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Religious Conversion and Modes of Religiosity

Ilkka Pyysiäinen

Whitehouse's theory of the modes of religiosity is a good analytical tool. But it is also easy to misunderstand the point. When I, for example, use the theory in my teaching, a frequent comment is that no known religion seems to be imagistic or doctrinal; the features rather mix and mingle. It is then difficult to try to argue that the modes theory actually is meant only as an analytical distinction, not a typology. It may thus be helpful to forget the labels of "imagistic" and "doctrinal" altogether for a while and only focus on the way the differing contents of the twelve modal variables (Whitehouse 2002b) may "excite" or "inhibit" each other. We must remember that "imagistic" and "doctrinal" only refer to ideal types, that is, to purely abstract clusters of variable contents. A single ritual, belief, or any other single feature cannot be imagistic or doctrinal, because being imagistic or doctrinal depends on all 12 variables simultaneously. It is only a larger combination of features that can be more or less imagistic or doctrinal. But also these are seldom simply imagistic or doctrinal.

Let us substitute the letters from *a* to *l* for the imagistic contents of the 12 variables and the letters from *m* to *x* for the doctrinal contents of the same variables (the actual contents are discussed below one by one). The theory now seems to presuppose that in practice $\{a \dots l\}$ are not the singly necessary and jointly sufficient characteristics of imagistic religiosity, and that $\{m \dots x\}$ are not the singly necessary and jointly sufficient characteristics of doctrinal religiosity. As the distinction is only an analytical one, we can always find *some* of the $\{a \dots l\}$ in otherwise doctrinal constellations and some of the $\{m \dots x\}$ in imagistic ones.

The question now follows *how many* of the features $\{a \dots l\}$ can we find in an otherwise doctrinal constellation and still be able to recognize/regard

it as doctrinal? Or, how many of the features $\{m \dots x\}$ can we find in an otherwise imagistic constellation and still be able to recognize/regard it as imagistic? Also, if the contents of the variables in the sets of $\{a \dots H\}$ and of $\{m \dots X\}$ mix in practice, what might be the "evolutionarily stable strategy," that is, the most fit combination of $\{a \dots x\}$? In other words, which combination of features from the two sets results in a religious tradition that has the best potential for cultural survival? This would be the real attractor position; pure imagism and pure doctrinality are not attractor positions since they do not canalize actual religiosity. Pure imagism and pure doctrinality, rather, are ideal types.

Still another question is how many of the features $\{a \dots x\}$ must be present in order for the transmission to count as modal (assuming that also non-modal transmission exists)? Or, perhaps, the question cannot be framed in quantitative terms and we should rather look for some specific contents of the twelve variables that are necessary for a transmission process to count as modal? It also seems that the distinction between modal versus nonmodal transmission is more important in Whitehouse's theory than the distinction between imagistic and doctrinal itself (see Whitehouse 2000, 2002a, 2000b).

CONVERSION

I shall here discuss the case of religious conversion in the light of the above questions. I mean by religious conversion a sudden change in one's religious convictions, behaviors, and affiliations. These may then also have repercussions other than for religious beliefs and behaviors. "Sudden" here means that the person in question is able to point out a specific moment when "everything changed" in his or her life (see Miller and C'de Baca 2001). Even if the conversion experience is a doctrinal construct, one can point out a specific moment in his or her life when the import of the doctrine supposedly was personally realized. To the extent that it is a real event, its suddenness does not exclude the possibility that the change may have been preceded by a longer period of restlessness, doubt, seeking, and so forth. Yet I am primarily interested in the moment at which all this culminates in an experience of a dramatic change (real or imagined). By "change" I mean the fact that some beliefs, concepts, and practices that one previously either has ignored or actively opposed suddenly begin to seem both true and relevant (see Miller and C'de Baca 2001). "Relevant" here means that one is able to perceive some positive connection between the target information and the knowledge one already possesses; one is able to combine it with one's existing knowledge and to form new premises on that basis. This, then, allows for new inferences (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 46–50, 118–71). By "religious" I refer to anything that involves counterintuitive representations, is an object

of belief, is shared by a group, and is used in management of life (see Pyysiäinen 2001, 9–23; 2002a; Boyer 2001, 51–91, Atran 2002). A conviction is a metarepresentational attitude that takes certain concepts and beliefs to be more important than others as premises in reasoning.

