

Leitmotifs in Life Stories: Developments and Stabilities of Religiosity and Narrative Identity

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RAMONA BULLIK



LEITMOTIFS IN LIFE STORIES

DEVELOPMENTS AND STABILITIES
OF RELIGIOSITY
AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ramona Bullik
Leitmotifs in Life Stories

Ramona Bullik is a post-doctoral researcher at Universität Bielefeld, Germany, in the Center for the Interdisciplinary Research in Religion and Society (CIRRuS). Her research focuses on narrative identity, specializing in religious narrative identity over the adult lifespan. With a background in linguistics, she is especially interested in argumentation strategies and ways of autobiographical reasoning. One main focus in her work is the religiosity of women and intercultural comparison of German and US-American religiosities and worldviews.

Ramona Bullik

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Developments and Stabilities of Religiosity
and Narrative Identity

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1. Introduction

The way people talk about their religiosity has been fascinating me for years: Already in my master thesis (Teschner, 2006), I investigated the ways people justify their deconversion from religious groups and how they integrate those experiences into their life story—as it was laid out in their Faith Development Interviews (FDI), an interview format that is based on Fowler’s seminal work on the development of faith over the lifespan (Fowler, 1981) and which captures participants’ life reviews as well as how they approach relationships, moral questions, and, last but not least, their religiosity or, more generally, their worldview. Having studied linguistics, I was interested in the argumentation strategies that were used when trying to convey why someone had joined a contestant religious group and why they had left that group a while after that, having to master the task to still portray one’s own life, one’s own personality as a sensible, coherent whole. The interviews back then were taken from the Deconversion Project (Streib et al., 2009) which had the aim to investigate why people leave their religious groups and which trajectories they follow afterwards; it was conducted in a cooperation between Bielefeld University (Germany) and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (USA). This cooperation, which was initiated by James W. Fowler, Heinz Streib, and Ralph W. Hood, jr. has been lasting for two decades and has evolved into a longitudinal and cross-cultural project that has been investigating religious development in different facets in multiple projects. The interviews that I use for this study have been conducted in the course of these research projects, which I have been a part of for nearly all my academic life. Accordingly, whenever I refer to the greater frame of the research project, I reference it as “the Bielefeld/Chattanooga project.”

The question that remained open when I finished my master thesis was: How does the story proceed? A longitudinal perspective was not available at the time, and the cases I analyzed only had one interview each. The case study that fascinated me the most at the time was that of a married couple who had deconverted from the Jehovah’s Witnesses together, yet the stories they told were remarkably different: Werner’s¹ story was that of self-empowerment, and he took a very active part in the process and convinced his wife. Gudrun, on the other hand, appeared passive and gave in to her husband’s arguments, even though she cherished the community that she experienced with the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Furthermore, it was interesting to carve out the dynamics of their relationship,

even though this was not the focus of my research interest. However, this couple's story stuck with me and years later, when the first phase of re-interviewing the participants from the original project was finished, and Gudrun and Werner were part of this re-interviewee sample, I re-read their interviews and prepared them for a presentation given at the conference of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR) in Hamar, Norway, in 2017 (Bullik et al., 2017) in which I showed how the stories of their deconversion got more condensed over time, and the ambition to convey a certain image of self became more visible. It became apparent how much the stories differed between the spouses, but also within each person. Hypotheses about a development could be drawn at this point; however, having only two timepoints, it could not be said for sure that what I found out in my analyses actually was development and not just a momentarily different approach. With the third interview phase starting in 2018, this desideratum could be addressed. Gudrun and Werner agreed to be interviewed again and, moreover, the sample of cases with three interviews contained two more couples. This gave me the opportunity to pursue the question further how a relationship or a joint life is portrayed by both parts and how this portrayal changes over time. I was interested in the role the women played in these relationships, having found a profound change in Gudrun's self-portrayal between times 1 and 2. Accordingly, in addition to the couples, I wanted to look into the diverse ways of development that can be traced in women's biographies. The focus on linguistic means to position oneself and the respective partner, to convey a certain image of self—or, in other words: to create a narrative identity—was still prominent in my considerations for a research design, yet I also wanted to pursue the way people talk about their subjective religiosity and how this might influence their narrative identity.

Over time, these diverse research interests developed into a design that is able to capture the facets and particulars of each case while paying special attention to the research questions that will be laid out in section 3.3. In the center of attention is the individual and their life story, in other words: the *self as author*, as it was termed by McAdams (2013). The person in the interview wants to convey their life story as a coherent whole, creating a life narrative that integrates the high points as well as the low points, eccentricities and conventionalities and thus presents a narrative identity that they feel adequately encompasses their worldview. To assess this narrative identity, I use the approach of a content analysis, coding for image of self, relationships, religion/spirituality/worldview, and moral orientation. Additionally, paying tribute to my interest in argumentation strategies, I apply a narrative analysis which focuses on autobiographical arguments and the way coherence is created. Being aware of the fact that this approach has its blind spots, and following McAdams' argumentation that there are "at least three different kinds of psychological material or content, each kind specifying what the I may see and know when it reflexively encounters the Me" (ibid., p. 273), I wanted to include other perspectives, derived from a different look at the interview material or different data: I include the structural analysis of the FDIs, which is the traditional way of analyzing this kind of material, going back to Fowler's own approach (cf. Streib & Keller, 2018, for the latest version of the *Manual for the Assessment of Religious Styles in Faith Development Research*). This approach gives insight into the way a person structures their world and their meaning-making processes on a more general level, purposefully neglecting the content for the sake of structure, which may roughly correspond with McAdams' *self as agent*, focus-

ing on goals and motivations (McAdams, 2013). A different kind of data comes into play when trying to take into account more basic personality traits and self-ascribed roles, thus, including the *self as actor* as well: I look at selected data from the extensive surveys that have been part of the study designs, knowing that answers on survey questions offer a different look into a person's perception of self; additionally, this gives me the chance to compare a single case to the rest of the sample, taking into account sample means and standard deviations as well. All of these data are assembled and triangulated for all three timepoints, thus allowing for a comprehensive longitudinal analysis, which has the aim to depict single trajectories, carve out individually meaningful changes and developments and, in the end, also compare those results inter-individually to see in what ways these results from in-depth analysis of single cases may help better understand the development of religiosity or worldviews, and of narrative identity over the adult lifespan.

Notes

- 1 Of course, the names used here are all pseudonyms; in the case studies, I have tried to disguise the people's identity as good as possible by pseudonymizing names, places, occupations, etc.

2. Theoretical Approach: Narrative and Religious Identity

As has been pointed out in the Introduction, I come from a background in linguistics. Combined with the orientation toward developmental psychology, this chapter will accordingly focus on literature that is appropriate to theoretically frame my research interest in the development of narrative identity and subjective religiosity from both a linguistic and psychological perspective. This approach, arisen from my academic biography, will be able to capture both the *structure* of the narrative identity and the *processes* which lead to change in the reconstruction of life stories, a distinction that is connected to the model of the self as actor, agent, and author as introduced by McAdams (2013; cf. Streib & Hood, 2024; Pasupathi & Adler, 2021); it is also in line with the research tradition which has evolved, over the years, in the Bielefeld/Chattanooga cooperation (for a comprehensive description, see, for example, Keller et al., 2024).

The question of how narrative identity is formed is one of the key questions in this study. The term *identity* shall be understood, as Josselson (2017), with reference to Erikson, pointedly puts it, as “the integration of all the important elements of the person we are in the world, from the most public to the mainly private” (p. 16). A narrative identity serves to create coherence and continuity over the lifespan, a task that may be achieved by telling one’s life story, as will be detailed later in this chapter. The way this narrative identity is created may change over time, may be altered after meaningful events, or adapted to circumstances—which may well be the case in the interview settings analyzed here. Since questions of faith and worldview will arise, it is obvious for most participants to create a narrative identity that takes into account their stance toward religion as well. This chapter here will therefore first present approaches to narration and autobiography, with a focus on narrative identity and the means that are used to create this. Moreover, in a next step, the theory of religious development will be presented, along with the question how a religious identity is formed, thereby building a bridge between the two theoretical strands.

2.1 Narration and Autobiography—Making Sense of One’s Own Life

When people are asked to talk about their lives, they usually find that task difficult at first. So, starting the Faith Development Interview (FDI) with the question, “Reflecting on your life thus far, identify its major chapters” is often rather challenging, since most people are not used to structuring their lives facing a stranger (moreover, a lot of them are not used to looking at their own life in such a structured fashion). This observation already contains two aspects that are constitutional for narrations (cf. Gülich & Hausendorf, 2000):

- a) Narrating is a communicative act.
- b) Narrating is a reconstructive act.

By referring to the communicative aspect of narrating, it is stated that a narration needs a counterpart or an audience. In the interview material used here in this work, the counterpart is an interviewer, a person (in almost all cases) unknown to the interviewee. This makes talking about one’s life both harder and easier, since it is not possible to draw on any shared memories (even though a lot of people will nevertheless try to create a common ground or make assumptions about shared knowledge or experience based on age, professional or educational background, etc.); on the other hand, there might be a certain liberty going along with speaking to a person that one has not met before and will probably never meet again. The “ignorant interviewer,” that is, a person who is not familiar with any of the circumstances relevant for the memories that are shared, therefore needs context and the interviewee will have to make explicit “some part of the ideological or emotional meaning that was an essential part of the memory” (Cook-Gumperz, 2005, p. 244) which leads over to the reconstructive act of a narration. Theoretically, it has to be assumed that a person is free to interweave both fictional and real aspects in their interviews, since a narrative *per se* does not contain sufficient intrinsic signs of truthfulness (Koschorke, 2018; 2012). Yet, when dealing with autobiographical narratives like the interviews that are the fundament of this study, a certain authenticity is to be expected—even though, as will be detailed later, with the limitation that there is always an agenda (conscious or unconscious) behind the way people tell their stories, at the very least the wish to express something of importance for themselves and their worldview (cf. Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004b, Linde, 1993). Moreover, people will display different forms of “the truth” throughout the years, and reconstructing these different truths will be one focus of this work. In other words, narratives can be characterized as “occasioned” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 106), adapted to the respective context in which they are told. This context is also relevant for the decision of which story should be told in the first place and which one does perhaps not seem appropriate (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004b, p. 32). It can thus be said that autobiographical memories, even though they may seem to us stable over time, are highly susceptible to time and context. They are reconstructed anew with each occasion they are retrieved, constructed, as Mead (1929) put it, “from the standpoint of the new problem of today” (p. 241). And while some of the most often told memories, which supposedly are most important for constituting one’s identity, may over time gain some stability by being processed as part of the semantic memory rather than the episodic, talking about the past always means that the primary

experience of what has been lived through is mostly hazy and influenced by the present (Heinlein, 2020, p. 112).

An important point that was made by Koschorke (2018) is that the narration, in written, but even more so in oral form, is always shortened, condensed, and more pointed than the event that it refers to and therefore the reconstructive act of narrating is always mediated by language: “The needle’s eye of verbalization admits nothing not giving impetus to the story. Here—at least at first sight—narrated and lived life are distinct” (Koschorke, 2018, p. 16). Single fragments of a narrative are given in a special order that does not necessarily have to be chronological but may pay tribute to a certain dramaturgy or a striving for causality. Moreover, it is necessary to verbalize non-verbal parts of a memory and to list simultaneous processes one after the other due to the strict linearity of spoken language which prohibits a simultaneous reproduction. Some parts of a memory will have to be shortened, while miniscule moments are spread out in much more detail, following an agenda of some sort.

Summed up, talking about one’s life, telling stories, narrating, is constituent of how people perceive themselves; over the years, they develop a repertoire of stories that are perceived as representative or in other ways important to understand the individual life story. Analyzing narratives helps to understand not only how stories are told, but also “how experience is organized” (Schiffrin, 2003, p. 538). I will further explore here how these life narratives, i.e. that stories that are deemed important when talking about one’s own life, are constructed and how they become part of a person’s identity.

It is not a trivial act to present a coherent picture of one’s life. Children and younger adolescents will in most cases not be able to link important events to their overall life story (cf. Habermas (2011) for a description of how autobiographical reasoning develops). But when aging, people get more competent in organizing past events in a fashion that integrates more general context information about life with those personal experiences into what Bluck and Habermas (2000) termed *life story schema*. These schemata help create a continuity and ensure an efficient way to reconstruct one’s own narrated biography. While parts of a person’s schema are bound to be exchanged, or even forgotten, over time, due to new experiences that are made which lessen the importance of other, formerly significant, memories, the life story schema integrates context with subjective memories of past events, therefore being fundamental for the mental organization of a person’s own past (p. 125). As life proceeds, this life story schema necessarily is updated, rearranged or reinterpreted, due to new experiences that shape one’s life meaning, and also due to one’s own development which may go along with an adapted morality, a focus on generativity (defined, for example, by Erikson (1998) as encompassing “procreativity, productivity, and creativity” (p. 67), thus, a concern for passing something on to the next generation), etc., while still trying to integrate these new experiences into the image of self. This integration is achieved by autobiographical reasoning, which will be laid out in more detail below, and often emerges as stories. The story form has the benefit of being close to the actual experience and easier for the listener to follow than an abstract explanation. For a story to be considered “good,” it has to fulfill certain expectations, which are, following Coleman (1999): coherence, assimilation, structure, and truth value (p. 134). Regarding coherence, there are, on the macro-level, different forms for creating this (listed as well in Bluck & Habermas, 2000):

- temporal coherence
- cultural concept of biography

Both of these serve to provide a template for putting life events into order and for creating a framework for the narrated autobiography, in literature often referred to as *cultural life scripts* (cf. Bohn & Habermas, 2016), a “cognitive structure containing knowledge of normative events and their timing” (Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008, p. 421). The temporal coherence may be constituted by giving years and dates (“I was born in 1950.”), or maybe by referring to important historical events (“I got married the year the Berlin Wall fell.”). A cultural concept of biography, more generally, is addressed when mentioning certain turning points that are perceived to be more or less universal, for example when starting an autobiographical narration with listing educational stages and going on by naming landmarks of a “classical” (Western European) biography (“There are those common chapters, like childhood, a phase of puberty, end of time in school, having children, getting divorced.”) Note here that the earlier stages are usually more normed than the later ones and that these cultural life scripts are, naturally, different in different cultural contexts¹. References like these are often found in our interviews and can be seen as an indicator for a certain insecurity at the beginning of the interviews: People in general need to test what is expected of them with this question, so starting with naming conventional stages of development is a safe start for most of them. Thus, a cultural life script also influences autobiographical memories, that is, the way we remember things when asked for meaningful events (Hatiboğlu & Habermas, 2016). These types of coherence serve as an important framework, for both the interviewee and the interviewer (and also for the person who will later analyze the answers, who is, rather vaguely usually, present in form of “the research” while talking²).

The other constitutional forms of coherence are:

- causal coherence
- thematic coherence

Causal and thematic coherence are forms of meaning making, ways to explain, to justify, to make argument with the aim to make sense of one’s own biography. By using forms of causal coherence, the person, as Habermas (2011) puts it, bridges biographical change. They will use certain arguments for explaining a change in their mindset, a turning point in their biography, etc. The work of Pasupathi and colleagues (2007) adds the idea of a self-event connection which is defined as “the relationship between a given experience and one’s sense of self constructed within a particular narrative” (p. 87). In the interviews for this study, efforts to create causal coherence are frequently found and therefore one focus of my analysis. The next sub-section will describe in more detail the linguistic forms by which this coherence is created.

Thematic coherence, on the other hand, serves to create a biographical continuity. By narrating different, isolated episodes or other biographical elements, the person attempts to create a biographical whole that is perceived as continuous and harmonious. This does not mean that there are no disruptions or radical turns. On the contrary: continuity can in general only be assumed when there is also discontinuity, contingency,

temporal (and other) discrepancies (cf. Straub, 2016, p. 139). Accepting and integrating these contingencies is seen as the most important step toward creating continuity and, in the process, a diachronic identity, that is, an identity that encompasses the changes that have happened in a person's life, and which constitute who the person is today. This form of coherence contributes to the wholeness of the autobiography within one interview. Profound experiences, crises and other times of change may lead to a revision of the narrative repertoire. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2004b) name experiences of deconversion, psychotherapy, or the encounter with strange cultures as experiences that may lead to a fundamental reinterpretation and rearrangement of one's own life story (p. 31). However, the most important stories of a person's life tend to solidify over time, maybe becoming, as Koschorke (2018; 2012) has called it, a set of bookmarks for the individual book of life. Sticking to the book metaphor, and in accordance with the phrasing of the first question in the FDI, a way to organize a life review is to divide it into chapters, which may be defined as "temporally extended autobiographical memory" (Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008, p. 422). Those divisions are often oriented toward the cultural life script; however, they are shaped individually in each life story, which may regularly deviate from that cultural life script. Chapters help create coherence between events by tying them to one common theme. Thomsen and Berntsen asked participants to recall five memories from their personal life story and then told them to evaluate those events regarding emotionality (finding that, for example, the dimensions of the NEO-FFI personality inventory are associated with either positive or negative valuation of life events; Thomsen et al., 2014) and importance, and then to divide their lives into chapters. They compared those personal life stories and memories with cultural life script events and found that there was a substantial overlap between those two (61%; see Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008, 427f). Plus, they identified a bump in memories during young adulthood, which is commonly referred to as the reminiscence or memory bump and describes the phenomenon that, when investigating people's autobiographical memories in middle or late adulthood, a majority of the memories will be related to the time of young adulthood (see, for example, Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000)³. The analysis of the FDIs will show to what extent this finding also applies to the narrations of our participants and where their personal life stories deviate from the cultural life script.

Another way of trying to capture this process is a metaphor from music theory: the *leitmotif* (Sacher, 2015). The stories people use to construct their identity may differ; however, single elements can be recognized and point to a central theme of the whole composition, or in this case, the person's life theme. For example, there may be different stories that do not have much resemblance on the surface, but which all point to a central personality trait that the narrator wants to stress (Sacher portrays a teacher who, with a variety of different little stories, underlines his own unconventionality, without too explicitly saying, "I am an unconventional teacher."). This approach establishes an implicit line of argumentation, which helps establish the desired identity. Finding this metaphor fitting to summarize my analyses in the case study chapters, I will propose a leitmotif for each participant and point out where this might have changed over time since this has proven to be a useful proxy to assess the core of each person's narrations and their narrative identity; this leitmotif will be mirrored in the heading for each case study.

Summed up, it can be argued that there is a core of a story that stays constant over the years. Norrick (1998) has found in his research that “a story may remain substantially intact from one telling to the next” (p. 75), and has established the term “kernel story” for his finding. And while most research cited here focused on a life story schema or a leitmotif at one point in time, Norrick refers to retold stories, which constitute a special unit and shall get a special focus here, for these retold stories are also part of my own research.

2.2 Autobiographical Reasoning—Creating Coherence and Credibility

When people talk about their lives, regardless of whether they are explicitly asked to do so or not, they usually have an agenda in mind, even though this agenda may be unconscious. They will have the desire to portray themselves in a certain light, to create a coherent life story that may focus on generativity, or on an emancipatory movement, on uniqueness or on personal and/or professional success—in short, they are creating a narrative identity, which will be detailed below. A coherent life story seems necessary to most people, since a lack thereof might deprive them of meaning and direction, therefore a coherent narrative will serve as a means of coping with contingency (even though Koschorke (2018, p. 3) points out that a different goal of a narrative may also be the explicit evocation of contingency). A way to achieve this coherence is autobiographical reasoning, that is, creating chronological as well as motivational and thematic implications explicating the biographical relevance of memories, an activity that not only re-constructs, but interprets the past, with a good deal of implicit normative aspects involved, appealing to logic and assumed shared logic (Habermas, 2011, pp. 2–3). My engagement with the interviews at hand, in particular the life review section, shows that autobiographical reasoning is a substantial part of the identity work done by our participants, linking elements of the past with each other and to the self in the present, with the agenda to integrate one’s past in one’s present self while maintaining and creating a coherent, if not continuous image of self. Therefore, the autobiographical narrative can be described as a process that leads to understanding by placing events and experiences in a frame of reference which can provide coherence. This is not usually achieved by dealing with a single event, but by placing multiple single events into more encompassing structures (Polkinghorne, 1998; Bruner, 1990).

As another important stylistic device that is found frequently in the interviews analyzed in this study, I present narratives that are constructed according to the schema expatiated by Labov and Waletzky (1967). This form of talking about specific life events is often applied when participants talk about identity forming (or changing) events and shall therefore receive special attention.

2.2.1 Autobiographical Arguments

One form of autobiographical reasoning is the use of autobiographical arguments. The term “arguments” subsumes all kinds of (verbal) activities that serve the purpose to create plausibility and credibility. Moreover, arguments can be used to weaken standpoints

that seem unfavorable to the narrator as well (cf. Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004b, p. 162). Thus, in general, in an autobiographical interview argumentation means dealing with different positions and expectations, presenting them in a form that aims to make the listener come to the “correct” conclusions about the person who is talking. This is often achieved by narratives that illustrate, explain, or justify what the person wants to convey. Argumentation usually goes hand in hand with the wish for comprehensibility. It needs some (biographical and/or historical) background information to understand a person’s motives (p. 168). These argumentations are generally rather implicit, thereby referring to common knowledge, cultural models which the person talking presumes to be universal, or at least known to the person who is the recipient of the talk. Köber and colleagues (2018; 2015) have, following Habermas’ (2011) classification, named one form of these implicit argumentation strategies “autobiographical arguments,” which create causal-motivational coherence by creating connections between past events and the self. Six forms of arguments have been found to be the most common, referring to:

- a. developmental status
- b. biographical background
- c. a formative experience
- d. a turning point
- e. lessons learned
- f. generalized insights

Referring to *developmental status*, a person might try to make a point by saying that they were too young to understand something, or, as Bianca (see chapter 5.1) puts it, “Puberty, that’s when you live through the process of building your own opinion.” So, in other words, this kind of argument is usually attached to a life phase which is societally defined and used as container for several assumptions that are not made explicit but set to be common knowledge. A *biographical background* argument is based not on a temporal reference, but on an experience, for example when Carola (chapter 8) says, “School was stressful at my time [...]. Teachers weren’t pedagogues, but just hammering knowledge into us. [...] And so, then I studied, and became a teacher myself.” These arguments do not refer to a singular experience, but rather to a series of events, oftentimes connected with a certain sentiment. On the other hand, while the *biographical background* argument may be used in a broader way, a *formative experience* refers to a unique event that has had a meaningful impact on a person’s life, in Nadine’s account (see chapter 6), for example, “I sometimes thought about suicide [...]. And then I once had a very intense dream and then that subject was closed.” A *turning point* is, more explicitly, referring to an experience that made a person change their life’s course and is often brought up when talking about becoming a parent, the change being perhaps more sudden than it would be for a *formative experience*. A *lessons learned* argument is drawn when trying to emphasize that a—usually negative—experience made the person be more cautious or more hesitant with people. Finally, *generalized insights* orient toward normative assumptions, as when Renate (see chapter 7.1) talks about a lack of friendships and adds, “But I guess this is connected with that fact that I got married early and therefore could not establish any independent relationship with others.” This kind of argument has less temporal reference than the *develop-*

mental status argument, but similarly refers to norms that are assumed to be universally known and acknowledged.

This categorization was implemented in the course of creating the ATLAS.ti coding guideline (see section 4.2.2) and has proven useful for capturing certain forms of argumentation in the interviews. The coding of the interviews shows that there are certain people who frequently use some or all of these arguments and others who reconstruct their life and talk about their values and religiosity in different ways. Arguments like these help to show consistency and change in one's life story ("we have been friends since first grade," or "I never talked to him again after that"), but they can also serve to illustrate a self-perceived development ("I was a trusting person before that deception, now I'm a skeptic"), which are usually tied to certain events. By this, autobiographical arguments help to connect time and identity, specific events and experiences with one's own self-image (Habermas, 2020) and therefore constitute an important factor for autobiographical narrating as a whole.

However, the argumentation strategies laid out above are seldom made explicit (although sometimes they are, when people say something like "I remember a situation which for me was a real turning point") and instead rely on implicit assumptions and prerequisites, on an assumed shared knowledge. The logical structure of these argumentations remains generally implicit as well. Following Aristoteles and his writings on rhetoric, these argumentative figures are sometimes called *topoi* (cf. Kindt, 1992, p. 191, who is referencing Aristoteles, 2018).⁴ People will try and reinforce their own arguments by naming an authority as a source or by stressing the lack of alternatives, thereby anticipating possible dissent and rebut objections prophylactically (Spranz-Fogasy, 2003, p. 36cf). Summed up, it can be stated that

life memories have a rhetoric character, whether they are told to others or maintained for oneself. They always serve the purpose of self-affirmation and are therefore not mere narratives, but always argumentation, too. The past is never just repeated, it is explained and justified, and thereby also exculpated and defended.⁵ (Keller, 1996, p. 94; transl. by R.B.)

2.2.2 Narratives Told in Autobiographies

A look into the interview material of my study quickly reveals that people often tell little stories or episodes to help substantiate their standpoint, to illustrate the importance of a life event, etc. A story, quoting Bruner (1990, pp. 49–50), is told when there is a "deviation from a culture's canonical pattern" (or cultural life script, as introduced above)—that is, when something out of the ordinary has happened, something that makes a story worth telling. These narratives often follow a certain dramaturgy, which may result in leaving out certain parts that do not seem relevant (or maybe even contradict the point the narrator wants to make), in condensing (or flattening) other parts, while further aspects get more elaborated, sharpened or exaggerated (cf. Polkinghorne, 1998, p. 25). This way, contingencies can be processed and possibly reduced. Narratives thereby serve the purpose of providing such contingencies not only with meaning but with an important function or role for the narrator's life course, which, according to Straub who refers to Ricœur,

may bestow contingencies with a “new face” (cf. Straub, 1998, p. 143). Following this logic, it seems evident that a narrative is not just the repetition of consecutive sequences, it necessarily needs a form of connectedness in order to be understood as “a bounded whole or *gestalt* with a beginning, middle, and end, that, taken together, has a point” (Mishler, 2007, p. 31). For the approach to the interview material and with the aim to line out this special *gestalt*, it has, over the years, proven useful to implement the schema introduced by Labov and Waletzky (1967) which was modified by Habermas and Berger (2011; see Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2004b, pp. 146ff.) for a comprehensive explanation). Table 1 shows the structure of a standardized narrative, as adapted by Keller et al. (2016, p. 253).

Table 1: Structure of a Narrative According to Labov and Waletzky (1967)

Orientation	Provides background such as antecedents, place, time and persons
Complication	Central event that breaks with normality, elicits an emotion, defines a goal
Evaluation	Assessment of the situation/attempts to return the situation to normal
Resolution	(Non) successful result of attempts to solve complication/adjust evaluation
Coda	Signals end, leads back to present

It should be noted that not all narratives will strictly and entirely follow this structure. An orientation may be missing or embedded in the preceding interview sequence and the middle part may contain several loops with different attempts to solve the complication, for example. Still, this structure provides a good approximation to a generic form of narrative. Endowing the narrative with a title helps condense the essential content of a narrative. Sometimes the interviewees themselves provide a title or a form of abstract to prepare their listener for what is about to follow (Keller et al., 2016a; Habermas & Berger, 2011). Narratives like these can be found when the narrator wants to justify their behavior, plead for understanding or otherwise wants to make a point (Keller & Streib, 2013, p. 13), and they seem to occur frequently for example when people try to explain their self-perceived religious or spiritual development, making the “religious identity narrative” (Keller et al., 2016a) a common sub-form of narratives in the FDIs. Therefore, the coda, or the moral, is the core of the whole story and constituent for a person’s autobiographical reasoning, the story fulfilling a certain task. Telling the story may even, as Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2004b, p. 149) note, have an emergent autoepistemic potential: interviewees often state that they told this story for the first time, being sort of surprised themselves that this situation came to their minds. Due to the interview situation, the interviewees may feel obliged to find a coda for their story, thereby creating an impromptu valuation of the whole event. In longitudinal perspective, the task will be to find narratives that are told again years later and see how their focus has maybe changed and carve out the differences (or hypothesize about why they are not told anymore).

Another way to look at narratives, in addition to the Labov/Waletzky structure, is to assess their set-up, or their arc of tension: do things turn from bad to good or vice versa? McAdams and colleagues have introduced the terms of *redemption* and *contamination story*

for narrative psychology, following studies with middle-aged American people (for example Dunlop et al., 2016; McAdams et al., 2006c; McAdams, 2011). A story in which the protagonist starts at a low point and ends with a success, an amelioration of the situation or another benefit is called redemptive. The narrative identity created by the telling of redemption stories “provides the midlife adult with the confidence and commitment required to make sustained and positive contributions to the next generation” (McAdams, 2006, p. 98). The opposite can be described as a contamination story. Characteristic for the contamination story is the stark contrast between a very good starting point and the spoiled outcome, the stories often seemingly moving in a vicious circle of repetitions (cf. McAdams, 2006, p. 213). The respective forms of narrative are associated with either positive or negative outcomes on various psychometric scales including well-being, the frequent occurrence of contamination stories being associated also with depressive disorders and low scores for generativity. Life stories containing many contamination sequences lack a forward movement and long-term goals; often early psychological injuries and a failed secure attachment to significant others is reported (cf. McAdams, 2006, p. 220). Dunlop and colleagues found the frequency of contamination stories decreased after the college years, presumably due to listener’s feedback being more favorable to redemption stories and a general social desirability for stories with a positive outcome (cf. Dunlop et al., 2016, p. 431) and the cultural prevalence of redemption stories associated with the occurrence of meaningful events and general life circumstances (p. 434). While they state that especially redemption stories are constituent for the American identity, fitting into the general cultural script of the Horatio Alger interpretation of the American Dream about rising from rags to riches, it is less clear whether this applies for Germany as well. However, it appears that the occurrence of redemption/contamination sequences depends on the social contexts and the prevalent master narrative the respective culture offers.

The way people talk about their live and the ways they tell little stories creates a narrative identity. The next paragraph therefore will take a closer look at this phenomenon.

2.3 Narrative Identity—Creation and Adaptation of Personal Myths in the Lifespan

When analyzing a person’s life accounts, their approach to moral questions and their assessment of their subjective religiosity, we get access to the person’s narrative identity, which is therefore a key concept in this study. Narrative identity can, as a first approach to the concept, be described as the “internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person’s life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning” (McAdams, 2011, p. 100). One’s past is reconstructed based on one’s own memory, thereby, creating a subjective story that may exaggerate or alter events and may leave out others. This process usually starts in late adolescence, and it is never finished. Therefore, when looking at narrative identity, the main point is not to get to know any exact truth, but to capture the subjective truth as it is remembered at one point in time by one individual. This account, as will be seen in this study, may change over time, and the narrative identity may show facets that were not present in younger life. As a first glimpse into a longitudinal

perspective, McAdams, in his own longitudinal study with college students, found that the content of the stories that were told often changed, while the emotional and motivational quality more often remained similar (cf. McAdams, 2011, p. 108). Life narratives, in the lifespan that his study focused on, became more complex while containing a greater variation of themes. My study will cover a broader lifespan (see section 4.1 for the sample description), so it may be possible to replicate McAdams's findings as well as expand them. The themes that McAdams found to be predominant in life narratives were often related to either agency or communion; among the examples that he names (p.101), religion is missing. Given the nature of the material used in my study (with questions explicitly focusing on religion and worldview), it is not surprising that religion will play a major role in the analyzed interviews.

To assess the way individuals think about themselves, the way they see themselves, how they want to be seen by others, it seems necessary to distinguish between the identity that is presented during the interview (the narrating self) and the identity that is established in the person's narration (the narrated self). Keeping in focus those two facets of identity, it is possible to draw conclusions on current attitudes, opinions, etc. Possible questions might be: Is the narrated self somehow portrayed in a negative light or does the narrating self still identify with that person that is the subject of the narration? How is the narrated self positioned in this story? In the context of an autobiographical narration, positioning may be understood as the way the person themselves as well as the other characters in their narrative interact, how they refer to each other, what kind of roles, traits and motives they are attributed with (cf. Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004a, p. 168). This takes place on two levels at least: "first, as a character within the story they are telling, and second, as a participant within the social context of the narration" (Pasupathi, 2015, p. 171). And while these acts of positioning are often more apparent in a dialogical situation, they can still frequently be found in a more monological discourse situation, like for example an interview. Here, the narrator will draw on different "past selves" and thereby position themselves within different contexts in the narrative as well as in the present. But the interviewer or the listener will be positioned as well, as has been alluded to above: as an ally or as a contestant, as a researcher, often as an expert for questions of theology or psychology, but also as the recipient of the interviewee's expertise. Looking at these positionings will also help assess how coherence is created within the autobiographical story as a whole. Following Gergen (1998, p. 195), to present oneself as a coherent, concise individual (narration of stability), and/or as someone who aims for higher levels (progressive narrative), and/or as fighting against setbacks or injustice (regressive narrative) means, at least for Western societies, to approximate a state of (moral) identity which has a high reputation in a community. Thus, narrative identity can be defined as the way a person performs identity work within a specific interaction. This identity work is performed by a narrative presentation and by establishing aspects of their identity that are relevant in the respective situation. That being said, it is evident that a narrative identity is highly contingent on the circumstances in which it is created; it is constituted and presented in the autobiographical narrative and can therefore change as the situation changes in everyday life (for example if there is a different recipient of the story) and as the narrating self changes over time (cf. Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004b, p. 55).

The relation of identity and time is relevant here. Following Ricœur's work, Streib (1994, pp. 181–182) states that a narrative has a double bind with time in that a time difference is prerequisite and expressed: an event that is the subject of a narrative cannot exist synchronously to it being told; narrating happens either after something happened or is projected to assumed future events. And, while performing the act of narrating, the time difference is eliminated by “importing” a lived experience to the present, by re-creating a past event in a different situation, thereby making a narrative a diachronic action. By doing this, by deciding which story to tell and in what way to discuss it (and what to leave out), an identity is created that is deeply rooted in the narrative and that is shaped following the narrator's path. Thus, identity is not to be understood as a construct that stays the *same* over time, but as something dynamic. In a life story, it is possible to find different versions of the self which form, in its entirety, a continuous self, not in spite of, but because of its discontinuities and changes which are bridged by temporal, thematic, and causal-motivational coherence (cf. Habermas & Köber, 2015, p. 149). With people being asked to “reflect on their life thus far,” we get their subjective life review as well as an expression of their momentary self-conception framed by their current implicit or explicit awareness of cultural life scripts. Habermas concludes that since conveying this self-conception is one of the main motives of giving an account on one's past, this personal past is bound to change while the person changes over time (Habermas, 2020), which makes longitudinal research on narrating and narrative identity mandatory for better understanding how and why these changes happen. As McAdams (2011) points out, when narrative identity starts to form in late adolescence, the stories that are told are often “grandiose and breathless, [...] tales of personal greatness and personal tragedy” (p. 106). However, these narratives may be revised or adapted to current circumstances and new experiences, becoming more realistic and reflecting the understanding of society, values, etc. This forms, as McAdams has called it in his earlier work, a *personal myth*, which he defines as “a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole” (McAdams, 1993, p. 12).

Narrative identity as a construct is often associated with well-being and with different personality traits. McLean and colleagues (2020) have tried to approximate the empirical structure of narrative identity in order to understand the different approaches that exist in literature and to see what has not been captured in past works. By applying a factor analysis approach and drawing on pre-existing samples of narrative research, they aimed to better describe the “structure underlying the many features of life narratives,” expecting to find “at least three conceptual groupings representing: affective quality (overall, or distinct positive and negative), autobiographical reasoning, and structure” (p. 924). Autobiographical reasoning, they found, is thus related to change and development, usually administered to convey a positive, redemptive story. Redemption stories are described as a “hybrid construct” (p. 936), sharing components of both autobiographical reasoning and motivational and affective themes, while well-being was associated with affect and motives. In the instances where autobiographical reasoning was linked with a positive interpretation, well-being emerged as well. Interestingly, regarding personality traits, they found that *openness to experience* was associated with autobiographical reasoning for low points in the individual's life story, suggesting that talking about low

points in one's life and sensibly integrating them in one's autobiographical account requires a form of openness, which may also admit uncertainties (cf. p. 938). These findings are important for understanding the underlying structure of and personality traits associated with narrative identity. However, the researchers advocate for an approach that does not neglect the qualitative study of narratives, for this may capture what could not be mapped by their own quantitative analyses. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative strands seems like a path well worth exploring in order to assess the complex concept of narrative identity. This desideratum will thus be taken up in my research questions and study design.

Important events, meaningful experiences, amusing situations—there is a set of life narratives that gets told over and over again across the lifespan. As has been explained above, the necessity to adapt the experience to (spoken or written) language demands certain amendments, which go along with a change of the “original” story. A new experience not only influences an individual's present and future, but also alters their past as it is remembered and narrated (cf. Hermans, 1997). Moreover, when stories are retold, they are adapted as well—depending on the audience or reactions of earlier audiences, since the desire to tell a story that shocks, inspires, or amuses may be rooted in most people. Additionally, the tone or the emphasis of a story may change as well, depending on the current life situation. Retelling may lead to a coagulation of experiences into prepared stories that can easily be reproduced (Habermas, 2020). Schiffrin has, in her research on retold stories of Holocaust survivors, found that language is adapted to serve as a template to fit the experience, and later a performance is developed “through which language can be fit to audience” (2003, p. 542). Moreover, differences in the way a story is re-told might also be caused by a form of coping or of having found a way to deal with an experience, which leads to a re-evaluation of the past (Gülich & Lucius-Hoene, 2015). However, the aspect of credibility always plays a certain role in creating a life narrative. While dramaturgy and a personal agenda may influence the way a story is told and may alter certain facts to a certain degree, people aim to tell a “true” story, creating a life story that is coherent and reflecting their current standpoint. This standpoint, and therefore the evaluation of events, may change over time and alter the stories that are told and the content of what is deemed “true.” Concurrently, the thematic content of a narrative identity may stay relatively stable in the course of the lifespan (Dunlop et al., 2016, p. 428). Thus, thematic coherence is expected to become more prevalent in later adulthood.

Camia and Habermas have, in their longitudinal study on the stability of life narratives over times, attempted to find out which life events get retold and can therefore be deemed constituent for the individual life story (Camia & Habermas, 2020). At the first timepoint, participants were first asked to name the seven most important memories of their life and then, in a second step, to tell their whole life story including those events. Four years later, these tasks were repeated, and afterwards, the participants were asked to name two events that they had omitted now but which had been part of their memory collection the first time. If the participants were not able to recall any memories by themselves, they would be given hints by the researchers who then went on and asked the participants to recount the omitted memories and to think about possible reasons for the omission. Some of the main outcomes were that older life events were more stable than more recent ones (which, in consequence, hints to a stabilization of the self-concept over

time) and that contrary to the initial hypothesis, negative events were not more likely to be forgotten and/or omitted than positive. My own study presented here, adding a third timepoint, however, not pursuing the question of omitted memories explicitly (but allowing for more freedom in exploring different areas of one's life; for a description of the interview format used here, see 4.2), will show whether these results can be found in the material examined.

Studies with a genuine longitudinal design that investigate change in life narratives are rare, as Köber et al. (2015) report. Most research focuses on one timepoint, comparing two age groups, and usually examines one aspect of narrative identity. Köber and colleagues have tried to fill that gap by applying a longitudinal design, using multiple methods with diverse age groups and asking for an entire life story rather than a single event, building on a study by Habermas and Silveira (2008). By quantifying results from a content-focused coding procedure, they found temporal, causal-motivational, and global thematic coherence to emerge in adolescence and stabilize in adulthood. With reference to Erikson's model of identity development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998), they suggest that "the life story enables the individual to explain change in identity due to uncontrollable circumstances as well as due to decisions made in the light of life experiences" and that narratives both establishing stability and change in identity develop equally throughout adulthood (Köber et al., 2015, p. 270). The lack of truly longitudinal data is also noted in the work of Dunlop and colleagues who claim that this data must be tracked through time and demographic factors need to be considered in order to understand the nature of narrative identity (Dunlop et al., 2016, p. 429).

When looking at retold stories, we will find that they are subject to change since "new events may have direct implications on an existing story and, must be integrated" (Hermans, 1997, p. 229); or, as Josselson (2009) states, like in a kaleidoscope, elements get combined in different ways, showing a different pattern, depending on the dominant selves of the present. Most of these changes will not be conscious to the person who tells the story. Instead, there are more or less unconscious processes at work that may lead to a thorough reinterpretation of certain events. The concepts of leitmotifs and life story schema are put to a test here when adapted to research in a longitudinal perspective: do they change over time, maybe related to a turning point in the life story? Or will the core of one's life narrative stay the same? My analyses will assemble single examples throughout all of the respective person's interviews in order to carve out the "leitmotif" (see above), or, as Augst (2002) has termed it, "Lebensdeutungsmuster" (patterns of life interpretation, p. 95), thereby creating a thematic coherence that may not be intentioned or even conscious by the interviewees, but will serve the purpose to work toward a typology of change that can happen within a person's lifetime.

Narrative research is not limited to any special field; in fact, it can be applied in any field that examines written or spoken language. When focusing on the creation of narrative identity, the topics under observation may differ as well, and religion may well be among those topics that are considered constituent for identity in various ways. When a member of the research team comes to interview a participant, it is self-evident for them that the interviewer wants to learn about their stance toward religion, supported by the fact that the Bielefeld arm of the research group is affiliated with a theology department and asking questions dealing with the participants' image of God or their spiritual

praxis. But the questions asked and the narratives that are unfolded are so much more than just questions about faith. They are basically a set of questions asking “Who am I?”, the “cardinal existential question that people grapple with in their daily lives” (Scherer-Rath, 2014, p. 131). When investigating narrative identity in the context of faith development research, it makes sense to also take into account the religious identity given the broad conceptualization of ‘faith’ that is laid out below, the interview format touches on fields of identity and meaning making that can be understood in a religious as well as in a spiritual or secular sense (and often, these fields will overlap). It is important to note that this research is not looking for an exact truth but is instead searching for a subjective reconstruction of the individual’s religiosity as it is perceived by the persons themselves. There may be divergent positionings within the narrative of one’s own personal faith (cf. Hermans, 2014, p. 59), a strong belief in God on the one hand, anger and anxiety on the other; or, accordingly, a firm atheist stance with the notion of experiences that are beyond rational explanations. Narratives exploring religious identity will go through the same dilemmas that have been described by Erikson (1998), wherein “one must negotiate between two extremes in the identity landscape” (Schwab, 2013, p. 220). Following Bamberg (2010, p. 112), there are three challenges or dilemmas that a person telling their life story will face: continuity and change (“How can I remain the same when everything changes?”); uniqueness and conformity (“What parts of my story are really unique and where do I follow others’ footsteps?”); and agency and construction (“How much am I the creator of my own story?”). People in the interviews used here will, more or less explicitly, bring up these challenges, sometimes finding different answers to each of them as they grow older. Thus, oscillating between these challenges, the person talking about their life and their faith (or non-faith) will try to create a coherent, plausible identity that is also positioned within a context of religion and spirituality that is greater than one’s own personal realm: they will talk about a perceived development of religious/spiritual ideas and views, how they are similar or different from others within and outside their group of reference, and how they have arrived at their current views (cf. Schwab, 2013). Schwab has shown in a study that while the process of constructing such a religious identity may be characterized by ambiguity and contradictions, it is still unfolded systematically by making use of the unifying structure identity work offers while noting a wide “expanse of heterogeneity in individuals’ conceptions of existential concerns” (p. 225). While there may be great diversity on an intra-individual level, religion may still serve as a master narrative, a framework provided by society. This can be assumed for Western Europe which is, even though widely secularized nowadays, still influenced by Christian traditions. For West-Germany, this means that the Christian holidays still dominate the (secular) calendar year. During these times, many children and adolescents are traditionally baptized as well as attending communion or confirmation. Religion therefore can be seen as a narrative in which one can place oneself and may give orientation when talking about one’s religious socialization.

The interviews that I analyzed for this study grant insight into the way a (religious) narrative identity is created. The interviewees will talk about their lives and the role religion plays in this context. They will interact in certain ways with the interviewer, addressing them as an ally mostly, but sometimes also seeing them as an agent provocateur whom they will have to convince of their opinions. The way these narrative identi-

ties are presented will subtly change over time, thus showing a development. To get a better understanding of the way development is conceptualized in this study, I will now lay out important aspects of the theory that is the basis for the research conducted in the framework of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga cooperation. In a final step, I will line out how religious identity may be assessed within this research context.

2.4 Talking about Religion: From Stages to Styles and Types and the Development of a Religious Identity

The research of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga project is based on a theory that stands in the tradition of developmental models of the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, deriving inspiration from Erikson, Kohlberg, and Piaget, among others. When Methodist theologian James W. Fowler (1940–2015) published his seminal work *Stages of Faith* (1981) in the late 1970's, he touched on different disciplines outside his theological wheelhouse, among them developmental psychology, psychology of religion, and research in autobiography. He was inspired by stage models in developmental psychology that were popular at that time (see, for example, Erikson, 1959; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1997/1929). Given this widespread approach, he did not limit his theoretical and practical work by applying a narrow definition of the subject of investigation. Instead, he defined “faith” in a very broad sense:

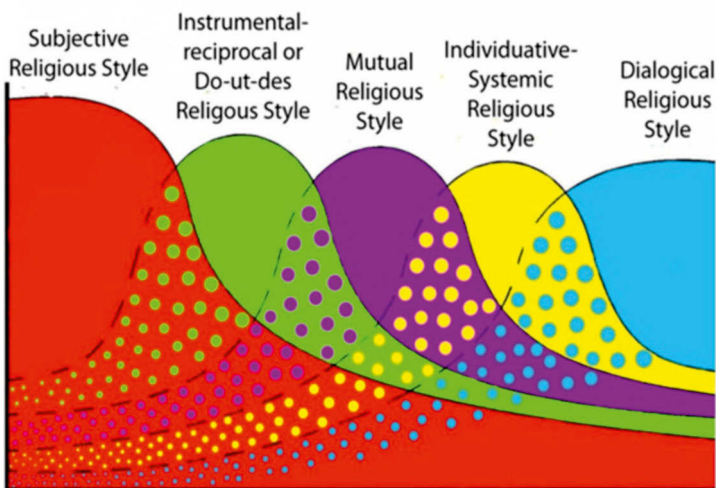
In the most formal and comprehensive terms I can state it, faith is: people's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in the light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images – conscious and unconscious – of them). (Fowler, 1981, pp. 92–93)

Fowler's definition encompasses theistic as well as non-theistic worldviews, and it may even serve to capture completely secular ways of meaning making since it has claimed to examine what is of “ultimate concern” for each individual. This is not trivial, since only this broad conceptualization allowed our research team and other researchers around the globe to apply the Faith Development Theory (FDT) and the FDI widely and across different cultures, religions, and worldviews⁶. In other words, this definition captures vertical transcendence (the belief in something higher, a higher power, or a god/gods) as well as horizontal transcendence, referring to a more worldly orientation which surpasses the borders of one's own existence and is oriented toward a bigger frame of reference.

