Universität Bielefeld

- Evangelische Theologie -

Heinz Streib
Biographies in Christian Fundamentalist Milieus and Organizations

Report to the Enquete Commission of the 13th German Parliament on „So-called Sects and Psychogroups"
Results of the Research Project on "Drop-outs, Converts and Believers: Contrasting Biographical Analyses of Why Individuals Join, Have a Career and Stay in, or Leave Religious/Ideological Contexts or Groups"

translated by *Ella Brehm*

Beiträge zur biographischen Religionsforschung (Contributions to Biographical Research in Religion) No. 1

Contact: **Prof. Heinz Streib, Ph.D./ Emory Univ.**
Universität Bielefeld ■ Postfach 10 01 31 ■ 33501 Bielefeld ■ Germany
Phone: +49-521-106 3377 / -3380 ■ Fax: +49-521-106 8034
E-Mail: Heinz.streib@uni-bielefeld.de ■
WebSite: http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/hstreib

CONTENTS

Contact: **Prof. Heinz Streib, Ph.D./ Emory Univ.**
Universität Bielefeld ▪ Postfach 10 01 31 ▪ 33501 Bielefeld ▪ Germany
Phone: +49-521-106 3377 / -3380 ▪ Fax: +49-521-106 8034
E-Mail: Heinz.streib@uni-bielefeld.de ▪
WebSite: http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/hstreib

Our research project was set up and carried out at the University of Bielefeld by means of third-party funding.[1] The study aimed to establish contrastive analyses of the biographical trajectories of members and ex-members of Christian fundamentalist milieus and organizations, i.e. the processes individuals go through when entering, remaining in, or leaving such milieus and organizations. Of the total 22 interviews conducted, 12 were chosen for closer scrutiny. These interviews were transcribed, and subsequently analyzed and compared according to the biographical-reconstructive methods for the interpretation of narrative interviews.[2] The interpretation sessions in small groups were recorded on tape and have been incorporated in abridged form into the evaluation of the research project results presented here.

Our analysis focused primarily on the relationship between the 'religious career' and the biography of each individual from two perspectives: from a *retrospective* point of view (motivational factors leading to the initial entrance and continuing involvement), and from a *prospective* point of view (biographical consequences ranging from transformation to decompensation). We devoted special attention to changes and continuity in the personalities of the test subjects, in their level of contentedness with life, their capacity to act autonomously, and in their identities in light of the often far-reaching processes of conversion and transformation involved when entering, remaining in, or leaving such a milieu or organization.

This report focuses on the more detailed presentation of the case study analyses (detailed, yet nevertheless limited in view of the many interesting details to be found in each individual case); however, in order to make the report more readable, I would like to begin with a brief summary of our findings: the typological classification of the cases resulting from our study.

---

[2] In terms of methodology, we have combined the approaches of U. OEVERMANN and F. SCHÜTZE (for references see Streib 1999; 2000c).

1 Results of the research project: a typology of Christian fundamentalist biographies

One of the essential results which qualitative empirical research using narrative interviews strives to attain is a typology of biographical trajectories. This typology results from the contrastive comparison of the case studies. In analyzing the interviews, we paid special attention to three levels or dimensions, as was mentioned in the preceding brief outline of our analytic focus:

- The dimension concerning modes of entrance and adaptation (Dimension α),
- The dimension concerning biographical consequences and ways of coping (Dimension β), and
- The dimension concerning motivational biographical factors (Dimension γ).

The typology focused upon in our study of Christian fundamentalist biographies differentiates between three basic types. Taking the ways of entrance and adaptation (Dimension α) to Christian fundamentalist religiosity as the point of departure, a typology of this nature seeks to ascertain typical relationships to the other dimensions: in particular to the dimension of biographical consequences (Dimension β), but also to the dimension of motivational biographical factors (Dimension γ).

1.1 Three types of Christian fundamentalist biographical trajectories (basic contrast according to modes of entrance and adaptation)

If, while reading the interviews, one pays close attention to *how* the interviewees acquired their respective fundamentalist-religious orientation, how they found their milieu, what factors guided them in their choices, and *how often* they have changed their orientation or milieu, it becomes apparent that there are significant differences between individuals. Taking the modes of entrance and adaptation as a criterion, it was possible to make this observation the basis for a basic typology according to which the individual cases could be compared and contrasted. The presentation of the cases which follows in this report is structured according to the typology in Dimension α; that is, the individual cases have thus already been assigned to a specific type. At this point I would like to introduce the typology briefly:

A) The *type governed by tradition* (Type A) has been strongly influenced by familial or milieu-related monocultural religiosity and accepts his/her enculturative integration as a welcome fate or as an act of providence. The characteristics of this type are thus:

- He/she has experienced a formative, usually familial, religious socialization.
- The religious socialization determines the modes of entrance and adaptation to the fundamentalist religious orientation.
- A fundamentalist conversion means in this case the confirmatory reinforcement or more intensive continuation of the traditional religiosity or the preceding familial or milieu-related religious socialization.
- Alternative religious orientations seldom play a role or only marginally.
- In general, one can assume that the point of departure for this type's adaptation of fundamentalist religion is the (at least subjectively) sheltered religious enclave.

This particular type, an individual socialized within the framework of a certain religion by an act of fate, can be further differentiated in terms of *when* in the individual's life the fateful enculturation into a fundamentalist religion occurred. An early, family-related entry is to be distinguished from one in late childhood, in adolescence or in adulthood. A collective entry of this nature is not less fateful and must not necessarily lead to government by tradition simply because it occurred after early childhood; however, with increasing age it becomes less prob-

able that an individual will adopt an orientation without first perceiving and seriously considering the alternatives, thus increasing the role of free choice in making the decision. It is characteristic for the type governed by tradition that the subjective horizon - and usually also that of the milieu - is to a great extent closed and determined by tradition. Possible alternatives which would place the individual in the position of choosing are hardly or not at all perceived, and may even be blocked out entirely. This subjective blindness to alternatives does not, of course, contradict the fact that from the perspective of the scientific observer and not least from the global and societal perspective, fundamentalism is a form of *modern anti-modernism* (cf. Küenzlen 1996; Streib 1997b) and thus a reactive flight into a closed niche, away from the confusing and frightening plurality of possible religious orientations.

B) Two additional types stand out against this first type governed by tradition. They can both be described as heretic types or types subjected to the compulsion of making a choice. 'Heresy' is used here as defined by Paul Berger (BERGER, 1979); that is, it denotes a modern, anti-traditional mode of adopting a religion, one that keeps to the literal meaning of 'hairein' as 'to choose' and asserts the imperative of making a choice regarding religion as well. It does not denote an orientation which deviates from the officially valid one. I have described the first variant as the *mono-convert* (Type B). The characteristics of this type consist of the following:

- A familial, religious primary socialization is usually not discernible or not significant.
- The mono-convert is quite aware of the alternatives and plurality in religious matters and has possibly also either noticed or perhaps even already tested one or two such possibilities.
- The mono-convert chooses the dedication once and for all in his/her life to a certain religious orientation, at least he/she would like to perceive the decision as a singular event, and to have others likewise perceive it as such. The conversion to fundamentalist religion thus means in this case: „A decision for...“
- A conversion to fundamental religiosity thus also means: a decision *against* the previous religious views and orientation.

Fundamentalist ideology masks the essential arbitrariness of the choice, as well as the basically indisputable fact that the orientation represented in the own fundamentalist group is only one variant in the pluralistic palette of religions. This masking of alternatives is achieved by means of an authoritative aggrandizement of the respective fundamentalist orientation. Making use of theories of literality such as verbal inspiration, such an attitude lays claim to an absoluteness of a degree far exceeding that of the modern sciences and humanities - including the discipline of theology in particular. It is thus understandable that the fundamentalist mono-convert soon represses the element of free choice in his/her decision, embracing the belief that the newly acquired religion is the sole true one.

C) The third type of fundamentalist biographical trajectory differs constrastively from the other two types: the *accumulative heretic* (Type C). This type is easily distinguishable from the mono-convert in that such individuals go beyond the heretical mode of entrance and adaptation characteristic of mono-converts; that is, the individual does not choose only one religious orientation. A more exact explanation of what 'choice' means in this case will serve to make the difference clear: the mono-convert considers the choice to be mono-directional and final for the rest of his/her life, a decision for a certain, relatively closed religious system which exerts a determining influence on many aspects of life. In the case of the accumulative heretic, however, 'choice' is understood - by the individual as well - to be more a selection than a singular choice which can not be cancelled. It is a *selective* choice, one which by far does not require the acceptance of all the details involved in a certain religious tradition. The characteristics of this type consist of the following:

- The accumulative heretic moves from one religious-spiritual milieu to another, performing a wide variety of initiation rituals.
- Conversion means a rite of acceptance, an initiation ritual into a certain religious orientation which can be repeated numerous times.
- Accumulative heretics do not usually notice cognitive contradictions between these different religious traditions or at least do not take them seriously.
- Accumulative heretics thus prefer open religious milieus.
- Familial religious socialization is unimportant and usually not discernible.

In his/her process of adaptation, the accumulative heretic can both accept greatly differing religious and spiritual traditions and 'borrow' from them, thereby usually ignoring the cognitive, theological, and dogmatic contradictions between them. In some cases, the different religious and traditional loans and possibilities are combined to create an ontological theoretical framework; in other cases, the individual's search is guided by a vague sense of connection in the form of an implicit theory.

The accumulative heretic can be further differentiated into two sub-types: on the one hand, the *sequentially accumulative* heretic, an individual capable of switching from one orientation to the next - often restlessly and relatively quickly, thereby leaving behind one orientation (to a great extent at least) before moving on to the next; on the other hand, the *synchronous accumulative* heretic, an individual who is polytropic enough to adopt different orientations, philosophies of life and rituals simultaneously, exhibiting thereby a remarkable ignorance of the often serious cognitive contradictions involved. The accumulative heretic, especially the synchronous accumulative type, prefers open religious milieus which - notwithstanding a hard fundamentalist core - allow a large margin of freedom for the individual in broad peripheral areas of life and lifestyle.

Thus far, the typology has implemented only the criterion denoting ways of entrance and adaptation (Dimension α); the typological aspects of the other dimensions (dimensions β and γ) have not yet been taken into account. This will be carried out in the following; these two aspects were utilized to pose the question of *connecting lines* between the different dimensions, to subject the case studies to questions such as: Are there certain biographical experiences or experiences in the family or early childhood which are formative for the type governed by tradition? Is it possible to identify fundamental patterns of motivation leading to the heretic type, in some cases to the mono-converts, in others to the accumulative heretic type? Is it possible to discern typical procedural coping processes and typical biographical consequences for the individual types?

It should, however, be noted that even if we succeed in identifying certain fundamental patterns of motivation indicating an affinity for a certain type, this is not sufficient to permit the assumption of a causal relationship between such a fundamental pattern of motivation and the affinity to a certain type. The case analyses do not allow such psychologically deterministic statements. And even if we are able to identify certain coping methods and biographical consequences for the individual types, it will most certainly remain impossible to make causal-deterministic and generalizing predictions about the future of individuals belonging to certain types or of the respective milieus. However, the relationships to the motivational backgrounds and biographical consequences are of great interest and significance for the delineation of contrastive profiles of the three types.

1.2   The motivational profile of the types of Christian fundamentalist biographical trajectories (further differentiation according to motivational circumstances and life themes)

In the sense presented above, the motives for entering or remaining in a certain religious organization or milieu can be used for a further differentiation of the typology. As we determined from the case studies, the level denoting motivational biographical circumstances (Dimension γ) is of particular significance.

Formative influences play an important role here, experiences which the subject has not (yet) been able to deal with satisfactorily and incorporate into his/her biography, and which persist in taking up the individual's attention and energy. I call such formative influences life themes (cf. NOAM, 1985; NOAM, 1988; NOAM, 1990). Life themes are based upon often traumatic experiences in the subject's past which are also sometimes referred to as self-tensions (cf. HELSPER, 1989). The following examples were discernible in our cases:

- Early experiences of a loss of embeddedness and inclusion (e.g. due to the early death of or separation from a parent),
- Experienced deficit in unconditional security and acknowledgement,
- The experience of being an unwanted child,
- Painful experiences with death and grief or
- Traumatizing experiences with power and powerlessness.

These experiences apparently overtaxed the mental resources available to the test persons and repeatedly re-surfaced both in the individual's biography and in the biographical narrative in the interviews.

Life themes can of course not be pinpointed in the experiences and influences of early childhood alone; they can also occur in adolescence and early adulthood. However, they can often nevertheless be interpreted as manifestations of earlier life themes. Some of the acute experiences of crises in early and middle adulthood reported to us by our interviewees can be presented here as typical examples; the subjects mentioned them in their narrative in connection with the beginning of their search for religious orientation or with their conversion:

- Attempted suicides (two of our interviewees give an account of their own attempts to commit suicide in adolescence)
- The crisis of a divorce
- The distressing experience of the incurable illness and death of the mother

It has been observed that compensation for such pertinent life themes is sought in the fundamentalist-religious orientation. Understandably, if this compensation is found in the new religious orientation, a strong affinity develops. The more successfully this compensation occurs, the stronger the forces become causing the individual to remain. This is also relevant in view of the exiting processes, as this also means the leaving behind of more or less successful strategies for coping with the life themes. Once again, it is necessary to warn against a causal-deterministic misunderstanding: not all individuals who have suffered the early loss of a parent or who had to bear emotional coldness, a feeling of unwantedness or parental brutality later convert into fundamentalist milieus; and not every divorce results in Christian fundamentalist conversion.

However, one of the results of the contrastive comparison is particularly interesting: when examining the cases in search of relationships between the fundamentalist conversion or affinity for fundamentalism on the one hand and the life themes and crisis experiences on the other hand, it becomes apparent that such relationships are to be found mainly in the narratives recounted by the two heretical types - the mono-convert and the accumulative heretic; such relationships are to a large extent lacking in the biographical interviews with types governed by tradition. The situation is similar concerning the conversion of the type governed by

tradition; the sequential and narrative analysis do not bring forth any such connections to life themes and motivation. Thus, the reference to motivational circumstances and life themes is of significance for contrasting the cases and leads to a clearer delineation of the type profiles. How can this contrast be explained? A comprehensive and final explanation cannot be provided here; some aspects remain open for further research. However, we can venture to put forth the following theory: the difference between the type governed by tradition and the two heretical types runs along a dividing line that differentiates between (in sociological terms) the attachment to a milieu or tradition and experience orientation (Erlebnisorientierung, cf. SCHULZE, 1992); between (in psychological terms) motives oriented towards cognition, conviction and morality on the one hand and emotional and need-oriented motives on the other; and between (in psychoanalytic terms) superego impulses of desire and id impulses.