“Conversion” is a predominantly Christian and Protestant theological concept, although its application has been extended to other religious traditions as well (see Taves 1999; Malony and Southard 1992). It has been studied from varying angles, yet the phenomenon seems to escape definition as well as explanation. The actual process of conversion, as well as the effects of conversion processes on the self, have so far not been properly specified; neither have different types of conversion processes been adequately differentiated (Zinnbauer and Pargament 1998, 161). Conversion has been explored mainly from sociological, psychological, and theological perspectives, identifying the phenomenon mainly by its effects, that is, transformations in the contents of beliefs, behaviors, and religious affiliations. The neurocognitive mechanisms of conversion have been by and large ignored in research (see Brown and Caetano 1992; Miller and C’de Baca 2001, xi–xii, 3–7, 156). As far as I know, there is currently no evidence indicating the existence of a separate neurocognitive (or socioneurocognitive) mechanism responsible for the sudden transformations taking place in a conversion (cf. Miller and C’de Baca 2001). The concept of “conversion” has mostly received its coherence from underlying theological assumptions (see, e.g., Rambo 1993, 1998).

Atran (2002, 165–169) summarizes some of the work on religious conversion, arguing that linked feelings of guilt, anxiety, and social alienation are good predictors of a religious conversion; in large-scale industrial societies, socially marginal individuals, especially adolescents, whose stress levels are high and levels of self-esteem low are likely to pursue a religious identity. Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998, 1999), for example, argues on the basis of empirical studies that insecure-anxious and insecure-avoidant adult social-attachment styles were more likely predictors of finding a new relationship with God than a secure attachment style. Women who were initially anxious were significantly more likely than either avoidant or secure women to report having had a “religious experience or conversion” during the four-year period that the study covered. (The attachment-theoretical approach, however, is elsewhere [71–78] criticized by Atran.)

Pargament (2002a) argues from a coping perspective that religious converts have experienced great difficulty in their lives, so much so that existence itself has become a problem. In realizing that something is wrong, the would-be convert sees his or her “old self” and way of life as inadequate and regards a radical change that would transform his or her entire life as the only possible solution (see Miller and C’de Baca 2001). Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) found that both a sudden spiritual conversion and a gradual conversion markedly changed the self-definition of the converts. When

compared to a group of religious subjects who had not experienced religious change, the sudden-conversion group showed more preconversion perceived stress, a greater sense of personal inadequacy and limitation prior to the conversion, and also greater pre–post improvement, together with a greater increase in postconversion spiritual experiences. Paloutzian and colleagues (1999), however, suggest that spiritually transforming experiences can result in profound changes in life mostly at the level of goals, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Also, such self-defining personality functions as identity and meaning of life change dramatically after a spiritual experience. Yet the elemental functions of personality (whether one is open to experience, conscientious, extroverted, agreeable, or neurotic) change only minimally. These are also the dimensions of personality that are strongly heritable; in a typical population, 40 to 50 percent of the variation in them seems to be tied to genes (Pinker 2002, 50).

Atran (2002, 176–79) suggests a mechanism based on the finding that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is accompanied by heightened amygdala activation in response to fearful stimuli. He speculates that the overly stimulated amygdala goes into undirected hyperactivity, being unable to process the emotional significance of individual stimuli. The hypothalamus then receives a confounding flood of information and relays it to the autonomic nervous system; this then provokes increased discharges in the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (see also Pyysiäinen 2001, 114–15). PTSD is characterized by uncontrollable arousal mediated by adrenergic dysregulation. However, adrenergic blockers, such as beta blockers and possibly antidepressants, can reduce terror and arousal and interrupt the neuronal imprinting leading to long-term symptoms, if administered in the first hours after the terrifying incident. Patients also may benefit from cognitive-behavioral therapy (see MacReady 2002). Atran then argues for the possibility that heightened expressions of religiosity can serve a similar blocking function. This is supported by Atran and Norenzayan's (in press) result that the strength of belief in God and in the efficacy of supernatural intervention are reliably stronger after exposure to death primes than to a neutral or religious prime.