Going into more detail of what Fowler conceptualized as faith development, one may see the stages that he assumed every person would experience, starting in infancy. The assumption that faith develops over the lifespan was a novelty, yet was in tune with developmental psychology and its stage models at that time. Within this understanding, development is a qualitative change which moves up unidirectionally, going from one

stage to another and leaving the former behind when reaching the next step without the possibility of going back. As a short orientation (for a detailed description of the stages, I refer to Fowler, 1981), it can be said that during the first stage, which covers the age-span of infancy and is described as intuitive-projective, the child does not discriminate between fantasy and reality and is not able to take the perspective of the other. Having reached the second stage of mythic-literal faith, the child (7 to 12 years old) will be interested in the connections between things and events, in explaining the world through myths and stories, and it will still be mainly focused on its own interiority. Stage 3 (synthetic-conventional), which is usually reached in early adolescence, is oriented toward interpersonal harmony and the conventions of one's immediate societal group. Stage 4, the individuative-reflective faith, is generally not found before early adolescence, and is characterized by a more autonomous approach and the ability to critically reflect on actions of oneself and others. Stage 5 of conjunctive faith is dialogical, emphasizing subjectivity and the awareness of the multidimensionality of the world. As the elliptical form of the model shows rather nicely, this stage may appear as returning to "the roots" of one's faith. However, stage 5 cannot be thought without the critical reflection and distancing that happened in stage 4. Stage 6 is the universalizing faith and is a theoretical construct, which refers to an ideal of self-transcendence and unconditional commitment to humanity and "the good cause." This stage was rarely evidenced empirically, and postulating the "Kingdom of God" as the ultimate, normative endpoint of development did not seem a plausible goal for a psychological model of human development. Thus, Fowler's model received critique and was thoroughly revised and adapted over time (see Streib, 2005; 2001a).

Figure 1: *The Religious Styles* (Streib & Keller, 2018, p. 9, reprinted with kind permission)



Summing up the criticism that was directed toward Fowler's model of faith development, it can be said that not only it was considered too normative, but it also neglected development that takes place in later adulthood. In Fowler's model, the majority of faith development takes place in early to middle adulthood, with little notion of what might come after. Empirical research showed that most adults will be sorted into either stage 3 or 4, with stage 5 assignments being the exception. This empirical evidence called for a more differentiated description of the development that takes place in adulthood.

The theoretical model of religious styles, as it was developed by Streib (see, for example, Streib, 2001a), takes up these concerns. As Figure 1 shows, the stages have been transformed to a form that resembles sine waves (and notice that there are only five waves; Fowler's sixth stage was discarded for reasons mentioned above). Those waves overlap while keeping a certain hierarchy and a general forward direction, and they exist long before they breach the surface.

Most important for this revised model of religious development is that it is now (theoretically and practically) possible to have more than one style present at the same time, and the person can fall back on an earlier style should it seem adequate or necessary. Development is displayed, and there is usually one style that is dominant, but the other styles are there as well—those that were “overcome” as well as those that have not yet surfaced. To make the model a bit more use-oriented, I provide training for new members of the research team in theoretical and practical applications. These waves may be compared to volcanos that can erupt at any time even though they have been long dormant, adapting Streib's analogy of “geological layers, where previous ages of our planet are invisible from the surface but nevertheless present and available,” which may conflict and fracture in some cases (Streib, 2001a, p. 153; cf. also Streib, 2001b). This eruption may happen in or after traumatic situations (as in during a pandemic) which may be a sensible way of coping with stress and anxiety. Falling back onto well-known strategies and simple answers can help navigate in times of uncertainty and upheaval and may provide a guide through a jungle of diverging, contradicting opinions, advice, and information. The “simpler” patterns that one falls back to can be old, discarded ones; or they might be new ones, a religion or a worldview that offers guidance. Style 2, the instrumental-reciprocal style, describes people who stick to texts orthodoxically and who take those for granted, without any interpretation or critical reflection. Perspective taking is usually not possible within this style. The mutual style 3 is characterized by a conventional approach, and a person fitting this style will uncritically adopt views and dogmas of their church, but also of friends and other important peers. Perspective taking will be stereotypical, and there is little critical questioning. This changes in style 4, the individuated-systemic style. Here, the person will be able to take a critical distance and to question beliefs of oneself and others. They may listen to others' diverging opinions, even though they will typically stick to their own opinion, the ability for dialog and perspective taking is still not fully developed; style 4 may also appear rather dogmatic. A person in style 5, the dialogical style, is fully able to listen to what others say and they will actively seek conversations with people with views different from their own. This will be the starting point to critically engage with one's own faith/worldview and offers the possibility to allow oneself to be changed by the strange, the other. The person is able to appreciate that there are different positions, and the individual can hold them in tension. In contrast to

style 4, which will try to solve the tension (maybe even going so far as to depreciate the deviating opinion), style 5 does not need to resolve this situation and can instead handle it with an intellectual humility. Applying this theoretical model onto a more concrete situation: A person in the middle of a pandemic might try to calm their inner uproar, their fear and the confusion by turning to a worldview (or converting to a religion) that offers solutions for all their concerns. When new to a religion or worldview, it is not unusual and may be necessary to start at a style 2 or 3 understanding of one's new conviction, because doubting or critical reflection would just not be intuitive at this point; rather, one needs to learn the tenets of this new belief. This does not change the fact that the person may be a thoroughly reflective person capable of abstract thinking in other domains of their life. Therefore, the prevalence of more than one style comes into practice here. The actual content of a belief or worldview is not the focus. Rather, it is the structure of believing that is taken into account, which makes the theory applicable to different worldview and religions. A person following conspiracy myths about a chip being injected with a vaccine can be assessed with this model as well as the "conventional" Christian or the enlightened Buddhist.

The styles resemble Fowler's stages from which they are derived. However, they are more flexible in their composition and structure and have a clear focus on interpersonal relationships, on the environment that surrounds the individual and with which the person interacts, and on the worldview as it develops over time. Perspective taking is a clear focus in the model of religious styles and has become even more important in the latest revision of the *Manual* (2018), in which *perspective taking* is introduced as the leading aspect. Thus, the religious styles model is itself a development of Fowler's stage model, taking what has proven valuable from the theory and revising what did not seem plausible anymore and discarding what could not be verified empirically. In other words, it is the result of a developed view on human development.

To account for the finding that more than one style may be present in the ratings of one interview, recent research (Streib et al., 2020) has developed a way to compute religious types which are derived from the 25 ratings of each interview and which allows for a "final total FDI score" (p. 2) that can be used in statistical analyses as well. Those types reflect a pattern which may consist of more than one style, but usually will display a preference for one style, resulting in four types: substantially ethnocentric (type 1, with at least 20% of ratings for style 2), predominantly conventional (type 2, with a majority of style 3 ratings), predominantly individuative-reflective (type 3, showing a majority of style 4 ratings), and the emerging dialogical type (type 4, which is assigned when at least 20% of the answers are rated style 5). This typology may then be modeled to account for development which has been tested with the longitudinal sample of N=75 from the Bielefeld-Chattanooga research (Streib, Chen, & Hood, 2021), resulting in a typology of movement (up or down) and stability. So far, these types have been constructed combining qualitative and quantitative methods in order to "carry the model of faith development out of the cognitive-structural niche" and to emphasize the "individual difference approach to religious styles" (Streib et al., 2020, p. 125). This study will try to reinforce this theoretical framework and reconstruct, with the help of a combination of methods (see chapter 4) what being a "mover upward," actually means. This is where the above elaborations concerning narrative identity connect with the theoretical framework laid out here

because the way narrative identity is reconstructed in the interviews interacts with the assignments of religious styles and types. Narratives have always had a clear focus in the research tradition, which this work is part of. In other words: In Faith Development Interviews, the participants not only create a narrative identity by talking about their lives. Given the topic of religion that weaves through a lot of the questions, they also create a religious identity, making the latter a specification of the former (a little more on the creative potential and uniqueness of the FDI can be found in 4.2). Therefore, special attention is granted to what has been labeled “religious identity narratives” which “emerge when our respondents talk about their own religious/spiritual developments [and which] are seen as windows into their narrative identity” (Keller et al., 2016a, p. 253). Doing this, the demand for a longitudinal design (Keller et al., 2016b) is met, aiming at reconstructing consecutive reconstructions of religious identity. In the case study chapters, most of the narratives analyzed will be religious identity narratives. In some cases, other narratives that are constituent for the participant’s identity are included as well.

Notes

- 1 Since this work here focuses on the German interviewees of the German/US American research project, the cultural life script the participants refer to is assumed to be rather similar. For research on the differences found in different countries, see for example Hatiboğlu and Habermas (2016) or Scherman et al. (2017).
- 2 Sometimes people wonder, during the interview, what we “are going to do” with these answers. Those people are often interested in receiving updates in our research and, from time to time, they ask whether they could get a copy of their interview transcripts. We usually try to deflect that wish, or postpone it to a later point in time, since reading the older interviews would most certainly have an influence on the way the interviewee talks and would maybe make them take up topics that they would not have remembered otherwise.
- 3 McAdams (2011) suggests that the accumulation of memories during young adulthood is directly connected to the development of a narrative identity and the effort to put one’s life into a coherent story (p. 107). More on narrative identity, see paragraph 2.3.
- 4 The principle is familiar as well, for example, in the speech act theory. Austin (1975), in his seminal work “How to do things with words,” describes how actions are performed by utterances, for example in weddings, baptisms or during a trial. And even though the argumentations I deal with in this research are less formalized and much less institutionalized, they still constitute reality, which is an important criterion of performative acts according to Austin.
- 5 Lebenserinnerungen haben, ob sie anderen erzählt oder allein gepflegt werden, einen rhetorischen Charakter. Sie dienen immer auch der Selbstvergewisserung und sind damit nie nur Erzählung, sondern immer auch Argumentation. Vergangenes wird nicht einfach repetiert, es wird erklärt und begründet und damit auch entschuldigt und gerechtfertigt.

- 6 The intercultural application of this research can remain only a side note here, but it is nevertheless an important factor for this tradition since this may, in the future, allow us to carve out differences and commonalities within as well as between cultures and religions. The FDI has been translated into several languages, among them Korean, Arabic, Urdu, and Brazilian Portuguese. Research is planned for the near future to be conducted in China, for example.

3. Couples and Women—A Look into the Research Landscape

Having laid out the theoretical foundation for my study, I now turn to the subjects of my research: married couples and, with a special focus, women. This section will first give an overview on research that has been done regarding interaction within relationships. Secondly, I will present research that focuses on gender differences in religiosity as well as narrating. In these sub-sections, I will give more elaborate reviews of studies that stood out for me in the course of researching literature for my own study in an illustrative fashion.

3.1 Studying Couples

When studying couples, a multitude of research focuses is possible. The FDIs do not focus directly or exclusively on marriage, so the task will be to find those parts of the interview where the marriage, or the joint life, plays a role and where the respective partner is discussed. How do the spouses speak about each other? I am interested to learn about the role the other might play in the portrayal of one's own life and one's own religiosity. Some may portray the other's personality and grant insights into the other's life story, thereby revealing something about joint processes of meaning-making and lived religion. One question that is of particular interest to my own research is how life stories of the other are perceived and reconstructed, in other words: how do people talk about their spouse's life? Those so-called *vicarious life stories* are part of the complex system creating a feeling of closeness to people, including one's own life partner. Knowing another person's most important life stories—knowing how they came to be who they are—is key to understand the other and to be able to take their perspective (Panattoni et al., 2021; Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018). Panattoni and colleagues suggest, in these studies investigating the role of vicarious life stories for romantic relationships, that couples likely reproduce each other's stories as similarly as they were told to them as favorably as possible in order to preserve closeness with the (usually implicit) aim to justify one's investment within the relationship and to show understanding for the partner (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018).

They found that the way people remember and tell stories about their partner's life sheds light on themselves and on the way they are and the way they construct their own life stories (p. 1428). In a qualitative analysis derived from that original study, Panattoni and colleagues investigated how a couple with a mixed ethnical background wrote about each other's life stories with the aim to show how these stories are actually interwoven on an idiographic level (Panattoni et al., 2021). They found the couple's written narratives to be highly interdependent with cultural master narratives. They conclude that a similar in-depth qualitative analysis would most likely be the only way to highlight the power of such culturally dependent master narratives (p. 49). In my estimation, this hypothesis would also call for a longitudinal observation in order to trace developments which may occur the longer the relationship lasts on the one hand and the more the cultural master narrative of the dominant culture is assimilated (or rejected, for that matter). Rauer and Proulx (2020) point out that while various contexts may influence relationship maintenance, cultural influences may become even more salient over time; however, observation over a longer time period would be needed to empirically prove this hypothesis.

Longitudinal studies on couples are rare; more so, studies with a qualitative approach. Those that do exist give profound insights into the intricate dynamics within those relationships. Coleman and colleagues (2015) investigated what it means to grow old together in their longitudinal study on the health and well-being of older people in England: Similar to what Holmberg and colleagues say of their sample (see below), they found most of their couples still living together in their 70s to be rather happily married, they accordingly found more similarities than differences among those couples. Various benefits of marriage and family life were emphasized, especially as health declined with old age; but while the men's accounts revealed an awareness of a possible dependency on their wives as they grew older (most of the husbands in the sample were older than their wives), often emphasizing the important role their wives play in their lives, it seems as if the wives profited less of the long companionship, even though most of them would talk fondly of their marriage, they would also see the restrictions that went along with the task of having to take care of an ageing husband (cf. p. 58ff). On the other side, the loss of a spouse, even if it occurs in later life and therefore usually not completely unexpected, goes along with a long time of adaption and bereavement and of developing skills to cope with the loss and the necessity to organize one's life anew. The study design offered the opportunity to investigate this process longitudinally by opening the opportunity to have the person portrayed before the death of their spouse and therefore being able to analyze change and coping not only from a subjective reconstruction. Coleman and colleagues found that "faith in a future life for their loved ones and an eventual reunion was well illustrated in a number of cases" (p. 98). This is an interesting observation which will be taken up again when portraying Carola (chapter 8) who has to deal with the loss of her life partner as well as struggle with her belief in God.

Assuming that the life partner is possibly the most influential person in an individual's life, the question which role religion plays in a relationship is obvious. Jung (2020) investigated in what ways the religiosity of one's spouse is associated with the other's meaning in life and their well-being. On the basis of calculations using data from a large survey, he found spousal religiosity to be "positively associated with the partner's sense of meaning in life, independent of the partner's own religiosity" (p. 523). Lakatos and

Martos, in a meta-analysis of existing literature (2019), confirmed that religiosity plays a vital part in the relationship of religious couples, potentially having a stabilizing effect on the partnership. They likewise point out that longitudinal research may be interesting regarding the development of religiosity in each individual (explicitly mentioning, for example, deconversion) and its impact on the relationship, but also when looking at the impact the relationship has on religiosity (p. 273f).

That being said, research like that is widely missing and my study may, in an exploratory fashion, fill that gap. Before turning to that in more detail, I would like to present two studies that I found to be inspirational not only during my literature research, but also in the process of figuring out details for my own study. Both of them do not deal with religion directly, and only one of them is longitudinal, yet they both gave me an idea of how the richness of the material at hand could be made fruitful.

3.1.1 Dirty Linen: Couples as Seen Through Their Laundry

This study by French sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann was first published in 1992 (the German edition is from 2005). Because of his unique approach to the research question, I decided to include it here. Kaufmann reconstructs the underlying mechanisms and structures of committed, exclusively heterosexual relationships by focusing on an apparently minor, everyday part of living together: the handling of dirty laundry. Laundry is seen as an indicator, constantly present but rarely made explicit, therefore containing a symbolic meaning which Kaufmann argues may inform how a relationship works at its inner core. His goal was not to conduct a quantitative study with extensive surveys asking the couples about their household routines. Instead, by interviewing 20 couples first separately, then together, his idea was to “get the laundry to talk” (Kaufmann, 2005, p. 12). While remaining vague about the actual nature of the method he used, he points out that his analysis aimed at finding contradictions, hidden ideas, and subtle insinuations. In order to get hold of the contradicting statements especially, he created a chart for each couple individually which helped him organize the themes that emerged and determine those topics that were talked about in a different fashion when the respective spouse was present. What is remarkable about the study is that he works close to the cases, with little quotes from the participants’ interviews throughout the whole body of text. Through this, he gets to a profound characterization of the individuals as well as their relationships. For example, he portrays a young man who was brought up by a mother with rigid ideas about cleanness and tidiness. However, she never taught him how to keep up to these standards himself, since the mother considered these tasks, as the participant says, to be a woman’s work. When he moves in with his partner, however, he realizes that she, in contrast to his mother, is less interested in a clean and tidy household, yet is more interested in sharing the tasks equally. Accordingly, the man is forced to switch his attitudes depending on whether he is with his wife or his mother. From the relevant interview passages, Kaufmann reconstructs what he calls a split of personality (which of course is not meant in a clinical psychological sense), thereby arriving at a characterization of the participant as well as thoroughly analyzing the relationships that man has with the two women (cf. pp. 158–159). Kaufmann goes further in demonstrating the merit and the unique feature of this study: He deduces, from having analyzed in

detail the interviews of his participants and their stance toward dirty socks lying on the bedroom floor and toward sharing household tasks, more generalized traits of personalities and of ways to organize a relationship. He looks into the past of his participants as well as the societal past and finds reasons for behavior that is influenced by a traditional role understanding for women as well as their claim for emancipation. He notes change happening regarding gender equality, tentatively saying that the couples younger than 50 valued equality in their relationships higher than the older ones.

Regarding his study design, having first interviewed the individuals separately and later as a couple, Kaufmann gave them the chance to test the “idleness of conjugal discussions” (p. 223). He reveals that the couples did not talk about their individual experiences or revelations in the single interviews with each other afterwards, which, as Kaufmann concludes, proves the importance of silence and concealment of problems as a factor for structuring a relationship. As an interesting finding, he points out that amusement is often used as a means to express anger toward the other in a socially more acceptable way (p. 252).

In the final part of his study, Kaufmann draws the conclusion that by following the trace of the laundry, he is able to reveal how much the foundation of relationships has been changing over time: from a pre-tailored marriage to a custom-made relationship. In summing up his efforts and his insights, he states:

By itself, every single gesture, the ironed slip, the piece of clothing lying around, is of absurd meaning. In each of these gestures, in the slip or tie which is turned into a social object, there lies the whole society which determines the individual who tries to manipulate it.¹ (Kaufmann, 2005, p. 293, transl. by R.B.)

What Kaufmann metaphorically emphasizes here is that from every single sock, every single case, nomothetic knowledge can be gained. The sock left lying on the ground may symbolize a minor nuisance within a relationship but may lead to a more general discussion about learned gendered behavior regarding the handling of laundry. This is why Kaufmann’s work made a meaningful impact for my research. It identifies how important it is to look closely and to analyze also minor details in order to see a possible bigger picture.

3.1.2 Thrice-told Tales. Married Couples Tell their Stories

With the aim to learn more about the dynamics of the first years of marriage and about factors that contribute to a positive development of marital relationships, Holmberg, Orbuch, and Veroff (2004) studied how each member of a couple looked at the relationship individually with a representative sample of 344 newlywed couples. In a second step, both were asked to narrate the story of their relationship together. While some of the questions asked were eliciting short, precise answers that were easy to put into a rating system, the focus was on the joint relationship narrative that was intended to give an elaborate account on how the spouses met, about the decision to get married, the honeymoon, and the present and the imagined future. To make sure those relationship milestones were mentioned, the couples established a guideline to help their memory. In the up-

coming years, the couples were asked to participate again with shorter interventions in years 2 and 4 in addition to a similar comprehensive set of instruments in years 3 and 7 after the marriage. Naturally, some couples opted out for various reasons (among them separation; the study authors admit that this may contribute to a certain bias in their sample, since the unhappier couples in majority did not stay together or declined to participate) or could not be contacted again since they moved away. The longitudinal sample consisted of 144 couples, which is a large sample for a study with a qualitative focus, from the same county in Michigan, which is described as socio-economically diverse and that had a sizable African-American population. Thus, half of the couples studied were African-American, which gave the researchers the opportunity to study ethnicity as a possible factor affecting the narratives.

As indicated, the approach the researchers took was mainly qualitative with the aim to quantify most of the data by means of systematic coding with variables put into systematic statistical analyses and applying a repeated-measures analysis of variance (p. xii; p. 77). Other means of measurement were implemented in order to get the most comprehensive picture of the relationships and to “predict marital quality over time” (p. 1). The narrative approach proved most useful to assess the less direct feelings and structures and the more implicit emotions and experiences. Three different sources of information were hypothesized to be of importance for people when building an understanding of their relationship as they tell its story (p. 13ff): 1) the provided information about relationships/marriage in their culture or, more specifically, their subculture (these pieces of information or assumptions may turn out to be myths; however, they are important in shaping young people’s expectations); 2) meaning that is developed on an interpersonal level, i.e. questions that are negotiated between the members of the marriage, like what marriage in general and their marriage especially mean to them; this way, couples add their own variations to the cultural script they grew up with; and 3) individual beliefs about marriage, and also individual differences in the capability of telling a story. In a very detailed coding procedures, trained researchers coded for thematic particularities, for affects/emotions, and for interaction (between the spouses).

The research team expected changes to occur; however, they were well aware of the fact that longitudinal studies using narrative methodology was and still is rare, and their work had an exploratory character. One assumption was that the couples’ stories about their relationship would become “better” over time, i.e. better composed regarding dramaturgy, more entertaining, etc. (p. 75). This hypothesis was not supported. On the contrary, the narrative quality seemed to decline over time, the stories became shorter and, seemed less dramatic overall. Possible reasons for this might be that the couples did not want to be repetitive (even though they were encouraged by the interviewer to be as elaborate as possible) or that the stories (of how they met, etc.) were not repeated as often the longer the marriage lasted. Another possible reason for this finding is that the couples “may be feeling less of a need to use their narratives as a source of meaning-making over time” (p. 83). Moreover, the focus would shift from being a couple to being a family over the years. However, the analysis revealed that the narratives changed in tone as well as emphasis. Stories often becoming more ambiguous over time, mirroring the current state of their relationship as well as other factors that are relevant in the present. Regarding differences in gender, it is stated that women tend to talk more about their own

feelings and also about the presumed feelings of the couple as an entity (using “we/us” more often than men did).

Overall, Holmberg and colleagues found that the couple stories in general had a rather positive tone; again, with the caveat of a selection bias since unhappy couples supposedly did not partake in the study in the first place and were more likely to drop out in the course of the longitudinal research (p. 152). However, the stories were often characterized as pragmatic and more engaged in dealing with everyday problems than with a state of bliss and infatuation. One of their participants described the process as: “You get married, you have kids, you raise them. I don’t plan on being no rock star” (p. 166), which may reveal a pragmatic approach to long-term marriages. Interestingly, it seems that a story of a marriage could not be told without including other significant others and a network of supporting people, making marriage “not a duet, but rather a complex orchestral arrangement, one in which many different people’s needs and preferences must be considered and negotiated” (p. 154). Fiori and colleagues (2018), using the same sample for their analysis, found that negative aspects of couple’s friendship (e.g., disapproval of friends) was even a predictor for a later divorce.

The approach this study took had a focus on the narratives. However, the aim was to quantify as many of the findings as possible, which was to be achieved by elaborate coding systems. That way, coding for affect yielded quantitative data which would feed into the qualitative findings. The limitations of that approach became clear in fully understanding the meaning the narrated episodes had for the couples. The researchers admit that, while their more quantitative-oriented methods are valuable for drawing more generalized conclusions about marriage and narrative, the detailed qualitative analysis they used in an exploratory fashion at times was necessary to carve out the more private, more implicit meanings and dynamics of those joint narratives. With their approach they were able to show how the meaning of narratives may change over time and reflect the teller’s well-being as well as the state of the marriage by taking circumstances and other factors into account. The same story may illustrate the happy feeling toward one’s marriage and imply a rather nostalgic sense of better times at a later date. Thus, the demand for future research is to carefully consider “current life circumstances and life course issues of their storytellers if they wish to obtain nuanced insights into their stories” (p. 169).

Regarding the study design of this research, this claim can be fully supported. Studying such narratives in a longitudinal design stands out, as does how Holmberg and colleagues tried to capture the essence of a joint narrative and how they carved out different meanings, meaningful differences, general conclusions, and delicate personal trajectories. The material I study has the advantage of giving a more comprehensive insight into people’s lives and current motivations, identifying a greater variety of causes that may affect relationships, well-being, etc. These phenomena can be taken into account and captured in a satisfying way by having a clear focus on the qualitative analysis of the narratives.

3.2 Gender Differences in Religiosity and Narrating

That women are variously more religious than men has been widely postulated, especially in the sociology of religion, and is accounted for by diverse theories and hypotheses (for an overview, see Klein et al., 2017) based on the different socialization of girls and the different position women had and have in a society. The purpose of these gender differences in socialization was supposedly to make girls and women more altruistic, more sociable, less competitive, and more drawn to religion and its communities in accordance with the assumption that there are gendered differences in personality traits contributing to further the attraction of religion for women. Especially group activities, like prayer circles and discussion groups, seem likely factors for attracting women and reproducing (often traditional) gender norms in a “sacred space” of like-minded peers (Di, 2020; Woodhead, 2009). Kecskes (2000) reports a gendered effect in religiosity when accounting for religious socialization that is often gender-specific with girls and women being socialized in a more religious fashion than boys. This suggests that it is plausible that the religious education of the next generation falls into the hands of women. For women, the certainty that aligns with following strictly traditional religious rules may be tempting in a world in which gender norms are being questioned more and more, yet with the result that the expectations toward women become more varied and more demanding. Here, religion may serve as a means to cope with contingency (cf. Kaufmann, 1989). Modernization within a society is still shaped by women to a lesser degree, with the result that they often remain more traditional and more religious. This leads to the assumption that a modernization process that has girls and women more involved may eventually contribute to a decline in religiosity (cf. Sammet & Bergelt, 2012; Inglehart & Norris, 2005). Interestingly, results from traditionally Catholic countries like Spain, Portugal, and Croatia show that women may be more religious and likewise more egalitarian than men, exemplified in their agreement to a gender-specific division of labor, which leads to the conclusion that in those countries which “have seen modernisation processes being pushed, modernisation and detraditionalisation apparently occur in different spheres for each sex” (Sammet & Bergelt, 2012, p. 57). This might align with Schnabel’s finding that “women are, on average, more religious, but less dogmatic” (Schnabel, 2018, p. 59), at least when looking at largely Christian samples.

Most of those deductions are based on rather thin evidence and often limited to Western, therefore mostly Christian, samples. This may be due to the fact that religiosity is often assessed with a limited set of items which suggests a Christian background (Klein et al., 2017). In most cases, this will miss the point when the question is how religiosity is subjectively embellished. Surveys in societies with a Christian tradition often seem to support the thesis of gender differences, especially when it comes to positive religious emotions and the attitude toward religiosity (ibid.). These observations are stronger in societies, like the German, in which a traditional division of roles is still lived reality (for the West-German society, it can be said that at least until the 1970’s, the marriage with a single earner and the wife staying at home with the children was the norm²). In her analysis of ISSP survey data covering multiple nations and denominations, Di (2020) has shown that the societal level of gender equity and secularization is associated with the level of traditional religiousness that can be found in women.

An interesting example for the manifestation of roles within a religious community is given by Rajtar (2017) who describes the relation of religion and gender within the East German community of Jehovah's Witnesses (a group that will be of some importance in chapter 9 on Gudrun and Werner who left the Jehovah's Witnesses together, both of them having a GDR background). While she, unsurprisingly, reports that the structure of the community is generally hierarchical and dominated by men, she also found reports from North America in which the wives of elders and ministerial servants were not only taking care of the sick and poor but were also in charge of the majority of "preaching" (p. 184). The Watchtower Society, which is the main organ of the Witnesses, requires marriage to be structured hierarchically as well, with the husband ruling over his wife, in order to ensure a happy marriage and an intact family. This hierarchy is directly derived from the religious hierarchy, and obeying one's husband is equaled with obeying Jesus (pp. 187–188). However, she found that the actual praxis sometimes was different. The actual dynamic was more egalitarian, and there may even be some benefit gained for women who may subordinate themselves to men on a surface level but in everyday life experience emotional advantages. Moreover, Rajtar points out that the traditional and hierarchical education postulated by the Witnesses may lead to expectations by women that cannot always be met (in the case portrayed, the woman is disappointed when her husband becomes unemployed and she has to work fulltime to provide for the family, which was not how she had expected married life to be). Rajtar also notes that in the German Democratic Republic, where Jehovah's Witnesses were prohibited and persecuted, the "Stasi" often concentrated on finding and imprisoning the men of the community, overlooking the role women played for the congregations. In consequence, women often became heads of the families (p. 185).

Another study with a decidedly qualitative focus and with a sample of mainly Christian background (Ozorak, 1996) examined how women deal with the possible dissonance between their perceived role in society and the role assigned to them by their (former) religious community (the women in the sample were rather privileged which was a conscious decision for a sample bias in order to maximize the likelihood for experiencing such dissonance). Ozorak describes these different mechanisms (which may range from denial to the urge to change their environment) by analyzing 61 interviews with open-ended questions concerning the participants' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Selective attention was pointed out to be one way to deal with the cognitive dissonance which arises by the realization that, while religion is perceived as good, it goes along with discrimination against women (p. 24). A similar strategy is to focus on historical context and thereby cognitively reframing the perceived flaws and injustices, "to imagine that whatever progress their religion has made represents a segment of a trajectory, continuing indefinitely, borne on a rising tide of gender enlightenment" (p. 25)—in other words, they try to see a development toward the positive. However, the women in Ozorak's sample also emphasize the importance of the community, which serves as support and as the place where friendships with like-minded people are possible. Community and caring were carved out to be the most central aspects of women's religious experience, which makes it possible for them to perceive the religious community less in terms of hierarchy. The women reported substantial benefits for their self-esteem by being part of their respective communities. In her conclusion, Ozorak calls for longitu-

dinal studies to see how the motifs she found to be central in women's argumentation here develop over time (p. 28).

These examples show the points in which research falls short when it only incorporates surveys and official documents in determining differences in religiosity and gender roles. Specifically, this previous research lacks a focus on the praxis of traditional systems such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and on individual trajectories and argumentations shows a rather different, more accentuated picture. But this shifts the focus to another question: Is the way people talk about their life and their faith gendered as well?

The way a life story gets told may depend on age, gender, race, and class. As McAdams (2011, p. 110) points out, "within modern societies different groups are given different narrative opportunities and face different narrative constraints." For the sample under study, class and race seem comparably negligible (see chapter 4.1 for the description of the sample), but the different ways in which men and women will tell their stories (and if there is an age effect, of course) are of great importance. McLean and colleagues (2018) report that women rather told stories about marginalization by trend, but also with more positive meaning than men. Following Fivush and Zaman (2015), that knowledge is always dependent on context and is highly dynamic. It can be assumed that "certain aspects of knowledge will be articulated, and thus, by definition, some aspects will be silenced" (p. 36), or: we will hear a different story when it is told by a woman than by a man. This can be explained with very individual experiences that are not gender-related. But the gender perspective should not be neglected since it is one that we carry with us since early childhood as previous research has shown. Parents talk differently to their daughters than they do with their sons, using more emotional language and focusing more on relationships with their daughters; mothers tend to be more elaborate when talking with their children than are fathers (cf. Fivush & Zaman, 2015). In general, reminiscing can be regarded as a "gendered context" (p. 36), with the result that women tend to tell more emotional and relational stories, while men's narratives will focus rather on autonomy. Fivush and Zaman (2014) argue that reminiscing is a "stereotypical female activity that leads females to both engage in reminiscing and to value reminiscing more than do males" (p. 587). Thus, it might be expected to find more elaborate autobiographical narratives in the interviews of the women in my sample. However, it has to be taken into account that certain aspects of "gendered" behavior are learned skills and may differ depending on the actual upbringing of the woman.

As an example for a qualitative longitudinal study focusing on women's life narratives, I want to present the research done by Ruthellen Josselson (2017; 2009) who has interviewed 26 women, over the course of 35 years, starting while they were college seniors, and in intervals of approximately ten years.

3.2.1 Paths to Fulfillment. Women's Search for Meaning and Identity

US-American psychologist and psychotherapist Ruthellen Josselson started her research on the identity of young women in 1972 when she interviewed 60 college seniors randomly chosen from four different universities. Over the course of 35 years, she has interviewed 26 of them three more times—once each decade, and the last interviews took place in 2007. Since the project was not initially planned to be longitudinal, tracking

down the women for the second phase proved to be a challenge due to the fact that many participants got married in the interim and changed their last name as it was the norm in the 1970's and 1980's. Since the women lived all across the country and some abroad, conducting the interviews had to be improvised when a face-to-face situation could not be arranged. Some women recorded their answers, others filled out questionnaires, all of those followed up by a (short) interview via phone (cf. Josselson, 2017, p. 12ff). The fourth interview of the series was conducted mostly in-person, the majority of which by Josselson herself. All those interviews were long, narrative interviews (duration: 3–5 hours) in which the participants were asked to unfold their life story, with a special focus on the most recent years, but also “reflecting on aspects of the past that have contributed to ‘who you are today’” (Josselson, 2009, p. 650). Josselson reports that most of her participants claim not to remember what they talked about in their past interviews and firmly reject the idea that participating in this study has in any way influenced their life decisions (p. 14).³

A majority of the women interviewed were, in Josselson's estimation, “first women,” the first of their families to go to college and the first generation that would lay the ground for a change of women's role within US society. Only few of them were actively involved in politics, even though most of them reportedly sympathized with the feminist movement. However, the societal background against which the sample is portrayed is rather homogeneous. The women in Josselson's sample all had to fulfill the task of bridging two worlds: the one they grew up in and the one they were aspiring to be part of; their wish to combine work and family was a novelty in modern history (pp. 4f). In the first part of this research project, Josselson identified four distinct pathways: the *pathmakers*, who created a path of their own, taking control of their lives and exploring their possibilities; the *guardians*, who were not fundamentally changed by their college experiences, usually sticking with the values that were derived from their families of origin; the *searchers*, who are characterized by active questioning and questing, yet without a defined goal; and, finally, the *drifters*, who were found to be leaving their future to fate without making any active attempt in shaping it. The longitudinal perspective then allowed her to follow the path those distinct groups took over the course of 35 years and the results are interesting: Nearly all of those women who were classified as pathmakers at time 1 stayed pathmakers, while some of those who were seekers or guardians in college in later life became pathmakers as well. Some of those searchers gave up searching after a while to go back to where they came from and became guardians of sort.⁴ Those who had been drifters continued to drift. In other words, there seemed to be two rather stable groups: those who felt they could shape the future and those who never thought they had the power to change anything and who felt that things just happened to them. Not all of those were unhappy with this feeling in college; however, a lot of them were considered to have major psychological problems that inhibited their identity development (p. 207), and Josselson states that already in college it was clear (for her) that their lives would continue in such a way that would lead to them being middle-aged women who feel battered and betrayed by life.

Even though her work has a clear focus on single case studies, there are some overarching remarks regarding the trajectories of her sample: In the years after college, most women were occupied with the task of finding themselves and their place in life (“Find-

ing *Herself*” being the title of the corresponding book; see Josselson, 1987). The women are described as less religious (p. 40) than they used to be in college, politically rather uninvolved, yet rather critical toward the government. They were more aware of women’s issues in the working world and the ongoing discrimination, albeit, rather passively. In their 30s and 40s, most of the women had found that place and were now in the process of juggling the different tasks life held for them (“Revising *Herself*,” Josselson, 1996), working and having children, while at the same time having to deal with strokes of fate. The last decade covered by the study, the women now being in their 50s, is tentatively labelled as “Reaping the Fruits.” What unites those women, and what is affirmed strongly in those last interviews, is the belief in choice and the belief that men and women should have equal rights and equal responsibilities and they tried “to send their own children off into the world with a bedrock assumption about gender equality” (Josselson, 2017, p. 12). Overall, she found that the women tended to root their identity in their relationships with other people. At the highpoint of the women’s movement, this was not what Josselson had expected (and hoped for, presumably). Yet she came to a deeper understanding of what those relationships mean over the course of the interviews, finding that

[a] woman forms her sense of herself through connections with others—at home, at work, and in her values and beliefs. Identity in women is more rooted in “being” than in “doing,” and a woman’s life story is often centered on how she experiences herself, or wishes to experience herself, with others. [...] How a woman comes to define her identity is a process of articulating herself with others, bridging what feels inner and necessary with what opportunities she has for expressing herself in interaction. (Josselson, 1996, pp. 32–33)

Interestingly, the meaning of friendships changed over time, and when analyzing the fourth wave of interviews, she found that the women did not seem to value friendships as highly as they did before; in their 50s, women still held friendships, but they were not as mandatory for stability and their overall identity as they used to be (Josselson, 2017, pp. 277–278). In general, she found that the women did not show a great amount of self-reflection; they were focused on the future, looking forward rather than backward or inward. In the most recent decade of their lives, they seemed to look at their lives with more awareness of the various influences, their embeddedness in relationships and society and seem to have gained a deeper insight into their own inner world (pp. 261–262). Mainly being done with the task of raising children and mastering their work life, they are probably able to look back for the first time in their lives. However, when they do look back, they emphasize the impact they have had on their children and others they cared for—in other words, most of them have a clear focus on generativity (cf. also McAdams, 2006); this is true for the pathmakers, while in the drifters’ accounts the absence of such generative thoughts was notable.

Josselson’s approach to this kind of study is rather idiosyncratic. While she did follow certain interview protocols in the earlier phases of the project, she states that the interviews were rather unstructured in the last phase, with a focus on capturing the uniqueness of each woman’s life trajectory (pp. 294–295). Her approach is sorted into the field of narrative inquiry, which may focus on the in-depth reading of an interview like in her

study, focused on one or more particular topics (cf. Josselson, 2009, p. 650), and taking into account structure as well as content. This way, she arrives at a very profound understanding of each woman and her life story, those portraits being in her words, “very much my renditions, based on what [the women] have told me but organized through my own perspectives” (Josselson, 2017, p. 15). So, her agenda is not to prove something, she does not stick to one special method (other than consequently staying within the area of qualitative research methods), but adapts them according to the needs of her participants and the material derived from them. Josselson states in the preface of her book:

I make no argument in this book; I have no axe to grind. My aim is to map the developmental paths of adulthood. I lay claim to charting the seasons of a woman's life and demonstrating how different inner arrangements at the end of college give way to different life courses. Because of these different launching patterns, generalizations about women, even college-educated women, become impossible to sustain. Women become themselves in intricate ways. (ibid., p. xiii)

This way of putting the subject of investigation in the center of the research focus, arranging all the instruments and analytical tools around it, is appealing when the aim is to follow individuals' life trajectories since this pays tribute to the fact that lives are so diverse, narrations so unique that it needs a certain degree of flexibility to get to the core of them. The price to pay is that it is difficult to attach research like this to a wider frame, to enable comparison and ensure validity. But this, obviously, was not Josselson's main concern; instead, she wanted to understand the individual and thereby create a more general knowledge about the “paths to fulfillment” US-American women took in the second part of the 20th century. For my own research presented here, the clear focus on the subject, on the single case is likewise important. The idea to give each individual the room they need was very inspiring for me and encouraged me to proceed with a design that has a clear focus on the content and narrative analysis of the interviews. However, as has been indicated in the Introduction already, I also wanted to look at the material, at the individual, from different perspectives, and, not leave the general paths that have been laid out by the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research project. Thus, my own approach includes a manualized structural analysis as well as the look into the survey data, thereby staying within the long-standing research tradition of the project which has always aimed at a mixed-methods approach.

3.3 Relevance of my Own Research and Explication of Research Questions

The development of faith, of religiosity, and of worldview has rarely been studied longitudinally. Recently, our team published results from the first phase of our own longitudinal study (Streib, Keller, et al., 2022), which only encompasses two timepoints of measurement. Having three interviews and survey data from three waves of measurement, it is now possible to trace actual development and to see what changes over time and which stories, etc. stabilize (cf. also Keller et al., 2024). This study is built on these different data and focuses on couples and, more specifically, on women. The challenge is that the study

that is the basis for my own research does not have a focus on either women or couples, which means that the participants are never directly asked how they experience being religious together as a couple or if they experienced any particularities, special treatments, etc. that they attribute to their gender. However, the literature review above has shown that longitudinal research in this field is a desideratum, which is why my analysis may help shed light on the question of gender differences in subjective religiosity and its development over time. Having the chance to analyze interviews of married couples as well opens the opportunity to compare the way people talk about their respective spouse and will grant insights into the way a mutual faith shapes the relationship and how this is subject to change.

Qualitative and mixed-methods approaches are still rather rare in the study of the psychology of religion, as has been pointed out by Pak (2020), who, in a review of journal articles, found those approaches to be the exception, and, in the case of mixed-methods research, often treating qualitative inquiry in a rather neglecting way. My focus on qualitative methods will, thus, allow an in-depth analysis of religiosity as it is actually experienced. Schwab (2013) has pointed out that approaches like these are able to demonstrate “how religion and spirituality is lived and experienced, highlighting the contextualized and socially situated nature of these topics” (p. 219), and especially a focus on narratives will make it possible to gain insights into the nature of people’s (religious) narrative identity. This way, and with a special focus on linguistic particularities, I want to contribute to the study of psychology of religion by generating further understanding of people’s individual ways of meaning-making and religious development over time, since my hypothesis is that those changes are often so subtle that it is not possible to capture them with less fine-grained methods. However, quantitative methods shall not be completely neglected in this study, since they can allow for a different perspective on the participants’ personality. Looking at “the subject,” i.e., the individual, from different perspectives, taking into account quantitative findings as well as the micro analysis of narratives grants the opportunity to draw a picture that has multiple dimensions, creating knowledge that is greater than if one just limited analysis to one single approach. Following a research paradigm called triangulation (Flick, 2018), I will thus try to contribute to questions such as:

- *How does the narrative identity change over time? How is a religious narrative identity created?* These questions are, naturally, best approached with a thorough narrative analysis; they can, however, be enriched with findings from the structural analysis of the FDIs (for a more detailed descriptions of methods, see chapter 4). Data from the surveys will help complete the picture since it is hypothesized that changes in narrative identity may also reflect in a different response behavior in the questionnaire.
- Going further, I want to know *how subjective religiosity changes over time*. The models of religious styles and types have laid a complex theoretical groundwork and the aim here is to put more flesh on the categories that these models propose. Especially regarding the longitudinal perspective and therefore the modeling of trajectories of types, this study here will be able to explicate what it actually means to “move up/move down/stay” in the logic of the religious types. This is achieved by looking in detail at the participants’ answers regarding their self-assessment as religious or

spiritual, in combination with free text entries defining religion/spirituality on a more general level.

- *Can we find life themes, “leitmotifs” that are constituent for the way people look at themselves and their lives? Are these constant?* As has been laid out above, master narratives are not bound to change that much, and it is assumed that leitmotifs can be found in the life stories of my participants.
- *Looking at the couples: How does the look on the other spouse change over time? How does the “same story” differ depending on who is telling it (and when)?* Here, as has been said above, the challenge is, since the relationship is not a direct topic of the interview format, to carve out the little stories that deal with the partner, to find implicit positionings and to analyze the subtle differences that are bound to occur when the story of a joint life gets told again and again.
- *Focusing on the women: Is religiosity gendered? How do women’s accounts on their religious experiences differ from those told by men? In what ways are the women shaped by their upbringing and how does the narrative identity change as they get older?* In contrast to other research, I am not interested in the questions whether women are more religious, pious, etc. I want to know *how they are* religious, how they see themselves, how they describe their own religiosity. Moreover, I am interested to learn how this self-presentation changes over time.

Naturally, these questions demand a rather idiographic approach. I expect get a nuanced picture of the individual under investigation from the detailed analyses of personal accounts. I do not aim to get to conclusions applicable to *all* women, to *all* religious people, etc. However, my research interest is not limited to the trajectories of single persons, even though each of them is fascinating in its own sense and well worth the effort; but by carving out themes that may stretch over more than one case study, by taking into account established measurements of personality traits and other scales used in large surveys, I am able to link the individuals that I present in the case studies to follow to the larger sample of this study. I hope to contribute to the research tradition of the Faith Development Theory and to establish it in the wider field of narrative and developmental psychology and vice versa.