1.3 The generative profile of the types of Christian fundamentalist biographical trajectories (further differentiation according to coping processes and biographical consequences)

Having already been differentiated according to the respective modes of entrance and adaptation, the three types can be further differentiated using the dimension concerning ways of coping and biographical consequences (Dimension β). In principle, the entire range of possibilities is open: transformation, stagnation and decompensation. On the one hand, there are possible educational processes, opportunities for learning and transformation processes, while on the other hand, there is the danger of stagnation and mental or social decompensation. Within the framework of the fundamentalist orientation present in fundamentalist milieus, problems and life themes for which the individual has not found a solution can be dealt with either by means of an increase in or loss of the capacity to act. This results in far-reaching biographical consequences.

The paths of transformation in religion can be interpreted within the framework of a model delineating the transformation of religious styles (cf. Streib 1997a; 1999; 2000a; see also Fowler 1981; 1996a; 1996b): we encounter such transformation processes most noticeably when individuative and reflective ways of approaching and dealing with religion are rediscovered or once again become the dominant pattern. Notwithstanding the individual's (initial) unwavering adherence to the main principles of the fundamentalist ideology, this leads to resistance against the subordination to the authorities governing instruction and rules at the top of the respective group's hierarchy, whether they call themselves apostles, elders or pastors. The inevitable consequence of such transformation processes is usually the individual's exit from the fundamentalist group.

Looking through our material with a focus on such ways of coping and the development of biographical consequences, one soon discovers that all three variants are present. Decompensation is discernible in some cases; in many cases the initial problems pinpointed as the individual's reason for turning to a fundamentalist group remain unchanged, and have thus been deferred. However, contrary to the widespread prejudice towards fundamentalist groups and milieus, our sample contained a number of cases in which the individuals underwent a transformative process within the context of such a group or milieu, leading to greater self-confidence, stronger self-assertion, and more differentiated ways of approaching and dealing with problems - and also with religion and religious ideas.

Can biographical trajectories in which transformation takes place be assigned to certain types? Is a process of transformation to be found more frequently in some types than in others? Certain tendencies are clearly discernible: processes of transformation were either seldom or not at all present in the case of the type governed by tradition; they were found to a certain extent in mono-converts, and most frequently in the case of the accumulative heretic. This difference can be explained by the way in which the type governed by tradition enters a fundamentalist milieu: an individual who enters a fundamentalist group under the constraints

of fate and tradition will most probably meet with less freedom for autonomous decision-making and fewer opportunities for development; however, an individual like the heretic, whose conversion is more a result of self-determination and an orientation to personal experiences and needs, has greater chances of going through a transformation. The same is true of the separation process from a fundamentalist group: regardless of the age, individuals who for reasons of fate have adapted to a certain for of fundamentalist religiosity suffer greater struggles and pain when exiting the group or milieu. Great disappointment, rejection and hatred are often to be found. Such phenomena are also discernible in the mono-convert type, but usually in a less extreme form. The reason for these struggles and traumas is presumably to be found in the fact that the type governed by tradition (and the mono-convert type to a somewhat lesser extent) has a stronger tendency to join more closed groups or organizations, so-called *high-tension groups* (BAINBRIDGE, 1997; STARK & BAINBRIDGE, 1997) of fundamentalist character. In contrast, the accumulative heretics prefer open groups and milieus which do not necessarily demand the absolute acceptance of the totality of world views, dogmatic principles, rituals, and rules, and which allow a relatively large degree of freedom in addition to a minimal, but imperative, degree of consensus. This facilitates both the process of transformation and the process of separation from the group or milieu.

2   Case studies

The typology of Christian fundamentalist biographies as it has been presented thus far cannot be fully understood without a presentation of the case studies, the basic foundation essential for both the establishment of the typology and the demonstration of its validity. Each individual case study should be taken into account and taken seriously in its own right (ideally, each case study should be presented independently and without assignment to a particular category). I have compiled here abridged versions of the case studies which are classified and ordered according to the typology. The segment for each of the three types opens with two typical cases. I have allowed additional space for each case, most extensively in the case of 'Thomas' (2.3.1) as this individual has proved to be one of the most surprising and significant cases in our research project. Given the seemingly clear-cut classification suggested by the outline, it should be pointed out that there are no absolute dividing lines between the types. A classification of the types is nevertheless informative, as will hopefully be shown in the following presentation of the individual analyses of the case studies.

2.1 The type governed by tradition

2.1.1 „There's absolutely no humanity in it, absolutely none" – Analysis of 'Sarah', an example of the type governed by tradition

Biographical information. At age twenty-one, Sarah is one of our youngest interviewees. She is currently training to become an ergotherapist. Sarah has six siblings: one much older sibling (a foster child), one sister (+4), one brother (+2), one sister (-1), one brother (-3) and one sister (-5). Sarah's mother is a housewife, her father is a trained clerical worker. Sarah tells us that she has hardly any positive memories of her father; her numerous negative memories of him revolve around the emotional oppression and cruelty he inflicted upon her and her siblings. As members of a Christian fundamentalist congregation called „Brüdergemeinschaft" ("Brethren Community"), Sarah's parents raised their children in accordance with the beliefs and rules of this group.

After finishing school with a diploma qualifying her for studies at a technical college, Sarah began training as a pediatric nurse, during which time she lived away from home for the first time. Sarah broke off her training, quitting due to mental problems. Sarah then lives at home again for five months. During this time she developed an increasingly distinct dislike for both her father and his religiosity; she was placed increasingly under pressure.

The break with both the fundamentalist milieu and with the father soon followed. Sarah and her parents left the congregation almost simultaneously, but they headed in different directions: as the congregation was not Christian and biblical enough for the father, he sought out a new group for himself and his wife; Sarah, however, leaves the Christian fundamentalist milieu entirely. The disagreement culminates in a confrontation: Sarah is thrown out of her parents' house, moves in first with a female friend and then with her boyfriend. Sarah then began training as an ergotherapist. In order to receive financial support from her father, she is currently suing him for maintenance costs. She will finish her training in one year with an examination.

Circumstances of socialization, especially in view of religious socialization. Sarah's vital need for stimulating, warm, and unconditionally accepting companionship is not fulfilled by her family. She tells of feelings of rejection caused by her parents' rigid notions of upbringing. Her father was unfriendly, inflicting extreme forms of punishment on his children - sometimes beating them or forbidding them to return home. Emotional coldness and fear are the heavy burdens that Sarah will have to deal with as life themes for the rest of her adulthood. Nevertheless, Sarah is also capable of relating some positive aspects of her religiosity which were in retrospect beneficial for her. She places special emphasis on the feeling of community that she experienced in the group events. These episodes provided a certain degree of compensation for the deficits she experienced in the emotionally cold, repressive and violent situation at home. Sarah was involved for many years in this fundamentalist milieu and felt happy there; of course, at that time she was also convinced that she was on the right path. Sarah is obviously an example of the Christian fundamentalist biographical trajectory to be found in the type governed by tradition.

Biographical consequences of Sarah's religious socialization. When asking about the function that religiosity and religious milieus fulfill for Sarah, one must first point out the repressive effects of the amalgam of patriarchal, authoritarian and fundamentalist religiosity.

The narrative dynamics of the opening sequence of the interview already indicate the inability to cope with life and deal with fear still oppressing Sarah. The noticeably slow start, opening with a clearly defensive gesture points to an aggressive, even hateful attitude towards her own biography thus far. Even after the slow start, when Sarah finally quite openly turns her attention to the past, the hostile and restrictive elements of the religiosity prescribed by her father clearly come to light.

In many of the areas of life important to her, Sarah felt oppressed, discouraged and exploited. Sarah recounted the following details as examples of the comprehensive reglementation of life, including matters concerning clothing and hairstyles:

„...um, one of the main things I disagree with is that, that it's all just theory, you know, there are all kinds of laws that have to be obeyed, (takes a breath) [...]...but it's not anything that can really be lived and there's absolutely no humanity in it, absolutely no [I.: mhm] humanity (takes a breath). If, if they have to choose between humanity and their law, then they follow their law and violate humanity, you know (takes a breath) and the practical side of it was that we girls never had our hair cut, our hair had to be long. We had to wear sk-, we had to wear skirts, couldn't ever wear pants, we couldn't wear jewelry, and we couldn't wear make-up either...“

An example of the decompensatory effect of this socialization for Sarah is the fact that she broke off her first course of training. She recounts:

„...and then the training didn't work out;... (clicks her tongue) I couldn't deal with it because I uh... couldn't work independently, couldn't organize myself... oh and I was totally absent-minded, couldn't remember anything, nothing at all (takes a breath), so uh, so really, seriously weak in remembering things or memory problems... and then I always felt insecure dealing with people, you know...“

For many years, Sarah was incapable of developing the initiative and willingness to deal with conflicts necessary for offering resistance to this restrictive power. When a conflict comes to a head, the only solution Sarah finds is to direct the aggression towards herself. We have a case of depressive decompensation with suicidal tendencies when Sarah recounts:

„...and uh...somehow I just wanted everything to be over, I just wanted to be dead and not live anymore, you know (takes a breath), even though I never thought about committing suicide, you know, so [I.: mhm] it was like, passive, that is, it was a passive wish to be dead, but not to commit suicide actively, you know [I: yes] only passive (takes a breath), because I didn't have the courage to do it - and you shouldn't have the courage to, because suicide is a sin and then you end up in hell again, you know...“

„...first I left the congregation and then I left home...“ - Steps towards liberation. Encouraged by contacts in school, by the example of protest set by her older brother, and finally by the critical questions posed by a boyfriend, Sarah begins to question the narrow-minded and unrealistic thinking of her religious group. Another significant factor in this process of detachment and withdrawal from the religious group is Sarah's simultaneous adolescent process of detachment from her father, a process which had been delayed for years and now ran its course with increased vehemence. Her father was both a member of the group and also held a key position of authority in the organization. The discrepancy she perceived between her father's words and actions, his rigidity, and above all his lack of humanity were reason enough for Sarah to rebel radically against both her father and his repressive religion. She had thus far „gone with the flow" and submitted to her parents' will; she then began to take concrete steps towards independence. The fact that Sarah was immediately thrown out of her parents' house, was forced to seek an accommodation with friends, and is even today still fighting to obtain financial support from her father demonstrates the volatile nature of the detachment process, but also reveals the beginnings of the subsequent transformation process.

For many years Sarah lacked the powers of self-assertion necessary for a critical questioning of the world view determined by her patriarchal father and the fundamentalist Christian group, and for distancing herself from them. However, both intellectual inconsistencies in the world view of the Christian group, the emotional deficits present in relationships to other group members, as well as the harshly negative reaction of her father caused Sarah to become more courageous and to finally begin seeking her own path. Sarah's feeling of autonomy grew and she increasingly expressed her own ideas. At the same time, she no longer received love and affection of any kind, became increasingly marginalized and finally experienced

total emotional isolation. Sarah succeeded in escaping from further suppression, but only after going through suffering and massive relationship conflicts - even to the point of accusing herself of being incapable of carrying on a relationship, and only after clear symptoms of a depressive phase with suicidal tendencies had already become apparent. In the meantime, the burden of her suffering has become so great that in the last months before the interview she was increasingly willing to take on the confrontational offensive.

Decompensation or transformative work on life themes? Sarah has tried two ways of dealing with her particular life themes of fear, emotional coldness, insecurity, and religious and patriarchal oppression. In childhood and early adolescence she was able to follow the rules and the dogma of her fundamentalist community in blind fanatism as issued from the dominant persons of reference (father, the parish leader), while the milieu of this community provided partial compensation for the emotional coldness she experienced. In Sarah's later adolescence, critical questions and pressing emotions increased. Only after Sarah gradually succeeds in allowing room for her feelings and begins trusting her own critical and perceptive faculties does it become possible to lay the foundation for independence, autonomy and independent personality development. At the time of the interview, the course was set for constructive continuing development; however, there still remains a great need for dealing with and working on the religiosity, a continuing source of mental illness and decompensation for her.

As a summarizing conclusion of our in-depth analytic work, I will present the main typological attributes of the individual in list form (this will be repeated in each of the following case studies):

Typological attributes:

(α) **Type governed by tradition**: introduction into the fundamentalist community by the family

(β) **Depressive decompensation with suicidal tendencies and a high degree of fear, negatively affecting the individual's ability to cope with life**

  Late adolescent deconvert (liberated herself simultaneously from both father and fundamentalist religion)

  Reinforcement of the ego by struggling with the process of leaving the group; transformation discernible

(γ) Nevertheless, but secondary: initial compensation in the fundamentalist community for emotional coldness experienced at home

---

2.1.2   „...when I ride my bicycle, I pray..." – Case study of 'Ruth'

Family background. Ruth was born in 1967 as the middle child of five siblings; she is thirty years old at the time of the interview. Her parents are devout Christians and members of a mainstream Protestant, presumably pietistic association. Both Ruth's childhood and adolescence are embedded in religious life. The parents read aloud to their children from the children's Bible, they all participate in church services and other groups, regular prayers structure everyday life. Nevertheless, Ruth does not really feel loved; she does not feel that she has the security of being loved for who she is, in spite of her faults. When describing this problem, she speaks only of her father.

'Decisions'. At the age of eleven, Ruth makes a 'decision': she decides to believe in God. In retrospect, she laughs a little at the serious nature of this childish decision. She places the date of her actual 'conversion' at a later point in her biography, when this decision was made in the throes of deeply moving emotions. After a phase of doubts about God and her beliefs which she herself describes as a phase of adolescent rebellion, Ruth makes a 'decision of the heart' at the age of nineteen. The topic of conversion takes on a dominant position throughout the entire interview: this date is of great significance for Ruth. The decision for God marks one of the most important stages in Ruth's personal development. During this time, Ruth enters into the Baptist church. These independent steps occur after Ruth has left home and taken up a course of studies in social work. For Ruth, true belief exists only when one personally decides to establish a relationship to God; it is not possible to 'grow into' a belief.

