How to assess the viability of a scientific (sub)discipline?

The answer to the question concerning how to assess a certain field of science is not an easy one. Who would be able to judge where innovative and fruitful thoughts, or even theories are being developed; who can say today that a certain body of research will, in twenty or more years, have proved to be a stimulus to the field; who can know whether this or that psychologist, just having finished a brilliant dissertation in the psychology of religion, will be going to make lasting contributions to this discipline? When psychological articles or monographs of exceptional quality are being published on religion, does this then imply that the psychology of religion is doing well? If it were only incidental cases, one would certainly not be inclined to assert so. So how could one assess the quality and viability of a field like the psychology of religion?

As so often when the questions are too difficult to be answered in a qualitative way, potential funding organizations, university managers and other policymakers will turn to quantitative answers. If assessed by quantifying means, we may indeed readily say that the psychology of religion is doing well: the increase in publications, paper presentations, conferences etc. dealing with the object of our field is quite substantive, the number of positions assigned to psychology of religion has been growing steadily (at least in Europe during the last decades), the interest in the field is manifesting itself throughout (and, e.g., visible in the steady growth of the membership of Div. 36). Evidently, anyone interested, or even employed, in the field will hail these developments and be inclined to answer the question whether psychology of religion is doing well affirmatively. Scholars, however, are (or should be) trained to be keen on counterevidence, on searching data refusing the initial hypothesis, and being aware of possible alternative interpretations of the same set of empirical evidence.

Keeping this in mind, I want to report in this paper on a recent development in the international context of the psychology of religion, namely the reconstitution of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR). Whether this development may count as a sign of the discipline’s health and viability, only the future can reveal. In many respects, of course, the establishment of international infrastructure for the field may be interpreted as positive. However (and although very much involved in these developments myself), I want to stay sober in my assessment, and not praise the day before the evening has come. There certainly are positive developments to be registered on an international level: people from various countries are meeting and sometimes collaborating, and the founding of The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion (IJPR), now already more than a decade ago, is generally considered as a substantial contribution to the field’s infrastructure. Nevertheless, not everything calling itself an ‘international’ initiative should be applauded: too often initiatives...

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fail, live a short life, causing psychology of religion to make the impression of an ‘eternal beginner’. Such initiatives do not contribute to a positive assessment of the field (neither by insiders nor by outsiders). Perhaps because the leaders in our field realized this, there was only a reluctant, at best hesitant reply, to an effort, some years ago, to establish a new, international organization. Moreover, there was the peculiar fact that an organization of this kind already existed, even if it sometimes seemed to be no more than a virtual reality: the Internationale Gesellschaft für Religionspsychologie (International Association for Psychology of Religion), a primarily European organization. In what follows, I shall briefly review the Association’s past, report on its recent reorganization, elaborate its present self-understanding, and try to develop an assessment of the present status it may have within psychology of religion.

The International Association for the Psychology of Religion

The association was founded in 1914 in Nuremberg, Germany, and published in that same year the first volume of what should have become a journal: the Archiv für Religionspsychologie (Archives for Psychology of Religion). A number of international scholars, including some from the USA, belonged to the board of both the association and the journal. Essentially, however, the enterprise was the work of one single man, dr. Wilhelm Stählin (1883–1975), a German protestant minister. As Germany went to war during 1914–1918, the interior situation of that country changed dramatically and a next volume (nr. 2/3) of the Archiv was not published until 1921, to be followed by one in 1929. Stählin’s interest changed, and in 1927 he was happy to hand over both the Association’s and the Archiv’s affairs to Werner Gruen (1887–1961), a Lutheran pastor from the Baltic countries, who in later years became a professor of theology at Berlin. In this way, the enterprise kept much of its character of a private affair of a single person. Moreover, Gruen did not try to open up the Association to the many new directions in psychology that were flourishing before and after the Second World War, but instead remained narrowly focused on the introspective method as developed by his compatriot Oswald Külpe (1862–1915), accepting only this approach as ‘real’ psychology of religion. Before the War, Gruen managed to publish two more volumes of the Archiv (nr. 5 and 6), but then things definitively went wrong: in 1945, he had to flee from Berlin, lost his professorial position, and needed to live on a moderate pension in a small town in Germany. In fact, the Association and the Archiv were extinct. In the fifties, Gruen tried to organize an international congress to revive the Association, but he failed (Norager, 2000).

At the beginning of the 1960’s, however, Wilhelm Keilbach (1908–1982), a professor of Roman Catholic systematic theology who had a strong interest in history of religions, expressed the wish to reactivate the Association. He organized some ‘Tagungen’, small conferences, to which only a limited number of people were invited, essentially pre-war students and friends of Gruen, and Keilbach’s own priest-students. The papers read at the conferences were printed in the irregularly published Archiv, which now functioned more as Proceedings than as a journal. (Nr. 7 was published in 1962.) Unfortunately, although people like André Godin, Antoine Vergote and especially Hjalmar Sundén published some articles in the Archiv, the Association after some years ended in a cul-de-sac again. There were only a few professional psychologists involved with most attendees of the conferences having only limited training in psychology during their pre-war education as theologians. No efforts were made to broaden, to professionalize or to modernize the Association’s perspective or style. Although in the sixties and seventies psychology of religion started to grow in Europe (some professorial chairs were established for the subject, quite a number of courses entered the curriculum at several universities, etc.), the board of the Association did not show much interest in integrating the ‘fresh blood’ into the organization.