Notes

- 1 Für sich betrachtet, scheint jede einzelne Geste, der gebügelte Slip, das herumliegende Kleidungsstück, von lächerlicher Bedeutung. In jeder dieser Gesten indes, im zum sozialen Objekt geronnenen Slip oder Schlips, steckt die ganze Gesellschaft, die das Individuum determiniert, welches sie zu manipulieren glaubt.
- 2 See, for example: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1166560/umfrage/erwerbstaetige-frauen-in-westdeutschland/>
- 3 This is an interesting observation and a question that may also be applied to my sample: Does being interviewed with the FDI, does being asked to reflect on one’s life, relationships and so on change the way people think about those questions? Most of the longitudinal participants claim that they do not remember their past interviews;

some of them, though, do remember single questions when they seemed particularly interesting or difficult; it might be hypothesized that thinking about those for oneself or even talking about them with others will change the answer people give in the next interview. So, being interviewed might indeed have an effect on their development, however small.

- 4 This is an interesting observation which will be taken up again in the case study of Jannis (chapter 5.2).

4. Methods

As has been pointed out above, the research topic is complex and needs more than one method. In this section, after introducing my sample, I will present the different approaches I took to explore the essentials of each individual's narrative identity, remaining mindful of the question how individual findings can contribute to the greater understanding of (religious) development on a more general level. Kaufmann has presented a pointed argument in his approach to his study of couples' dirty laundry (see above) which I would like to prepend to this section dealing with methods:

Indeed, it was never about doing a survey, which would have necessitated a big-scale poll, but instead to work on answers for a longer period of time to get "the laundry to talk." [...] As in a police investigation, the tiniest signs for the existence of hidden ideas and gestures had to be noted. Therefore, special attention had to be given to the contradictions between different statements, in order to identify the social logic at work behind the apparently uniform façade, and the social fragmentation of the individuals behind their superficial psychological unity, and so to isolate the single fragments as elements of the couples and to determine what was their place within that.¹ (Kaufmann, 2005, p. 12, transl. by R.B.)

What Kaufmann describes is also true for the investigation of personal or subjective religiosity: The framework provided by religion may often serve people as a hide or refuge when asked for personal opinions, and therefore an idiographic approach is necessary (cf. Schachter & Ben Hur, 2019, p. 292) to decode what may be hidden, which Josselson (2004) has called "hermeneutics of suspicion," borrowing the term from Ricoeur and applying it in narrative research, thus focusing on singularities instead of trying to figure out regularities. Since the terms *idiographic* and *nomothetic* are of importance for my approach, I define them as follows, borrowing the terminology from Lamiell (1981, 2019) which was also used to describe the approach in the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research (cf. Keller et al., 2022): nomothetic, in this context, is understood as explaining "that, which always is" (Lamiell, 2019, p. 32; a definition Lamiell himself borrowed from the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband, 1894) with a focus on regularities that is traditionally found in the natural sciences. The idiographic approach seeks to understand "what

once was" (ibid.), with an emphasis in the German original ("was *einmal* war"; Windelband, 1894, p. 12) on the singularity of an event or entity. The differentiation between "explaining" (nomothetic) and "understanding" (idiographic) is crucial here and lines out the different ways of looking at data and subjects of investigation. In an attempt to integrate the nomothetic perspective as well, this study also includes the view on survey data which makes it possible to compare the single case to the sample and also draw on findings from previous research. The approach I take, following the general line the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research project has established, is that of methodological pragmatism and disciplinary agnosticism (see Steppacher et al., 2024; cf. also Hermans, 2014, pp. 60–61). This means I put the subject of the research—the participants that are part of my sample and my own research questions—in the center and from there explore how they can best be analyzed, attempting to "choose the combination or mixture of methods and procedures that works best for answering [my] research questions" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Accordingly, I will first present the sample and the selection of cases and then each strand of the design separately; in a last step, I will describe the triangulation process, thus, the process of relating the different kinds of data with each other, covering also the longitudinal perspective. The chapter is concluded with a presentation of the case study structure that is applied to all cases.

4.1 Sample Description

As explained in chapter 1, the interviews used for this study stem from the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research project which has accumulated over the years a large longitudinal FDI sample which consists of 75 participants who have been interviewed thrice in the course of nearly 20 years. The first interview timepoints are different, since the longitudinal research design assembles participants from different research projects, namely the Deconversion Project (Streib et al., 2009) and the Spirituality Project (Streib & Hood, 2016). Thus, when I talk about "time 1" in the case studies to follow, this refers to different timepoints: For those who started in the Deconversion Project, the time of the first interview was between 2003 and 2006; those who had their first interview in the course of the Spirituality study completed it between 2009 and 2012. The second timepoint tried to tie those two projects together yet still covered a considerable time range from 2013 to 2017. The third project phase was the shortest in this respect and lasted from 2018 to 2019. Accordingly, the period over which the survey data was collected was long as well. The terminology I chose to acknowledge this fact is the following: whenever I refer to questionnaire data, especially when it is related to the whole sample, I refer to a "wave" of data collection as indicating a period of time. When analyzing the interviews, I adhere to the terminology of "time" since those can easily be dated. In the following subchapters, I will first present the sample and its characteristics and then go on to describe the overall design I apply to the case studies that will follow in the chapters 5 to 10. A note on the consideration of ethical aspects and data protection: The study design and all its elements have over the years been evaluated and approved by the ethics committee of Bielefeld University and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. This ensures the work is conducted under high ethical standards. Par-

ticipants were asked to sign consent forms that fulfilled the respective standards at that time. The portrayal of the participants in the case studies is done in a way that preserves the anonymity of the individuals in the best possible way. Names, places, and occupations were pseudonymized, and details in narratives left out if they could potentially have led to the person's identity.

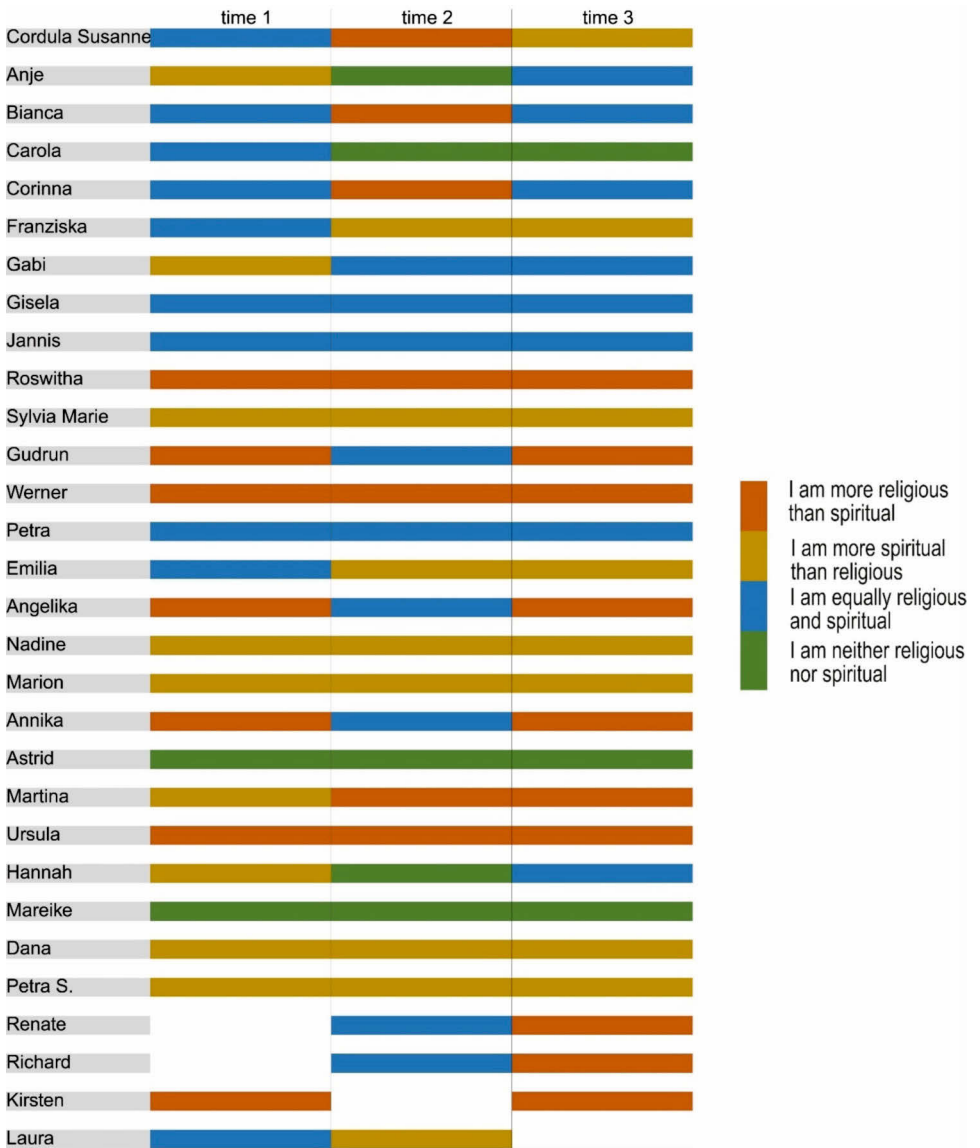
Since my research interest is on the development of subjective religiosity and narrative identity over time, I chose those cases that had been interviewed thrice² already to be able to line out a development over three timepoints. Given that my research questions are extensive enough in themselves, I decided to focus on the German part of the sample and to map single cases and autobiographies on the background of German history and society. This left me with 59 longitudinal cases from Germany whose survey data are all included in the sample means I present in the case studies. Of these 59 cases, 31 are male and 28 female. The mean age at wave 1 was 47.4, ranging from 20 to 76 years. Nearly two thirds of the sample (64.3%) report to have tertiary education, another 30.4% has upper secondary education, so, as a whole, the sample can be described as rather well-educated. As for their religious affiliation, at wave 1, 45.8% state to belong to the Protestant church and 16.9% to the Catholic. 23.7% do not affiliate with a specific religion, 6.8% sympathize with Paganism; moreover, there are two Buddhists, one Hindu, and one Muslim. These cases will help me map the (however non-representative) background, allowing for comparison of single survey results. This sample, since it assembles participants from different projects which had different research foci, comprises people with diverse religious and nonreligious backgrounds, ranging from former members of the Jehovah's Witnesses over members of the mainline Protestant church to persons invested with esotericism and to persons who have been atheists their whole lives.

As I have already laid out when explicating my research questions, I decided to focus on the three couples that are part of this longitudinal sample. These couples are all highly religious and thus are supposed to give profound insights into the meaning-making processes of faithful people and also into how they look back at their lives and their relationship. The couples serve as minimal contrast in regard to their religiosity, even though they do cover a range of different religions: While Bianca and Jannis (chapter 5) have both been raised in the Catholic faith, Renate and Richard (chapter 7) share a background in the Protestant church and within the missionary movement. Gudrun and Werner (chapter 9) have deconverted from the Jehovah's Witnesses and are, after a time in the mainline Protestant church and a couple of years spent in a Charismatic parish, engaged in private Bible studies enriched with lectures by a theologian at the time of the last interview. Yet, the couples are in very different places in their lives when they were interviewed: Bianca and Jannis are both in their early 20s by the time of the first interview and have recently been married, having just had their first child. The other two couples are older and have already left behind the phase of raising children. They are, to different extents, occupied with the question of how they want to spend the rest of their lives and how to spend their time after retirement along with how to cope with the adversities that come along with getting old. All of these couples have been together for a long time, so change and continuity in their life stories and the way they talk about each other can be observed on a micro level.

As another research interest formulated in the research question is on the development of women, I then took a closer look at the female part of my sample. The idea was to portray the breadth of the female sample while also being able to compare the cases. Since the couples are all religious, yet vary in age, my strategy was to find women who are comparable in age to the women within the couples but who did not consider themselves religious, thus combining a minimal contrast (the women I chose as contrast should each match one of the couples regarding age) with a maximal contrast (regarding religiosity vs. non-religiosity). To get a first impression of how the women self-identify in this regard, I decided to look at the question in the survey “Do you consider yourself more religious or more spiritual?” As forced-choice answers for this question, the following options were available: “more religious than spiritual,” “equally religious and spiritual,” “more spiritual than religious,” and “neither religious nor spiritual.” This promised to capture the self-assessed religiosity better than the question of religious denomination, since this might reveal formal membership only; however, this approach is still rather coarse-grained, since it can be expected that participants will not always fully agree to one of those statements but will instead choose the one that fits best. Figure 2 illustrates the answers of 27 female participants at all three timepoints (one person did not fill out the survey at any point in time) and the three men that are part of the couples.

This figure also shows the development over time, which was also taken into account when I looked for interesting cases to contrast with the couples. As can be seen here, Renate and Richard did not fill out the survey at wave 1, and labeled themselves “equally religious and spiritual” at wave 2, while at wave 3, they both opted for “more religious than spiritual.” Werner and Gudrun favor, in almost all waves, the self-description “more religious than spiritual,” with the exception for Gudrun who, at wave 2, prefers the answer “equally religious and spiritual.” A similar pattern can be observed for Bianca and Jannis: while they mostly opt for “equally religious and spiritual,” Bianca chooses to call herself “more religious than spiritual” during wave 2. Finding and portraying those that identified as “more spiritual than religious” or “neither religious nor spiritual” was the next step. Considering age as well as self-identification, I ended up with three women that would broaden the perspectives offered by the investigation of the religious couples and could therefore serve as maximal contrast: Nadine, who is in her mid-20s at wave 1, constantly identifies as “more spiritual than religious.” She serves as contrast to Bianca and Jannis, being of similar age, yet not affiliated with any religious denomination while also favoring some kind of spirituality. Carola, who is in her mid-50s at wave 1, self-identifies as “more religious than spiritual” in the first wave (while also reporting a deconversion experience), while in the later waves self-identifying as “neither religious nor spiritual.” Age-wise, she can be compared to Renate, while her (non-)religious journey seems to take a different pathway. For the oldest age group, I chose Marion, who is in her mid-60s at wave 1, and who, like Nadine, constantly self-identifies as “more spiritual than religious.” Marion states to be affiliated with Buddhism at wave 2, but otherwise does not indicate a religious affiliation. She is of similar age as Gudrun and Werner at wave 1 and will serve as a contrast to the couple’s religious pathway.

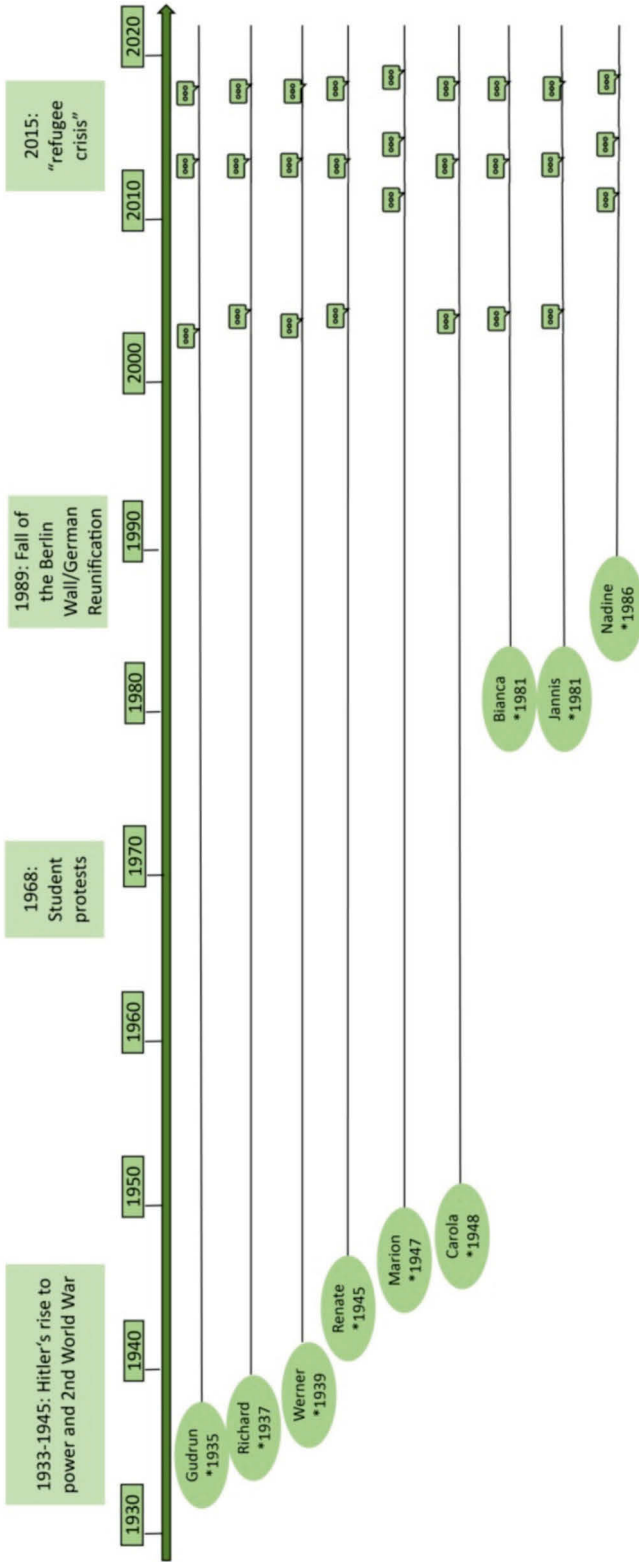
Figure 2: More Religious or More Spiritual?



For an overview, I have illustrated how the cases are distributed age-wise in Figure 3. The cases I chose cover an age-span from young to middle adulthood (Bianca, Jannis, and Nadine) and from middle adulthood to old age. The figure maps those cases against a historical background that is shared by most of the participants (Jannis is the exception here, since he was not born in Germany). The older part of my sample has experienced World War 2 and/or the post-war era in Germany as children and adolescents, therefore they may refer to a cultural life script that involves the hardships of this timespan. Yet, they do this to different degrees as will be seen in the case studies with some hardly mentioning the war time and others portraying it as important and influential for their development. The other historical landmarks have been chosen to point out important events and stand, for a time period that may have influenced the participants in their political stance, the way they think about “strangers,” etc. The speech bubbles appearing in the 2000s indicate the interview timepoints.

The selection of course could have looked different. Even with a sample of that rather small size, the opportunities for comparison are immense (and are explored in other studies related to the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research project; more on this in chapter 12). The cases I chose with the criteria laid out above aim to show the diversity that lies within this sample that is fairly heterogenous: the participants are all White and none of them reports a gender other than the male/female binary (the option “diverse” was offered in wave 2 and 3. The exception is Nadine who did not give a clear statement regarding her gender at wave 2 yet identifies as female in the other surveys). Many participants are rather well-educated and report having “Abitur” (the school-leaving qualification necessary to go to university) or a college degree, and most of them report a fairly high income. They all presumably have some interest in the field of religion/spirituality/worldview and the questions that we ask in the longitudinal project since otherwise they would not have agreed to participate thrice, and thus it can also be assumed that they are, to a varying degree, comfortable with talking about themselves, their lives and their values. Yet, the case studies that will be displayed here in the following show a great variety: They have different life stories, each of them interesting in their own way and display a high variance in the way they have experienced relationships, different values, and fundamentally disparate worldviews and religious standpoints. Carving out the multiple facets of each case and portraying them with as much diligence as possible is achieved by applying a detail-oriented analysis, focusing on narrative and content. The different personalities and the different life stories demand some flexibility when presented here. However, I developed a model for the case studies which is oriented by the approaches that have been used in the Bielefeld/Chattanooga projects before (Keller et al., 2022, Keller et al., 2016a, Streib et al., 2009) and adapted to my specific research questions. The next paragraphs will line out the different methods applied and will then go into more detail regarding the structure of the case study chapters.

Figure 3: Cases Mapped against Historical Background



4.2 Research with the Faith Development Interview

The most important instrument for my research is the Faith Development Interview (FDI), which has been developed by Fowler (1981) with the aim to support and verify empirically his theoretical considerations. In the course of 40 years, the 25 questions that Fowler proposed to study how faith develops have basically stayed the same. However, changing religious landscapes and upcoming trends (for example, the growing popularity of the term spirituality) as well as the aspiration to study religious as well as atheist people required the careful adaptation of the wording of some of those questions (for example, in question 4, “worldview” has been added in the latest revision to make the question more accessible for non-religious participants or for people who do not believe in a god). Table 2 presents these questions in their current form.

Table 2: The Questions of the FDI (current version)

LIFE REVIEW	
1.	Reflecting on your life thus far, identify its major chapters. If your life were a book – how would you name the different chapters? What marker events stand out as especially important?
2.	Are there past relationships that have been important to your development as a person?
3.	Do you recall any changes in relationships that have had a significant impact on your life or your way of thinking about things?
4.	How has your worldview changed across your life's chapters? How has this affected your image of God or of the Divine, or what is holy for you? What does it mean to you now?
5.	Have you had moments of intense joy or breakthrough experiences – moments that have affirmed or changed your sense of life's meaning?
6.	Have you experienced times of crisis or suffering in your life? Have you experienced times when you felt profound disillusionment, or that life had no meaning? What happened to you at these times? How have these experiences affected you?
RELATIONSHIPS	
7.	Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents? How do you see your current relationship to them? Have there been any changes in your perceptions of your parents over the years? If so, what caused the change?
8.	Are there any other relationships that are important to you?
9.	What groups, institutions, or causes, do you identify with? Why are they important to you? Are there groups that have been important to you, but are not important anymore? Did you leave a (religious) community recently?
PRESENT VALUES AND COMMITMENTS	
10.	Do you feel that your life has meaning at present? What makes your life meaningful to you?
11.	If you could change one thing about yourself or your life, what would you most want to change?
12.	Are there any beliefs, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?
13.	When or where do you find yourself most in communion or harmony with the Universe?

14. What do you consider mature faith or a mature way to handle existential questions?
15. When you have an important decision to make, how do you generally go about making it? Can you give me an example? If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to whom or what would you look for guidance?
16. Do you think that actions can be right or wrong? If so, what makes an action right in your opinion?
17. Are there certain actions or types of actions that are always right under any circumstances? Are there certain moral opinions that you think everyone should agree on?

RELIGION AND WORLDVIEW

18. Do you think that human life has a purpose? If so, what is it? Are we affected by a power or powers beyond our control?
 19. What does death mean to you? What happens to us when we die?
 20. Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person? Or would you prefer another description? What does it mean to you?
 21. Do you pray, meditate, or perform any other spiritual practice?
 22. Are there any religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? If so, what are they and what makes them important?
 23. What is sin, to your understanding?
 24. How do you explain the presence of evil in our world?
 25. If people disagree about issues of worldview or religion, how can such conflicts be resolved?
-

The table shows that the interview is divided into four areas and covers the topics life review, relationships, values and commitments, and religion and worldview. The interview guideline is semi-structured, and the questions are to be asked in the order that is presented here with the aim to keep the framework as controlled as possible. And even though the interview questions are not completely open-ended, it becomes clear at first sight that they are meant to elicit narratives and to get the participant to talk in length about their life, their worldview, and their moral stance. With answers to these questions, researchers may learn how participants construct the world around them and create meaning. Fritz Schütze introduced the method of the narrative interview to social science. The invitation to be as elaborate as possible ideally creates an atmosphere in which it is possible to surrender to a narrative stream of re-living experiences, without falling back on a narrative template that has, in other circumstances, been of use frequently (cf. Schütze, 1984, p. 78). Often, these interviews become long, often lasting two hours or longer. Conducting the interviews is a challenging task and should not be attempted without a thorough training and consulting with an experienced interviewer. The training also ensures that the questions can be explained to the participants while giving them space to find their own interpretation and access to the question and that short answers are prompted with follow-up question that may get the interviewee to elaborate on their strand of thought. Last but not least, this kind of training ensures that different modes of interviewing (face to face, via telephone or video call) result in comparable interviews.³ Together with an understanding of the underlying theory and the following evaluation process it serves to account for differences in the interviewers' profes-

sional background and to ensure a common approach, which leaves room for the dynamics that emerge in the course of an interview, with the result that the interviews are conducted in the best controlled way possible⁴. Properly conducted, the FDI is a formidable instrument for both researchers and participants since it allows to explore all facets of faith within one's own biography as well as engage with profound questions and possibly find new and surprising answers. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed, according to rules based on content semantic transcription (Dresing & Pehl, 2018).

Ending up with such rich material demands rigorous methods of analysis in order to capture the richness of the material at hand. The traditional way of approaching the interview texts has been introduced by Fowler and has been revised thrice with the structural evaluation based on a manual designed for a specific purpose. Section 4.2.1 will give an introduction into this method; however, since this is not the main instrument used in my study, the remarks will be short. For a more comprehensive presentation of this method, I refer to the latest version of the *Manual for the Assessment of Religious Styles* (Streib & Keller, 2018b).

4.2.1 Coding for Religious Styles Using the Manual for the Assessment of Religious Styles

As just mentioned, the *Manual*, which serves as the guideline to evaluate the FDI regarding the structure of the answers given by the participants, has been revised over the years (Moseley et al., 1986; DeNicola & Fowler, 1993; Fowler et al., 2004; and the latest version by Streib & Keller, 2018b). The basic principle when coding an FDI is observing structure rather than content. Structures, in this context, are to be understood as “patterns of cognitive and affective operation by which content is understood, appropriated, manipulated, expressed and transformed” (Streib & Keller, 2018b, p. 19). We want to assess how a person is arguing something, not what they are arguing. This necessitates an intense training and supervision process. This way of looking at data is not easy since it means we neglect the content of an answer in order to determine the structure of a person's meaning-making processes. These processes are not simple patterns, but multi-dimensional constructs. Thus, the questions of the FDI are sorted into six different aspects that Fowler has found to be “windows” on faith. Originally, Fowler spoke of seven aspects, including *form of logic* (a concept referring to Piaget connected to the assumption that structural differences in faith relate to the structural difference in cognitive operations, with a development going from pre-concrete to formal logic during adolescence/young adulthood), which was eliminated in the current version of the *Manual* with the aim to separate the observation of development of cognitive operations and religious styles and to allow for comparative research of these two (ibid., p. 10). The six aspects remaining are: *perspective taking*, *social horizon*, *morality*, *locus of authority*, *form of world coherence*, and *symbolic function*. In a very condensed form, these aspects can be described as follows:

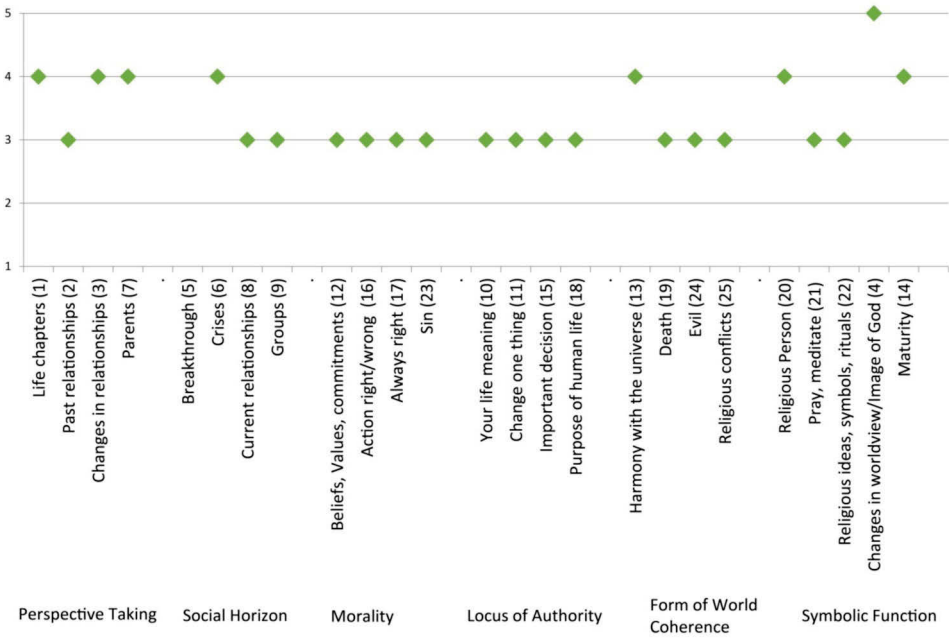
- *perspective taking*: the way a person constructs themselves and others as well as the relationship with others; the extent to which a person is able to construct one's own inner life and that of others;
- *social horizon*: the way a person positions themselves within their environment: family, the peer group, society, humanity; which persons and groups are important and why?
- *morality*: the way a person thinks about moral issues and what they consider to be a moral question in the first place;
- *locus of authority*: the way a person chooses authorities; how is the relationship toward an authority constructed?
- *form of world coherence*: the way a person "makes sense" and how they fit different elements of experiences together;
- *symbolic function*: the way symbols are understood and appropriated

For each of these aspects, the *Manual* gives style-specific descriptions, so-called coding criteria, which are the groundwork for the assignment of one style to each answer. In order to do this, an understanding of the styles in general is necessary before applying this to the aspect-specific descriptions. I have given a brief outline for the styles in section 2.4 already, so I will now exemplify this by describing the styles as specified for *perspective taking* which is the leading aspect in the newest version of the *Manual* (cf. pp. 28ff for all coding criteria):

- *style 1 (subjective)*: there is no awareness of the interiority of the other;
- *style 2 (instrumental-reciprocal)*: realizing that others have their own perspectives, however stereotypical;
- *style 3 (mutual)*: perspective taking is rather implicit, on an interpersonal level and connected to social roles
- *style 4 (individuating-systemic)*: the perspective of the other can be taken, in a way that is mediated by one's own view of ideology
- *style 5 (dialogical)*: full perspective taking is possible, the own standpoint can be excluded in order to fully understand the viewpoint of the other

Having made oneself familiar with the detailed coding criteria, the coding procedure itself demands a close look at the single answers in order to determine the most adequate style for each. At the end of this process, we get a style aspect map which allows for a good overview over the whole interview:

Figure 4: Style-Aspect Map



Here, one sees the questions sorted by aspect, which grants the possibility to view the aspects separately. As illustrated in the figure, aspects may be rated with different styles and thus the overview shows a detailed picture with a differentiated view which gets even more complex when taking into consideration the development over time. Though I refrained from showing the style aspect maps for my participants' interviews, I will discuss those ratings in relation to the findings of the narrative analysis and considering the survey data, as will be detailed below. Furthermore, I will point out the classification into the religious types categories (cf. section 2.4), which constitute the further development of the styles and allow for an easier view on the changes that happen over the lifespan.

4.2.2 Coding for Content and Narrative Using ATLAS.ti

The approach to look at the structure of the interviewee's answer and neglect the content seems necessary but not sufficient when aiming at portraying in depth an individual's trajectory and their narrative identity as it changes over time. The themes that are discussed in the interviews deserve at least equal attention, last but not least because they, too, are subject to change over time. Which life stories appear over and over again and which ones obviously lose importance? Which are the bigger societal topics that the participants refer to when talking about their own life and their approach to moral questions? Following these questions, and as has been described in Keller et al. (2022), it is necessary to look at the interview in different ways for capturing change in content:

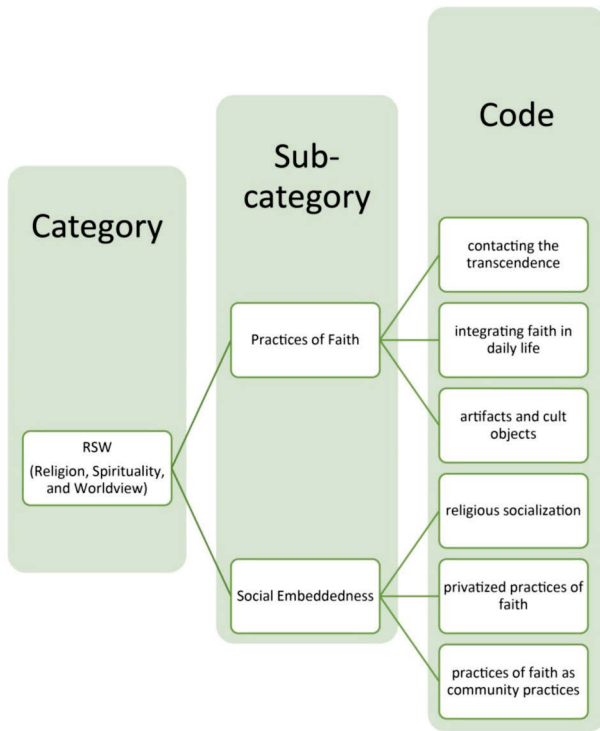
- presentation of life review, relationships, values, and religion/worldview; thereby adhering to the areas suggested by the interview guideline;
- identification of religious identity narratives, deconversion stories, and other meaningful narratives that may explain subjective change;
- identification of pre-existing categories derived from previous research, such as deconversion criteria (Streib et al., 2009) and autobiographical arguments (see above);
- openness for new and surprising particularities of the single case.

For this study, the last bullet point was the guiding principle; while my central aim was to capture the development of subjective religiosity and narrative identity, I soon realized that I did not want to risk losing the special features of each life story and each person I portray here. Overall, writing extensive case studies has proven to be useful in order to do justice to the rich material, not only for me but also in the history of the research projects my own study emerged from (see Streib et al., 2009; Streib & Keller, 2015; Streib & Hood, 2016; Streib & Klein, 2018, and Streib, Keller et al., 2022).

All these demands listed above hint at the complexity and the necessity to have an instrument to systematically analyze the data. Thus, the research team that I am part of developed a coding guideline using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti. The creation of that guideline started with an open approach of reading different interviews carefully, using maximal and minimal contrast as selection criteria in order to get an idea of the variety of the sample as well as finding interindividual similarities, following the idea of theoretical sampling in which the choice of cases is driven by an interplay with findings from already evaluated data (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999; Dimbath et al., 2018), noting down everything that caught the eye and then comparing those notes with the other researchers. Step by step, we came to a long list of codes that were clearly too detailed, the list simply too long to be of practical use. Thus, we shortened and condensed the list, eliminating the most idiosyncratic codes and merging others that were similar enough to refer to a joint, bigger, topic. After this time-consuming process, we ended up with two separate coding guidelines (that are still subject to changes, extensions and reductions), having made the decision that it would be wise to facilitate handling the content codes and the narrative codes separately. The content codes are meant to capture important themes and their variations, giving an overview about the most important aspects the interviewee discusses in their interview. The narrative code list pays attention to the way the participants talk, looking at structure from a different angle than the evaluation method described above; here, we pay attention to argumentation strategies and ways of creating coherence by linguistic means. Both coding guidelines are too extensive to show here entirely⁵, but as an illustration of their structure, Figure 5 and Figure 6 provide some insights. Given the fact that the idea was to combine inductive as well as deductive approaches, the content code guideline does not only contain codes inductively derived from the interview material itself, but also codes that stem from previous research, such as the deconversion criteria and the exit trajectories (Streib et al., 2009). The narrative code list was created in a top-down fashion, even though we enriched it, in a rather exploratory fashion, with more specific topoi, i.e. implicit argumentation strategies, that we found in the interviews (finding topoi and other implicit argumentation strategies in FDIs was already part of my master thesis (cf. Teschner, 2006) which has proven a useful

approach and was adopted here as well). The structure of both code lists is similar: starting out with a rather broad category (religion, spirituality, and worldview (RSW) in Figure 5, or causal-motivational coherence (CAMOCO) in Figure 6) which are split up in sub-categories (like, for RSW, practices of faith and social embeddedness). The last columns of the figures show the characterization of these sub-categories, the more specific, detail-oriented codes that are directly applied in the interview material.

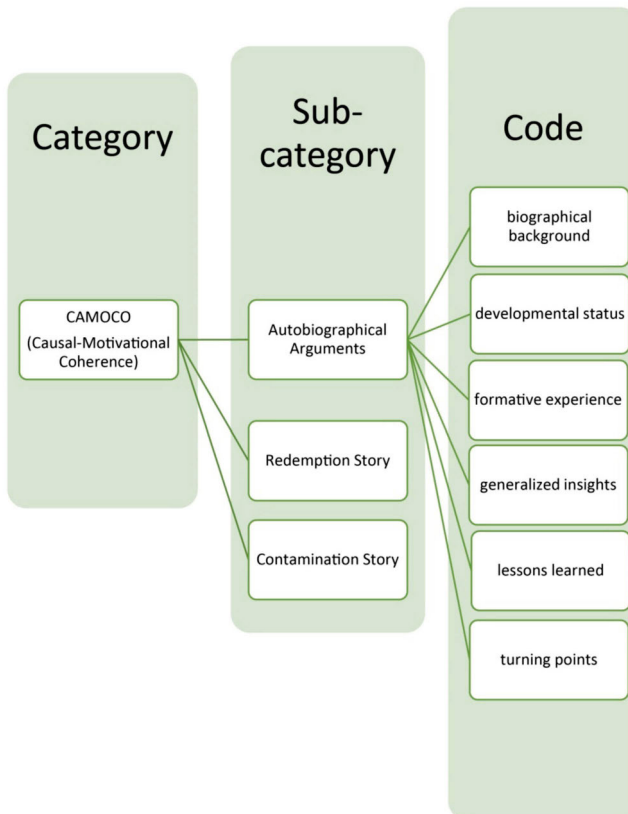
Figure 5: Content Code List (excerpt)



The coding guideline in its current form was applied to all the interviews in this study. I went through the interviews and coded everything that seemed notable, both for the narrative and the content code list, applying the characterizations of the codes and sub-codes. Often, there would be more than one code fitting to describe a statement, and sometimes it was even mandatory to apply more than one code in order to capture the statement in its entirety. Through this process, the extensive material was made more accessible and the codings tentatively showed prominent themes, emerging or declining emphases in the participants' interviews, and gave a glimpse into the way they structured their speech and how they made their points by argumentation strategies. On a single case basis, this allowed me to determine which topics needed to go into the case study and which were negligible. I was able to attend to the particularities of each case while still being aware of my superordinate research questions. To achieve an even flow of the

text, I do not use the bulky codes in the case studies but base my analysis on the codings done in ATLAS.ti.

Figure 6: Narrative Code List (excerpt)



The methodical frame for this procedure could best be described as qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2019; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier et al., 2019). While in Germany, Mayring's approach of coding qualitative data with explicit categories to put to use in statistical analyses in a next step may be one of the most prominent ones (cf. Mayring, 2015), qualitative content analysis encompasses a variety of different approaches. The way I want to apply it here, I aim at assessing the main themes and important content of each interview, thus arriving at a "subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). And while parts of the coding guidelines implement and test existing categories (from multiple disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and linguistics), the greatest merit is gained from its open approach to the data (achieved by a cooperation of researchers from more than one discipline), which allows new topics to emerge from the data itself. The coding process demands interpretation

and a carefully documented proceeding. Here, I use the coding guideline for the assessment of the single cases and their longitudinal development.

4.3 Inclusion of Selected Scales Based on the Questionnaires

With the aim to portray the individual participants against the background of a broader sample—samples that were meant to provide the specific focus groups under investigation with a comprehensive background portrayal—the Bielefeld-Chattanooga research team has always implemented in their research design an extensive survey for questions including demographic inquiries, but also scales that are widely used and validated in diverse fields of psychology and beyond. This also serves the purpose of engaging with the broader field of developmental and personality psychology.⁶ My study has a much smaller sample and a much smaller scope. It does not have the ambition to draw conclusions on a broad quantitative level. However, I found the inclusion of selected scales to be elementary for the multi-faceted interpretation of my cases through the expectation of getting a different view on the participants. The way they assess their personality (NEO-FFI) should shed some light on whether they see themselves as open and agreeable, and whether this self-assessment resonates with my findings from the content analysis. The self-assessment of eudaimonic well-being (Ryff Scale on Psychological Well-Being) has been found to be related to deconversion (cf. Streib et al., 2009) and can add another layer on the way the participants present themselves. Do they see their lives as meaningful, how do they perceive relations with other people, etc.? The Religious Schema Scale (RSS) allows for a better understanding of the participants' religiosity and their approach toward the strange, both of which seem interesting in the light of my research questions. This approach allowed for a comparison of cases on a more general level and with a different instrument—a survey instead of an extensive interview. In the case studies, the scores of the single case are mapped against the background of the scores for the whole sample. The scales I chose to include constitute but a part of the larger battery of psychometric scales and instruments that were used in the course of the studies. The selection presented here seems a good approximation to the question of how personality and well-being change on the level of self-reported survey data and how those results relate to the findings from the narrative analysis, since they may shed light on parts of my participants' identity that are not always revealed directly in the interviews. In any case, the scores on these scales will help enhance the picture that is drawn in the interviews.

The scales I will draw onto for the triangulation of data in the conclusions of the respective case studies are the following:

4.3.1 Religious Schema Scale (RSS)

This scale, which was developed by Streib and colleagues (Streib et al., 2010; Streib & Klein, 2014), is based on the model of religious styles that has been introduced above. The scale introduces three different schemata which are said to be part of a dynamic field and interact with each other in different ways (cf. Streib et al., 2010, p. 155). Those three schemata are *truth of texts and teachings (ttt)*, *fairness, tolerance, and rational choice (ftr)*, and

xenosophia/interreligious dialog (xenos). The subscale *tnt* is conceptualized to assess a worldview that is guided by the belief that the texts of one's own religion are to be taken literally, the religion and its dogmas being the absolute and unquestioned truth, in other words: an ethnocentric approach. A person high on *tnt* would show high agreement with a statement such as "What the texts and stories of my religion tell me is absolutely true and must not be changed." The second schema, *ftt*, is pointing in the opposite direction and favors justice and fairness over the exclusivist view displayed by *tnt*. A sample item for this subscale is "It is important to understand others through a sympathetic understanding of their culture and religion." Lastly, *xenos* is characterized by intellectual curiosity and the willingness to engage with the strange, a sample item being, "The truth I see in other worldviews leads me to reexamine my current views." And while *xenos* was found to be associated strongest with self-rated spirituality, *tnt* was highest in people who identified as religious and was predicting anti-Islamic prejudice (Streib & Klein, 2014), whereas *ftt* might play a bigger role in an atheist/nontheist worldview. Although this association was not found to be that strong (Streib et al., 2016), both *ftt* and *xenos* seem to be associated with reduced prejudice. Furthermore, low scores on *tnt* predict faith development, i.e. a movement upward to a higher type (Streib, et al., 2021). For my sample and as an exemplification of the above-mentioned interaction between the schemata, the look at *tnt* and *xenos* seems plausible in determining the extent the religiosity of my participants can tentatively be characterized as dogmatic and to explore how they approach the new and strange, and whether or not a high religiosity (with high *tnt* scores) can go along with high score on *xenos* and therefore an appreciation of the (religious) other.

4.3.2 Ryff Scales on Psychological Well-Being (Ryff Scale)

This scale measures different dimensions of subjective, or more precisely, eudaimonic well-being promoting positive adult development and serves the purpose in adding to the impressions gained from the interview with regard to the participants' self-presentation. The dimensions found by Ryff and colleagues (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) are: *autonomy* (the extent to which a person acts independently), *environmental mastery* (how well they interact with the world around them), *personal growth* (developing one's potential), *positive relations with others* (including empathy and the ability to establish and keep up meaningful relationships), *purpose in life* (directedness and intentionality), and *self-acceptance* (which measures to what extent a person holds a positive image of self). Previous research has shown *environmental mastery*, *positive relations with others*, *purpose in life*, and *self-acceptance* to be lower for people who left their religious tradition (at least in Germany), which might be interpreted as "signs of a loss or a crisis" (Streib et al., 2009, p. 81), with some of those scores staying low at the second point of measurement, while others, such as purpose in life, show some improvement, which indicates a regaining of meaning over the years (see Streib and Keller (2022) for an overview of the quantitative data for the second wave of the longitudinal project). The longitudinal development of the different dimensions of eudaimonic well-being seems to be an interesting aspect when looking at how narrative identity changes in the course of the adult lifespan.

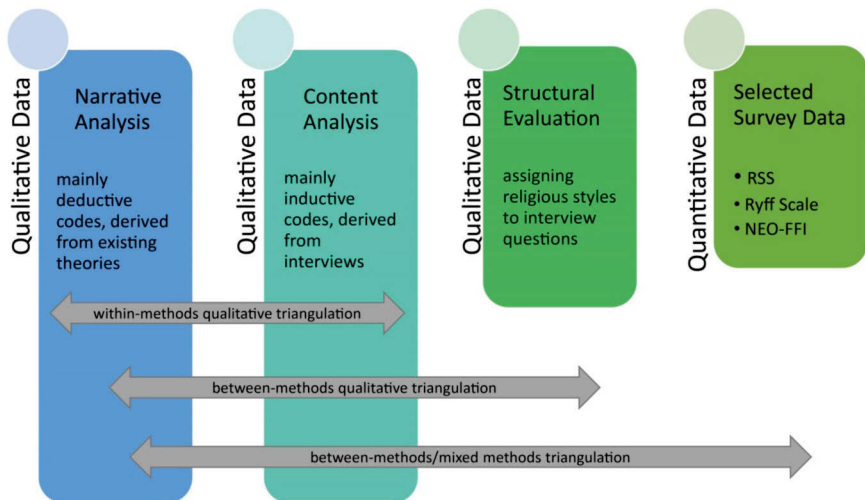
4.3.3 NEO Five-Factor-Inventory (NEO-FFI)

I include the NEO-FFI scores of my participants to get an idea of more general personality traits which are assessed here, following Costa and McCrae (1985/1992), with five different characteristics that have been termed “The Big Five” of personality psychology: *neuroticism* (which is presented here in its reversed version as *emotional stability*; this subscale measures irritability, emotional robustness, etc.), *extraversion* (investigating the extent to which a person feels comfortable in social situations and in interaction with others), *openness to experience* (assessing the willingness to seek new and strange situations, explore new ideas, etc.), *conscientiousness* (attending to the degree of organization and commitment), and *agreeableness* (relating to altruism and the willingness to engage with others in a benevolent way). *Openness to experience* has, in the research line of the Bielefeld/Chatanooga team, proven to be correlated with xenosophia (Streib & Klein, 2014) and suitable for mapping versions of spirituality (Streib, et al., 2016). *Openness to experience* has demonstrated its utility in being a predictor for deconversion (Streib et al., 2009) and the development of higher religious types (Streib & Keller, 2022). Keeping an eye on the development on these subscales accordingly seems appropriate for portraying change in religiosity over the adult lifespan.

