starts by one player picking up and reading a word on a card. The other players are not supposed to know the word in question. The player who holds the card then attempts to explain the word on it, using any other words except the word on the card. The word on the card is forbidden, taboo, as the American version of the board game calls it. All other words; synonyms, antonyms, words with similar meaning (polysemy words) can be used by the player who knows what word is on the card as clues to explain the word. The analytical procedure used in this chapter produces a result very similar to the explanation which the card-holders in the board games “Alias” and “Taboo” are expected to give. The basic result of the analytical procedure can namely be seen as an attempt to explain a word with all the words one can come up with. The only word which cannot be used is the word in question, the alias or the taboo word. In the analysis here, the “forbidden words” are the words “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”.

The feature which makes the analytical procedure under discussion powerful is that it orders explanations like the ones players of “Alias” or “Taboo” are asked to give according to how typical the explanations are. Imagine several thousand people simultaneously playing “Alias” or “Taboo”. Then, imagine ordering all these players’ explanations according to how often they were used; that is, the most typical explanation first, the next most typical explanations second and so on. In this way we may map the semantic terrain of explanations used to explain the chosen word, the “forbidden” word. That is, we would create a map of the explanations which most typically pop into people’s minds when thinking about what a word stands for. Of course, in social reality, these explanations would not be restricted to single words as they are in the board games “Alias” or “Taboo”. Instead, longer phrases, analogies, or examples could be used but for the same purpose - to explain words like “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”. The most typical sets of explanations will be discussed as ‘themes of associations’ with words. These typical associations are taken to matter in social reality as it can be imagined that the less typical associations run the risk of being silenced in the ‘cultural realm’ since they differ from the typical. To express difference from typical associations and be understood in the ‘cultural realm’ might require explanation of how it differs from the typical. That is, in turn, knowledge of the typical is required to express difference. In this way, the typical themes of associations hold double the “cultural power” (cf., Alexander 2011), since they are the most typical and also are required to express difference from the typical.

⁹⁸ For matters of identification it can be mentioned that the European game ”Alias” is produced by the Finnish company Tactic while the American version ”Taboo” is produced by the American company Hasbro.
In a nutshell, the analytical perspective applied brings out the semantic aspects of the words “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”. The chosen words are not treated in cultural isolation as if the goal were to reach a generic and highly abstract definition. By contrast, emphasis is on the underlying qualities which an identified set of explanations of a word make observable. Lists of words or extracts of texts are all used to generate a lucid understanding of what the extracted explanations, in the form of words and or short word extracts, have in common. Of interest are the characteristics and nuances that all the explanations, taken together, give to a word like the “sacred”.

This means that the lexical meaning of the term is of secondary importance. Furthermore, the meanings attached to the sacred by social theory are primarily used for comparisons. Mills ([1959]/2000) comments on the value of comparing concepts derived from grand social theory aiming for generic definitions that include actual examples of how the conceptual terms are used in everyday language. Mills writes:

> When we are dealing with what a word stands for, we are dealing with its semantic aspects; when we consider it in relation to other words, we are dealing with its syntactic features. I introduce these shorthand terms because they provide an economical and precise way to make this point: Grand theory is drunk on syntax, blind to semantics. (Mills [1959]/2000: 33-34)

With Mills’s ([1959]/2000) argument in mind, consider the definitional debate on religion reviewed in Chapter 2 (pages 31-38). The focus of this debate was how the “sacred” relates to the “profane” or, at times, the “secular”. A prominent standpoint of the debate was that the “sacred”, in order to be recognized as religious in character, needed to be a description of a transcendent reality. Berger (1974) clarified that if the “sacred” was taken to include immanent descriptions, researchers may “provide quasi-scientific legitimizations for secular world views” (ibid: 128). For Berger immanent descriptions of the “sacred” risk leading scholarly attention away from studying what he defined as “religion”. So, much in line with Mills’s ([1959]/2000) reasoning, a definition merely becomes an invitation for others to use it as the definer would like it to be used (cf., ibid: 34). Such invitations, argues Mills’s ([1959]/2000) do not achieve the scholarly purpose which Mills sets to be “to transform argument over terms into disagreements about fact, and thus open up for further inquiry” (ibid: 34). Instead, there seems to be a gap between what people within ‘cultural realms’ take “religion” to stand for and what the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ takes “religion” to mean.

We will now go on to give a description of how results revealing the most typical themes of associations with words like the sacred can be achieved. Keep in mind that the goal ahead is to explore what words such as “reli-
“religion”, “spirituality” and “sacred” may stand for even though the emphasis is shifted onto the means of achieving this exploration.

Choosing a sample – the Blogosphere and the ‘cultural realm’

In the preceding chapters the ‘religious mainstream’ in Sweden has been portrayed as a collectivity which forms legitimate ways of relating to the religious. This collectivity is visible in the ways which people communicate about the issues in focus; in the ways in which they explain their specific approach to “religion”, “spirituality” or the “sacred”. An example of this type of explanation is when people claim to believe in “something” beyond this world but claim not to be religious because of this belief as shown in Chapter 5. A collection of this type of comment from a first person perspective can be treated as something more than the sum of its parts, because these comments are not only subjective but verbalized in a way which others familiar with the specific ‘religious mainstream’ in question would recognize. The sum of these comments might be understood as a ‘cultural realm’ which people living in Sweden or, presumably taking part of Swedish culture by speaking Swedish, would be relatively well-informed about.

In Chapter 3 it was specified that what is taken to be conventional does not necessarily operate in the private sphere but is constituted of public agreements. Drawing on insights from cultural sociology, one area of social life where the type of agreements of interest here are acquired and pursued is the area of societal conversations (cf., Besecke 2005). That is, arenas of communication where critics of religion are talking as well as devout Christians, Muslims or Buddhists, people who believe that holistic well-being activities offers relief to a stressed soul, and people who believe Jesus Christ to be the only path to salvation. In these arenas, all voices are not equal. Some are allowed to form the dominant perspectives, and they silence or transform the perspectives with which they coexist (cf., Berger 2012).

In this chapter, the Blogosphere is considered as one arena of communication where the ‘cultural realm’ of the ‘religious mainstream’ might be observable. A Blogosphere is a collection of webpages updated from a first person perspective, with the newest entry presented at the top of the webpage commonly called a weblog or a blog (e.g. Blood 2002; Burns & Jacobs 2006). Of course, other types of communication could also have

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99 Media scholars are not completely in agreement concerning what constitutes a blog and not (e.g. Blood 2002; Bruns & Jacobs 2006). Although a blog is usually a personal webpage written from a first person perspective, there are blogs which are maintained by groups or organizations publishing content in line with the group or organizations’ ideology or policy (e.g. Blood 2002). Thus, blogs are most commonly personal but cannot be assumed to be maintained by only one individual. Moreover, there have been some discussions (e.g. Blood 2002; Garden 2011; Haas 2005) on the frequency with which a blog should be updated to be labeled a blog and not an ordinary webpage displaying information. As the practice of blogging has come of age it has, in line with many other commercial services (e.g. Einstein 2008),
been chosen. For example a large sample of newspaper articles could have been an option. Newspaper articles from papers read by many have the advantage that the same text is known by many. However, newspaper articles are typically written by journalists with specific training and a professional intent in their writing. This professionalism may conflate with the ‘religious mainstream’ which, given its commonality, must include more than journalists. Another possible sample could have been a very large set of transcribed interviews. Research interviews are often used as data for the social sciences and have the advantage that the researcher gets to ask questions relevant for the inquiry in focus. However, this procedure would be very time-consuming because of the hundreds of interviews needed for the type of analysis here conducted. Moreover, if the interview setting was a one-to-one conversation, the aspect of communicating in ways which a larger audience than the interviewer would understand would not be a self-evident part of the material. As the discussion in this chapter is intended to show, in the light of the pros and cons of other sources of data, the parts of the Blogosphere which have been chosen come across as representing a compromise and a reasonable first set of data to test a new method. This is why the type of freely accessible blogs chosen to be analyzed here are taken to reflect typical word usage related to words such as “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”. In these blogs the typical meaning content of the chosen words might be known by a larger ‘cultural realm’ of people who communicate in Swedish.100

Based on these reasons the sample selected for analysis was collected from the freely accessible Blogosphere written in Swedish. The specific sample of the Blogosphere consists of 220000 blog posts (which equals about 70000 written A4 pages, single spaced in Times New Roman, 12 points). The sample of the Blogosphere was provided by the Blog search engine Twingly (http://www.twingly.com/). The Twingly blog search engine enhances the chances of the content of individual blogs being found through a common search window; thus, the main reason for a blogger to register a

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100 According to Lindgren (2013) the social scientific study of blogs and other forms of Internet-mediated social media has entered a third wave of research. The first wave of research on online milieus was characterized by an overly optimistic attitude towards the cultural power of online milieus and their unique difference from the offline milieu. Thereafter, Lindgren (2013) explains, followed a second wave of research which reacted to the overly optimistic attitudes by adopting overly pessimistic presumptions holding that nothing had changed with the new online milieus and that the online and the offline were more or less of the same kind of social interaction. At present, concludes Lindgren, the third wave of Internet research is discussing the online realities as a part of the whole social reality. As such, an Internet-based phenomenon like the Blogosphere is assumed to be formed by its specific online medium; however, what is communicated in this sphere of online communication also reflects the way in which people communicate outside of the Blogosphere. Freely accessible blogs, Rasmussen (2008) clarifies, are written in way intended to be understood by larger audiences.
blog with Twingly is for enhanced visibility. Twingly also monitors the possibilities to comment on news articles in the big national newspapers in Sweden (e.g. Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Expressen) as well as in some of the large fashion companies (e.g. Ellos et cetera). Accordingly, if a blogger wants his or her blog comment to be accessible from an online published newspaper article in Swedish, the blogger needs to sign up with Twingly. This also means that the blogs being signed with Twingly are predominantly public blogs that anyone can read. The Twingly search engine has in previous studies been described as comprehensively covering the Swedish Blogosphere (e.g. Dahlberg 2010; Görnerup and Boman 2011).

The Blogosphere covered by Twingly also seems to span all political ideologies in Sweden (e.g. Twingly Report on Sweden) and does not have any formal links to any religious or atheist organizations. The sample analyzed in this chapter was derived from Twingly’s in June 2009. It thus comprises all blog posts using words related to religion from the first post in Twingly’s database to the date when the sample was retrieved, which is the period 1998-2009. This sampling strategy was assumed to yield a sample consisting of bloggers with different affiliations, beliefs and practices to “religion” and “spirituality”. At the time when the data was selected, the 220 000 blog posts selected were worked out to be about four percent of the total number of blog posts available from Twingly’s search engine.

For this analysis the Blogosphere is deliberately chosen as an empirical material for analysis because weblogs are typically written in the first person to communicate the opinions, experiences or preferences of a blogger (e.g. Blood 2002; Burns & Jacobs 2006). The Blogosphere is thus understood as an extensive sample of contemporary word usage in Swedish and an arena where a ‘cultural realm’ can be studied. The Blogosphere is known to harbor unequal power structures among the people blogging which monitor what is socially acceptable to say in a blog, and which push the formation of genres in terms of topics and style (e.g. Burns and Jacobs 2006; Schnider 2010). It is said that everyone with Internet access can in principle be a blogger, but that does not means that all blogs will be read or gain an influence in the Blogosphere. The Blogosphere is probably a sphere of opinion formation where the social milieu continuously forms what is said and by whom.

One consequence of the unequal conditions for communication in the Blogosphere is that the demographics revealing who write and read blogs cannot be taken to be the group to which the word usage of the Blogosphere is generalized. Even though it is fairly well-established tendency that young women (age 14-25) are overrepresented among those who write and read blogs, an alternative sampling strategy could have started from the blogs written by representatives of religious organizations (e.g. Schnider 2010). Because the analytical interest is in the “religious mainstream” which in Chapters 3 and 4 was suggested to be somewhat autonomous of the religious organizations and the expectations of these, a sample written by representatives for religious organizations would not have been preferable in this specific case.
blogs in Swedish (e.g. Findahl 2009, 2013), this does not necessarily mean that it is the word usage of these girls which is the most typical online. The official numbers on Internet usage in Sweden (i.e. Findahl 2013) are summarized in English in the cross-nationally comparative publication World Internet project – International Report (2013). The following statistics are found in these reports: about 90 percent of the population living in Sweden have access to the Internet in their homes and 74 percent of the population use the Internet as part of their daily routine. Thus, people living in Sweden take part in many things happening online. One of the most common activities is participating in social media (blogs or other forms of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter). Findahl (2013) reports that 66 percent of people living in Sweden use Facebook regularly while 41 percent of the population also read blogs (cf., ibid: 33-35). Accordingly, the readership of blogs does not completely match the authorship, and if there are unequal power structures forming what is said in blogs, young women, who represent the largest proportion of bloggers, are not necessarily representative of what is most typically expressed about religion in blogs.

For someone trained to conduct opinion surveys based on representative samples, the Blogosphere may very well come across as the exact opposite of an ideal case. Among other things, a summary of the word usage of the Blogosphere diverges from the long held standard of trying to summarize polls from randomly chosen samples perceived as representative “miniatures” of a geographically defined area or group (cf., Perrin and MacFarland 2011). Examples of populations generalized in this way are the populations of Sweden and the United States, members of a church, or the population of a parish. Geographical borders cannot be used when summarizing the Blogosphere because blogs might be written or read by people located outside Sweden (though familiar with the Swedish language). The blogs are brought together as a world of discourses (i.e. the Blogosphere) and, as such, most of them can be assumed to be written in such a way that the content of the blog could be read and understood by others participating in this sphere of online communication as writers or as readers. Accordingly, the claim of generalization cannot be applied to the geographical area of Sweden because the representativeness of the sample is not suitable for this kind of generalization. To summarize, typical word usage in the Blogosphere might rather be seen as systemizing a ‘cultural realm’ in order to make observable the categories which people familiar with this realm may have knowledge about. Put differently, the most typical associations with words might be used to “think with” when answering surveys and guide, for example, what is perceived to be a politically correct answer.
Specifying a sample - the Blogosphere on religion

The results of the analytical procedure applied here can, as mentioned before, be compared with word association games designed to make people explain words without using the word they are explaining. This means that there must be words to explain in order for the analytical procedure to function. Accordingly, all the blog posts selected for analysis used one of the following words: “religion” (in English: religion), “andlighet” (in English: spirituality), “tro” (in English: belief or faith), “Gud” (in English: God) and, finally, “helig” (in English: sacred or holy).102

Two related difficulties arise from using these specific words to specify the content of sample of the Blogosphere. The problem can be formulated into the question: what kind of total is the outcome of the chosen sample-strategy? The question about the total is of importance since the analytical procedure, which is intended to identify the most common themes of associations with chosen words, depends on the total of the sample of blog posts. Clearly, the words (henceforth in English) “religion”, “spirituality”, “belief”, “God” and “sacred” do not reflect the dimensions stipulated by Glock and Stark (1965) and underpinning the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Even if the four simplified dimensions used by Glock and Stark (1968) Beliefs, Practice, Knowledge and, Experience are used as the point of departure, the words selected here do not explicitly span the dimensions of practice, knowledge and experience. Instead, the sampling approach chosen starts from the idea that Glock and Stark’s dimensions are covered if they are typically associated with the word “religion”.

In other words, the specific words were selected to encompass blog posts with religion-related content. To do so the sample cannot be too broad since the intended result of the analytical procedure – typical themes of associations – is dependent on the content of the total sample of blog posts. Therefore, not all words which can be imagined to carry religion-related content could be used for sampling content. For example, a list of the world religions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism could have been used to broaden the scope. Another example could have been names associated with holistic wellbeing, such as New Age or Yoga. To use a sampling strategy consisting of too many words increases the risk of the sample of texts as a whole becoming too disparate. Thus, sampling from a very long list of words may not be the best sampling procedure, as every word included as a base for selection broadens the disparity of the sample. Ideally, the sample should be precise and focused for the results to be interpretable. As the present sample was of satisfactory size for the intended analytical procedure when the words chosen for sampling content were set as “religion”,

102 For technical reasons which will be explained shortly, the words “God” and “belief” were not used in the analysis.
“spirituality”, “belief”, “God” and “sacred”, this sampling procedure was chosen.

The second difficulty with the outcome of the sampling-strategy relates to issues of translation between Swedish (the language used in the data) and English (the language used to describe the outcome of the analysis). These translations may conflate with the kind of content the chosen words can be expected to carry with them. To start with, among the words chosen for sampling blog posts, the selected Swedish words do not always translate into only one word in English. The Swedish word “tro”, for instance, can be translated into “belief” and “faith” depending on context. In Swedish one could also use the word “tro” in more secular circumstances with the meanings “think”, “consider”, “guess” or “hold to be true”. “Helig” can be translated into both “sacred” (when related to objects or phenomenon) and “holy” (when, for instance, related to persons). As there is only one word in Swedish – “helig” – the words “sacred” and “holy” are used as synonyms in this chapter if not explicitly stated otherwise.