Inevitably, the politics of the Association raised criticism, especially in European...
psychology-of-religion circles (outside Europe, hardly anyone was still aware of the existence of the Association or its Archiv). Its style, self-understanding and self-presentation were said to be outdated; it had no connection with present-day psychology (almost none of its members were trained as psychologists); over the years its character had become increasingly confessional; its understanding of the psychology of religion was not up-to-date.

In each of these points the Association has now substantially changed itself. In what follows I shall review these changes in their own context. Criticisms like the ones mentioned were articulated, among other things, at a conference in Uppsala (Sweden) in 1977, where older, German-speaking theologically trained members and younger, psychologically trained members, who wanted to use the English language were at loggerheads. When the Board at the time opposed all forms of modernization, a number of European psychologists of religion in 1979 formed a group which consequently organized a symposium every third year and, in addition, developed various forms of international cooperation (Belzen, 2001).

Although this group called “European Psychologists of Religion” in no way sought to compete with the Association, but only to push it in the direction of modernization as a sort of pressure group, the leadership of the Association for decades rejected the various proposals aimed at reorganization and had—with a truly controversial Roman Catholic bishop as chairman (cf. Wächter, 1993)—increasingly worked itself into an isolated position. Particularly in recent years one could say that the psychology of religion was going through a period of growth internationally, one which was unfortunately not at all reflected in the International Association. At a barely attended conference in 1995, held in St. Pölten (Austria), Nils Holm—a historian and psychologist of religion from Finland, who is also a prominent member of the “European Psychologists of Religion”—was elected as its new chairman. In 1998 he organized a conference in Aarhus (Denmark), to which he also invited colleagues attending the symposia for “European Psychologists of Religion,” some of whom joined the International Association. At the general meeting held there the proposal to allow candidates for the Board to be nominated by the members was, as it had been up till then, rejected by the incumbent Board with an appeal to the Constitution of the Association. The exclusive right of proposing candidates held by the Board-in-office, as laid down in the Constitution, was called undemocratic and unacceptable by a majority of the new members. Lively debate showed that the Association would lose its newly-gained members if it were not reorganized. Thereupon the Board held out the prospect of a revision of the Constitution of the Association and admitted a few new members. When, at a 1999 meeting of the Board in München (Germany) a new majority situation manifested itself, the Board decided after turbulent negotiations to accept an invitation—already introduced by Belzen, in Aarhus—to a conference in the Netherlands.

The reorganization of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion

It was the hope of the “critical” members of the Board that it would be possible to invite to this conference a number of younger psychologists of religion, among others from the group of the “European Psychologists of Religion,” but also from other international circles. In actual fact, the conference in the Dutch town Soesterberg (from September 28-30, 2001) was attended by approximately eighty persons, the majority of whom were new to the Association. The same subgroup of the Board also worked out proposals for a new set of Constitution and Bylaws. They were discussed at an Board meeting (2000) in Leiden (the Netherlands), adopted by the Board, and submitted to the general meeting in Soesterberg (2001). Similarly adopted was the proposal to return to the original name of the Association. After thorough discussion and a number of changes both documents were adopted by the general meeting. (The text of the

2, 3 (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
A new Board was chosen at the general meeting on September 29, 2001, in Soesterberg. The Board, now reduced again to seven members serving three-year terms, consists of:

- Jacob A. Belzen (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), chair
- Nils G. Holm (Abo, Finland), vice-chair
- Sebastian Murken (Trier, Germany), general secretary and treasurer
- T. Hetty Zock (Groningen, the Netherlands), vice-general secretary and vice-treasurer
- Susanne Heine (Vienna, Austria)
- Ralph Hood (Chattanooga, USA)
- Dirk Hutsebaut (Leuven, Belgium)

Holm was appointed Editor of the Archives for the Psychology of Religion, Hutsebaut as Vice-editor. The Archiv will have to be turned into an effective, peer-reviewed international yearbook for psychology of religion.

The next conference of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion will be co-sponsored with the European Group for the Psychology of Religion in Glasgow (Scotland), August 28–31, 2003. Local organizer will be dr. Geoffrey Scobie (email: gscobie@ace.gla.ac.uk), chairman of the Programme Committee will be prof. dr. Dirk Hutsebaut (email: Dirk.Hutsebaut@psy.kuleuven.ac.be).