All of those scales contribute to the idea of portraying the single case from as many perspectives as possible. Filling out a survey yields different results than a comprehensive interview, and taken together, it can be expected that the picture to be painted gains additional layers.

4.4 Triangulation of Longitudinal Data—Putting it All Together

Figure 7: Triangulating Methods



With these different methods and detailed research questions described above, I still have a huge amount of data that needs to be put together and reasonably related to each other in a final step. In Figure 7, I show the methods used in this study.

As can be seen here, the major part of my study engages the qualitative data and the different approaches I took to analyze them. The figure also shows the different methods of relating these data, a process which is labeled as triangulation (Flick, 2018). Adopting the term from geodesy which describes the practice of looking at a specific object or point in a landscape from different angles with the aim to describe it as differentiated and as exact as possible, the concept was introduced into qualitative research in the 1970s by the work of Denzin (1970/2017). Biography research has a long research tradition in combining different methods as well as a multi-perspective view on the topic achieved through the collaboration of research groups with different backgrounds (Alber & Schiebel, 2018). I apply triangulation on different levels, following Flick's elaborations on triangulating data as it has been introduced by Steppacher and colleagues for the data from the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research (Steppacher et al., 2024; Flick, 2018). First and foremost, my design includes the within-methods triangulation of narrative and content analysis, enriched with findings from the structural evaluation also derived from the qualitative data, which could be called a between-methods qualitative triangulation since the approaches applied for content/narrative and structural analysis are rather dissimilar yet refer to the same kind of data. A between-methods/mixed-methods triangulation is exploratively applied when the quantitative data from selected scales of the surveys are considered as well. That way, more general personality traits and assessments of well-being and religiosity are combined with the subjective accounts individuals give in their interviews. As has been laid out by Keller (2020) in detail, this combination of methods allows for a differentiated look on the subject—in this case: religious development—and overcomes the binary of nomothetic and idiographic. Nomothetic approaches tend to focus on regularities and look for similarities between individuals, whereas an idiographic focus tries to “explain the lawfulness of the individual case holistically, focusing on the inner organization of the case, and often, although not always, by looking at the particular and unique” (Schachter & Ben Hur, 2019, p. 291). The approach described by Keller and applied here could best be described with Lamiell's neologism “idiothetic” (2019; 1981), aiming at describing each case in its individual particularities (thus, attending to it idigraphically), while providing a comparison with the bigger (however, still small, and not representative, in my study here) sample to account for similarities and disparities.

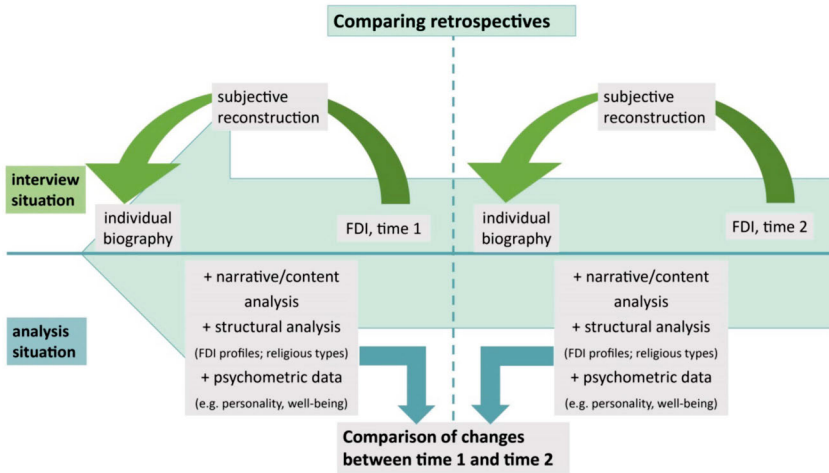
The complexity of this analytical procedure is multiplied by the fact that the material under investigation here is longitudinal and thus the aim is to portray a development on different levels. Figure 8 shows this principle, illustrated with two points of measurement only to keep the figure readable.

The concept of double diachronicity can best be defined as follows:

In our interpretations, we distinguish between change as reported and change as observed. Change as reported is based on our respondents' subjective reconstructions of their (religious) lives and accounts of development, resulting in the single diachronicity of individual biographies. Change as observed is based on following

these biographical reconstructions and accounts across time, resulting in the additional diachronic perspective of tracing changes of these accounts and reconstructions. (Keller et al., 2022)

Figure 8: Double Diachronicity (slightly adapted from Keller et al., 2022)



The subjective reconstruction of the individual biography is analyzed for each timepoint, using the narrative and the content code list and taking into account the results from the structural evaluation, i.e. the religious styles and types. The narrative identity of each timepoint is operationalized and then enriched with the survey data. In a next step, the findings from each timepoint can be compared, assessing changes as well as stabilities and arriving at the outlining the individual's development over the course of a significant portion of their respective adult lives. The next section will describe the structure I developed to include all the methods described above to get the most out of each case.

4.5 Structure of the Case Studies

Life stories are complex, and talking about one's relationships, values, and beliefs as invited by the FDI questions is a very individual process. To account for this, while at the same time keeping the analyses comparable, the case studies will generally follow the areas of the FDI (life review, relationships, values and commitments, religion and worldview). However, this process reserves the option to merge two areas when they are connected closely in the autobiographical account (and, in some instances, neglect certain areas when they do not seem to contribute to the understanding of the case). The perspective of double diachronicity (see section 4.4) will accordingly be applied to those smaller portions of the accounts. The aim is to show how the reconstruction of the participants'

own lives has changed over the lifespan under examination here and how this is connected with a different perception of themselves or a shifted focus on what are important values.

All of the 59 participants in this study have been interviewed with the FDI at three timepoints. As has been mentioned above, those who have first participated in the Deconversion Study (Streib et al., 2009) and were back then interviewed as focus people, i.e. as people who have left a religious tradition, also took part in a narrative interview in which they were asked to lay out their deconversion story in as much detail as they wished to, without any restraints by an interview guideline, and with only minimal intervention by the interviewer. Narrative interviews were conducted with Carola, Gudrun, and Werner⁷. The sections of the case studies will present and analyze interview quotes from all three timepoints, allowing to trace changes, stabilities, and developments in the way life stories are told and how people speak about moral questions, etc. For the case studies involving couples, I have embedded a section in which I compare the way the couples talk about their respective partner and their marriage to assess meaningful differences in this regard.

The section dealing with subjective religiosity touches on one focus of my research questions, and it contains a special feature that has not been implied in this form in other case studies of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research group in the form of a table showing data from different resources which all assess in a different way the subjective religiosity (or worldview) of a person:

Table 3: Data for Subjective Religiosity/Worldview

	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	<i>spirituality:</i>	<i>spirituality:</i>	<i>spirituality:</i>
	<i>religion:</i>	<i>religion:</i>	<i>religion:</i>
self-assessment			
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?			

- *free entries*: As part of the extensive survey, the participants were asked, starting in the Spirituality Project (Streib & Hood, 2016): “How would you define the term religion?” and “How would you define the term spirituality?” These short subjective definitions give a first insight into what these terms mean to them, without necessarily tapping into very personal experiences or beliefs.
- *self-assessment*: Here, the question from the survey “Do you consider yourself more religious or more spiritual”—which has guided the selection process for the cases—is taken up again.
- *answer to Q20*: The question number 20 of the FDI “Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person? Or would you prefer another description? What does it mean to you?” explores the way the person prefers to describe their take on

the self-assessment as religious or other. Here, it is possible to go into detail regarding one's identity as a religious or spiritual person, which usually leads to a nuanced description.

The table shows all the data assembled per wave. An interpretation for each wave is undertaken separately. I want to make sure that each wave's particularities are assessed individually and in response to different methods before turning to any observations concerning development following these analyses. Additionally, the answers to the question "How has your worldview/image of God changed across your life's chapters?" are analyzed to line out changes happening and aligning them with the findings of the analyses of the data in the table. Where it seems fitting, scores from the Representation of God Scale (Johnson et al., 2019), which was part of the wave 3 survey, are taken into consideration as well. With these different data combined, I hope to assess the different facets of a person's religiosity and the way it changes over time.

Each case study is wrapped up with the triangulation of the data available (aggregated with the different methods laid out above). The results of the structural analysis according to the *Manual* and selected results from the survey are presented to provide additional information that was not captured by the detailed content and narrative analysis. It will be elaborated how the assignments of styles and types correspond with what has been found out by analyzing the content of the interviews. Inversely, the results from the content analysis can help to better understand the model of types. With the look at the survey data, a broader view is achieved since they allow for a comparison with the whole sample and shed light on the spots where the participants' self-assessment differs from the sample in meaningful ways. That way, I can give a multi-faceted report on each participant's narrative (religious) identity and the way it changes over time. The case studies are sorted here with regard to age, starting with the youngest participants, Bianca and Jannis, and ending with the three eldest, Gudrun, Werner, and Marion. A final synopsis will take the results from the single cases and the in-between comparisons of the couples on an inter-individual level and line out possibilities for comparisons that go beyond the single trajectory and toward a deeper understanding of people's religious and non-religious development and the evolvement of narrative identity over time.

Notes

- 1 Es ging in der Tat nicht darum, eine Meinungsumfrage zu machen, wozu eine Befragung im großen Maßstab notwendig gewesen wäre, sondern die Antworten über längere Zeit hin zu bearbeiten, um die Wäsche „zum Sprechen zu bringen“. [...] Wie in einer polizeilichen Untersuchung waren die geringsten Anzeichen für das Vorhandensein verborgener Ideen und Gesten zu beachten. Dabei musste besonders den Widersprüchen zwischen den verschiedenen Aussagen besondere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt werden, um die hinter der anscheinend einheitlichen Fassade wirksame soziale Logik und die soziale Fragmentierung der Individuen hinter ihrer vordergründigen psychologischen Einheit zu identifizieren und die

einzelnen Fragmente als Elemente der Paarbeziehung zu isolieren und festzustellen, welchen Platz sie darin einnahmen.

- 2 Note that, in the Deconversion Study, the interviewees of the focus group, i.e. the deconverts, were invited to conduct a narrative interview before the FDI in which they were asked to elaborate on how they came to be in the religious group they later left and how that leaving process took place. Accordingly, some of my participants have had four interviews already (the first FDI and the narrative interview happening at the same timepoint) and I will tag the respective interview format for clarification when necessary.
- 3 We tried to interview as many participants face to face as possible. However, restrictions in time and budget made it necessary to conduct some interviews by phone or video call. Some participants even preferred these methods for various reasons.
- 4 As the interviews I use here are part of the large interview pool of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga research team, I naturally did not conduct most of the interviews myself.
- 5 See Appendix for a comprehensive list.
- 6 It should be noted again that the samples are not representative. The sampling strategies were based on conceptual considerations with regard to the qualitative research questions. Therefore, the informative value is limited with regard to the total population.
- 7 Since those narrative interviews took place right before the FDI, the first FDI question asking for a life review (but potentially other questions as well) may lack detailedness since those parts of the life story had been related in the narrative interview already. In these cases, I refer to quotes from the narrative interviews, marking them accordingly.

5. Bianca and Jannis—A Catholic Couple in the Family Phase

Bianca and Jannis are a married couple who have both been brought up in the Catholic faith, Bianca in Germany, Jannis in a country in the Middle East as part of one of the three largest religious groups in that country. They met at a timepoint when Jannis was alienated from his faith and went on a pilgrimage, mainly to do his mother a favor. During this pilgrimage, Jannis not only found back to his “old” faith but also met his future wife, and it will be detailed below that these two experiences remain closely connected for him. Bianca, on the other hand, has a constant foundation in her faith, which was never seriously challenged. Bianca and Jannis’s relationship seems to be centered around their joint faith, and their religious practice is an important part of their family life. At time 1, they have just had their first child, and their family has grown to include two more children by time 3, their first-born being a teenager by then.

5.1 Bianca—Negotiating Catholic Faith Within a Secular Society

“[The people at school] asked me [about the Pope] and it unnerved me to say, ‘I believe it and I back it, but I can’t explain it.’ I did not like that, and that’s why I dug into it.”¹

Bianca is a young woman of 23 years when she is first interviewed in 2004. Her other interviews took place in 2013 and 2018, making her 37 years old at time 3. She was raised in a Catholic family and has never left or seriously doubted her faith, even though she reports being somewhat skeptical during puberty. Bianca is an example for a relatively young person without any experience of disaffiliation in her biography. Her interviews do not contain a lot biographical information, but she is very outspoken about her faith. In the questionnaire, she has identified as being “equally religious and spiritual” at wave 1 and 3, while preferring the item “more religious than spiritual” at wave 2.

5.1.1 Bianca's Life Reviews—Being Faithful during Puberty

Bianca's answers to the first question of the FDI are rather short, she seems uncertain at all time points with how to react to the task to divide her own life into chapters and refers to a normative structure containing childhood, adolescence, and family life:

Well, I guess you could divide it. For example childhood, adolescence, (laughing) being an adult, perhaps. And yes, important events were certainly (laughing) puberty. That's when (laughs) you go through the process of building your own opinion. And (quietly) yes. Perhaps personal experiences of how the family changes when someone has died or a new one is born, something like that.² (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

Puberty seems to play a certain role in this first attempt at describing her life, even though her statement sounds more generic than very personal. The reference to the topos of "adolescent rebellion" is clear, though, and the interviewer is expected to understand the implications that go along with the word "puberty" without needing much further explication (and by laughing while saying this, Bianca tries to create a common ground, establishing a shared knowledge and a mutual understanding). This reference to a developmental status serves as an autobiographical argument (cf. Köber et al., 2018). She goes into further detail as to what this rebellious phase meant in her case when asked about how her image of God has changed over time:

And then... yes, then I reached (laughing) puberty, and then I started seriously thinking about things. I had other influences in school, people who did not believe anything or differently. So, you had to argue with the whole topic more strongly. And then there also was a time when I sort of fell from faith. Because somehow, I did not fancy going to church on Sunday anymore, because I wanted to sleep in and be left in peace.³ (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

This episode of her life is presented as something disrupting the routine, which is the routine of a faithful life in her case. She questions the beliefs she grew up with that were initiated by her peer group who was rather heterogeneous. It remains unclear whether she sees that as a bad influence or as an opportunity to reflect and to widen her horizon by discussing it with others and get a better access to her own faith and be more aware of what she believes. In any case, she reports that there was a short period in that time where she claims to have turned away from faith, even though it does not become clear if she actually stopped believing or if it was the religious practice (and getting up early) that lost its appeal for a time. Regular visits to a pilgrimage site help her regain her beliefs.

In her second interview, the answer to the first question is pretty similar as at time 1:

Well, for example, I might say: childhood, adolescence, yes, adulthood. Or rather, since I'm married, perhaps something like marriage and family or something like that, you know? [I: What marker events stand out as important?] Yes, well, during childhood there were lots of important events. For example, celebrations, or when some relative died or something like that. And then during adolescence, yes, surely, cutting oneself off from the parents or graduating or the vocational training. Then

of course the wedding and ... we have children, you know, so, the births. Something like that, you know.⁴ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

By elucidating her answer after starting by naming common developmental milestones again, she alters the landmark “adulthood” to better fit her personal circumstances of a married woman with children. Adolescence is marked here as the time when she grew more independent from her parents. But in a later part of her interview, when asked what groups, institutions, and causes are important to her, she elaborates on how puberty was also the time of seeing her own faith challenged:

Of course, the ideas and concepts of the Church and the Pope are interesting for me. Also, to question all that, and that’s what I always did. Especially when I was 16, 17, 18, when you want to make your own experiences. Until then, I have always followed the path of faith and the Church and so on and at some point, you ask yourself, like, “The Pope is a clever man, why would he be against the pill and condoms and all that?” And I kept that, I still question things like that. If you want to take part in the discussion, you have to do the reading yourself, stuff like that. And why is that important for me? Yes, because I want to teach that to my children, basically, you know, [...] because for me that’s a center of my life and I get a lot of strength from it and therefore, you know?⁵ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

Here she portrays herself as a reflective person who does not blindly believe what is dictated by the Church or other authorities. However, neither does she say where she got her alternative information from nor from what conclusions she draws from them. The question why the Pope is in opposition to contraceptives remains unanswered in the interview. But the concept of thinking for herself is important and something she wants to teach to her children as well since her first child was still very young at that time which is a wish that was not as present at time 1 for obvious reasons. From that passage, it can be gathered that believing and being part of the Catholic Church is a conscious decision for Bianca and is a decision she renews all the time.

At time 3, her elaborations on her life review are more extensive, albeit only after further inquiries by the interviewer:

Um, I guess, first, childhood, adolescence, adulthood. Then perhaps marriage and family. [I: What criteria made you choose those sections?] Well. (smiles) I believe that’s like ... normal, like, when you divide a life, that you ... I don’t know, that’s just what I thought of first. [...] [I: Could you elaborate on the respective phases?] Childhood, that’s when you’re a child yourself and learn a lot by your parents, by the social surroundings, by own experiences. You grow and explore the world for yourself. And, yes, I think that changes with puberty, that’s when you start being adolescent, then adult, and you get to know life in a different way. Perhaps through school, through friends, through first relationships or your job, vocational training, something like that. And then adulthood, yes, you go to work, you marry perhaps, or you don’t. (smiles) When you have children, that’s a totally different impact. [I: And you would find your own life course—yeah, this just sounded a bit like a normative life course—you would find yourself within this?] Basically, yes. Like, my life has

been pretty much according to that norm (smiles). Although, some might say, you know, when you've been married for a certain time, which is not that common these days, (laughs) [...]. A lot of people will say, "What? Really? For so long with the same guy?" Sadly, that's not common today anymore, you know.⁶ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

It is striking here, and in the other answers as well, that Bianca rarely says "I" in these elaborations on her, or rather: an assumed normative, life review (which is what led me, being the interviewer of that third interview, to the provocative last supplementary question). Bianca sticks to the idea that the milestones she has learned are "normal" and only reluctantly gives insights into what that may mean for her and her own life. The topic she picks for making a point about her own norm is her marriage. She clearly sees a discrepancy here between what she might consider the norm and what other people think. Being married for so long—and at such a relatively young age—strikes her surroundings as odd, which makes her realize that she is somehow different, but she seems to be rather proud of deviating from others' expectations in that respect. This may have to do with her self-perception as a Catholic woman and may even be connected with what she tells about her worldview being challenged when she was a teenager:

I was raised Catholic, my parents practiced that with us a lot. And I started questioning that during puberty, because I was like, somehow I know that what they believe is right. But I don't want to believe that just because they do, but because I for myself wanted to know, what is the reason why I believe it, you know. I wanted to decide that for myself and not just because I had learned it that way.⁷ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

While her parents in this quote do serve as role models up to a certain point, Bianca again portrays herself as reflective and thinking for herself. It is hard to say whether what she describes here could be classified as intellectual doubt (which, according to Streib and colleagues (2009) is one criterion that can lead to deconversion) because she remains vague about the actual process. But it is noteworthy all the same that she mentions this process of critical questioning again. However, neither at time 2 nor at time 3 does she mention "falling from faith" again as she did at time 1. When asked to elaborate on that time during puberty, she tells something that can be declared as her religious identity narrative (according to Keller et al., 2016a). The narrative possibly is an iterative one, i.e. most likely a culminated version of different events.

Table 4: Bianca's Narrative: "Getting her own Faith Straight"

Orientation	At school they used to call me a hyper-Catholic. (laughs) Because they knew that I was faithful and live that way. And this didn't bother me really, because I had my friends anyway who accepted that, you know.
Complication	But, yes, there were a lot of people at school who couldn't relate to that at all, and they used to tease me and challenge me. And maybe that was what gave the impetus. Because they used to approach me and be like, you know, the usual topics, Pope, pill and condoms and all this stuff concerning contraception. That's what they do during puberty (smiles), you know, because that's exciting at that age. Well, and I used to wonder, I knew that it's like that in the Church, but I did not understand it, you know. I always thought, the Pope is an educated man, right? How can he say something like that in the present time?
Evaluation	And then I just started to deal with all of this. I started reading more concerning this topic, why he's saying those things. And it convinced me.
Resolution	For me, I could just accept it like that.
Coda	[...] They asked me and it unnerved me to say, "I believe it and I back it, but I can't explain it." I did not like that, and that's why I dug into it. ⁸ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

Already in the orientation, she makes clear that she had an outsider position because of her religion, a fact that is underlined by the appearance of her account as an iterative narrative. At the same time, she states she was not bothered by this, since she still had a group of people who accepted her for what she was. This is significant for her overall self-portrayal: she is aware that her faith (and her long-term marriage) is "out of the usual," but she is self-reliant enough to not be disturbed by that. Yet, being challenged by her peers regarding the content of her faith and the proclamations of the Church she belongs to are marked as a complication. Themes circling around the Pope and his attitude toward contraception were mentioned as problematic in her second interview already, but those arose in that interview rather as questions she asks herself (see above). Here, in the third interview, the context is constructed differently: The challenge comes from the outside and from her peers, which was not the case in her time 2 account. However, she decides to accept that challenge and starts reading about why the Pope has those strict attitudes, despite being an educated man and living in the present time. She does not elaborate on what actually convinced her, but obviously the justification she read was strong enough to lead her to the conclusion that she can still support the Pope's stance toward contraception. It is remarkable that she says, "it convinced *me*," and "*I* could just accept it like that." Even though the challenge comes from the outside, she is content with just being convinced for herself, and she does not feel the need to convince the others. Therefore, her coda sums up well how she claims to approach faith. It is important for her to look behind the façade and not just believe blindly. The situation during puberty was the initial impulse, but she has kept that conviction ever since. In that self-image, she has become more self-assured over the years, which can be seen by comparing her answers from the different timepoints. She is more aware of what she is and can face challenges from the outside with serenity. It therefore seems plausible to assume that Bianca constructs her

social surroundings according to an in-group/out-group schema with all her important relationships being part of the in-group and sharing her faith.

5.1.2 Bianca's Relationship with Jannis and Their Children

The Marriage from Bianca's Perspective

To approach Bianca's reconstruction of her own biography from a different angle, it is interesting to take a look at the way she talks about important relationships. Unfortunately, she does not provide many details about her relationship with her husband. At time 1, when asked how she makes important decisions, she says:

Well, now that I'm married, first I talk to my husband. What he thinks about it, what he would do and what he would advise. And, yes, then I sit down and talk to him. And then we see what are the pros and the cons.⁹ (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

It becomes clear here that "being married" is still a rather new concept for Bianca, and she still has to acclimate to speaking about her husband and their relationship. At this point, she describes her husband as the person she goes to to discuss an important decision and who provides the opportunity to reflect.

In her time 2 interview, an interesting passage that deals with marriage, albeit on a more abstract level, can be found when she is asked about whether our lives are guided by a higher power or if there is a greater plan behind everything:

I do believe that we have a great freedom to make our own decisions and that... You know, there's the saying, "Every pot finds its lid," and... how do I know that the partner I have is the right one? And someone once said, "At that moment when you marry in church, before God, when you make that promise, [...] that is the right one for you. Because you made that decision." And your own will plays a great role and God does not just say, "There you go. That's the right one for you and if you don't find that person, tough luck." But instead, our decisions are considered as well. And God acknowledges if we stand by that, you know. [...] Once I make a decision for that one man before God, he becomes the right one for me. God gives his blessings, when I make that decision and say yes, God says yes as well.¹⁰ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

Here, Bianca tries to balance her belief in a free will with her strong belief and trust in a leading, benevolent God. Referring to an unnamed authority ("someone once said"), she unfolds the theory that if you choose a partner and decide to marry him before God, God will acknowledge and endorse this person and the relationship. That being said, choosing her husband was her own choice, which was (later) legalized by a marriage in church. It is implied that this choice is irrevocable, since the partner was marked as "the right one," which obviously does not exist in plural. Despite a form of openness that is displayed here, her concept is rather absolute. And it can be stated that this stance has manifested more clearly and has become a universal desirability in the ten years that lie between the first and the second interview.

She gives more personal insight into what could be called relationship work at time 3, when she is asked about important relationships, with a follow-up questions asking specifically about her husband:

At best, that's also a good friendship, you know, between spouses. Yes, I would say that we try to cultivate mutual interests, that you do something together in the midst of the day-to-day stress. That you take time for each other and have those little moments when it's only the two of you, without the kids [...]. That you remain in contact and are open and honest. Like, yes, just maintaining the relationship so that it doesn't wither or that you don't grow apart.¹¹ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

At this time point, she has been married for more than 15 years and can now report what it takes to keep a relationship alive in her eyes. In this paragraph, it becomes clear that a marriage is work and it takes an effort from both partners, but it seems to be implied that she is quite content with what she has, knowing that this may not be the norm. This continues her self-portrayal as a person who sticks to her beliefs and commitments, which she thinks could and should be the norm, but are nowadays rather seen as an exception.

As for her development, these three passages show how her concept of “marriage” has been refined over the years, how she is more comfortable to talk about her marriage at time 3 and perhaps more *able* to do so. In this interview, the absoluteness we see at time 2 cannot be found again. Rather, the way she describes an ideal marriage is a pragmatic approach, which is without any reference to a transcendence but with a view that is shaped by long years of experience and presumably accompanied by more self-confidence at age 37 than she had when she was 23.

Bianca and her Children—Growing Generativity?

Over the years, her children come more into focus, which is to be expected, since her first child was still very young at time 1. At time 3, she has three children, the eldest being a teenager. Her elaborations at time 1 regarding the question what makes her life meaningful are still rather theoretical, since the first child is still a baby:

I think my family definitely makes my life meaningful, my own family as well right now, my child. So, that's the obvious meaning (laughs), I would say, to be there for your child, for your husband and take care that the child is raised well.¹² (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

Being there for and taking care of her own little family (which includes not only the baby but also her husband) has come into focus for her and is currently defining her life meaning. She gives a little more detail on how she wants to raise her child when asked about values and commitments:

So, commitments, maybe toward my family and my child. And I intend to teach him those values like I experience them. And I want to raise him in a way that enables him to find his own way. And I think I also want to raise him within the faith, like, take him to church, until he starts to question things for himself. Because I think that's important, I don't like it when you just copy everything 100% from your

parents. I believe you have to form your own views, because otherwise it doesn't make sense, otherwise it will all collapse at one point, if you don't question things yourself and then you'll stand there and be like, oh well.¹³ (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

Bianca's understanding of generativity and of how to raise her child is closely connected with her own faith. Her plan is to raise her son in her faith, but from her own biography she also deduces how important it is to not simply take one's parents' faith for granted but to ask questions and find your own way. Without that process of questioning she believes, "everything" will collapse sooner or later, probably implying that the chance of falling from faith is greater when there is no reflective moment in your biography. As it happens, that same son is about 15 when she is interviewed for the third time, and at the same point that she talked about in the quote above. When she is asked for crises, she says the following:

Our eldest son is in the middle of puberty right now (laughs). I guess that counts as a crisis. (laughs) No, well, he has some issues, and we collide here and there. And I have to grant him that, since he is now in this phase that he wants to get things clear for himself, you know. Cut the cord and question things, like I did as well when I was his age. So, I cannot accuse him of doing that now. (smiles) But anyway he's more extreme than I was and you have to learn to deal with that, you know. He's a boy, that's probably different than with a girl, I think. And yes, the thing is, I'm immediately enraged emotionally and sometimes I don't succeed in giving myself space, retreating or something like that. Instead, I'm somehow, like, in the midst of it. (smiles) And I have to learn to deal with that, you know.¹⁴ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

These two quotes encapsulate how Bianca's theory of how to raise her children at time 1 has in the meantime been put under a practical test. Her eldest's puberty is described as a crisis, albeit by laughing while she says it, and she indicates that she masters this situation with a sense of humor (and this little moment also serves the purpose of reaffirming a common ground, or a momentum of solidarity, with myself as the interviewer by knowing that I am a mother as well). But there is probably a reason why this situation comes to her mind when the "crises" question is asked. Her son is beginning to question things, but what kind of questions is not elaborated here. It can be deduced, since she says "like I did as well when I was his age," that the conflicts are circling around topics of faith as well. She concedes that this questioning is a normal process and generally something she approves of, but in the case of her son, this is more extreme than she would wish it to be and is a fact that is at least partly attributed to his gender. But the main point is that she cannot adequately deal with her son's behavior and reacts more impulsively than she actually feels comfortable with, and Bianca is rather self-critical about this. Indirectly, she sketches an educative ideal (which would presumably consist in being more patient and understanding) that she does not live up to, which she sees as a learning goal for herself. This realization about herself is interesting to observe because it lines out a development from being a young mother with theoretical ideas of how to raise her child to an experienced mother who still holds ideals but can grant herself being human and flawed at times all the same. Like with her marriage, her elaborations become less ab-

stract and less dogmatic over time, making way for a more praxis-oriented approach. As can be seen here, her faith plays a big role in all parts of Bianca's life. The next section will go into more detail regarding the question how this faith influences her values and her moral stance.

5.1.3 Bianca's Faith and her Approach to Questions of Morality

Bianca's Subjective Religiosity

To get a more structured view into the way Bianca's faith, or her subjective religiosity, has developed over time, I present here the table containing various data circling around that topic, from both the survey and the interview at three timepoints.

Wave 1: At wave 1, it seems important for Bianca to emphasize the Catholic tradition she comes from, making it clear that being a member of this church for her goes along with certain obligations as well. Living her faith as a community practice (by attending mass, for example) is as important for her as the idea of Christian charity. Helping friends in need by being there for them and by praying for them is the way she lives up to this ideal. Being spiritual does not seem to be in her focus at all, neither in a positive or a negative manner, even though in the survey, she has indicated to be "equally religious and spiritual." What is interesting to see here is that she obviously believes that a person needs to get in contact with God first by praying, and only then God will take action and lead the way. This may hint to an appreciation of the concept of free will by implying that God will only then take the lead when He is asked to do so.

Wave 2: Her definition of the term "spirituality" indicates that being spiritual may be a part of her belief system, since directly experiencing the transcendence is something that is in the range of her own experiences (see below) and not something that she frowns upon. The transcendence, however, in her case definitely is God and her definition excludes other forms of transcendental experiences. Interestingly, her definition for "religion" takes up the theme from her time 1 interview answer by stating that being religious means to believe and live by the teachings of the Catholic church (interesting to note here is the limitation "in my case" she inserts, acknowledging the fact that there are other ways of being religious, or at least other churches that one might follow). Interestingly, she opts for being "more religious than spiritual," which might mean that the spiritual dimension does not play a big role in her everyday life at that time. This can be found as well in her interview answer in which she puts the focus on being faithful and religious and on performing sacred rituals as well as on integrating her faith in daily life. This time, the generativity aspect comes into focus, which seems logical with three children she wants to convey her faith to. Interesting to see here is that she adds an outside perspective to her argumentation to make clear what being religious means for her. While she perceives that there may be people who claim to believe (in God) without going to church, she argues that this stance basically misses the point of what believing in God means for herself, she adds. The way she outlines her own position implies that she sees a belief without the church as misdirected.

Table 5: Data on Bianca's Subjective Religiosity

Bianca	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	<p><i>spirituality</i>: not asked</p> <p><i>religion</i>: not asked</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: to have transcendental experiences that can be related unequivocally to God's existence (wonders, inexplicable phenomena)¹⁵</p> <p><i>religion</i>: to believe in the teachings of the Catholic church (in my case) and to live by them¹⁷</p> <p>more religious than spiritual</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: to be at one with God in prayer, to surrender to Him, to open up and seek His will¹⁶</p> <p><i>religion</i>: to follow the commandments and laws of the church, to celebrate the Holy Mass, to receive the sacraments¹⁸</p> <p>equally religious and spiritual</p>
self-assessment	<p>equally religious and spiritual</p> <p>I do think I'm faithful, definitely. And for me, this means that I try to live as it conforms to the Catholic church, because that's where I belong to. And this means that I attend mass regularly and I pray. And I also try, when I see friends or people I know devastated because something bad has happened, I try to stand by them. In some way or other, yes, I pray a lot for others, I think that's part of it all. I just believe that prayer is very, very important. For the whole world and for every individual too because when you really assume that there is a God, I say, prayer is the most important thing because that's how you get in contact with Him, and then He can, you know, take control of things or show us His way.¹⁹</p>	<p>I am faithful and also religious, so, this means for me that I strive to go to mass on Sundays and also teach this to my kids, and that we pray several times a day and, yes, just try to find God in the world and follow him. Also read the Bible or other Christian scriptures. Like, just practice what you believe, you know? [...] Some might say, "I believe, but I don't need the church for that." But for me that's the crucial point. Because Jesus founded the church and through Eucharist we can meet him bodily and that's most important for me, because what do I need a good friend for if I don't go and visit him? Right?²⁰</p>	<p>All three, I guess. (laughs) But I don't know, they are not mutually exclusive, for me. Of course, spiritual, that might apply for esoteric stuff as well, and that's not what I am. But spiritual might also mean that you have a special connection to God or to, I don't know, heaven. [...] I just talked about having those dreams sometimes. Maybe this would fall under the term spiritual for me. [...] [Being religious/faithful] that's the most important thing in my life, to which I attach great importance and by which I live. [I: Would you differentiate between religious and faithful?] I think for me it's the same. But I can imagine that there are people who call themselves religious who [...] perhaps cannot believe deep inside, but want to be religious on the outside [...] Or the other way around, someone who is faithful [...] and says, "I believe in God, but I don't need the church for that." That does exist. And I think there are those differences, but for me personally it belongs together.²¹</p>

Wave 3: Here, we have an interesting definition of “spirituality” that was not present in her earlier statements. She states that spirituality means to be at one with God in prayer, which leaves out the more extraordinary notion her definition at wave 2 had but implies that this is something that can be achieved on a regular basis. This definition also contains some hints regarding her image of God, since realizing and fulfilling His will seem to be of importance here. However, in the interview she refers to more singular experiences like dreams in which she feels a special connection with God or, more generally, something higher (Heaven). She strictly rejects being spiritual in an esoteric way, which is not elaborated further. An obvious explanation for this being an assumed common ground with the interviewer that being esoteric is not desirable in general. On the other hand, her definition for “religion” again is closely bound to the laws and rituals her church offers. She affirms the importance of her faith for her whole life even though there is no mention of how this faith is integrated in her daily life in this answer. She does mention again other possible ways of being religious and/or faithful (without really believing, or without attending church). In contrast to her time 2 answer, she is more able to allow those positions to stand next to her own, even though she makes clear that her approach is different. But she sounds less judgmental than in her answer at time 2.

Bianca’s Image of God

Turning to Bianca’s image of God, it has been indicated above she believes in a benevolent and leading God, someone she can trust completely without losing the ability to think and decide for herself. However, her descriptions change subtly over time:

Well, I would say during childhood, till the age when you start thinking for yourself, [...] my image of God was shaped by my parents, definitely [...] and they took me to mass, [...]. And my parents did not provide the image of a judging God. That’s pretty common to say, like, if you don’t behave, God will scold you. [...] They rather portrayed Him as the loving God. And then... my personal conversion basically took place at this pilgrimage site. [...] Yes, and we started going there when I was very young [...]. And so, I somehow grew into it, you just get a different image of God there. Because when you’re there, then... you just feel that something supernatural is happening there and you experience a strong peace and love and quiet. [...] Yes, and so my image of God has been consolidated more and more. And that’s how it is today, I still have a pretty positive image of God, and, erm, of course you have doubts sometimes, but that’s just part of it all, I guess. And you can grow further (laughs).²² (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

I think my image of God has developed further. Just because of different experiences and because of becoming more mature in everything. Of course, many years ago, my thinking would have been more naïve and not so much directed toward the future, but (sighs), you know, with kids, you think about the future in a different way and about values and about life in general. But I would say it developed in a positive way, one can evaluate things better [...]. So, God is still very, very important, the most important part of my life.²³ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

[...] When you’ve grown up until you die, you mature through experiences, through encounters. And that’s all growth. Like, I feel settled within my faith and, of course, I question that again and again. Like, with what’s been going on in the

church. [...] For example, this whole abuse scandal, what is revealed more and more in the world church, you know. Of course, that's a no-go. [I: And does that influence your personal faith?] Well, not my personal faith since I believe in God and not in the church. Like, of course, we go to church regularly. And I still see that as a God-given institution, but the problem is the ground staff. [...] I think the church would have to audit those people who want to become priests in a better way. Like check, how is their attitude toward sexuality? What is their attitude toward, erm, a healthy image of humans? [I: And how would you describe your faith today?] Yes, this is still growing. Some time ago, I read a very nice book, [...] and there this relationship with God as Father was taken up in a different way. And this helped me a lot to get a different approach to this topic. To be able to comprehend this mercy and that He really is like a daddy who just loves us.²⁴ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

At time 1, Bianca spends a lot of time on how her image of God has developed since she was a child, and an emphasis is put on the what she calls conversion experience she had at the pilgrimage site. Directly experiencing the transcendence and finding inner harmony led, despite a rebellious time during puberty (which has been reported in the life review section), to a continuity of faith, and even the fact that she has doubts is turned into a possibility to grow further. In this first interview, the experience dimension of her faith is in the foreground while in the second interview, her statement is less specific. She describes her faith as growing and changing, yet this time, the emphasis is clearly on passing on her values and beliefs to her children (which has already been pointed out above in the analysis of her answer regarding her religiosity). The third answer is the longest and has been shortened a bit here to put into focus a new motif: Bianca brings to attention the negative headlines her church has been faced with recently, which may, be seen as a proactive act of taking up possible critique in itself. She does make it clear that while she criticizes the way the church chooses their personnel, this really has nothing to do with her personal faith. So, by applying moral criticism, she distances herself from the church as an institution. This is remarkable since in her other interviews she was very insisting on the importance of following the orders set by the Catholic church. This contingency is not addressed in that third interview. Her last point in this answer is that she recently came to view God more than ever as Father and how this is achieved by reading a book, which is seen as a good development by focusing the benevolent and loving God and casting away the doubts that were mentioned earlier. On the Representation of God Scale, she indicated that at wave 3, she sees God as more authoritarian and at the same time more benevolent than does the rest of the sample. On the other hand, the facets of God as mystical and ineffable do not appeal to her.

In all interviews, she describes how God guides her way and there are multiple occasions where she describes having directly experienced God's work in her life. This is still vaguely mentioned at time 1 when she talks about her experiences at the pilgrimage site. At time 2, she tells a vivid story about how God helped her make an important decision regarding house building (the story is longer, but has been shortened here especially for anonymity reasons):

Table 6: Bianca's Narrative: "Building a House"

Orientation	A lot of people think, [the Bible] is an old book, dusty, and not up to date, but I cannot sign this. (smiling) Because somehow it always contains the solution and... that was really funny. [...] Just little things, and people might say: "That was a coincidence or it might mean something different," but for us it really was a sign.
Complication	(laughs) And so we were reasoning whether we should build a house [...],
Evaluation	yes, and so we prayed and (smiling) and opened the Bible [...], then there was this [story] in which Joseph has that dream, that he should go to another country with Mary. And well, we are building that house in the nearby village and for us, it was all like, "Take your wife and your children and take them to this (smiles) nearby village," (laughs) something like that.
Resolution	So, stuff like that. And that helped us a lot. Sometimes there are those funny parts, (smiles) which make me think, "God really does have a sense of humor." (laughs)
Coda	Yeah, I don't know. Others would maybe say, "Such bullshit, to make a decision just because it is written down there," you know, but for us it seemed fitting and (smiles) until now we have not regretted it. ²⁵ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

The fact that she tells a story here (and, additionally, that she repeats it at time 3 with only slight alterations) suggests how important it is for her to bring across how she actually lives her religion, so calling this a religious identity narrative (Keller et al., 2016a) seems adequate. As can be seen in the table, she laughs and smiles a lot while telling her story, which might indicate on the one side that she likes remembering the situation. Moreover, this emphasizes her thesis that "God really does have a sense of humor." On the other hand, this might be interpreted as defensive, since she knows how other people react when she talks about this form of decision making ("such bullshit"). She may anticipate a critical reaction from the interviewer and by laughing about her experience herself shows that she takes this with a grain of salt. This is supported by the observation that the narrative is framed with critical remarks that she obviously got from other people, and her coda is that for her and her family, this procedure seems fitting and has proved suitable. However, when the interviewer asks to elaborate a bit more on the decision-making process, she makes clear that they do not follow this procedure in a servile way:

So, yes, we pray in advance that God may give us an answer that we understand and then we open [the Bible] on a random page. [...] Sometimes... it happened that some (smiles) text from the Old Testament came up that nobody understands. (laughs) And then we were like, "Well, no, we did not get that. Make it more specific please." (laughs) Of course, and then we consider our own feelings, "Do we want that or not?" Otherwise, it doesn't make sense, you know, if you do that.²⁶ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

She underlines here that her faith and her belief that God leads her does not mean she follows all of His orders blindly, but she is even allowed to criticize the way He chooses to communicate at times. What is also important for her is that her intuition is considered as well, and she emphasizes here that not doing this “doesn’t make sense.” All in all, Bianca describes a form of faith that is self-chosen and scrutinized when it seems necessary, which does not diminish her belief in a leading and well-meaning God.

Morality in Bianca’s Interviews—Questions on Life and Death

For her morality, it is interesting to see that there are certain topics that are discussed in more than one interview, even though they are not directly asked for or are connected with her biography. Among them are the topics of abortion and assisted suicide. Here, it becomes clear that even though Bianca portrays herself as a critical and reflective person, there are limits which are pretty strict and people who overstep those limits are viewed judgmentally. When she talks about those topics, it is with a critical tone toward an all-too-liberal society. At time 1, when asked if there are certain actions that are always right under any circumstances, she says:

Yes, for example, life per se, which is threatened a lot in today’s society. For example unborn children, who are simply aborted. And how a person just stands above that and says, I’m the doctor here, I decide to abort that child. Or in old age, that you just give old people an injection, for them to have their peace and don’t have to suffer anymore. And I believe that’s a step, and the whole society should agree on that, especially when life is concerned, because I think that’s where humans’ area of competence ends, I don’t think that we have the right to intervene there, because I believe for example that it’s just God’s decision, when someone should be born or die. [...] And everyone has the right to live. Every person has the will to live. [...] and that’s a value, I think, that should have real priority, life per se.²⁷ (Bianca, FDI, time 1)

She shows here a very strict adherence to the rules of her Church, which vehemently rejects both abortion and assisted suicide without differentiated consideration of other positions. It is interesting to see that when she talks about abortion, the responsible party is “the (male) doctor” who obviously makes the relevant decision (and acts god-like, or even puts himself above God). The pregnant woman is not mentioned and neither are potential circumstances that might have led to the wish or the necessity to terminate a pregnancy. “Today’s society,” in her portrayal, allows these acts and seemingly even encourages them, thereby disrespecting the rule that should stand above all, namely that it should be God who decides about life and death. In saying that, she again reveals an unconditional trust in a leading God and a concurrent feeling of superiority of her own religion. This complex of themes is taken up again at time 2 when thinking about actions that are always right and moral principles:

Well, I find it really important to protect life. This whole debate about assisted suicide and abortion, I think that's just horrible because... Where will this lead to? I mean, we really claim to be God by interfering everywhere. [...] Everybody should agree on that and say, "Come on, so far and no further." Like with all this research on embryos and so on. I think at some point humans should just (laughs) stay out of it.²⁸ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

While her time 1 statement was more concrete and more focused on giving a graphic impression, she is more abstract here, and her answer is more condensed to the main message, which otherwise stays the same: people should not intervene in God's area of competence. She formulates this as a claim for all people as something that everybody should agree on, again combining social criticism and the feeling of having superior knowledge. Yet, when the interviewer asks her to elaborate further on what she means when she criticizes assisted suicide, she goes into further detail:

Yeah, it's just about granting people a dignified death. That you don't just go and give them an injection or switch off a machine. So I think dying is a process and we can't just steal away and [...] block out the suffering, [...]. I think a difficult process of dying is important for the person, so that he can come to terms with God. But, well, when nobody believes in God anymore, there's no one to come to terms with, so you can switch off a machine more easily, you know. And I experienced that with my grandma. [...] She died at our home and that was so nice and such a peaceful death and in my eyes it's a pity that people want to interfere here. Because I think the whole life is a path and you make experiences and it's a process. And if you just go and cut this off, the process does not have an ending. And in my eyes, that's somehow just not natural.²⁹ (Bianca, FDI, time 2)

Bianca has a very clear concept of how a person should die, including difficulties which are nonetheless necessary in order to come to terms with God. For her, this is not debatable, or the optimal way, and by giving the example of her old grandmother, she underlines that she must be right with this concept. She mentions that she is aware of the fact that "nobody believes in God anymore," which results in a very unemotional act of "switch[ing] off a machine more easily" in her argumentation. Her faithful way to look at the world seems superior to others, and thinking and acting differently about dying is "somehow just not natural" to her. While the argumentation from her point of view seems coherent and convincing, there is no room left for doubt or for people who hold values different from her own. The absoluteness of her stance is shaken by time 3. At this time point, she does not talk about assisted suicide (nor about abortion), but death and dying are present in her life and in the interview nonetheless. A friend of her has died of cancer, which made her question the way she deals with that topic. She tells about these recent experiences in the form of a narrative, thereby underlining the importance of them:

Table 7: Bianca's Narrative: "Dealing with Death"

Orientation	So, [some time ago], a good friend of mine died of cancer. [...] And he wrote something like a dying diary on [social media]. [...] You suffered with him. And that was a hard time.
Complication	Because... I asked myself, what would I do if I was in this situation, [...]? Yeah, and that was a question of faith, and I was like, would God let something like that happen? And if yes, then why? And what would that do to my faith? Could I just accept it or would that make me fall from faith?
Evaluation	(smiles) So this was also kind of a good time for me, because in the end I said, no, because in the end we all die. I die at one point. And I think it's important to face this. [...] And this friend wasn't faithful unfortunately. For him, it was really important to take big actions, to travel, to plan his funeral, a big hubbub. He didn't know what would come after that. But he couldn't manage to truly believe. Yeah, so I prayed for him a lot and hoped that he would achieve this, because it gives you hope and consolation. To die just like this and then you're just gone, that's somehow... [...] Then nothing has value, you know, when everything's just gone after you're dead.
Resolution	[I: So, your answer to this question would have been a different one, or rather your handling of the situation?] Yes. Well, I'm saying that now, while I'm not affected (smiles). When you're in this situation, of course you don't know how you... But [...], I mean, if you have that basic orientation in life, you don't completely fall away from that.
Coda	[...] I do believe that my attitude has changed insofar that I take a closer look perhaps or am more open or more sensitive if things like this happen, you understand people in a different way, you know. ³⁰ (Bianca, FDI, time 3)

Bianca's narrative resembles a redemption story in which a negative situation (a friend's death, questioning your own stance) is turned into something good (renewal of a certainty in faith, at the same time higher sensitivity for people with different circumstances), which is a form of narrative generally associated with higher self-acceptance and well-being (cf. McAdams et al., 2001). The "complication" of her story is that she feels compelled to ask herself how she would handle such a situation and if a fate like her friend's would make her question her belief in God. She consciously took that situation as an opportunity to reflect her own beliefs, thereby portraying herself as an open-minded person. Nevertheless, her evaluation is in line with what she believed to be true at time 2 as well: that faith in God is the best way to face such an adverse situation, since the belief in an afterlife gives hope and consolation in her opinion. She prayed for her friend who did not believe until the end, because she believes that without faith, "nothing has value" since there is no prospect of a life after death. Interesting, though, are the "resolution" and the "coda" parts. In the "resolution," she shows that there is at least the possibility to falter when faced with existential circumstances, even though she is quite certain that having her faith laid as a groundwork will help her stick with it nonetheless. But this moment of uncertainty was not visible at time 1 or 2, so it can be inferred that having to witness a friend's death has perhaps made Bianca more susceptible for something beyond her convictions. This is made clear as well in her "conclusion:" she says that this experience has made her more open and more sensitive

for people's individual needs and furthered her understanding. So, while she may still strongly adhere to her faith and consider this the ultimate solution for handling ultimate situations, she got a glimpse into a worldview different from her own by observing her non-faithful friend's management of his own death.