This means that the chosen words for sampling – “religion”, “spirituality”, “God”, “belief” and “sacred” – constitute the basis for a specific total of blog posts. The specific total does not necessarily cover all dimensions social theory or the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ have ascribed “religion”. On the contrary, aspects of “religion” are covered if they actually are prominent within the semantic context of the word “religion” and not otherwise. In a similar manner, the sample did not include more words or other words to account for differences related to translation between Swedish and English. In its place, the chosen sample has a basis in the ‘cultural realm’ of Swedish language and is only hereafter translated, commented and discussed in English. Thus, the differences which exist between the language of the data and the language of the presentation will be discussed in relation to the presentation of results. Again, it is worth repeating that one consequence of the data and sampling strategy used for this analysis point at a generalization to a ‘cultural realm’ of people familiar with communication in Swedish and not to a geographically defined population or, to all content possible to define as religion.

One aspect which was not considered at the time of the sampling procedure was that religion (the noun) may come with other connotations than religious (the adjective). In an ideal case, perhaps, the sample analyzed would have been based on search techniques including asterisks - “religio*” – in order to include all usages of religion, religious, religiosity and so on in the sample. The same procedure would have been useful for the other words - spiritual, God, belief and sacred - as well. As things are, the analysis is tilted towards how religion is explained and not the “religious” or “religiosity”. The words “religious” or “religiosity” appear if closely associated with “religion” and not the other way around. For future research it might be recommended to compare analysis based on single word sampling strategies like this one with more inclusive search techniques asterisk search terms.
Transforming the Blogosphere into a Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) Space

In order to achieve a useful summary of the large sample consisting of almost a quarter of a million blog posts sampled from the Blogosphere written in Swedish, these text documents were transformed into a Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) space. LSA (e.g. Landauer and Dumais 1997; Landauer et al. 2007) is a quantitative linguistic technique developed within computer science, computer linguistics and the behavioral sciences (most prominently within the field of cognitive psychology) (e.g. Perfetti 1998). The basic idea behind LSA is the way words co-occur in texts and languages give words their meaning (e.g. Landauer et al. 2007, see especially the chapter written by Kintsch 2007). From a psychological point of view (e.g. Landauer and Dumais 1997) this insight into the impact of word co-occurrence on meaning has been stipulated to explain how humans can learn language. In short, instead of assuming that humans are born with a reservoir of words, LSA researchers took the stance that people learn words by connecting them to a network of other words, and by associating words with words they already know (cf., Landauer and Dumais 1997). This stipulation about word learning processes led researchers interested in LSA to conduct numerous experiments aimed at determining how to define a representation of word occurrence which would resemble human word association processes (cf., Deerwester et al. 1990; Landauer et al. 2007). When a useful definition was obtained (i.e. Deerwester et al. 1990) academic disciplines such as Computer science started to use LSA techniques for information retrieval (cf., Tonta and Darvish 2010). That is, LSA was used for tasks such as matching a search term in Internet search engines with relevant documents selected from millions and millions of possible digital documents online.

For our purposes here, the application of LSA to information retrieval is relevant because it marks the development from using LSA to understand how the human brain works, to applying the LSA procedure to the task of analyzing texts. If texts are considered, people can be explicitly aware of the type of co-occurrence which LSA measures. Such awareness is, for example, present when people pay attention to “context clues” (cf., Nordquist 2013) which is information appearing near a word in a text that offers an indirect suggestion of the word’s meaning. Such “context clues” may consist of synonyms, antonyms, definitions or examples and are thus not just one type of information. So, similar to the example of the board games “Alias” and “Taboo” mentioned earlier, the co-occurrences are different forms of explanations or clues to a word. When used in order to summarize text, LSA recommendations have repeatedly been proven to capture the complexity of the “coherence of human written discourse around a given topic” (Perfetti 1998:375, see also Evangelopoulos 2013). Thus, it seems that LSA insights
concerning how to define a representation for word association (cf., Landauer and Dumais 1997) can be applied as a form of statistical text analysis.

In everyday language, words co-occur too seldom to be the basis of the type of conscious interpretation which is characteristic of the text analysis a researcher can perform by reading and coding texts. This is why the basic feature of LSA is to automatically enhance and systemize the most typical co-occurrence of selected texts (e.g. Landauer et al. 2007). The result is a mathematical representation of the co-occurrence of words in the texts subjected to analysis. Henceforth this mathematical representation is referred to as the “semantic space” – a comparative universe that represents what words most typically stand for in a given communicative context.

The procedure to represent co-occurrence of words in a semantic space starts with an operation that transforms texts into frequency counts describing how often a unique word occurs in each of the selected texts. Figure 2 is intended to illustrate these frequency counts. In each cell in figure 2 the frequency with which each unique word appears in a blog post is counted. As a result of this operation, it can be noticed in the illustration provided in figure 2, that if Blog post 1 (the first column) makes use of the word “religion” twice, the number 2 will be in the cell representing the first column and the first unique word. In this manner a huge matrix is created, blog post by blog post. Before attempting to summarize the information which this huge initial matrix contains, the count of word occurrence is advanced by an operation which calculates the logarithm of the word frequency documented in the cells within plus one. This additional operation is performed in order to make the planned statistical summary possible.

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104 Each row in the initial matrix represents a unique word existing in the sample of blog posts to be analyzed. In accordance with established practice (cf., Landauer et al. 2007) words have not been stemmed in any way, which means that all tenses of verbs, singular and plural forms of nouns and so on will each be given a specific row (see the examples provided for row 1 and 2, figure 1). The only words removed are stop-words (such as “och” (i.e. “and”) and “eller” (i.e. “or”) which in the LSA literature are taken to be words without semantic content.
105 The procedure for working this out blog post by blog post is, of course, dependent on the specific type of data being analyzed. If some other type of document were used, for example news articles or transcribed interviews, this matrix would be calculated using these units as the base for the count of word occurrence. For example, how many times does the word “religion” appear in news article one, how many times does it appear in news article two and so on.
Blog post 1.  
Blog post 2.  
Blog post 3.  
Blog post 4.  
Blog post 5.  
And so on…  

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<td>Unique word 5.</td>
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<td>Unique word 6.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique word 9.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique word 10.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And so on…
Until the last unique words of used in all blog posts in the sample

Figure 2

*Illustration of the initial rectangular matrix on which an LSA vector-space is based*

Note. This is an illustration of the very first step of transforming texts into an LSA semantic space. This step is followed by an operation computing the frequencies displayed above in the cells to represent the logarithm of the word frequency within a text/document, or in this case, word-contexts defined by the 30 words appearing before or after the selected blog post.
The values in the initial matrix (illustrated in figure 2) is used as input for the mathematical algorithm of Singular Value Decomposition (SVD) (cf., Deerwester et al. 1990). Thus, the result of this operation is a vector space. A vector space can be described as a space that is spanned by a set of linearly independent base vectors. In this space, semantic features of words are represented by vectors that are linear combinations of the base vectors. The procedure of creating an LSA vector space resembles the procedure for doing a factor analysis. The output of the SVD is a matrix which schematically can be described as having dimensions instead of the original documents as columns. A further resemblance with factor analysis is that the dimensions of this output matrix are ordered in accordance with how much of the variance of the whole matrix the dimension explains. That is: the first dimension explains more of the variance in the initial matrix, the second more than the third and so on. This provides an opportunity for information reduction and, thus, also, enhancement of the most typical co-occurrence of words and word contexts.

Note, however, that the analogy with factor analysis cannot be stretched any further as the dimensions based on the input from the Blogosphere are too complex to be suitable for immediate interpretation. Instead, at this stage of the analytical procedure, the recommendations from the prominent LSA researchers Deerwester et al. (1990) and Landauer and Dumais (1997) are crucial. In fact, what makes the vector space, calculated on the basis of word occurrence, a semantic space is the application of the finding of Deerwester et al. (1990) that the number of dimensions should be set between 100-500 dimensions to resemble the human capacity for word association (eg., Deerwester et al. 1990). In order to specify the most suitable number of dimensions within the range 100-500 dimensions tests are typically used measuring how well the dimensions performed in synonym tests. For the specific analysis performed on the Blogosphere, the result of these synonym tests was a semantic space of 150 dimensions.\footnote{One consequence that follows from reducing the number of dimensions is that the number of unique words also is reduced. This follows from the simple fact that all words used in the original Blogosphere are not used in the dimensions kept after reduction. In the specific case of the semantic space used here, the 150 dimensions corresponded with n=45330 unique words. This means that the semantic space under discussion consists of approximately 45330 diagonal vectors representing the semantic features of these 45330 most commonly co-occurring unique words. These diagonal vectors exist in a field of right-angled vectors giving the diagonal vectors their position in the space.}

The operations performed so far allowed semantic meaning to be measured as a relation among words (cf., Kintsch 2007), which is a measurement of meaning that goes well beyond raw frequency counts. Thus, the focus was on relations between words measurable through the angle that occurs between vectors that are not orthogonal and thus represent the semantic features of words. This measurement is referred to as (D). Because this meas-
The measurement of relatedness between words is based on the angle between straight lines it runs along a simple scale running from +1.0 (completely and positively related) via 0.0 (not related at all) to -1.0 (completely but negatively related), just like a Pearson's correlation. However, in the present analysis no values below zero was observed.

The summary achieved of the Blogosphere after subjecting it to LSA is conceptually a representation of the most common associations between words in this sample of online communication. Compared with the interview data used in Chapter 5, this summary is rich in detail since it covers almost a quarter of a million written statements using words such as “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”. Furthermore, and importantly for the analytical procedure, the statistical representation of the Blogosphere in a LSA semantic space provides a suitable basis for statistical operations. In what follows, why and how the measurement \( D \) of relatedness between words was used to group vectors (the standard ones and new created ones) on the basis of semantic similarities will be explained. That is to say, how the measurement \( D \) was used to generate the most typical themes of associations of the Blogosphere.

Using semantic contexts to create themes of associations

The last steps taken within the analytical procedure here described involved generating overarching yet interpretable themes. Since the LSA technique allow for a measurement of word meaning (rather than simply word frequency), the analytical goal was set to generate a result which showed the nuances of the word meaning in question. There was one technical and methods-related reason for the decision to retrieve the original sentences that exemplified the actual word-use. LSA treats the meaning of words as a “bag of words” (cf., Kintsch 2007). This means that the outcome of closely related words along a scale of \( D \) +1.0 to \( D \) -1.0 regardless of whether the related words are antonyms, synonyms, examples or even analogies. Without further specification, the results from the LSA semantic space will not reveal whether or not words are related because they are used negatively (e.g. “X is not Y”), or if the word is used in a positive tone of voice and appreciated (e.g. “X is Y and that is good thing”). The LSA semantic space cogently represents relations between words but the original context (i.e. examples of how the word at issue actually were placed in sentences in blog posts) is lost if the semantic space is used without further operations.

Generating themes of associations is one approach for retrieving the original word contexts which get lost when transforming texts into a semantic space. This approach also comes with the advantage that the most typical word contexts are related to the most typical explanations in the form of single words within each group, based on similarity in meaning. Two forms of results are hereby obtained: lists of words and lists of original word con-
texts. These two separate lists are ordered in relatedness to a shared center, a cluster center also known as the cluster centroid.

Consequently, a technical difficulty, the loss of the original word context, is by the approach of generating themes, turned into a feature that is analytically useful. By identifying the most typical yet distinctly different ways of explaining words, information concerning semantic and specific syntactic features is gained. Put differently, what words stand for is specified into subgroups of different meanings and these sub-groups can also be compared, and thus, provide information on how different meaning aspects of a word relate to other meaning aspects of this word. This provides opportunities to compare the results with the assumptions of the research practice discussed in Chapter 2 as ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

Generating the themes of typical associations started with restoring information on original word context location in the semantic space. This was done by retrieving the original word contexts and then averaging the vectors related to the words used in the particular word context in question. Because the word “God” was not used often enough and the word “belief” was used in too many disparate contexts other than religious or spiritual, retrieving the original word contexts for these words did not result in interpretable themes. Accordingly, the words left for analysis were “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred”. Of these words, the presentation of results focuses on the “sacred”. This focus is due to the tendency reported in Chapter 2 which showed that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ tended to equate religion and the religious with the sacred. Results from the other two words, “religion” and “spirituality”, will briefly be presented as a background to the more general semantic context of the “sacred”.

After averaging the vectors related to the words in the original word contexts, their location in the semantic space was identified. In the semantic space there were now vectors representing semantic features of words in the Blogosphere and identified locations for the original word contexts. The contexts related to one word at a time (first the word “religion” was subjected to this procedure, then “spirituality” and then the “sacred” and so on) were clustered using a standard clustering algorithm. For this operation k-means clustering was used because k-means seeks to identify groups by minimizing the in-group variation but maximizing the variation between groups (cf., Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1987). In this specific setting, this feature of

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107 The lists are separate in the meaning that the list of words and the list of word contexts are obtained somewhat differently (a procedure which will be explained shortly). Accordingly, every unique word and word context has its own measurement (D) of closeness to the group’s shared center (i.e. the cluster centroid).

108 For example, in contexts relating to where one believes that one placed one’s keys, what one believes is the best way home, or other contexts related to guessing or having an opinion about something. See, footnote X for further details on the lexical meanings of the Swedish word “tro” (e.g. “belief”).
k-means clustering was assumed to enhance the chances of finding groups characterized by being internally coherent and similar in content yet clearly distinct from the other groups identified. Put simply, the chosen approach helped us identify themes that were as qualitatively different in meaning as possible.

When a k-means clustering algorithm is applied, a center for each cluster is calculated (cf., Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1987). This center is not a word in itself but a mathematical construct, and part of interpreting cluster analysis results usually involves naming this cluster centroid. For this analysis, the cluster centroid was also used to identify which of the original word contexts were typical for each cluster constituted of diagonal vectors. The most typical blog posts of each cluster were retrieved with information about the closeness to the respective cluster centroid.\textsuperscript{109}

The output consisting of lists of words and lists of word contexts was interpreted in a final stage of the analytical procedure using a hermeneutical approach (cf., Gademar [1975]/2011). In detail, the ten most central words and word contexts were read and analyzed in an abductive and circular fashion. Given that the words and word contexts were selected from almost a quarter of a million blog posts as the most typical of their kind, the interpretation was carried out in two steps. First, the words and texts were interpreted at a concrete level. The words and texts were coded descriptively to make sure that the information was not misinterpreted or that meaningful details were not lost. Put differently, the words and blog texts were analyzed as if they were randomly selected texts without a specific connection between them. Thereafter the specific features of the words and blog texts relation to a shared center were accounted for. Thus, the interpretation shifted focus. Words and blog texts were analyzed as the most typical examples of a specific and internally coherent way of explaining the word in question. In line with a hermeneutical approach (cf., Gademar [1975]/2011), the words and blog texts were therefore analyzed as part of a whole. In this process, the parts and the whole were considered and re-considered in several waves until what he described as the circle of understanding appeared to have estab-

\textsuperscript{109} Recapitulating the analogy with the board games “Alias” and “Taboo” the procedure with cluster analysis explained here emphasizes a limit of this analogy. The groups of words obtained by cluster analysis can include the target word “sacred” (which in the game plan of “Alias” and “Taboo” was forbidden). This is a source of many misunderstandings of the analytical procedure. Specifically, the target words “religion”, “spirituality” and “the sacred” may appear in the tables because when the analytical procedure is advanced from merely representing the most common associations between words to creating groups of similar explanations, the underlying target of explanation is also advanced. It is no longer the actual words “religion”, “spirituality” and “the sacred” but a mathematical construct based on the semantic features representing which is shared by the typical explanations in the respective group. In order to accomplish these themes of associations with terms, all associated words are used, including the initial target words, and this means that the target words can appear in the tables.
lished its circular form. In other words, until the point was reached when the interpreter found no more angles of information to add to the interpretation.

A short summary of the analytical procedure

Returning to the example with the board games “Alias” or “Taboo”, the analytical procedure can be described as an attempt to explain words with other words. These words can be antonyms, synonyms, examples or other words related to the word to be explained. The most typical explanations of words were retrieved and ordered by the analytical approach. These typical explanations were taken to indicate what words stand for in the ‘cultural realm’ of which the Blogosphere written in Swedish is used as an example. Taken together, groups of explanations similar in semantic meaning were conceptualized as themes of associations. Within the ‘cultural realm’, typical themes of association may hold “cultural power” (cf., Alexander 2003, 2011) to determine how it is legitimate and not legitimate to relate to the religious. Thus, the result of the analytical procedure can be seen as a first attempt to explore and specify the current themes of associations within the ‘cultural realm’ of people communicating in Swedish about religion-related topics.

In short the analytical procedure can be summarized into the following:

- A sample of the Blogosphere focused on religion-related content written in Swedish was collected.
- The texts chosen were transformed into a Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) (cf., Landauer et al. 2007) semantic space representing statistically the most common relations between words in the chosen sample of the Blogosphere.110
- The original word context, the blog posts, of the words subjected to analysis was retrieved and their location in the semantic space was identified.
- The measurement of relatedness between words from the LSA semantic space was utilized to group words of similar meaning.
- The most typical word contexts for each group of words were identified and retrieved.
- The ten words and word contexts most semantically similar with the cluster center were conceptualized as themes of associations and interpreted using a hermeneutical approach to understanding and interpretation.
- The result of the analytical procedure was presented in table format (words) and in the form of quotes (original word contexts).