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The present character of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion

With this reorganization the “old” criticisms of the organization and style of the International Association may be assumed to have been resolved. It has now clearly opened itself up to new ideas and persons: it is free from every tie to a religion or confession, and functions in accordance with the democratic practices followed in the world of science today. The new Constitution and Bylaws can certainly still be improved at some points, but are a clear step forward by comparison with the version existing up until now. There is now a guarantee that the members of the Board will not always be the same persons and are there because the members want them there, instead of being imposed on them. The Board now consists of persons of various orientations and training, all of whom however are devoted and professionally obligated to the psychology of religion.

As for the material criticism concerning the dated understanding of psychology of religion, the following can be noted. The Association is not a professional association (like APA) but an organization revolving around a discipline. All academicians, whatever their discipline, who subscribe to the goals of the Association can join and work with others in it. Nor is it a “school” in the sense that it practices, pursues, or promotes a certain kind of psychology of religion. Rather, its goal is to bring together followers of different approaches in the psychology of religion and to promote their exchange. The Association is partial to no particular trend but aspires to serve the entire field of psychology of religion. Nor can the Association pin itself down on a single definition of psychology of religion. Its present self-understanding best fits a broadly conceived description of this field, which moreover avoids defining either “religion” or “psychology” as the constitutive elements of the concept of “psychology of religion.” It would certainly not be the Association’s goal to restrict its focus and accept as religion or psychology only those forms that agree with a certain pre-determined definition; on the contrary, it will much rather have as a goal to provide...
a platform for the entire spectrum of the scientific-psychological study of religion. In this connection, however, it will not do either to view as “psychology of religion” everything that moves between the two poles of “religion” and “psychology,” as we shall see in a moment. Since in the earlier criticism of the Association the issue was its understanding of psychology rather than its view of religion (or religious schools), it may be advisable in this presentation to briefly discuss the concept of “psychology.”

The discussion on the object of psychology has meanwhile assumed dimensions which resemble those about the object of theology (and/or the science of religion). In (or outside of) the discipline of psychology there is no consensus on what one must understand by “psychology”: there are discussions, if not disputes, about its object, its methods of inquiry, its theories, its approach, indeed about almost everything. Even those who think that “behavior” is the object of psychology do not agree on which determinants of behavior psychology must then analyze. All determinants of behavior, whether they are limitative (like psychophysical makeup or social and geographical conditions), operative (like acquired, learned activities), motivational (like needs and emotional states of mind), or normative (like rules and norms), are always culturally-historically stamped and conditioned (cf. Peeters, 1994). These facts, however, are not taken into account by most psychologists.

For a growing number of psychologists, however, it is no longer “behavior,” that is the exclusive object of psychology (it is, after all, also the object of totally different disciplines, such as economics and historiography), but meaning-bestowal. Psychology must analyze what a given kind of conduct means for the actor and how this meaning originates. Many theoretical psychologists are concerned to distinguish “main trends” in psychology (the classic ones, meanwhile, being considered psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanistic psychology, theories relative to “social cognition” and to “traits” with their particular psychometric instrumentarium; cf., e.g., the globally used textbook by Gray, 1994), while other psychologists employ more complex, technical, and experimental forms of investigation into the structure and functioning of—say—the basal ganglia of the brain, such that others again wonder whether such analyses could not be better performed in the faculty of medicine. Contemporary psychology represents an enormous pluralism, which need not be introduced here. It is important to realize, however, that there are totally different kinds of psychology, almost all of which can be found in the psychology of religion. If psychology—to restrict ourselves now to these simple examples—must above all study “behavior,” it will and must of course study also religious behavior; if “meaning-bestowal” is its object, also the bestowal of religious meaning naturally falls into its domain. It is just as important, however, to realize that the discussions and “confusion of tongues” which characterize the field of psychology will, by that token, be found also in the psychology of religion, and that the work of one psychologist will perhaps not at all be accepted as psychology of religion by another psychologist (cf. the title of the essay by Vergote, 1993). Similarly, as indicated above, not everything that has been said and written by psychologists on the subject of religion is psychology of religion. Let us now take a look at a number of generally accepted differentiations.

On the understanding of the psychology of religion in general

In the first place, we must maintain that the psychology of religion is not religious psychology (a term that was still generally current a half century ago). The psychology that is utilized in the psychology of religion (though almost never independently developed) is not as such religious. The psychology of religion uses conventional secular psychology, which is applied to examine religious phenomena from a conventional secular point of view. Precisely as it was at the time of the rise of so-called Scripture criticism and other historical research on the religious traditions

4, 5 (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
or doctrines of various religious groups who believed that the phenomena they held in honor were not historically conditioned, so this was the case also with the rise of the psychological study of religion. One should probably say that there still exist people who think that the “human” factor plays no role in religion and that therefore they do not need the insights of a human science like psychology in the study of religion. For all the material differences of opinion present in it, the formal axiom governing the psychology of religion is that—to put it in the words of the title of a publication that has become well-known—“it doesn’t fall from Heaven” (Godin, 1985). Whatever the origin, essence, and value of religion may be, earthly-human factors such as emotions, learning, psychodynamics, social-cultural class, motivation, gender, and much else, play a weighty role in the formation of religion. Within a given religious tradition it is often these factors that are primarily responsible for the differences between individuals and groups. Just as “sacred Scriptures” become no less “sacred” as a result of philological analyses, so also religious conduct, perception, and experience become no less religious as a result of psychological investigation. In whatever measure they may always be dependent on religious meanings and intentions, in religious conduct, perception, and experience there are always countless factors at work that can be examined by psychology (and that have often long been recognized before by “judges of human nature” among believers or religious professionals).