Atran's (2002, 169) tentative conclusion about conversion (based on a somewhat different sample of studies than here) is that "the more traditionally and continuously religious the person, the less likely to suffer depression and anxiety in the long run." However, religion provides not only comfort but also is a source of fear. Many religious concepts, images, and beliefs can be interpreted either as fearful or as comforting, depending on how one relates to them. Gods, for example, have counterintuitive potency to punish and to reward alike; the course of action is determined by the nature of the relationship. (See Pyysiäinen 2001, 136–37.) Thus religion can both increase fears and anxieties and resolve them. The mechanisms work in both ways: a

very difficult life situation may trigger the fear of extinction and lead to a religious solution, or religious stimuli may trigger the emotions of fear, anxiety, and hope; that is, religion may be both “the sickness and the cure” (see Thorson 1998; Guthrie 1993).

This entails that the emotions of fear and hope are closely allied both cognitively and religiously, just as Atran (2002, 68) argues. They may be cognitively (but not physiologically) composed of identical elements, differing only in valence. There is, for example, some empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that an increase in fearfulness is accompanied by heightened faith in God as well as hope for a providential outcome in a difficult situation. Hope is here understood as the subjective sense of having a meaningful future, despite obstacles (Post 1998, 24).

Fear is also related to anxiety, which is an internal state that generates multiple fast scenes in the mind, as though they were occurring in the external world. The turnover of neural constellations at the basis of anxiety is as high as in fear, although the mental contents are as internalized as in depression (Greenfield 2000, 152–53). Anxiety has no clear object; it is dominated by internal reasoning processes, not by sensation; yet it also involves emotions. It may also not be easy in practice to differentiate between anxiety and depression; some common cognitive and behavioral features may underlie the apparent differences (see Craig and Dobson 1995). There is, for example, some empirical evidence for anxiety as a sequel to depression (MacDougall and Brown 1984). Information may also be misattributed to substitute objects, the information about which is derived from affective states. This happens when an affective state lacks a salient object, as is the case in anxiety. An anxious mood is turned into an emotion when an object is provided by focusing on whatever happens to be most salient to the experiencer (Clore and Gasper 2000, 10–11.) Thus, for example, indefinite feelings of guilt can be turned into religious emotions by connecting them to religious objects. This may make it easier to handle them (see Thorson 1998).

But, as Enmons and Paloutzian (2003, 394) observe, almost all studies of conversion suffer from various kinds of methodological shortcomings, such as for example near total reliance on measures of self-perceived change. This is no minor issue in the study of religion (cf. Barrett and Keil 1996). Many extensive literature reviews have shown that results from studies on religion and mental health are mixed and even contradictory. Bergin (1983), for example, found that in 23 percent of the reviewed studies there was a negative relationship between religion and mental health, in 47 percent of the studies the relation was positive, and in 30 percent there was no relationship. This is close to what one would expect by chance. Another alternative is that the results are skewed because of methodological difficulties. For example, Gartner (2002, 187–88), who is suspicious about the existence of such difficulties, yet acknowledges the fact that the very concept of “religious concept” has no

generally accepted definition. Krymkowski and Martin (1998), for instance, found that in papers published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, beginning from 1986, religion was prominently taken to be an independent causal factor, affecting such things as abortion attitudes and alcohol consumption. They claim that such explanations are highly problematic because no sufficient attention has been paid to the mechanisms by which "religion" supposedly exercises influence, the direction of causality is not always clearly established, and controls are not always used. Often it is not too clear what is meant by religion (see Pyysiäinen, in press).

