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A Social Psychology of Religion with a Phenomenological Case Study



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ABSTRACT

This article defines religion in terms of some of its major characteristics. Special attention is paid to how religion is attuned to the structure of a prevailing social order. Religion renders valuable functions within the psyche of individuals and renders justification to the integrity of a community. A brief qualitative investigation utilizing interviews challenges Freud's viewpoint about religion being a neurosis. It also illustrates that religion can be studied phenomenologically without having to bracket the concept, of God. Finally, people can live comfortably with paradoxes in their interpretations of reality. The awareness of personal limitations and the need for a sacred, embodied, immanent and transcendental world ensures the future of religion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religion as a human social arrangement is not easily defined. Any attempt to encapsulate this phenomenon in a single definition will be treading on thin ice. Roberts [1] quotes an unknown sociologist who said: "there are few major subjects about which people know so little, yet feel so certain" and, that this seems to apply to

those who are sympathetic to religion as well as those who renounce it. Research, however, is hardly possible without clearly stating the nature of the phenomenon that is under investigation. Hamilton [2] expresses the same frustration, but at least offers a solution, albeit only a partial one, when he says: "clearly no investigation can proceed without some conception of what the limits of the subject matter

are, and to avoid confusion it is better to make this explicit at the outset even if such conceptions are imperfect and have to be altered in the light of deeper understanding”.

II. THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Etymologically, the term religion implies a binding or connection to a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Clearly, the varied components and intensities of religious beliefs, rituals and practices adhered to by divergent cultural groups all over the globe make religion too multi-dimensional to be framed in a single sentence or paragraph. In order, therefore, to come to a closer understanding and agreement about what is meant by this comprehensive concept one must analyse some of its most intrinsic properties. Glock and Stark [3] have identified some of the major elements of religion. These include experiential, ritualistic, devotional, sacred knowledge, moral, communal, temporal, spatial and geographical (holy space) dimensions. Although none of these elements alone appropriately define religion across all cultures, most religions do hold some of these in different degrees and combinations.

A. Structural Considerations

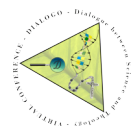
The existence of a holy site and place of special reverence featured predominantly on South African National Television recently. In recent media coverage [4], The South African Eye Witness News of 21 March, 2022, featured Cape Khoi and San indigenous leaders holding a cleansing ceremony on sacred land, the Two Rivers Urban Park, after a court issued an interdict against developers of Tech Giant, Amazon's planned new headquarters. This is only one recent example of many such

conflicts over sacred ground, which occur throughout the planet, with the ongoing struggles surrounding Jerusalem being a prime example.

Such indigenous ceremonies bring home the fact that not all religions have a church, a temple, an abbey, a synagogue such as is familiar to the Western World. The existence of a shrine, or holy place, is a site where people may choose to bring their offerings to worship, or even a place that is considered with such awe that it is even avoided, is nevertheless very common amongst so many religions, therefore, deserving to be considered a general feature that defines religion. The gods, the totems, usually have an 'address' and the followers have a gathering place where often a special section is reserved for symbols of reverence. Even nomadic peoples have such geographical sites that bear a special spiritual meaning. This place is often also the place where the souls of the deceased will go to reside with the ancestors. The feature of "to go" highlights the element of transcendence in softening the impermanence of life whilst at the same time connects and render solace to those who struggle with death's permanency. As such it locates a space in the outer world where the ancestors and deceased family reside in the company and comfort of the most revered and holy, so that each individual will ultimately reunite with loved ones.

B. Functional Considerations

The study of a topic such as religion, a phenomenon that is possibly as ancient as *Homo sapiens* himself, has no borders other than those paradigms drawn by the researcher for the sake of theoretical interest. Throughout the history of mankind there is evidence of adherence to spirituality. There were times when those in power did not tolerate dissent, especially if



the dissent was perceived to be a challenge to the authority of those who proclaimed themselves the custodians of the prevailing worldview of the people – in other words, the acclaimed truth. Haralambos and Holborn [5] state that a functionalist perspective ought to examine religion in terms of the needs of society, such as the need for social solidarity, value consensus, harmony, and integration amongst its different structures. Religion fulfils many psychological functions for individuals and consequently also for society [2]. Anxiety and tension that arise during the crises of life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death, tend to threaten the stability of social life. Rituals around these events provide meaningful explanations in terms of a larger worldview, reduce anxiety, ease emotional distress, reintroduce confidence and assist with a reintegration with the other.