About four years later, Ruth switches to a newly founded charismatic congregation. She explains this step as follows:

„...the so-called charismatic churches just place more emphasis on the relationship to the Holy Spirit and on the power of the Holy Spirit, and everything that goes along with it;...yes and so, pfh, I guess I've just received or experienced a lot in the charismatic [area?] already and (takes a breath) and when this group was founded, the one I belong to now, I just went along, because I just somehow knew, I belong there [...]."

This explanation is more an indication that this newly founded congregation is a low-tension group, distinguished by the fact that Ruth is able to find a better fulfillment of her religious needs, that is, of her desire to feel and experience the 'power' of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that Ruth is an example of the type governed by tradition.

Biographical consequences. The practising of her beliefs in everyday life is one of the decisive life goals for Ruth. In this context she also tells of problems she experienced at work for religious reasons: she was accused of pursuing the Christian indoctrination of Islamic children in the child care center where she works. However, Ruth does not deal with the situation from a political perspective, although she is quite aware of the political implications and aspects of the conflict. Instead, she emphasizes the impossibility of abstinence from religious missionary work for truly devout individuals. Without overrating this event and its consequences, it should nevertheless be mentioned that Ruth did not feel comfortable in her job much longer and soon afterwards withdrew even further away from the (evil) „world" - she found a new job in the office of the charismatic congregation.

The security offered by the community is of great importance to Ruth, providing a smoothing away of everyday problems instead of altering them. The congregation itself is of primary importance, Ruth's sisters and brothers express their sympathy and support for her, especially by means of the frequent and often spontaneously initiated praying sessions with each other; one example of this is her father's health-related crisis. Prayer and communication with God take up a lot of space in the interview: Ruth is satisfied with her dialog with God and knows how to express herself to God, for example when riding her bicycle. Faith offers security and meaning in the face of personal crises. It offers Ruth sufficient resources for getting through difficult situations. In Ruth's case, there is a successful fit, a satisfactory compensation for her

Typological attributes:	
(α)	**Type governed by tradition:** introduction into the fundamentalist community by the family
(β)	**Adolescent newcomer** (at the age of twenty-one); **switch in late adolescence** (at the age of twenty-five)
	No transformation discernible
(γ)	Secondary: compensation for strictness in the family and lack of acknowledgement

12

problems; however, there is no sign of a transformation of her religiosity.

2.1.3 „...just go wherever you feel most comfortable...“ – 'Daniela'

Biographical information. Daniela, twenty years old at the time of the interview, has been a firmly believing Christian since childhood and has been a member of a New Apostolic congregation for one year. She is in the beginning stages of becoming acquainted with this new religious orientation and compares it constantly with the Catholic religion she has given up. Concerning Daniela's religious socialization, it is significant that she was born in the GDR and emigrated to the west before the Wall came down (1986-87) by means of an application for expatriation. Her mother had already made the move to West Germany via the U.S.A. with twin brothers three years younger than Daniela. Daniela thus spent several months alone with her father and helped him with the preparations to leave the country (selling of household belongings, etc). After the family was reunited, they moved several times in West Germany. The parents divorced shortly after the fall of the Wall and Daniela returned with her father to East Germany.

Religious socialization. Daniela's mother is Catholic; when they married, her father converted from the Protestant to the Catholic church. Religion plays a role in the family: her father is a practicing, firmly believing, even enthusiastic Catholic; her mother „has a pretty deep faith" as Daniela puts it. Although Daniela also realizes that her mother „opened her eyes to God", she describes her mother in a very negative light in the end, summing it up thus: „...I don't miss her, the fact that she's gone, well, to be honest, I don't really care" - a topic which is not further discussed by Daniela. At several points in the text, Daniela mentions a grandmother, once referred to as a „substitute grandma", but this individual is not further commented upon. In Daniela's narrative, this individual takes the place of the socialist and atheist as the opponent in some of the theoretical disputes that Daniela conducts about her faith.

As a small child, Daniela becomes acquainted with God in a more peripheral way. Later, when the family is already separated by the inner German border, Daniela's father brings her into intensive contact with faith and the church („then we started, my father taught me how to pray"). Her attitude toward religion and the mode of religious practicing is also intensified by the fact that participation in religious services in the former GDR had to be kept rather secret, especially in a very small minority church as the Catholic Church in the former GDR and she thus, even as a small child, overcame great difficulties in order to be close to God.

Life at home is conflict-ridden, characterized by her parents' frequent arguments, the mother's use of physical violence towards the children, and a drawn-out divorce. The family crisis, the hope of expatriation, and the trials and tribulations of everyday life accompanying these special circumstances all form the exterior framework leading to Daniela's quick approach to faith: the church as an institution of assistance, God as the recipient of inner thoughts and desires which can be expressed in prayer.

After arriving in West Germany, the family settles in a place of pilgrimage. Daniela begins religious instruction in school, has Communion instruction in church, celebrates her first Communion, has a priest as a teacher, and a very devout seventy-year-old female friend. In this quickly progressing segment of religious socialization, Daniela not only memorizes biblical texts and learns to follow the liturgy, but also becomes acquainted with God, she establishes a relationship with Him. From then on, she is a devout Catholic, but is also interested in religion in general. She participates in church services - mostly with her father - and discusses questions of faith with him.

The path leading to the entrance into the New Apostolic Church. In 1995 Daniela meets her boyfriend; he has been a member of the New Apostolic church since childhood. Through him she comes into contact with the local New Apostolic congregation. Shortly after a not entirely uncritical discussion with her boyfriend about faith, Daniela joins this church and is 'sealed'

by the apostle. The prerequisite for her joining is that she leave the Catholic Church. She describes herself as an unprejudiced individual who has independently decided to join this community of faith, not out of love for her boyfriend, but as a result of her in-depth struggles with questions of belief.

Since entering the New Apostolic Church, her life has changed dramatically: she attends church services three times a week, attends choir, prays very frequently and is in almost constant communication with God. Suffering is just as much part of her commitment to the church as are small sacrifices. While she is active and involved where her faith is concerned, in terms of the decisions to be made regarding her own life she is passive: God alone plans the future and creates meaning, and it is therefore not worthwhile to think about it oneself or to make decisions. She has no concrete plans for the future regarding her career and private life; rather, she daily - or even hourly - expects the return of Jesus Christ. There were some disputes with family members and other individuals concerning her conversion, but Daniela can stand up to the arguments presented by the others and also defy them.

Interpretations. Daniela has a close personal relationship to God, one which she describes as family-like, similar to the relationship between father and child. The relationship to God takes precedence over all other social relationships - regardless if they are with family members, partners or friends. Her relationship to God takes the place of her relationship to her father. The personal quality of the relationship rests upon the consciousness of having been 'chosen' because God considers her „somehow good". Her conversion can be interpreted within the context of the adolescent struggle for autonomy, also and perhaps above all because Daniela also hopes that her father will convert to the New Apostolic Church.

Daniela is convinced by the liveliness she finds in the New Apostolic Church, the spontaneity of the sermons, the non-professional quality of the preachers, and their work in the area of pastoral care. She is enthusiastic about the authenticity of the lay preachers who tell of their own experiences in the sermons, „for me, that is the real thing". Faith seems easily comprehensible to her, she no longer sees an alternative to it. The idea of community in connection with the religious group does not seem to be of great importance for Daniela, just as it does not play an positive role in her biography. Faith is concentrated on the 'figure' of God.

The following possible interpretations emerge from the overall view of her biogaphy: since childhood, Daniela has interpreted her personal experiences in a religious way. In the New Apostolic Church she has now found a faith which, in a fitting relationship, takes up and strengthens the religious views internalized during the stages of socialization. Daniela is therefore a type governed by tradition. In the process of growing up, she has left behind both the Catholic Church as the sole institution capable of making sense of life, and her father as the person who had up until then offered her security. Prompted by her boyfriend, she has decided to join a church which offers her more, and in which she can find greater fulfillment of her religiosity. She is now dependent upon the God of the New Apostolic Church in the same way that she was dependent upon her father and the Catholic Church. For Daniela, the relationship to the church is free of conflict and strong; in contrast, the relationship to her father is now weak and the Catholic church belongs to her distant past. Even a crisis in her relationship to her boyfriend cannot affect her faith. Religiosity is the central focus of her life.

2.1.4 „We are leaving the church ...” – Case study of 'Helene and Kurt'

At the time of the interview, Helene is fifty-five and Kurt is sixty-six years old. They have been married for about thirty years. They have two daughters who were both born two years apart in the mid-seventies. Kurt's initial contact to the New Apostolic Church occurred after World War II. Although he was baptized as a Catholic and had no contacts at all to the church during the war, he is „deeply moved" when he reads the Bible for the first time in 1948, and begins to search for a church in which he can find the realization of the principles of a 'primeval church' which so inspired him during his study of the Bible. He finds a congregation in which the atmosphere is „very loving and very warm" and finally decides to join the New Apostolic Church; he will remain a member for forty-five years. After his divorce from his first wife, Kurt meets Helene. They become engaged and finally marry; however, Kurt's condition is that she convert from the Protestant to the New Apostolic Church.

Protestant from the time of her birth, Helene experiences her religious socialization in the mainstream Protestant parochial milieu. She is active in the church community in childhood, youth and adolescence. At this time she also makes her first conscious decision in favor of a religious life: at the time of her confirmation, Helene decides to be a serious Christian. When Helene meets Kurt, she knows from the start that there will be problems due to their different religious affiliations; however, out of love for the man who will become her husband, she begins to become interested in the New Apostolic Church.

Helene and Kurt participate together in the church services on a regular basis; at the same time, Helene is given 'special attention,' i.e. she receives special training. Helene has difficulties with the new terminology, and she must also pay the social consequences, giving up the circle of friends and acquaintances which she had grown up with since childhood. The members of the New Apostolic community seem „different" to her, strange. Although Helene still harbors doubts about the tenets of the New Apostolic Church, especially concerning its claims to absoluteness, she soon receives her 'seal.' She is twenty-eight years old at the time. She cannot remember any special feelings experienced at the time, but she does remember the shame she felt when she did not inform her parents of the event.

Everyday life is structured entirely anew: church services are attended several times a week, participation in the choir, etc. Helene soon experiences conflicts with the faith. She does not feel like the others, does not feel the exalting quality of the religious services. She soon experiences the New Apostolic faith as an obligation in which conformity is of greater importance than one's own feelings. Helene feels like an outsider, not only concerning her religious views, she also has problems with participation in the standard activities in the congregation. She dislikes the „vineyard work" (door-to-door missionary work) and she is happy to be able to excuse herself from such duties because of preganancies and births. Her maternal feelings

are also in conflict with the requirements of the New Apostolic Church. The neglect of her children in favor of the numerous church services seemed to her just as questionable and alarming as the early integration of the children into the church and the long-term removal of the children from their parents by the institution. In strong emotional tones, she tells about the „fury" she felt about the „huge power" that the church elders exerted over their lifestyle, especially that of the children. One of the daughters wants to wear trousers, although this is forbidden for girls. Both parents fail in their attempt to reach a relaxation of the rules from the church superior. This event leads to an inner break with the new-apostolic religion on the part of the daughter involved. As another example of giving in to the church authorities – however not completely –, Helene tells, that after they have been caught watching television, they get rid of the television set; later they set up the television in the cellar. In addition to the exterior constraints, Helene and Kurt are also burdened by inner obsessions and nightmarish fears that the return of Jesus Christ could take place without them noticing it. This fear plagues them especially when they cannot attend church services because of vacations or trips.

Helene and Kurt's withdrawal from the New Apostolic Church developed in a long-term process. Against the will of their personal priest, Helene and Kurt secretly participate in a course on psychological astrology in another city. Also the aspect of their relationship seems important: the two are bonded closely in these secretive doings. Helene formulates their main intention thus: they wanted something of their own, something they could decide upon independently, they were concerned with the development of their personalities – that is, in view of their religious milieu, the learning of astrology was an „awakening".

In the phase of disaffiliation from the community, they sometimes skipped church services although they were both aware that this is considered a serious offence. Helene tells of the torments her guilty conscience caused her at that time - and even three years after leaving the church. She has the feeling that she has betrayed the New Apostolic Church, feels that she is ungrateful, and tells us in this context in great detail and with great emotion about a priest who helped her during the death of her mother.

Another deciding factor in the decision to leave the New Apostolic Church was - especially for Helene - the conflicting requirements of the church and everyday life. After taking up her profession again, Helene is overworked: her job, the household, the children and the church cannot be combined and she suffers from exhaustion. She appeals to the responsible priest for some understanding, but does not receive permission to reduce her duties in the church for the sake of her health and her profession.

Helene and Kurt's disappointment with the New Apostolic Church increases steadily. Kurt no longer recognizes the church he joined originally as a result of the deep emotions he felt while reading the Bible. In a series of letters which finally reach the 'Stammapostel', the conflict reaches a head. After examining the points of criticism, the congregation cannot confirm them and Kurt is branded a liar. The church superior comes to the conclusion that either personal or marital problems may be involved, but that the congregation is innocent. The end of this sad story of their process of withdrawal is quickly told: Kurt sends a final farewell letter to all the decison-makers in the church: „we are leaving the church ... and that was the end of the matter."

Helene and Kurt's religiosity has changed and transformed greatly since leaving the church: they currently strictly refuse all religious activities with a ritualistic, formalistic or compulsive quality. After leaving the New Apostolic Church, Kurt's idea of God has developed in a more positive direction: God simply cannot be merciless enough to punish weaknesses in such a severe manner, with punishments such as the stroke that Kurt suffered. Helene characterizes her idea of God as vague at the moment. She speaks of a basic trust which cannot be described in words and which gives her a feeling of security, thus drawing attention to the fact that she is able to deal quite well with this vagueness. She thinks that she may some day be able to re-join the Protestant church, which she has known „from childhood." But for the time

being, she does not want to commit herself. The change in the idea of God – „the 'spark of life' in us is of divine origin, God is in us" – has also been accompanied by a change in prayer. Praying has now acquired the character of 'listening to one's inner self', of an interior dialog. This corroborates the fact that even the „psychological aspects" of astropsychology were helpful to Helen and Kurt in their search for themselves.