110 The semantic space in question was generated by the Infomap software (Infomap NLP Software). The semantic space was then transferred into LSALAB presently found at: www.semanticexcel.com
The results in the form of words are presented with each word’s unique measurement of relatedness (D). The results in the form of original word contexts have been given the following identity markers presented in parentheses: the order-number of the blog post counted from the cluster-centroid, the theme number and target word, the blog text’s unique relatedness to the cluster centroid. This means that the information blog post no. 1, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86 stands for the most typical blog post retrieved for the first theme of associations with “religion” located at D=0.86 from the cluster center. The information on relatedness to the cluster centroid is of relevance since the interpretation of the blog texts departed from the idea that these texts relate to a shared center, and explain together an underlying quality related to the word subjected to analysis. The shared center was named and it is the names of the themes of associations as a whole which are given in the headings of the tables presented in the coming section on empirical results.

The semantic context of “religion” and “spirituality”

The present analysis of what “religion” and “spirituality” stands for in the Blogosphere give reasons for continuing to reconsider how notions about “religion” and “spirituality” relate to the “sacred”. The main reason for this is that none of the themes of associations with “religion” and “spirituality” were typically related to the “sacred” at all (see, table 6.1 and 6.2). Thus, it is highly unlikely that the most typical associations with “religion” and “spirituality” in the ‘cultural realm’ under discussion, revolve around whether or not “religion” involves acceptance of a transcendent “sacred”, while “spirituality” fosters beliefs in an immanent “sacred” with roots in the holistic well-being or New Age movements.

In this section of this chapter, what “religion” and “spirituality” are actually associated with instead of the sacred will be presented and critically discussed. The presented results are intended to clarify the semantic conditions for the sacred and contextualize its content.
Table 6.1. *Themes of associations with “religion”. Presented with the cluster names given to these themes after interpretation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion’s relation to politics</th>
<th>Consequences of religion</th>
<th>Presumptions about Islam and Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(D) Swedish word</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
<td>(D) Swedish word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.61 Religion</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>0.42 Religiösa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.52 Kristendom</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>0.41 Individer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.50 Politik</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>0.40 Religioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.45 Intressanta</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>0.39 Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.45 Psykologi</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>0.37 Etnicitet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.42 Filosofi</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>0.37 Snarare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 Intressant</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>0.36 Religionen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.39 Posted</td>
<td>Posted</td>
<td>0.36 Läggnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.39 Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>0.34 Ursprung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.39 Homofobi</td>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>0.34 Tillhörighet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* the Blogosphere in Swedish between the years 1998-2009 (n=220 000 blog posts) retrieved from Twingly’s blog search engine archive in June 2009 (www.twingly.com).
Table 6.2. Themes of associations with “spirituality”. Presented with the cluster names given to these themes after interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality’s relation to churches</th>
<th>Spirituality’s relation to religion</th>
<th>Spirituality as lived emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(D) Swedish word</td>
<td>English translation</td>
<td>(D) Swedish word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.48 Kyrka</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>0.69 Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.44 Kyrkor</td>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>0.69 Andlighet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.42 Kristna</td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>0.67 Filosofi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.42 Kyrkan</td>
<td>The church</td>
<td>0.62 Kultur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.42 Tron</td>
<td>The belief</td>
<td>0.61 Vetenskap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.42 Kyrkans</td>
<td>Church’s</td>
<td>0.60 Kristendom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.41 Kyrkorna</td>
<td>The churches</td>
<td>0.59 Ideologi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 Samfund</td>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>0.59 Teologi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.40 Präst</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>0.54 Religionen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.39 Enhet</td>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>0.54 Konst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** the Blogosphere in Swedish between the years 1998-2009 (n=220 000 blog posts) retrieved from Twingly’s blog search engine archive in June 2009 (www.twingly.com).
Apart from the absent associations to the “sacred”, the words associated with “religion” draw attention to neither religious beliefs nor practices in line with the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Looking at table 6.1 it is observable, for example, that no doctrines such as belief in Heaven or Hell or practices such as church attendance or rites of passage are associated with “religion”. In the absence of these words, the words which according to this analysis are associated with “religion” have been taken to stand for: 1) a discussion concerning ‘religion’s relation to politics’, 2) ‘consequences of religion’ in society and for individuals, and 3) ‘presumptions about Islam and Muslims’. The themes of associations with “religion” in table 6.1 have been given names to reflect these discussions.

The first theme was taken to stand for a discussion on ‘religion’s relation to politics’ (see, table 6.1). Typical words listed in the first column of this table are “religion” (D=0.61), “Christianity” (D=0.52), “politics” (D=0.50), “psychology” (D=0.45) and “philosophy” (D=0.42). In addition, the most typical associations with “religion” include the word “interesting” (D=0.45; D=0.40) as definite and indefinite noun. These words seems to point at a discussion concerning ‘religion’s relation to politics’, as the blogger who wrote the post closest to the theme center says that someone (not named) “mixes revealed religion with politics. Both are wrong” (Blog post no. 1, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86). This statement is further nuanced by typical blog posts which seem to stress that mixing up religion with politics is not desirable. According to the authors of the typical blog posts, religion and spirituality are nonetheless mixed up at times because the line between the Christian tradition and politics is sometimes difficult to define. Blog post number four from the center, for example, holds that “it is quite unclear” (Blog post no. 4, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86) how religion and politics should be defined. Also, commenting on the problem with definitional clarity the second blog post and the third blog post highlight the need for strict “principles of interpretation” in discussions of religion and politics (Blog post no. 2, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86; Blog post no 3, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86). Taken as a whole, this theme of associations with “religion” seems to reflect “religion’s” syntactic relations to “politics” on a rather abstract and

111 The reference point for each cluster is the cluster centroid, a mathematical construct representing a shared center of the theme of associations. This is how the word “religion” can appear as one word associated with a theme related to “religion” more generally in the Blogosphere.

112 The typical word contexts have been given the following identity markers presented in parentheses: the order-number of the blog post counted from the cluster-centroid, the theme number and target word, the blog text’s unique relatedness to the cluster-centroid. This means that the information blog post no. 1, theme 1 “religion”, D=0.86 stands for the most typical blog post retrieved for the first theme of associations with “religion” located at D=0.86 from the cluster-center. The information of relatedness to the cluster centroid is of relevance since the interpretation of the blog texts departed from the idea that these texts relate to a shared center, and together explain an underlying quality relating to the word subjected to analysis.
theoretical level. The words “psychology” (D=0.45) and “philosophy” (D=0.42) may signal that discussion in the theme is of an academic character, a character which perhaps is supported by the word “interesting” (D=0.45, D=0.40) which may show that discussing the lines between “religion” and “politics” is nothing but a thought-provoking exercise.

For the second theme of associations with “religion” the words “the religious” (D=0.42), “individuals” (D=0.41), “religions” (D=0.40) and again “religion”\(^{113}\) (D=0.39) are the most typical ones. Given that the established research practice of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ focuses on what religions expect of individual adherents, these words represent a promising start in relating the theme to the assumptions that this practice uses. However, instead of associating individuals with religious beliefs and practices like Glock and Stark (1965) did, the theme under discussion carries with it connotations with words such as “ethnicity” (D=0.37) and “rather” (D=0.37), “nature” (D=0.36) and “origin” (D=0.36). One example of how the word “rather” is used comes from the most central blog post which discusses why “religion suppresses personal development” (Blog post no. 1, D: 0.74). A few lines into this blogger’s discussion that focuses on the Catholic Church and its view on demons, the blogger writes:

“The individual who has a concept of a God which is not in line with the Catholic Church’s and therefore questions the Church’s view will rather be lectured on how things are and informed that questioning is not directly appropriate” (Blog post no. 1, theme 2 “religion”, D=0.74, italics EW).\(^{114}\)

Accordingly, the blogger concludes that religion is suppressive because it does not support critical thinking or freedom to make up one’s mind about what to believe and not believe. This argument is comparable to the arguments which appeared in the interviews analyzed in Chapter 5. In the interviews, this type of argument was found to mark a difference between one’s

\(^{113}\) NB! The analysis is based on k-means clustering which allows for the same observation to be part of several clusters or groups (cf., Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1987). This is how the word “religion” can be part of more than one cluster.

\(^{114}\) In Swedish: ”den individ som inte har ett begrepp om en gud som stämmer med katolska kyrkans och ifrågasätter kyrkans bild snarare kommer att få en föreläsning om hur saker och ting förhåller sig och att ifrågasättande inte direkt är välkommet”. In this quote the word ”snarare” or in English ”rather” is mentioned. This word “snarare” is also observable in table 6.1, Column ‘religion’s relation to politics’. There are exceptions to this type of consistency between the words in the tables and the quotes chosen to exemplify the content of the themes under discussion. The reasons for this are twofold. First, because the quotes are semantically similar with a calculated cluster center and not the words “religion”, “spirituality” or the “sacred” themselves, these words are not always present in the quotes. Second, the names given to the themes of association after interpretation (for a discussion see page 188-189) may be more overarching than single quotes and for this reason they are not identifiable in each quote. For example, the quote above does not mention the word “politics”, which is a word used in the name of this particular theme of association.
own belief and a religion from past times in Sweden. In the blog post quoted above, however, the argument is used to mark a difference between what the blogger holds to be a good in terms of expressing beliefs and the Catholic Church. That means that the scope of difference is broadened to include religions which are not Protestant in the manner perceived to be represented by the Church of Sweden in past times.

Following this opening and most central blog post, the other typical blog posts jointly discuss how to avoid violating personal integrity. That is, avoid situation that risk lead to violations of personal integrity as a consequence of individuals’ religion. For example, blogger number four from the center argues that religion poses threats against personal integrity due to the way in which official records can be kept. “No one”, this blogger argues, “should be registered based on ethnicity, origin, religion, political or religious conviction” (Blog post no. 4; theme 2 “religion”, D=0.70). Although the bloggers express great concern for personal integrity, religious freedom in the form of non-regulated pluralism is not put forward as a solution. Instead, one typical blog posts states:

“The demand that schoolchildren are given the same education regardless of background, culture or religion, is not hostile towards foreigners” (Blog post no. 3, theme 2 “religion”, D=0.71).

The link between the “religious” (D=0.42) and “individuals” (D=0.41) therefore seems to address issues concerning how to safeguard personal integrity against religion. In other words, how to govern ‘religion at an individual level’ which seems to be a topic unrelated to religious affiliation, belief or practice.

Reflecting very briefly on these two themes of associations with religion – ‘religion’s relation to politics’ and ‘consequences of religion’ – found in table 6.1 (page 190) not much seems to relate to what representatives of religions expect from politics or individuals. In its place, the discussion seems to be about “religion” as a third party. It is a discussion between bloggers who do not claim to be religious themselves on how to govern “religion” in order to diminish the bad consequences it might have for politics and individuals. That is, if understood in line with the results presented in Chapter 5, the discussion is about how to avoid repeating the situation imagined to be true for past times in Sweden when “religion” was an obligation due to political power exercised through laws and confessional schooling.

In the third theme of associations with “religion” the discussions continue to be about someone else’s “religion”. Among the most typical words in this theme are “Islam” (D=0.63), “Muslims” (D=0.49), “Mohammed” (D=0.46) and the “Koran” (D=0.45). Accordingly, “religion” is in this theme seen as Islam without the connotations with Christianity found in the previous themes. The tone of voice in the third theme also seems to be different com-
pared with the first two themes. The most typical blog post of the theme here called *Presumptions about Islam and Muslims* reads:

“In Sweden, why are people associated with racism as soon as they criticize Islam? Islam is a religion and not a race. Why should Islam be protected against criticism, and not any other religion?” (Blog post no 1, theme 3 “religion”, D=0.89).

This blog text reveals the recurrent line of argument within this theme which revolves around a plea for the right and need to criticize Islam and Muslims. Because this critique does not go into religion as such but focuses on describing Islam and those described to be Muslims as violent and hungry for power the discussion seems Islamophobic (cf., Allen 2010, Gardell 2010). This too, extends the discussion of what ‘religion’ should be avoided. In Chapter 5 the people interviewed mainly discussed a ‘religion’ of past times in Sweden. Here, by contrast, ‘religion’ is identified to be Islam, which is portrayed as a currently present form of ‘religion’.

Instead, and for our purposes here, it can be pointed out that none of the themes associated with “religion” discuss the description of the “sacred” in any depth. Thus, the “sacred” seems to be an issue without importance. Moreover, “religion” seems to be discussed as a third party because it is someone else’s “religion” which is discussed by bloggers who come across as if they think of themselves and their audience as non-religious. In itself, this is a striking difference from the research practice discussed as ‘Religion in Dimensions’ which rarely, if ever, conceptualized religion as something which was criticized or even discussed outside congregations. Therefore, the themes associated with “religion” seem to jointly suggest that in order to come across as legitimately religious, one has to harbor the expectations of critics. These critics would be people like the bloggers writing here who themselves speak from the self-claimed position of “no religion”.

Turning the discussion to the semantic context of spirituality, three themes of associations were found for this word too. These themes were called: ‘Spirituality’s relation to churches’, ‘Spirituality’s relation to religion’ and ‘Spirituality as lived emotions’ (see table 6.2, page 191). To recapitulate the reason for the short description of these themes here, it is noticeable that the sacred is not mentioned among the words associated with spirituality. Compared with the themes of associations with “religion”, the “spirituality” theme seems to relate more closely to the assumptions underpinning the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Even though the word “sacred” is not associated with “spirituality” there are other words, for example, “belief”, “inner” and “outer” which, may, perhaps, be linked to a description of religious belief in terms of a transcendent or immanent description of the “sacred”.

195
However, scrutinizing the themes ‘Spirituality’s relation to churches’ and ‘Spirituality’s relation to religion’ found in table 6.2 (page 191) the description of religious belief does not appear to be these themes’ focal points. These two themes are similar and the difference between them is of scale and only partly of kind. Most markedly, in the theme ‘Spirituality’s relation to churches’ the words “church” (D=0.48), “churches” (D=0.44), “Christians” (D=0.42), “the church’s” (D=0.42) and “the churches” (D=0.41) seem to be associated with “spirituality” because these words describe the opposite pole of “spirituality”. In blog post number five, the distinction between “church” and “spirituality” is from the cluster center expressed in the following manner:

“People are quickly categorized as Christians. They only need to express a positive view about Christian beliefs or religion more generally or to have visited a church, and all of a sudden, they are categorized as Christians” (Blog post no. 5, D=64)\textsuperscript{115}

Because this blog post is about what “spirituality” stands for, it seems reasonable to suggest that “spirituality” is something different than describing people as Christian simply because they fulfill the ‘religious mainstream’ criteria which in Chapter 4 were set to be: member of the Church of Sweden, but seldom attend this church’s services yet have a personal belief in “something”. “Spirituality” stands in contrast to a Christian identity, the blogger quoted above suggests. Compared with the reasoning exemplified in Chapter 5, this way of relating to the Christian religion resembles the ways in which the people interviewed argued for a legitimate middle-position for their own beliefs, in-between the religious and the non-religious. A nuance of this distinction between “church” and “spirituality” is also expressed clearly by the blogger writing the third blog post from the center. This blogger argues in favor of “spirituality” by writing:

“There is too much emphasis on the belief which is in line with big religious congregations, like the church and religion and Christianity. I believe in God and pray to him in my own personal way” (Blog post no. 3, theme 1 “spirituality”, D=0.64)\textsuperscript{116}

Based on this quote, “spirituality” seems to be in line with Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) term “invisible religion” that Hamberg (1989) translated into “privately religious” and deemed to be a sign of secularization. This theme

\textsuperscript{115} In Swedish: “folk [kallas] snabbt kristna. De behöver bara ha uttalat positivt om kristen tro eller religion i allmänhet eller att de har besökt en kyrka så vips tror man att de är kristna”

\textsuperscript{116} In Swedish: “[Det är] för mycket att man måste tro bara genom en stor religiös församling som kyrkan och religion som kristendomen. Jag tror på gud och ber ibland till honom på mitt eget personliga sätt”.

196
of association can also be related to the discussion of “anonymous religion” that Pettersson (1982) related to Luckmann’s concept of “invisible religion”. However, the idea behind “anonymous religion” was that people living in Sweden, almost secretly, felt a commitment to the Church of Sweden. In the typical blog posts used to exemplify the theme Spirituality’s relation to churches the opposite point seems to be made: spirituality is not in line with churches’ expectations of their adherents.

Perhaps there is an underlying quality that can be described as rejection of religious obligation in the first theme on “spirituality” in table 6.2 (page 191). If so, it can be claimed that it is elaborated in the second theme ‘Spirituality’s relation to religion’. In this theme of associations with “spirituality” the contrast is “religion” (D=0.69) (see table 6.2). The most typical blog post of this theme expresses the contrast clearly and says:

“They mix up religion with spirituality even though these are radically separate phenomena. Spirituality is an individual experience; religion is a cultural external form”117 (Blog post no. 1, theme 2 “spirituality”, D=0.82).