Cypriani [6] notes how the contemporary diffusion of religion in the form of the experience of a personal God, typically transcends the traditional structures and functions of religion, as individuals come to terms with the truths claimed and propagated by the various religious structures. The experience of a transpersonal, transcendent God as well as an imminent, fully embodied spirituality [7] seem very functional when grappling with multiple and complex, risky and unpredictable challenges whether in nature and or in society.

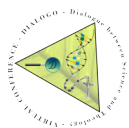
III. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The psychology of religion is well dealt with by David Wulff [8]. His *Psychology of religion, classic and contemporary views* is described by Connolly [9] as “the most comprehensive general textbook on the psychology of religion ever published.” In this paper, however, the authors will only highlight one or two theories that

is of special significance in the context of understanding the dimensions of religion as a social psychological phenomenon. Firstly, it must be pointed out that there is not a psychology of religion that shares the same method and phenomena of investigation. Many schools of psychology approach religion and its dimensions from different methodological and conceptual angles. Psychoanalysis emphasises the role of unconscious processes in determining religious behaviour. Social Psychology focuses on behavioural dimensions such as frequency of involvement, demographic factors as well as its real or implied influence. Phenomenological existential psychology studies the meaning as experienced in the lived world and humanism again is interested in how religion enriches the shared value systems in a society. “Reality is too rich and too manifold to leave us even the slightest hope that we may ever be able to interpret it out of one single principle and by one single method” [9].

Even if one is not inclined towards a psycho-analytical orientation in psychology, one cannot ignore the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Both these psychologists emphasized the role of the “unconscious” in determining behaviour and thought. Freud firmly believed that God is a projection of the primordial earthly father. He believed the “unconscious mind can come in conflict with the conscious mind and split off from it – possessing a kind of semi-autonomous existence” [9]. This is a very significant observation although one could question the validity of the explanation. It is significant in the sense that it describes a situation where the same person or group might act very prudently in one context and very aggressively in another, seemingly incapable of realising the paradoxes.

Freud likened rituals to a form of obsessional neurosis. He believed that in



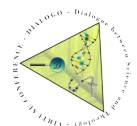
the first stage of human development the human mind was occupied by gods, demons and spirits. In an insecure, threatening world man felt helpless. To deal with the insecurities posed by a strange and overwhelming world, humans created gods upon whom they could find recourse and solace. Monotheism, Freud [9] believed, “is simply a continuation of this process, whereby the projection of the father figure attains omnipotence and omniscience, and the appropriate behaviour becomes that of submission. Furthermore, the problem they believed with such a solution is of course not just that it is based on an illusion but more seriously it inhibits psychological and emotional maturation, reinforcing as it does the individuals replay of the childhood pattern.”

Although Jung also regarded religion as based upon illusory perceptions, he did not regard religion as a psychopathology such as Freud had done. To him, religion was a necessary coping strategy to attain psychological well-being, especially in later life. Also like most other forms of behaviour, Jung believed religion finds its origins in the collective unconscious. Not only does the conscious being have a personal unconscious but also a collective unconscious. The latter represents the imprints left by generations upon generations that preceded the living organism – a history, vague, symbolic and complex which could hardly be understood by logical reasoning. To Jung the encounter with the sacred is in fact within the collective unconscious and as such the source of projections of the psyche onto the universe at large [9]. The “reality” as perceived is, therefore, nothing more than projections of the inner self. Like Freud, Jung believed that religion is within us, projected onto the outer world in such a way that our reality is split into a real and spiritual world. Integration of these two

worlds is believed to be necessary for psychological wholeness and this Freud and Jung believed could also be attained by their analyses – for Freud psychoanalysis, and for Jung, individuation through analytical psychology. Freud and Jung were dogmatically convinced about the reality and influence of the unconscious.

In contrast with those psychologists who view religion as pathology, neurotic and illusory attempts in dealing with life’s problems, some firmly believe that it could foster mental health. “Being religious can shield people from the most obvious forms of a mental disturbance perhaps because involvement with a religious organization or group often provides a strong sense of community and attachment as well as offering a framework of explicit behavioural boundaries” [9] Another psychologist who deserves attention in this regard is John Schumaker [10] who believed that healthy people can quite comfortably live with accurate and illusory conceptualizations of reality. The dissociation necessary to live with paradoxes and dissonances seem not to trouble them at all. “Religion is the traditional method employed by cultures to distort reality beneficially by the promotion of meanings and values for example. It succeeds in this because of the brain’s capacity for dissociation, the capacity to run different mental programs in parallel” [9]. When religion as a transcendent value system fosters beliefs in the spiritual guidance of everyday life and as such renders security and meaning to one’s existence, Schumaker [10] believes, it is a psychologically healthy adaptive strategy. What then defines reality so that one dares to speak about the distortion or corruption of reality? Is reality only relatively valid – valid in terms of a contextually and culturally approved description?