The direction of Helene and Kurt's religious movement of transformation is open in different directions: one the one hand, Helene expresses her interest in Buddhism. She speaks of the similarities that this eastern religious doctrine shares with Christianity, stating that: „the fundamental things are interchangeable." On the other hand, Kurt is still convinced by the idea of an original, primeval Christianity and thereby explains his disappointment about the New Apostolic Church, in which there is no longer any trace of the idea of a primeval church. Kurt sums up his experiences in saying that the teachings of Jesus forced him both to join and to leave the New Apostolic Church.

Typological attributes:

(α)   **Type governed by tradition:** Helene: religious socialization in the Protestant church, determined by the family; Kurt: Catholic, but not involved religiously

        Mid-life converts into the New Apostolic Church, Kurt's motive: the study of the Bible; Helene: her future husband's membership in the New Apostolic Church

(β)   **Late mid-life deconversion** (due to unbearable constraints and limitations; in addition: conflicts concerning lifestyle, authority and interpretation)

        Transformation and an increase in self-confidence are discernible in the process of leaving the church

---

2.1.5   „backing out" at the „right time" – Case study of 'Waltraud'

Waltraud is about fifty-five years old at the time of the interview. She is married, a housewife and mother of two children. She lives in southern Germany and was also born there. Waltraud grew up in a Catholic area, but was baptized and raised as a Protestant. Waltraud is educated in school by nuns and is thus confronted with religious differences from early on. However, she is able to deal with them in a self-confident way. These experiences familiarize Waltraud with ways of concretely defining herself through religion. She learns at an early stage of her life that it is good and also socially attractive to accumulate religious knowledge. She develops her own faith.

This faith will later draw upon the religious knowledge of the Bible acquired in early childhood and the following years. For Waltraud, the Bible is the foundation of truth and is universally applicable. „A firm knowledge of the Bible" will prove to be an irreplaceable asset in the confrontations to come. Waltraud's intuition also grows out of her firm knowledge of the Bible; an intuitive feeling of estrangement, of not belonging can be pinpointed as one of the central aspects of her religious behavior. She relies upon this inner voice and becomes distrustful or more critically distanced whenever she feels this sensation of estrangement. There is only one true faith for Waltraud, one which is oriented on the Bible and possesses a fundamental validity for normative behavior. Societal power relationships such as hierarchically organized personnel structures are mere secondary structural elements.

In late childhood and early adulthood after moving to a new town, Waltraud takes part in a youth group/Bible study group in the Protestant church parish. She attends confirmation

classes and is then confirmed in the mid-1950's. She describes this period as „a really great time". Following her confirmation, she has no contact with the church for a long period of time. First she concentrates on training for a profession, then she marries, and finally she moves into a rural town, then devoting all her time to motherhood. She has two children. The daughter is probably about twenty-nine today, and the son about twenty-six years old. Her children's participation in church services sets the stage for Waltraud's return to religious involvement. Waltraud remains as an onlooker at the children's services because timewise it would not be worthwhile for her to drive home and then return to pick up her children. Waltraud's contact to the church is continued through the daughter, whom she accompanies in the congregation.

In the mid-1980's, initiated by her daughter, Waltraud takes up contact with the Free Church, a charismatic congregation in which she remained a member for almost six years. She was at first worried that her daughter had become a member of a sect. Waltraud then accompanied her to a service and there had her „conversion experience." In the midst of modern songs and a sermon in English, Waltraud has the feeling, that the certainty that Jesus is present. She feels something indescribably new and cannot categorize it within the framework of religiosity familiar to her. This is the beginning of Waltraud's entrance into the charismatic church community. A stranger prophesizes that her husband will react with openness and accompany her. The prophesy proves correct (but only temporarily: after participating once, her husband does not develop a relationship to this religious community). In the transitional phase lasting several months, Waltraud alternates between services in the Free Church and in the Protestant parish. Then mother and daughter travel to a number of conferences in order to hear certain preachers. Waltraud is pleased that she and her daughter share the same belief.

Waltraud has a moving experience at the first conference, an experience which paves the way for her entrance into the charismatic community. She dislikes the shouting of the other people praying and gets up to leave the room. A man steps up to her as she is leaving and asks that she permit him to pray for her. As they continue to talk, it becomes clear that he is familiar with details about her life which a total stranger could not possibly know. She suspects that God has told this young man about her; the situation sets her „feelings all a-whirl". Waltraud also attends the second conference with her daughter and here too she has a pivotal experience. Waltraud once again feels uncomfortable during the service. This time the participants begin to fall over one after the other. Waltraud wants to leave the room and once again she experiences physical changes which manifest themselves in tension and a feeling of helplessness: „I couldn't do anything - I felt like I was standing in the middle of a power current." Waltraud provides a rationalizing explanation for her state of consciousness at the time: „I was probably open for everything, everything coming from God."

After joining, a consolidation takes place in her everyday life. Small regional groups, prayer sessions, and seminars emerge from the religious community. Waltraud participates in various prayer groups, organizes the mail service, manages stands presenting books, listens to sermons on cassettes, etc. Waltraud's everyday life is structured by her membership in the charismatic community and the demands it places upon her. Waltraud once again draws special attention to the emotional aspects of her religious life at this point. She emphasizes the friendliness and closeness of the other members, so that „in the beginning you had the feeling that, really, yes, you were experiencing paradise on earth." During her time in the charismatic church, Waltraud also participates in missionary-exorcistic activities. In this context she once again experiences a feeling of doubt because she cannot justify this activity using the Bible. Once again she puts forth her state of consciousness at the time as an explanation for both her doubts and for the fact that she nevertheless remained in the community: at the time she was entirely open to everything there was to be known about God.

The first crisis, an initial sign of the approaching break with the community, occurs while Waltraud is listening to a taped sermon on a cassette. She is listening to the cassette in a state

of total inner contentment and then discovers a mistake: a passage from the Bible is inter-preted incorrectly. For Waltraud, the Bible is the only verifiable medium: „no, there's nothing else." She experiences a crisis of conscience. Whereas she realizes that it was never difficult for her to adjust herself to hierarchical structures, it now becomes necessary to discuss and question these structures critically.

Waltraud describes her withdrawal from the community in terms of a process, much as she described the events leading to her joining. First she can no longer listen to the cassettes, then she discovers a mistake in the interpretation of the Bible, and begins to harbor doubts. She then repeatedly fails in her attempts to confront the individual in charge of the community. She experiences both her own limits and the limits of friendliness and love within the com-munity. Within this context, she compares the two systems of knowledge - that of the religion and that of everyday life, and decides in the end in favor of the knowledge to be found in eve-ryday life. Waltraud continues to question her charismatic community's system of belief. The priests' interpretation of images seen in dreams (the seeing of visions) seems to her just as arbitrary as their interpretations of the Bible or the decisions made by the persons in charge concerning who is a Satanist. Two accounts of offences committed by Waltraud during this critical time deserve special attention. First, Waltraud consciously breaks the rules of the community when she speaks with a member that had been expelled. Second, she disagrees with the prophetic interpretation of a vision. She indicates that according to the community's codex governing its members' behavior, the refusal to accept a priest's interpretations unques-tioningly amounts to a deadly sin. Waltraud sums up these experiences by remarking that she was not yet ready to say „no"; however, in retrospect, she also locates the turning points in her charismatic period in that time: „Definitely...that set the foundation for the break, totally." Waltraud receives anonymous telephone calls during her doubting phase. The calls escalate to the point of harassment, disturb the family's life at home, and finally force Waltraud to seek help from the police. Waltraud recounts these events as the final point of her exiting phase. During this period of time, she also receives a written summons to a meeting in which she is to „face" the community members. She does not attend the meeting. The family seems to stick together during the period of separation from the community; the „family ties" are apparently stronger than religion or the membership in the community.

In the final phase of separation from the charismatic group, Waltraud and her family once again become the victims of a religious battle. A car is parked in front of the house and the family suspects that the passenger is a member of the community, praying intensively. The whole family sleeps badly that night, „negative energy" seems to emanate from the praying individual. They feel the power of the prayers, the 'hostile praying'. At this point it becomes clear that Waltraud is still under the influence of the members of the charismatic church and that she has not yet successfully completed the inner, spiritual and mental separation from the group. Although Waltraud explicitly emphasizes that she is in retrospect „thankful for the

---

Typological attributes:

(α) **Type governed by tradition with a charismatic episode**: Protestant religious sociali-zation, determined by the family (in a Catholic surrounding)

Mid-life convert (compensation for emotional deficits in mainstream Protestantism)

(β) **Mid-life deconversion** (due to 'superior' knowledge of the Bible compared with the charismatic-fundamentalist leaders)

Increase of self-confidence in the process of deconversion, but little change discernible

---

time" and that she acquired useful knowledge for the rest of her life during her charismatic phase, she is nevertheless glad that both she and her children succeeded in „backing out" at

the „right time". Above all towards the end of the interview, it becomes apparent that Waltraud is making an effort to win recognition from the interviewer for being a devout Christian. It is perhaps surprising that she continues to make such an effort, especially following her charismatic episode, in which she experienced many positive things, but also a number of frightening aspects. However, these experiences did not throw her off her track, and also did not change her fundamental religious orientation.

2.2 Mono-converts

2.2.1 „...well, after this incident I became really stubborn...“ – Case study of 'Ute'

Ute summarizes the 'incident' referred to by the quote in the opening sequence of the interview in the following brief and straightforward manner:

„Well, I, in 1982 I took up religion, actually through acquaintances,...mhm, they told me that I should spend my life with Jesus, yes, and so then I spent a long time looking for the right church, until I finally ended up in a Pentecostal church. I thought at the time that that was my path, that it was what God had willed for me. Yes, and so I was in the Pentecostal church from 1983 to 1990, um... yes and then after I moved I ended up in a charismatic church. At first I didn't realize that it was a charismatic church and not a Pentecostal one, but after a while I noticed it pretty quickly...[...] (coughs) Well, I managed pretty quickly to reach a high position in the community and then I quit because of the question of whether or not a member of the charismatic church or a Christian can go into a mixed sauna. It came to a fight about that. I just decided for myself that I didn't want to subject myself to that anymore...That's all (laughs) I know.“

That Ute of course knows more is clearly documented in the lengthy interview. Not everything can be recounted so briefly and not everything can have happened as smoothly and unproblematically as Ute's concise narrative above seems to suggest.

Biographical information. Ute is thirty-five years old at the time of the interview. She is a single mother and has a fourteen-year-old son. Ute works as an ergotherapist on the psychiatric ward of a hospital. After finishing high school, Ute had begun studying law, but broke off her studies when she became pregnant. Shortly thereafter she completed training as an ergotherapist. Ute has a conversion experience at the age of twenty-one, joins a Pentecostal church, and then becomes a member of a charismatic church in 1990. She had a successful career in the charismatic community. As a pastor, she was entrusted with a supervisory position in the pastoral team; in 1994 Ute left this charismatic community.

Circumstances of socialization, especially concerning religious socialization. In retrospect, Ute sees herself as an unwanted child. She describes her mother as cold. It can thus be concluded that Ute did not receive very much love and affection in early childhood.

„Uh, my mother is a pretty cold person, and <u>now</u> she also admits that she never wanted to have children. Um, well, and I think that was very formative for my childhood.“

The only feelings Ute experienced from her father took the form of choleric outbursts of rage. The emotional coldness she experienced and the feeling of being unwanted take shape as Ute's central life theme.

A remarkable step in Ute's religious socialization takes place in late childhood: within the context of religious instruction and the regular Sunday attendance of church services for children in the Protestant parish. Ute recounts that she was „incredibly devout“ when she was a child. She continues practicing religion in her own way in spite of the criticism and „mockery“ this incurs from family and friends. This is presumably an initial formative attempt to deal with her feelings of unwantedness by means of religion.

At the age of twelve, Ute radically renounces the religion of her childhood and her church. In addition, she goes through a very disappointing break with her godmother, who had probably been able to provide temporary compensation for the emotional coldness and feeling of unwantedness Ute experienced from her parents. Shortly thereafter Ute struggles with depression. She attempts to commit suicide at seventeen. Then Ute converted: once and for all in her life. Ute is therefore to be counted as an example of the mono-convert type, even though she moved from a Pentecostal community to the charismatic one in which her religious career actually took place.

Motives for entering and remaining. Ute's conversion is connected with her depressive, sui-
cidal mood. In terms of narrative dynamics, she describes it in the following manner:
*„In that hole...I really just stayed there, uh, until I converted...until I started to spend my life
with Jesus."*
Ute's religiosity, her conversion, and her affinity for the devoutness of the Pentecostal church
are to be interpreted as a compensation for the emotional coldness and feeling of unwanted-
ness she experienced in childhood. Ute compensates for these experiences both by means of
her conversion, and also with particular success by means of her year-long search for the „fit-
ting" affiliation with a charismatic community. Ute herself places this in an even more drastic
biographical context in the continuation of the statement quoted above:
*„Uh, my mother is a pretty cold person, and <u>now</u> she also admits that she never wanted to
have children. Um, well, and I think that was very formative for my childhood. My father is a
choleric type who never admits that he has feelings. So, and then at some point this God came
along, a God who was incredibly interested in me, and I thought that was really great then
(laughs quietly), hm, well and I think that's really the function that faith has had in my life."*
In contrast to the emotional coldness and lack of interest she experiences from her parents, „at
some point this God came along, a God who was incredibly interested" in her enters her life.
In view of Ute's description of her mother and father, the search for a God from whom one
can expect closeness, affection and emotional strength is quite understandable.