5.1.4 Bianca's (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

Looking now at the other data available for Bianca, it can be said that Bianca's style-aspects maps do not show much change over the course of the three interview timepoints. She has mostly been rated a style 3 (mutual religious style), which indicates a rather conventional approach by usually applying norms and values of trusted authorities. In Bianca's case, it is the Catholic Church that serves as an authority and mainly influences how Bianca sees the world and how she answers to moral questions. The effort to abstract from these claims or to critically reflect them is only rarely visible throughout all of her interviews. Consequently, her religious type does not change either and she is constantly described with type 2, which is considered predominantly conventional. The structural analysis of Bianca's interviews reveals a rather constant conventional approach to the different forms of meaning-making that are part of the interview. However, as we have seen in the analysis above, it would have been wrong to conclude that nothing has changed in Bianca's accounts over the course of 14 years.

To complete the picture, we have the following results from her survey data:

Table 8: Selected Data from Bianca's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Bianca	M (SD)	Bianca	M (SD)	Bianca	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	4.60	2.63 (1.17)	4.40	2.42 (1.12)	4.40	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	3.80	4.35 (0.38)	4.40	4.28 (0.51)	4.80	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	2.60	3.64 (0.75)	2.80	3.57 (0.76)	2.40	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	4.29	3.67 (0.59)	3.43	3.20 (0.40)	2.86	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	4.00	3.67 (0.71)	4.14	3.72 (0.59)	3.86	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.57	4.38 (0.38)	4.71	4.17 (0.39)	4.14	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	4.29	3.86 (0.65)	4.71	3.90 (0.62)	4.43	3.94 (0.65)

<i>purpose in life</i>	4.29	3.77 (0.61)	4.43	3.76 (0.51)	3.71	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	3.86	3.79 (0.68)	4.43	3.86 (0.62)	3.86	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.83	3.42 (0.78)	3.67	3.40 (0.70)	3.25	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	3.58	3.26 (0.58)	4.00	3.25 (0.58)	4.00	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	3.67	3.90 (0.47)	4.33	3.89 (0.49)	4.08	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	3.92	3.74 (0.46)	4.08	3.73 (0.44)	4.00	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	3.67	3.70 (0.49)	4.08	3.76 (0.51)	3.83	3.78 (0.50)

On the Religious Schema Scale, we find scores for *ttt* that are more than one standard deviation higher than those of the whole sample. Along with *xenos* scores that are one SD lower than the sample mean, this suggests a rather fundamentalist mindset in which the rules of her own religion are taken more or less literally and there is little (and even decreasing) appreciation for the new and strange, which is not consonant with her comparably moderate to high scores on the NEO-FFI subscale *openness to experience*. It might be hypothesized that Bianca’s openness ends when the strange appears in the form of a faith that is different from her own. Increasing scores on *ftt* support this hypothesis and indicate that Bianca is opening up her worldview slightly in the course of the 14 years examined here, which is during a time when she raises three children and most likely is confronted with many different views and which may contribute also to her increasing scores on *extraversion*. Her scores on the Ryff Scale are puzzling: while most of her scores are rather high, indicating a mostly content personality, which is in accordance with her tendency to give her narratives a redemptive turn, her scores on *autonomy* and *purpose in life* drop drastically over the years. This finding might hint at a certain dissatisfaction with her position in life which may be related with having to care for three children and possibly not being able to follow the professional path she had planned. Bianca is rather reserved regarding this part of her life story, and we do not learn anything about her ambitions and dreams outside the realm of the family and her faith. Other than the structural analysis, the look into her quantitative data does show change, even though it cannot completely be related to her accounts in the interview.

Having analyzed Bianca’s interviews with the help of content and narrative coding and considering the other data presented here, it can be said that her morals, the way she raises her children, and the way she lives her life is permeated by her Catholic faith. Yet, we still see development: Bianca starts off as a young woman who has just had her first child with motherhood not being too present in her accounts at this time. This changes drastically in her time 2 interview. As has been pointed out, raising her children in the

Catholic faith and teaching them values and morality are a focus in her life at that time (however, going along with a loss of a feeling of *autonomy* and *emotional stability*). By time 3, some of these ideals have been put to the practical test by having a teenager in the house who challenges her views and the way she sees herself as a mother (and likely as a Christian). In some ways, her time 2 interview might be classified as her most dogmatic one by reproducing sometimes radical opinions which, however, stay rather abstract. At time 3, it becomes obvious that some of her attitudes have lost their edges by having been adapted to a life in a more and more secular world, even though her faith itself has not faltered. As for her leitmotif, this might best be described as “Negotiating Catholic faith within a secular society,” since this is a topic that is explicitly taken up in all of her interviews with different emphases while becoming more prominent the older her children get. The way she talks about her marriage and the education of her children becomes less abstract and less dogmatic over time, making way for a more praxis-oriented approach. This development cannot be deduced from looking at her style-aspect maps only and it is a merit of the ATLAS.ti-based content analysis to be able to carve out those subtle changes.

5.2 Jannis—Finding his Faith Again

“And then I had that deep experience during a pilgrimage. And I met my wife there, and that started a whole new chapter. [...] Yes, this conversion or this turning back from unbelief to belief, I would say that it simply saved my life.”³¹

Jannis, as has been mentioned above, was born in the Middle East and grew up in a Catholic community. By the time of his first interview, at age 23, he has moved to Germany, gotten married, and has just had his first child. Jannis reports a time of alienation from his church and his faith during puberty, which is a time in which he listened to heavy metal and was drawn to Satanism and had, in his own words, “false friends” (time 2). During a pilgrimage that he had only reluctantly agreed to attend when he was 18, he had a mystical experience which reinstates his belief in God. During that same pilgrimage he also met Bianca, and it can be said that this was a life-changing event for him in more than one way. It is therefore not surprising that faith plays a big role in Jannis’s life as well³².

5.2.1 Jannis’s Life Reviews and His Religious Journey

Looking back at his life, Jannis is quick to turn the attention to his religious journey in his first-time interview. He tells the story of his deconversion/reconversion experience, which will be detailed below. When asked to divide his life into chapters, he chooses the following division:

So, the first experience for me was just being a child and going to school, that was just a normal year in my life, you know. Just believing. As it was taught, catechism belief, you know. In the beginning, I just learnt what God is and so on. And then [in the 90s], that was, to be blunt, an extreme life. Like, a really bad life. Black life, I would say. For me, that was a black life because I had no vision anymore. And, erm, [after that] ... transformation. From this black life to, let's say, white life. My phrasing. And now I have a lucky life.³³ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

This is a redemption story in a very condensed form. Jannis falls from faith, and through a transformative process turns his black life to white again. This part of his biography is the most important and the most defining section. At different points in the interview, he references this phase by referring to his teenage years during which he was alienated from his family and his faith as “a normal puberty situation” and describing it further when for example asked for crises:

Yes, there were some. Like I said [in the 90s], I don't know the exact year. That wasn't just a day; it was permanent. Yeah, I had a love relationship. And that wasn't so good. That was the first problem. A problem of puberty, everyone has that. That is such a burden. [...] And then I talked to friends [rather than to my parents], and the friends, they said: [...] “Let's listen to hard rock.” [...] “Come to the disco with me and dance and forget everything.” And I felt good then, I said, yes, okay. And so I drifted toward hard rock a bit. Listened more to hard rock. I was so far away from God, I did not even think about God. (firmly) Not at all. But hard rock—I liked that music. But for me it was not just good music, it was like a relief [...]. I mean, everybody likes that, around here, or everywhere. It is good music. [...] When I went into puberty, [I was] like nearly every child who wanted to get away from their parents a bit, because puberty is hard.³⁴ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

By attaching his own development so closely to a normative trajectory, he tries to take away the blame from himself and his parents for his “misbehavior.” Paying more attention to friends and listening to a certain type of music, his alienation from God is something that he depicts as very typical for teenagers. In other words, his “deviant” behavior is normalized and may be seen as a necessity of growing up, and as conventional. This whole paragraph can be seen as an autobiographical argument referring to a developmental status. So what Jannis describes is a normal teenager behavior, and he relies on that normality. His attraction to hard rock and his alienation are no longer individual choices but become something more compulsory. Hard rock music here serves as a representative for the temptations of the secular life, envisioning an angry, protesting younger audience as common ground. Jannis, however, does not seem very keen on explaining his motifs for feeling attracted to hard rock and Satanism on a content level (if and how Satanism really got into that mix is elaborated at no point) but prefers to excuse this “lapse” with circumstances at that time, e.g., his peer group and a general discontent due to that unhealthy relationship. He puts a lot more focus on his re-conversion, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

While referring to a norm seems to be very important to him in his first interview at age 23, it is interesting to see that he does not refer to that norm as much in his second interview:

And, like I said, during puberty I had to rebel a bit, had to make my own experiences and had my downs and my problems and walked away from religion. [...] There are also negative relationships [...] There were these friendships, I had good friends, but at the same time I also had bad friends who showed me bad ways. And that changed me as a person. [I: You mean, the typical relationships as a youth?] Yes, in a way, but at the same time... things like heavy metal. Heavy metal isn't necessarily negative, but I went into a negative direction of heavy metal, like, everything bad that you can think of. This had an impact on me. False friends—you can have them, but you don't necessarily have to. There were bad relationships, this one girlfriend. We were always having crises. And I was also having problems at school, so there were different factors: puberty, always rebelling, all at the same time. And I did not have somebody who would tell me, "Come on, I'll show you the way," something like that. And that's how I got lost.³⁵ (Jannis, FDI, time 2)

He seems more self-assured and more pragmatic about his juvenile behavior as well as less defensive, even though he still names the "wrong" friends and the unhealthy relationship with a girl as important factors for his "apostasy." In the end, he comes up with something that was not obvious for him in his first interview, perhaps due to the relatively short amount of time that had passed since his puberty. Falling from faith could have been prevented if he had had someone who showed him the way.

While at time 1 and time 2, Jannis chose to orient his life review toward a perceived norm, he takes a strikingly different approach at time 3:

Yes, I'd have to name several chapters. Like, the beginning chapter would be "learning," and the middle part, yes, "testing, collecting experiences." And for the current chapter, I would give as a title, yes, still "collecting experiences," but also "living." That's a good chapter, "living." (laughs) [I: Can you elaborate a bit on the single chapters?] Yes, well, the "learning" chapter is more or less, at the beginning, time at school, studying or vocational training, and then at one point, I mean, this whole thing, until you're 18, you learn a lot. [...] After the age of 18, you start working sometimes or continue studying. And that's what you call experiences, I would say. And in the end it's like, you have the experience and you have learned. Of course, my mother says, "You never stop learning." [...] [I: Could you give examples?] Yes, so, my examples would be, you follow your professional path, like, you know, I studied, [...] and then at one point I had collected so many experiences in this area and everything was interesting and new for me. [...] In the private sphere, of course, family. That's the time when simultaneously the family was created and so on. And for me, that was all new. Having kids and all that. That's also an experience. Positive experience. [...] Through my work, I gathered a lot of experiences, and I can pass them on to my kids.³⁶ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

It becomes apparent that Jannis is now, in his mid-30s and being a father of three, is able to structure his life review in a more abstract way yet not completely independent from

milestones like school. At the same time, he gives away more personal information aside from his religious socialization than at the other timepoints. His religious journey is not mentioned in this paragraph, which is a huge difference to his other interviews. Instead, his professional life and his family life become more prominent. At this point, he has integrated his conversion experience in his life that much that it does not seem necessary to mention it at once (later, as can be seen below, he elaborates on that experience quite a lot, though). His life in this answer is presented as a constant flow, and the ups and downs that it contains come up later when other questions are asked. For example, his crisis during puberty is elaborated on when he is asked for meaningful relationships in the past:

There were positive and negative [relations]. Of course, I also had negative friends that had a negative influence. That was during my puberty phase. That's basically the bad that you can have. [...] I was influenced in a negative way as in trying everything what there is during puberty, and a lot of alcohol was involved and stuff like that. And that was negative, in my opinion, like, the experience wasn't so nice, looking back. Of course, when you're in it, you're just dull and, yes, just in it. Looking back, I may find that bad and therefore I'd say it was a negative experience, but it is an experience. (smiles) [...] Because, of course, when you drink from time to time, it's not a problem, but when you drink too much and do stupid things, then it turns to being negative. [I: Do you also have an example for the positive relations?] [...] When I got married, or shortly before that, I experienced a new faith, I returned to my faith, my Christian faith. And I was all new and juvenile in that sense, regarding my faith, and so my friends, who are also faithful, they gave me strength in this faith. [I: So you walked away from your faith and then came back?] Exactly, because of puberty, because of bad friends, I walked away from my faith. I put other things to the foreground, and then it was like a return for me.³⁷ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

In this answer, Jannis seems more distanced from his adolescent rebellion than in the other interviews (which he is, regarding the elapsed time). He even has adopted a milder view on his juvenile antics, stating that he would still consider his behavior as negative, but he can today just call it an "experience." His choice of music and any references to Satanism are missing here, making this puberty crisis less vivid and less formative maybe even. There is less regret and less blame in his account, and the friends are not mentioned as actors or as persuaders. He appears to have made his peace with that phase. Interestingly, he also mentions his positive relations, forming a stark contrast to those negative relations in so far as those new friends help him on his way of finding back to his faith and giving him strength. He appears to be happy in that homogenous group of fellow Christians with his faith being the central part of his life.

Jannis's Pilgrimage

It is therefore not surprising that the most important event in Jannis's biography is the pilgrimage where he rediscovers his faith, which could be categorized as a re-conversion narrative. This narration takes up a large part in all of his interviews. In his first-time interview, he describes it as follows:

Table 9: Jannis's Narrative: "Rediscovering His Faith in Medjugorje"

Orientation	So then I got to go to Medjugorje. It was funny because I wanted to go to Italy, to the World Youth Day, and my mother wanted to travel to Rome, but she didn't know what was the cheapest, we didn't have much money. And then she found that pilgrimage, which was cheap. But it was one week in Medjugorje. Nobody knew where that was. And she was like, okay, you'll get more vacation. One week in Rome, one in Medjugorje. That's in Bosnia. And I said, fine, the main thing is to get out of [Arabic country A]. (laughs)
Complication	Yes, and I was happy, and then, when I arrived in Medjugorje, everything seemed strange to me because everybody wanted to pray, to do praise, and to sing. Medjugorje has a Marian apparition, like Lourdes or Fatima. [...] But it's still happening there. [...] And in the beginning, I was skeptical.
Evaluation	But somehow, it was such a strange day that—boom! —I started believing. I can't explain how that happened, and I am not the only one. Maybe millions of others who go there say the same.
Resolution	And I met my wife there. At first, we were just friends. [...] When I was back in [Arabic country A], I wrote her e-mails, and then she invited me to visit, and then sparks flew immediately. I met her parents who also go to Medjugorje regularly.
Coda	She was more faithful than I was at first. I was at the beginning; I had just started being faithful again. ³⁸ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

By using the form of a classic narrative according to Labov and Waletzky (1967), Jannis underlines the importance of this story for his life and his subjective development. In other terms, this is how he internally conceptualizes his religious identity narrative. Starting with the topos of a "favorable opportunity" (he wants to get away from home and then there is his mother's offer to go on that pilgrimage), he implies that his original plan was not to go there to find his faith. Rather, this portrayal is in accordance with the stereotypical picture of an apparently lazy teenager who has to be shoved out of the door by his mother, making his story even more plausible. The conversion he describes here is actually a *re*-conversion—he goes back to his old faith, thereby re-establishing continuity in his religious trajectory. Moreover, what can be seen here again is his orientation towards the norm. He suddenly believes again, which he cannot explain on a cognitive level, but he reassures himself by saying that others experienced it in the same way. Another important concept introduced here is the connection between his faith and his relationship, or more precisely, his family life. He stresses that his wife and her parents share the same faith and that they were guides at the time when his faith was still new (see paragraph below for more details).

It is not surprising that Jannis at time 2 also tells the story of his re-conversion:

When I was about 18, there was a new chapter where I had to discover religion and the Christians anew and, so to say, converted again from not being faithful to being faithful. I was still a Christian, I never formally left. But I just wasn't faithful. And then I had that deep experience during a pilgrimage. [...] And I met my wife there, and that started a whole new chapter. [...] Yes, this conversion or this turning back from unbelief to belief, I would say that it simply saved my life. I was pretty much

lost, I would say, and then I met my wife. [...] [I: Was there a certain point...?] Yes, during that pilgrimage, there was this Marian apparition, which is still happening there. And there I felt the Mother of God. Incredible! [...] [I: Did you go to that place of pilgrimage for a special reason?] Yes and no. Yes. I was there because I just wanted to get out, have a little vacation—not a religious reason because I had no religious purpose anymore. You see, I wasn't faithful anymore. And my mother just sent me on vacation, and then everything changed, 180 degrees, about that, you know. [...] And I am sure, in my personal opinion, that was no coincidence that I came there and that everything changed. Yes, there's that. I met my wife there, basically.³⁹ (Jannis, FDI time 2)

While the introduction of how he went on a pilgrimage in the first place is rather short during this interview, the most important elements (going there despite not being faithful, becoming faithful again, and meeting his wife) are there. The part of how he became faithful again is more elaborated during his narrative. Moreover, there is a very strong evaluation in the first part: "Yes, this conversion or this turning back from unbelief to belief, I would say that it simply saved my life." This level of importance is not articulated at time 1, perhaps because it is something that Jannis needed more time to verbalize. The general motifs named here were also present at time 1: the deepening of his faith, a form of continuity and again, the connection between his newfound faith and his relationship. Searching for meaning and for something to hold onto has become more prominent at this timepoint. The immediate feeling of transcendence when feeling the Mother of God is named more directly here than in his first narrative. What sounded like a favorable opportunity at time 1 sounds like a fateful event at time 2.

This formative experience is told in more detail at time 3. Starting with how he got to Medjugorje in the first place (this time, like at time 1, framing it rather as a favorable opportunity), he describes his sojourn in Medjugorje as follows:

And the first week was in Medjugorje, that's a place where the Mother of God or Mary makes an apparition, even today still. [...] I didn't believe that, didn't think much about it. [...] On the first day I was skeptical because everybody was praying, had a rosary [...]. And then, on the second and third day, of course, a special experience, [...] an apparition. That does not happen often that there are group invitations, but there was one that day. [...] And by 10 o'clock, there was a prayer and then, how can I explain this? [...] I started praying as well. Even though I had forgotten how to pray. I also sang along. Even though I... that was group pressure, if you want to put it like that, but I sang along anyway. And then at some point, I, by accident... what does that mean, by accident? I just let go of my problems or sorrows. [...] And suddenly there was the apparition, everybody became quiet, like, silence and quiet. And then, at this moment, while I was praying and renouncing my problems, I felt an infinite warmth. Nearly pain. I mean, not really pain, but strong in the heart. [...] And at the same time a sort of, I don't know, just love, or a funny feeling, just peace, if you want to put it like this. [...] And from then on, I think I changed 180 degrees, completely. That was the big turnaround. From then on, I confessed everything and let go of everything I had done and had been. And from then I believed in a strong way that this exists. And this experience... it's hard

to convey it with words, but I cannot give you the feeling, this has to be experienced for oneself. [...] And then I also met my wife there.⁴⁰ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

He makes a point of stressing his skeptical stance more than once, even though, in the end, he gives in to what he labels here as “group pressure” by singing along. This is similar to his other accounts and makes his conversion experience even more believable. Following his line of implicit argumentation, it can be assumed that convincing a heretic should be a lot harder and would need really good arguments. This account, which has been shortened considerably, takes a different direction than the others. His focus is on the experience level, and he gets lost in his own accounts and seems deeply moved by them. He acknowledges at the end of the above quote that this experience basically cannot be captured by words, which is mirrored in his account in some places where he is struggling to find the right phrasing. This is interesting because he actually did capture it with words in a more coherent fashion in his earlier interviews. At time 3, most of his other elaborations seem to have developed a more critical, abstract structure. Yet this conversion experience does not fit into this mindset. Farther below, it will be analyzed whether this can be found in his other answers regarding his religiosity as well.

First, I will turn to Jannis’s important relationships, since they seem to play an important role in his self-definition as a Christian.

5.2.2 Jannis’s Relationship with Bianca and Their Children

The Marriage from Jannis’s Perspective

While Bianca only rarely directly addresses her marriage with Jannis, Jannis himself is a bit more outspoken, for example, at time 1, when asked about important relationships:

Yes, my wife. So, I met my wife. At first, she was like a friend for me. I liked her and she was faithful, and she was nice enough to invite me to Germany. [...] And there, it just clicked and we had a good relationship, then a love relationship and we got married. And that changed my life. Like, I came to Germany because of her.⁴¹ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

When Jannis and Bianca met at the pilgrimage site, Jannis was having a crisis of faith and had just found his way back to his old faith at this place. When he mentions in the statement above that “she was faithful,” this is meaningful as she has obviously helped him on his way back to being faithful again. She and her family were important for Jannis because with them, he could live his new-found faith as a community praxis. Besides an obviously harmonious relationship, he emphasizes the importance of the faith he shares with his wife with this faith being constitutive for their marriage. While Bianca is obviously a bit hesitant to talk about her husband at that time point, for Jannis she is an important pillar in the new course that his life took, not only because he left his home country to live with her in Germany. This is underlined with the answer he gives when asked for moments of joy or breakthrough experiences:

Yes. So, when I got married, I was so happy, for me that was (searching for words), such a lucky event. Because, since I married, I have the feeling that I have responsibility. I have a partner who I'm always with. She also believes. And I pray with her. I got parents-in-law who are faithful as well. For me, they are like my parents. Because my parents are far away.⁴² (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

It becomes clear here that the marriage means taking responsibility for another person. Furthermore, it is seen by Jannis as an opportunity to share his life with someone who he can also share his faith with. Having re-converted only recently, this is an important point for him, since this also means to be embedded within a surrounding that appreciates his faith. The parents-in-law are a welcome addition and even serve as substitute parents for Jannis, whose biological parents live abroad. Summed up, Jannis paints his young married life in golden colors, emphasizing the joy it brings him to have found her and her family.

In the second interview, his remarks about his wife are scarce, but he does mention again the way they met when looking back at his life:

I was in Medjugorje and I met my wife from Germany there and then we started a new chapter in Germany. We got married there and it's a whole new chapter, you know. We are both faithful, religious and [...] we helped each other and taught each other in faith.⁴³ (Jannis, FDI, time 2)

At this timepoint, his focus clearly is on the beliefs they share, and on the possibility to grow and develop together within their faith. His migration and the importance of being welcomed in a community in Germany are not mentioned here.

At time 3, when asked about current relationships, his marriage is what comes to his mind at once:

So, my marriage, that's the most important basically. [...] For me, it's like, thanks to my wife, well, it would be incorrect to say I found my faith. No, that's not true. But it increased, because she is also faithful, as faithful as me. And together, we let our faith grow. And that made me strong. And we still think that faith created our love and that our love is just as strong as our faith.⁴⁴ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

Jannis closely connects his growth in faith with his wife, similar to his statement at time 2, even though he had found his way back to faith itself previously. Together with his equally faithful wife, his faith can develop; it is what defines his marriage and guarantees its stability. Faith as the starting point and the core of their relationship could be found implicitly in his earlier interviews as well. Here it is more directly phrased than before.

Jannis and his Children—Passing on Values

At time 1, Jannis has only recently become a father. Therefore, his elaborations are rather abstract and he speaks of a generalized responsibility at some points in the interview. While Bianca talks about taking care for child and husband and raising the child well, Jannis phrases it like this when asked how he goes about making an important decision:

First, I take a look at what it is. Whether it's important for me. [...] For example, if I'm looking for a job or want to go to university. [...] Then I ask myself what is important for society. [...] And I look at my family, at my life. What is important is that I feel good with it. And then I do it. And then it's a decision, for work, for the future, for my family or any decision.⁴⁵ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

Here, we find a more generalized approach to generativity and taking care of the new family than Bianca has. For Jannis, it is important to take his and his family's well-being into consideration when making a decision along with society at large. This might be connected with a traditional role model in which the father is responsible for feeding the family, but since this is not elaborated in either of their interviews, this remains vague.

At time 2, by now having three children, Jannis mentions his family when asked what makes his life meaningful:

It definitely has meaning because I'm thankful for everything. I live my life as Christ wants me to or I try at least to get as close to holiness as possible. If I succeed or not, everybody is sinful and everybody may commit sin. I'm only human, that's what they say. But for me, that life that I'm living is completely meaningful. I have a family, I have kids, I'm thankful for everything and I have a big sense in life. Like, everything: faith, kids, life, my wife.⁴⁶ (Jannis, FDI, time 2)

Here, the close connection between the different parts of his life becomes apparent, and one could surmise that they are not different parts but facets of a whole entity with faith being lived within the family, thereby giving the family unit meaning and stability. He does not elaborate on any moral opinions or something else that he wants to teach his children beside raising them in faith by integrating them in their faith practice. His conceptualization of this dynamic is different at time 3, given the fact that his children are now older and certain topics come more into focus. His answer regarding beliefs, values, and commitments reads (in a shortened version) as follows:

I talked about faith in length, about the values of faith. But also family values, like, when I pass on this good morality to my kids, for example. Morality is a big abstract thing which can be made better with faith, but also with completely normal things. Morality is important, this is a good value. For example, there is this, how shall I put this, respect for other people, respect for one's parents. Of course, people of different faith will say that too. That's why I say, it is mixed among many people, it's all morality. Also sexuality is an important point with faith. And all these values, that are given to faith by the Ten Commandments, I pass this on. Basically, what's in the Bible is valuable for me. [...] [I: Can you elaborate on that?] For example, there is sex before marriage, for me that's a value about which the Christian is like: nay, no, you know? Then there is this pornographic stuff that one could also watch. For me that's without value and that's why I pass this on to my family and friends.⁴⁷ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

In general, he pleads for passing on the rules his faith provides, being certain that they provide a solid basis of values. However, he admits that other religions (albeit omitting

non-religious people) might have similar moralities. When he elaborates on his example regarding sexuality, it becomes clear that, for him, the Christian approach is favored over the secular temptations (those will be taken up again in the next paragraph). However, while this may be something that is a current topic in his family, his elaborations remain on a more abstract and general level.

Having now seen the importance of his faith for his whole life, I will analyze more closely the way Jannis describes his faith and his value system.

5.2.3 Jannis's Faith and the Supremacy of his own Religion

Jannis's Subjective Religiosity

To get a more detailed picture of the way Jannis views his own religiosity, see here the data compiled of the questionnaire and the interview at all three timepoints. Jannis identifies as “equally religious and spiritual” constantly, and has solely at wave 2 given definitions of the terms “spirituality” and “religion.”

Wave 1: Here it is interesting that Jannis starts his answer by stating what he is not. It may be hypothesized that he has been faced with the accusation of being a fanatic before and he tries to meet this criticism before it even appears in the interview. However, he freely admits to following the rules the Catholic church teaches him, displaying a clear orientation toward fixed authorities. Additionally, he emphasizes that his faith and God are the top priority in his life. All of this might be categorized as fairly fanatic by a critical audience, but the crucial distinction for Jannis is that while he wishes as many people as possible would believe what he does, he does not seem to be willing to evangelize anybody. Interestingly, there is no further reference to being spiritual as well as religious in this answer, as can be found in the other answers.

Wave 2: It is not completely clear what Jannis means when he defines “spirituality” as “to believe with the spiritual eye.” Reading this in contrast to his definition of “religion” (“to believe with the mind”), it may be argued that he makes a distinction here between a belief on the intellectual level, which would be religion and a belief that goes beyond that, evoking the spiritual realm to some degree. In his interview answer, his focus this time is on the practical dimension of his faith and his religious praxis being the main point of his definition. And while he states that all three concepts offered by the question belong together in his own understanding, he attempts to differentiate them anyway, interestingly making a distinction between believing in God (which would be faithful) and believing in other higher powers and the Holy Spirit (which would be spiritual). Being religious for him contains that practical aspect that he had mentioned before. All in all, his self-identification in the survey seems to match this more elaborated answer.

Table 10: Data on Jannis's Subjective Religiosity

Jannis	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	spirituality: not asked religion: not asked	spirituality: to believe with the spiritual eye ⁴⁸ religion: to believe with the mind ⁴⁹	spirituality: not answered religion: not answered
self-assessment	equally religious and spiritual	equally religious and spiritual	equally religious and spiritual
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	So, I believe in... like, I'm not a zealot in my faith, you know? I'm not, like, erm, going on crusades (laughs) or something, no. I am simply... I believe in God, that's my own opinion. I hope and I pray that a lot of people will believe that too. Because for me, that's the right thing. I am faithful. I just do what the Catholic church teaches us. [I: What does that mean for you?] Yes, faith is my whole life. Without faith, there's nothing. For me. It means everything to me. My God is first priority for me. ⁵⁰	I would say faithful, spiritual and religious all in one. (laughs) For me, this means I'm a practicing Christian. That's faithful for me. It means, I try to practice my faith, to move it, it's not a dead faith, but a living faith. [...] So, religious, spiritual and faithful of course have different meanings probably, but for me ... all I can say is, "I am faithful" means all three of them. [...] I believe in higher powers, I believe in the Holy Spirit, that's more spiritual again. [...] I believe in God, that's being faithful. And religious: I practice my Christianity. And for me that's religious. ⁵¹	Yes, I consider myself religious or faithful. But not enough. [I: Why not?] Like I said, my faith is growing until I die and that's why I'm, if you want to put it like that, [...] always growing and that's why it's always small, [...]. Being religious means to just take a religion, accept this religion. For me that's religious. Believing, because you believe in this religion. Because there are so many who are baptized or took jobs [...]. But they don't believe it. And that's a difference, religious, faithful, the third stage would be spiritual and for me, that's, I don't want to say highest stage, but the stage in which you really believe in higher forces, really, really believe in it and actually believe that through faith things can be changed, not only through practiced faith, routines or traditions, but faith can really heal or do wonders. And that's spiritual, exactly. ⁵²

Wave 3: The way he starts his answer at this timepoint shows that Jannis wants to be perceived as a modest and humble person. He states that his faith, despite growing constantly and—obviously—despite the effort he lies into developing it, is still small. However, this part of the answer describes a continuity of deepening of his faith on his religious journey. In the middle section of his answer, a criticism can be heard, directed toward people who become members of the church not because they share the belief system but because they share practical concerns. It becomes clear that Jannis does not endorse this behavior and it's the first time in these answers that such a critique is mentioned. Most interesting is his definition of being spiritual in this answer, which reveals a concept that was not present in the other two interviews: spirituality is defined as a higher stage, a state which is obviously free of doubt and open for wonders and other experiences beyond the intellectual realm. For Jannis, this state seems to be an ideal and is to be achieved by a regular praxis.

Summed up, his statements differ regarding their focus: at time 1, there is obviously an imagined critical counterpart, the other answers are less defensive in that respect. His answer at time 3 seems to be the logical continuation of the way he emphasizes his religious praxis at time 2, since the desirable higher stage of being truly spiritual, without having any more doubts and just truly believing, can be achieved. His self-identification as “equally religious and spiritual” gets progressively fleshed out over the years.

Jannis's Image of God

As a next step, we look at the way Jannis describes how his image of God has changed over time:

So, I believed in God like any child does and felt that He was good. And he was like a father for me in the beginning. [...] And then, [in the 90s], I went away from God. Like, I met other friends that did not believe in God. Erm, that was, let's say, like Antichrist, you know. Heavy Metal, hard rock, that's just music for some people, but for me it was running away from God, you know. [...] Until, [later in the 90s], when I went on that pilgrimage, I felt, let's put it bluntly, the Mother of God. [...] I confessed there, after not having gone to confession for many years. And there I felt that there was someone who helped me. [...] And now I have my old faith. I believe in God, Jesus, Mary. In everything what normal faithful people believe in. [I: And how would you describe your image of God today?] Yes, well, I believe in God. I believe in everything, the Catholic catechism, like... [...]. So, for me God is always stronger, I always believe in God. some days it's less, some days it's more, that's normal, I'm human, you know. I'm not the Pope or something. But yes, I try my best to keep my faith.⁵³ (Jannis, FDI, time 1)

[In the beginning], it was just a routine form of faith, [...]. I always knew that God exists, even in my down phase, but the relationship with God was very bad at that time. God for me was like an opponent, I put all the blame on him and told him, “It's your fault that I am like this.” And I fought with him on the inside. Like, very hard. [...] and my view has changed again after the conversion in Medjugorje, when I realized that it's not god's fault, but mine, [...] and my view changed and I saw that He is merciful and love all people [...] and He forgave me and that changed

my view on God. [...] Like I said, for me, he is now like God the Father, like a father for me, God. How He cared for me, always preparing a path for me, [...] Before, it was just a routine. I had to do it, go to church, because everybody was doing it and my parents were doing it, and now, I know I go to church because I want to be with God.⁵⁴ (Jannis, FDI, time 2)

Basically, it has not has changed, my image of God because I believe in God. But life itself, it's getting more difficult to maintain a relationship with God. [...] Yes, so it's a deep, amicable relationship with God. [...] And so, everything that I do, I think that's what's accompanying me. And for me, that's the most important thing. So, yes, basically nothing has changed, it's always been like that. Once stronger, then weaker, that's always a struggle, a daily struggle, for everyone. [...] But, yes, you always have to realize that we live in a world in which faith is not in top position. [...] And, of course, I have friends who believe and I have this whole community that I'm part of where everyone is faithful. It's not too hard for me. And I stand by it, strongly, and that's why I'm not too bothered by this. [I: And what does your image of God mean for you today?] Still a big image of a father, of a protector and trust, great trust, so to say, yes.⁵⁵ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

At times 1 and 2, Jannis draws a line from his childhood faith to his current image of God. At both times, being brought up in a religious environment is presented as an important topic. At time 1, the image of God as father is brought up before he turns to his phase of disaffiliation, which is described with drastic terms (“Antichrist”). His conversion experience is discussed in more detail above. The primary point here is that after that direct experience with the transcendence, he claims to have found back to his old faith and to the “normal” way people believe. This is remarkable, considering that it might be expected to report some kind of changed approach to faith. However, Jannis perceives being faithful as a desirable norm and the time he spent away from this norm as an unhappy exception. At time 1, his faith as described as oriented toward the Catholic church, even though he admits to experiencing ups and downs in his belief, which is justified with the topos of the flawed human being that he is.

What is interesting at time 2 is that he describes his “down phase” as well, but in contrast to his account at time 1, he says that he still maintained a relationship with God, albeit a strained one. It may even be argued that his external struggles and adolescent rebellion are mirrored in his internal struggle and fights with God. His conversion experience still plays an important role, but in a different way: he is not brought back to God, but he realizes that God was not at fault for this difficult time, but only Jannis himself was to blame. After this, he claims to have changed his view on God, and unlike at time 1, it does not seem as if he just returned to his old faith. Instead, he has renewed his relationship and given it a different basis by not just following routines, but embracing practices out of his own accord. This is a very different emphasis than at time 1.

At time 3, the difficult phase during puberty is not taken up in his answer (and, as has been described above, does not play such a big role in his whole account). Rather, the focus is on the continuity of his faith. But there is still some bad influence reported this time, coming from “life itself” and a “world in which faith is not a top priority.” This criticism of the secular society was also found in his answer to question 20 (see above). This conflict with society leads to struggles within himself and with his own faith or with

God. In the end, his trust in God is strong and he feels supported by the community he mainly stays in. This point is made stronger here than in his other interviews, probably due to the fact that he is now more able to engage in other social relationships than in the years before that with his children being older. His image of God as a father and as a protecting entity, is emphasized in the interview and can also be found in his answers on the Representation of God scale in which the benevolent God is the most prevalent facet for him.

Morality in Jannis's Interviews—Talking about Evil

For Jannis, his religious beliefs are formative for him and are the foundation for his actions and the upbringing of his children. An orientation toward fixed authorities and a priority of religious rules compared to other moral rules can be found throughout his interviews. The belief in the supremacy of his own faith is made more explicit when he talks about the evil in the world:

I feel like the evil in the world is always getting stronger. Even though there are many people who believe and pray and convert many people, the evil is still there, and it will stay until, let's say, the Catholic Church says, Jesus has returned. After that, the evil will be gone, but for now, it is still on the rise. A lot of people are against the church. That is evil too. For me at least. Like Antichrist. Satanism and Antichrist, that's evil. [...] I am not the expert, but I know that quite well. I can comment on that and I have had my experiences. This is evil. (Jannis, FDI, time 1)⁵⁶

He is convinced that the evil in the world can be extinguished by the second coming of Christ, but as long as that does not happen, evil people will keep getting more power, despite religious people doing their best to convert them. With referral to his biographical background he makes a strong autobiographical argument by saying that he himself has experienced what it is like to meddle with those evil powers, stating that anti-Christian trends are evil.

Interestingly, his answer to that question has a different twist ten years later:

So, evil is anything that brings us to commit sins. The evil basically is the so-called devil. [...] Just believing in God and negating the existence of the devil, that's wrong. But I am sure, and I believe, or I know that God is stronger than the devil, that's why I'm not afraid of him. [...] There are a lot of people who say, "Oh, the devil. Don't speak about him," but for me that's not the case. [...] What is not light becomes dark, something like that.⁵⁷ (Jannis, FDI, time 2)

In the first quote, his focus is on how the evil in the world is becoming stronger and fighting against the evil forces is mandatory. In the second quote, it instead sounds like good and evil are both necessary parts of human life, and one cannot exist without the other. Speaking of "the so-called devil" points to a reflective distance he did not yet have at time 1. Maintaining equilibrium seems to be the main objective for Jannis. This points to a development: The evil becomes less terrifying, and that may be due to the fact that Jan-

nis is now more stable in his new-found faith than he was at time 1. He does not feel threatened anymore. Due to a developed (self-)reflective distance, there is obviously less necessity for keeping the evil “outside,” but he can face him as a part of human life.

In his third interview, the devil topic is taken up again when he is asked to explain what causes evil:

Well, in Christianity, we believe in God, but at the same time in the devil too. The devil is not a god, he is just an angel that withstood God or did not want to listen or was disobedient. And through this devil, we believe evil was put into humans. [...] And of course, humans commit sins, the devil is constantly working on this, it's a fight between God and the devil, he always tries to take advantage of them and God tries to win them over with the greatest love. And God does not do this with violence, instead He granted us the free will and you can decide for or against it. [...] Temptation may exist in different things, [...] pornography for me is a temptation which is the devil, but also all this murder and the violence. [...] From the secular view, a murder has happened, a person has killed someone, and that's really bad. [...] And that can be explained in a secular, juridical way, but it can also be explained with my faith.⁵⁸ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

Jannis takes some time to explain the theological background of his concept of evil because the interviewer asked him to do so. Thereby, he unfolds the basis of his faith differently than he did before: the focus is on the struggle between God and devil, but on a more abstract, theological level than in the other interviews. This may be interpreted as a form of coping with his own background of having fallen from faith, of having given in to the temptation the devil had offered. He emphasizes that God's strongest weapon is His love and the free will that He has granted humankind. Jannis has in the end chosen the “good” side, and his elaborations need not remain as personal as at time 2. In the end, he even arrives at drawing a comparison with the secular system of judging good and evil, implying that this is basically the same principle as the clerical path he is following. This, as well as other examples mentioned above, hints to a certain openness or maybe a tolerance toward other approaches, even though this always remains vague. His focus is decidedly on his Christian belief and value system that he still deems superior, or at least more than sufficient for himself and his family.

5.2.4 Jannis's (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

Looking at results from his survey (Table 11), one can see some interesting scores for Jannis.

Table 11: Selected Data from Jannis's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Jannis	M (SD)	Jannis	M (SD)	Jannis	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	4.60	2.63 (1.17)	5.00	2.42 (1.12)	5.00	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	4.20	4.35 (0.38)	4.40	4.28 (0.51)	5.00	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	2.20	3.64 (0.75)	2.80	3.57 (0.76)	2.80	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	4.14	3.67 (0.59)	3.00	3.20 (0.40)	3.57	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	4.14	3.67 (0.71)	4.29	3.72 (0.59)	3.57	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.86	4.38 (0.38)	4.57	4.17 (0.39)	4.29	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	4.57	3.86 (0.65)	4.71	3.9 (0.62)	4.43	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	4.29	3.77 (0.61)	4.29	3.76 (0.51)	3.57	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	4.43	3.79 (0.68)	4.57	3.86 (0.62)	4.00	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.75	3.42 (0.78)	3.58	3.40 (0.70)	3.33	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	3.75	3.26 (0.58)	3.42	3.25 (0.58)	3.58	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	3.92	3.90 (0.47)	3.67	3.89 (0.49)	3.58	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	4.42	3.74 (0.46)	4.25	3.73 (0.44)	3.92	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	4.33	3.70 (0.49)	4.33	3.76 (0.51)	3.83	3.78 (0.50)

His scores for *ttt* are one to two standard deviations higher than the average and even reach a maximum of 5 in waves 2 and 3. When reading his interviews, it becomes clear that he has an almost literal belief in the Bible and the word of God, which is similar to his wife's. His score for *xenos* is substantially lower than the sample mean. However, it rises considerably in wave 2 and is nearly within the range of the mean at that timepoint. Xenosophia being defined as the wisdom that might emerge from the encounter with the strange (Streib, 2018), one can see here that Jannis has developed more of that reli-

gious schema, which also reflects in his answers in the interview. On the Ryff Scale, one sees that Jannis's scores on *purpose in life* and *self-acceptance* are stable or slightly higher in waves 1 and 2 with his values being higher than the average of the total sample. This indicates that he has settled down and is at peace with his environment and content with his life, possibly because of his family situation and his stable faith along with his relationship with God. Interestingly and not quite explainable by his interview answers, one sees a drop in both of those subscales in wave 3, mirroring the downward movement that has also been reported for Bianca. Remarkably, one also finds a drop in his scores on the NEO-FFI subscales *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness*, both of which were scored high in the first two waves. While his scores are still within the range of the sample, this might hint to a personal or professional crisis that is not addressed in the interview.

Turning to his ratings in the structural analysis of the FDIs, it becomes clear that there is not much development to be found here. They focus on style 3 (mutual religious style), indicating that Jannis is mainly concerned with interpersonal relationships like meeting the expectations of others and overall applying a rather conventional and group-oriented approach to the world. This does not seem to mirror in the structure of his answers. Ratings according to the *Manual* stay more or less constant over time, which also makes him a “stayer” in type 2, a predominantly conventional type whose overall approach to questions of faith and meaning-making stays constantly within a range of conventions mostly offered by the Catholic church. Thus, Jannis is portrayed here as a “stayer,” a person who stays within his faith tradition and whose religious type does not change over the course of his three interviews. Yet, as the content analysis has shown, Jannis *did* leave the faith he was brought up in, even though there never was a formal de-conversion. On coming back, he saw his old childhood faith with new eyes. He could appreciate again the teachings, the morality, and the community that this faith provided. This story arc recalls the pathway described by Josselson (2017) in which some of those that were found to be searchers as college students in later life settled down and became guardians, metaphorically or literally guarding the traditions they grew up in and which they had left for a time. Over the years, Jannis has become surer of himself and his faith. His approach at looking at his past life has changed with that, too. The story of his re-conversion still has an important function in his life narrative and cumulates in the statement at time 2: “Yes, this conversion or this turning back from unbelief to belief, I would say that it simply saved my life,” making this story a religious identity narrative with a clearer arc of tension at time 2 and, overall, can be identified as the leitmotif of his interviews. At time 3, the story is less structured again and resembles a stream of consciousness in which he lets himself be led by the emotions that are closely connected with this experience. This is not in accordance with his overall appearance at time 3 since his overall attitude seems to become more analytical over the years.