Gartner (2002, 200), for his part, claims that much of the discrepancy in the findings may be explained by differences in the ways mental health is measured. Thus we actually are dealing with variables too vaguely defined; it is therefore very difficult to find unequivocal causal relationships. Gartner (2002, 201) argues that the studies reporting a negative relationship between religion and mental health typically employed personality tests with only limited reliability and validity, whereas the studies that found a positive correlation were based on real-life observations concerning such things as drug abuse, delinquency, and so forth. It should, however, be specified what it is in religion that contributes to mental health: professing certain counterintuitive beliefs, performing rituals, the social relationships among believers, or what (see Levin and Chatters 1998)? Thus George and colleagues (2002) conclude that "we are far from understanding the mechanisms by which religious involvement promotes health," and Pargament (2002b, 169) says that, even when significant results are obtained, they provide only little insight into how religion works. Moreover, many of the relevant studies have been made in the United States, and the results cannot necessarily be generalized to other cultural contexts (see Pyysiäinen, in press).

Thus, although traditionally and continuously religious individuals may report less stress and anxiety than nonreligious or unconventionally religious individuals, this may be because they have more enduring social relationships and because they have conceptual and other cognitive-affective means to deal with their negative experiences. They do not necessarily lack these negative experiences; they only are better equipped to deal with them.

In the following section, I present the 12 modal variables systematically according to Whitehouse (2002b; cf. Whitehouse 1995), trying to evaluate their relevance for explaining conversion phenomena.

CONVERSION AND THE MODES

1. Frequency of Transmission

In the imagistic ideal type, the transmission of a given ritual takes place once every year at the most. More frequent transmission means a decisive

move toward the doctrinal position, although we cannot say that increased frequency *makes* the ritual doctrinal (doctrinality depending on all the other variables as well). It is also problematic to measure only the frequency of one single ritual, as some rituals may be embedded in other rituals; an individual ritual always works in that wider context (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1979). Moreover, what counts as participation in a ritual is not always clear (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 55, 17–30; Atran 2002, 160–61). Third, what is learned in a ritual may also be learned from other sources; myths and doctrines are recounted not only in rituals.

With these caveats in mind, we can say that religious conversion may take place in both frequently and infrequently performed rituals. Sometimes a single event may trigger a conversion; sometimes it happens only after participation on a regular basis. It all depends on so many other things.

2. Level of Arousal

The imagistic ideal type is characterized by high emotional arousal, the doctrinal one by low. Whitehouse does not suggest any exact method of measurement, but he seems to mean the type of arousal that can, in principle, be registered by physiological measures (saliva samples, galvanic skin responses, etc.). The scale to be used should be a universal one: what is high among American Protestants is also high among the Haitian practitioners of voodoo, as well as everywhere. We are not talking only about the external expression of emotion and its cultural interpretation but rather about basic physiological facts. The argument is clearly different from that advanced by McCauley and Lawson (2002), which deals with relative levels of arousal across the repertoire of rituals found in any single religious tradition (rather than across traditions).

Conversions typically involve high emotions by both standards. It could even be said that this is one of the defining characteristics of conversion as here understood.

3. Memory

One of the central characteristics of the imagistic ideal type is episodic memories for personally experienced events, the doctrinal ideal type relying more heavily on semantic memory for teachings codified in language. While the cognitive contents of doctrinal religions are largely based on semantic knowledge organized into abstract scripts and schemata, conversions are personal experiences encoded in episodic memory. They take place at a specified time and place and are remembered as such: it happened to me then and there. For Tulving, episodic encoding actually depends on prior semantic encoding and vice versa, episodic and semantic memory working in

a parallel fashion in storing information: it is only retrieval of information from these two stores that happens independently (Tulving 1995; Frith and Dolan 2000; Brown and Craik 2000; see Atran 2002, 159–61). Semantic memory, based on the lateral temporal cortex, and episodic memory, based on the medial temporal lobe, need to cooperate for us to be able to recognize surprising and exceptional events and phenomena: semantic memory represents what is common across situations, while episodic memory represents the exceptions. This means that situations requiring more conscious control tend to give rise to stronger episodic memories (Lieberman et al. 2002, 228, 233–34; see Zola and Squire 2000; Schacter et al. 2000; Pyysiäinen 2004c).