However, whereas from a scientific discipline like history it is often no longer expected that it should furnish some evidence for the truth of a given doctrine, this seems frequently to be still the case when it comes to the psychology of religion. Granted, in psychology of religion there are scarcely any authors left who will, for example, attempt to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity; in their place, however, there are numerous writers who are perfectly willing to proceed from the premise that humans are by nature religious beings and that for that reason being religious is better, healthier, and more natural than not being religious. To what extent, given this apologetic interest, they do not finally end up with a kind of reductionism (when, for example, in the case of clearly non-religious persons still “something,” even if it is something like meaning-bestowal, has to be described as religious), is something on which we must postpone judgment (cf. Vergote, 1996; Belzen, 1999). One also encounters apologetics where—for example, in Allport (1960, 1962) or Batson and Ventis (1982)—in part technical-statistical procedures are used to document the superiority of one’s own religious views or disposition. It is important at this point, however, to maintain that even in such cases the psychology of religion works with the theories, methods, and techniques of conventional secular psychology: it does not develop a psychology that only concerns religion and would be necessary because in matters religious people function differently than in everyday matters.

Also when in English or French the term for our discipline is “psychology of religion” or “psychologie de la religion,” what matters in this “of” (resp. “de la”) is an objective, not a subjective, genitive. Referred to is a psychology that deals with religion, not one that belongs to religion. The latter, of course, also exists. Buddhism, for example, has a highly differentiated psychology that is inherent in it (cf. de Wit, 1993). Although Western psychology (for it is this that is applied as a rule in the psychology of religion) has certainly been influenced by Christian (but even much more still by Greek) ideas, it is nevertheless not an intrinsic part of any religion, not even of Christianity, of whatever denomination it may be. The psychology of religion is in principle neutral with respect to the religion it examines (even though individual studies may or could be inspired or guided by antipathies or sympathies toward religion).

One finds a rapidly growing number of psychological publications on “religion” in esoteric and “New Age”-related circles. Here the authors frequently fall back on so-called “transpersonal” psychology (with its influential author Ken Wilber). Inspired by C.G. Jung, an author like Corbett (1996), for example, views the psyche as intrinsically religious; in his opinion, the divine and the human belong to a single indivisible consciousness continuum. In this view so-called “depth psychology” replaces religion, inasmuch as it would be in a better position than traditional religious
or theological categories to articulate and conceptualize the experiences which used to be called religious. While frequently interesting, publications of this sort are not, however, considered as part of psychology of religion. Hence Corbett himself expressly distinguishes his school (and other Jung-inspired schools) from the psychology of religion. In his opinion he represents a religious understanding of a certain dimension of the individual psyche (which is roughly the opposite of psychology of religion).

Psychology of religion as interdisciplinary science

When, then, is psychological work focused on religion actually psychology of religion? As stated, only a very broad definition of the future labor of the International Association will serve; hence something like the following: psychology of religion is the attempt to determine what is psychic in or about religion (it sounds almost tautological perhaps but, as we will find in a moment, is not so at all). Psychologists for the most part examine—as briefly sketched above—persons in the here and now. When, in whatever fashion, they research the religious conduct, perception, and experience of today’s subjects, they are practicing the psychology of religion. Up until this point the proposed definition will probably provoke little resistance. The psychology of religion would then be the attempt to investigate what is “psychic” about a given religious conduct, perception and experience, and this investigation of the psychic moment or aspect would then take place by way of the theoretical, methodical-technical instrumentarium of psychology. In this sense, then, the psychology of religion is an area of application of psychology in general. One must not, however, view this simplistically. An area of application in psychology is something very different from what it would be, say, in the natural sciences which find their application in technology. Since psychic reality is always shaped by changing cultural-historically given factors, it is never identical in different persons and groups (as this may be—to put it simply—presupposed concerning the empirical reality examined by the natural sciences). Religion, too, is a structuring factor in psychic functioning as it manifests itself in dreams, longings, emotions, cognitive activity, and so forth. Psychology, therefore, is never a deposit of knowledge and techniques that can be “applied” to any person or group whatsoever. Psychology in its various characteristic forms, however, makes available a heuristic and hermeneutic instrumentarium which enables its practitioners to determine in how far certain previously known structures can be found in the persons or groups to be studied or invoked for the purpose of investigation, also when it concerns religion.6