The last school of thought that will be briefly touched upon is secular humanism.



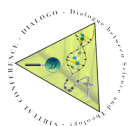
Paul Kurtz [11] tends the preface of his book *Embracing the power of humanism* as follows: “It is the theme of this volume that embracing humanism intellectually and emotionally can liberate you from the regnant spiritual theologies of the day, mythologies that bind you and put you out of cognitive touch with the real world. By embracing the power of humanism, I submit, you can lead an enriched life that is filled with joyful exuberance yet is intrinsically meaningful and is developed within shared moral communities” (p. viii). He continues: “Important as individual audacity, courage, intelligence, self-power, and the fulfilment of one’s personal dreams and projects are, the good life cannot be experienced alone, in isolation. The richest of human plans and joys are shared with others.” (p.6) Kurtz believes “the meaning of life is not to be found by withdrawing from its challenges, contemplating the universe in mystical transcendence, but rather, it is created by us as we reach out, voyage and adventure. In this lie the drama, excitement, and exaltation of living the full life. Life has no meaning per se; it only presents opportunities for us to seize and act upon” (11). He sees some forms of religions as promoting asceticism, nihilism, and a slave mentality. The authors of this paper do not concede that religion by its very nature would stifle freedom and authenticity as implied by Kurtz. Human beings may through their own initiative choose a life of freedom and authenticity inspired by their choice of living in accord with their religious principles. The existential humanistic theory does not exclude conformism to systems of human endeavour that enhance personal wellbeing and social connectedness.

In Africa *Ubuntu* is recognized as foundation for African centered, indigenous psychology. In its emphasis on honouring all forms of human social research dialogue,

Ubuntu and *indaba* constitute original research and communication methods [12, 13]. Such methods have cultural recognition and time-honoured respect that facilitate the transformation of social psychology into an open and inclusive educational context with an authentic Afrocentric, phenomenological freshness and focus. Their particular emphasis is on those forms of community spirituality and spiritual community that characterize ancestral reverence, beliefs and practices, including generational consciousness, respect and love, which function as a cornerstone, if not foundation, of all religions.

Humanism strongly supports morality. Paul Kurtz ([11] proclaims there is no logical connection between the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. A hierarchical church has defended in the past an unequal society with strict social class and privilege.” History is full of examples of the wanton aggression and atrocities committed in the name of Motherhood, of God, The Prince of Peace or other religious orders. Non-conformists who refused to submit to unquestioned dogmas have been burned and castigated. Today, in some countries as Pakistan and Afghanistan women are degraded, humiliated, and exploited by those who solemnly kneel before Allah every Friday. Kurtz reminds us that religious devotion is no guarantee of moral devotion. Rather there is good evidence that the moral concern is autonomous and rooted in independent phenomenological experiences.

Many people in the modern world continue to believe that morality lies exclusively within the religious domain and that those who renege on religion would also renounce various forms of ethical behaviour. Religion is not the *sine qua non*, the only custodian of good moral behaviour because there are just too many examples where religion serves a selective morality.



The motivation for this study was to search for theoretical structure that would elucidate the construct religion and the narratives informing it, especially, concerning the great variety of religions that may confuse and complicate academic and lay debates. It became clear from a social-psychological and a sociological perspective that the structure cannot be divorced from its function and vice versa. It was such social-psychological considerations that led to a phenomenological investigation into contemporary experiences of religion of a Christian Church in the Western Cape, South Africa.

The open-ended research question could therefore be stated: How do local people experience religion? Furthermore, a secondary research question that came to the fore was, could two belief systems that pose seemingly contradictory narratives, i.e., science, and religion, creationism and evolution, monotheism, polytheism and ancestral reverence be cognitively held by the same person or group without experiencing dissonance?