5.3 Bianca and Jannis—Comparison and Conclusion

Bianca and Jannis were very young when they were interviewed for the first time. They were already married and had just had their first child, which is unusual in German society⁵⁹. This couple offered the possibility to accompany two people from emerging to young adulthood. And while for most of their peers this phase may be characterized by searching movements and by finding their place in life, it seems that Bianca and Jannis have found that place already, and it has become clear in the analyses above that this can be attributed to their strong faith. However, the way they talk about that faith, their lives, their family, and their relationship differs. Jannis lays an emphasis on the stabilizing and defining aspect faith has for their marriage and for himself, and this stays constant over all of his interviews, at times granting this relationship an almost holy coalition. In Bianca's accounts, while also emphasizing the importance their faith has for them as a family, the relationship does not get such a special role. At time 3, she is more concerned with the more secular aspects of being a long-term couple. Moreover, Bianca talks at length about the problems with their eldest son at time 3, which is not mentioned by Jannis. This may be seen as a sign that Bianca is more responsible for such "worldly" matters, yet it is implied in her account that the conflict mainly exists between her and her son, which may not involve Jannis. The community along with his wife and child is what secured Jannis' faith when he was still "new" to it, and this aspect gains more importance in his account, while Bianca's faith never was so much at stake and therefore this is not a crucial part of her definition of her relationship with Jannis. However, Bianca does report a time of doubt during puberty as well. But for her, this was not a problem with her faith itself, but rather with justifying it in front of her peers and her secular surroundings. Her way to deal with this conflict was to find an intellectual approach and to consume literature, thereby putting her faith on more solid ground and even leading to a deepening. This intellectual approach is missing from Jannis's accounts. He is very focused on the experience dimension and on the emotions that are associated with being faithful. This is interesting and unexpected since with the other two couples in this study, it is the other way around, with the women being more focused on feeling and community, while their husbands take a more abstract approach.

The connection with the church is important for both participants. The analysis of their answers to question 20 has revealed that they both cannot imagine being faithful without the attachment to a community and compliance to the rules of the church. Jannis finds a nice way to verbalize this in his third interview when asked to talk about his spiritual praxis:

I do different forms of prayer, those are given to us by the Bible, but also by the church and various saints. I meditate. I'd rather not call it meditation, for me it's worship. I worship the Eucharist, which means, the suffering of Christ. [...] Meditation means to go inward for oneself. I personally go outward and I devote myself. [...] People of different faith, whom I tolerate, most of them at least, but they meditate a lot. They go inward, for themselves, because they believe the human himself is God, something like that, at least some believe that. That's why they meditate for themselves. And for us, for Christians, it's like, the soul is there, the soul speaks

with God and is not inwardly alone and by itself. And that's why for me it's worship, I worship Him, I talk to God personally on one level.⁶⁰ (Jannis, FDI, time 3)

For him, directing his prayers outward onto God is an important pillar of his faith, and he feels rooted in the Christian community. Only praying for themselves would mean for both Bianca and Jannis not to be part of that community. Tolerance is mentioned in passing here as well, when Jannis talks about people of different faith, but they primarily serve the purpose to distinguish himself from them. Overall, people who have different faiths or worldviews are not part of their close community.

What is the leitmotif that weaves through Bianca and Jannis's account of their lives? Being faithful Christians is the most prominent theme, which can be found throughout all of their interviews. The nuances change a bit over time and differ slightly between the two of them. While Bianca brings up some more worldly topics in her last interview and explicitly stresses her ambitions to pass on what is important for her, which suggests the presence of generativity, Jannis does not do this. Instead, there seems to be a threat or a challenge coming from the outside, which comes into focus the most at time 3 and which may well have to do with his teenage son now facing that same temptation that he had to deal with when he was that age. However, this is not made explicit.

Notes

- 1 Die [Leute in der Schule] haben mich [nach dem Papst] gefragt und das hat mich geärgert, wenn ich sage: „Ich glaube und stehe dahinter, und kann es aber nicht erklären.“ Das fand ich blöd, und darum habe ich mich da rein gelesen.
- 2 Also, das könnte man schon einteilen. Zum Beispiel erst mal in Kindheit, Jugend, (lachend) Erwachsensein, vielleicht. Und ja, wichtige Ereignisse waren auf jeden Fall (lachend) die Pubertät. Da (lacht) macht man ja so seine eigene Meinungsbildung durch. Und (leise) ja. Vielleicht so persönliche Ereignisse, wie sich die Familie verändert hat, wenn welche gestorben sind oder neue geboren sind, so in der Richtung vielleicht.
- 3 Und dann... ja, dann kam ich (lachend) in die Pubertät, und dann hab ich mir dann schon auch ernsthaft meine Gedanken gemacht. Dann habe ich auch in der Schule andere Einflüsse mitgekriegt, von welchen, die jetzt gar nichts glauben oder anders glauben. Dann hat man sich halt schon stärker damit auseinandergesetzt. Und dann gab's auch so ne Zeit, wo ich ein bisschen davon abgekommen bin, vom Glauben. Weil irgendwie hatte ich auch keinen Bock mehr, dann sonntags in ne Kirche zu gehen, weil dann wollte ich halt ausschlafen und meine Ruhe haben.
- 4 Also zum Beispiel würde ich jetzt so sagen: Kindheit, Jugend, ja, Erwachsenenalter. Oder beziehungsweise da ich ja verheiratet bin, vielleicht so Ehe und Familie oder so, ne? [I: Und welche Ereignisse sind rückblickend besonders bedeutsam für Sie?] Ja gut, in der Kindheit gab es natürlich viele wichtige Ereignisse. Zum Beispiel Feiern oder wenn jetzt jemand aus der Verwandtschaft gestorben ist oder so was. Und dann in der Jugend, ja, sicher auch das Abkapseln von den Eltern oder das Abitur

- oder die Ausbildung. Dann natürlich die Hochzeit und ... wir haben ja Kinder, die Geburten. So was, ne.
- 5 Natürlich auch so die Ideen und Vorstellungen der Kirche und vom Papst finde ich immer ganz interessant. Auch, dass man das mal hinterfragt, und ich habe das eigentlich immer schon so gemacht. Vor allem damals so im Alter von 16, 17, 18, wenn man so seine eigenen Erfahrungen machen will. Bis dahin habe ich ja auch immer den Weg verfolgt des Glaubens und der Kirche und so und irgendwann fragt man sich halt, ne: „Der Papst ist ja ein cleverer Mann, warum ist der gegen Pille und Kondom und so was?“ Und das habe ich mir auch beibehalten, dass ich so was immer noch hinterfrage. Wenn man da mitreden will, muss man ja auch sich selber da reinlesen, dass man das auch vertreten kann, diese Meinung, ne. Und das ist mir halt auch wichtig, so was. Und warum ist mir das wichtig? Ja, weil ich das auch meinen Kindern vermitteln will halt eigentlich, ne, [...] weil das für mich halt so ein Lebensmittelpunkt ist und wo ich auch viel Kraft rausschöpfe und deswegen halt, ne?
- 6 Hm, ich denke mal so, erst mal Kindheit, Jugend, Erwachsenenalter. Dann vielleicht Ehe und Familie. [I: Nach welchen Kriterien haben Sie jetzt diese Abschnitte vorgenommen?] Tja. (lächelt) Ich glaube, das ist eigentlich so ... normal, also dass man, wenn man ein Leben unterteilt, dass man ... ja, weiß ich nicht, das fiel mir jetzt als erstes ein. [...] [I: Können Sie mir vielleicht zu den einzelnen Phasen noch ein bisschen was sagen?] Die Kindheit ist ja erst mal, wo man selber noch Kind ist und viel lernt durch Eltern, durch das soziale Umfeld, durch eigene Erfahrungen. Man wächst und entdeckt die Welt selber. Und, ja, ich denke mal, mit der Pubertät ändert sich das dann, dann kommt man so langsam in die Jugend, ins Erwachsenenalter und lernt halt ja, das Leben auf eine andere Art kennen. Vielleicht durch Schule, durch Freunde, durch erste Beziehungen oder durch Beruf, Ausbildung, sowas halt, ne. Und dann Erwachsenenalter, ja, man geht arbeiten, man heiratet vielleicht oder auch nicht. (lächelt) Wenn man Kinder kriegt, das ist sowieso dann wieder ein ganz anderer Einschnitt. [I: Und Sie würden Ihren eigenen Lebenslauf auch in diesem ja, das klang jetzt gerade so ein bisschen so nach so einem Normlebenslauf, da würden Sie sich da auch wiederfinden?] Eigentlich schon, ja. Also mein Leben ist auch bis jetzt so der Norm entsprechend (lächelt) etwa. Obwohl, manche sagen, ne, wenn man eine gewisse Zeit verheiratet ist, ist ja nicht mehr üblich heute, (lacht) [...]. Ja, viele sagen: Wie? Echt? Solange schon immer mit dem Gleichen? Das ist ja leider heute nicht mehr so üblich, ne.
- 7 Ich bin halt katholisch erzogen worden, meine Eltern haben das auch sehr praktiziert mit uns. Und das habe ich halt auch angefangen zu hinterfragen in der Pubertät, weil ich gesagt habe: Irgendwo weiß ich, dass das richtig ist, was die glauben. Aber ich will das jetzt nicht glauben, weil die das glauben, sondern weil ich für mich wissen wollte, was ist jetzt für mich der Grund, warum ich das glaube, ne. Dass ich einfach selbstständig mich dafür entscheiden wollte und nicht nur, weil ich es so gelernt habe.
- 8 In der Schule hat man mich immer als Hyper-Katholik betitelt. (lacht) Weil, die wussten das halt, dass ich gläubig bin und das auch lebe. Und das hat mich eigentlich nicht weiter gestört, weil... also ich hatte trotzdem da meine Freundinnen in der Klasse und die haben das dann auch so akzeptiert, ne. Aber, ja, es waren halt

immer viele, die da jetzt auch nichts mit anfangen konnten in der Schule, die haben mich dann natürlich immer da gestichelt und mich da immer herausgefordert. Und das war halt vielleicht auch irgendwo der Anstoß. Weil, dann kamen die natürlich zu mir und sagten, ne, das ist ja immer diese Themen Papst, Pille und Kondom und all diese Sachen mit Verhütung. Damit kommen die ja dann (lächelt) in der Pubertät gerade, ne, weil das dann ja auch gerade spannend ist in dem Alter. Ja und dann habe ich eigentlich immer so überlegt, ich wusste zwar, dass das so ist in der Kirche, aber ich habe das nicht verstanden, ne. Ich habe immer gedacht, der Papst ist ja eigentlich ein gebildeter Mensch. (lächelt) Wieso kann der sowas sagen in der heutigen Zeit? Und dann habe ich halt angefangen, mich damit zu befassen. Dass ich mich da weiter rein gelesen habe in die Thematik, warum der das jetzt so sagt. Und das hat mich halt überzeugt. Ich habe das dann für mich einfach so annehmen können. [...] Die haben mich da gefragt und das hat mich geärgert, wenn ich sage: „Ich glaube und stehe dahinter, und kann es aber nicht erklären.“ Das fand ich blöd, und darum habe ich mich da rein gelesen.

- 9 Also jetzt, wo ich verheiratet bin, spreche ich erst mal mit meinem Mann. Was der dazu meint, wie der das machen würde und was der mir rät. Und dann, ja, setze ich mich hin und unterhalte mich mit ihm. Und dann gucken wir halt, was dafür spricht oder dagegen.
- 10 Ich denke schon, dass wir auch eine große Freiheit haben, selber Entscheidungen zu treffen und dass... Es gibt ja so das „auf jeden Topf passt ein Deckel“ und ... woher will ich jetzt wissen, dass der Partner, den ich habe, der richtige ist? Und da hat mal irgendwer gesagt: „In dem Moment, wo man dann halt vor Gott auch, wenn man jetzt kirchlich heiratet, sich dann das Versprechen gibt, [...] das ist dann der Richtige für dich. Weil du hast dich entschieden.“ Und dass sein eigener Wille auch noch einen großen Aspekt mitspielt und dass Gott nicht einfach sagt: „So. Ne, das ist jetzt der einzig Richtige und wenn du den nicht findest, hast du Pech gehabt, sondern dass unsere Entscheidungen da auch mit reinspielen darf. Und dass Gott dann das auch anerkennt, wenn wir dazu stehen dann, ne. [...] In dem Moment, wo ich dann vor Gott mich für diesen Mann entscheide, dass der dann zu meinem richtigen wird. Dass Gott dann seinen Segen dazu gibt, also wenn ich mich dafür entscheide und mein Ja gebe, dass Gott dann auch sein Ja dazu gibt.“
- 11 Das ist ja eigentlich im besten Fall auch eine gute Freundschaft, ne, zwischen den Ehepartnern. Doch, das würde ich auch sagen, dass wir halt schauen, dass wir gemeinsame Interessen auch pflegen, dass man zusammen was unternimmt im ganzen Alltagsstress. Dass man sich auch Zeit füreinander nimmt und noch so kleine Momente hat, wo man auch mal zu zweit ist, ohne Kinder [...]. Ja, dass man weiterhin immer im Gespräch bleibt und offen ist und ehrlich. Und ja, einfach die Beziehung pflegt, dass sie nicht kaputt geht oder dass man sich nicht auseinanderlebt.
- 12 Ich glaube, meine Familie gibt mir auf jeden Fall den Sinn, auch jetzt meine eigene Familie, mein Kind. Also das ist erst mal so der auf der Hand liegende Sinn, (lachend) sag ich mal, dass man halt für sein Kind da ist, und für den Mann und so halt alles regelt, dass das Kind gut erzogen wird.
- 13 Also Verpflichtungen vielleicht gegenüber meiner Familie, meinem Kind. Und ich hab mir schon vorgenommen, dass ich dem auch so die Werte beibringen möchte,

- wie ich sie so erlebe. Ich möchte den auch eigentlich so erziehen, dass er irgendwann mal so seinen Weg findet. Und ich denke, dass ich den auch im Glauben so erziehen möchte, dass ich den erst mal mitnehme zur Kirche, bis er dann mal selber anfängt, und auch selber mal nachfragt. Weil das finde ich wichtig, ich finde das nicht gut, wenn man das alles so hundertprozentig von den Eltern übernimmt. Ich glaube, man muss sich schon sein eigenes Bild auch machen, weil sonst hat das keinen Sinn, sonst bricht das irgendwann zusammen, wenn man das selber nicht hinterfragt, und dann steht man da und sagt, hm.
- 14 Unser großer Sohn, der ist ja im Moment (lacht) in der Pubertät. Das zählt, glaube ich, als Krise. (lacht) Nein, ach, der hat halt so einige Dinge auch, wo wir immer wieder aneinandergeraten. Und was ich ihm aber auch zugestehen muss, weil er gerade auch in dieser Phase ist, wo er selber für sich Dinge klar haben will, ne. Und selber sich abnabeln will und Sachen hinterfragt, was ich ja auch gemacht habe in dem Alter. Das kann ich ihm ja jetzt nicht vorwerfen. (lächelt) Aber trotzdem ist es schon krasser als bei mir und da muss ich auch erst mal lernen, mit umzugehen, ne. Ist auch ein Junge, ist auch nochmal was anderes, als wenn es jetzt ein Mädchen wäre, denke ich, ne. Und ja, das ist halt auch, ich bin dann halt immer sofort emotional sehr aufgebracht und kann das manchmal auch nicht so, dass ich mir da Abstand gebe, ne. Dass ich mich zurückziehe oder so. Sondern, ich bin dann irgendwie, ja, mitten drin. (lächelt) Und da muss ich halt lernen, dass ich da auch mit umgehe, ne.
- 15 Übersinnliche Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse, die eindeutig auf die Existenz Gottes zurückzuführen sind zu haben (Wunder, unerklärliche Phänomene).
- 16 Im Gebet mit Gott eins zu sein, sich ihm überlassen, sich zu öffnen und seinen Willen zu suchen.
- 17 An die Lehre der (in meinem Fall) Katholischen Kirche zu glauben und nach ihr zu leben.
- 18 Die Gebote und Gesetze der Kirche zu befolgen, die hl Messe zu feiern, die Sakramente zu empfangen.
- 19 Ich denke schon, dass ich gläubig bin, auf jeden Fall. Und das bedeutet für mich, dass ich versuche so zu leben, wie es der katholischen Kirche entspricht, weil ich eben dazu gehöre. Und das heißt, dass ich auch regelmäßig zur Messe gehe, und bete. Und ich versuche auch, wenn ich zum Beispiel Freunde oder Bekannte sehe, die irgendwie total am Boden zerstört sind, weil irgendwas Schlimmes passiert ist. Da versuch ich schon denen beizustehen. Auf irgend ne Art, ja, ich bete dann auch viel für Andere, das, finde ich, gehört auch dazu. Ich glaube halt, dass das Gebet sehr, sehr wichtig ist. Für die ganze Welt, und für jeden Einzelnen auch, weil wenn man mal wirklich davon ausgeht, dass es einen Gott gibt, sag ich, dann ist Gebet das Wichtigste, weil man ja dann so mit ihm in Kontakt tritt, und dass er dann auch, ja, Dinge lenken kann oder auch uns seinen Weg zeigen kann.
- 20 Ich bin schon gläubig und auch religiös, also, das bedeutet für mich schon, dass ich auch bestrebt bin, sonntags zur Messe zu gehen und das auch meinen Kinder zu vermitteln und dass wir auch mehrmals am Tag beten und ja, einfach versuchen, Gott in der Welt zu finden und ihm nachzufolgen. Auch in der Bibel lesen oder in anderen christlichen Schriften. Halt, dass man das auch praktiziert, ne, was man glaubt. [...] Viele sagen ja auch: „Ich glaube, aber ich brauche die Kirche dafür nicht,

aber das ist für mich eigentlich der entscheidende Punkt. Weil Jesus die Kirche ja gegründet hat und in der Eucharistie können wir ihm leibhaftig begegnen und das ist für mich das wichtigste, weil was soll ich mit einem guten Freund, wenn ich den nicht auch (schmunzelnd) besuche? Oder, ne?

- 21 Ich glaube, alles drei. (lacht) Aber ich weiß nicht, das schließt sich nicht so aus, finde ich. Klar, spirituell, das trifft vielleicht auch auf so esoterische Dinge zu, das bin ich jetzt nicht. Aber spirituell kann ja auch heißen, dass man, ja, irgendwie so eine spezielle Verbindung hat zu Gott oder zu, keine Ahnung, dem Himmel [...] Ich habe ja eben erzählt, dass ich manchmal auch so Träume habe. Das würde vielleicht für mich unter spirituell fallen. [...] [Religiös/gläubig sein], das ist halt das Wichtigste so in meinem Leben, dass ich da auch viel Wert drauf lege und danach lebe. [I: Würden Sie nochmal unterscheiden zwischen religiös und gläubig?] Ich glaube, für mich ist es das Gleiche. Aber ich könnte mir vorstellen, dass es auch Menschen gibt, die sich als religiös bezeichnen, die [...] vielleicht gar nicht so von innerlich glauben können, aber nach außen hin halt religiös sein wollen [...] Oder anders rum, wer gläubig ist, [...] und dann sagt: „Ich glaube an Gott, aber ich brauche dafür die Kirche nicht so.“ Gibt es ja auch. Und da denke ich schon, dass es Unterschiede gibt, aber für mich persönlich gehört das zusammen.
- 22 Also ich sag mal so, in der Kindheit bis so in das Alter, wo man anfängt selber nachzudenken, [...], da war mein Gottesbild auf jeden Fall durch meine Eltern geprägt [...] und die haben mich dann auch immer mit zur Messe genommen, [...]. Also meine Eltern haben das jetzt nicht so als strafenden Gott dargestellt. Das gibt's ja oft, dass sie sagen, ja, wenn du jetzt nicht lieb bist, dann schimpft der Gott, oder so. [...] Die haben das eigentlich immer schon als liebenden Gott dargestellt. Und dann... also meine persönliche Bekehrung hat halt hauptsächlich stattgefunden durch den Wallfahrtsort. [...] Ja, sind wir da recht früh hingefahren. [...] Und da bin ich dann auch irgendwie mit reingewachsen, dass man da ein ganz anderes Gottesbild bekommt. Weil wenn man an dem Ort ist, dann... spürt man einfach, dass da irgendwas Übernatürliches passiert und man empfindet ganz starken Frieden und so ne Liebe und so ne Ruhe einfach. [...] Ja, und so hat sich das Gottesbild eigentlich immer mehr gefestigt. Und das ist auch heute noch so, dass ich eigentlich ein recht positives Gottesbild hab, und, ähm, klar hat man manchmal seine Zweifel, aber das gehört so dazu, mein ich. Und man wächst ja auch weiterhin. (lacht)
- 23 Ich denke, mein Gottesbild hat sich schon weiter entwickelt. Halt durch die verschiedenen Erfahrungen auch, dass man da in allem reifer geworden ist. Klar, vor was weiß ich wieviel Jahren, da denkt man ja noch naiver und vielleicht nicht so weit ins Voraus hinein, aber (seufzt leise) ja, mit Kindern da denkt man auch irgendwie ganz anders über die Zukunft nach und über die Werte und überhaupt übers Leben. Aber ich würde sagen, es hat sich positiv entwickelt, also man kann viele Sachen ganz anders einschätzen [...]. Also Gott ist mir nach wie vor noch sehr, sehr wichtig, ist halt der wichtigste Bestandteil meines Lebens.
- 24 [...] Wenn man erwachsen ist bis zum Tod, dass man da immer weiter reift durch Erfahrung, durch Begegnungen, durch Erlebnisse. Und dass das eigentlich nur noch ein Wachstum ist. Also ich fühle mich schon gefestigt auch im Glauben und klar, hinterfrage das auch immer wieder. Auch, was so in der Kirche los ist. [...] Jetzt zum

Beispiel aktuell dieser ganze Missbrauchsskandal, was da immer mehr und mehr sich aufdeckt in der Weltkirche, ne. Das ist natürlich, das geht gar nicht. [I: Und beeinflusst das Ihren persönlichen Glauben?] Also meinen Glauben nicht, weil ich glaube ja Gott und nicht an die Kirche. Also, ne, klar, wir gehen regelmäßig zur Kirche. Und ich sehe das auch nach wie vor als eine von Gott gegebene Institution an, nur das Problem ist halt das Bodenpersonal. [...] Ich finde, die Kirche müsste diese Menschen, die sich da zum Priester bewerben, besser prüfen. Dass die gucken, was haben die eine Einstellung zur Sexualität? Was für eine Einstellung haben die, ja, hm, zu gesunden, (lächelt) also Bildern von Menschen? [I: Und wie würden Sie Ihren Glauben heute beschreiben?] Ja, auch das wächst immer noch. Ich habe mal vor einiger Zeit ein sehr schönes Buch gelesen, [...] und da wurde halt diese Beziehung zu Gott Vater nochmal anders aufgegriffen. Und das hat mir sehr weitergeholfen, dass ich jetzt nochmal eine ganz andere Herangehensweise habe. Dass ich so mehr diese Barmherzigkeit nachvollziehen kann und dass er wirklich wie so ein Papa ist und eigentlich nur, ja, uns liebt.

- 25 Viele denken ja, [die Bibel] ist ein altes Buch, ist verstaubt und ist heute nicht mehr aktuell, aber das kann ich so nicht sagen. (schmunzelnd) Weil irgendwie steht dann immer so die Lösung drin und ... das war wirklich witzig. [...] Sind natürlich nur so kleine Sachen, wo jetzt jeder sagen würde: „War ein Zufall oder heißt jetzt was anderes“, aber für uns war es dann wirklich so ein Zeichen. (lacht) Und dann hatten wir halt überlegt wirklich, ob wir bauen sollen [...], ja, dann haben wir halt gebetet und (schmunzelnd) die Bibel aufgeschlagen [...], das war dann halt dieses hier, wo Josef den Traum hat, dass er mit Maria in ein anderes Land gehen soll. Und ja, weil wir bauen halt im Nachbarort und dann war das so für uns: „Nimm deine Frau und deine Kinder und gehe in dieses (schmunzelnd) Nachbardorf“, (lachend) so ungefähr. Also das sind halt so Sachen. Und das hat uns schon oft so weitergeholfen. Sind dann auch so witzige Stellen, (schmunzelnd) wo ich dann immer denke: „Gott hat auch echt Humor.“ (lacht) Ja, ich weiß nicht. Andere würden jetzt vielleicht sagen: „Ja, so einen Schwachsinn, weil das da halt steht, so eine Entscheidung zu treffen“, ne, aber für uns hat das auch gepasst und (schmunzelnd) bis jetzt haben wir es auch noch nicht bereut.
- 26 Also ja, wir beten halt vorher, dass Gott uns auch eine Antwort gibt, die wir dann auch verstehen und dann schlagen wir einfach irgendeine Stelle so auf. [...] Manchmal... das war jetzt auch schon, dass das dann so (schmunzelnd) alttestamentliche Texte waren, wo keiner durchsteigt. (lacht) Und dann haben wir auch gesagt: „Nee, das haben wir jetzt nicht verstanden. Jetzt bitte mal konkreter.“ (lacht) Klar, und dann natürlich nehmen wir auch unsere eigenen Empfindungen: „Wollen wir das jetzt oder nicht?“ Sonst hat das ja keinen Sinn, ne, wenn man dann so was macht.
- 27 Ja, zum Beispiel das Leben jetzt an sich, das ist ja gerade in der heutigen Gesellschaft sehr angegriffen. Sei es jetzt bei ungeborenen Kindern, dass die einfach abgetrieben werden. Und dass der Mensch sich einfach so da drüber stellt und sagt, ich bin jetzt der Arzt, ich entscheide das jetzt und treibe dieses Kind ab. Oder eben im Alter, dass man alten Leuten ne Spritze gibt, dass die dann ihren Frieden haben und nicht mehr leiden müssen. Und ich glaube, das ist ein Schritt, da sollte sich die ganze Gesellschaft einig sein, gerade wo es um Leben geht, weil ich finde, da hört der Bereich

des Menschen auf, da, finde ich, haben wir kein Recht mehr uns einzumischen, weil da glaube ich zum Beispiel, dass es einfach Gottes Entscheidung ist, wann jemand geboren wird oder stirbt. [...] Und jeder hat ein Recht auf Leben. Jeder Mensch hat auch den Willen zu leben. [...] Und das ist so'n Wert, finde ich, der richtig Priorität auch haben sollte, das Leben an sich.

- 28 Also ich finde es ganz wichtig, das Leben zu schützen. Diese ganze Debatte da um Sterbehilfe und Abtreibung, das finde ich einfach so furchtbar, weil es ist... Wo führt das denn hin? Ich meine, wir maßen uns ja echt schon an, Gott zu sein, indem wir überall eingreifen. [...] Da sollten alle wirklich einig sein und sagen: „Komm, bis dahin und nicht weiter.“ Auch mit diesen ganzen Forschungen an den Embryonen und all so was. Also irgendwann finde ich hat der Mensch seine Finger da mal (lachend) rauszulassen.
- 29 Ja, einfach dass man den Menschen einen würdevollen Tod gewährt. Dass man nicht einfach hinget und dem eine Spritze gibt oder eine Maschine abstellt. Also ich denke, das Sterben ist auch ein Prozess und wir können uns nicht einfach immer davonmachen und [...] das Leid ausblenden, [...]. Ich denke, ein schwieriger Sterbeprozess ist auch ganz wichtig für den Menschen, dass er einfach mit Gott ins Reine kommen kann. Aber gut, wenn keiner mehr an Gott glaubt, dann braucht man auch mit keinem ins Reinen kommen, also kann man auch so eine Maschine schneller abstellen, ne. Und ich habe das jetzt auch bei meiner Oma erlebt. [...] Die ist zu Hause bei uns gestorben und das war einfach so schön und so ein friedlicher Tod und ich finde es schade, dass man da eingreifen will. Weil ich denke, für jeden Menschen [ist] das ganze Leben ein Weg und man macht Erfahrungen und es sind Prozesse. Und wenn man da einfach hinget und das abschneidet, dann ist der Prozess nicht zu Ende. Und das finde ich, das ist nicht natürlich irgendwie.
- 30 Jetzt ist vor [einiger Zeit] ein guter Freund von mir an Krebs gestorben. [...] Und der hat über [soziale Medien] so ein Sterbetagebuch geführt. [...] Man hat das mit durchlitten. Und das war schon eine heftige Zeit. Weil... ich habe mich dann auch gefragt, was würde ich machen, wenn ich in der Situation wäre, [...]? Ja und das war auch wieder so eine Glaubenssache, wo ich gesagt habe: Würde Gott sowas zulassen? Und wenn ja, warum? Und wie würde es dann mit meinem Glauben stehen? Könnte ich das so annehmen oder würde ich jetzt irgendwie dadurch total abfallen? (lächelt) Also das war schon also für mich auch wieder eine gute Zeit, weil im Endeffekt habe ich gesagt: Nein, weil, irgendwann sterben wir. Irgendwann sterbe ich auch. Und ich finde es wichtig, sich damit auseinanderzusetzen. [...] Und dieser Freund war leider nicht gläubig. Für ihn war es dann ganz wichtig, nochmal große Aktionen zu starten. Nochmal zu verreisen, seine ganze Beerdigung, alles, ein großes Tohuwabohu zu planen. Er wusste selber nicht, was jetzt kommt. Aber so richtig glauben konnte er auch nicht. Ja, ich habe dann viel für ihn gebetet und gehofft, dass er dann irgendwie noch hinkommt, weil es ja auch irgendwo eine Hoffnung ist und ein Trost. Einfach so zu sterben und dann weg zu sein, das ist ja irgendwie, dann [...] ist ja nichts von Wert, ne, wenn alles weg ist nach dem Tod dann. [I: Das heißt, Ihre Antwort auf diese Frage wäre eine andere gewesen oder Ihr Umgang mit so einer Situation?] Ja. Also das sage ich jetzt, wo ich nicht betroffen (lächelt) bin. Wenn man in so einer Situation ist, ist es natürlich, weiß man ja nicht, wie man dann al-

- so... Obwohl [...], ich meine, wenn man so eine grundlegende Lebenseinstellung hat, dass man dann nicht da ganz von ab kommt. [...] Ich glaube schon, dass sich jetzt meine Einstellung dahingehend geändert hat, dass ich mehr hinschaue vielleicht oder offener bin dafür und auch sensibler, wenn sowas ist irgendwo, dass man die Leute auch anders versteht, ne.
- 31 Und da habe ich tiefe Erfahrungen in ein Wallfahrt gehabt. [...] und da habe ich meine Frau kennengelernt und hat sich wieder neu- ganz neuer Abschnitt. [...] Ja, diese Konvertierung oder diese Umkehr wieder von die Unglaube zu Glaube, das hat mir ... ich würde sagen, mein Leben [...] einfach gerettet.
- 32 Jannis has been portrayed as well in Bullik, Keller, and Silver (2022), yet that chapter only refers to his first two interviews. Analyses referring to these first interviews have been taken from this chapter and carefully adapted to fit the research questions of this study.
- 33 Also erste Ereignis war für mich einfach als ich Kind war und Schule, das war einfach so normales Lebensjahr, ne. Einfach glauben. Gelehrt, also Katechismusglauben, ne. Am Anfang, ich hab nur gelernt, was Gott ist und so. Und [in den 90er Jahren] ungefähr, das war, krass gesagt, das krasse Leben gehabt. Also richtig schlimmes Leben gehabt. Schwarzes Leben, würde ich sagen. Für mich war das so'n schwarzes Leben, weil da hatte ich keinen Blick mehr. Und äh [danach] ja, ... Umwandlung. Von diese schwarze Leben zum, sagen wir, weißes Leben. Meine Titel. Und jetzt ist glückliches Leben.
- 34 Ja. Äh gab's. Die ich gesagt habe, 9X, 9X, genau weiß ich nicht, das Jahr. War nicht so auf ein Tag, ne. Das war immer. Als ich äh- ja, Herz und Liebesbeziehung. Und die war nicht so gut. Erste Problem. Das ist vor der Pubertät Problem, jeder hat das. Das ist so ne Belastung. Ich hab mit Freunde gesprochen, die Freunde waren aber für mich- sie haben mir gesagt, komm, [...] lass uns Hardrock hören oder [...] Sagen wir, geh mal in Disco mit mir und tanz und äh vergiss alles, ne. Und da hab ich gut gefühlt, hab ich gesagt, ja, ok. Da bin ich ein bisschen mit Hardrock mehr äh zusammen, also gezogen. Ich hab mehr Hardrock gefühl- gehört. Ich war so weit weg von Gott, ich hab gar nicht gedacht an Gott. (nachdrücklich) Überhaupt nicht. Aber Hardrock, das Musik hat mich gefallen. Aber für mich war nicht nur schöne Musik, war so Erleichterung, also hab ich immer- Ne. Man hört jetzt jeder fast hier, also überall, ne. Das ist schöne Musik. [...] Meine Eltern. Und äh als ich Pubertät angefangen, das fast jedes Kind, das wird ein bisschen von den Eltern weg, weil Pubertät ist schwer.
- 35 Und wie gesagt, ab der Pubertät musste ich halt selber ein bisschen rebellieren, musste ich ein bisschen selber erfahren und hatte ich auch mal meine Tief und meine Probleme [...] habe ich mich entfernt von der Religion. [...] Es gibt auch negative Beziehungen, [...] Das war diese Freund-Beziehung, hatte ich auch gute Freunde, aber ... gleichzeitig auch sehr schlechte Freunde. Und die mich wirklich [...] schlechte Wege gezeigt haben. Und da ist auch hat mich in mein persönliche geändert. [I: Inwiefern? Also so die typischen Jugendbeziehungen?] Jugendbeziehung, aber auch gleichzeitig kann, ja. so wie Heavy Metal [...]. Ich ... Heavy Metal, das muss nicht negativ sein, aber auch in eine negative Richtung von Heavy Metal gegangen, in der Richtung von alles Mögliche, was man so Schlechte... Also das hat sich beein-

flusst. Schlechte Freunde kann man (lachend) immer haben, [I: (lacht)] muss man aber nicht, ne... [...] Es gab schlechte Beziehungen, [...] also eine Freundin. Wir haben immer Krise gehabt [...] Und auch hatte ich mit die Schule Probleme, also das waren mehrere Sachen: Pubertät, immer rebellieren, also das hat alles auf einmal. Und da hatte ich keinen (Menschen), der neben mir gezeigt: „Komm, ich zeige dir den Weg“, so ungefähr. Und da bin ich verloren gegangen.

- 36 Ja, mehrere Kapitel muss ich denn nennen. Also Anfangs-Abschnitt ist erst mal Lernen und mittlerer Abschnitt, ja, Ausprobieren, Erfahrungen sammeln. Und jetzigen Kapitel würde ich sagen erst mal als Titel, ja, weiter Erfahrung sammeln, aber, ja, Leben. Das ist ein guter Abschnitt, Leben. (lacht) [I: Können Sie zu diesen einzelnen Kapiteln noch ein bisschen mehr erzählen?] Ja, also Lernen-Kapitel ist mehr oder weniger, wo man von Anfang an, Schulzeit bis Studium oder bis Ausbildung und dann irgendwann auch, ich meine, auch diese ganze, bis man 18 ist, lernt man viel. [...] Am Ende, nach 18, fängt man an halt zu arbeiten teilweise oder weiter zu studieren. Und da nennt man halt Erfahrung statt Lernen, würde ich also sagen. Und dann am Ende ist es halt so, die Erfahrung, hat man das und das Lernen hat man auch schon. Klar, meine Mutter sagt: Kann man nie aufhören zu lernen. [...] [I: Haben Sie da auch Beispiele dafür?] Ja, also meine Beispiele ist halt, wenn man auf beruflichen Gang gehen, dass man halt, klar, ich habe studiert, [...] und dann irgendwann habe ich jetzt so viele Erfahrungen gesammelt in diesen Bereich und jetzt, das fand ich so interessant, das war für mich alles neu. [...] Privatbereich, klar, Familie. Das ist auch in der Zeit, wo auch parallel dazu die Familie entstanden ist und so weiter. Und da war auch für mich alles neu. Kinder zu haben und alles. Ist auch eine Erfahrung. Positive Erfahrung. [...] Ich habe ja durch meine Arbeit, durch meine ganze Erfahrung gesammelt, ich kann weitergeben auch an meine Kinder.
- 37 Es gab positive und gab es negative [Beziehungen]. Klar, man hat auch negative Freunde gehabt, die auch negativ beeinflusst. Das war während meiner Pubertäts-Phase. Das ist eigentlich so das Schlechte, das man so haben kann. Aber auch nachher, nachdem ich geheiratet habe, hatte ich auch durch diese ganze Gesellschaft halt, hatte ich auch positive Freunde, die mich auch gestärkt haben, durch auch Glauben dazu und auch freundschaftlich mäßige. Ja, die beiden Aspekte hatte ich. [...] Negativ beeinflusst wurde ich in alles probieren lassen, was man so gibt im Pubertätszeit oder auch viele, ja, Alkohol einbezogen und alles drum und dran. Und das war eigentlich negativ, meiner Meinung, also die Erfahrung war jetzt nicht so schön, Nachhinein gesehen. Klar, währenddessen ist man einfach stumpf- ja, miten drin. Nachhinein finde ich das zwar schlecht und deswegen auch, fand ich, es war negative Erfahrung, aber es *ist* eine Erfahrung. (lächelt) [...] Weil, wenn man, klar, wenn man ab und zu trinkt, ist kein Problem, aber wenn man zu viel trinkt und zu viel Blödsinn macht, dann wird es dann negativ. [I: Haben Sie da auch ein Beispiel für die positiven Beziehungen?] [...] Als ich geheiratet habe oder kurz vorher, neuen Glauben wieder erfahren habe, in meinen Glauben wieder zurück, christlichen Glauben zurück gekehrt bin. Und war ich ganz frisch, jugendlich in diesem Sinne, vom Glauben, und da haben meine Freunde, die auch gläubig sind, haben sie mich gestärkt in diesen Glauben. [I: Also Sie haben sich von Ihrem Glauben, meinten Sie, entfernt und sind dann aber wieder zurückgekommen?] Genau, durch die Pubertät,

durch schlechte Freunde, habe ich meinen Glauben entfernt. Habe ich ganz andere Sachen, Vordergrund gebracht und das war auch für mich, wie gesagt, eine Wiederkehrung.

- 38 Also weil- und dann [...] bin ich nach Medjugorje gelandet. Das war auch komisch, dass ich- meine Mutter hat äh- wollte ich nach Italien gehen- [Weltjugendtag]. Und äh meine Mutter wollte eine Reise nach Rom, aber sie- sie wusste nicht, was das billigste war, wir hatten auch Situation nicht [...] viel Geld gehabt. Und äh- sie hat am besten gefunden, dass diese Wallfahrt war billig, Aber dafür ist eine Woche in Medjugorje. Keiner wusste das, dass ist. Aber sie hat gesagt, ja, kriegt ihr mehr Urlaub, ne, halt. Einmal- eine Woche in Rom, eine Woche in Medjugorje. Es ist in Bosnien, ne. [...] Ja, und ich hab ok gesagt. Hauptsache rau- raus, von [A arabisches Land] weg. (lacht) [...] Ja, war ich glücklich, und dann, als ich angekommen bin, in äh Medjugorje, war alles für mich komisch, weil sie waren- wollten alle beten, alle Lobpreis machen, und so singen und so. Und äh Medjugorje ist das so'n Marienerscheinung. Äh wie- so ähnlich wie Lourdes oder Fatima. [...] Aber dafür ist es nur das immer noch am Erscheinen. [...] Und äh- ja, am Anfang, alles war mich skeptisch. Aber irgendwie war [...] so'n komischer Tag, die ich ... zack, geglaubt habe. Wie, kann ich auch nicht erklären, das sage nicht nur ich. Sagen vielleicht Millionen von Menschen, die da gehen. [...] Ja, und äh seitdem habe ich meine Frau kennen gelernt. Da, aber wir- das war nur Freundschaft, ne. [...] Und als ich wieder in- äh nach [A arabisches Land] zurück, hab ich per Email immer sie geschrieben, und sie hat mir einmal eingeladen, und dem ich- und da hat gefunkt. Da hab ich ihre Eltern kennen gelernt. Ihre Eltern gehen auch regelmäßig nach Medjugorje. [...] Sie war mehr gläubig als ich. Und ich war wieder am Anfang, also war ich wieder frisch gläubig, ne.
- 39 Irgendwann, so gegen 18, bin ich ... das ist auch wieder ein neuer Abschnitt, wo ich die Religion halt, die Christen ... ja, neu entdecken musste und sozusagen wie konvertiert wieder von „nicht gläubig“ zu „gläubig“. Ich war immer noch Christ, also ich bin nicht ausgetreten, sondern einfach nicht gläubig gewesen. ... Und da habe ich tiefe Erfahrungen in einer Wallfahrt gehabt. [...] und da habe ich meine Frau kennengelernt und hat sich wieder neu- ganz neuer Abschnitt. [...] Ja, diese Konvertierung oder diese Umkehr wieder von Unglaube zu Glaube, das hat mir ... ich würde sagen, mein Leben [...] einfach gerettet [...]. Ich war ziemlich verloren, würde ich sagen, und da habe ich ... da bin ich dann mit meiner Frau. [...] [I: Ja, gibt es da irgendeinen- gab es da einen bestimmten Punkt?] Ja, das ist ja in ... dieser Wallfahrt, das ist die Erscheinung von Maria, Marienerscheinung da und ... aktuell noch. [...] Und da habe ich die Mutter Gottes gespürt. Wahnsinn! [...] [I: Und waren Sie da in diesem Wallfahrtsort aus einem bestimmten Grund?] Jei- ja. Also ich war in so einem Grund, dass ich einfach rausgehen möchte, ein bisschen ... Urlaub machen und ... eigentlich kein religiöser Grund, da ich ja keine religiöse Bedeutung hatte mehr. Also ich war ja nicht mehr gläubig. Und meine Mutter hat mich einfach geschickt, Urlaub zu machen und da hat sich alles geändert, verdreht. 180 Grad, so ungefähr, ne. [...] Und ich bin sicher, das ist meine persönliche Meinung, das war kein Zufall, ne, dass ich einfach dahin- angekommen bin und dass es alles so geändert hat. Ja, das ist dieses Ereignis. Ich eigentlich meine Frau kennengelernt habe.

- 40 Und die erste Woche war Medjugorje, heißt das, dieses Ort, wo Mutter Gottes oder Maria-Erscheinung ist, immer noch ist. [...] Habe ich nicht daran geglaubt, habe ich nicht weiter gedacht. [...] Der erste Tag war für mich alles skeptisch, weil die Leute alle beten, alle Rosenkranz [...]. Und dann der zweite Tag und der dritte Tag, natürlich eine besondere Erfahrung, [...] eine Erscheinung. Das ist eigentlich nicht oft, dass sie auch Gruppeneinladungen gibt und da war an dem Tag Gruppeneinladung. [...] Und gegen zehn Uhr war ein Gebet und dann, wie soll ich das erklären? [...] Habe ich angefangen, auch zu beten. Wo ich eigentlich verlernt habe, zu beten. Habe ich auch mitgesungen. Wo ich eigentlich- das sind Gruppenzwang, wenn man so sehen, aber trotzdem habe ich auch mitgesungen. Und dann irgendwann habe ich meine ganzen Probleme aus Versehen- was heißt aus Versehen? Man kann Probleme oder Sorgen, habe ich alles einfach losgelassen. [...] Und plötzlich war die Erscheinung, haben alle Ruhe gestellt, also Silence und ruhig. Und da, in dem Moment habe ich, während ich am beten oder meine Probleme lossage, habe ich eine unendliche Wärme gespürt. Nahezu Schmerz. Was heißt Schmerz, aber stark im Herz. [...] Und gleichzeitig habe ich so eine Art, weiß nicht, einfach Liebe oder komisches Gefühl, einfach Frieden, wenn ich so sagen will. [...] Und da habe ich von da an, ich glaube, 180 Grad geändert, komplett. Das war die große Wendung. Von da aus habe ich alles, ich habe dann gebeichtet und habe ich alles losgelassen, was ich gemacht habe und was ich bin. Und da habe ich stark geglaubt, dass es gibt alles. Und diese Erfahrung kann ich jetzt nicht so- ich kann das nur mit Reden weitergeben, aber das Gefühl kann ich nicht geben, muss man erfahren. [...] Und dann, ja, habe ich meine Frau auch da kennengelernt.
- 41 Ja, meine Frau. Also ich hab meine Frau kennen gelernt. Ich hab sie am Anfang, also das war wie [eine Freundin] für mich. Ich hab sie gefunden nett, und sie war gläubig, sie hat mich einfach so netterweise eingeladen, hier nach Deutschland. [...] Und da, irgendwann hat gefunkt, und dann so wir waren ein gutes Beziehung, dann jetzt Liebebeziehung geworden und wir haben geheiratet. Und hat mein Leben geändert. Also bin ich wegen ihr nach Deutschland gelangt.
- 42 Ja. Also als ich geheiratet, haben mich so gefreut, das war für mich (nach Worten suchend) so'n Glücks-Ereignis. Weil ich, seit ich geheiratet habe, habe ich Gefühl, dass ich Verantwortung habe. Habe ich einen Partner, die ich immer dabei bin. Die glaubt auch. Und ich kann mit beten. Ich hab so Schwiegereltern gekriegt, die sind auch gläubig. Für mich auch wie meine Eltern. Weil ich meine Eltern weit weg.
- 43 Ich bin da in Medjugorje gewesen, habe ich da meine Frau aus Deutschland kennengelernt und da haben wir diesen neuen Abschnitt in Deutschland angefangen. Wir haben da geheiratet und das ist komplett neue Kapitel wieder, ne. Beide sind wir gläubig, religiös und [...] da haben wir uns im Glaube uns einander sozusagen geholfen und erzogen.
- 44 Ja, also Ehebeziehung, das schon das Wichtigste eigentlich. [...] Es ist für mich, durch meine Frau habe ich auch meinen Glauben, ich will nicht sagen: gefunden. Das stimmt nicht. Aber auch gestärkt, weil sie auch gläubig ist, genauso gläubig. Und miteinander haben unseren Glauben wachsen lassen. Und das hat mir auch sehr stark gemacht. Und wir sind immer noch so der Meinung, durch Glaube ist unsere Liebe entstanden und durch diese Liebe, ist so stark wie das Glaube ist.