Biographical consequences. Ute describes the satisfaction with life that she felt: the activities
in the charismatic community were „fun" for her. She feels well taken care of in the group,
likes the singing and dancing, and also enjoys such 'crazy' undertakings as – with the story of
Jericho in mind – circling around the outskirts of her town seven times (which was not easy
with a baby carriage). Ute can also compensate for both her depression and her life themes –
the feeling of unwantedness and the mockery she experienced from her parents in childhood –
by means of her own important position as a pastor of this charismatic group. We can also
discern paths of transformation leading to greater autonomy and an increased ability to act:
Ute presents herself as an individual who has independently determined which path she
wishes to take and what she is looking for (of course, together with Jesus, „Jesus and me");
she also describes herself as satisfied with her choices.
But the shadows return: Ute feels threatened by angels of death and demons. Is this a ques-
tioning of her autonomy? Ute's autonomy is subjected to considerable strain: a huge black
angel of death threatens her, other demons as well; according to the advice of her pastor, she
can only drive them away by means of singing praises. The threat of the angel of death and
the demons can be interpreted as a symboloization and personification of Ute's depression.
This is the only occasion in her charismatic phase that Ute feels threatened to such an extreme
extent by demonic forces; however, Ute herself describes the constant „need to fight" against
demons, etc. as her main problem. This is thus an example of a restriction of autonomous
freedom of choice and of the return of her depression in the form of symbolical, mythological
figures.
However, this personification also offers Ute new opportunities for dealing with her problems
and thus also results in an increase in autonomy – of course within the context of the reli-
gious-charismatic mind-set. An increase in autonomy occurs when Ute succeeds in driving
away the depressive spirits by means of religious rituals (singing praise) and with the help of
her fellow church members. She learns to master the demons and forces from her high-rise
apartment balcony, and feels „almost like a kind of small god."
The effects of this newly acquired method for dealing with fear and the resulting strengthen-
ing of her ego also make themselves felt in her relationships with other people. Ute has a piv-
otal successful experience with her newly strengthened ego in the confrontations concerning
her withdrawal from the charismatic group. She clearly feels and makes use of her superiority
in dealing with the leader of the charismatic community; this individual is made out to be a

„weak person." Ute does not tolerate intimidation, she decides instead to leave the community.

What is left for Ute? Ute succeeded in overcoming her depression while in the charismatic milieu, and managed to transform it into the feeling of being in command of herself and others. Ute acquired this feeling of power in her incantatory and commanding use of language when dealing with her demons and the angels of death – the personifications of her own fears. She has thus successfully tested methods of dealing with her life themes, emotional coldness and the feeling of unwantedness. Nevertheless, she states that all the years have taken their toll on her.

Ute achieved an increase in self-confidence, even a feeling of empowerment in a charismatic milieu and was also able to put them to the test. Even though she acquired this feeling of empowerment when mastering demons and angels of death, and although this feeling was exaggerated within the context of the illusions, the lasting effects of this newly acquired method of dealing with fear and her strengthened ego make themselves felt in her relationships with other people, for example within the context of the confrontations with the community leading to her exit from the group.

Problems with self-responsibility? At the time of the interview, about three years after her withdrawal from the community, Ute is still very enthusiastic about her experience in mastering demons, using magical incantatory language, and about the feeling of power she experienced („almost like a kind of small god"); she still finds the experience „really great". Looking back, she mourns the loss of the feeling experienced at the time in an almost melancholy way. This is an indication that Ute has serious difficulties in independently developing the power and strength „borrowed" from these strong authorities and forces.

According to Ute, a continuing education workshop organized mainly by Sanyassins was very helpful to her in dealing with her exit from the charismatic community. The workshop helped her to achieve a certain further stabilization of her independence. The workshop leaders advised Ute that she should „live in the here and now," and that she should not always be so nice and kind, but should rather now and then be aggressive and impudent. Ute takes this advice to heart, especially the impulses encouraging her to make use of the independence and strengthened ego she has attained in a religious context and develop them further under purely secular circumstances.

Typological attributes:

(α)   **Mono-convert in adolescence**

(β)   **Transformation: strengthening of ego through driving out of demons**

      Mid-life deconversion without the need for therapy

      Reinforcement of the ego by argumentative superiority in the exiting process

(γ)   **Anti-depressive, anti-suicidal compensation** (charismatic religion as a remedy for depression, unwantedness and emotional coldness, and as an educational experience for the strengthening of the ego)

2.2.2   *„...I just surrender it to God..." – Case study of 'Rolf'*

Biographical information. Rolf is thirty-seven years old at the time of our interview. He is a self-employed civil engineer in a large city, busy with the building up and expansion of his own company. He finished high school with a technical specialization. In 1979, finally completed studies (bachelor degree) at the university in the city in which he now lives. He then took up work as a civil engineer and founded his own company ten years later.

We received little information about the beginning of Rolf's marriage; it presumably lasted about ten years. He has been recently divorced. In a mere brief comment, Rolf mentions that he also has a ten-year-old son, whom he hardly ever sees because, as Rolf puts it, his son rejects him. Rolf still suffers from the divorce. His wife left him because she felt he could not offer her enough love and closeness. Religion neither impressed nor interested Rolf in his childhood and youth. However, shortly after his divorce in 1993, Rolf is approached in the subway and thus makes contact with the Gemeinde Jesu Christi. Two and a half months later he has a conversion experience and is baptized.

Circumstances of socialization in view of the religious turning point. In retrospect, Rolf describes his father as emotionally cold („no love at all came from my father"), his mother was less so; within the course of the interview, his home is portrayed as emotionally cold, his parents' marriage as full of quarrels, gibes and emotional injuries. The life themes burdening Rolf are: first, a fear of relationships which in adulthood develops into a fear of experiencing the pain of being abandoned, and the anxiety which overlays Rolf's second main life theme: the self-tension between power and powerlessness, control and the loss of it. Rolf's religious socialization within the family is insignificant. His mother demonstrates little interest in religion (church services on Christmas Eve) and his father has no interest in religious questions and institutions. Rolf did not develop a deep interest in religion in childhood and youth.

Rolf's problems with the fear of relationships continue into the present. He has entered into only a few relationships with women because he is afraid, „afraid of being hurt":

„...and relationships and so on, that was really a topic where (takes a breath), where nothing at all almost, well, I really haven't had that many relationships (sniffs), well, because I always had a lot of fear in my heart, always had fears in the past, fear of being hurt."

Rolf's divorce and his ex-wife's rejection of him due to a lack of love and closeness is the most serious crisis he has experienced recently, in his mid-thirties. In a more reserved tone, Rolf states: „It simply became clear that we just couldn't find a way to reach each other in marriage."

Motives for entering and remaining. Rolf's divorce took place just before he joined the Gemeinde Jesu Christi. It seems that the dynamics of Rolf's relationships have a lot to do with the dynamics of his religious feelings; he brought up his divorce himself in connection with his joining of the community, without first being questioned about it by the interviewer. The breaking off of personal relationships has serious consequences for him regarding religious orientations. It is possible that he is seeking a deep closeness in religion which he was unable to achieve in his failed partnership. Religion would thus function for him as a replacement for a partner, allowing him to experience the feeling of closeness he lacks.

Deferment vs. transformation? Rolf's life themes of power and powerlessness, control and the loss of control are the impetus behind his affinity to the new religious milieu; however, in this context they are not being dealt with – on the contrary, they are being intensified. Rolf's new religious orientation offers him a simple and clearly structured world view, an escape from the lack of orientation and confusion:

„Yes, that's a lifestyle.....that, that, that simply, yes, that what, uh, what's written out in the Bible is from God. And that it's from our creator and that he really knows what's best for us. (sniffs) And first (sniffs) I formed my opinion about, well, for example, things like, like marriage or the relationship between man and woman (takes a breath), I just, uh, formed an opinion based on my own standards (sniffs), or based on what I read in magazines or whatever. (sniffs) But those are all things that were usually based on human knowledge...yes, and

they're things with a lot confusion and chaos. (sniffs) The emancipation movement, and then the softies as a counter-movement.....yes, where there's an orientation for us, where it's actually obvious that there's a lack of orientation; (takes a breath) where I could just see, there's a clear standard."

It is therefore not surprising that autonomy is not only not mentioned at all by Rolf, but is also not desirable for him. On the contrary, he likes the passivity, the delegation of responsibility and initiative to God. It is a relief for him. Rolf wants to have everything be determined and carried out by God, „I put everything in God's hands - even my finances, for example."

A dualism forms the religious-mythological framework, separating eternity and hell, God and Satan and satisfying Rolf's need for clear structures and instructions. Thoughts and feelings can become threatening in this context; because Satan „*puts thoughts in our heads, feelings too, he puts us in strange situations that make us uncertain (takes a breath)*".

Fundamental aspects of human relationships, such as sexuality, also become threatening. For Rolf and his friends in the community, sexuality is the gateway to Satan. Opportunities for sexual encounters are to be avoided:

„*...we generally do it in such a way that (takes a breath), so that a man and woman do not meet alone, we meet usually meet in groups of four or six (sniffs), just so that (takes a breath) so that temptations, possible temptations like those in yourself, that aren't (takes a breath), let's say haven't been purged (sniffs), yes, well, for example, being alone with a woman, with a woman in an apartment (takes a breath) and things like that, well, we just try to live in purity and we consciously say: no, we don't want to bring about (takes a breath) a situation a like that, and if such a, such a situation comes up, then we try to find another solution. (sniffs) Yes, well, so that, uh, so that Satan doesn't get his foot in the door...*"

Rolf can feel secure in his fear of relationships, sheltered by the religious group and its repressive regulations concerning relationships between the sexes, protecting the individual from him-/herself. Within the framework of the group's restrictive instructions, Rolf can even enter into relationships. Thus, this life theme – the fear of relationships – is not dealt with, but perpetuated; however, it is also one of the deciding motivational factors for his affinity to this repressive religious milieu. Rolf is satisfied with his membership because he has found the corresponding fit for his life themes in the new religious community and because he can to a great extent ascribe the responsibility for his decisions to God and Satan.

Typological attributes:

(α)   **Mono-convert: mid-life newcomer**

(β)   **Delegation of responsibility to 'God' and 'Satan' (**substitutive interpretation of life   experience)

No transformation discernible

(γ)   **Compensation: dealing with a crisis (divorce)**

2.2.3   *"I have become a happy person again" – Case study of 'Monika'*

Biographical information. Monika is thirty-nine years old at the time of the interview and was born in a mid-sized town in the GDR. Her mother raises her alone and works full time. Her father has been absent in her childhood (he has only recently begun to play a role and

supports Monika financially). Monika grows up as the eldest of three children in a large city in the GDR. She completes the usual secondary school education; at the age of sixteen she is in vocational training which also leads to the Abitur.

While religion is of no importance at all at home, Monika has her first conversation with a Jehovah's Witness at the age of sixteen and becomes interested in this religious community. Monika's mother notices it four months later, but Monika was not to be dissuaded from her activities. Because she refuses to complete military training, Monika loses her place in the training program, and takes up work as an assistant in a photo shop. Not quite eighteen years old, Monika is baptized by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Her mother then forces her to move out; the contact to her family breaks down. Monika moves in with a woman who is a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. At the age of nineteen, Monika marries an official of the Jehovah's Witnesses, has two children with him (a daughter in 1978 and a son in 1981), and works until 1990 as a housewife.

Towards the end of the 1980's, Monika begins to harbor doubts about the group's teachings (hierarchy; number of 'saints'; Holy Communion). She would like to correct her uncertainties using the Bible and learns Ancient Greek for this purpose. This leads to disapproval and alienation from her husband. Finally, Monika confronts (together with another member) the community with the unheard of request to participate in Holy Communion. This leads to hearings before the elders and in 1990 (after fifteen years of membership) to expulsion.

Afraid that her husband could take the children away from her, Monika runs away to her brother, files for divorce. She obtains the divorce within one month and then moves to a middle-sized town. There she meets an old flame from her youth and marries him. He had also recently left the Jehovah's Witnesses. This marriage also soon ends in divorce because Monika discovers that her husband has remained a practicing Jehovah's Witness. Monika lives with her two children, seeks contact in the Protestant church community and completes training as a tax consultant's assistant. She also finishes her Abitur (high school diploma) in evening classes. At the time of the interview is in the middle of her second semester studying business administration.

Circumstances of socialization in view of religious socialization. As a single parent working full time, Monika's mother has little time for the children. In retrospect, Monika felt a lack of warmth, security and the feeling of belonging together in her family life. The life themes which continue to burden Monika in later life are: a need for inclusion and companionship, and the need for a feeling of self-worth. Her socialization within the family is not religious, as was common in the GDR. An interest in religion and the readiness to enter into religious commitments develop in Monika's adolescence. The initial contact with the Jehovah's Witnesses quickly leads to her headstrong decision to join the group, in spite of her mother's opposition.

Motives for entering and remaining. The following motives for joining are discernible in Monika's case: the feeling of community fascinates her; upon joining the community, she receives warmth, security and care; Monika is also assigned substitute parents. This compensates for the lack of warmth she felt in her own family.

Monika is proud of her first husband and looks up to him. His successful career in the Jehovah's Witnesses compensates (at least temporarily) for Monika's lack of self-worth in that, through him and her membership in a chosen community, she is protected from feelings of insignificance.

Subsequent processes. Concerning social contacts, Monika experiences the 'feeling of community' with the Jehovah's Witnesses as an enhancement of her satisfaction with life. Concerning the ideological, doctrinal dominance and rigidity of the beliefs represented by the Jehovah's Witnesses, Monika will later find herself in a state of unbearable dissatisfaction. Monika experiences the hierarchical and authoritarian mode of instruction and the patriarchal subordination she is subjected to in her marriage as serious restrictions of her capacity to act.

However, she also learns to understand them as obstacles that she can tackle and subvert by argumentation, thus practically succeeding in fleeing from them. This results in a strengthening of her ability to act. Monika was presumably beaten during her first marriage to a Jehovah's Witness official. Monika avoids the danger that her husband might attempt to take the children away from her - a danger that probably cannot be ruled out - by leaving the shared household.