The just proposed definition of the psychology of religion can, however, be understood more broadly. Religion, however defined, almost always contains, peripherally or centrally, elements like ideas (doctrine), ethics and morality, cultic and/or liturgical action, images and conceptions, spirituality, organization, tradition, Scriptures, and much else. With regard to each of these categories one can similarly examine what about their rise, persistence, and functioning is or has been psychic. The moment one becomes aware that religion, however defined, is always something that involves a supporting human subject, the (potentially) relevant domain of research is of almost immense proportions; and psychology is one of the weightiest points of entry for this research. If one realizes that there is no such thing as religion without people, then all its manifestations can be explored in terms of the aspect of human involvement in it. Since all liturgy, dogmas, symbols, conceptions are always formulated by people, the human factor inherent in them can be examined. With all these phenomena it is naturally the case that much more can be said about them than has been formulated by human beings. Texts, symbolic representations and actions are and have been influenced by so many distinct factors that it will not do to leave their exploration solely to psychologists. History, anthropology, semiotics, economics and many more disciplines have their own legitimate role to play here. This may sound like a platitude,

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6 (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
but it is manifestly true that problems always arise when either (a) one of these discipline-based viewpoints becomes the all-determining one, or (b) a certain viewpoint must be suppressed at any cost (perhaps even out of fear of the reductionism indicated under (a)).

Despite its modesty, the proposed definition therefore nevertheless implies a broad conception of the psychology of religion. Implied in it is that the psychology of religion must necessarily be interdisciplinary in its practice. If, for example, a given person, speaking as a psychologist, wanted to say something about a mystic like Ramakrishna, he or she would have to have a thorough knowledge of Hinduism in the variants known to Ramakrishna. Additionally, one would also have to have a history-of-culture-based knowledge of the individual being studied and about his or her social environment. Another example: those who wanted to say something about the psychic processes involved in the production, reading, interiorization and “living out of” holy Scriptures, can consult the scholars, including exegetes, of the literature in question. But also those who wanted to study the religious conduct, perception and experience of people of our time will be dependent on theological or science-of-religion-based knowledge concerning the religious tradition to which the people being studied belong, on knowledge concerning their culture and their time, and so forth. In the examination or treatment of the psychic dysfunction of a religious person medical-psychiatric knowledge may be relevant. Here again the reality is: and so forth.

On the disciplinary classification of the psychology of religion

The psychology of religion, accordingly, is basically an interdisciplinary enterprise. It is this understanding which is in the best position to do justice to the diversity to be found in the psychology of religion and to render discussions about the discipline to which it belongs patently irrelevant. When we accept the premise that contributions can be made to psychology of religion from within psychiatry, academic psychology, psychoanalysis, the sciences of religion, history, anthropology and other disciplines, it is rather meaningless to discuss the question what kind of discipline the psychology of religion is and where it should be academically situated. However, this understanding—so liberally put forth here—does not imply that psychiatrists, historians, theologians, and so forth, can simply be psychologists of religion or practice psychology of religion. On the contrary: the instrumentarium of the psychologists of religion is psychology in general (a statement that hopefully no longer sounds tautological at this point), but this does not mean that it is exclusively reserved for those who are officially registered as psychologists or active in a faculty (or department) of psychology.7

Just as the literature of psychology works with the instrumentarium of psychology, but is most often localized in a faculty of the humanities, so the psychology of religion is a branch of psychology that is often found in faculties other than that of psychology. Most frequently one finds it in the sciences of religion (though only still too rarely), in religious studies and in theology (also far from everywhere). It is self-evident that the psychology of religion, even when it is localized, say, in a faculty of theology, must remain an independent form of psychology (hence not subordinate to systematic or practical theology) that will be influenced by the particular objectives of its context and is influenced by them. This also means that psychologists of religion at faculties of theology will pursue research of a different kind from that of colleagues at a faculty of psychology. More fruitful than debates about the question who does “real” psychology of religion, however, is picturing this situation in terms of the principle of “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein) and bearing in mind that, for all their differences, the representatives of the psychology of religion are united in the attempt to determine what is psychic in or about religion.

The understanding presented here, while sounding quite irenic, should not tempt us to think that everything that presents itself as psychology of religion is equally valuable or, perhaps better said, equally central. Metaphorically speaking, one can