Klein, Cosmides, Tooby, and Chance (2002), for example, present strong empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that decision rules designed to render judgments about the self and others recruit information both from episodic and semantic memory stores. Episodic memories are about specific events and behaviors involving a target, while semantic memories consist of summaries of the target person's personality traits abstracted from a set of particular events. Once a "trait summary" has been formed, judgments about a person's traits are made on this basis. However, if there are episodic memories that are inconsistent with the trait summary, they will always be activated when a piece of summary information is retrieved. Thus, we might speculate that also in their religious judgments people draw information both from episodic and semantic memory stores, with semantic information consisting of summaries of what has been acquired in cultural transmission. It is the interaction between episodic memories and summaries that needs to be considered in developing a theory of religious conversion.

4. Ritual Meaning

In the imagistic ideal type, ritual meanings are internally generated in contrast to the doctrinal position typified by learned or acquired meanings. In the doctrinal position, persons can interpret the rituals using concepts and beliefs that can be inferred from cultural communication without much effort, whereas in the imagistic mode, the interpretative concepts are arrived at through a lengthy and laborious process of "spontaneous exegetical reflection" (see Sperber and Wilson 1986; Barrett and Keil 1996).

In a conversion, what Barrett and Keil (1996, 612) call "rehearsed, nonintegrated attributes that have no causal efficacy" might suddenly be invested with a very personal meaning; what previously seemed like unconnected bits and pieces that could not be connected to one's database without very costly cognitive processing, suddenly appear as a coherent whole that can be combined with what one already has in mind. Thus, although one is processing familiar (partly at least) and "rehearsed" concepts, they acquire a new meaning that is somehow internally generated, doctrinal summaries

and episodic memories being simultaneously activated. The difference between imagistic and doctrinal is that in learning meanings one merely uses some commonly accepted concepts without much reflective thought or feeling of personal relevance, whereas in the case of internal generation one consciously ponders over the meanings and arrives at an interpretation that seems to have personal relevance. Thus conversion is typified by internally generated meanings, although they can be arrived at by reinterpreting learned concepts.

5. Revelation Techniques

Whitehouse's way of differentiating between two kinds of "techniques of revelation" may be problematic. He argues that whereas imagistic religions are typified by iconicity, multivocal imagery, and analogic reasoning, doctrinal religiosity is characterized by "logical integration" and rhetoric. This might lead a psychologist to think that Whitehouse is actually distinguishing between intuitive/spontaneous/automatic processing and systematic/rational/controlled processing. This, however, is not his point; the two types of cognitive processing certainly belong to both imagistic and doctrinal religion, although in varying degrees (Bargh 1994; Pyysiäinen 2003, 2004d). Atran (2002, 155–57) correctly remarks that there is no evidence to support the claim that the doctrinal mode tends toward some "logically integrated and coherent ideology" connected by implicational logic. This is only true of theology as an ideational artifact that exists in the collective book–minds interaction (Pyysiäinen 2004a, 2004d). If, on the other hand, we step back from this argument and define logical integration more loosely, we risk blurring the difference between imagistic and doctrinal (see Pyysiäinen 2004c).

6. Social Cohesion

The imagistic ideal type is characterized by intense social cohesion and the doctrinal one by diffuse cohesion. It seems, on the basis of relevant literature, that conversion takes place from a diffuse group to a more cohesive one (see Malony and Southard 1992).

7. Leadership

In imagistic religion, leaders are either passive or totally absent; doctrinal religiosity is characterized by dynamic leadership. Conversion seems to necessitate, somewhat paradoxically, both intense group cohesion *and* dynamic leadership. The leader in a way represents the whole group, which gets personified in the leader. However, it might be that these two variables are complementary in the sense that a conversion requires either a coherent

group or a dynamic leader (of a diffuse group). If both are absent, there can be no concrete doctrinal expectations to trigger the conversion.