Disaffiliation and its consequences. Monika's motives for leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses are her doubts about the teachings. Her doubts result in vehement rejection and finally culminate in a provocative and bold undertaking: the request to participate in the Holy Communion, resulting in her expulsion. Monika nevertheless struggles with depression after leaving the community: „I'm a happy person today, really. I was always a happy person. I have become a happy person again." It may be assumed that there were times when she did not feel so happy. On the one hand, Monika says that she will never again need a marriage. It may be inferred that both her experiences with men - both of her husbands were Witnesses - and with the belief system of the Jehovah's Witnesses have left her sick and tired of such people and systems. On the other hand, Monika would quite definitely like to find a new partner, one who „doesn't consider me to be his property and doesn't think that I have to have the same opinion as him about everything, including ideological things". Forced subordination and ideological paternalism are traumatic experiences which have temporarily forced Monika into retreat. The following can be assessed as a *successful learning experience*: emancipation from the rigid and totalitarian belief system of the Jehovah's Witnesses and at the same time from the patriarchal husband – who as an official in this religious community is the focus of the confrontation – by means of independently acquired (exegetical) knowledge. Because of Monika's rationally structured process of dealing with her situation, she is capable of leading an independent life and pursuing her own educational and professional goals.

Monika does not think that she needs therapy. „I'm, well, I've never needed therapy, I have a lot of friends, I can get along fine." This may have to do with the fact that Monika tries to solve her problems with her intellect. She has thus developed a hatred for the system (of belief) and not for the people, the former fellow Witnesses. Monika's coping strategies are intellectually oriented. Monika finds relief and a strategy for coping by radically and critically attacking the two 'systems': the educational system of the GDR and the system of belief held by the Jehovah's Witnesses. These two targets function as scapegoats for her. Monika also experiences her relationship to her children, her responsibility and care for them as extremely empowering.

Typological attributes:

(α) **Mono-convert, adolescent newcomer seeking familial compensation**

(β) **Mid-life deconversion / no need for therapy**

Reinforcement of the ego by asserting argumentative superiority in the disaffiliation process

(γ) **Compensation for lack of inclusion in early childhood**

2.2.4 *The Healing Power of Christian Science – Case Study of 'Hilde'*

Biographical information. Hilde is seventy years old at the time of the interview. Her parents divorce when she is seventeen. She lives with her mother. Hilde completes training as a housekeeper in a hotel (during the time of the Nazi dictatorship). She continues to work in the hotel, in which training sessions are held for the *Bund Deutscher Mädchen*. Hilde is working in another hotel in the region when the war comes to an end. She runs into several dangerous situations with soldiers, but survives them unharmed. After the war, Hilde meets her future husband. They marry in 1950. Her mother dies in 1951 of a serious incurable illness.

Circumstances of socialization in view of religious socialization and career. Hilde's mother is a practicing Protestant Christian, but this does not prevent her from making astrological interpretations for her family and daughters. Hilde came to know many stories about Jesus in her childhood. Hilde tells us that she was frequently sick as a child. Hilde's predominat life theme is the mystery of illness, the fear of sickness and of catastrophes, and coping with the fear of death.

Thus, the reason for her joining the Church of Christ (Scientist) is also the threat of an illness and the search for a (magical) remedy which could bring about a cure: her mother's incurable illness and the search for a remedy give Hilde cause to take up contact with Christian Science, arranged for her by her brother. Hilde's mother does not accept her daughter's new religious orientation or the actions offered by this organization's healers and finally passes away. Nevertheless, Hilde remains in the group and to this day lives according to the teachings of Christian Science. She experiences healing in the form of a pregnancy. For nine years she tried in vain to become pregnant; the doctors she consulted were unable to help her, but the female healer from the Christian Science group was supposedly successful. She raises her children in the spirit of and in accordance with the rules of Christian Science.

Processes of religious transformation. Hilde herself describes her religious career as a process of change. First, she transformed her childhood belief in Jesus as a healer: in Christian Science, Jesus is a state of mind and no longer a person – that is, Jesus as a person is an example of this state of consciousness. Second, today Hilde would like to find a relationship between the divine and everyday areas, of course within the religious framework of Christian Science. She would like to shape this relationship in the right way, keep the 'bond'; however, she does not want to submit herself unquestioningly to a system which prescribes how she is to form this relationship. She hopes to achieve health and protection by this means. Hilde has an extremely positive idea of God. Everyday situations are the object of pragmatic consideration. The rules set forth by Christian Science are not by any means the compulsory sole source of guidance. She also sometimes consults a doctor and allows for the common sense of everyday life.

Hilde is a mono-convert case. Both her religiousness and her way of living out her religion have experienced a transformation within the religious milieu – a development towards a more pragmatic, playful ease. Unlike other cases, this transformation process has not caused the individual to leave the group, but rather to stay.

Typological attributes:

(α)   **Mono-convert (in early adulthood)**

(β)   **Transformation discernible**

(γ)   **Compensation** (Christian Science as a remedy against illness, catastrophes and the fear of such events)

2.3   Accumulative Heretics

2.3.1   „I've taken a little bit from everywhere..." – Case study of 'Thomas'

Biographical information. Thomas was born in 1949 and is forty-eight at the time of the interview. He spent his youth and time of education in a large city in northern Germany in the 60's and 70's. After finishing high school, Thomas begins studies at a university to become a science teacher in secondary school and subsequently completes his practical training. After completing his studies, Thomas took up a number of jobs as both a craftsman and in the area of agricultural work. The exact nature of Thomas' current profession remains unclear in the interview. He lives with a woman, her two children from a previous partnership, and their own eight-month-old child.

Thomas' colorful religious career. Thomas is a child of the times in many respects. He is a typical example of the sequentially accumulative heretic. Already around the time of finishing school, Thomas comes into contact with many different schools of thought all offering a wide variety of philosophies of life. The majority of these philosophical and religious approaches have East Asian or charismatic characteristics. Thomas is a 'child of the times' in that he cannot deal with the traditional societal conventions predominant in the middle-class. He experiments with alternative ways of life. His religious and spiritual quest lasts for more than twenty years and brings him into contact with a number of milieus and groups:

- Contact with meditation groups beginning in 1971
- Bhagwan groups from 1978 to 1980
- Bio-energetics group, end of 1983 (or 1986?)
- Self-encounter group (for a short time)
- Psychological therapy
- Scientology (from 1989 to 1990)
- Protestant charismatic free church in 1990
- He is not a member of any religious organization at the time of the interview

In the early 1970's, Thomas comes into contact with the Bhagwan movement through a friend. Towards the end of the 1970's, he finally moves to an ashram in southern Germany and spends several years of his life there. The group lives in the country on an old farm and meditates together. Thomas leaves the group in the early 1980's because he feels oppressed by the ideology and teachings of the Bhagwan movement and cannot accept the open sexuality practiced in the commune. Thomas leaves southern Germany and returns to his home town in northern Germany.

An old friend introduces him to a bio-energetics group. The group's leader is an interesting individual („a fundamentalist Catholic priest from Costa Rica active in bio-energetics"), and under his supervision Thomas experiences fasting, meditation and strenuous physical exercises with the group. Thomas eventually also leaves this group. He finds it too difficult to conform to the group continually. He does not find enough of what he is looking for.

Thomas steers clear of religious groups for a certain time. His only contact with a religious institution is occasional participation in a church choir. He briefly takes part in a self-encounter group and then also attends a psychodrama group. These are the non-religious activities he experiments with during his search.

Scientology members approach Thomas on the street in 1989, and he becomes an active member for about six months. Thomas' account of the activities in the Scientology group has the terse quality of a report and is punctuated with extremely critical and political comments. We learn little about the emotional aspect of his membership. Thomas nevertheless places a very positive emphasis on the healing of a childhood trauma, a falling trauma, which he experienced through a personal therapy conducted by the Scientologists. Thomas does not tell of

any other similar positive experiences in the other groups of which he was a member. His membership in Scientology thus takes up a position of special significance in Thomas' religious career.

Thomas continues to sing in a church choir in spite of his Scientology membership. After a few months, he gets to know a woman there with whom he begins to discuss questions of faith. He falls in love with her, but she is already committed in another relationship. They nevertheless become quite close. She prays for him and through her Thomas 'gets to know Jesus'. Finally, she strongly advises him to leave Scientology. Thomas spontaneously decides to quit the Scientologists and then becomes a member of a Protestant, charismatic community. Thomas does not describe in detail the end of his membership in the charismatic free church; however, he does mention the conflicts he experienced in being forced to live up to demands placed upon him from without. These conflicts eventually lead to an inner separation from the free church, although this group led him to the discovery of what it means to be a Christian. In powerful arguments mainly making use of biblical material, Thomas makes clear his reasons for rejecting institutionalized faith in whatever form.

While going through the process of leaving the free church, Thomas enters into a long-term relationship with a Christian woman who is not associated with any particular religious institution for the first time since his youth. She has two children from a previous partnership and together they have a child who is eight months old at the time of the interview. Thomas' future plans and his argumentative standpoint are both determined by the newly discovered ideal of the nuclear family and life with the children. Thomas' life had long been a search for himself and for liberation; many of his problems now seem to have been solved by the responsibility he has assumed for his family.

Having reached the (temporary?) end of his religious tour, Thomas describes himself as a 'healed' individual who has gone through a 'purification'. His eyes were suddenly opened and he was able to achieve the insights which he had always lacked. He strictly refuses membership in an institutionalized religion.

Interpretations of the case. In the following I would like to compile the theories which were worked out in the course of the case study analysis and led to Thomas' position in our typology.

Sequentially accumulative heresy. After reading only a few pages of the interview, the image of a supermarket comes to mind – a supermarket in which Thomas seems to vary his choice of the religious persuasions displayed on the shelves. After making an initial choice, Thomas then tries out everything that seems to promise a fulfillment of his desires. Thomas is a sequentially accumulative heretic, an individual who picks and chooses among the supermarket-like offerings of various religious persuasions, selecting the elements which provide compensation for the problems he/she is dealing with in life. Irrespective of the criticism expressed and the distancing from the organization, such an individual is still capable of 'collecting' the positive effects remaining from personal developments experienced in each respective group.

The search for unconditional love. Thomas' deepest unfulfilled desire seems to be the hunger for love, security and acknowledgement from one certain person (his mother, his father, his partners). He wants to be loved for *who he is*, not for professional or intellectual achievements or as a reward for the fulfillment of *demands*. If this does not occur to his satisfaction, he moves on to the next experiment. This desire for unconditional love, acknowledgement and attention can be pinpointed as one of Thomas' predominant life themes. This is supported by the observation that Thomas' contacts to the various groups always occur passively. He does not intentionally and purposefully seek out membership. He allows himself to be recruited, convinced, persuaded and pulled into a group. The contact persons are usually acquaintances, room-mates, or former schoolmates.

His search aims to attain a form of *unconditional* love, in combination with a strong desire for (familial) companionship. An additional aspect of this need is clearly the principle of cate-

gorical faithfulness in intimate relationships. In the beginning of his religious career, this principle caused him to leave a group and continued to be of importance in his subsequent search for new relationships. This becomes particularly clear in the context of his narrative about the Bhagwan milieu: in this case, the frustrating experience of having to share a woman he loved with other members for ideological reasons led not only to the failure of the relationship, but also to Thomas' withdrawal from the community.

The life theme of 'unconditional love' is the determining factor for Thomas' search and religious career. The feeling that he has never really been loved is a recurringly pertinent topic throughout Thomas' entire religious-spiritual career. He meets repeatedly with disappointment in the search for his idea of unconditional love and companionship. This disappointment always leads to Thomas' withdrawal from the group.

Individualization of religion. Thomas' search is specifically characterized by a deep dissatisfaction with social norms. Perhaps typical for his generation, Thomas experiences them as a constraint. The involvement in a religious community gives him the opportunity to distance himself from the societal system of values. Thomas has a strong desire for liberation and is also unable to enter into commitments and keep them up on a long-term basis. As a result, whenever things begin to 'get to him' and conformative behavior is required of him, Thomas leaves the group. Thomas himself is the center of interest in his efforts towards achieving harmonious coexistence. Whenever an ideology requires the overstepping of his own personal limits, Thomas prefers to drop the ideology instead of his own principles. Thomas thus demonstrates an individuative independence which makes him resistant to the total submission to hierarchy as often required by fundamentalist or ideological instances. This nevertheless does not invalidate his incessant search for the warmth and embeddedness making up the elements of his life theme. On the contrary, Thomas devotes almost thirty years of his life to this search.

Secondary importance of religious content. What does 'God' mean and what does religious content mean for Thomas? Ideology and content-related issues seem to be of lesser importance for Thomas in his choice of an organization. Religious content has little or no importance and exerts no influence on the motivation to either change or remain in certain milieus. Spiritual and content-related aspects are unimportant in the choice of a particular organization. Thomas is searching for personal salvation, for ways of dealing with his life theme. Religious content has no far-reaching significance, and as a result, cognitive contradictions are mainly inconspicuous secondary phenomena. Thomas is looking for personal salvation and for a practicable path towards attaining it. He repeatedly experiments with possible methods until he finds a - temporarily - acceptable solution. Thus, the entrance into, exit from or switch to a new religious or spiritual milieu have a different significance for Thomas, as contrasted against an individual who is entirely convinced of his/her belief and converts once and for all. In the case of Thomas, movement to different institutions is motivated more by biographical aspects than by spiritual or content-related issues.

Coping with life themes or deferment? Thomas himself explicitly describes the personality-centered goals which guide him on his journey through various religious communities. He first of all mentions his lack of self-confidence and his desire for release from fears and compulsions. The usual approaches offered by therapy cannot help Thomas in dealing with such serious problems because they are not capable of reaching the everyday situations. However, in spite of his comments to the contrary, the dynamic of the interview indicates that the therapeutic milieus frequented by Thomas did in fact bring about a significant change in him. His narrative is strongly characterized by self-confident ideas which could not by any means come from an individual who considers himself insignificant. This offers grounds for the assumption that, at the end of his long fundamentalist-spiritual expedition, Thomas finally did succeed in coping with his life themes in a transformative manner. Two stages in this more or less successful coping process are described below as a conclusion of the case study.