Here the blogger is making a statement after discussing two fractions of opinions which are ascribed to Christians and atheists. In the quoted blogger’s view - which happens to be the most typical of the theme - both sides of this debate make a mistake when mixing up “spirituality” with “religion”. In a manner similar to the first theme of associations with “religion” (see, table 6.1), ‘Religion’s relation to politics’, the discussion in the present theme is academic in character and what moves the bloggers to write seems to be that it is difficult to define “religion” and “spirituality”. This similarity with the theme ‘Religion’s relation to politics’ is also visible in the words associated with “spirituality” in the theme ‘Spirituality’s relation to religion’ (see, table 6.2). In both of these themes the words “philosophy” and “Christendom” are found to be typical associations and the discussions appear to be principal in kind. Accordingly the present theme, ‘Spirituality’s relation to religion’, can also be seen as a principal elaboration of the distinction between churches and spirituality found in the theme ‘Spirituality’s relation to churches’. In the forthcoming discussion on the “sacred” it is noticeable that the “sacred” is not explicitly discussed in these themes on “spirituality”.

The focus in the third theme of associations with “spirituality” differs compared with the first two themes. Among the most strongly associated words for the theme ‘Spirituality as lived emotions’ are “inner” (D=0.54), “meaning” (D=0.51), “meditation” (D=0.48), “creativity” (D=0.45) and “experiencing” (D=0.45) (see table 6.2). Even though these words share connotations with the assumptions underpinning the contemporary orientation of

117 In Swedish: “De blandar ihop religion med andlighet fast det är fullkomligt väsensskilda företeelser. Andlighet är en individuell upplevelse religion är en kulturell yttre form.”
the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, discussed as “assessing the extent of spirituality” (pages 58-63), the focus on “inner” and “meaning” does not in itself reflect a “spirituality” which is alternative in the sense that it originated from New Age beliefs and is rooted in contemporary holistic health movements. The two most typical blog posts refer to spirituality as something more general than something only located outside churches. The blogger of the most typical blog post writes:

“In Sweden we easily forget that spirituality does not necessarily have to do with religion but is rather a feeling of meaning, satisfaction, trust and an inner calm” (blog post no. 1, theme 3 “spirituality”, D=0.70)118.

The distinction made here places an understanding of “religion” located in Sweden in opposition to an understanding of a general spirituality. This preference for a more general notion of “spirituality” is also elaborated by the next blog post which contains a reflection on the words “grow” and “build”. The author of this blog post makes the point that choosing the word “build” to describe success reveals a mechanical outlook on the world which is unfortunate. The word “grow”, in contrast to the word “build”, reflect an organic outlook on the world. In the opinion of this blogger, “grow” carries with it a more humane view of what human success is all about. Similar to the first blog post quoted above, the second is also a more general discussion applied to people “in general” and no specific origin of these ideas associated with “spirituality” is mentioned. Blog post number three can be seen as a contrasting example compared with these general discussions because the blogger writes:

“[It is] spiritual sensitivity and knowledge and/or spiritual processes of change to transform the negative to the positive. Spirituality, magic and healing and a mind at peace make greed and jealousy go away” (Blog post no. 3, theme 3 “spirituality”, D=0.69)119.

In this quote, “spirituality” seems to stand for an “alternative spirituality” as suggested in the contemporary research orientation “assessing the extent of spirituality”, which is dependent on the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ discussed in Chapter 2. However, recapitulating the initial remark, it is noticeable that the sacred is not mentioned among the words associated with spirituality (see, table 6.2). In detail, “alternative spiritual” specific words which, for Heelas and Woodhead (2005) are words like “Chak-

118 In Swedish: “I Sverige vi glömmer lätt att andlighet inte behöver ha något att göra med religion utan snarare en känsla av mening tillfredsställelse tillit och inre lugn.”

119 In Swedish: “[Det är] andlig känslighet och kunskap och eller andlig förändringsprocess att förändra negativt till positivt. Andlighet, magi, healing och frid driver bort missunnsamhet och svartsjuka.”
ras”, “Chi” and “Body-Mind-Spirit” are not among the words associated with the sacred (see table 6.2, column ‘Spirituality as lived emotions’). In their place the more general words are in focus. This might indicate that the “alternative spiritual” specific words are not typical enough to be the most typical explanations of what “spirituality” stands for.

If the themes explored here make the ‘cultural realm’ of a ‘religious mainstream’ in Sweden observable, there might be a set of complexities brought forward here. The themes explored up to this point make distinctions between “religion” and “politics” as well as “religion” and “spirituality” in types of comparisons which make “religion” the unattractive or illegitimate alternative. Accordingly, there might be a semantic incitement for people familiar with the ‘religious mainstream’ to avoid being associated with religion. Therefore, when making room for a legitimate alternative, which to some extent is done in the themes of associations with “spirituality”, this alternative is strictly positioned against “religion”. However, then the alternative is filled with content that is not always in tension with the cultural heritage of religion and churches in Sweden. In Chapter 3 it was suggested that teachings such as the possibility for a direct relationship with God and the obligation for every individual to make a personal stance in matters of religious beliefs have a historical past in Sweden. In the themes of associations with “spirituality” the importance of taking such an individual stance is a recurring issue. There are examples which can be used to challenge this speculation. For example the blog post which mentions magic and healing quoted above, however, as the theme of associations with the “sacred” is to be presented, drawing a distinct line between “religion” and “spirituality” comes across as a rushed conclusion. After all, the themes of association with spirituality also seem to underline the experience of inner calm and meaningfulness\(^\text{120}\), feelings which can be everyday aspects of “spirituality” rather than related to the principle discussion and arguments over definitions. Related to the findings presented in Chapter 5, this meaning of “spirituality” might relate to the paths of knowing the “sacred” where creedal literacy was taken to be overruled by inner experience, and the word of the priest was of less value than the word of one’s own “inner voice”.

The semantic context of the “sacred” in the Blogosphere

In the same way that the themes of associations with “religion” and “spirituality” did not include the “sacred”, so the themes of associations with the sacred did not include the associations “religion” and “spirituality”. This point is worth considering since even though the themes of associations with “religion” did not include “spirituality”, the reverse cannot be said about the

\(^{120}\) See, blog post 1, theme 3 “spirituality”, D=0.70, quoted on page 198.
themes of associations with “spirituality”. Quite the opposite, the themes of associations with “spirituality” seemed to be dependent on a distinction from “religion” suggesting that “spirituality” stands for something that is not religious. From these analyses, no direct guidance is provided concerning whether or not people participating in the cultural realm bound together by the Swedish language are capable, to use the terminology of Bourdieu (1973), of applying categories to different descriptions of the “sacred”. Against the background which the themes of associations with “religion” and “spirituality” provide, there seem to be semantic conditions for the sacred to be detached from any explicit references to “religion”, “church” or “spirituality”.

In spite of this detachment between “religion” and the “sacred”, in the first theme of association with the “sacred” among the most typical words are “God’s” (D=0.61), “Salvation” (D=0.57) and “Christ” (D=0.57) (see, table 6.3). At first glance, these words seem to have connotations with a description of the sacred as transcendent and supernatural in nature, which the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumed to be pivotal criteria for the “religious sacred”. Before going deeper into the nuances concerning the meanings of the “sacred” in this theme of associations with the sacred, the second and the third theme will briefly be presented. In contrast with the first theme, the two following ones seem to center around words which are immanent yet not identified as words typical of the “alternative spirituality” like “Chi”, “Chakras” or “body-mind-spirit” (cf., Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Specifically, table 6.3 shows that the second theme of associations with the sacred includes words such as “hardly” (D=0.44), “principle” (D=0.41) and “cow” (D=0.41). By comparison, the third theme of associations with the sacred emphasizes inherently immanent words such as “the days” (D=0.40), “home” (D=0.40) and “morning” (D=0.35). At first glance, it appears as if the first theme connotes a transcendent description of the sacred while the following two themes refer to an immanent “sacred”. However, similar to the interview results discussed in Chapter 5, what appear at first glance to be mundane and non-specific words for the “sacred” might have a wider meaning when placed in context, which is what the analysis will do next.

The names given to the themes of associations (see table 6.3) reflect what are perceived to be the shared meanings for these words, taken to be the most typical explanations for what the sacred stands for. The themes are called ‘Sacred as being saved’, ‘Sacred as moral rules’ and ‘Sacred as everyday life’. These themes will now be discussed in turn.
Table 6.3. Themes of associations with the “sacred”. Presented with the cluster names given to these themes after interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>Swedish word</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>Swedish word</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>Swedish word</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Ande</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Knappast</td>
<td>Hardly</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>Dagarna</td>
<td>The days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Helige</td>
<td>Holy [man]</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Princip</td>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>Hemma</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>Heliga</td>
<td>The sacred</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Ko</td>
<td>Cow</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>Morgon</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>Guds</td>
<td>God’s</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>Exempelvis</td>
<td>For example</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>Eftermiddagen</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Anden</td>
<td>The spirit</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>Uppenbart</td>
<td>Obvious</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>Stund</td>
<td>A moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>Frälsning</td>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>Faktum</td>
<td>A fact</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Passa</td>
<td>Tend to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>Kristi</td>
<td>Christ</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>Kallas</td>
<td>Called</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Helgen</td>
<td>The weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>Helig</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>Ansas</td>
<td>Is found to be</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Helgerma</td>
<td>The weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>Härlighet</td>
<td>Glory</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Betraktas</td>
<td>Is regarded</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Veckan</td>
<td>The week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>Jesu</td>
<td>Of Jesus</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>Snarare</td>
<td>Rather</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Idag</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: The ‘sacred as being saved’

The most typical blog posts for the theme of association with the sacred called ‘sacred as being saved’ share a specific tone of voice. In order to exemplify this tone of voice the four most typical blog posts are provided below.

“Whatever John then said and did, he did in the power of the Holy Spirit as God works with the Holy Spirit though us” (Blog post 1, theme 1 the “sacred”, D=0.82)

“Your savior has been born again by the Holy Spirit as God calls you holy, and then a mediator is no longer needed between you and God” (Blog post 2, theme 1 the “sacred”, D=0.82).

“The Holy Spirit gives your tongue to God so that you speak foreign languages. The Holy Spirit makes you shiver and gives you wonderful visions” (Blog post 3, theme 1 the “sacred”, D=0.82).

“Eternal life for those who anointing of the most holy, Jesus was smeared with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon him” (Blog post 4, theme 1 the “sacred”, D=0.81).

Within the range of these four most typical blog posts, usage of nearly all the top ten words is exemplified. For example, in the first quote the first words “spirit” (D=0.73) and “holy” (D=0.72) are used for the phrase “Holy Spirit”. The word “God” (D=0.61) is also used in this very first quote. Thus, based on what is conveyed in these quotes the theme in question appears to be rather focused on one topic, and it appears as if the bloggers use the same source for their argumentation, namely the Holy Bible. In addition to this suggestion based on the word usage alone, the tone in the most central blog posts seems creedal; as if the samples come from sermons or some form of online preaching. It is noticeable that although the word “salvation”

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121 In Swedish: ”Allt vad Johannes sedan sa och gjorde, gjorde han i kraft av den helige ande. Så arbetar Gud med helig ande genom oss”.
122 In Swedish: ”din frälsare har blivit född på nytt genom den helige ande. Så kallar Gud dig helig och då behövs inte längre någon medlare mellan dig och Gud”
123 In Swedish: ”helig ande ger din tunga till gud så att du talar främmande språk. Helig ande får dig att skälva och ger dig underbara syner”
124 In Swedish: ”Evigt liv för dem som smörjandet av det allra heligaste. Jesus blev smord med den heliga ande vid sitt dop då den helige ande kom ner över honom”
(D=0.57) is not explicitly used in the quotes above seems to reflect this underlying quality – salvation through belief in Jesus Christ.

Relating the word usage in this theme to assumptions ascribed to the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, it is observable that the word use meets several of this practice’s criteria. Glock & Stark (1965) stated that to accept a “personal God” is to “believe in God, in Christ and his miracles, in the virgin birth and so on” (ibid: 24). In the blog posts in question, God as well as Christ and his miracles are explicitly mentioned, framing a picture of the sacred as transcendent, opposing people from the outside with agency. In addition, it can be mentioned that in a related blog post (no. 6, theme 1 on the “sacred”, D=0.80) the virgin birth is mentioned. In this sense the description of the sacred in these blog posts meets the criterion of ‘religion at an individual level’. Nevertheless, even in this much focused discussion of the “sacred” there are nuances which diverge from meeting all criteria set up for the operationalization of ‘Religion in Dimensions’. For example, the “sacred” or “God” is indeed described as something with agency; however, as visible in blog post number 2, emphasis is given to a personal relationship with God (i.e. “this means that no mediator is necessary between you and God”). Thus, the phrase “personal God” is not explicitly used.

Theme 2: The ‘sacred as moral rules’

The “sacred” in the second theme is thus different from what was discussed in the first theme. Political priorities seem to be a persistent theme found in most of the blog posts close to the theme center. The blogger writing blog post number 4 expresses the relation to the “sacred” in the following manner:

His main observation is that no question was sacred enough to save if it stood in the way of power (Blog post no. 5, theme 2 sacred, D=0.59).

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\[125\] A note on grammar is called for in relation to this discussion. Previously it was mentioned that the word “helig” in Swedish can be translated as both sacred and “holy”. The sacred is here frequently used as a noun – the Holy, and more specifically the Holy Spirit. In table 6.3 (page 201) it was seen that several of the most typical word usage in this theme were different types of nouns for the sacred (i.e. “helig” the common noun for “sacred/holy” (D=0.55), “helige” the proper noun naming a male person “holy [man]” (D=0.72). The sacred was also used as an adjective (i.e. “heliga” relating to the religious translated into “the sacred” (D=0.61, Table 7). In a similar manner, a grammatically different use of the word “spirit” was found (i.e. “spirit” (D=0.73) (i.e. the common noun) and “the spirit” (D=0.60) (i.e. the proper noun). As shown through the blog texts, the commonality of these words is heavily dependent on the frequent use of the term “Holy Spirit” in these particular blog posts. Summing up this grammatically related comment, it seems to me that for this theme the translation from Swedish to English is extra tricky. However, it is clear that the sacred is referred to here in a context of Christianity, relating to the possibility of being saved, and expressed in quite a Biblical way.
In this quote, the use of “sacred” as something non-negotiable in a political setting can be seen. The “sacred” seems to stand for those principles which should not be comprised, even at the expense of loss of power. This usage of the “sacred” seems to suggest that if the sacred is made into a subject for negotiation it is no longer “sacred”. Thus, at stake here is what “sticks out” from the political agenda, something named here as the ‘sacred as moral rules’.

Another example of this usage of the “sacred” is found in the following blog post:

“The so-called welcoming of refuges is a sacred cow for all governmental parties; however, it is not as sacred for X as the unemployment relief which is his “sacred cow””127 (Blog post number 4, theme 2 “sacred”, D=0.59).

In this blog post the blogger places two different issues of “sacred” status next to each other. The “sacred” here stands for the fact that the political issue at hand (i.e. the welcoming of refugees) and its underlying principle is non-negotiable and a top priority.

This discussion of the “sacred” seemingly has no direct relation to religious affiliation, belief or practice. Although it is immanent in kind, it does discuss the “sacred” as an immanent reality. In its place it fills the sacred with principles which stand out in the moral order of politics. Avoiding any references to any transcendent sacred might even be deliberate in this discussion. As one of the most typical blog posts states:

“What, however, definitely is missing in the constitutional law is a complete neutrality between religion and the state in current times”128 (blog post no. 3, theme 2 “sacred”, D=0.59).

The statement of this blogger might indicate that the distinction between “religion” and “politics” which was observed earlier is related to this discussion of the sacred. The moral rules of the political must therefore not be too closely linked with “religion” in order to remain legitimate in the political setting. However, this does not mean that there necessarily exist tensions between what politicians and what representatives of the churches take to be sacred political issues. On the contrary, ethical principles and the ordering of these have often been a topic addressed by religions and their representatives. The Church of Sweden is no exception. For example, in 2005 the

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126 In Swedish: "hans huvudsakliga observation är att ingen fråga var helig nog att spara ifall den stod i vägen för makten"
127 In Swedish: "det så kallade flyktingmottagandet är en helig ko för samtliga riksdagspartier, men den är inte lika helig för X som hans "akassekossa""
128 In Swedish: "vad som däremot definitivt saknas i grundlagen är en fullständig neutralitet i förhållandet mellan religion och stat i dagens läge"
Archbishop was awarded the title “lobbyist of the year” by the paper “Resume” for making the issue of the reception of refugee-children a priority question on the political agenda. The mentioning of one particular representative for the Church of Sweden serves here the purpose of making the point that the churches do not necessarily oppose the ordering of principles put forward by the bloggers on this theme. As the bloggers in the sample are anonymous, there is no information for this analysis as to whether or not they are self-defined as religious or not. The ordering of principles can therefore be seen as something sacred maintained by both secular and religious outlooks.

Compared with basic assumption of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ that the immanent sacred opposes the transcended “sacred”, this use of the ‘sacred as moral rules’ is different. It can be of a secular character but it can also be incorporated within a religious or spiritual outlook.