7 (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
picture the psychology of religion as a number of concentric circles which intersect with other (probably equally concentric) circles which represent other academic disciplines or areas of specialization (which are therefore not identical!). In that case the central focus would be the development of a psychology that is or would be capable of analyzing a subjectivity that has become religious. Centered around it there would be a circle for basic research (including methodology); around that again a circle with theories, methods, and techniques from related psychologies. A further circle would represent the numerous applications, or praxis-orientation, of psychology. Each of these circles would intersect with circles representing such disciplines as history, sociology, or anthropology, or areas of specialization such as psychotherapy, the pastorate, or exegesis. It is not the label that is used as a term for the research or praxis but the nature of the work performed that in the understanding presented here determines whether one can speak of psychology of religion and whether one is dealing with a central or a more peripheral element in the field. Fact is, there are many publications in which the term “psychology of religion” (in whatever language it is used) does not occur or hardly ever occurs, but which nevertheless belong to the core of this discipline. Other publications may clearly have been written from the perspective of another discipline, like history (cf. e.g. Breure, 1987) or systematic theology (e.g. Dresen, 1990), but are nevertheless psychology-of-religion in character. Others again, though they have been defended at some faculty of theology, are clearly not theology, but psychology of religion (e.g., Källstadt, 1974; Alma, 1998). Again, other academic achievements in theology, though they employ psychological theories or techniques, clearly remain theological in nature (e.g. Ganzevoort, 1994; Meng, 1997; Nestler, 1998). Those who would want to actually draw the picture presented here will probably not find this portrayal very clear, but it is likely to do justice to the rather complex structure of the psychology of religion (as well as to the empirical reality to which it refers). Like most things which have a certain significance in human life, it does not readily fit into simply schemes and formulas.

The practical aims of the International Association

When we finally return to the question whether the reconstitution of the IAPR may count as a positive fact, I will, as already suggested, postpone judgment. A future generation, or its historian, may judge this issue. It may make sense, however, to offer some thoughts on what I would suggest as a preliminary assessment of the development: I would like to regard the revived IAPR as both an opportunity and a challenge. For what aims may be pointed out for an international organization like the IAPR? Generally speaking, the aim of the reconstituted Association has already been defined in the preceding section. It is to serve the entire domain of the psychology of religion. Concretely, however, the challenge to the Association will be to realize its international character. Already a number of national organizations exist which have assigned to themselves the whole area of the psychology of religion. The International Association will have to offer and realize something that clearly goes beyond this; it dare not play a parallel role to that of national organizations. Its aim must be to facilitate and foster the encounter with representatives of other languages, other mores and mentalities, as well as bring about the confrontation with other possibilities of being psychologists of religion, enlarge the understanding for the “other” and increase tolerance for it. This will certainly not be a simple task and initially perhaps produce more problems or discomfort than direct benefits. But if there is anything true in current talk about globalization and multiculturalism it will be required also of the psychology of religion to involve itself in the multiplicity that is manifesting itself in them. Let us attempt to list a number of somewhat more concrete desiderata for an international association for the promotion of psychology of religion at the beginning of the so-called third millennium.
It is certain that the psychology of religion, as a branch of psychology in general, is primarily a Western enterprise that has mainly had Christianity as its object of investigation. Hence it must be considered extremely desirable, in the first place, to move other than Christian denominations and phenomena into psychology of religion’s field of vision. One must not misunderstand this: psychology of religion should not cease to be a part of the secular psychology developed in the West, it must distance itself from every form of religious psychology; but, like psychology in general, it must realize that its object of investigation is not everywhere and ever the same, and it cannot be its goal to make universally valid pronouncements about a “global” population. Confrontation with other modes of being religious will require the search for suitable methods of investigation and appropriate academic modesty. Will it perhaps be possible in the future to schedule conferences of the IAPR outside the West? Until then the Association must, in the second place, view it as its task to integrate, help, and support colleagues from other cultures, inasmuch as it is frequently far from simple to be a representative of this discipline in countries that are not exactly receptive to the demythologizing and naturalizing tendencies inherent in the psychology of religion. In the third place, the Association must attempt to bring together, possibly coordinate, and support, for the purpose of international collaboration, the initiatives started off and on, here and there, in the recent past. Obviously we must remain modest: the psychology of religion is too small a field to keep alive a wide range of uncoordinated initiatives. This has altogether too often happened in the past when interesting initiatives expired unnoticed after some years. Such initiatives could be benefited by being embedded in an international association. Even though the history of the Association was not always glorious, it is now in fact the only organization, worldwide, that has maintained itself since the rise of the psychology of religion around the turn of the previous century. It has a certain history to which reference can be made and which can perhaps inspire confidence in support of fundraising. This, too, must be correctly understood. It may and will not be the Association’s goal to dominate, to colonize existing or still to be developed associations and initiatives. On the contrary, the Association offers itself as a possibility: the possibility of a rootage in an existing tradition, as well as a possibility of demonstrating that new initiatives in the psychology of religion need not be seven-day wonders.

This way into the future will not be simple; even now already one can foresee difficulties of various kinds. For example, there will be problems with the languages the Association regularly uses. In the past there has been vehement criticism of the dominance of German. In the conflict over this issue the Association almost broke up. In the future our concern — to formulate a last desideratum — will have to be to avoid a repetition of such quarrels. The International Association can obviously not confine itself to the use of a single language; it must guard against allowing a simple language to become dominant. It must rather create a space in which, for example, also non-English speaking psychologists of religion can make their own contribution and articulate themselves, and in which all members have the same opportunities of communication (and, hopefully, share the same difficulties). Also in this area it can perhaps be a school in which to learn tolerance and patience. Solutions to this complex of problems are not simple: the Association does not have the resources — like those of the United Nations or the European Union — to be able to offer simultaneous translations at its conferences. It will be incumbent on all the members of the Association, at this and other points, to be constructive and creative in their thinking about the problem. The fact that the members of the Association have explicitly decided that the Association’s own Archiv für Religionspsychologie must remain multilingual is to be regarded as a step in the right direction.