- 45 Erstmal ich gucke, was das ist. Ob es für mich wichtig ist. [...] Zum Beispiel, wenn ich jetzt Arbeit suche oder studieren will. [...] Dann gucke ich, was ist jetzt für die Gesellschaft wichtig. [...] Und gucke auf meine Familie, für mein Leben. Gut und wichtig ist, oder für mich, dass ich gut wohlfühle da. Dann mache ich das. Und dann geht's für Arbeit, für Zukunft, für meine Familie oder überhaupt eine Entscheidung.
- 46 Definitiv hat es einen Sinn, weil ich bin dankbar für alles. Ich lebe mein Leben, wie es Christus will und ich versuche es zumindest, so weit wie möglich in Nähe zur Heiligkeit zur kommen. Ob das klappt oder nicht, ich jeder ist sündig und jeder kann sündigen. Ich bin nur ein Mensch, heißt das, ne. Aber das ist für mich das Leben, was ich jetzt lebe, es komplett einen Sinn. Ich habe Familie, ich habe Kinder, ich bin dankbar für alles und ich habe einen großen Lebenssinn. Also alles eigentlich: Glaube, Kinder, Leben, meine Frau.
- 47 Glauben habe ich ausführlich gesagt, über die Werte von Glauben. Aber auch Familienwerte, also wenn ich diese gute Moral weitergeben kann an meine Kinder zum Beispiel. Moral ist aber auch eine ganz große abstrakte Sache, kann man auch durch Glauben, aber auch, kann man durch normale Sache weiter verbessern. Moral ist wichtig, ist so auch ein guter Wert. Zum Beispiel, es gibt ja immer diese, wie soll ich sagen, Respekt für andere Menschen, Respekt auch für seine Eltern. Na klar, anders Gläubige werden das auch ja sagen. Deswegen sage ich, es ist viel gemischt unter vielen Menschen, ist Moral. Auch Sexualität, ist ja auch ein wichtiger Punkt durch den Glauben. Und diese ganzen Werte, die auch Zehn Gebote in den Glauben geben, gebe ich das einfach weiter. Das ist eigentlich, was in der Bibel steht, ist für mich viel wert. [...] [I: Können Sie das ein bisschen näher erläutern?] Also es gibt Sex vor der Ehe zum Beispiel, das ist für mich ein Wert, der eigentlich in dem christlichen Glauben sagt: Nein, ne, deswegen. Gibt es aber auch diese ganzen pornografischen Sachen, die man auch gucken könnte. Das ist für mich auch wertlos und deswegen, finde ich, gebe ich das weiter an meine Familie und an Freunde.
- 48 Im Geistliche Auge glauben.
- 49 Im Verstand glauben.
- 50 Also ich glaube an... also ich bin nicht ein [Fanatiker] im Glauben, ne. Ich bin nicht, dass ich jetzt äh Kreuzzüge (lachend) machen, nein. Ich bin einfach- ich glaube an Gott, das ist meine eigene Meinung. Ich hoffe und ich bete, dass viele Leute auch das glauben. Weil für mich, ich halte das für richtig. Ich bin gläubig. Was die katholische Kirche uns lehrt, ich mache das halt. [I: Und was bedeutet das für Sie?] Ja, mein ganzes Leben ist [...] also Glaube. Ohne Glaube für mich ist nix. Für mich. Und bedeutet für mich alles. Mein Gott ist erste Stelle für mich.
- 51 Ich würde mich da gläubig, spirituell und religiös in einer. (lacht) Es bedeutet für mich, ich bin ein praktizierender Christ. Das ist für mich gläubig. Das heißt, ich versuche, mein Glaube zu praktizieren, zu bewegen und das ist kein toter Glaube, dann lebendiger Glaube. [...] Also religiös, spirituell und gläubig natürlich haben verschiedene Bedeutungen wahrscheinlich, aber für mich ... ich kann nur sagen: „Ich bin gläubig, bedeutet eigentlich alle drei. [...] Ich glaube an höhere Mächte, ich glaube an den Heiligen Geist, das ist spirituell wieder mal. [...] Ich glaube an Gott, das ist Gläubigkeit. Und religiös: Ich praktiziere mein Christentum. Und das ist für mich religiös.

- 52 Ja, ich halte mich als religiös oder gläubig. Aber auch nicht genug. [I: Wieso nicht?] Wie ich erzählt habe, mein Glaube wächst bis zum Tod und deswegen bin ich, wenn man so betrachtet, [...] immer am wachsen und deswegen ist es immer klein, [...]. Religiös ist, wenn man einfach einer Religion angenommen hat, akzeptiert diese Religion. Das ist für mich religiös. Glaubt, weil man diese Religion glaubt. Weil, es gibt viele, die getauft sind oder auch ihre Berufe gemacht haben [...]. Aber die glauben das nicht. Und das ist unterschiedlich, religiös, gläubig, dritte Stufe ist spirituell und das ist für mich die, ich will nicht sagen, höchste Stufe, aber die Stufe, wo man wirklich an höhere Mächte, wirklich daran wirklich glaubt und tatsächlich glaubt, dass durch Glaube, nicht nur praktizierter, aber auch nicht nur Routine oder Tradition, sondern, durch Glaube kann man Sachen verändern, kann man Heilung machen, kann man aber auch Wunder tätigen. Und das ist spirituell, genau.
- 53 Also hab ich geglaubt an Gott wie jedes Kind, die glaubt an Gott, am Anfang und hab ich das Gefühl, dass es gut ist, ne. Und das war für mich wie ein Vater am Anfang. [...] Und dann so [in den 90ern] ja, bin ich weg von Gott. Also ich hab also mehr Freunde, die ich nicht Gott glaubt, kennen gelernt. Äh das war, sagen wir, Antichrist, ne. Heavy Metal, Hardrock sind nur Musik für manche Leute, aber für mich es so'n weglaufen von Gott, ne. [...] Bis [später in den 90ern], als ich auf diese Wallfahrt [gegangen bin] und da hab ich also Mutter Gottes, sagen wir mal so, krass gesagt, gefühlt. [...] [Ich] hab gebeichtet da, [nachdem ich] [viele] Jahre nicht gebeichtet [hatte]. [...] Und da hab ich da gefühlt, das gibt jemand, der mich hilft. [...] Und ich habe jetzt meinen alten Glauben. Ich glaube an Gott, an Jesus, an Maria. An alles, was normale gläubig ist [I: Und wie kann man Ihr derzeitiges Gottesbild heute beschreiben?] Ja, also, ich glaube an Gott. Ich glaube an alles, was katholischer Katechismus also... [...]. Also für mich Gott ist immer stärker, ich glaube immer an Gott. Manche Tage ist weniger, manche ist stärker, ist normal, ich bin auch ein Mensch, ne. Ich bin kein Papst oder so. Aber ja, ich versuche mein Bestes, meinen Glauben zu behalten.
- 54 [Am Anfang] das war einfach ein ganz routinierter Glaube, [...]. Ich habe immer gewusst, dass Gott existiert, auch in meiner Tiefphase, aber die Beziehung zu Gott war sehr schlecht in der Zeit, wo ich Tiefphase hatte. Gott war für mich wie ein Gegner, ich habe alle Schuld auf ihm gegeben und ich habe ihm gesagt: „Du bist Schuld, dass ich so bin.“ Und habe mich mit ihm so im Inneren gestritten. Also ganz stark. [...] Und mein Blick hat sich wieder geändert nach der Umkehr in Medjugorje, dass ich gesehen habe, dass Gott nicht Schuld ist, sondern bin ich selber, [...] und da hat sich dieser Blick geändert, dass er barmherzig, dass er alle liebt [...] und der hat mich verziehen und das hat mich so totales Blick zu Gott geändert. [...] Also wie gesagt, für mich ist es jetzt geworden wie ein Gottvater, wie ein Vater für mich, Gott. Wie er auf mich aufpasste, einen Weg für mich immer vorbereitet, [...]. Und früher war das Routine. Ich muss das machen, ich fahre in die Kirche, weil es ja alle machen und meine Eltern machen das und jetzt, ich weiß, ich gehe in die Kirche, weil ich mit Gott sein will.
- 55 Es hat sich eigentlich an sich nicht verändert, das Bild zu Gott, da ich an Gott glaube. Aber das Leben an sich, es wird immer schwieriger, solche Beziehungen zu erhalten mit Gott. [...] Ja, also es ist eine tiefe freundschaftliche Beziehung mit Gott. [...] Und deswegen, alles was ich tue oder mache oder so, das, denke ich immer, in

- diesem Sinne, ist immer, was begleitet mich. Und das ist für mich das Wichtigste. Also, ja, es hat sich eigentlich auch nicht verändert, das ist immer so geblieben. Mal stärker, mal schwächer, das ist immer so im Kampf, im täglichen Kampf, bei jedem. [...] Aber, ja, muss man immer sehen, wir leben in einer Welt, Glaube ist nicht immer das Erste. [...] Und hier, klar, habe ich Freunde, die glauben und da habe ich diese ganze Gesellschaft, die ich mitmache, das ist alles gläubig. Das fällt mir nicht schwer. Und ich stehe dazu, ganz stark und deswegen hat es mich jetzt auch nicht so gestört. [I: Und was bedeutet dieses Bild von Gott heute für Sie?] Immer noch ein großes Vaterbild, Beschützerbild und Vertrauen, großes Vertrauen, sozusagen, ja.
- 56 Also Böse in der Welt finde ich, es ist immer stärker. In der Welt. Obwohl jetzt viele Leute glauben und beten, und viele Leute umkehren, aber also Böse ist immer noch da, und bleibt eben auch da bis- sagen wir mal, katholische Kirche sagt, Rückkehr von Jesus. Ne. Dann ist es nicht mehr da, aber Böse ist immer steigt. Viele Leute sind gegen Kirche. Das ist auch böse. Also für mich. Also Antichrist, ne. Sind Satanismus, Antichristen, das ist böse. [...] Kenn ich also nicht am meisten, aber kenn ich das ganz gut. Ich kann das was sagen, und ich hab Erfahrungen damit. Dass es böse ist.
- 57 Also das Böse ist alles, was dazu bringt, Sünde zu machen. Das Böse ist eigentlich [der] sogenannte Teufel. [...] Wenn man jetzt nur an Gott glaubt, aber an den Teufel [nicht] glaubt, das ist auch wieder falsch. Nur ich bin sicher und ich glaube, oder ich weiß, dass Gott stärker als der Teufel, deswegen habe ich keine Angst vor ihm. [...] gibt viele Menschen, die sagen: „Oh, der Teufel. Spricht man nicht darüber“, und für mich ist es nicht der Fall. [...] Was nicht Licht ist, [wird] dunkel, also so ungefähr.
- 58 Ja, also im Christentum glaubt an Gott, aber auch gleichzeitig an den Teufel. Der Teufel ist kein Gott, ist einfach ein Engel, der Gott widerstanden hat oder nicht hören wollte oder ungehorsam gewesen. Und durch diesen Teufel, wir glauben dran, dass dieses Böse in den Menschen getan hat. [...] Und klar, Menschen tun Sünde, der Teufel arbeitet immer da dran, das ist ein Kampf zwischen Gott und Teufel, dass er immer versucht, Menschen für sich zu nehmen und Gott durch die größte Liebe die Menschen halt versucht, für sich zu gewinnen. Und Gott versucht das nicht durch Gewalt, sondern der hat ja wirklich den freien Willen gegeben und man entscheidet dafür oder dagegen. [...] Und Versuchung entspricht halt verschiedene Sachen, [...], Pornografie ist für mich eine Versuchung, die der Teufel ist und aber auch dies ganze Mord oder Gewalt. [...] Wenn man auch von weltlichen betrachtet, ist ein Mord passiert, der Mensch jemand umgebracht hat, das ist eigentlich ganz schlimm. [...] Und das kann man durch weltliche, rechtliche erklären, kann man auch durch meinen Glauben erklären.
- 59 The mean age for getting married in the early 2000s was about 32 years for men, and 29 for women (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).
- 60 Ich bete verschiedene Formen von Gebet, die uns halt die Bibel gibt, aber auch die Kirche uns gibt und verschiedene Heilige. Ich meditiere. Meditation will ich es nicht nennen, das ist für mich eine Anbetung. Ich bete die Eucharistie an, das heißt, die Leid Christi. [...] Meditation ist, wenn man für sich innerlich geht. Ich gehe für mich äußerlich und ich gebe hin. [...] Andersgläubige, wo ich alle toleriere, die meisten toleriere, sage mal so, aber die meditieren viel. Sie gehen innerlich, für sich selber, weil die glauben, der Mensch ist es halt Gott selber ungefähr, oder manche glauben.

Deswegen meditieren halt für sich selber. Und bei uns, also bei Christen ist es so, die Seele ist da, die Seele spricht mit Gott und die ist nicht innerlich alleine und für sich selber. Und deswegen ist für mich Anbetung, ich bete ihn, ich spreche halt mit Gott persönlich in einer Ebene.

6. Nadine—Spiritual Experiences without a Faith

“I’m rather flexible in my mind and perhaps I’m not really able to assemble a fixed worldview, which is something to get to grips with of course. Actually, I lack the ability. I used to try to create this somehow. I lack the ability to believe in something.”¹

Nadine is a young woman aged 25 in 2011, the year the first interview took place and who is studying at a university at time 1 and 2. At time 3, now aged 34 and having finished her studies, she refers to her current status rather vaguely as “working.” Growing up with a single mother and a grandmother who also served as a caregiver, one can say that Nadine’s main influences in her childhood and adolescence were female. She shares that her grandmother was a religious person, but did not influence her in this respect. Moreover, there is no explicit recognition of the fact that the majority of her childhood caregivers were women. Nadine self-identifies as “more spiritual than religious” and, despite being brought up in a liberal Catholic environment (especially kindergarten), she today does not feel like belonging to a denomination. Instead, her interviews suggest she can best be described as agnostic, which makes for an interesting contrast to a decidedly religious woman like Bianca.

6.1.1 Nadine’s Life Reviews and her Spiritual Experiences

It is not easy to get a clear image of Nadine’s life and her past, since she is an interviewee that needs time to acclimate to the interview situation, making her answers to the first few questions rather short in all of her interviews. Another reason for this might also be that she is reluctant to share too much personal information and feels more comfortable answering the more abstract questions in the third and fourth area. However, there is in an interesting difference between her answers at time 1 and time 2. Here is what she said in her first interview:

I would probably structure it into the classical developmental phases and less into actual events, or lines of thought or something because here it’s about, something

about lines of thought I believe, but I don't know. As a child you think in different ways than as an adult. You can't compare that.² (Nadine, FDI, time 1)

She refuses to go into much detail regarding her life review, and instead hypothesizes about the aim of the interview (which she suspects to be about different lines of thought). These thoughts come to a preliminary end with the rather generalized insight that children think differently from adults.

At time 2, her answer has a note that is more oriented along her biography, even though it is still quite abstract:

There is always this stuff where something has changed, for me, that is. Like, when I was eight or nine, that's the first section, that's when I first decided consciously to give up externalizing behavior and to internalize more. At 13, well, I can't give that a heading, at 13, I basically first started to develop a lot personally, to engage with different topics and made some first experiences, like, I basically started to deal with myself and my environment more consciously.³ (Nadine, FDI, time 2)

Nadine shows that she is a reflective person and can look at her younger self from an analytical perspective; however, while the vocabulary seems to fit, it remains unclear what exactly she means when talking about "externalizing behavior." She pinpoints crucial turning points for her thinking yet does not connect them with actual events, like in the first-time interview. What she does mention at another point in the interview is a friendship/relationship that started when she was 13 and that changed the way she approached the world because with that person, she could be herself for the first time in her life.

At time 3, her answer is even shorter and more generic:

Well, the classics, I guess. Kindergarten, primary school, school and so on. The classic development phases according to external standards. [I: How would you describe the chapters?] Um, time till kindergarten, kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, high school, um, a phase of self-discovery, um, how should I call the next? Work, study, work, (smiles) like that.⁴ (Nadine, FDI, time 3)

Nadine more or less completely rejects several offers to go into more detail regarding the named chapters. Instead, she repeats those chapters that are characterized as "classic development phases according to external standards." Thereby, she emphasizes the normality of her own life course while implicitly revealing that she may know a bit about developmental psychology. The only term that deviates from the important stations she names is "a phase of self-discovery." And while this still fits very well into the set of "classics" she names, it will become clear that this phase is of some importance for her development.

Going on, Nadine reveals a little more detail about her past. During adolescence, she started voluntary work:

[...], it's normal to make experiences in life and have this job or do something there [...]. So, in my youth, from 13 to 16, I worked in the animal shelter. [...] and of course,

after the 'Abitur,' I had a lot of different jobs, any of which were turning points, with new experiences with stuff that I learned from scratch, because I always did stuff that I had not done before, in order to learn that. Like, I always looked for jobs and work—not the animal shelter, that was out of passion—but the rest I always picked according to the aspect, what am I not capable of, what is my biggest horror, and then I tried it and therefore I collected a lot of experiences, because I was like, hey, your development is maybe not complete at that age, you can still turn things around.⁵ (Nadine, FDI, time 1)

She refers to a norm of having different jobs, in her case for different reasons. While the work at the animal shelter was 'passion,' the other jobs were chosen from a very pragmatic and analytic perspective. Driven by the wish to learn something new and to confront her fears, Nadine portrays herself as a very autonomous person who is open to new experiences and, despite her fears and limitations (which will be discussed below), competent and capable.

This wish to be the master of her own life story gets framed differently at time 3. When asked for times of crises, she states that it has always been difficult for her to adapt and that finding understanding with other people was always problematic. She then says:

That went on for a couple of years, and then I was like, I have to get back on my feet again, I have to do something. [...] Plainly, it was a bit of stubbornness, because there was a different life predestined for me than I had imagined it, you know. You just get put into a pigeonhole and that gets you into a system, erm, in which you stay a victim, if you don't resist, I'd say, or, you know, just stay sick. [...] and my perspective wasn't very bright [...], and therefore, for me, this was the motor to just do something. [...] And I believe, in the end the biggest driving force was always fear. Fear of the alternatives. Like, you can say that about my whole life, anything that I ever accomplished or did, was mainly because of fear of the alternatives. That's slightly depressing, but that's how it is, yeah.⁶ (Nadine, FDI, time 3)

This statement has a very different level of reflectedness than is apparent in her other interviews. She gives an explanation for the striving for autonomy and confronting herself with new situations that were mentioned in her first two interviews. Growing up, she has experienced that she does not fulfill society's expectations and obviously faced the fear of getting stigmatized and eventually "locked away." Thus, it seems that she became proactive to avoid this possible dystopia she talks about. She does not go into detail about what kind of problems she has had, but she does mention that there was a time when she was depressed and even considered suicide. Interestingly, even though she describes herself as not religious and rather science-oriented, this episode is connected with a spiritual experience. For her, this is something she has to argue strongly, as can be seen in her answer regarding breakthrough experiences at time 1:

You have to be careful how you talk about all this, but I was quite depressive and was feeling poorly. I sometimes thought about suicide, never seriously tried, but thought about it, and then I once had this very intense dream and after that, I was finished with that... I knew the score. That was very interesting. Like, I had

stuff like this from time to time, wherever this comes from, and I don't mean to judge, whether I was on a different level or in heaven or something like that. Well, heaven is wrong as well since I don't believe in that Christian heaven. [...] Whether this comes out of my brain or wherever that comes from, I don't know. Well, I'm not crazy (laughs), but those were partly helpful things. [...] The terms are difficult because a lot of esoteric people are going into that direction, with whom I don't want to be stuck into a box, but there is something like a higher consciousness, which is always there but which you can't always reach and, in this night, I just could reach it. And looking back it's like, the knowledge has always been there but could not be reached and so this was such an enlightenment.⁷ (Nadine, FDI, time 1)

The answer is initiated with a cautious statement indicating that Nadine is well aware of the fact that the things she is going to say might be controversial. She has portrayed herself as a person oriented toward science and not at all religious. The spiritual experience she describes then is formative in more than one way. Not only does it end her suicidal thoughts, but it also makes her realize that there is a "higher consciousness" that is usually out of reach despite her being a self-identified rational person. She is struggling for the right words here and coming to the conclusion that both the Christian framework ("heaven") and the esoteric one ("higher consciousness") do not suit her well, even though she does not succeed in describing her experience without referring to either of those. Being associated with both Christians and esoteric people is connotated negatively for her.

The story is brought up again at time 2, again when asked for breakthrough experiences:

That's probably a bit difficult to describe, I mean, other people would probably file that under spiritual experience—I know that, and I just accept it—but from time to time I had very enlightening experiences, inspirations, that helped me on. Like, for example, in my youth I was really depressive and often thought about suicide and how I just don't want to anymore and so on, but then I just... it was shown to me or I made the experience, don't know, doesn't matter at all what my brain did there, but since then I could never again seriously consider this [...]. Like, that was quite interesting, I don't know exactly how to call it, like, if you should call it a vision or something, yes, but since then the topic was done, and it's always like this: I've never known in my life how it would go on, I don't have any goal, which is probably related to my lack of self-image or worldview or something like that. [...] I just have things like that sometimes. Basically, they are also somehow parts of me that are obviously doing something, but this may also go against my actual opinion. [...] And I have things like that at times which push me into one direction. Yes, that's kind of interesting.⁸ (Nadine, FDI, time 2)

The way she starts her answer appears defensive, as if she expects some form of judgment from the interviewer, potentially because she has faced criticism when telling her story before. The nature of her experience remains vague in this account as well, but it becomes clear that it was a life-changing experience which cannot be put into words and may be

best described with “directly experiencing a form of transcendence.” By mentioning her brain, she implies that this experience might be a neurological phenomenon, but she obviously does not feel the necessity to resolve this fully. She then says that she does not have a real direction in her life and attributes this to a “lack of self-image or worldview,” and this gap in her life plan is filled with those experiences that push her life in a certain direction, whether she likes that direction or not. This remark is interesting because it serves the purpose to render her inspirations more believable. They work even if she does not want them to work, making them “real magic,” since they work against her own intuition and will at times. This makes her overall statement at time 2 more defensive than at time 1.

Nevertheless, she has managed to integrate this experience into her life story, but when she talks about it at time 3, she sounds like she is not very happy with or at least skeptical about having these moments of enlightenment, as can be seen in this quote:

Sometimes there are those intuitions, like suddenly I know I have to do that. They come out of the blue or like I know why I should not do a certain thing or [...] I get a certain dream somehow, which is quite different from this usual dream nonsense. And then I just know... I'm basically a different person in the morning because I'm like, oh, okay, this has to be different from now on. And I don't always like that, but it always turned out to be the right thing. [...] I believe the most remarkable situation was that at one point, basically from one night to the other, by having this sort of experience, I knew that I would not kill myself, I would not want to do that. [...] Since this night, I never seriously considered it. [...] Which I find stupid at times, (smiles) but, yeah, that's why I would say: yes, there are such experiences.⁹ (Nadine, FDI, time 3)

Her line of argumentation is interesting here. Those “intuitions” appear unexpected and are unwanted and inconvenient at times. They appear on such a regular basis that she cannot ignore them and so instead she decides to make them part of her life narrative, albeit with a skeptical undertone that shows a certain distance from her own experience and makes it harder to argue against it, since even though she does not embrace them. As a reflective and rational person, those dreams and intuitions are still there. This is a similar line of argumentation like at time 2; however, it comes across in a less defensive way.

Summed up, Nadine's life review is meagre when it comes to personal details. However, a development could be traced insofar as that her experiences and her special features seem to become more integrated into her life narrative. She seems the most defensive at time 2, which is a time when she felt the need to justify the course her life is. The look at Nadine's life review contains a surprise. Despite her not belonging to a denomination, some of her most defining accounts circle around a spiritual experience. Therefore, I will take a closer look at her worldview and her assumed spirituality and at the way Nadine answers the question “What does death mean to you?” as an example of her approach to existential questions.

6.1.2 Nadine's Worldview and How She Thinks about Death

Nadine's Worldview

Nadine is an individual who has self-identified throughout all phases as “more spiritual than religious.” According to her interviews, she does not identify with any form of religion, yet she also rejects the label “atheist.” From the accounts analyzed above it became clear that there is some involvement with a form of transcendence, but it is not easy to figure out how Nadine defines this transcendence. So, as a first approximation to her belief system, we have here the data that have been labeled as describing “subjective religiosity,” which may not be the most fitting term for Nadine:

Wave 1: Her concept of spirituality, as she provides it in the survey, is an encompassing one and she states that everything is spiritual. At the same time, she emphasizes her openness to different interpretations, thereby rejecting narrow-mindedness. Religion, being the literal translation of re-connection (a detail that she gives at every timepoint), is something man-made and is created to give support and provide meaning. These two definitions show the contrast she sees between those two concepts and imply that religion is something that is connotated slightly negatively, rather by omission than by actually saying it, since the openness that is emphasized in her definition of spirituality is missing when she defines religion, which is characterized as a more concluded concept. This is in accordance with her choice for “more spiritual than religious” and is further supported by her answer in the interview in which she chooses “spiritual” for characterizing herself. Again, there is a clear distinction between spiritual and religious with the latter obviously being connected to a community (implying, again, a certain rigidity). Being spiritual is described as being open, aware, and mindful, which is a condition that seems desirable to her (and probably also desirable for society as a whole), since she distinguishes between a “spiritual level” and a “human level.” The human level, on which she finds herself sometimes as well, is judgmental and probably not very tolerant, while a person on the spiritual level does not value others and shows a great sense of tolerance with the presupposition that there is no reason to believe that the person in front of her should be wrong while she is right. Here, Nadine shows traces of a xenosophic approach by emphasizing an equality between all humans at a young age, even though she does not go as far as letting herself be actually changed by the other.

Table 12: Data on Nadine's Worldview

Nadine	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	<p><i>spirituality</i>: There is nothing that's not spiritual, I view everything that is as spiritual. Terminologies are a matter of interpretation and I see a definition of something not as the only, but as one possibility among others.¹⁰</p> <p><i>religion</i>: For me personally, religion means: religiare – reconnection (to God). In my common parlance for me it means, though: a human construct, created to hold on to and produce meaningfulness.¹²</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: "Geistigkeit, Geistliches" (which both, in English, translate to the term spiritual(ity), with the connotation of mental, intellectual)</p> <p><i>religion</i>: belief system with metaphysical or transcendental content¹³</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: "Geistigkeit," inner life¹¹</p> <p><i>religion</i>: literally: reconnection¹⁴</p>
self-assessment	<p>more spiritual than religious</p>	<p>more spiritual than religious</p>	<p>more spiritual than religious</p>
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	<p>Umm, spiritual. But like I said, spiritual, what does that mean? [...] For me, it's not connected with a community or with a little group that I hang out with or with a denomination. [...] I think to be spiritual, for me that's just trying to live consciously and to the best of my knowledge and to be mindful and to try to look behind things and just be open for everything [...], because the other person is a part of the creation just like me, why should they be wrong and I am right? No, that's not plausible and that's why spirituality for me is an awareness of this level on which there is no valuation. On my lower human level, I evaluate just like any other person does. Right, you can't avoid that. [...] But often, I'm on this level where there is no valuation.¹⁵</p>	<p>Definitely not faithful. Religious in the sense it is connotated in our society today—neither. Most likely I would probably say I have a spiritual element, at least due to my experiences and because I engaged with that a lot, like during adolescence, when I was still searching. I engaged myself a lot with faith, religion, and spirituality and from this, spirituality—as the term is used—is what's closest to me. Like, actually I would describe myself as a latently spiritual person. [...] I used to wish sometimes that I could [be religious], because it's nice to have a system you can hold on to, that's really helpful, you know, but, since I cannot do this, I could not fit into this or just accept that for myself, things like, that's true, that's false, that's good, that's bad, that's right, these are the laws, these are the commandments, that's how you're supposed to live, God is this and that, you have to follow what God says, like, this is... nay.¹⁶</p>	<p>Umm, of these three, maximally spiritual, but this with caution since, like I said, I just don't feel belonging to a group, no faith community. I don't follow a special worldview or a model or something. I'm just interested in those things, I'm interested in religion, spirituality, what others believe, what kind of experiences they have made, what kind of realizations they had in this area, that's what I'm interested in, and that's what I engage with, now and then. [...] And I don't associate spirituality with a rigid system or something. [...] Like, I'm not a person who'd say, "So, this guy can see angels, has he lost all his marbles or something?" I can just accept that and be like, okay, well, why not. Like, I do not necessarily judge this.¹⁷</p>

Wave 2: This time, her definitions are short. For “spirituality,” she gives two words, which are associated with intellect or the mind in German. Her definition of “religion” may be seen as in opposition to this “Geist,” by naming “belief” as first association. Interestingly, a transcendental reference is brought up here which does not appear in the other data in this table. In her interview answer, she chooses to characterize herself as spiritual again, though not with references to an open mind, even though she indirectly names her open mind as a reason for her spirituality. But her statement sounds less deterministic than at time 1, which may be an indicator for a development with Nadine having integrated this stance and feeling less compelled to declare this as a prerequisite for everyone. Her own “supernatural” experiences are named as an additional factor for her own spirituality, hereby giving a biographical background information which serves as an autobiographical argument, since it can be assumed that having actually experienced something supernatural would not leave a person without effect. Moreover, she portrays herself as an intellectual person who has engaged with religious and spiritual people and literature despite not being faithful herself, describing a thorough searching movement, which implies that she was not looking for easy answers. However, when turning to the term “religion” in her answer, she admits to flirting with the idea of following a religion with its strict and unambiguous system of rules. But she cannot bring herself to believe in something like that, implying a certain rebelliousness which prevents her from actually “fitting in.” This might be described as “religiously tone-deaf” (Weber, 1994, p. 65) and as not being able to get to the core of a belief. We have a very strong self-characterization of Nadine as an autonomously thinking person who, despite admitting to certain “weaknesses” occasionally, prefers making decisions for herself and not following blindly any kind of rulebook. This is also in accordance with what has been said about her approach to religion at time 1.

Wave 3: Her definitions in the survey are very short. In addition to the term “Geistigkeit” (which is a very uncommon word in German), she makes a reference to the “inner life” without elaborating on that further, which may be, taking into account her answers from the earlier interviews, understood as an inner attitude. Interestingly, in contrast to her other interview answers, being spiritual is not embraced as unconditionally as before, rather appearing as the best, but not correct approximation to a self-characterization. She rejects the idea of belonging to a community and emphasizes her individual, intellectual approach of engaging with religious and spiritual topics. An intellectual curiosity can be inferred from her statement, which was there already at time 2 but not with the same emphasis. While, at time 2, this engagement was justified with her searching for something, at time 3, it seems as if she does that with the aim of gathering knowledge and of a better understanding of people in general. In this statement, she is also demanding tolerance, or rather describes lived tolerance for everyone, including people who are outside a socially demonstrated norm. Her last sentence infers a certain openness and acceptance of approaches that obviously seem improbable to her; however, this does not seem to go further than just letting the other be in a “live and let live” manner.

Nadine's Image of God

With this in mind, it is interesting to look at her answers to the question regarding her image of God and her worldview.

I have relatively early, at the age of 10, 11, started to deal with religion. When I was 13, I read the Bible. Like, from the beginning to the end. I believe I am one of the few people who did that because that is a real torture reading all those family trees in the Old Testament. That's crazy. [...] Yeah, I just wanted, I was in search of... Like, I wanted to see what benefits do people gain from that? Does it make sense? Does it not make sense? How do I position myself? I wanted to experience all of this. [...] Went to a Christian camp two or three times, when I was 12 or 13. [...] But couldn't agree to some of those opinions and accordingly I dealt with those on a deeper level and so turned away from Christianity. [...] So I was always in search of how other people do that [...] and processed a lot, thought a lot, read a lot. [...] Yes, and I always pondered, always coming to the conclusion that if there is a god I cannot find out and if there isn't I can't either. Like, well, maybe I'm too much of a logical person. [...] But basically, I don't allow myself to be too opinionated about God because I just cannot judge this.¹⁸ (Nadine, FDI, time 1)

Starting age 12, 13—perhaps it started a bit earlier even—I was always searching for my worldview and really engaged with a lot of things, with religion, philosophy, I read the Bible from the beginning to the end, I engaged with Buddhism a lot, like, the things you do [...]. During a period when I felt really bad, I was kind of searching again in some form, I guess, but yes, actually, I've not been searching actively for anything for years now because, for me, it's okay as it is. [...] I'm rather flexible in my mind and perhaps I'm not really able to assemble a fixed worldview, which is something to get to grips with of course. [...] Actually, I lack the ability. I used to try to create this somehow. I lack the ability to believe in something, [...]. I can't just go about and say: God exists, God doesn't exist, because I just don't know it, and for me it is of no relevance because I'm not able to figure that out reasonably, like, therefore, my worldview is, like, when you connect this, but also generally speaking, not that fixed.¹⁹ (Nadine, FDI, time 2)

Since I was eight, I think, I slowly started to ponder, do I have a worldview? And if so, what does it look like? [...] And since then I've usually been looking at multiple different worldviews. So, in the end, for me it is difficult because every person has a view of the world, and so do I. But I could not assert that I have a fixed worldview. There are just too many variables that I cannot take into account objectively because I am a subjective being, [...]. For my life, I just try to figure out what is important in the respective situation or relevant or what is useful. [...] So, I have engaged with that a lot, met people accordingly and questioned them about their faith. [...] At least, for me, that widened my horizon concerning other people, and therefore contributed to my basal understanding of the world, so, in the end, to my worldview, which I can't really grasp because it is not fixed, but beliefs or worldviews mainly have to do with people and therefore I learned a lot about people, yes.²⁰ (Nadine, FDI, time 3)

At time 1, she portrays herself as a person who is well-read; having read the Bible completely is marked as something special (“I am one of the few who did that”), even more so since that experience is described as torture. This can be seen as a rebellious act because

by doing so, she seems to deviate from what would normally be expected from a teenager. The reason why she did that seems to have less to do with wanting to be different but because she wanted to understand the benefits people gain from being religious. It seems that she was hoping for support and to find meaning, not only in the religious area, but as a means to better understand people in general. Intellectual doubts (“couldn’t agree to some of those opinions”) prevent her from adopting the Christian faith. In the end, she does not seem to completely deny that there is a God after all, yet states that there is no way for her to know for certain, which may be labelled as “pragmatic agnostic.”

Her answer at time 2 takes up similar topics. She talks about her searching movements and the ways she engaged with different approaches to answering her questions and to finding support and stability, emphasizing the intellectual way she deals with these topics, this time marking it as an expected behavior (“like, the things you do”). Her desire to portray her teenage self as rebellious and non-conformist are not as strong at this time. More emphasis is put on herself being at peace with the fact that she could not come up with a fixed worldview. Having to deal with an unstable worldview is described as hard work (“which is something to get to grips with of course”), but she can accept it now just as it is, and doesn’t feel the pressure to definitely decide existential questions for herself such as whether God exists or not. Combined with previous efforts of finding answers in Christianity or Buddhism, the observation that Nadine sees herself as “religiously tone-deaf” is supported, a finding that is the strongest in her time 2 interviews. Again, her overall stance can be labelled as “pragmatic agnostic.”

At time 3, we can still see the search for meaning (“try to figure out what is important in the respective situation”). But at this timepoint, it is less a debate about religion—the question of the Divine is not asked here—and more about different worldviews. More importantly, it seems like she has changed the way she approaches those different worldviews. While at time 1 and time 2, she talks about reading a lot, at time 3 she explains how she has met different people with different backgrounds (and it is implied that she maybe even sought those encounters deliberately) and thereby widened her own horizon. These encounters also helped her get a better understanding of the world and of her own stance towards it, even though she still arrives at the conclusion that her worldview cannot be fixed because there are too many unknown variables. This indicates a certain tendency to hold her own worldview higher than that of others, since she does not consider it very plausible to hold firm beliefs. In the end, she concludes that those encounters have helped her understand people as a whole better.

Combining the findings from the data assembled here, Nadine’s worldview can best be described as agnostic. She does not want to be associated with any form of organized religion, yet she has no fixed opinion regarding the existence of God, which is mirrored also in her answers on the Representation of God scale. God, for her, is equally authoritarian and benevolent as well as a little more mystical and ineffable. All of these scores, however, demonstrate an accordance with normality in the sample average. This also means that most people who characterize themselves as atheist and/or as not belonging to one religion have lower scores on these scales, which might indicate that Nadine is not “finished” dealing with God. Her self-characterization of being spiritual gets less convinced over time, and the meaning it has for her becomes less abstract and less life-defining. However, it becomes clear that this whole topic has some relevance for her life. She names

it directly when talking about her searching movements in her youth. It is striking that she takes a very rational and intellectual approach when investigating other worldviews and that there obviously is little that she can fall back onto, and there seems to be a strong desire to engage with this topic, albeit with a critical stance. But, unlike what you would expect from someone who does not have any special form of religiosity or spirituality, Nadine defines herself consistently as “more spiritual than religious.” There is a prevailing uncertainty, or, more positively, an openness for something that may be beyond her otherwise rational approach. Looking at her answers regarding her worldview, we see a development insofar as there is less critical engagement with organized religion. While she noticeably contrasts her own stance with that of faithful people in her first two interviews, she seems more self-assured in her third interview and more settled in her not-fixed worldview. Interestingly, she mainly talks about reading a lot during times 1 and 2, yet at time 3, her focus is on engagement and dialog with people with diverse backgrounds. Even though it cannot be said for certain how much Nadine internalizes from these conversations and how much she lets herself be actually changed, it can be stated that Nadine is moving toward a more xenosophic worldview over the years.

Nadine’s Approach to the Question on Death

When looking at her FDI ratings (for a discussion of her style assignments, see below), it became clear that the question “What does death mean to you? What happens to us when we die?” might serve as an example to trace how Nadine’s religious style has developed over the years. She takes a seemingly pragmatic approach at time 1:

Yeah, it happens. (laughs) I believe [...] I’m not afraid of it, though I wouldn’t cheer it either. It’s just a process, like going to the loo, so, everything that lives in a biological sense, dies at one point [...]. Even though I adored my grandma, it was not upsetting when she died, like, it was not upsetting for me. With that, I am pretty out of the ordinary.²¹ (Nadine, FDI, time 1)

She states that death itself is a normal process and just a part of human existence in her estimation. She underlines that opinion by mentioning how unaffected she was by the death of her grandmother. Again, she admits that this is something she believes sets her apart from the majority of people, making her special or the “odd one out.”

In her second interview, she basically affirms what she said in her first interview but illustrates what she means by telling a story. Keeping in mind that Nadine’s usual way of answering the questions is more abstract and analytical, it is still not surprising that we find this narrative here when Nadine is asked about death, since she talks about her friend who has suffered a life-threatening condition:

Table 13: *Nadine's Narrative: "Talking with her Friend"*

Orientation	My friend nearly kicked the bucket more than once, when she had that [medical condition X] and I could not visit her in the ICU because I'm not a close relative.
Complication	But one night I disputed with her—or rather, not with her, that's the question—perhaps my brain did that, but I disputed with her or her spirit or whatever a whole night long, about her condition, it was like she visited me, spiritually or whatever and I thought, shit, how far away is she already if she comes to visit me? That was awfully intense and I tried to break it to her the whole night long, what condition she is in, she did not understand that at all, for her, it was all like, "Why, I'm fine, all is cool and stuff," [...] that was really exhausting, [...]. I told her, "You have to decide this. If you want to go, then go, if you want to stay, then stay. But you have to make that decision based on facts."
Evaluation	But those are experiences that you can't really tell anyone about and I can't classify that. [...] Like, I can't say that was real. Perhaps my brain did that, I don't know.
Resolution	I don't care, I just take that as it is, as a given, but I know that I don't know what this is about. Actually, it's funny, but interestingly it doesn't lead me to a faith. (laughs)
Coda	Yeah, but such things regarding death come to mind, making me think, if I just take this for granted, I can imagine that there is something like a spiritual existence that is connected to the body. ²² (Nadine, FDI, time 2)

This narrative illustrates how she handles both emotionally challenging situations and her "spiritual" streak. It is interesting to note that she pleads for a fact-based approach and asks her friend not to die out of impulse even in this described conversation. It becomes apparent that she is struggling to integrate those episodes into her otherwise scientific mindset. She implies that she cannot classify those experiences, which is why she is hesitant to talk about them in the first place, maybe fearing judgment from others or being labeled with something she does not identify with ("faith" is named here; in her first interview, she mentions not wanting to be called esoteric). Nevertheless, she can leave the question of who is right in the end open, which is remarkable and a special feature of all of her interviews.

At time 3, she gives an answer which was rated style 5 (dialogical religious style) in the FDI analysis:

I guess what I think about death is connected to what I think about life. For me, this whole concept is so crazy, to somehow come into being and then be no more. That can't be understood easily, I believe. [I: And what happens to us when we die?] We rot. (smiles) No, I don't know, like, on a spiritual level I don't know that and otherwise, of course, the body decays into its components, in one way or another. And perhaps you passed on your genes and you can wonder whether this leads anywhere. And everything else, if there is such a thing like a soul beyond the brain and so on, I just can't tell, the same with the question of a higher power or something else. I have experienced stuff that could be called spiritual experiences. I can't say whether my brain fired and mixed something together or not. [...] But I just let it stand as it is. And therefore, I can leave open the question as to what happens after death. I cannot answer this and I will surely find out.²³ (Nadine, FDI, time 3)

This answer considers aspects that were not mentioned in her first two interviews: a more holistic view on life and death as a whole. The biological side is described and there is even the notion of generativity, i.e. passing on one's genes. All these aspects are considered with a certain curiosity enriched with her spiritual experiences, which add a different perspective on the whole topic which is, as she admits, not to be answered easily. Nadine seems more certain and more self-assured in this answer than she was in her first two interviews. The challenge to not ultimately know everything and to deal with uncertainties seems like something she is even more at peace with.

Her development in religious styles can be followed well in those answers. Starting with style 3 (mutual religious style) and an approach that is rather reticent and defensive, she moves on to a more elaborated engagement with the topic of death. At time 3, she can hold different aspects in tension and she seems to be content with not having a finite answer as is typical for the dialogical style 5. The following section will take up this observation and triangulate the different data available for Nadine.

6.1.3 Nadine's Development—Triangulating the Data

To complete the picture the narrative analysis of Nadine's interviews suggests, I present selected scores from her survey data:

Table 14: Selected Data from Nadine's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Nadine	M (SD)	Nadine	M (SD)	Nadine	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	2.00	2.63 (1.17)	1.40	2.42 (1.12)	1.40	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	4.40	4.35 (0.38)	5.00	4.28 (0.51)	4.80	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	4.60	3.64 (0.75)	3.40	3.57 (0.76)	4.00	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	4.00	3.67 (0.59)	3.86	3.20 (0.40)	3.43	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	3.14	3.67 (0.71)	2.43	3.72 (0.59)	2.14	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.71	4.38 (0.38)	4.29	4.17 (0.39)	4.14	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	3.29	3.86 (0.65)	2.71	3.90 (0.62)	2.57	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	3.43	3.77 (0.61)	3.14	3.76 (0.51)	3.29	3.64 (0.50)

<i>self-acceptance</i>	3.14	3.79 (0.68)	3.14	3.86 (0.62)	2.86	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.08	3.42 (0.78)	2.67	3.40 (0.70)	2.50	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	2.92	3.26 (0.58)	2.42	3.25 (0.58)	2.08	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	3.50	3.90 (0.47)	3.92	3.89 (0.49)	3.75	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	3.17	3.74 (0.46)	3.33	3.73 (0.44)	3.17	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	3.92	3.70 (0.49)	3.92	3.76 (0.51)	3.92	3.78 (0.50)

On the Religious Schema Scale, it is interesting to see that her score for *ttt* declines over time and is one standard deviation lower than the sample mean at wave 3. While her score for *ftr* is constantly high, her *xenos* score is less unambiguous. She may reveal that while she rejects the idea of a dogmatic faith that demands uncritical and literal belief, her approach to the strange becomes more cautious over time. This is also implicitly mirrored in her interviews where she presents herself as a person who is introverted and not very sociable, even while enjoying discussions with others. This also shows in her low scores on *environmental mastery* and *positive relations with others*, which both ask for different facets of social interactions and general accomplishment of everyday life. Similarly low, and even declining over time, are her scores for *self-acceptance*, *emotional stability*, and *extraversion*. This all points to a personality with rather low self-esteem along with struggles in her biography, resulting in a person who keeps to herself. And while this general description may seem fitting and in accordance of what has been carved out as Nadine's narrative identity in the interviews, the downward tendency does not show in the interviews. It seems as if Nadine is more reflective and more stable at time 3; however, this may be due to the fact that she is very brief in responding to those questions that touch on her personal life and only gets more elaborated when she can give more abstract answers.