Theme 3: The ‘sacred as everyday life’

The third theme of associations with the “sacred” seems rather different compared with the other themes. The words closest to the theme’s center found in table 6.3 refer to time (i.e. “the days” (D=0.40), “morning” (D=0.35), “afternoon” (D=0.35), “a moment” (D=0.35), “the weekend” (D=0.34) seems to be connected by stories about what people like to do with their time. In the most central blog post of this theme a blogger (who describes himself as a man) begins by stating that he “loves shopping”, even “grocery shopping” and particularly on “early Saturday mornings”\(^{129}\) (Blog post no. 1, Theme 3 “sacred”, D=0.73). What is particularly lovely about shopping on Saturday mornings is, according to this blogger, the fact that almost no people are in the shops at that time. This gives the blogger the possibility to shop without the disruption of families with small children, a category of people which he feels makes too much noise and creates disturbance. When children are not around, the chances are he will meet a woman to date, he figures. In a similar manner, the next blog post is also about what to do at the weekend if free to choose. The blogger writing blog post 2 (D=0.70) expresses joy over the unexpected news that she/he will be home alone the whole Sunday. These circumstances give this blogger the chance to dye his/her hair, have a coffee with family and friends at his favorite coffee-shop and plan the forthcoming week in a calm manner. From here on, the stories continue.

More excitement is expressed by the blogger writing blog post 3 who retells how the weekend spent at a dog exhibition proved to be great as his dog won a prize and it was sunny. The blogger writes:

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\(^{129}\) In Swedish: "Jag älskar att gå i affärer. Jag tycker till och med att det är kul att åka ut till Ica Maxi och storhandla. Helst en tidig lördagmorgon"
“We have had such a lovely time and the weather was great. Sunny and clear skies, windy but just perfect for an exhibition”\textsuperscript{130} (Blog post no. 3, theme 3 on the “sacred”, D=0.65).

There are experiences of joy expressed in these blog posts which describe situations when everything was just perfect. The settings for these experiences are informal, embedded in everyday life, but still seem to reflect situations where people feel at peace with themselves. In blog post 4 (D=0.65) a runner describes a successful day, starting with finding the perfect parking slot, then running a half-marathon in a time which the blogger thought was pretty good, and then rounding this off with a pizza, a beer and watching the Eurovision song contest on TV.

The stories concerning what to do with one’s weekends are perhaps far from what is conceptualized as the “sacred” in the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. There are no references to the supernatural nor are these blog posts concerned with that which “sticks out” (cf., Berger [1969]/1990) from the everyday life. Instead the concerns in focus are those that give everyday life its pleasures. Keeping with Berger’s ([1969]/1990) terminology, the “sacred” in this cluster might be understood in terms of the sacred being an antonym to disorder (and in the worst case, chaos) and the sacred is invested with sacredness as it prevents disorder. The bloggers explicitly expressing excitement over spending time doing favorable things after being sick or ill can be understood against this backdrop of the “sacred” being the antonym of disorder.

Take, for example blog post 6, which in detail describes the joys of spending the weekend with family celebrating a birthday: “I live a reality made of dreams”\textsuperscript{131} the blogger (D=0.64) states. After writing about the birthday party the blogger goes on to reveal that he/she is looking for a summerhouse at a lake. Some time ago, the blogger would not even dream about a summerhouse because at that time he/she was living through treatment for cancer. Today, the blogger writes, it is very important to leave the past behind and actually fulfill dreams. The opposite: “to make myself a victim, to destroy the valuable time I have in this world”\textsuperscript{132} (Blog post no. 6, theme 3 on the “sacred”, D=0.64) would be “incredible pathetic”\textsuperscript{133} and “stupid”\textsuperscript{134}. Thereafter, the blogger concludes: “It is just me who decides how happy I want to be”\textsuperscript{135} (Blog post no. 6, theme 3 on the “sacred”, D=0.64).

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\textsuperscript{130} In Swedish: ”vi haft det jättemysigt och trevligt och vädrets makter har verkligen varit med oss. Strålande sol på en klarblå himmel, blåsigt men alldeles så där lagom för att vara ett perfekt utställningsväder”

\textsuperscript{131} In Swedish: ”lever i drömmens verklighet”

\textsuperscript{132} In Swedish: ”göra mig själv till ett offer och förstöra den värdefulla tid jag har här på jorden”

\textsuperscript{133} In Swedish: ”otroligt patetiskt”

\textsuperscript{134} In Swedish: ”dumt”

\textsuperscript{135} In Swedish: ”Det är jag som bestämmer hur glad och lycklig jag vill vara”
The story here seems to point at the importance of living one’s own subjective life to the fullest. It seems to be up to individuals to take charge of their own lives. Thus, the theme discussed as the ‘sacred as everyday life’ seems to be about living one’s own dreams in this life. The opposite seems to be spending time doing what one wants (e.g. the “sacred” order is maintained) versus being ill or unable to live one’s life (e.g. the “sacred” order is disrupted, disordered). Days filled with happy life may not be the antidote to the disorder of the “profane”, but these days may help to control the symptoms of disorder related to life being unbalanced. Similarly, in blog post 5 (D=0.64) it is not the joy of winning the computer game in itself which makes the allergic reaction go away; however, the win is “sacred” because it is related to the moment of feeling well again. Adding on the stories of the other bloggers writing the most typical blog posts concerning the “sacred” in everyday life, stories of being in control of life, being able to choose what or what not to do, and being happy might be said to be related to feelings of flow, wellness, harmony, of being at peace with oneself or in states of happiness and joy.

Moreover, it is these types of feelings which Heelas and Woodhead (2005), among others, discuss as feelings of self-transcendence. According to them, this feeling of self-transcendence lies at the heart of alternative forms of “spirituality” that they discuss as “spiritualties of life”. In their terminology the “sacred” in the meaning “self-transcendence” is a popular understanding of the “sacred” challenging the “sacred” understood as a belief in a transcendent reality or a “personal God”. In the cluster under discussion here, there is no explicit reference to the sacredness of everyday life being a replacement of, or a challenge to, a “belief in God”. In the cluster under discussion here, there is no explicit reference to the sacredness of everyday life being a replacement of, or a challenge to, a “belief in God”. Attention is rather drawn to the bloggers’ capacity to choose what to do themselves. Thus, a line is drawn between being in charge of one’s own life (which is discussed as something good) and being forced to comply with others or, in the cases relating to sickness or illness, being unable to control life.

Taken together, theme 3 was conceptualized as a theme of the ‘sacred as everyday life’ (see, table 6.3). This name was intended to reflect the significance given to the happy days of our lives in this life. Being explicit about relating to worldly times, the “sacred” in this theme is arguably immanent in character. However, this is not the same as claiming that organized religion or an understanding of the “sacred” as a “personal God” is the opposite pole of the immanent sacred outlined in this cluster. By contrast, as also shown in Chapter 5, feelings of flow or harmony may be in line with a belief that there is “something” existing beyond this world. The fault line is rather drawn by the sacred of one’s own choice (individual prerogative) and the sacred chosen by others (collective prerogative). Moreover, the “sacred” contextualized through the words and blog text in this cluster might be considered as a “sacred” which prevents chaos by simply keeping the mundane everyday going.
Making space for a ‘religious sacred’ outside religion

The present chapter was intended to address the second objective of this thesis and deal with how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. Therefore, it recognizes that the current ways of analyzing ‘religion’ have been heavily criticized for ignoring religion outside congregations (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013). In line with this criticism, the results of the just presented analysis suggest that the typical themes of associations with “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” revolve very little around the dimensions of religious activity expected by the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. That is, “religion” was not typically associated with discussions concerning the meaning of church membership, church attendance or matters of how the “sacred” should be described. In other words, the dimensions of religious affiliation, practice and belief were not called attention to at all in the ‘cultural realm’ studied. The immediate consequence of this might very well be that something outside the control of religious congregations is typically alluded to when the ‘religious sacred’ comes up for discussion. As a response to these established ways of analyzing ‘religion’, the analysis presented in this chapter identified three separate themes of associations with the word “sacred” in the Blogosphere written in Swedish (n=220 000) (see, table 6.3). These themes can be seen as the result of this study’s attempt to develop new methods (instead of adding new interpretations to established methods like the analysis in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 did) for empirically approaching ‘religiosity’ in sociological studies.

The first theme of association was named the ‘sacred as being saved’. In this theme the “sacred” was discussed as a Christian God invested with the power of salvation. The tone of voice in this theme was Bible-related and the “sacred” was given a transcendent description. This might indicate that even if one’s own beliefs in the “sacred” preferably are distinguished from “religion”, an understanding of the “sacred” as transcendent is present in the ‘cultural realm’. Thus, people would know about this notion of the “sacred” even if they do not accept it as their own beliefs. The other two themes of associations with the “sacred” were, in line with what the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumed, immanent in character. Within the theme called the ‘sacred as moral principles’ the ordering of political principles was discussed. This discussion was not clearly related to the Christian tradition or to churches; however, among the key principles to be valued were the rights of asylum seekers which are principles supported by the former state church. Finally, the “sacred” was also discussed in terms of the ‘sacred as everyday life’ where perfect days were noted. By perfect days I here mean days which the bloggers described themselves to be happy about because they got to do what they desired and everything happened according to their plans. During these days, the bloggers expressed that they felt at ease with
themselves and in harmony with their surroundings. Moreover, there was a sense of self-authority in this theme in that people had the feeling they could choose for themselves what to do. Thus, the “sacred” in this theme seems to relate to the binary concepts of the “sacred” as order, and the “profane” as disorder. In other words, by contrast with the assumption of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, the “sacred” did not relate to the binary concepts of a transcendent description of the “sacred” reality and the immanent description of the “sacred” reality found to be typical in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The syntactic relations between different aspects of the sacred did not reveal a strict difference between “religion” and “alternative spirituality” since the immanent “sacred” was more overarching, related to humans or people in general. Nevertheless, it was still perceived in a broader semantic context of suspicion towards “religion”.

Accordingly, the themes of the “sacred” seemed to be related to different aspects of the “sacred”. The “sacred” as a transcendent reality is present in the theme called ‘being saved’ but it is not juxtaposed with holistic or immanent ontologies concerning the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. Instead of conveying a coherent system-of-beliefs at the level of a world-view, the themes concern that which is more near at hand. This also means that the forms of the “sacred” discussed in the themes are not self-explanatory, clearly separate, or challenging for each other. One and the same person can easily use all three meanings of the “sacred” depending on what the person wants to say and, in what context.

The finding of combinable notions of the “sacred” rather than opposing notions of the same is noteworthy in several respects. Here I am going to mention two. First, the analysis conducted in this chapter was based on “organic data” (cf., Groves 2011) in the form of blog posts written for other purposes than research. As “organic data” the content of the blog posts cannot be generalized to a preset population or geographical area. The sampling procedure did not involve any form of probabilistic sampling common for “designed data” (cf., Groves 2011) within survey research. The claim of generalization was therefore set to a ‘cultural realm’ exemplified by a case of “societal conversation” (cf., Besecke 2005) which was assumed to shape the typical meanings of words at a collective and cultural level. In this chapter, the ‘cultural realm’ was assumed to be held together by the use of the same language, Swedish. Thus, as weblogs were commonly read by people living in Sweden at the time of the data collection (e.g. 1998-2009) and freely accessible blogs are typically (e.g. Rasmussen 2008) written to be understood by a larger audience, the most typical themes related to the sacred are assumed to be known within the specific ‘cultural realm’ in question. This generalization, however, cannot be taken to say anything about how many of the people living in Sweden accept the different notions of the “sacred” conveyed by the Blogosphere. Rather, it casts light on the fact that immanent descriptions of the “sacred” underlying a holistic understanding of
the naturals relationship to the supernatural are not among the most typical associations. Thus, the dichotomy of transcendent “sacred” versus immanent “sacred” found to be typical expectations of the “sacred” for the research practice examined in Chapter 2 seems not to be applicable to the ‘cultural realm’ analyzed here.

Second, in the previous research on religion in Sweden outlined in Chapter 3, Luckmann’s ([1967]/1974) concept of “invisible religion” was used to understand the long, stable trend of affiliation, belief and practice. More precisely, the use of Luckmann’s concept brought with it a previously not assumed distinction between that which was perceived to be the “mainstream” way of being religious and Christian traditions. By contrast, in the introduction to this chapter, Besecke’s (2005) reading of Luckmann’s concept “invisible religion” was described. In short, Besecke understands “invisible religion” to be: “systems of symbols that meets people in terms of their everyday life” (ibid: 183). Viewed from this perspective, “invisible religion” is acquired and pursued in conversation between people. That is a kind of conversation about religious meaning which most probably goes on in Sweden too, regardless of the “indifference” toward the “religious” which secularization has sometimes been taken to mean for the Swedish context (see, Chapter 3). This type of meaning shaping conversation also takes place at the macro level as “societal conversation” within the cultural dimension. Thus, equipped with the analytical tool provided by Besecke (2005) the meanings found to be attached to the word “sacred” in the Blogosphere can be interpreted as features of “invisible religion”. When this is so, the “invisible religion” in Sweden is not without connection to an understanding of the “sacred” as transcendent reality. This is visible in the theme the ‘sacred as being saved’ (see, table 6.3). It is rather this conglomerate of values attached to how to live life, visible in the theme “everyday life” and how to organize society, visible in the theme the ‘sacred as moral rules’.

Interpreting the findings of this chapter through the lens of the findings from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, there seems to be a recurrent tendency in the material. This tendency is visible in the descriptions of efforts to distance oneself and one’s own beliefs from ‘religion’. In Chapter 4, the ‘religious mainstream’ was found to relate to the religious in ways that could be imagined were not always considered ideal from the perspective of the expectations that religion have on their adherers. This convention sat well with describing the “sacred” as “some sort of spirit or life force”, which was suggested to be maintained by something outside congregations. Going deeper into how people talk about the ‘religious sacred’ it was shown (in Chapter 5) that expressing individual prerogatives in matters of religious beliefs was more important than how, exactly, the origin and nature of the sacred was described. An underlying reason for this seemed to be a wish not to conflate one’s own beliefs with a religion of past times understood to be paternalistic. Against this background, the finding in the present chapter (table 6.1) - that
the word “religion” stands for an undesired relation to politics, oppression of personal freedoms and excessive use of violence in the Blogosphere - can be situated in a broader frame of reference. This frame of reference seems to suggest that the “sacred”, in order to be a legitimate source of significance, needs to be decoupled from the term ‘religion’. It is in the aftermath of these circumstances that sayings starting with “I’m not religious, but”, which are popular in the Swedish contexts, have cultural relevance.
This thesis began with the claim that there were assumptions underlying the currently established ways of analyzing religion that where in need of problematization and development. It was arguably so, because the same assumptions had been criticized for years without any major changes in the ways in which research was conducted. Practically, this meant that questions asked in survey questionnaires about ‘religion’ have not been changed much at all for more than 30 years. Conceptually, which is also the level at which this thesis is focused, this meant that the underlying assumptions had prevailed for how to analyze and interpret the phenomenon called “religion”. Therefore, the thesis aimed to contribute to the ongoing critical discussion on how to analyze “religion” sociologically. For these purposes the following two objectives were defined:

I To problematize the established ways of analyzing ‘religion’ in sociological studies.

II To develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies.

Although the overall aim of the thesis focused on assumptions underlying ways to analyze ‘religion’ at a conceptual level, there were empirical findings from each of the studies conducted to address this aim that were worthy of a summary of their own. In this concluding chapter, this summary of empirical findings will be provided first. This summary is followed by a discussion of what I take to be the three major points of the thesis. Two of these are of a theoretical nature and will be discussed under the headings: ‘Religion’ and ‘Religiosity’ – On the analytical value of ‘cultural meaning’ and Towards a ‘sociology of the sacred’? The third point takes the form of a Concluding remark formulated as a clarification of what ‘religiosity’ in a country such as Sweden might imply.

A summary of the empirical findings
In the introduction to this thesis, its content was divided into three parts headed by the keywords ‘revisit’, ‘reconsider’ and ‘explore’. Since this
structure was kept throughout the presentation of findings, the present summary of the empirical findings will continue to use the keywords revisit, reconsider and explore for its structure.

The first part was made up of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. These chapters ‘revisited’ a research practice (i.e. shared ideas about what constitutes justified ways of doing research) and a research site (i.e. a geographical area from which data is collected). The research site at issue (i.e. Sweden) was by previous research (e.g. Heelas 2007; Inglehart and Baker 2000) found to be deviant and paradoxical. Even though these chapters shared a focus of looking back and problematizing the ways in which ‘religion’ has been analyzed in sociological studies (that is to say, the first objective of this thesis), the chapters differed in their scope and conclusions. While the scope in Chapter 2 was the underlying assumptions of the established research practice called *Religions in Dimensions*, the scope in Chapter 3 was the implementation of the same underlying assumption to the work conducted at a specific research site, namely Sweden. This means that whilst the conclusions in Chapter 2 focused upon identifying the most central assumptions underlying ‘Religion in Dimensions’ and the prevailing implications of these assumptions in ‘contemporary research orientations’, Chapter 3 focused upon identifying in what way ‘Religion in Dimensions’ changed how research was conducted and data was interpreted in Sweden. In other words, Chapter 2 problematized how ‘religion’ has been analyzed at a principal and cross-national level while Chapter 3 gave the problematization a concrete and localized context.