IV. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The investigation described below was conducted by the first author. As he considered himself a religious sceptic, for greater objectivity or inter-subjectivity, the first author invited the second author, a fellow academic, a friend of over forty years standing, with considerable experience of the phenomenon under investigation, to co-author the paper. Although primarily African Christian in orientation, the second author inclusively embraces various spiritual, wisdom and healing practices, especially ancestral consciousness, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist.

The study followed ethical standards in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Institutional approval was obtained

from the Zululand University research committee, project number S894/97. Nine unstructured interviews were recorded and summarized after phenomenological analysis (method described by [12]. Persons interviewed were all from the Shofar Christian Church. This was a convenient sample nominated by a friend who is a member of the church. All nine interviewees are intelligent professional persons, fully capable of articulating clearly their ideas and experiences. The leading request was, "Please share with me your personal experience of your religion"

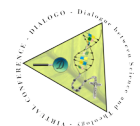
To maintain the integrity of the study, the redrafts of their interviews were returned as well as the overall summary. They were requested to indicate to what extent it reflected their views. Seven replied and indicated an accuracy of between eighty and ninety-nine percent. Sample demographics are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample Demographics

Age	Educational Qualifications	Profession
23	BCom.Man.Acc. + Ed Dip.	Student
23	BTh	Administrator
30	MBChB +Fil. Dip	Medical Doctor
60	MBChB +Fil. Dip	Medical Doctor
30	MSc	Lecturer
27	MA	Psychologist
40	BA	Ordained Minister
30	MSc. Ing	Scientist
33	MBChB +Fil. Dip	Medical doctor

A. RESULTS

Main findings in terms of a thematic summary of experiences that emerged from the phenomenological analysis follow:



Religion. Interviewees were uncomfortable with the word “religion”. It seems as if this term was for them too impersonal. To them it is as if this term is more appropriately associated with established cultural practices, prescriptions and rituals – “that part of traditional churches”, described by one person as, “going through the motions.”

Background. All the interviewees came from Christian homes where their parents have guided them in living a devoted Christian life. They acknowledged with gratitude and appreciation the roles their parents have played in setting a good example. They, at some stage in their late teens, became dissatisfied with the traditional church. Some had undergone a particular life changing experience, an event, which they could clearly identify. Others actively sought after a change, because they felt disillusioned with their circumstances at a particular time and place in their lives.

Relationship. Their relationship with God had become a more personal relationship. This personal relationship they described as very much the same as that between living persons. It is, however, a deeper more intimate, intense relationship and very gratifying. They can feel God being part of them. To them God is part of everything they do and think. They consider God in prayer about every major decision or about the problem with which they might be confronted. To them God is real - they experience Him as being an integral part of their reality.

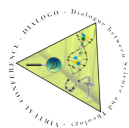
God is good and trustful – God cares for them. They have grown in their relationship with God. Through His Spirit God manifests Himself in their lives. Some, therefore, refer to this as a spiritual relationship. This relationship is also character building and has given them a firmer grounding in life.

Communication. God speaks to them. They listen to God. They hear Him giving them guidance. They speak to God sometimes throughout the day. They read the Bible which they consider as their “compass”, but God also speaks through dreams or visions, or even through remarks made by complete strangers.

Nature. God’s reality is observed in the wonders of nature. They look at nature with awe – and almost with an overwhelming appreciation of how nature reveals the way in which God created it. The simplicity, the beauty, as well as the complexity, convince them that it could not have come about merely by chance. The physical structures, the order in it is proof of a power much greater than humans can imagine. They reject evolution – as one person has said: “if there was a Big Bang, well, then it was how God created it.” Their personal relationship with God makes them feel uncomfortable with the term supernatural. To them, God is natural – real. They are also reluctant to believe in chance; everything that happens to them is predetermined by God.

Relaxed confidence. They are confident in their faith – “I do not need to be continuously reminded of His existence”, were words of one of the interviewees. They do not doubt, because they can cite many instances where they have observed and experienced the wonders of His works. They know what God wants, they feel relaxed – they have found a feeling of inner peace.

Others. They would like to share the wonders of their experiences with others. They feel a calling to share their faith or to mean something special to others who might need emotional support. Some of them are currently doing evangelical work; others are doing whatever they can in their daily professions to be a living proof of their faith – to shine forth an example of a good life – a life of honesty and integrity.



They have visions for the future where they would find themselves increasingly in positions of service to others and being in the service of God. They participate in outreach activities of the church, not only in their own community, but also in other countries where they focus on the needy and the perplexed. It touches them that everywhere people experience God in the same way, albeit in their own culture and language.