To conclude: the opportunities the IAPR offers to the field of psychology of religion, are all likewise challenges to those individual colleagues who want to involve themselves in the Association. International collaboration inevitably entails problems. These problems, however, are at the same time its appeal and charm. In the Interna-
tional Association for the Psychology of Religion this will exactly be the same case. Its reconstitution may be regarded as an invitation to all involved in psychology of religion to join the Association, to learn from, to collaborate with and to support colleagues on a global scale, seeking together the discipline’s best.

Endnotes

1 Dr. Belzen is a chair professor for psychology of religion at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. At the last meeting of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion, he was elected President.

2 A number of members pressing for reorganization (like Holm, van der Lans, and Belzen) had indeed been included in the Board, which however only grew numerically as a result, without in any way changing the majority situation.

3 In 1984, the Board (at the general meeting in Regensburg, Germany) had tried to meet the criticism that the Association was not psychologically but primarily theologically oriented, by expanding the name (“and science of religion”). The Association was not and did not become “science of religion” in the customary sense, however, nor did it gain any members from this, in fact, related discipline. In 2000 it seemed wiser and more appropriate to the Board to return to the original name.

4 Naturally, the discussion about the object of theology has a much richer tradition and much greater depth. Opposed to this, however, is the fact that the number of persons who are to be educated as psychologists and hence to be appointed as academic psychologists today far exceeds the number of theology students or theologians.

5 One must not think that this point of view is entirely undisputed. Also in the psychology of religion there is a small group (often calling itself “Christian”) of authors who think they are able to construct their psychology (of religion) not only on the basis of an intersubjective processing of generally accessible empirical materials but also of religious doctrine and/or premises (or even to be compelled to do so); cf. e.g. Utsch (1998), Benner & Hill (1999).

6 In clinical psychology, perhaps the best known form of “applied” psychology, psychologists usually proceed in this fashion. It is never the case that a syndrome (e.g. anorexia nervosa) found in a person can simply be reduced to some psychosocial complex of problems. On the other hand, knowledge of the relations between psychosocial factors and psychic dysfunction does, generally speaking, facilitate the exploration and eventual treatment of individual complaints.

7 With respect to psychoanalysis, for example, it can be quickly established that it is represented at almost no faculty of psychology. One finds it in all sorts of other faculties, although it is nevertheless manifestly a branch of psychology.

8 Such publications can even be considered classics, as, e.g. Rizzuto (1979), a work that begins with the statement: “This is not a book on religion” (p. 3). Such modesty is characteristic for most of psychology of religion today. There is scarcely a single psychologist of religion who thinks that the psychology of religion has “religion” (in general) for its object or in any way explains it. Usually authors restrict themselves to precisely defined aspects of a given religion (as a rule the Christian religion) which are then exclusively analyzed from a precisely fixed perspective. Thus Rizzuto continues: “It is a clinical study of the possible origins of the individual’s private representation of God and its subsequent elaborations.”

Bibliography


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For the Office of President

Robert Emmons

Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D. is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Davis where he has taught since 1988. He received his Ph.D. degree in Personality and Social Ecology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and his Bachelor’s degree from the University of Southern Maine. Prior to coming to Davis, he taught at Michigan State University. He is the author of over 70 original publications in peer-reviewed journals or chapters in edited volumes, including the books *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality* (Guilford Press), and *Words of Gratitude for the Mind, Body, and Soul* (Templeton Foundation Press). He is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the American Psychological Society, a Fellow of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies and a member of the Templeton Foundation Advisory Board. Professor Emmons is an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Personality Processes and Individual Differences) and a Consulting Editor for the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. His research focuses on personal goals, spirituality and religion, the psychology of gratitude and thankfulness, and subjective well-being. He has received research funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, the John M. Templeton Foundation, and the National Institute for Disability Research and Rehabilitation (U.S. Department of Education).

“How can we stimulate continued progress in the scientific study of religion? How can we find creative ways of applying this basic knowledge in the scientific study of religion to solving fundamental human problems? I see these as the two primary challenges for the members of Division 36. We must continue to cultivate an awareness of what the psychology of religion can offer the larger discipline of psychology as well as to the world at large. I would like to see increasingly dialogue and collaboration between psychologists who specialize in religion and our colleagues in evolutionary biology, neuroscience, philosophy, anthropology, and cognitive science so that developments in the psychology of religion take into account and build upon advances in these related scientific disciplines in a non-reductive way. I am grateful for the opportunity to be considered for President of Division 36.”