Against this background it can be specified that the established research practice discussed in Chapter 2 as ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was understood to be of American origin. Specifically, the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was the result of interpretative maneuvers conducted by an American research milieu publishing from about the end of the 1940s to the 1970s. This established practice was characterized by its most enduring debate, namely how to define “religion”. This debate was found to stipulate two strategies for defining religion as in principle incompatible with each other. On the one side, substantive definitions of “religion” place an emphasis on transcendent descriptions of the “sacred”. That is, the “sacred” is described as a reality existing in a supernatural world and there is a difference between the supernatural world and the natural world. On the other side, functional definitions treat some immanent descriptions of the “sacred” on a par with transcendent descriptions and hold that these immanent descriptions may be the functionalistic equivalent of a transcendent description of the “sacred”. Examples of immanent descriptions of the “sacred” would then be describing the “sacred” as something which exists in the natural world, transforming the difference between the natural and the supernatural into a holistic relation. However, despite the fact that proponents of both sides of the debate on how to define “religion” have claimed to be in opposition to
each other, the debates as a whole reveal more points of commonality than difference. The commonalities include defining “religion” and its counterparts at the level of belief systems, treating descriptions of the “sacred” as the most central aspect of both “religion” and its counterparts, and assuming that describing the “sacred” as either transcendent or immanent explains behavior. The latter implies that certain beliefs, derived from the abstract and remote level of a belief system, were taken to explain why and how people relate to the religious. Moreover, this line of argumentation implies that the definitional debate started from the expectations which the researchers within the American research milieu imagined that religions’ had of their adherents. Religiosity was accordingly defined as ‘religion at an individual level’. The research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ focused on commitment to “religion” and acceptance of its expectations among individuals. This focus resulted in measurements to quantify the extent of “religion” in terms of the individual’s affiliation, belief and practice since congruence between religions’ expectations and individual behavior was essential for assessing the right amount of “religion” in different parts of the world.

Against these findings, the underlying assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ were understood to be a belief-centered perspective on “religion” narrowed down by a “church-orientated” approach for the practical task of defining the beliefs to center upon. Accordingly, the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was found to promote the same type of assumptions which critics (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013) have described as incapable of analyzing “religion” outside American congregations. In addition, since ‘Religion in Dimensions’ assumes congruence between religion at the level of belief systems and individuals’ ways of relating to the ‘religious’, the assumptions of research practice also fall into what critics have called the "congruence fallacy" (cf., Chaves 2010:2). That is to say that individuals act in accordance with belief systems as if they lived their lives in line with a coherent image of how the supernatural relates to the natural. According to Chaves (2010) and Wuthnow (2011) this type of assumption seems to suggest that people cannot talk with each other and reinterpret ‘religion’ at the level of their own lives.

Taken as a whole, the assumptions underlying the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ appeared to fit quite well with the ongoing critical discussion. Therefore, the unique contribution of Chapter 2 is arguably the analysis of how these assumptions continue to influence present day research. For this analysis, two contemporary research orientations were identified - ‘assessing the extent of religion’ and ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. Jointly, both these research orientations depended on assumptions taken to be central for ‘Religion in Dimensions’. For example, both contemporary research orientations assumed that “religion” can be analytically reduced to a belief in a transcendent “sacred”. Dependent on this assumption, the object in question for the two contemporary research orientations was
found to be ‘religion at an individual level’ or ‘spirituality at an individual level’. Analytically, then, ‘spirituality’ was molded from the same piece of clay as ‘religion’, and was formed as an alternative to ‘religion’ with the same type of structure and characteristics. Compared to most of the critical discussion (e.g. Bender et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2013) on what can be described as the underlying assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, this extension of the analysis to include the consequences of how ‘spirituality’ is analyzed can be viewed as a contribution to an ongoing debate.

Specifically, splitting the contemporary research orientations into ‘assessing the extent of religion’ and ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’ meant revealing that the two orientations basically ask the same research questions: How many individuals accept the belief system descriptions of the “sacred”? And, how many individuals commit to these beliefs by also being affiliated to and regularly practicing different forms of worship? Instead of critically studying whether or not acceptance of certain descriptions of the “sacred” really explain affiliation and practice, this rationale in contemporary research focuses on completely different issues. Heelas’ (1996) emphasis on the correctness of understanding alternative spirituality as a movement that is coherent enough to have a belief system may be seen as an example of this focus on the belief system level. In the light of the analyses conducted in Chapter 2, this ambition of understanding alternative spirituality as a belief system seems to sit with the assumptions that belief systems somehow guarantee religions’ strength in public life. Because without a belief system, beliefs are taken to be of a “private” and, thus, publically insignificant character given the rationale provided by ‘Religion in Dimensions’. That means that if alternative spirituality does not have a belief system of its own, it is taken to be a weaker form of “religion”. Focuses such as this one, on the whereabouts and character of belief systems, seem to set certain expectations on how individuals express “religion”. These expectations give the impression of mainly being about commitment and congruence.

This means that the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, in its original as well as its current forms as contemporary research orientations, overlooks ‘religiosity’. Inspired by Simmel (1955), “religiosity” was understood as the aspects which individuals highlight as the religious. The aspects which are selected by individuals hold ‘cultural meaning’ and may, if typically selected, hold a “cultural power” of legitimizing ways of relating to the religious. If the individual level of religious expression is conceptualized as a commitment to ‘religion at an individual level’, the tensions which may exist between ‘religion as a belief system’ and ‘religiosity’ get lost. This finding, that ‘religiosity’ continues to be a blind spot of current research, was taken to support the analytical strategies applied in Chapter 4-6.
In Chapter 3, the scope shifted from the principle consequences of the underlying assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, to the consequences resulting from importing and implementing this research practice outside the United States. In other words, Chapter 3 problematized how ‘religion’ was analyzed by looking at a research site that the established research practice seemed to find extreme. This research site was Sweden. Sweden appears to be extreme from the perspective of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ since data from this region does not fit expectations derived from its underlying assumptions. This has generated a wide range of incompatible conclusions on “religion” in Sweden. The country has, at the same time, been described as one of the world’s most secularized nations (e.g. Inglehart and Baker 2000; Therborn 2012) and the leader of a spiritual revolution of alternative beliefs (e.g. Heelas 2007). However, as the analysis in Chapter 3 showed, both of these wide-ranging conclusions were based on data which show remarkable stability over time. Church attendance, for example, which is often used as a form of “common currency” (cf., Bruce 2011a:15) when measuring the extent of “religion” in countries, has been notably low for more than a century in Sweden. This means that the drastic conclusions on advanced secularization or spiritual revival were not based on any sudden decline or increase, but on a pattern that was stable throughout time in Sweden. Similar observations seem to be possible for religious affiliation (which for the period analyzed was a trait of the vast majority) and religious belief (which most people living in Sweden seem to have described in comparable terms such as “some sort of spirit”, “something” or “some form of divine principle” for a very long time).

Two results were made visible through observing the differences between, on the one hand, the underlying assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, and, on the other hand, the long stable trends of religious affiliation, beliefs and practice together with how this pattern was explained in Sweden. First, a main assumption of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ - that of analyzing commitment to ‘religion at an individual level’ instead of religiosity - was already prevalent in the domestic research discussion when ‘Religion in Dimensions’ was imported. Among other things, this meant that ‘religion’ was already being investigated as a multidimensional phenomenon at this research site and not one dimension at a time, as Glock and Stark (1965) argued was the case in the US prior to their multidimensional operationalization of “religion”. Moreover, it meant that what churches were assumed to expect from their adherents was in focus for research and not how people between themselves discussed “religion”. Second, the comparison with the long stable trends in data made it clear that the drastic conclusion that Sweden was one of the world’s most secularized countries came in the aftermath of importing ‘Religion in Dimensions’. Prior to this import, the domestic research site was typically interested in describing the group which remained members of the state church but did not attend its services. The
domestic research milieu was, one could say, focused on what Merton (1968) has called sociological theories of the middle range. After the import of ‘Religion in Dimensions’, however, the conclusions became bolder and more far reaching because they could not be combined with each other and because they were generalized for cross-national comparisons. The grand theoretical package of understanding “religion” as a belief system was systemized and the standardized measurements of “religion” that followed left little room for local variation in how beliefs are expressed.

In Chapter 3 it was also concluded that the pattern of religious affiliation, belief and practice was stable despite the fact that regulations on individual expressions of religiosity have changed dramatically over the last 100 years. At the turn of the 20th century, for example, people living in Sweden were not permitted to be without religious affiliation and, as a result, everybody had, officially, a religious affiliation. The king approved a small number of congregations to which one could be affiliated if one was not of the Lutheran faith. Adherents of the state church were nevertheless not permitted to enter non-Christian congregations and only a couple of decades had passed since dissidents from the Lutheran state doctrine were forced to migrate. Non-religious affiliations were permitted in 1952 when a law was passed allowing people to opt out of the state church without entering any new religious organization. In the case of church attendance, which has been irregular for the entire time-period investigated, there were laws on obligatory communion in the 19th century. These laws did not result in regular weekly attendance. There were also regulations on church attendance but these can be described as recommendations and guidelines rather than strictly formulated laws. As a result, church attendance was not regulated in the same way as religious affiliation, and the numbers for attendance were much lower than the numbers for affiliation. Religious beliefs were also regulated by far-reaching attempts to socialize people living in Sweden to accept what was perceived to be the correct interpretation of Christendom. For example, the compulsory school system was confessional and there were laws against heresy in public. These regulations were kept until the 1960s-1970s when school was made non-confessional and the laws on heresy were dropped. Taken as a whole, this means that the stable trend of religious affiliation, belief and practice somehow survived radical changes in the ways in which the surrounding society regulated individuals’ expression of religion.

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Drawing on the insights of the findings from part one of the thesis, the second part set out to reconsider the conceptual meaning of the ‘religious mainstream’ and the ‘religious sacred’. These reconsiderations were required to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies and are, thus, related to the second objective of this thesis. In detail, at issue here are Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. These two chapters differed in scope as the former made use of data collected for ‘assessing the extent of
religion’ while the latter made use of data collected for ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. Specifically, Chapter 4 was based on European Value Study (EVS) data collected in Sweden between the years 1982-2010. Chapter 5 was based on interview data collected as part of a Swedish follow-up study of the British Kendal project (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), understood to be one of the most prominent examples of research within the research orientation discussed as ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’ in Chapter 2. In other words, the chapters made use of data that could be categorized in both the ‘contemporary research orientations’ outlined in Chapter 2. Furthermore, while the analysis in Chapter 4 was based on survey data, the analysis in Chapter 5 was based on interview data. This meant that the analysis in Chapter 4 was described as a new interpretation of a form of data often used to ‘assess the extent of religion’. The analysis in Chapter 5, by contrast, was described as a new analysis of a form of data often used to ‘assess the extent of spirituality’. Due to this difference in scope, the chapters also differed in the type of questions which the analyses intended to answer. It is to these matters which the present summary now will turn.

Chapter 4 was informed by the tendency within the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ to start with “religion” at the level of belief systems. Because of this tendency, what was or was not considered ‘mainstream’ was defined from the perspective of religious institutions’ acceptance or dismissal of secular institutions in their surroundings. Since “religion” was assumed to be mainstream from this perspective while “spirituality” was assumed to be alternative and in tension with society (through its assumed dependency on cults, sects and new religious movements), the transcendent descriptions of the “sacred” were expected to be mainstream while the immanent descriptions of the “sacred” were alternative or marginal. For a research site such as Sweden, where most people described their beliefs in ways considered to be “alternative” according to the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, questions arise concerning how to interpret this finding. Therefore, by contrast to this established notion of the ‘religious mainstream’, it was proposed in Chapter 4 that the ‘mainstream’ can be interpreted in line with the most typical ways of relating to the religious over time. For Sweden, as established in Chapter 3, this mainstream behavior appeared to be characterized by remaining religiously affiliated while not practicing regularly, and expressing belief in “some sort of spirit or life force”. However, since the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ operated under the principle of the more the merrier, the relations between religious affiliation, belief and practice were seldom investigated in their own right.

Equipped with this new understanding of the ‘religious mainstream’ as that which the majority consider to be the religious, the analysis in Chapter 4 studied how religious affiliation and practice, on the one side, relates to religious belief, on the other side. That is to say, can being among the ins of the ‘religious mainstream’ in terms of affiliation and practice explain how one
chooses to describe one’s beliefs? For the purposes of addressing this stipulation, five comparative categories were created. The construction of these categories was further supported by an analysis of how the long trends of affiliation, belief and practice appear in the most recent data. This analysis showed that both religious affiliation and religious practice are in decline, while the level of describing beliefs in “alternative” ways remains stable. Accordingly, it was suggested that the internal relations between these three dimensions must have changed. Because of this, the five comparative categories were defined as: the ‘old mainstream’ consisting of Church of Sweden members that seldom attend church; the ‘established mainstream’ consisting of Church of Sweden members who never attend church; and the ‘new mainstream’ consisting of the growing subgroup which do not have a religious affiliation. By contrast, there were also the ‘old margins’ defined as Church of Sweden members who attend church regularly and the ‘established margins’, defined as people who are affiliated with minority religions in Sweden. All in all, these comparative categories were justified on the basis of the long trends detected in Chapter 3 and the extended analysis conducted in Chapter 4 of the trends that have most recently appeared.

The main result of the analysis can be summarized into tendency that the ‘old mainstream’ maintained beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” back in 1982. Over the years analyzed, this tendency shifted, and in 2010 beliefs in “some sort of spirit or life force” were almost equally maintained by the ‘old’, the ‘established’ and the ‘new’ mainstream. Looking at the change that has taken place within the group of the ‘new mainstream’ it seems that a larger proportion of this group expressed beliefs in ‘some spirit or life force’ in 2010 compared with 1982. One conclusion drawn from these results was that it appears that people living in Sweden opt out of the Church of Sweden while maintaining their beliefs. That is to say, the ‘mainstream’ ways of describing beliefs remain stable, notwithstanding this group’s explicit relation to the Church of Sweden. It does not seem possible for this result to be explained away by differences caused by demographical factors such as gender or age, since no systematic differences with regard to these factors were found. The implication of this finding was said to be that something outside the walls of the congregations in Sweden has an impact on how religious beliefs are typically expressed. That is, how beliefs are expressed might be explained by mainstreaming - the adaption to what the majority take to be conventional and normal in these matters.

Chapter 5 built on this suggestion, that typical ways of talking about the religious may explain how beliefs are expressed. It thereafter focused on one of the most central assumptions of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, namely that the ‘religious sacred’ is a transcendent description of the “sacred”. By contrast, it was argued in Chapter 5 that the aspects of the “sacred” which are considered religious by people may differ from this assumption. The understanding of the ‘religious sacred’ from the perspective of
‘religions as belief systems’ may therefore differ from the ‘religious sacred’ derived from observations of religiosity.

With this said, the analysis in Chapter 5 made use of analytical strategies for theorizing even though an established research practice exists to study the phenomenon in question. In this case, this meant perceiving theoretical concepts as the outcome of the distinctions which the ins and the outs of a group actually use to understand the difference between these groups. For the analysis, the ins were defined as the ‘old’, ‘established’ and ‘new’ mainstreams, while the outs were represented by the ‘old’ and the ‘established’ margins. This meant that the comparative categories constructed for the analysis in Chapter 4 were reused for a new analysis. Because the data used for the analysis was collected in order to follow up the Kendal project (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), the ‘established margins’ were supplemented by interviews with persons committed to holistic or alternative spiritual movements. The analytical strategy of theorizing even though an established research practice exists also entailed consciously choosing interview extracts to analyze which would upset the thinking that the ‘religious sacred’ needs to be defined as a transcendent description of the “sacred”. In other words, the central assumption proposed by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

Bringing these analytical strategies together, the analysis seemed to point to an understanding of the ‘religious sacred’ as beliefs which are subjectively, personally and voluntarily chosen. This focus did not really rule out the possibility of the “sacred” being of a transcendent nature. Instead, the emphasis was placed on making sure one’s beliefs were perceived as a personal choice. A salient topic accompanying this effort to make sure that it was recognized that one’s beliefs were personally chosen appeared to be about avoiding a ‘religion of past times’. The ‘religion of past times’ was perceived to be involuntary and paternalistic by the people interviewed. As a response to this ‘religion of past times’ the interviewees were cautious in explaining that their beliefs should not be associated with the type of ‘religion’ which, they argued, we should do away with. This tendency was found among the ‘mainstreams’ as well as the ‘margins’ (here represented by those who attended church often and alternative spiritual activities regularly). At the same time, however, the beliefs which were described as subjectively chosen were harmonized with what was perceived as good behavior of others. That is, ‘good behavior’ in the eyes of the beholder. Also, since there seemed to be a norm to choose for oneself what to believe, this behavior cannot in essence be treated as a “privatized” act carried out by individuals only guided by their own subjective intuition. By contrast, if everyone is doing the same thing, there is probably some form of social control that operates in the context and influences the behavior observed. In the present thesis, this collective side was discussed in terms of ‘cultural meaning’ and “cultural power”. Following this, the main suggestion from these findings
can be described in terms of support for the idea that there is something in how people talk about religion and the religious which influences how beliefs are expressed. This communication is by no means restricted to what is said at church services but seems to be of a more far-reaching character. Communication at the level which Besecke (2005) has described as “societal communication” where people inside and outside church talk, discuss and negotiate the meaning of the “sacred” might be of interest for addressing this suggestion.