Bhagwan: regressive compensation is not a long-term coping strategy. Thomas' experience in the Bhagwan commune provides evidence of insufficient strategies for dealing with his life themes within the context of spiritual possibilities. Thomas is interested and curious at the time; he believes that he has found a 'better human ideal'. At first he feels very comfortable in the group. The personal relationship to Bhagwan, the appreciative love expressed by the guru for his 'disciples' offer Thomas regressive compensation for his desire to be loved unconditionally. In addition, he is attracted by the exotic character of the group, accentuating the opposition to the conventional middle-class way of life. Thomas should be able to feel at ease. However, the fact that Thomas immediately follows up with criticism of the community results from a fundamental conflict: on the one hand, he longs for the feeling of community; on the other hand, he does not want to give up his individuality. It seems impossible to combine these two needs. He describes his „going away" as a chance to escape pressure. Thomas comes into increasing conflict with the basic principles of the Sanjassins and finally withdraws from the Bhagwan and its followers. Thomas succeeded in finding an answer, some compensation for his problems within the Bhagwan milieu, but no real coping or transformation took place. The beginnings of individuality and independence already become discernible in the process of leaving the group; these qualities will finally maintain the upper hand.

Scientology: giving and taking with positive effects and a rebellious end. Thomas is searching for his own personal liberation from a „burdensome past." Scientology employs methods which concentrate heavily on the individual's mental structure. This encourages Thomas and offers him a prospect for dealing with his „deficit in his life." He apparently feels that his past is a burden for his present life. For this reason his „first experience" with Scientology „was a help, a release at first," as he described it in the interview.

In the segment of the interview covering his membership in Scientology, Thomas uses language that differs noticeably from the other parts of the interview. Thomas uses terms of technical and economic origin. He develops an instrumental relationship to the Scientology activities:

„...it's interesting, exactly, what can, what could you offer me [I.: yes exactly], but, so I just dropped by, a little businesslike, exactly [I.: mhm] you guys want something to do with money, what (laughing) could you offer me [I.: ah yes], that's how I went about it (takes a breath), uh, always with this re- reserve, just take a-, take a look..."

Thomas describes another form of therapy in purely positive terms, and in contrast to his usual tone, with great emotion. The therapy's method requires the individual to visualize the situation which is the source of his/her fear repeatedly until the fear has disappeared. Since a childhood accident, Thomas has suffered from a fall trauma which torments him in his dreams. By means of „re-living" the situation repeatedly, he is able to liberate himself from his fear:

„...I developed a positive <u>feeling</u> about this situation by looking at it again and again, talking about it some more, going in again, experiencing it again and again (takes a breath), until it, until it has dissolved inside (takes a breath), and then I say, wow I survived, (quieter) I survived, you know, so I started feeling <u>joy</u> about the same situation, I can enjoy looking at it (takes a breath), then [I.: whereas before you were totally] [...], it's best to <u>repress</u> them [I.: yes], you forget, or if you've talked about them once, then it's best not to do it again [I.: (laughing) yes], or then you almost start to cry, uh, and you feel so miserable, like back then (takes a breath), and that changes in these sessions, uh, and a positive feeling (clicks his tongue), a positive, really, you see the situation with, uh, with different eyes [I.: mhm], uh, you just think, nothing happened to me, I survived..."

The criticism that Thomas expresses about the Scientology organization – which he eventually left – centers above all on the repressiveness of the Scientology system:

„...now, here, but the Scientology Church was a totally strict [...] tot-, total bureau- a total bureaucracy (takes a breath) uh [I.: system] bur-, bureaucratical system and also a really uh,

let's say, developed, uh, system of learning and a, uh, development program, uh, for human-
ity, uh, that you of course have to pay for fr- from one stage to the next and also go through
(takes a breath), mhm, in order to, say, reach the total consciousness and the freedom, uh, of
the, uh [...] to become a <u>clear</u>, [I.: mhm] a person who is clear, who doesn't have any func-
tional confinements any more and (clicks his tongue) and actually also functions correctly,
well of course, also functioning according to the motto [I.: mhm], functioning correctly of
course in the sense of the, the system or, of course, of, uh, so to speak of humanity in the ab-
stract sense [I.: mhm] to function correctly again..."

Thomas depicts his process of separation from Scientology as being just as quick and seem-
ingly unproblematic as his withdrawals from the other groups in which he was a member. He
differs in this respect from other individuals who tell of powerful inner conflicts and depend-
ency as well as of social sanctions following their decision to leave this organization. The
ease with which Thomas succeeds in leaving has to do with the fact that he initially entered
the organization with greater distance and more clearly conceived goals. This correspondingly
reflexive approach allows him to make a swift decision about leaving the organization and
then carry it out. Both aspects indicate that Thomas must have in the meantime succeeded in
dealing with his life themes in a better, transformative way. This in turn means that the moti-
vational affinity and adhesion to this group can be assessed as being relatively low, whereas
the individuative, independent ability to make a decision about leaving the organization
should be assessed as high.

Thomas - a summary. Thomas's own depiction of his biographical trajectory has a clearly
positive accent, in spite of the experienced sufferings he recounts in other parts of the inter-
view. He sees his life as a patchwork quilt, sown together to create something new and whole
from various scraps. Thomas describes this in memorable words:

„I've taken a little bit from everywhere, something from the Anthroposophers, something
from the Bhagwan, this and that (takes a breath) uh...you could also say, some people might
make an new sect out of it, a new movement, you know [I.: ah yes] a little bit of this and a
little bit of that [I.: [...] mix it up well and then] a little (takes a breath), uh, mix togther and
then shake well and, and with [...] serve it and then eat it up (takes a breath) (...) you collect
experiences in life and knowledge, like stones in a mosaic and, and mhm (takes a breath) and
uh, I've learned a little bit everywhere and I wouldn't like to have missed out on that (takes a
breath) and, uh, the b-, bad things, well, I'd say they just uh...they just come from group pres-
sure [I.: yes], if you give in to them and if they become too strong, if they...if they consume
your personality..."

Thomas seems to have succeeded recently in finding a solution which offers an answer to his
life themes, a more satisfactory one than those offered by all the other religious groups and
milieus he has frequented: his new partner. He first made her acquaintance as a neighbor. For
a long time his contact with her was limited to his role as babysitter for her children. Then
their relationship becomes closer. He falls in love with her while he is going through the
phase of withdrawing from the charismatic church. She accompanies and supports him as he
goes through this phase. He describes their relationship as non-religious; other things are
more important for them:

„I've prayed for her too but (takes a breath)...well, I guess let's say that just being together,
the human aspect [I.: yes], that plays a role in our relationship." (line 1482 ff.)

Thomas' new partner has „opened his eyes"; „suddenly" he is able to commit himself on a
„long-term" basis. Thomas describes the end of his colorful religious career as an opportunity
to live in lasting freedom from his compulsions. Thomas describes himself as a „healed" indi-
vidual, after concluding an almost humorous brief summary of his journey through the reli-
gious communities from the perspective of identity problems:

„...I'd always had continuous problems with that, and [I.: mhm] in my heart I thought to my-
self, who can I turn to and how [I.: yes, of course] and in the Christian community I thought,

oh, you're not holy enough, not Christian enough, not enough of an example, you're not (takes a breath) uh, well, Protestant enough [I.: mhm] (clicks his tongue), well, yes, Protestant, uh, Paulinian and (...) manly and, and, and [I.: mhm] yes...well and just, courageous and honest and exemplary and (takes a breath) faithful."

Thomas expresses himself in a manner that suggests that he has reached a meaningful and acceptable stopping point in his biographical trajectory. It sounds as though he has succeeded in overcoming his „existential restlessness" by changing the circumstances of his life. Even though he plainly states that he is still searching, he nevertheless seems able to take a more detached view of his actions than was the case in previous periods of his biography:

„...there are really so many different paths [I.: yes] and, uh, you can interpret it any way you want, well [I.: mhm] I guess I'm, I'd say that, uh, I'm still looking. [I.: mhm] But let's put it this way, I'm not looking for a group, I'm also not looking for total redemption (takes a breath) or for salvation, because I have that and I have something. [I.: mhm] Uh, sometimes I see family life as a little, let's say, it all takes a lot of time - a woman, children, work..." (line 1677 ff.)

Thomas' positive view of a relationship structured along conventional lines is also an aspect of the end of his journey. Even though his relationship has not been confirmed by the state or church through marriage, it nevertheless fulfills the normative demands of a monogamous partnership.

Thomas expresses the personal conclusions he has drawn from his search in a roundabout way citing the quotation that there are as many different paths to Christianity as there are individuals. This indicates that a great tolerance for religious individualism is part of his current world view, although he considers himself more committed to Christianity. On several occasions Thomas clearly states that freedom from the „demanding attitude" to which he felt predominantly himself subjected in the past is now a prerequisite for his way of life: that is, the freedom from the pressure he felt to live up to high demands. Thomas has gone through a de-

---

Typological attributes:

(α)   (Sequentially) **accumulative heretic**

(β)   **Changes affiliations continually until mid-adulthood**

        Transformation (to individuative-reflective modes of dealing with religion)

(γ)   **Compensation** or the restless search for it - for the unconditional love he lacks (life theme)

---

manding religious tour, taking him through a number of therapy groups in which he collected bits and pieces of therapeutic methods for coping. A process of transformation becomes discernible at the end of this journey, a process which has led to the dominance of individuative-reflective modes of dealing with religion over fundamentalist approaches.

2.3.2 „anything but loyalty to the party line..." – Case study 'Christian'

Biographical information. Christian was born in 1957 in the suburbs of a large city as the third of four children. Christian has a brother and two sisters. When Christian turns six (in 1963), his parents divorce. Both parents re-marry. Together with his blood brother, Christian grows up with his father and step-mother and the four children they subsequently have together. Christian is forty years old at the time of the interview. He is married, but has been separated from his wife for three years. He sees his eight-year-old child according to the stipulations set forth in visitation laws.

Education and profession: After completing elementary school, Christian enrolls in a high school with a curriculum focusing on classical studies. He leaves this school in the twelfth grade and begins training as a geriatric nurse. Christian completes the obligatory community service (the alternative to military service) and finishes his Abitur (high school diploma) in evening classes. Christian tries repeatedly without success to obtain a place in a psychology degree program at university. He finally registers for a degree program in comparative theology and psychology, later switching to a program leading to a certification in pedagogy. He successfully completes his studies with a double major in gerontology and adult education. Christian takes up work as an instructor for geriatric care, but decides (after the interview) to quit his job.

Religion: Throughout the course of his religious-spiritual search, Christian is interested in the following religious groups:

- **Bhagwan** and
- **Krishna Murti**, he is also initiated into the group associated with
- **San Tharka Singh.** After leaving the Tharka Singh group, Christian comes into contact - through discussions with his mother - with the
- *Heimholungswerk*, which he joins at the age of about twenty-seven. Christian's membership in this group lasts several years and ends when he decides to leave the group.

Circumstances of religious socialization. Christian does not provide very much information about his early childhood socialization in the family. However, he does tell of a childhood experience with far-reaching effects, one that still he is still struggling with: the divorce and re-marriage of his parents when he was six years old. Christian and his blood brother grow up with their father and step-mother. Christian does not develop a very close relationship to his step-mother, who is more occupied with her own four children within the context of the new marriage. The feeling of homelessness which Christian experienced in the divorce becomes one of his main life themes and sets him on a search which will take up decades of his life. The painful experience of being left by his mother has apparently not only been repressed by Christian (he has no memories of his mother in his parents' home), but it has also developed into an additional significant life theme: an intensive preoccupation with parting, with death. Christian considers himself to be something special, beyond the mainstream. In his comments about puberty and adolescence, he depicts himself as being a nonconformist; however, at the same time he describes the decisions he made up until the point of completing the Abitur at night school as pragmatic and influenced by others. The issues of removal and the search for identity which are typical at this stage of life turn into outright rebellion against conformity to the system in Christian's case, an attempt to be something special. At the age of seventeen, Christian breaks away from his (step-) parents, leaves home, and quits school without receiving a diploma in order to begin training as a geriatric nurse. He rebels against the high requirements of the humanistic, classical educational institution and against the middle-class life of his parents. He describes himself as being disoriented at that time, but nevertheless strong-willed. For Christian, his parents' divorce explains a number of events in his life. In his opinion, his parents' divorce is the cause of a serious crisis of orientation and of his suicide attempt at the age of twenty-one. Questions concerning the meaning of life dominate this stage in his biography, and the phase is characterized by a feeling of frustration and an extreme dissatisfaction with life.

Motives for joining and remaining. Christian's religious-spiritual career begins long before his membership in the *Heimholungswerk*. His career is motivated and characterized by one of his main life themes: a feeling of homelessness. His religious-spritiual search thus accordingly becomes a search for a „home" at the ontological level. He becomes a member of the group led by the guru San Tharka Singh. Here he learns how to meditate. He is also interested in the eastern-oriented religions practiced by Bhagwan and Krishna Murti.

Religious-ontological embeddedness of this nature also provides compensation for his other main life themes: separation, death, and thoughts of suicide. „I'm a specialist in death", Christian says, not only in view of his profession as a geriatric nurse, but also concerning the depression he experienced in late adolescence and his suicide attempt. Thus, one of the motivating factors in Christian's religious-spiritual quest is his need to deal with the suicidal and depressive tendencies which accompanied his experience of a total lack of meaning in adolescence - that is, with his life theme of death.

A related biographical motive is to be found in Christian's reasons for joining the *Heimholungswerk*. Based upon Christian's description of the nature of his relationship to his mother, the motivating factors include his admiration for her deeply religious attitude and also the attraction of the newly found closeness to her. This makes it possible for him to deal with the painful experience of having been left by her in the past, thus coping with one of the life themes of separation and death.

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the religious milieus. Even though his narrative focuses mainly on his rejection of the *Heimholungswerk*, he also has lasting positive memories of the group, an example of this being his description of a New Year's Eve spent with the group. This is the only time in the entire narrative that the emphasis is placed upon the feeling of togetherness, a sensation which is at the same time an experience of collective non-conformism.

Christian's decision to leave the *Heimholungswerk* is influenced by previous experiences. During his involvement in the group associated with San Tharka Singh, Christian experiences a separation of body and soul, becomes afraid of becoming „totally dependent" and leaves the group. The deepening of his studies of the anthroposophic teachings of Rudolf Steiner facilitate his withdrawal from the group. He also occupies himself intensively with C.G. Jung. These two figures are his „mentors" regarding theoretical questions, and in the course of the interview, he repeatedly mentions the formative influence they have exerted in his current way of thinking.