V. DISCUSSION

The authors of this article noted the enthusiasm “for life as lived” such as it is expressed by these individuals. In Rogerian terms these people could all be defined as congruent. There were no outward signs of distress or pathology. They all function well in their professions and social relationships. If their church would proclaim to be instrumental in promoting “a feel-good theology” (as is sometimes said about charismatic churches) then this church has indeed succeeded to attain it in the lives of these persons. They all radiated a positive aura of wellbeing and enthusiasm. It was not an irritating over-exuberance but a natural positive vigor “to worship their Lord” and to serve their church, community and the needy. Thus the authors were able to conclude that the research questions posed have been satisfactorily understood and answered. The interviewees openly shared their experiences in depth and detail and without apparent cognitive dissonance.

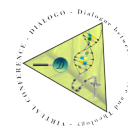
Wilber’s [13] all quadrants, all levels (AQAL) model provides an inclusive integral theoretical explanatory structure for the discussion. The interviewee’s individual fresh original experience can be situated in the top left hand subjective quadrant, the authors’ individual phenomenological interpretations in the top right hand objective quadrant, the respective,

collective intersubjective communicative relationships between the interviewees and authors in the bottom left-hand quadrant, and religion as a, established social psychological system with a theological structure and function in the bottom right hand quadrant.

Hamilton [2] discusses the phenomenological perspective under the heading ‘Religion and Meaning’, whereas Haralambos and Holborn [5] use the heading ‘Religion – a phenomenological perspective’. The theorists cited by these authors namely, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckman and Clifford Geerts all emphasize the nature of the meaning of religion. Human beings want to give meaning to their worlds in which they live. Social psychology cannot afford to ignore the views of some of the existential-phenomenological theorists about religion. Although these theories could be considered primarily philosophical and psychological, the holistic nature of the human being are thereby affirmed.

Interviewees’ experiences were affirmed by those of the second author who knows God as an energetic loving heart-felt presence, which is experienced as more true and real than any other experience. The experience becomes progressively amplified, as meditation, prayer and/or contemplation deepen. He understands transpersonal relationships with God and others as psychological and co-created, a gift passed on by caring parents, ancestors, and human relationships, characterized by Ubuntu, freedom, dignity, respect and caring consciousness. In deep contemplation, this becomes resonant Oneness.

It should be mentioned that the second author’s testimony is based on many psychological studies amongst Christian communities, as well as regular personal HeartMath scientific meditation practice, which is supported by robust



scientific evidence, that such practice transforms stress, builds resilience, promotes energy, health and performance. Studies indicate that positive and renewing emotions are independently linked to psychophysiological coherence. Scientific measures, e.g., using HeartMath equipment, indicate highest coherence levels in deepest contemplation [14-16]

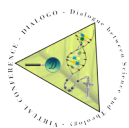
Reflexivity reveals that interviewees may have become uncomfortable with the word “religion” if this was perceived to objectify their faith which is experienced as a living present reality existing through their relationships. They probably would have preferred the softer word “faith”, which renders the experience more human, as in “trust,” which, according to Erikson [17] is the resolution of the earliest psychosocial stage of trust versus mistrust, which is particularly associated with significant others as usually exists in early parent-child bonding relationship, in both nuclear and joint extended family contexts. Africa traditionally emphasizes Ubuntu in the form of indigenous cultural practices associated with social, intersubjective, spiritual relationships, as reflected in the saying “it takes a village to rear a child” or “*umuntu, umuntu ngabantu*” (a person becomes a person through people).

The Ubuntu idiom resonates with what Martin Buber [18] has referred to as I-Thou relationships, as distinct from I-It relationships. It is interesting to note the extent to which Western scientific practices tend to emphasize I-It relationships, through such values as objectivity and instrumentalism, whereas those in the East tend towards interior subjectivity as practised in meditation methods such as yoga and chi-gung. However, it should be emphasized that these are generalized trends and contemporary global connotations of the term “science” include interdisciplinary domains, products