Nancy Stiehler Thurston

Nancy Stiehler Thurston received her B.A. in Religion from Hope College (1979) and her Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology from Central Michigan University (1991). She served on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary’s Graduate School of Psychology for nine years, and is presently (since 1999) an Associate Professor of Psychology at George Fox University. She is a licensed psychologist in California, and is currently applying for licensure in Oregon. Her areas of specialty are in shame, psychological assessment, and the integration of psychology and Christianity in classroom teaching. She has published numerous articles in the Journal of Psychology and Theology and the Journal of Psychology and Christianity, as well as a number of book chapters on various aspects of the interface of psychology and religion. She regularly makes presentations on psychology and religion at the international conventions of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, where she gave an invited keynote address in 2000. She has also made several presentations at the European Psychologists of Religion Biannual Conference (Lund Sweden, 1994). She leads a research team on shame, and has created a projective test of shame, which is in contract for publication.

(Continued on page 14)
with Western Psychological Services. She regularly leads CE workshops around the United States on “Shame in Psychotherapy and Christian Ministry”. For most of the past ten years, she has been a member of the executive board of Division 36 of APA. Her service to the division has included three years as Hospitality Suite Program Chair, three years as Member-at-Large (elected), and three years as Secretary (elected).

"Thank you for nominating me for President-Elect of Division 36. I have greatly valued our division, and have spent myself diligently and joyfully in its service for the past twelve years. As Hospitality Suite Program Chair for three APA conventions in the early 1990s, I got an introduction to the members and needs of the division. When I was elected as Member-At-Large in the mid 1990s, I was able to deepen my understanding of the mission of the executive committee of the division. Then, when I was elected Secretary of the division in the late 1990s, I was able to increase my service as an emerging leader in the division. I believe that my years of service on the executive board have prepared me well for stepping into the role of President-Elect.

I have several visions for the growth and productivity of our division. First, I would seek to broaden the membership and leadership base of the division. Specifically, I would like to accomplish this by making connections with undergraduate students at various universities who are majoring/minoring in both psychology and religious studies. Perhaps we could make a special effort to invite these students to submit proposals to present at the Hospitality Suite Program, and encourage them to join the division as student members. We could also consider setting up a mentoring program with these students and our current division members. My second vision is to encourage more clinical applications in our program submission for the APA Convention (given that I think we are already doing an outstanding job in offering sound empirical research presentations). My third vision is to encourage greater diversity in the range of religions that are featured in our program presentations. For example, if elected President, I would serve in that role for our 2004 APA Convention in Honolulu. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could be encouraging program submissions for that year from experts on the psychology of religion of native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders. My fourth vision for the division is to work strategically with the other divisions of APA to monitor the clustering of divisions for the APA conventions, and to advocate well for the needs and concerns of our division’s membership. Overall, if elected, I would plan to use my year as President-Elect to work diligently behind the scenes to “fire up the engine” of my four visions, so that when I would step into the role of President a year later, my work would already be up and running, in full swing. Thank you for considering my nomination for President-Elect."

For the Office of Treasurer

Rod Bassett

Rod Bassett received a BA in psychology from Seattle Pacific University (1973) and a PhD in social psychology from Ohio State University (1977). Rod currently is a Professor of Psychology at Roberts Wesleyan College (Rochester, NY). Rod has co-authored publications in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, the Journal of Psychology and Christianity, and the Journal of Psychology and Theology. In addition, Rod has presented several papers for Division 36 at the annual meetings of the American Psychological Association. Rod’s current research interests include the application of dual-process models to religious experience, sexual attitudes and religiousness, and the measurement of religiousness.

"I have been a member of APA for several years. During that time, I have especially appreciated Division 36. This division has been
a place where I have consistently found interesting people and interesting ideas. I also appreciate being part of a division that reminds the rest of psychology of the importance and value of exploring the spiritual dimension of human experience. For all these reasons, I would like an opportunity to serve Division 36.”

Mark McMinn

Trained as a clinical psychologist (Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University; ABPP in clinical), Mark McMinn is currently the Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College. After directing the Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology for four years, during which time the program successfully navigated the APA-accreditation process, Dr. McMinn initiated the Center for Church-Psychology Collaboration (CCPC). The mission of the Wheaton College CCPC is to serve religious communities while training doctoral students in the emerging competencies of psychology (consultation, program development, program evaluation, and so on). He has been an active participant in the National Council of Schools and Programs in Professional Psychology (NCSPP) and APA, and serves as a contributing editor to Professional Psychology: Research and Practice and Journal of Psychology and Theology.

"As a staunch supporter of the mission of Division 36, I believe it is imperative that we as a group are able to persuasively articulate our paradigm to the larger field of Psychology in a manner that shows both its value and necessity for the discipline. As a Counsel Representative, I will endeavor to be an active voice for the concerns of our division. I am also sensitive to our need for greater recognition and acceptance within this forum and will work to foster stronger ties with other divisions and with APA as a whole.”

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An Invitation to Division 36 Members

Make use of the Hospitality Suite at the upcoming APA Convention in Chicago by
1.) scheduling a meeting for an interest group or
2.) displaying books that one has authored

To inquire, contact:
Doug Hardy at hardyd@enc.edu or 617-745-3560.