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The third and final part of this thesis intended to map out the previously unexplored territory of “societal conversations” on how people talk about religion-related matters. This meant that the third part continued to address the second objective of the thesis - to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached. This third part differed from the previous part in that it did not make use of methods established within the contemporary research orientations ‘assessing the extent of religion’ and ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. Instead, a new method was introduced for summarizing the aspects of the religious which people typically mention in more wide-ranging communication than typically used before. The usefulness of this method was tried out on a sample from the Blogosphere written in Swedish on religion-related topics. The Blogosphere, understood to be a collection of web pages typically written in the first person, with the newest entry at the top of the page, can be viewed as previously unexplored territory - at least if the amount of terrain explored by the analysis is considered herein.

In detail, the analysis utilized in Chapter 6 was based on Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) (e.g. Landauer et al. 2007) which is a statistical technique for representing the most typical associations between words in a collection of texts. This statistical representation was used to cluster the most typical associations to the words “religion”, “spirituality” and the “sacred” into ‘themes of associations’. The term ‘themes of associations’ meant a coherent way of discussing a topic that was visible in the words and arguments typically used in discussion. It was argued that the ‘themes of associations’ hold “cultural power” within the ‘cultural realm’ (of which the Blogosphere is an example). The Blogosphere cannot be generalized geographically, since its participants, in the form of readers and writers, can be people living in Sweden or elsewhere. What connects these people was instead understood to be the capability to understand the Swedish language, and the community which arises from sharing a language was discussed in terms of a ‘cultural realm’. Associations which are typical within a ‘cultural realm’ were understood to set the tone for how things are typically understood in the same realm. Less typical associations therefore need to be explained with the typical as the point of reference to be understood. In this way, the typical can also be discussed in terms of the ‘mainstream’, while things outside these typical associations represent alternatives to this ‘mainstream’.
The focus of the analysis was what the word “sacred” (in Swedish “helig”) stands for in the Blogosphere. This analysis was backed up by analyses of what the words “religion” and “spirituality” stand for in the same arena for communication. The analyses of “religion” and “spirituality” were placed in the background since these analyses jointly showed that the “sacred” is not associated with “religion” and “spirituality” at all. Instead, “religion” was found to be at the center of the three ‘themes of associations’ named ‘religion’s relation to politics’, ‘consequences of religion’ and ‘pre-suppositions about Islam and Muslims’. Within these themes of association, “religion” was discussed as something that should not be mixed with politics, something for which people run the risk of being discriminated against, and something closely linked with Islam and prejudice against people associated with Islam and Muslims in Sweden. In none of these themes were the “sacred” or even beliefs discussed in any noteworthy way. “Spirituality”, by contrast, was discussed in themes named ‘spirituality’s relation to churches’, ‘spirituality’s relation to religion’ and ‘spirituality as lived emotions’. Some of the discussions here, such as ‘spirituality’s relation to churches’ and ‘spirituality’s relation to religion’ resembled the argument about a ‘religion of past times’ documented in the interviews analyzed in Chapter 5. In these themes of associations, “religion” and “church” appeared to be equated with collective prerogative and a paternalistic claim of power and should therefore be distinct from “spirituality”. Moreover, and also in line with the findings of Chapter 5, “spirituality” was discussed as experiences. For example, in the theme called ‘spirituality as lived emotions’, inner states of calmness and inner sources of knowledge were discussed as “spirituality”. This was taken to indicate that even though the “sacred” was not explicitly discussed, the ways which the bloggers related to “religion” and “spirituality” shared points of commonality with what was detected in Chapter 5.

Nevertheless, the lack of explicit discussion on the “sacred” in relation to “religion” and “spirituality” justified paying special attention to the semantic analysis of the “sacred” in itself. The “sacred” was also found to be discussed in three separate ‘themes of associations’ named ‘the sacred as being saved’, ‘the sacred as moral rules’ and ‘the sacred as everyday life’. When the “sacred” was discussed as ‘being saved’ the bloggers typically discussed the promise of Christian salvation. By contrast, with the theme ‘sacred as moral rules’ the bloggers typically drew on political principles and expressed their preferences for the order in which these principles should be prioritized. Finally, in the theme where the “sacred” was discussed as ‘everyday life’, the bloggers wrote about moments of happiness, of being in charge of one’s life, and of being able of do what one wanted in everyday life.

Based on these ‘themes of associations’ it was concluded that on one hand, there is no other description of the “sacred” explicitly discussed than the transcendent description visible in the ways in which bloggers discuss the promise of salvation. If the results are interpreted with this specific find-
ing alone in focus, the “sacred” seems to be understood in line with what the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ conceptualized to be the “religious sacred”. However, on the other hand, the “sacred” was also understood in terms of ‘moral principles’ and ‘everyday life’. The emphasis given to ‘moral principles’ and ‘everyday life’ adds nuances to the understanding of the “sacred”. At one level of the interpretation of these themes, the topic discussed might come across as sheer analogies of the “sacred”. That is to say, these themes represent understandings of the “sacred” that have lost all contact with what is taken to be the religious. However, at another level and in the light of how “religion” and “spirituality” were discussed, the ‘sacred as moral rules’ and the ‘sacred as everyday life’ might highlight how the response to what is perceived as the unwanted ‘religion of past times’ is broader. If interpreted against this background, these themes seem to suggest that the things which people stand up for morally in politics and take pleasure in during everyday life, matter to them. These things are immanent but not in opposition to understanding the “sacred” as a transcendent description of reality. In fact, religions, churches and other stakeholders have a long history of interest in moral principles and people’s daily lives. Thus, the findings on the “sacred” in Chapter 6 support reconsidering the ‘religious sacred’ as something which is multifaceted rather than used in a dichotomy with other descriptions of the “sacred” at a belief system level.

The studies in this thesis were broadly organized with two objectives: to problematize how ‘religion’ has been analyzed, and to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be empirically approached in sociological studies. If the answers to these two objectives are compared, ‘religion’ appears to have been analyzed at the level of the individual but from the perspective of a belief system. As a result, commitment and congruence with something as remote, abstract and coherent as a belief system was expected by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. By contrast, the initial findings on ‘religiosity’ presented in this thesis seem to suggest that ‘religiosity’ has to do with that which is closer. Importantly, this does not mean that it is some weaker form of ‘religion’. Quite the opposite, ‘religiosity’ has its own form of “cultural power” that has an impact in people’s lives. This is how, for example, the value of personal choice in matters of religious beliefs actually affects how the mainstream understands the ‘religious sacred’. Given this comparison, it can be argued that future research might benefit from recognizing that there are no purely generic definitions of “religion” since “religion” is always understood in a context giving “religion” its meaning. “Religion” does not exist in a vacuum, which the generic ambition of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ seems to suggest. Rather the phenomenon is continually related to criticism, approval or modifications as an aspect of people’s ‘religiosity’.
One major point which can be made from considering the results of this thesis concerns a shift in analytical approach when analyzing “religion”. In order to draw valid sociological conclusions, investigations of religion are often advised to begin with a definition of “religion” (e.g. Bruce 2011b; Dobbelaere 2011). Studies inspired by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ tend to start by defining “religion” as a system of beliefs. The belief system level for defining “religion” seems to be prevalent regardless of whether “religion” is defined functionally – allowing for immanent descriptions of the “sacred” – or substantially – stressing that the ‘religious sacred’ generically is of transcendent origin and nature. This tendency for defining “religion” as a belief system implies that congruence is assumed between the belief system level and the way in which individuals express beliefs and relate to the religious. These expectations of congruence are of the kind which Chaves (2010) has called “suspicious” (ibid:2) because empirical findings tend to prove them to be wide off the mark. Since empirical results tend to show less stringency than the generic ambition holds for Shils’s (1957) words on the same matter as Chaves (2010) might be remembered. Shils (1957) wrote that what sociologists call the:

Belief system of a society can be lived up to only partially, fragmentally, intermittently and in approximate ways. (Shils 1957:139)

For Shils the reason for this was that people are not, in general, implicit philosophers or theologians “with a coherent image of cosmos and society and a hierarchy of standards of preference” (ibid: 130). Instead, people make use of what is near at hand when making sense of what is going on in the world and happening to them. Regardless of this time-worn criticism, the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, in conjunction with its expectations of congruence between the belief system level and individual expressions of the religious, continues to dominate the ways in which “religion” is analyzed sociologically. Among other places, this tendency is visible in the ways which “religion” and its counterparts typically are defined – as belief systems in tension with and opposition to each other.

One consequence of the focus on belief systems for defining “religion” is the neglect of Simmel’s (1955) distinction between “religion” (understood as a remote and abstract belief system) and “religiosity” (understood as the patterns of meaning which emerge from what people typically consider as religious). That is to say, a distinction which systematically places emphasis on the all but self-explanatory relationship between what belief systems hold to be religious or sacred and what people invest with religious sacredness. By placing emphasis on the difference between “religion” and “religiosity”
in this way, we may use the ‘religious’ as an adjective, to scrutinize the ‘inside’ of both “religion” and “religiosity”. Here, ‘inside’ means the aspects of “religion” and “religiosity” to which attention is typically drawn. In this way, the ‘inside’ can be understood as the ‘culturally meaningful’ aspects of “religion” and “religiosity”.

There is a current research orientation which can be called “lived religion”, advocated by among others Ammerman (2006; 2013), Bender (2003) and McGuire (2008), which focuses on aspects of how “religion” is internalized and acted upon in everyday life by those actively engaged in community life. This research orientation was not mentioned in Chapter 2 because it does not depend on the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, like the research orientations ‘assessing the extent of religion’ and ‘assessing the extent of spirituality’. Rather, in conjunction with the approach to empirical analysis in this thesis, the research orientation of “lived religion” also stumbles in front of the basic assumptions which the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ represents. McGuire (2008), for instance, tells about this type of straggling experience when she comments on the issues she takes to be “what scholars nowadays think of as definitive of ‘real’ religion” (ibid: 21). The issues listed by McGuire include the location and nature of the “sacred” (in other words what in this thesis has been discussed as a focus on descriptions of the “sacred”). She also stresses that the focus on the individual is viewed from the perspective of the organization, belief system or overarching tradition, making the problem at hand how individuals should act to be religiously “in good standards” (ibid: 21). In the terms used in this thesis that would be the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’’ focus on ‘religion at an individual level’.

This means that the research orientation which can be called “lived religion” identifies the same problems with the established research practice as found in this thesis. In addition, at first glance, the analytical approach suggested by the research orientation “lived religion” also seems to be in line with the analytical strategy proposed in this thesis since they both focus on individuals’ expressions in their own right. However, there are also differences. The research orientation of “lived religion” makes not the same distinction between “religion” and “religiosity”. When starting to examine research sites such as the Swedish one, the approach taken becomes problematic because there is not that much “lived religion” to be found since most people do not see themselves as having any “religion”. As a result, only the margins of religious life are open for the ethnographical enquiries of the kind which the research orientation “lived religion” has become famous for. Setting the focus to “religiosity” therefore implies broadening the scope at this research site and allowing a larger set of methods to be used. In other words, this builds on the work which is presented within what can be called the research orientation “lived religion” but modifies it to include that which has no pre-given relation to “religion”.

225
The point of broadening the analytical strategy to focus on ‘religiosity’ might be useful for reconsidering the analytical use of concepts such as the ‘religious mainstream’ and the ‘religious sacred’. As documented in Chapter 2, for the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ the ‘religious mainstream’ was conceptualized according to whether or not religions recognized the secular institutions of their surroundings. Against the backdrop of distinguishing between “religion” and “religiosity”, the ‘religious mainstream’ was re-conceptualized in Chapter 4 in line with what the majority of people did in terms of relating to the religious. In other words, the ‘religious mainstream’ was re-conceptualized in line with a local version of “religiosity”. This, in turn, was used in a new interpretation of survey data collected under the influence of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’.

Furthermore, in addition to making space for re-conceptualizing the ‘religious mainstream’ the focus on ‘cultural meaning’ was utilized in order to enhance text analysis. First, in Chapter 5, this analytical approach was used for a small set of texts (n=11 interviews). Second, in Chapter 6, the same analytical approach was used on an analysis of a very extensive set of texts (n=220000 blog posts on religion-related content). Starting with the idea that both these sets of texts were cases of “religiosity” rather than “religion”, the ‘cultural meanings’ identified as being ascribed to the ‘religious sacred’ in these data materials were used to problematize the assumptions of ‘Religion in Dimensions’ on the same concept. That is to say, it was shown that descriptions of the “sacred” plays a minor role in the ‘cultural meaning’ of the “sacred” since “cultural power” is invested with distancing oneself against what is perceived to be “religion”. As a consequence, importance was placed on subjective, personal aspects when choosing beliefs. Since there value was repeatedly placed in the personal choice, this choice seemed to be part of a pattern of “religiosity” rather than something without collective overtones.

Since the analytical process described here is introduced at a time when survey research faces some extra demanding challenges due to declining response rates, the strategy might be abstracted even further and generalized beyond the field of sociology of religion. In the spirit of Mills’ ([1959]/2000) “sociological imagination”, sociology needs to contribute that quality of mind which addresses the relationship between empirical observation and theory. Starting with the approach of ‘cultural meaning’ may serve as a link between empirical observation and theory. If this is done, representativeness and generalization can be discussed in terms of ‘cultural realms’ bounded by the use of the same language or a shared experience of typical behavior in relation to the object of study. Importantly, a ‘cultural realm’ cannot always be equated with a geographical area or a predefined population. That is, the standard ways of guaranteeing representativeness and generalization for surveys is altered with this analytical approach. However, results obtained by using the ‘cultural meanings’ approach, identifying aspects of a phenom-
enon typical of a ‘cultural realm’, can be combined with results from surveys resting on random sampling techniques and geographical representativeness for generalization. It is in this type of combination of methods that the analytical value of ‘cultural meaning’ finds a more general methodological usefulness, beyond the empirical scope addressed herein.

Towards a “Sociology of the sacred”?

Whereas the argument just outlined advocated a shift in the analytical approach from “religion” to “religiosity”, the argument to be presented here is intended to extend the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This extension starts with the observation of the prevailing tendency within the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ to assume that “religion” basically is belief-centered and, that religious beliefs are about descriptions of the “sacred”. Accordingly, these assumptions are not necessarily multidimensional as the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ has suggested, but hierarchically ordered as these assumptions one-sidedly highlight certain pre-defined ways of describing the “sacred”. Because of this tendency to equate “religion” with the “sacred”, the sociology of religion can, perhaps, be rephrased to “sociology of the sacred”. To expand the sociological study of religion in this direction, however, would require a wider interpretation of how the “sacred” relates to other conceptual categories.

Scrutinizing the classical sociological literature on the “sacred” (e.g. Durkheim [1912]/2001, Eliade 1977, Otto 1958, James [1902]/1997) commonly referred to by sociologists of religion, it is notable that a wide range of binary concepts are present in this body of work. For Durkheim ([1912]/2001) the “sacred” is collectively defined as that which the religious community is centered upon. The opposite, the “profane”, is thus that which is not recognized by the collective as the “sacred”; it is the particular stance of a single individual. In Durkheim’s ([1912]/2001) writing the main idea is that the “sacred” is transcendent and above the reality of single individuals or groups of individuals. The transcendence of the “sacred” is also given a supernatural description in Durkheim’s ([1912]/2001) terminology, which is a description also found in the work of Eliade (1977) and Otto (1958). Thus, an ontological approach to the “sacred” can be derived from these classical texts where the sacred is defined by descriptions of the universe as divided into a “natural” and a “supernatural” world. The binary twin of an ontologically defined “sacred” is an immanently defined “sacred”, a “sacred” without any references to a supernatural world.

However, if Durkheim’s idea that the “sacred” is collectively defined is considered, it can be argued that the idea does not necessarily refer to the ontology of the “sacred” but to the epistemology of the “sacred” (cf., Lynch 2012). James’ ([1902]/1997) attempt to theorize the “sacred” can be read in
line with this, in terms of epistemology rather than ontology. When defining the personal branch of “religion”, James chooses to stress the:

feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. (James [1902]/1997: 31)

By defining the personal branch of “religion” in this way, James ([1902]/1997) aims to point out elements which “moral pure and simple does not contain” (ibid: 30). The difference between James’ “personal branch of religion” and “moral pure and simple” lies in the reference to the divine; however, he is careful to point out that the word “divine” should not be defined too narrowly. That is, James advocates avoiding narrowing definitions of the “divine” into descriptions of a transcendent reality such as a God and underlines that an abstract idealism can also be thought of as the “divine”. As a consequence, James ([1902]/1997) stresses that the transcendence of the “sacred” does not need to take ontological form but it also has an epistemological side to it. That is to say, in the theorizing of Durkheim and James there exist, simultaneously, a “sacred” defined as a transcendent ontology, and a “sacred” defined by how it is possible to have knowledge about the “sacred”. These two related aspects of the “sacred” may be understood as related; however, they also differ because they relate to different conceptual categories.