8. Inclusivity/Exclusivity

Imagistic religions are exclusive, doctrinal religions inclusive. Yet it seems that there are important differences in inclusiveness/exclusiveness between various types of doctrinal movements: conversions are more typical in doctrinal movements such as Pentecostalism than in the more hierarchical religions of Lutheranism or Catholicism. As Weber (1965) argued, in institutionalized religions, an "official grace" (*Anstaltsgnade*) replaces personal piety; personal piety can even be considered a threat to the institution's capacity to bestow salvation to anyone it chooses. This, however, only excludes conversion *to* inclusive religions; conversion *within* an inclusive religion but *to* a more exclusive one seems to be common.

9. Spread

The spread of imagistic religions is slow and inefficient in contrast to doctrinal religions that spread fast and efficiently. As conversion is a means of entering a religion, rapid spread also means great potential for conversions. Conversions cannot take place in stable movements that can only be entered by being born into the group.

10. Scale

Imagistic religions are small-scale phenomena, whereas doctrinal religions are large-scale phenomena. It seems that conversions most typically happen within large-scale movements but lead to smaller-scale movements. Although for example Pentecostalism is a large-scale movement worldwide, its noncentralized nature may make it appear locally as a small-scale movement.

11. Degree of Uniformity

The degree of uniformity is supposed to be low in imagistic religions and high in doctrinal religions. In the imagistic ideal type there is no binding doctrine, whereas in doctrinal religions everybody is supposed to subscribe to the same doctrine in principle. Yet at the same time, the way of life in imagistic religions may be at least as uniform as in doctrinal religions. It seems to be specifically the ideal of a *doctrinal* unity that is the catalyst for conversions.

12. Structure

The structure is noncentralized in imagistic religions and centralized in doctrinal religions. Such centralization seems to be a catalyst for conversions that, however, happen toward noncentralized groups (see below).

CONVERSION IN THE MODES DYNAMICS

There are now four possibilities:

- Conversion within imagistic religiosity (rare)
- Conversion from imagistic to doctrinal religiosity (tedium follows)
- Conversion within doctrinal religiosity (typically happens)
- Conversion from doctrinal to imagistic religiosity (might happen?)

The first option seems like a rather unlikely event; it is very difficult to “convert” from a local cult to another such cult. Or, if it happens, one usually does not substitute one cult for another but simply joins one more cult (as in the Greek mystery cults, for example; see Martin 2004).

As to the second option, conversion from an imagistic religion to a doctrinal religion is often a reaction to missionary efforts. Koskinen (1953, 91–94) argues that when the Pacific Islanders were converted to Christianity en masse, they still did not discard their old beliefs and practices. The influence of Christianity “remained superficial”; the natives “had none of the ambition of real Christians.” At first Christianity was popular, but “disappointment and tedium soon made their appearance.” The natives felt that Christianity had promised more than it had been able to give and that they did not gain the expected this-worldly advantages from “white man’s magic” (see Whitehouse 2000 44–45, 142–43). Thus, in this type of conversion, one adopts something of a doctrinal tradition, trying to combine it with one’s imagistic religion with varying degrees of success.

The most typical conversion seems to be a conversion within the doctrinal ideal type. It is possible, for instance, to have a Christian belief environment and yet be relatively ignorant about Christian doctrine. Conversion then revitalizes the known (if only vaguely) doctrinal beliefs.

The fourth option might be realized when someone for example converts from Christianity to an imagistic cult. It is, however, doubtful that one could really totally abandon one’s doctrinal way of thinking about religion. The result may rather be some kind of hybrid religion.

Summarizing the analysis, we see that conversions seem to belong to religiosity that is more typically imagistic on the basis of the variables of 2, 3, and 4. In the variables 1 and 4, both imagistic and doctrinal content allows for

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conversions. The fifth variable is undetermined because it fails to differentiate between the two modes. In the variables 6, 7, 10, 11, and 12, it is doctrinal contents that are more likely to lead to conversions. In the variables 8 and 9, something like a mixture of imagistic and doctrinal contents leads to conversions. It thus seems that although conversion is a phenomenon that typically happens in a doctrinal context, it is nevertheless a phenomenon that does not quite fit with Whitehouse's description of the doctrinal ideal type. It is a sort of imagism within doctrinality: the psychological variables (of the 12) have an imagistic content, while the social variables have a doctrinal content.