and processes involving quantitative, qualitative, mixed and integrative methods, applicable to any field of inquiry, event, practice or phenomena. For example, theological sciences extend beyond the study (logy) of God (Theos) and religious belief to include atheism, spirituality and such categories as spiritual, but not religious (SBNR). Similarly, the present social psychological study includes sociological, psychological, social psychological and phenomenological perspectives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Maybe in this contemporary scientific age in which we live, we should again ask ourselves whether religion is necessary? Do we still need to search for explanations of our existence defined by shared myths – ideas and experiences that have arisen from a transcendental space that lies beyond the immediate observable objective world – as in Chuck Mangione’s song “a world so wonderful, where no-one dies, a world where no one cries – a land of make believe?” The answer seems an unequivocal yes and no. Why yes? Because so many people still need to live in that world. All the functions of religion discussed in this paper continue to serve the needs of those many people. The modern technological world, higher education and balanced daily meals are not accessible to billions of people. Thousands and thousands of people continue to struggle in a strange, threatening, poverty-stricken world, where there is no room and time for the luxuries of knowledge and insight based upon logical reasoning and scientific experimentation. These people will need to make sense of the daily confrontations with death and illness, of the many insecurities based upon lack of education and they will need to find solace in the apparent unlimited powers that lie beyond – the powers that will ultimately take them up into a new sphere beyond



the hopelessness that is now perceived to be their inevitable fate. These mystical powers, be it the belief in totems or human gods, will render them the strength to regain self-esteem and to continue. In the closeness of social encounters, they will find solace, warmth, and hope.

Why no? Religion may be regarded by some as an impediment in the development of logical reasoning, in the development of scientific education for which a sceptical stance towards blind faith is essential. Richard Dawkins [19] believes blind faith stalls the mind and religious dogma justifies primitive behaviour executed against women, children and other categories of people who are made the targets of venomous discriminatory acts, prejudices, and false beliefs. It stands in the way of humanism because it enslaves the minds of persons who are deemed to be in reverence of a sacred power or ideology to be obeyed without any recourse to courageous resistance against predominantly male authority.

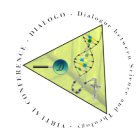
Yet, there are those who are well educated, who live in luxury, seem to need little materially and have hope in abundance for a better future. Should such people continue to believe in what religious myths proclaim and what religious practices have to offer? Although many people in the affluent strata of the world population have moved away from traditional churches, there still seems a dire need for what religion has to offer. Modern life poses its own insecurities and urban life can sometimes be very lonesome. Although secular entertainment is in competition with churches, it is sometimes exorbitantly expensive. Social activities arranged through church membership, bring people together. It institutionalises traditional practices such as marriages, births and burials. The rich and educated are not saved mortality, illness, and injury.

Religion does not necessarily serve to avoid suffering, but its doctrines can make suffering bearable. Some might feel guilty about their privileged status or who might experience cognitive dissonance when thinking about their exploitative practices. To them, Weber has suggested, religion provides justification in the sense of a 'good tree does not bear evil fruit'.

How can one rationally explain that seemingly very realistically oriented persons, who reason logically and who are unwilling to accept any information that is not scientifically validated, so easily succumb to practices and proclamations based upon religious myths? Clinical psychologist, John Schumaker [10] believes "that our brains are capable to dissociate itself from its own data." He continues:

The human brain gained the ability to (a) selectively perceive its environment, (b) selectively store memories, (d) selectively disengage from already stored memories, and (e) selectively replace dissociated data with more 'user-friendly' data. Ultimately, this empowered human beings, like no animal before us, to regulate their own reality.

Schumaker [10] unlike Freud does not regard it as pathology because it is shared by many and serves so many functions in society in a culturally accepted manner. However, to those who strive to think rationally and realistically, it remains an intriguing phenomenon how "we can believe one thing with one part of our mind and something completely different with another" [9] (Connolly, 1999: 173). This may not be such an awkward phenomenon to those who work in the field of business and advertising. Here subjective and objective reasons for purchasing goods and services are often seen to make no particular logical sense at all. Maybe this is how we should look at human behaviour in the religious domain as well - to accept that subjectivity



and objectivity need not be in harmony and that it is fine, if it is not destructive to either the individual or the group. Who, one may ask, is in full command of reality - can proclaim exclusive rights over reality? What would a world look like without subjective reality, without a land of make believe? There can be no freedom where there is not religious freedom. Human beings will live in families and communities where they support one another and continually validate reality as perceived - their reality. Religion will survive as one of the institutions in the modern technological era as much as it did in all other historical eras, albeit in adapted forms to serve human needs, to continuously re-define reality and guide the ethical conduct of every new generation.

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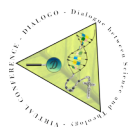
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BIOGRAPHIES



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