When Christian begins to deal in depth with his mother's religiosity and subsequently also becomes a member of the *Heimholungswerk*, Steiner and Jung continue to „accompany" him – even though this is frowned upon within the group. He makes himself into an outsider in the group, and he enjoys the role. He is apparently collecting spiritual experiences which he can intellectually combine with his studies of Steiner and Jung. Spiritual experiences cause Christian to break with and finally leave the group.

In connection with his membership in the *Heimholungswerk*, Christian points out several times that he did not toe the line; however, he also gives one the impression that the theoretical discussions were more important to him than his desire for a sense of community and belonging to a group.

Religiosity is one dimension of Christian's intellectual career, a career which does not seem to have reached the end of its development at the time of his withdrawal from the *Heimholungswerk*. Christian is not willing to subordinate himself to any kind of religious way of thinking or acting. Intellectual maturity goes beyond the spiritual aspect, to a stage consisting of the highest intellectual capacity, a stage which is attainable only if one maintains a distance and does not follow a (charismatic) leader. When Christian leaves the *Heimholungswerk*, he also quickly leaves their religiosity behind. Intellectually, he moves beyond the religious teachings of the *Heimholungswerk*, and finally presents fundamental elements of their belief as wrong for intellectual reasons.

Nevertheless, Christian seems to consider his religious search to be a source of personal enrichment. Christian's experiences in the *Heimholungswerk* still seem to be important to him in a certain way and he sees them in a positive light - embedded however within Christian's theoretical framework:

"...as far as that goes, the Heimholungswerk, the experience there is still really important for me and I can reactivate it anytime, so I can talk with...with God, with Jesus, with spirits... but it's not as dramatic anymore, and most of all, it's not as dramatic as C. G. Jung describes it in his biography, when he goes through those experiences, not as dramatic as with crazy people or possessed people or whatever, people who submit to them and, the old prophets were also driven, they couldn't do anything but obey their demon..."

Religiosity was a stage in Christian's intellectual career. He moved on after he had exhausted all of the opportunities it offered him. Christian's individuative-reflective ego always rebels against integration into a system, and is always successful in the end. His ego rebels in particular against authoritarian claims to knowledge and power; Christian resists giving up his knowledge, his „enlightenment" and his spiritual experience.

Typological attributes:

(α)   (Sequentially) **accumulative heretic: late adolescent convert**

(β)   **An individual who moves from one group to another but needs no therapy**

Ego reinforcement by means of 'enlightenment' and superior knowledge

Transformation is discernible

(γ)   **Anti-depressive, anti-suicidal compensation** (religiosity is used as a remedy for depression, the feeling of unwantedness and loss of home, and also as a testing ground for the strength of the ego, feeling of non-conformism and superiority)

Compensation for the loss of home in the search for ontological embeddedness

---

2.3.3   „well, I'm not really a happy kind of person..." – Case study 'Ulla'

Ulla is thirty-one years old at the time of the interview. She was born in a large city; she has two sisters. Her father is Catholic, but is not a convinced Christian. Her mother converts when Ulla enters the Catholic church as a child. Ulla's mother converts in more of a formal sense and in order to conform with the her husband's religious denomination. Ulla not only attends a Catholic kindergarten, but also accompanies her mother to religious instruction completed within the context of her conversion. Ulla gets to know the religious rituals and rules, memorizes prayers and songs. On Sundays, she is sent alone to church with her two sisters while her parents remain at home and have a leisurely breakfast. Ulla recalls that at the age of nine or ten, she experienced a feeling of sadness during a church service which affected her deeply: „...I just felt so sorry that Jesus had died on the cross." Ulla describes her family of origin as being rather untalkative. Ulla suffers from loneliness. The family's silence concerning her father's incurable illness has especially serious effects. The death of her father causes a feeling of depression, Ulla falls into a deep hole. The only strategy for dealing with it is the family's „principle of life": „You have to get over things" and „If you're good, if you behave properly, then you don't have as many problems, and you should just conform".

At the age of thirteen or fourteen, Ulla initially wants to leave the beliefs of the Catholic church behind her. She stops attending religious instruction and distances herself increasingly from her family. Because of a need for security, Ulla begins to occupy herself with astrology, she says: „...I was trying to, to learn a little more about myself...yes, about the future." She

looks for a solution in the stars instead of dealing with her environment and fellow human beings.

After completing her Abitur and finishing a one-year course in nutrition, Ulla finishes training to become a nurse. She is still working in this profession at the time of the interview. She had, however, planned to change professions and began studying library science and Jewish studies; she dropped out of the degree program after two and a half years.

At the age of nineteen, Ulla joins the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses offer Ulla compensation for her loneliness and depression. In retrospect, Ulla places a positive emphasis on the fact that the Witnesses helped her get away from the Catholic church and from astrology, which she now considers „wrong" and „not a good thing":

„That's it, when I look back on it now, it was really a search, all along, a search using astrology... to find a meaning somewhere, yes, why do certain things happen and how can you control them and what...what's my place in this whole system, and astrology gave it all a meaning...but not for very long. The Jehovah's Witnesses also gave things a meaning, above all, regardless of how negatively I see it now, the Jehovah's Witnesses helped me to gain distance from the Catholic church and from astrology, with what had happened before..."

Within the context of fundamentalist religiosity, Ulla finds fulfillment of her need for control, security and support. What she cannot provide for herself, she expects to receive from God:

„He just changes me inside and according to his standards, and I can live my life according to the Bible, I have something, like pillars, supporting pillars in my life, where I can find in...everything that's going on around me, I can find support somewhere ...I don't have to deal with all the stress, all I have to do is let myself be changed..."

For reasons that do not become clear in the course of the interview, Ulla leaves the Jehovah's Witnesses and repeatedly tries out new religious communities. At the moment she is a member of a Pentecostal community.

Ulla experiences the switch to the Pentecostal community as liberating because she meets with more tolerance in this group („that I know that somebody loves me, regardless of how I am now"). Nevertheless, she remains a captive of patterns of behavior learned in childhood: she instrumentalizes her faith as an escape from the problems of everyday life that she does not want to face; she needs a community so that she can finally receive the love and attention that was not given to her as a child. In a number of passages in Ulla's narrative, it becomes clear that she has problems admitting her emotional level of experience in general, and her feelings of grief in particular. She projects the emotional world which has become strange to her onto exterior sources of guidance. Ulla seeks the security she needs to live her life from outside sources: both via confirmation from other people and via her obeyance of rules set forth for her by the religious community. She does not receive the feeling of security by means of dealing with her environment.

In a certain way, Ulla's biography is an example of the type governed by tradition. She does not question the foundation of the religious orientations and convictions acquired in childhood; rather, she continues along the same path, with small changes, in her movement from the Jehovah's Witnesses, to other religious communities, and on to the Pentecostal church. However, Ulla belongs to the accumulative heretic type primarily because she has tried out so many different groups in the search for one suitable for her. In her search for a religion, Ulla finds compensation for her problems with depression, fear and loneliness. She does not show any signs of progress towards transformation, yet she also does not show signs of decompensation either. Her depressive mood, her fear, and the need for exterior influence are perpetuated.

> **Typological attributes:**
>
> (α) **Accumulative heretic**
>
> (β) **No transformation discernible**
>
> (γ) **Compensation for fear, depression and loneliness** (these are the life themes pertinent for her)

2.4   Contrastive discussion of the case studies

The findings resulting from the contrastive comparison of the case studies have already been set forth in the opening sections of this report. We also elucidated the typology which emerged from the contrastive analysis and subsequently served to structure the presentation of the case studies. Thus, the reader must return to the opening passages of our report in order to find the summarizing discussion of the case studies. I would like to close with some of the most striking observations resulting from the contrastive analysis of the case studies.

Our analysis and comparison of the case studies takes into account not only the modes of entering and dealing with religious groups (Dimension α), but also the coping strategies and biographical consequences (Dimension β) manifested by the individuals. When one takes these different dimensions into account and correlates them with each other, it becomes clear that not only processes of decompensation come to light – in contrast to the expectations raised by the assumption that all fundamentalist-religious groups and psycho-groups are in some way dangerous. The non-decompensatory stagnation and deferment of the active coping processes to be applied to the problems and life-themes is also worthy of note. This deferment often leads to a general subjective satisfaction with life. The subjects feels contend with their situation. However, we also found profound processes of transformation leading to greater independence.

We also found that the processes of decompensation and transformation were distributed differently among the cases. On the basis of the case studies, we can venture to claim that the individuals with a Christian fundamentalist biographical trajectory of the type governed by tradition have a greater tendency for decompensation (Sarah; Helen and Kurt) or for stagnation (Ruth; Daniela; Waltraud). And if individuals with this type of biographical trajectory begin to show indications of transformative development – even within the context of high-tension groups – these processes then release centrifugal forces which consequently cause the individual to leave the group (as in the case of Sarah, Helen and Kurt).

We can also venture to put forth the claim that the mono-convert type has a tendency towards both deferment and transformation. Transformation is discernible here in the form of the independent acquisition of cognitive superiority (Monika), a reinforcement of the ego and self-confidence gained by the experience of successfully driving away demons and then proving strong enough to stand up against the persons of authority in the community (Ute), or in the pragmatic moderation of religious demands in the face of everyday life (Hilde).

Finally, we can venture to put forth the claim that in contrast to the type governed by tradition in particular, the accumulative heretics are open to transformative forms of coping with positive biographical consequences and in general demonstrate a tendency towards transformation. Of course, in the case of an accumulative heretic both directions are possible: either the deferment of the life themes or a transformative way of coping; however, our sample contained two significant cases (Thomas and Christian) in which transformative coping can be proven, and one case in which transformation was not discernible (Ulla). In the case of Ulla,

one should not underestimate the significance of her continuous efforts to deal with her life themes, causing her to move from milieu to milieu in search of a solution. The cases of Thomas and Christian both demonstrate with unmistakable clarity the ambivalence of the accumulative heretic type concerning coping strategies and biographical consequences: the ambivalence between compensatory religious and therapeutic approaches that repeatedly end in disappointment on the one hand, and on the other hand, the progressive and creative ways of dealing with the life themes finally leading to an extrication from the vicious circle of a never-ending search for an answer; in the case of Thomas this is found in the nuclear family, for Christian it lies in the ontological theoretical framework which allows him to „make sense" of the world.

Obviously, the mental resources and potential for coping that an individual possesses before starting out on his/her fundamental-religious career also play an important role in what happens to the individual within the group. It does not depend exclusively on the type of group or milieu concerned. In this sense, our study's focus on subjectivity sought to delineate subjective possibilities for coping and biographical 'Gestaltung' and has finally succeeded in identifying these tendencies in the case studies.[3]

---

[3] For further details on the theme of transformative development in the process of deconversion from a new religious or fundamentalist group see also Streib 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d.

References

BAINBRIDGE, William S. (1997). *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, New York; London: Routledge.

BERGER, Peter L. (1979). *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, New York: Doubleday.

FOWLER, James W. (1981). *Stages of Faith. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco: Haper&Row.

-----. (1996a). *Faithful Change. The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*, Nashville : Abingdon Press.

-----. (1996b). "Pluralism and Oneness in Religious Experience: William James, Faith-Development Theory, and Clinical Practice ", in: SHAFRANSKE, Edward P., (ed.) : *Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology*, Washington: American Psychological Association, 165-186.

HELSPER, Werner . (1989). *Selbstkrise und Individuierungsprozeb. Subjekt- und sozialisationstheoretische Entwürfe zum imaginären Selbst in der Moderne*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

KÜENZLEN, Gottfried . (1996). "Religiöser Fundamentalismus - Aufstand gegen die Moderne", in: HÖHN, Hans J., (ed.) : *Krise der Immanenz. Religion an den Grenzen der Moderne*, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 50-71.

NOAM, Gil G. (1985). "Stage, Phase, and style: the developmental dynamics of the self", in: BERKOWITZ, Marvin & OSER, Fritz K., (eds.) : *Moral education: theory and application*, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates , 321-346.

-----. (1988). "A costructivist approach to developmental psychopathology", in: NANNIS, Ellen D. & COWAN, Philip A., (eds.) : *developmental psychopathology and its treatment*, San Francisco, London: Jossey- Bass Inc. Publishers, 91-121.

-----. (1990). "Beyond Freud and Piaget: Biographical Worlds - Interpersonal Self", in: WREN, Thomas, (ed.) : *The Moral Domain*, Cambridge: 360-399.

SCHULZE, Gerhard . (1992). *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt; New York: Campus.

STARK, Rodney & BAINBRIDGE, William S. (1997). *Religion, deviance, and social control*, New York, London: Routledge.

STREIB, Heinz . (1997a). "Religion als Stilfrage. Zur Revision struktureller Differenzierung von Religion im Blick auf die Analyse der pluralistisch-religiösen Lage der Gegenwart", in: HOLM, Nils G., MÖDE, Erwin & PETRI, Heinrich, (eds.) : *Archiv für Religionspsychologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 48-69. URL: http://www.tgkm.uni-bielefeld.de/hstreib/Literatur/stil2.htm.

-----. (1997b). "Transformation of Religion in the Context of Fundamentalist Milieus." Paper presented at the World Congress of Sociology / International Institute of Sociology in Köln, Germany, Jul 8, 1997. URL: http://www.tgkm.uni-bielefeld.de/hstreib/Literatur/köln.htm.

-----. (1999). "Off-Road Religion? A Narrative Approach to Fundamentalist and Occult Orientations of Adolescents", in: *Journal of Adolescence* 22:255-267. URL: http://www.tgkm.uni-bielefeld.de/hstreib/Literatur/Off-road.htm.

-----. (2000a). "Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective", in: *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (in press).

-----. (2000b). "Seelsorge im Kontext fundamentalistisch-neureligiöser Gruppierungen", in: SCHNEIDER-HARPPRECHT, Christoph, (ed.) : *Zukunftsperspektiven für Seelsorge und Beratung*, Neukrichen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 139-163.

-----. (2000c). "Biographical and Religious Development in Christian-Fundamentalist Converts and Deconverts: A Narrative Approach", in: *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (under review).

-----. (2000d). "Fundamentalism as Challenge to Religious Education", in: *Religious Education* (accepted for publication).