Pyysiäinen (2001, 2004c) and Tremlin (2002) have emphasized on the basis of Boyer's (1994, 2001) and Barrett's (Barrett and Keil 1996; Barrett 1998) studies that because theological traditions are an epiphenomenal overlay on natural religiosity (also McCauley 2000), doctrinal religiosity thus is constantly threatened by the fact that its concepts seem irrelevant and are difficult to use in everyday reasoning. Yet only doctrinal religions have the potential to spread beyond the boundaries of the local community and unite large masses of people. Tremlin (2002) thus argues that imagistic-like phenomena provide individual motivation, while doctrinal-type phenomena offer systems-level tools for the preservation of stable traditions (see also Pyysiäinen 2004a).

In this perspective, conversion might be said to be a reaction to a situation where doctrinal development has produced such abstract religious concepts and beliefs that they no longer can motivate people. Their abstractness makes them difficult to process and also makes it difficult to see their relevance: what for example concretely follows from the view that God is "The Ground of Being?" (see Boyer 2001, 320–22). It seems that when theology gets really abstract, religious institutions also tend to become all-encompassing but "empty" (see Pyysiäinen 2004a). Weber (1965) described such a process in his argument about new movements gradually getting institutionalized and then giving birth to revivalist movements that aim to restore the lost original spontaneity. At first the religious virtuosity of leaders may be important, but as institutionalization proceeds they become suspect because they seem not to trust the institution's capacity to bestow salvation freely to all. Weber takes as an example the Scholastic distinction between *fides implicita* and *fides explicita*: ordinary people were not supposed to know the whole doctrine; it was enough for them to accept it on the grounds that the specialists know it and have rational reasons to believe it. The specialists had to know the doctrine explicitly. Ordinary people thus have only implicit belief, whereas specialists have explicit belief.

This kind of development is evident in the Reformation that broke the doctrine of implicit faith (although similar phenomena, like the "New Devotion," were known also before). Christianity now was understood to be an intimate matter between God and the individual believer. Luther's emphasis on an individual believer's right to judge matters in the light of his personal

understanding of the Bible is well known. Yet Luther did not want radically to depart from the Catholic Church or the scholastic tradition, the presuppositions and methods of which he shared to a certain extent. Some of his followers, however, went much further in their individualism, rejecting hierarchical authority both on institutional and doctrinal levels (Williams 1962; Saarinen 1988; Lohse 1999).

But, as the Weberian hypothesis predicts, the Reformation itself was in due course institutionalized; this led the so-called Lutheran orthodoxy and its rigid dogmatism. A new kind of revival then took place in the Pietistic movement(s) that had their earliest beginnings in the early seventeenth century; the word *Pietism*, however, came to be known only in 1677, two years after the publication of Philipp Jakob Spener's *Pia desideria*; Spener's followers were now called "Pietists." In the various forms of Pietism, great emphasis was put on the personal life of piety (Brecht 1996).

In Finland, for example, the first appearance of radical Pietism is personified in the mysterious figure of Lars Ulstadius. He was a Lutheran minister and a schoolteacher who came to be tormented by religious doubt, guilt, and general anxiety. He fell ill, and for about two years he neither washed himself nor had his hair or beard cut. In his agony he turned to the local vicar, asking for public absolution for his sins. The vicar explained to him that such scruples were merely the work of the devil and he should not pay attention to them. On July 22, in 1688, Ulstadius then in due course appeared in the Dome of Turku in his rags, with his hair hanging long and with a huge matted beard, interrupting the service by starting to read aloud the radical theses he had written down. When two men grabbed him to throw him out of the Dome, what was left of his humble dress fell off, and poor Ulstadius stood there naked, only covered by his long hair and beard. Like some Old Testament prophet, he proclaimed that the Lutheran doctrine was to be doomed, that prayer books and postillas were a bunch of lies, and that the ministers were not endowed with the Holy Spirit (Akiander 1857, I 3–30; Odenvik 1940). The revivalist movements that then emerged in Finland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries all protested against a too-liberal and too-abstract interpretation of the doctrine, emphasizing both correct doctrine and an individual believer's responsibility of his or her religious choice: baptized members of the Lutheran Church were now expected to make a personal decision in favor of faith (see Pentikäinen 1975; Pyysiäinen 2004c).