When Berger ([1969]/1990) reads Durkheim, Eliade and Otto for the highly influential book *The Sacred Canopy*, two generalizations in the form of binary concepts appear which recur in the sociological discussion on the “sacred”. After stating that “religion”, to him, is “the human enterprise which a sacred cosmos is established” (ibid: 25) he elaborates his social constructivist starting point by underlining the following characteristics of the “sacred”: The “sacred” is an invested “quality” which may be attributed to a range of “natural or artificial objects, to animals, or to men, or to the objectivities of human culture” (ibid:25). The word “objectivities” here signals Berger’s use of a social constructive terminology. This signal is important as he also states that the “sacred” is a quality of a “mysterious and awesome power”; however, the mode of studying this “sacred” is the immanent world of human language and thought. In principle terms, Berger juxtaposes what can be called a transcendent epistemology’ with an ‘immanent epistemology’. Going further with this definition of the “sacred”, Berger underlines that at one level the antonym to the “sacred” is the “profane”. Here, the word “profane” means “the absence of sacred status” (ibid: 26) which reserves for the “sacred” the definition of being that which “sticks out”, and Berger writes: “The routines of everyday life are profane unless, so to speak, proven otherwise” (ibid: 26). In this there is a distinction which sits well with an ontological approach to the “sacred”, namely that the “sacred” should not be
studied in the mundane everyday context but in relation to specific occasions (e.g. Sunday services, rituals such as baptism et cetera) (see, for example Glock & Stark 1965). On a deeper level, Berger ([1969]/1990) views the “sacred” as an antonym to “chaos”. In this sense, the “sacred” is understood as “man’s ultimate shield against the terror of anomie” (ibid: 26). Accordingly he suggests that losing one’s sense of purpose in life, or, in Berger’s words “to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness” (ibid: 26-27) is the opposite pole of the “sacred”. Put differently, the binary concept to the “sacred” in this sense can be understood as disorder (the loss of a meaningful life) and isolation (the loss of a feeling of belonging). Understood in this latter sense, the “sacred” can be viewed as the heart of everyday life, the purpose for doing what we do in our mundane, everyday routines.

Any discussion on the uses and understandings of the “sacred” in classical sociological literature inevitably becomes complex since the classics contain a number of layers that can be used for any given interpretation. Let me therefore make clear, through a table, the four binary concepts which I find when scrutinizing the classical literature on this subject (see, table 7.1).

Table 7.1. The four suggested conceptualizations of the “sacred” and the “profane”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The “sacred” stands for…</th>
<th>The “profane” stands for…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcendent ontology</td>
<td>Immanent ontology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendent epistemology</td>
<td>Immanent epistemology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That which ‘sticks out’</td>
<td>The mundane everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful order</td>
<td>Disorder and isolation from the social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistent with the binary concepts put into words in table 7.1 the following examples of conceptual relations for the “sacred” can be outlined: (1) the ‘sacred as transcendent ontology’ vs. the ‘profane as immanent ontology’, (2) the ‘sacred as transcendent epistemology’ (e.g. the collective will) vs. the ‘profane as an particular epistemology’ (e.g. the individual will), (3) the ‘sacred as that which sticks out’ vs. the ‘profane everyday life’, and (4) the ‘sacred as the meaningfulness of everyday order’ vs. the ‘profane as disorder and isolation from the social’. If the findings from Chapter 2 and 3 are recapitulated, it can be argued that the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ most markedly used (1) the ‘sacred as transcendent ontology’ vs. the ‘profane as immanent ontology’.

In the influential operationalization of “religion” provided by Glock and Stark 1965 the binary relations between transcendent and immanent descriptions were in focus. Beyond this point, they only assumed that the transcendent description of the “sacred” explained other aspects of the “sacred”. Consider, for example, the way the survey item about a “personal God” was justified (cf., Glock and Stark ibid: 20). This survey item was not only intended to investigate a transcendent description of the “sacred” but also the
acceptance of a range of other doctrines such as the virgin birth and Christ’s miracles. That is to say, the underlying assumption was that one survey item investigated several aspects of the “sacred” at once without actually studying these other aspects.

If the contrasting example from this thesis is set to the semantic analyses presented in Chapter 6, it can be argued that within ‘religiosity’ almost all of the binary concepts presented in table 7.1 were used. Here, the example of describing the “sacred” as a transcendent reality in the theme of association was called the ‘sacred as being saved’. This understanding of the “sacred” was not juxtaposed with other coherent images of the “sacred” such as a holistic relationship between man, nature and the supernatural. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there was an element of the “sacred” as something which “sticks out” in this theme the ‘sacred as being saved’ which was paralleled in the other two themes by discussions which were more mundane and in that sense “profane”.

By contrast to the theme the ‘sacred as being saved’ there were discussions on moral principles in the theme the ‘sacred as moral rules’ and harmonious and happy life in the theme the ‘sacred as everyday life’. These two latter themes can be linked to the dichotomies shown in table 7.1 as the ‘sacred as meaningful order’ and the ‘profane as disorder’. In the light of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ these are aspects of the “sacred” that are very seldom considered.

Continuing along this path of contrasting typical ‘themes of associations’ of the “sacred” with principle distinctions found in the classical literature on the “sacred” would, perhaps, provide a way to extend the already established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. If future research finds this type of comparison fruitful, a more systematic review than the one presented here of the classical literature on the binary relations of the “sacred” and the “profane” is needed. Moreover, the attempt presented here to generate ‘themes of associations’ needs to be broadened to other sources of communication than the Blogosphere.

Concluding remarks

One of the main conclusions of this thesis is that there exists ‘religiosity’ with “cultural power” in contemporary Sweden. Here, ‘religiosity’ means relating to the religious in ways that are so similar that the outcome sets the standards of what is legitimate and not legitimate when relating to the religious within the Swedish ‘cultural realm’. This conclusion is highlighted because, arguably, it is important information for sociologists trying to understand why and how the religious continues to make a difference in contemporary times. However, it is likely that claiming religiosity to be a part of the Swedish ‘cultural realm’ will be controversial because, as specifically
documented in Chapters 3, 5 and 6, being ascribed a ‘religiosity’ does not sit well with how most people living in Sweden describe themselves or understand their culture. In the theorizing of Tomasson (2002) Sweden became so secular because influential politicians, public intellectuals and researchers took pride in promoting the description of Sweden as the most modern country of them all. The people, of course, did not always agree with this ambition of modernity claimed by those in power. However and importantly, the man in the street might have had reasons of his own to rebut religion. If the findings from Chapter 5 and 6 are recapitulated, religion appears typically to be associated with excessive claims of obligation by the people interviewed and the people writing blogs. Furthermore, this trait of religion (claimed to be salient) seems to justify bringing up memories of a time when people were obliged to learn Luther’s little catechism by heart. It is the shared memory of these past times, irrespective of how correct they are in their details, which gives the man in the street his reasons for resisting any form of ascribed ‘religiosity’.

Take, for example, the ‘themes of associations’ identified with the use of the word “religion” in the Blogosphere in Chapter 6. People writing blogs and participating in the ongoing public debate in Swedish today take “religion” to stand for an (unwanted) relation to politics, a risk factor which might lead to personal discrimination and a gateway to illegitimate use of violence. When “religion” stands for these meanings in the ‘cultural realm’, it is conceivable that people may hesitate in front of being ascribed with a ‘religiosity’. Nevertheless, even if there is a majority consensus on the opinion that “religion” is something which we had better do away with, this opinion also holds “cultural power”. It creates the conditions for how to express oneself about the ‘religious’ while still remaining among the ins of the mainstream. The outs of the mainstream becomes those who are not initiated into what “religion” is typically taken to stand for and, therefore, they are left unprepared for the possibility that their talk of ‘religion’ will be translated to fit the frames of reference of the ‘cultural realm’. How to express oneself about the religious becomes like a shibboleth which the insiders of the mainstream understand but the margins on the outside do not. This is also a reason why, even though it goes against what is popularly assumed, it is important to highlight the prevailing “cultural power” of ‘religiosity’ in Sweden.

Against the backdrop of what sociological studies (e.g. Inglehart and Baker 2000; Pettersson 1988a; Voas 2009) tend to conclude about religion in Sweden, the grounds for finding the claim of religiosity in Sweden controversial may differ from the reasons given by the people actually living in Sweden. Depending on the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ (outlined in Chapter 2), sociological studies have concluded that there is a very small proportion of ‘religion at an individual level’ in this country. Sometimes, the word “religiosity” is used as a synonym for ‘religion at an
individual level’ in the above-mentioned studies. Therefore, it is of the uttermost importance to clarify that “religiosity” defined by what people typically mention as the religious is not used as a synonym for ‘religion at an individual level’ researched by ‘Religion in Dimensions’. In the former case, individuals generate ‘cultural meaning’ in interaction with one another and harmonize this meaning to the social context surrounding the same individuals. By contrast, in the latter case, “religion” at the belief system level explains actions at an individual level and gives these actions their meaning. Therefore, claiming a religiosity in Sweden is not necessarily a negation of previous conclusions but highlights aspects which the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ overlooked.

Furthermore, given the extent to which the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ in general (e.g. Glock and Stark 1965) and its domestic form in Sweden (e.g. Hamberg 2003; Pettersson 1982; Therborn 2012) have produced expectations derived from “religion” at the belief system level, the claim of a religiosity in Sweden may be controversial. The reason for this is that the understanding of religiosity elaborated therein breaks with the principle of defining the ‘religious sacred’ as a description of a transcendent ontology. By contrast, the religiosity here claimed to have “cultural power” continuously reshapes what is taken to be the ‘religious sacred’ within the ‘cultural realm’. Approached from the perspective of belief systems, these processes of reshaping may come across as contradictory and paradoxical. For the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’, “religion” was defined generically and was described as having a transcendent sacred at the center. In the light of these assumptions the findings from Chapter 5 are controversial. Consider, for example, the finding that the legitimate way of relating to the “sacred” appears to be being filled with an individual prerogative yet not ruling out that the “sacred” can exist, so to speak, out there, as a transcendent reality. In other words, elements which fit the belief system description of the ‘religious sacred’ are mixed with elements which do not fit expectations derived from a belief system level. Moreover, the elements which do not fit the expectations derived from belief systems are given priority in the combination of aspects highlighted as the religious. Taken together, this means that the ‘religiosity’ that is claimed to be of importance here breaks with the standard rationale that religion as a belief system explains individuals’ behavior. Moreover, it breaks with the assumption that any deviations from expectations derived from the belief systems should be considered as weak forms of religion. By contrast, from the approach proposed here, it is quite possible that ‘religiosity’, without the support of religion as a belief system, holds “cultural power” which is collective and public.

At stake here might be an example of what Becker (1998) has called “letting the conceptual category define the case” (ibid: 123). In many fields of research, Becker argues, analytical strategies which start with the conceptual
category have been used successfully for constructing grand theoretical claims. However, Becker (1998) writes:

So the strategy of letting the concept define the case accomplishes a lot, but at a price: we don’t see and investigate those aspects of our case that weren’t in the description of the category we started with. The things we leave out, however, comes back to bother us. Whether we include them in our investigation or not, they are still there and continue to operate in the situation we’re studying, almost surely influencing the phenomenon we want to understand. (Becker 1998:124)

Applied to the case of “religion” in Sweden it was documented in Chapter 3 how the (unexpectedly) high rates of, for example religious affiliation and beliefs taken to be alternative and in opposition to the “church-oriented” mainstream have bothered researchers trying to make sense of this research site. In the international and domestic research discussed in that review, recurrent perplexity was found due to how the majority of the people in Sweden related to the religious. Was this large group which remained affiliated while not believing or practicing to be understood as ‘anonymous religious’ (e.g. Pettersson 1982) and therefore privately or, perhaps, secretly Christian? Or could it be that this group, as Heelas (2007) suggested, was alternatively spiritual in their religious ordination? Or were those in this large group representatives of “cultural religion” (e.g. Demerath 2000) which has lost its former priority given to accepting religious beliefs? All these suggestions are dependent on what has typically been thought to hold true for “religion” as a conceptual category at a belief system level.

Becker’s (1998) solution for this type of situation is “letting the case define the category” (ibid: 123). In the main, what Becker suggests to be the solution resembles the analytical strategy that was used for this thesis. For example, the analytical focus was here set to what people highlight as religious, regardless of the aspects which people highlight as religious also were defined as conceptual category “religion” by the established research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’. This allowed for observations of the long-standing (but never really church-approved) majority pattern of religious affiliation, beliefs and practice. It is this majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice which is treated as underlying the generalization of ‘religiosity’ as a conceptual category.

Continuing to rely on Becker (1998) for explaining the usefulness of the conceptual category of ‘religiosity’, the following point can be emphasized. According to Becker, the point of “letting the case define the concept” is that “it lets you define dimensions you might see varying in other cases” (ibid: 125). That is, if the findings from Chapter 4 are used as an example, ‘religiosity’ might be understood as a patterned process. In concrete terms this means that in every country (or other region used for comparative research)
there is a majority pattern of affiliation, belief and practice which may or may not be in line with what representatives of religious organizations or major religious traditions expect or wish for. In this way, data collected for the sake of fulfilling the criteria of the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’ can be used for answering new questions. This is because it is likely that the mainstream - defined by what most people do and have done for some time - may differ from the expectations which religions have of their adherents. If this holds as a conceptual starting point it implies that the extent of ‘religion’ and ‘religiosity’ is constant, but the relation between ‘religion’ and ‘religiosity’ varies over time and between places, and this can be analyzed with the established methods.

Regardless of what might be thought of the pros and cons of concluding that there is a ‘religiosity’ with “cultural power” in contemporary Sweden, it cannot be avoided that the suggestion implies there is a stable amount of ‘religiosity’ in this country. That is, there is as much ‘religiosity’ now as there ever was; it is only its relation to ‘religion’ which might have changed. This might raise questions concerning how the decision to define the phenomenon under discussion as ‘religiosity’ can be justified. Could it not have been conceptualized as some form of “secular religion” since it clearly does not center on a belief in God or a transcendent description of the “sacred”, taken to be of central importance by the research practice ‘Religion in Dimensions’? My reason for naming the conceptual category in question here ‘religiosity’ was that the object of study was how people relate to the religious. In other words, the object of study was not how people typically relate to the secular, which would have called for naming the studied case “secularity” or, if called for, “secular religion”. By contrast, the thesis set out to problematize how ‘religion’ was analyzed and to develop how ‘religiosity’ can be approached. These aims were achieved by the discovery, not of “secular religion” without any particular impact on society, but of a ‘religiosity’ with “cultural power”, characterized by typical ways of relating to the religious.

Of course, the study of the ‘religious mainstream’ in terms of majority behavior can be applied to other aspects of the religious than affiliation, belief and practice. The identification of proper measurements should be approached as an empirical question and settled in relation to the area researched.


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Fogelklou-Nordlind, E. (1934) Vad man tror och tänker inom svenska folkrörelser: Bearbetning av Carl Cederblads Enquetematerial. [Beliefs and thoughts in Swedish folk-associations: An analysis of Carl Cederblad’s Survey material]. Stockholm: FÖRLAG.


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254


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258


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# Appendix A

## Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 1 of 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year of Publication</th>
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<th>Cross-national comparison</th>
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<th>Empirical focus</th>
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*Kungliga Statistiska Centralbyrån [The Royal Bureau for Official Statistics]*
## Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 2 of 8).

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264
Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 3 of 8).

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265
### Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 4 of 8).

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## Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 5 of 8).

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Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 6 of 8).

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Appendix A: Previous Research, chronologically ordered, on Religious Affiliation, Beliefs and Practice in Sweden (page 7 of 8).

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<td>Sjöborg, A.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A, B, P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B

### Technical information concerning the EVS data collected in Sweden 1982-2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample size (N)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Population size (n)</td>
<td></td>
<td>954</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>1015</td>
<td>1187</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response rate (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sampling technique</td>
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<td>Two stage random</td>
<td>Two stage random</td>
<td>Restricted random</td>
<td>Unrestricted random sample (USR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data-collection mode</td>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews</td>
<td>Postal questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sources:

1. Calculated by the authors from numbers published by the EVS project (from Arts and Halman 2004, European Value Study 2010, Inglehart, Diez-Medrano, and Ruud 2007).
2. Random sampling selection of sampling points, according to geographical distribution ensuring that all types of areas (rural, urban et cetera) were represented according to their proportion in the population. People were selected randomly from all inhabitants. First 1000 individuals were randomly sampled and then an extra 200 people aged 18–24 were surveyed.
3. A two-stage representative sample (1) municipalities/regions, (2) individuals of the Swedish population age 18–75 years.
4. Representative unrestricted random sample (USR) of persons age 18 or above. Register of the total population (R&B).