Ulstadius's dramatic appearance in the Dome might have marked the beginning of a new imagistic movement, but that did not happen; the revivals took a very doctrinal form despite the emphasis on emotional experience. We may thus make the prediction that doctrinal religiosity develops slowly but has strong staying power: revivalism does not undermine doctrinal religiosity but supports it. Conversions are reactions to inherent problems in doctrinal religiosity; they derive their motivational power from imagistic-like

phenomena but combine them with elements of doctrinality. The important thing is that one experiences an intimate connection with some counterintuitive agent. Episodic memories of conversion experiences are then always activated when a doctrinal summary is activated, as they contradict what one previously thought about the doctrine. Yet the episodic memories may themselves in due course develop into schemata in semantic memory, due to the doctrinal context of interpretation and numerous retellings of the episodes. Thus the intimacy may also be lost to an extent.

In my opinion, the amount of emotional arousal in religious rituals and other religious situations depends precisely on whether such intimacy is experienced or not (Pyysiäinen 2001, 80–97). Ritual form (McCauley and Lawson 2002) is one way of producing it, ritual frequency is another (Whitehouse 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002), and there are others still (see also Atran 2002, 290–91). Let me emphasize, however, that I am here speaking of the actual experiences of real people, not of rituals' potential to arouse emotions—*ceteris paribus*—in an ideal participant. Thus, from the modes point of view, the strong emotional component in conversions is explained by the fact that a sudden conversion is a unique and personal event that creates strong episodic memories that seem to fulfill the criteria of flashbulb memory (see Whitehouse 2000, 7–9, 119–22; Conway 1995). The “spontaneous exegetical reflection” that supposedly follows is constrained by the doctrine, however. Therefore it may gradually develop into fixed schemata.

Conversion also is a way of establishing a personal relationship with the counterintuitive agent(s) as presented in the doctrine. Thus, from the point of view of the ritual form hypothesis (McCauley and Lawson 2002), the emotional component is explained by the logical form of the event: when one experiences a conversion, one supposedly is the direct object of action of some counterintuitive agent; this creates the intimacy that triggers the emotions. Such conversion also often leads to frequent participation in various kinds of services and devotions, and thus revitalizes doctrinal religiosity. Occasionally conversions may also form “epidemics” and spread like wildfire, as in the case of the Great Awakenings in the United States (see Taves 1999; Slone 2001, 85–102).

CONCLUSION

To the extent that the modes theory is meant as an empirical theory, its worth can only be judged by the range of phenomena it helps explain. We must ask how and for what purpose this theory can be used in the empirical study of religions. In the case of conversions, the modes theory helps draw attention to the interplay between psychological and social factors in canalizing religious transmission into differing feedback systems. They are not independent from each other. This, then, helps explain, for example, why there can be no con-

versions in the imagistic ideal type. In imagism there is no need for conversions because the problem is not motivation but the coherence and durability of the tradition. In doctrinal religiosity, the problem is motivation, not preservation. The attractor position thus cannot be imagistic or doctrinal, but precisely in between the two ideal types. Living religiosity always seems to combine features of the two modes; pure imagism and pure doctrinalism are abstract ideals only. Conversion is one example of how religious phenomena tend to oscillate in the middle position; magic might be another (see Pyysiäinen 2004b, 90–112). Conversions thus represent an attempt at an evolutionarily stable strategy in cultural transmission. Although a conversion is a psychological phenomenon, that is, something that happens in the mind, an increase or a decrease in conversions at some time or in some sociocultural context is a social phenomenon. The modes theory, albeit in a somewhat modified form, can help analyze the mutual interdependence of the psychological and social variables here.

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