Nadine is an interesting case and reveals unique features in her life story. While not being religious, she chooses to characterize herself as spiritual (albeit with faltering certainty) and refrains from calling herself atheist in the survey. While the group of "spiritual atheists" has been described elsewhere (Keller et al., 2018), Nadine does not fit into that category. When looking for her leitmotif or the essence of her life story, a first approach may be the label "pragmatic agnostic." She states in her first two interviews that there is no way for her to know for sure whether or not God exists and therefore she will not make a final decision on that. At time 3, this dispute is not brought up again. It seems like Nadine is more at peace with that unstable worldview and is more content with not having strict rules or borders, therefore eliminating the need to place herself in relation to a (Christian) faith. One may see a shift in leitmotifs here. As for the other prominent

features of her interviews, it can be said that Nadine puts a lot of emphasis on her intellectual approach to various topics, especially religion and faith. While in the first two interviews she talks about having read a lot, her focus changes at time 3 to talking with diverse people. Being open to other worldviews is a motive that is present in all of her interviews. Openness also applies to her own experiences, which are spiritual and are defining for her, even though this is a highly controversial label. But she learns to accept those experiences and embrace their impact without necessarily having to sort herself into a certain corner over the timespan of ten years in which the interviews took place. This is a unique approach and is not an easy one, as is elaborated by Nadine, since she is struggling with herself and her social surroundings at all timepoints. However, being authentic and true to oneself seems to be another important leitmotif for Nadine as she presents herself in the interviews. Her development is mirrored in her classification within the religious types as a mover upward as shown in the content and narrative analysis of her interview. The aspect style maps for her time 1 and time 2 interview show that Nadine's answers vary between styles 3 and 4 (so from a mutual to an individuating-systemic religious style). This is typical for a young adult and shows that she is moving from a more interpersonal approach to a more reflective thinking that can take into account other positions as well. At time 3, most of her answers were rated style 4, which indicates an increase of explicit reasoning through the explicit reference to the larger society and the ability to critically reflect on one's own viewpoints. So she has moved on to a clearly predominantly individuating-reflective type (type 3) at time 3, even though there may be some more private things that Nadine rather not talks about and which are therefore harder to take into account as has been noted above.

Notes

- 1 Ich bin da eher sehr flexibel im Kopf und bin vielleicht auch nicht so richtig in der Lage, mir ein Weltbild fest zusammen zu bauen, womit man natürlich dann auch erst einmal klar kommen muss. [...] Tatsächlich fehlt mir die Fähigkeit. Ich habe zwischendurch in meinem Leben schon versucht, das irgendwie herzustellen. Mir fehlt die Fähigkeit, an irgendetwas zu glauben.
- 2 Ich würde es wahrscheinlich nach klassischen Entwicklungsphasen gliedern und weniger nach konkreten Ereignissen, oder Denkrichtung o. ä., weil hier geht es ja eher drum, dass man irgendwie ich glaube mit Denkrichtungen und so, aber weiß ich nicht. Als Kind denkt man eben eh ganz anders als Erwachsener. Das kann man nicht vergleichen.
- 3 Es sind halt immer so Sachen, wo sich halt irgendwie was verändert hat, also, für mich. Ja mit acht, neun, also das ist so der erste Abschnitt, da hab ich mich zum ersten Mal so bewusst entschieden, mir externalisierendes Verhalten abzugewöhnen und mehr zu internalisieren. Mit 13, also ich kann halt keine Überschrift geben, mit 13 habe ich eigentlich überhaupt angefangen, mich persönlich viel weiterzuentwickeln, mich mit verschiedenen Themen zu beschäftigen und habe auch überhaupt mal ein paar Erfahrungen gemacht so, also, da hab ich quasi angefangen, doch mich noch bewusster mit mir und der Umwelt auseinanderzusetzen.

- 4 Naja, die klassischen, nehme ich an. Kindergarten, Grundschule, Schule und so weiter. So die klassischen Entwicklungsphasen nach externen Maßstäben. [I: Welche Kapitel wären das dann zum Beispiel?] Hm Zeit bis zum Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Grundschulzeit, Realschule, Gymnasium, hm Selbstfindungsphase, hm ja, wie nenne ich es denn danach? Arbeit, Studium, Arbeit, (lächelt) so.
- 5 [...], es ist ja normal, dass man im Leben irgendwie Erfahrung macht und da eine Arbeit hat oder das was macht oder so [...]. Also so in der Jugendzeit, ich habe von 13 – 16 im Tierheim gearbeitet. [...] und klar, nach dem Abitur habe ich ganz viele verschiedene Jobs gemacht, die ja auch für sich genommen wieder irgendwelche Einschneidungen waren, mit neuen Erfahrungen mit Sachen, die ich neu gelernt habe, weil ich immer ganz viel gemacht habe, was ich überhaupt nicht konnte, um es zu lernen. Also, ich habe mir eigentlich immer Jobs und Arbeiten gesucht, außer das Tierheim, das Tierheim war Passion, aber den Rest habe ich mir immer nach dem Aspekt ausgesucht, was kann ich gar nicht, wo habe ich den größten Horror vor und habe das dann probiert und dementsprechend habe ich dadurch immer ganz viele Erfahrungen gesammelt, [...] weil ich mir dachte, hey, deine Entwicklung ist vielleicht noch nicht so ganz abgeschlossen in dem Alter, du kannst noch was rumreißen.
- 6 Das ging dann ja ein paar Jahre so, dann dachte ich mir so, ich muss auf die Beine kommen irgendwie, muss irgendwas machen. [...] Es war einfach auch ein bisschen Bockigkeit, weil man hatte für mich ein anderes Leben vorgesehen, als ich mir das eigentlich so vorgestellt hatte so. Man wird ja recht schnell einfach auch abgestempelt und kommt in ein System, hm, in dem man auch einfach, wenn man sich nicht wehrt, Opfer bleibt, sage ich jetzt mal oder, ne, einfach krank bleibt. [...] Und meine Perspektive war nicht so rosig [...], und dementsprechend war das dann schon für mich auch so ein Motor, irgendwas wieder zu machen. [...] Und ich glaube, letztendlich für mich ist der größte Antriebsmotor eigentlich immer Angst. Angst vor den Alternativen. Also das kann man so über das Leben hinweg sagen, alles, was ich jemals geschafft oder gemacht habe, ist größtenteils Angst vor den Alternativen. Das ist etwas deprimierend, aber das ist so, ja.
- 7 Muss man natürlich immer vorsichtig sein, wie man das alles erzählt, aber ich war relativ depressiv und es ging mir schlecht. Ich habe manchmal über Selbstmord nachgedacht, nie ernsthaft versucht, aber nachgedacht und habe dann einmal einen sehr intensiven Traum gehabt und danach war das gegessen also mit dem... da wusste ich Bescheid. Das war sehr interessant. Also solche Sachen habe ich auch öfter gehabt, dass ich irgendwo, wo auch immer das herkommt, ich erlaube mir halt auch kein Urteil darüber, ob ich auf anderen Ebenen unterwegs war und im Himmel war und solche Sachen. Also Himmel ist auch verkehrt. Ich glaube ja nicht an diesen christlichen Himmel. [...] Ob das jetzt aus meinem Gehirn, sonst woher kommt, wo das herkommt, das weiß ich nicht. Also verrückt bin ich nicht (Lachen) aber das waren auch teilweise hilfreiche Sachen. [...] Die Begriffe sind schwierig, weil viele Esoteriker sind da dann auch so in die Richtung, mit denen ich auch nicht in einer Schublade stecke, aber es gibt so was wie ein höheres Bewusstsein, was eigentlich immer da ist, wo man aber nicht immer dran kommt und in dieser Nacht, da bin ich da einfach drangekommen. [...] Und im Nachhinein ist das so, das Wissen ist ei-

gentlich immer da gewesen, aber man kam nicht dran und deshalb war das so eine Erleuchtung.

- 8 Das ist nur wahrscheinlich ein bisschen schwierig zu beschreiben, ich meine, andere Leute würden es wahrscheinlich – ich weiß, ich nehme das so hin – unter spirituelle Erlebnisse verbuchen, aber ich hatte doch mal immer mal wieder sehr erhellen- de Erlebnisse, Erfahrungen, Eingebungen so, die mich eben dann weitergebracht haben. Also, zum Beispiel war ich sehr viel in meiner Jugend und so depressiv und habe auch öfter über Selbstmord nachgedacht und mir das überlegt, dass ich kein Bock mehr habe und überhaupt, aber ich habe dann eben doch... mir wurde ge- zeigt oder ich habe eine Erfahrung gemacht, keine Ahnung, ist ja auch völlig egal, was mein Gehirn dann gemacht hat, aber seitdem konnte ich nie wieder ernsthaft darüber nachdenken, [...]. Also, das war ganz, ganz interessant, ich weiß aber nicht genau, wie man das nennen soll, also, ob man das jetzt Vision nennen soll oder ir- gendwas, ja, seitdem ist das Thema eben vom Tisch und es ist irgendwie immer so: Ich weiß in meinem Leben eigentlich nie, wie es weitergeht, ich habe überhaupt gar kein Ziel, hängt wahrscheinlich auch mit meinem mangelnden Selbstbild und Welt- bild und überhaupt allen Bildern zusammen. [...] Solche Sachen habe ich manchmal. Das sind ja letztendlich zwar schon auch irgendwie Teile von mir, die da anschei- nend irgendwas machen, aber das kann eben auch gegen meine eigentliche Mei- nung gehen. [...] Und solche Sachen habe ich zwischendurch, die mich dann immer in eine Richtung wieder schieben. Ja, das ist ganz interessant.
- 9 Es gibt da manchmal so Eingebungen, wo ich weiß, ich muss das jetzt tun. Die kom- men aus dem Nichts oder ich weiß, warum ich irgendetwas nicht tun sollte oder [...] ich kriege dann irgendwie einen bestimmten Traum, der sich von dem normalen Traumblödsinn, den man träumt, unterscheidet. Und dann weiß ich eben... bin ich quasi morgens dann jemand anderes, weil ich dann, oh, okay, das muss jetzt anders sein. Und das gefällt mir nicht immer, das hat sich aber eigentlich immer als richtig erwiesen so. [...] Ich glaube, das Markanteste ist einfach, dass ich irgendwann mal, irgendwie quasi von einer Nacht auf die andere, durch eben so ein bestimmtes Er- lebnis wusste, dass ich mich nicht umbringen werde oder will. [...] Seit dieser Nacht habe ich da halt nie mehr ernsthaft drüber nachgedacht. [...] Was ich auch teilweise ein bisschen blöd finde, (lächelt) aber, genau, deswegen würde ich sagen: Ja, sowas gibt es.
- 10 Es gibt nichts Unspirituelles, ich betrachte alles was ist als spirituell. Begrifflichkei- ten sind Interpretationssache und ich sehe eine Definition von etwas nicht als die einzige, sondern als eine mögliche.
- 11 Geistigkeit, inneres Leben.
- 12 Für mich persönlich bedeutet Religion: religiäre-Rückverbindung (zu Gott) In meinem allgemeinen Sprachgebrauch bedeutet es mir allerdings: ein menschliches Konstrukt, geschaffen, um sich daran festhalten zu können und Sinnhaftigkeit zu produzieren.
- 13 Glaubenssystem mit metaphysischem oder transzendentelem Inhalt.
- 14 Wörtlich: Rückverbindung.
- 15 Mhm, spirituell. Aber wie gesagt spirituell was heißt das? [...] Das ist für mich nicht mit einer Gemeinschaft verbunden oder mit kleinem Grüppchen mit dem ich zu-

- sammenglücke oder mit einer Glaubensrichtung. [...] Ich glaube zum spirituell sein, ist für mich eigentlich nur, dass man versucht bewusst zu leben und nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen zu leben und achtsam zu sein und auch mal versuchen hinter die Sachen zu gucken und einfach offen zu sein für alles [...], weil der andere Mensch ist ja genauso ein Teil der Schöpfung wie ich, warum soll der Unrecht haben und ich Recht? Nee, das kann ja eigentlich gar nicht sein und darum ist Spiritualität viel für mich ein Bewusstsein dieser Ebene, auf der es keine Bewertung gibt. Auf meiner unteren menschlichen Ebene werte ich genauso wie jeder andere Mensch auch. Ne, lässt sich ja nicht vermeiden. [...] Aber ich bin oft auf dieser Ebene, wo es keine Wertung gibt.
- 16 Gläubig schon mal gar nicht. Religiös in dem Sinne, wie es konnotiert ist in unserer Gesellschaft auch nicht, am ehesten würde ich aber wahrscheinlich schon sagen, so einen spirituellen Einschlag habe ich allein aufgrund dieser Erlebnisse und aufgrund dessen, dass ich mich damit auch viel auseinandergesetzt hab, also in meiner Jugend und so, wo ich noch auf der Suche war. Ich habe mich viel mit Glaube, Religion und Spiritualität beschäftigt und da ist mir die Spiritualität – so wie der Begriff verwendet wird – am nächsten. Also, ich würde mich schon tatsächlich als latent spirituellen Menschen beschreiben... [...] Manchmal hab ich mir schon früher gewünscht, ich könnte [religiös sein], weil, es ist schön, wenn man so ein System hat, das einem Halt gibt, das ist total hilfebringend ja, so, aber, da ich das nicht kann, ich könnte mich da nie einfügen oder das nie für mich annehmen, so zu sagen: Das ist wahr, das ist falsch, das ist gut, das ist schlecht, das ist richtig, das sind die Gesetze, das sind die Gebote, so sollst du leben, Gott ist das und das, du sollst dich so nach Gott verhalten, also das ist... nee.
- 17 Hm, von den drei Wörtern maximal spirituell, aber das auch mit Vorsicht, weil, ich fühle mich eben, wie gesagt, keiner Gruppe zugehörig, keiner Glaubensgemeinschaft. Ich verfolge kein spezielles Weltbild oder Modell oder irgendwas. Ich interessiere mich aber für solche Sachen, ich interessiere mich für Religion, Spiritualität, dafür, was andere Menschen glauben, welche Erfahrungen sie gemacht haben, welche Erkenntnisse sie auf dem Gebiet haben, dafür interessiere ich mich, und da beschäftige ich mich auch mit, hin und wieder. [...] Und ich verbinde mit Spiritualität jetzt eben kein festes System oder irgendwie, [...]. Also ich bin jetzt auch niemand, der irgendwie sagt: „Ja und wenn der Typ da Engel sehen kann, hat er einen an der Waffel oder so?“ Ich nehme das so hin und gucke mal, also, ne, kann so sein. Also so, ich werte das jetzt nicht unbedingt.
- 18 Ich habe mich dann relativ früh, so mit 10, 11 ging es langsam los, angefangen mit Religion zu beschäftigen. Ich habe, als ich 13 war, die Bibel gelesen. Also wirklich von vorne bis hinten. Ich glaube, ich bin einer der seltenen Menschen, die das gemacht haben, weil das ist ja ein lendiges Gequäle durch die ganzen Stammbäume im Alten Testament sich durchzulesen. Das ist ja Wahnsinn. [...] Ja, ich wollte einfach, ne, ich war quasi auf der Suche ne. Also wollte einfach gucken, was haben die Leute davon. Macht das Sinn? Macht das keinen Sinn? Wie stehe ich dazu? Ich wollte das alles erfahren. [...] War dann auch zwei, drei Mal auf einem christlichen Zeltlager, so als 12-, 13-Jährige. [...] Bin aber schon damals mit einigen Ansichten nicht so konform gegangen und dementsprechend habe ich mich dann auch tiefer damit

auseinandergesetzt und bin dann auch vom Christentum abgekommen. [...] Also ich war eigentlich da immer sehr viel auf der Suche zu gucken, wie machen das andere Menschen [...] und habe da auch ganz viel verarbeitet, drüber nachgedacht, viel gelesen. [...] Ja und ich habe mir immer sehr viele Gedanken gemacht und bin aber eigentlich immer zu dem Schluss gekommen, wenn es Gott gibt, dann kann ich das eh nicht rausfinden und wenn es ihn nicht gibt auch nicht. Also, ne, ich bin vielleicht viel zu sehr Logiker [...]. Aber ich erlaube mir eigentlich kein großartiges Urteil über Gott, weil ich das nicht ermessen kann.

- 19 Ab so 12, 13 – vielleicht fing es schon ein bisschen früher an – war ich erst einmal eigentlich immer auf der Suche nach meinem Weltbild und habe mich wirklich auch viel mit allem Möglichen beschäftigt, mit Religion, Philosophie, ich hab die Bibel von vorne bis hinten gelesen, ich habe mich mit Buddhismus viel beschäftigt, also, was man dann so tut [...]. Ich hab es dann auch nochmal in der Phase, wo es mir recht schlecht ging, war ich glaube ich auch noch irgendwie am Suchen in irgendeiner Form, aber ja, also ich suche schon seit vielen Jahren eigentlich nicht mehr aktiv nach irgendwas, weil das so für mich in Ordnung ist, wie es ist. [...] Ich bin da eher sehr flexibel im Kopf und bin vielleicht auch nicht so richtig in der Lage, mir ein Weltbild fest zusammen zu bauen, womit man natürlich dann auch erst einmal klar kommen muss. [...] Tatsächlich fehlt mir die Fähigkeit. Ich habe zwischendurch in meinem Leben schon versucht, das irgendwie herzustellen. Mir fehlt die Fähigkeit, an irgendetwas zu glauben, [...]. Ich kann eben auch nicht sagen: Es gibt Gott, es gibt Gott nicht, weil ich weiß das natürlich nicht, und es hat für mich keine Relevanz, weil ich es nicht rausfinden werde, vernünftig, also, dementsprechend ist mein Weltbild quasi, also, wenn man jetzt das auch damit verbindet, aber auch allgemein, halt nicht so fest.
- 20 Ich habe dann irgendwann so ab acht, glaube ich, habe ich langsam angefangen, mir zu überlegen, habe ich ein Weltbild? Und wenn ja, wie sieht es aus? [...] Und seitdem schaue ich mir in der Regel recht viele Weltbilder an. Also letztendlich ist es für mich schwer, weil sich natürlich jeder Mensch ein Bild von der Welt macht, also auch ich. Aber ich könnte jetzt nicht von mir behaupten, dass ich ein festes Weltbild hätte. Es sind einfach zu viele Variablen, die ich nicht alle objektiv berücksichtigen kann, weil ich ein subjektives Wesen bin, [...]. Ich versuche eben, für mein Leben dementsprechend mir das rauszusuchen, was gerade in der Situation wichtig ist oder relevant ist oder mir grad nützt. [...] Also ich habe mich da viel mit beschäftigt, habe auch entsprechend Menschen kennengelernt und die befragt zu ihrem Glauben. [...] Das hat zumindest, glaube ich, auch meinen Horizont, was andere Menschen betrifft, erweitert, ja, und dementsprechend ja auch zu meinem basalen Verständnis der Welt beigetragen, also letztendlich auch zu meinem Weltbild, was ich schlecht greifen kann, weil es nicht fix ist, aber Glauben oder Weltbilder haben ja vor allen Dingen mit Menschen zu tun und dementsprechend habe ich viel über Menschen gelernt, ja.
- 21 Ja passiert. (Lachen) Ich glaube, [...] ich habe da keine Angst vor, ich würde ihn auch nicht bejubeln. Es ist einfach nur ein Prozess, wie aufs Klo gehen also, ne, alles was biologisch lebt, stirbt irgendwann [...]. Obwohl ich meine Oma über alles geliebt ha-

be, war es auch nicht schlimm für mich, dass sie gestorben ist also, das ist für mich nicht schlimm. Damit falle ich schon ziemlich aus dem Rahmen.

- 22 Meine Freundin ist mehrfach fast verreckt, also, als sie die [Krankheit X] hatte und ich konnte sie auf der Intensivstation natürlich nicht besuchen, weil ich keine nahe Angehörige bin. [...] Aber ich habe mit ihr quasi eine ganze Nacht, oder nicht mit ihr – das ist so die Frage – vielleicht hat mein Gehirn das gemacht, aber ich habe mit ihr oder mit ihrem Geist oder so mal eine ganze Nacht lang disputiert, in welchem Zustand sie ist, also ich hab quasi, sie hat mich besucht, geistig, wie auch immer und ich dachte: Scheiße, wie weit ist die denn schon weg, dass die mich besucht? Das war übelst krass und dann hab ich die ganze Nacht versucht ihr beizubringen, in welchem Zustand sie ist, die hat das überhaupt nicht verstanden, für die war alles, „Och, mir geht’s gut, alles cool und so“, [...] das war fürchterlich anstrengend, [...]. Ich habe ihr gesagt: „Du musst das entscheiden. Wenn du gehen willst, geh, wenn du bleiben willst, bleib. Aber du musst die Entscheidung aufgrund von Fakten treffen.“ [...] Aber das sind so Erlebnisse, die kann man ja eigentlich keinem erzählen und ich kann das halt nicht einordnen. [...] Also, ich kann nicht sagen, das war real. Vielleicht hat mein Gehirn das gemacht, keine Ahnung. Ist mir auch egal, ich nehme das eben so hin, als für mich gegeben, aber ich weiß eben, dass ich nicht weiß, was da jetzt dran ist. Es ist eigentlich ganz komisch, aber es verleitet mich komischerweise nicht zum Glauben. (lacht), ja, aber genau solche Sachen in Bezug auf Tod fallen mir eben ein, sodass ich denke: Wenn ich das jetzt erst mal so als gegeben nehme, kann ich mir vorstellen, dass es so was wie eine geistige Existenz, die mit dem Körper verbunden ist, gibt.
- 23 Ich glaube, alles, was ich über den Tod denke, ist auch verknüpft mit dem, was ich über das Leben denke. Ich finde überhaupt dieses ganze Konzept so abgefahren, irgendwie zu entstehen und dann nicht mehr zu sein. Das ist nichts, was man so einfach begreifen kann, glaube ich. [I: Und was passiert mit uns, wenn wir sterben?] Wir verrotten. (lächelt) Nein, ich weiß nicht, also auf einer spirituellen Ebene weiß ich es nicht und ansonsten, klar, der Körper zersetzt sich wieder in seine Bestandteile, auf die eine oder andere Art. Und man hat dann vielleicht seine Gene weitergetragen und kann sich überlegen, ob das jetzt irgendwie noch weiterführend ist. Und alles andere, ob es so etwas wie eine Seele jenseits des Gehirns gibt und so weiter und so fort, kann ich genauso wenig sagen, wie die Frage nach der höheren Macht oder irgendwas anderem. Ich habe ja nun durchaus einige Sachen erlebt, die man als spirituelle Erlebnisse bezeichnen würde. Ich kann ja jetzt auch nicht sagen, ob mein Gehirn das sich zusammengefeuert hat oder nicht. [...] Also ich lasse das so stehen. Und dementsprechend lasse ich es für mich auch so stehen, was passiert nach dem Tod? Das kann ich nicht beantworten und ich werde es rausfinden, ne.

7. Renate and Richard—A Life Lived for the Welfare of Others?

Renate and Richard, a couple in their late 50s/mid-60s at the time of the first interview, have lived their entire lives within the realms of the Protestant Church, both having grown up in families of missionaries in different African countries. The mission's main goals in Africa at the time were to herald the Word of God, which was to be achieved by founding schools and alphabetizing especially the children (cf. Tilettschke, 2020, pp. 124ff, for further details) to help care for the sick and people in need, especially after the 2nd World War. Interestingly, neither Richard nor Renate dwell on their or their parents' work in the missionary station. They both came to Germany when they wanted to pursue a professional training. Their families being acquainted, Renate and Richard met in Germany and got married, albeit before Renate could even start her vocational training. The first years of their marriage were spent in a missionary station in an African country, where they started a family as well. After their return to Germany, they were asked to serve as house parents¹ in a home for elderly people led by the Protestant Church.

This chapter will first portray Renate and carve out how the way she looks at her life has changed over time as well as show how she lives her faith and what values are important for her. In a similar manner, Richard will be introduced to be then able to compare how this long-term couple talks about their joint life.

7.1 Renate—Unfaltering Trust in a Leading God

“God is standing above all, but he gave the people a free will so they can decide for themselves if they work for or against God. But in the end, he is there anyway and will save the world somehow.”²

Renate is a woman aged 59 at the time of the first interview, which was conducted in 2004. Her (as well as Richard's) other interviews took place in 2013 and 2018. At that time-point, she is 73 years old. She was brought up in a Protestant environment, and lived in

an African country during her childhood and adolescence as the daughter of missionaries. She went to Germany to start a vocational training, but then, “my husband came up,” meaning that instead of pursuing her vocational training, she got married and followed her husband to Africa where he worked in a mission and they started a family. Coming back to Germany after eight years, they jointly worked as heads of an old people’s home, which was run by the Protestant church. This case study will reconstruct Renate’s biography as told by herself at three different points in time. A focus will be on the relationships described and on the way her faith has changed over time.

7.1.1 Renate’s Life Reviews and the Relationship with her Parents—Changes in Old Age

Renate seems hesitant to reveal a lot of personal information at time 1. This may be due to the fact that she is not used to being asked about her life and being in the focus of attention. She appears to be very modest and admits to not having a lot of self-confidence, probably in line with the Protestant habitus she grew up with. After having briefly named the main chapters of her life (childhood, school, life as an adult with husband and children—which can be characterized as a rather conventional CV), she names as the most important marker event her father’s untimely death:

My father’s death when I was ten. For my life, that was very—, erm, I noticed that over and over again, in hindsight I felt that very strongly. That was a deep incision.³ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

She remains vague about the impact this event has had on her, and we do not learn much about how this has affected her later life during this first interview. She also states when asked about times of crisis, “I did experience suffering, due to the fact that my father died early. But that has never challenged my relation to God.”⁴ It becomes apparent that the trust in God and a self-identification as faithful and devout are important motifs for her when telling her life story.

At time 2, her father’s death is named again as a marker event; however, this time it is mentioned among other events that are connoted more positively like her marriage, which might be read as a sign that the loss has become a more integrated part of her life story. But when giving a short overview of her life, this event is still given some attention:

Yes, first, there is the childhood. Then the time at school. I lost my father very early and so there was an abrupt change when I was ten. Then I was sent to a different school. That was kind of a boarding school. All of this took place in [country X in Africa]. [...] But I realized that my father’s death has greatly influenced my life, so that there basically was a caesura.⁵ (Renate, FDI, time 2)

Here, she gives a little evidence on the effects that her father’s death have had on her, besides the fact that she had a close relationship with him and missed him with the death being framed as a formative experience and used as an autobiographical argument (Köber et al., 2015). His death led to her having to go to a different school and, the new

school being a boarding school, having to leave the rest of her family as well and starting anew in a whole different context. It remains unclear how this is connected, but it becomes visible in this quote that Renate deems this important for her autobiographical reasoning at this point, indicating how much this event has affected the young girl. Knowing that this event is seen as formative across all interviews, it seems necessary to look at Renate's statements about her parents in more detail.

At time 1, she first does not differentiate between her father and her mother that much when asked about her parents:

For sure they set an example for me. And gave me a lot, regarding my faith. Especially my mother. [...] We come from a longstanding tradition of Christians. [...] Yes, I am grateful toward them. That they set that example.⁶ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

She describes her parents in the context of their shared faith and within their function of passing on their faith. She sees her parents as role models and describes a long tradition of being socialized in a religious surrounding. She gets more specific when asked whether the image of her parents has changed over time:

Surely, erm, my mother (searching for words) was a bit of a dominant person. And perhaps for my personality or my autonomy, it was quite good sometimes when she wasn't there anymore. But I am not resentful toward her. She even asked me for forgiveness. For all the mistakes that she made raising me. That was quite an important thing. [...] And, erm, after that, we did not see her again, [...] so that I am happy that we could come to terms with that and I did not have to resent anything with grudge.⁷ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

Renate hesitates before admitting that her mother impeded her personal development. Probably talking about her in a critical way does not seem appropriate. It is not surprising that after the negative prolog, she goes on and talks about how her mother has asked for forgiveness and how she does not hold any grudge against her. This should be also read in the Christian context, in which forgiveness or atonement is an important concept and which gains even more symbolic importance here since this reconciliation was also the last time she ever saw her mother (they lived far apart and did not see each other on a regular basis). In retrospect, Renate has found a way to keep the more positive image she has of her mother at time 1. Moreover, this positive resolution might also serve the purpose of resolving a cognitive dissonance. Coming to the realization that "it was quite good sometimes" to not have her mother around anymore, Renate might feel guilty for having these thoughts, and an inner conflict might be suspected. Therefore, a positive conclusion as in the quote above may have helped her to integrate also the negative feelings into an overall positive remembering of her mother.

There is more information on the difficult relationship with her mother at time 2:

I had a very close relationship with my father and my mother was the more dominant person in our family. And she dominated my life, too. And I realized only later that she—probably due to my father's death—she was the one who had to raise us and therefore dominated my life and thereby led me to a sort of dependence. [...]

I first experienced a rift with my mother when I was married. That I cut the cord. She tried (laughing) to gain influence in our life, in the way I raised my children, and that was when I fought back. But I had a conciliatory conclusion because she asked me for forgiveness. For the mistakes that she made with me. I did not feel it that way when she said it. I said, "I don't have anything to forgive you," but later I realized how she influenced my life. And I am grateful that we came to a good conclusion.⁸ (Renate, FDI, time 2)

At the beginning of her answer, she makes a clear distinction between her father, who she was very close to, and her mother, who obviously dominated her in a negative way. There are remarks which suggest an understanding for her mother's situation of involuntarily and suddenly becoming a single parent, which marks the father's death as a formative experience again. The rift with her mother that she describes was not mentioned at time 1, and it shows that Renate has adopted a more self-assured way of looking at herself because she mentions standing up against her dominant mother. Interestingly, the rift occurs only when her own role as a mother seems threatened along with the wellbeing of her children, and it might be hypothesized that this is because Renate feels caught between sympathizing with her mother and having to compete with her mother about how to fulfill that role now that she is a mother herself. The retelling of the "atonement scene" contains the awareness of a development in hindsight, since she mentions she did not realize at first that she actually had been influenced by her mother in an unhealthy way (which may be partly explained by a changed memory or an altered evaluation of that event).

The discrepancy in the perception of her parents becomes even clearer at time 3. The following quotes are derived from answers to different questions:

[I: Are there past relationships that have been important for your development as a person?] Well, I was totally daddy's girl. It's often like that with daughters and fathers, right? That surely influenced me, even though it was quite a short time. I think I inherited his humor, his calm manner. [...] [I: How would you describe your parents?] Since I've known my father as a small child only, it's hard to tell. All I know is that he was a very cheerful man, full of humor, affectionate. I never saw him being aggressive. My mother was the stricter one, more educational, the one who scolded. [...] But unfortunately, I didn't get to know my father as an adult.⁹ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

When she describes her father, she solely refers to his good characteristics and even states that she was "daddy's girl," which emphasizes the close relationship between the two. She even goes so far as to hypothesize that she inherited those good character traits from him. Her mother, in comparison, was stricter. Renate admits that it may not be entirely fair to compare her parents like this, having known her father only when she was a child, thereby showing a more systematic view on relationships than in her first interviews. However, the distinction between the loving father—an idealized image most probably—and the scolding mother stays true for her when reminiscing about her childhood. Her mother, as has been mentioned in the earlier interviews as well,

has always been a dominant person in her marriage as well as in the role of a caretaker. Renate elaborates on her mother's role in her life as well at time 3:

She surely dominated me for a time, even though I didn't realize that, but she determined my life. And when I married, I was out of her sphere of influence and in my own purview. And I think that was beneficial for me probably. There was a rift with my mother. Because then I had my children and she tried to influence or give advice or [...] in parts to rule over my life. [...] And for me it was beneficial when she wasn't there anymore. [...] And only a few years ago I realized that because of my father's death I felt responsible for comforting my mother because I was the only one who was there when my father died. [...] And I think I did not have the strength to revolt against her orders. [...] [I: Has the image of your parents changed over time?] My mother—as a child, of course you saw her as an authority person. Later I saw her in a more, erm, critical light. Well, then she died. Perhaps I was too critical sometimes, [...] so that I could not appreciate enough the good sides that she had.¹⁰ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

This account takes an interesting turn that was not there at time 1 or 2. First, Renate talks about the influence her mother tried to take on her life and how being married helped to get out of the motherly reach. There is an explanation given for why the relationship with her mother was complicated, which was not mentioned before. Being the only child living at home when her father died, she felt responsible to take care of her mother and may have taken a certain pride in being so important for her mother, carrying responsibility far beyond her actual age, which obviously led to a burdensome relationship, resulting in Renate's inability to revolt against her mother. That motif of the daughter who has to take care of her widowed mother will occur again in the case study of Carola (see chapter 8), and hints, in Renate's case, to a relationship oscillating between the wish to comfort and please the mother and her wish for independence. However, the last part of the quote above adds a self-critical note to Renate's critical stance toward her mother. Although she remains vague about the good sides that her mother might have had, she admits that her anger and the wish to distance herself from her mother might have clouded her judgment. This seems like a late remorse, considering that her mother has been dead for decades at that point in time. Again, it is interesting to see how such a profound revision of a meaningful relationship can happen even at such a late point in life and how the engagement with a relationship may go on even if the other person involved is not there anymore. The comparison still remains unbalanced since her mother, as the "surviving parent," is the only one who could ever serve as sparring partner for adolescent and grown-up Renate.

It is interesting to see how much the relationship with her mother and the early death of her father have influenced Renate's life. However, Renate's view on these two people has changed with her evaluation becoming more idealizing when talking about her father while being more differentiated regarding her mother. Having entered old age, Renate has arrived at being able to analyze the ways her mother influenced her more profoundly than in her first two interviews.

Having made this interesting observation, it seems mandatory to take a look at another relationship that has shaped Renate's life: the marriage with her husband, Richard, which is strongly connected with her faith and her professional life.

7.1.2 Renate's Relationship with Richard and her Self-Presentation –Marriage and Mission

Having grown up in an African country, Renate came to Germany to start a vocational training. There, she met her later husband and instead of pursuing her job ambitions, she married Richard and followed him to another African country where he was to serve in a missionary station. Renate speaks about her husband in an affectionate way, and the harmony of the relationship is stressed at all timepoints. It also becomes clear that this early marriage went along with a high degree of commitment and dependency even though Renate does not seem to find that too lamentable. What is striking is that meeting and living with her husband is connected with her belief in God, as becomes apparent in her first interview when she is asked for moments of intense joy:

Yes, my husband for sure. (laughs) I believe that he for me was a special stroke of luck, and because of my husband I was surely able to feel and perceive this relationship with God more strongly. [...] Yes, I perceived my husband to be God's gift, [...] that it was God's will and that God gave me the love for my husband. And that for me was a great fortune.¹¹ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

Meeting her husband is described as something fateful and is fully ascribed to God's will. Her image of God comes across here as a leading and, more importantly, benevolent figure who has made her the biggest gift possible in her eyes. In return, the life with her husband has deepened her faith, and the shared religion is an important marker of her marriage. This is explained more explicitly in her third interview:

My husband and I both have a history of mission, our parents had been on a missionary station together, so our families were acquainted. And that was a special act of providence that we got married. [...] You knew what the other one was talking about and that was something special.¹² (Renate, FDI, time 3)

Renate gives important biographical background information: her family having a "history of mission,"¹³ and having grown up in the special surrounding of a missionary station, Renate probably made experiences of strangeness when encountering people outside the missionary context, even though this is not mentioned explicitly in her interviews. But as she describes the "act of providence" (which, again, grants credit to a higher power) of meeting and marrying her husband, it becomes clear that the shared background, the possibility to reference mutual experiences, and the shared faith are important factors for Renate when she explains why her husband is so important for her. It has been reported elsewhere (Bullik et al., 2018) that being able to share uncommon experiences with someone who has made those themselves can be an important factor for overcoming those feelings of alienness and help integrate those experiences in a coher-

ent personal narrative. Her secure familial basis is offered also as an explanation for why she never felt her life had no meaning:

I guess that's also because I have a happy relationship. And I'm well integrated into the family. [...] I believe that's the reason; I had a very sheltered childhood, maybe not all the time, yes, but I grew up in a family. I have relationships in the extended family and am also feeling comfortable in my husband's family. And therefore the question never came up, I never questioned my life's meaning.¹⁴ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

These secure bounds are used as an autobiographical argument with the biographical information given serving as an argument for why she has that rather positive stance toward life. It seems as if nothing of this was achieved by herself with God or, more generally, fate seeming responsible for shaping and leading her life.

Without having even started her vocational training, Renate followed her husband on his missionary work to Africa, where they started a family and lived for some years. On their return to Germany, her husband became the head of a Christian home for elderly people, and Renate served as housemother, which was a fortunate coincidence since she could now combine being there for her family with having a satisfying job:

Working in a home for elderly people is really enriching. Because you can give so much love to the people there. And I received so much affection there. [...] And we tried to take those people as they are. To give them a bit of a home. And that was something really beautiful, for both my husband and me. To be able to do this work together, even though I was only the head's wife, but I was working as a housemother in the home. And [...] this was so enriching, to do something like that together.¹⁵ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

Here, she shows her caring and altruistic attitude. She relishes being a housemother and caring for the people who live in their home. In a small side note, she mentions that she could not completely shed the notion of being “only the head's wife,” a negative connotation probably related to the fact that she did not earn her own money with this job. Händler-Schuster (2013) reports that housemothers neither got an individual salary nor did they earn the right to a pension, often going along with a lack of acknowledgement of their work. This is an observation which does not hold true for all housemothers at that time, but which seems applicable to Renate's situation. Nevertheless, doing this work with her husband seems to be fulfilling for her, and it can be inferred that they both do their work in line with their Christian faith even though this is not mentioned directly in this quote.

While she does not talk at length about this part of her life in her second interview, it is interesting to note that the term she uses to describe their position in that home is “house parents,” which has a stronger notion of equality between her and her husband than the description she gives at time 1.

At time 3, she takes some time to elaborate on this topic, which is interesting, since she and her husband have by then been retired for a while already:

When we came back [from Africa], I stayed at home first, my husband being deputy head of the home here. And after five years, we were asked to take over the management of the home together, and that's how I got on board. And that was a very grateful task, to see the gratefulness of the old people and to experience it and feel it. [...] [I: And you did that without any special vocational training?] Without a training, yes. I simply did not have a profession and so I became housemother, that was the term used back then. [...] Back then, the deacon couple ran the homes for the elderly and that's how we became the house parents. We were still young, we would have rather been [the inhabitants'] children, but it was very, very nice all the same.¹⁶ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

Here, we get the impression that her engagement as housemother was not a by-product of her husband's employment but that it was intentionally decided to have a couple as head of house and that she consciously made that decision together with her husband. The constellation does not change much, but Renate's position seems reevaluated gradually at. Moreover, the fact that she did that job without being professionally trained even emphasizes her personal achievement with her being young and comparatively inexperienced at the time adding to that picture of a person who has shaped her own life. This argument is not very strong in Renate's interviews, but the fact that it can be detected in her third interview at all is remarkable. She gives more insight into her line of thought regarding her working life at a different point in the third interview:

I worked a little here and there, but never did that vocational training. And that gave me inferiority complexes, since having no real training made me feel incomplete (smiles) as a professional. That's why being a housemother was so great for me. In forms, I could fill in "housemother," instead of having to write "without a job" or just "housewife."¹⁷ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

Renate talks about a feeling of inferiority because she never got that vocational training she had wanted to start before meeting her husband, illustrating this with the question of how to fill out a form when asked for profession. Even though it was not unusual for a woman of her generation to be a housewife exclusively, Renate reveals here that she originally had different ambitions and may have been regretting certain life choices at some point in her life. Having a proper title for what she was doing presumably led to an externally more coherent self-perception and helped her become more self-assured. It is interesting to note that she verbalizes this the most expressively at time 3, at a point in time where she has long been retired and would probably not have to justify herself. As is described in other case studies (see, for example, Bullik et al. (2022), and chapter 9.1 on Gudrun), this is something that can be observed in older women especially who take the chance to re-interpret their lives or at least give their life stories a more emancipated touch in the last phase of their lives.

Renate's life is shaped by the triad of marriage, mission, and faith, and it is hardly possible to separate those from another. Whereas the relationship with her mother has been subject to ups and downs over the years as has been reconstructed in the last paragraph, the relationship with her husband is consistently described in a positive way as is her work that she perceived as fulfilling. The analysis in this paragraph showed how

Renate, while staying within this frame of reference, achieves a gradual shift in her perspective on herself and on the work she did together with her husband. Her narrative identity becomes more contoured and gains more depth without losing its general outline.

Having in mind that Renate's life is in all facets influenced by her religious orientation and her faith, the next paragraph will investigate more closely how her subjective religiosity and her image of God have changed over the years.

7.1.3 Renate's Faith and Her Image of God—Finding an Individual Path

Renate's Subjective Religiosity

Renate is a woman who was raised in the Protestant faith and milieu and has stayed faithful all her life and without having any serious crises of faith according to her self-reporting. The following table collects data from the surveys and the interview regarding the way Renate chooses to describe herself.

Wave 1: Having no data from her survey at that time, the assessment of Renate's subjective religiosity focuses on her answer to question 20. She rejects "spiritual" as a self-description without specifying her reasons. God is put in the center of her self-identification as "faithful." This God is benevolent, protecting, and leading, giving her strength and a feeling of being connected.

Wave 2: In her free entry, she declares spirituality to be too abstract for her, while religion is generally described as belief in God. In her interview answer, she rejects both spiritual and religious, since those terms are connected with esotericism or may refer to other religions as well in her estimation. However, she opted for the item "equally religious/spiritual," which sounds like a makeshift solution and an assumption supported by the fact that she chooses to call herself faithful in the interview. Being faithful should be understood in a strict Christian sense in her case. The description she gives of God is less personal than at time 1 and is rigidly oriented by the Christian definition of the Triune God.

Wave 3: In her free entry, spirituality is characterized as not fitting for her and placed in opposition to a "simple faith," which she obviously prefers. While she chooses the option "more religious than spiritual" in the survey, it becomes clear that what she really identifies as is "believing" (which is, in German, derived from the same word stem as the term for "faithful" but has a more active connotation due to its form) in the interview. For her, believing is more concrete, which aligns with her preference for "simple faith" in the survey. She self-confidently states that this is enough for her. The God she believes in is not defined any further here.

Table 15: Data on Renate's Subjective Religiosity

	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	spirituality: not asked	spirituality: Spirituality for me is too abstract, I call it worship. ¹⁸	spirituality: Spirituality for me is not so important. I rather go with the simple faith. ¹⁹
self-assessment	religion: not asked	religion: belief in God. ²⁰	religion: not answered
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	no data	equally religious/spiritual	more religious than spiritual
	I would say faithful. Not spiritual. [I: What does that mean for you?] It provides stability. To be able to believe in God. To know that there is a power that holds me, and that I'm not in a vacuum. (quietly) I get stability through this. ²¹	So, I would call myself faithful. Because I believe in God and that's very important for me. [...] Spiritual and religious might also refer to other religions. Or spiritual, that may also be something like esotericism. And for me, that's not it. [...] for me it's important that I believe in God. [I: So, "faith" for you is connected to "belief in God?"] Yes. I mean, of course, there is also "belief in Allah", or the Jews also believe in God, you know, but for me... I rather believe in God and the Triune God: Jesus, Holy Spirit and God Father. [I: So, in the Christian sense?] Yes. ²²	I always have problems with (smiles) "spiritual." Basically, I consider myself believing. I guess you could call this faithful, but I believe. I believe in God. [I: And you have a problem with "spiritual?"] Errm, you think of esotericism. (laughs) Well, I think of this. [I: And you prefer "believing" instead of "faithful." Why?] Errm, faithful is such a fuzzy concept for me. [I: And what does "believing" mean for you?] Believing is concrete. I believe in God. Faithful is more general. [I: And religious?] Religious, (smiles) that makes one think of religious fundamentalism. Errm, I would not call myself that. Because I don't believe I'm religious this way. [I: So, you're content with "believing?"] Yes, I am content. (smiles) That's enough for me. ²³

Summed up, Renate does not identify with the term “spiritual” at any timepoint. She opts for a self-characterization as faithful or as “believing,” pointedly naming this a simple faith at time 3. A development can be seen insofar as that she has found a unique label for herself in her last interview while differentiating her form of faith from esotericism as well as religious fundamentalism at times 2 and 3. As for the image of God that is conveyed in these answers, it can be said that there is a change observable from a personalized description at time 1 to a more abstract, yet more dogmatic one at time 2.

Renate’s Image of God—Maturing Faith?

A look into her answers to the question how her image of God has changed over the years will reveal whether she elaborates on this development:

As a child, you strongly perceived God as Father. That’s for sure how he was presented to us. And later... for me, it was an authority, yes, something that gave stability. Yes. I basically did not really have an image of God. He was just an entity that I cannot describe any further. But surely, God for me was the one who would protect me, hold me, whom I can trust. [I: What does God mean to you today?] Yes, still the same. Nothing changed in that aspect.²⁴ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

Back then, I don’t know how to put it... Perhaps I wasn’t as tolerant as I am today. But that has nothing to do with the relationship with God, but rather to be more tolerant toward others’ opinions. Back then, for example... I felt I wasn’t pious enough and nowadays I’m freer to say, “[...] God has a wide heart. And I don’t have to have a certain degree of piety to get to God.” [...] [I: Do you remember what initiated this development or this change?] Conversations, in the last years, and sermons or when you hear a service that is not so pious or read books, that’s what helped me on.²⁵ (Renate, FDI, time 2)

Back then, one used to have a childlike faith. The good God. [...] And later, one did not question things so much, or I did not question them. Later, I got more interested in the history behind the Bible. And I find it really fascinating to hear about the background of the Biblical stories, [...] and that does not shake my faith, even though I know that the Bible is not a chronology of events, but a story that people have written down to illustrate something. [...] For me, that’s not a contradiction that God created the world, even though I know there are the planets and space and so on and the evolution and creation, that’s no contradiction for me. [...] [I: And how is your image of God today?] God sometimes is an incomprehensible God. [...] I read that God granted freedom to humanity and therefore a person is free to decide one way or the other, for God and thereby for being there for one’s fellow humans and preserving creation, or for putting oneself in the center and basically not needing God at all. And if you don’t need God, you don’t care about what’s going on around you. [...] And thereby God disempowered Himself. [...] And I only learned that in recent years, from books. That was an eye-opener for me, that gives me so much liberation.²⁶ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

Aligning with what has been said above, Renate reports a very personal image of God at time 1. Looking back, she talks about having seen god as father and as leading. Asked for her current image, she states that those images still hold true for her today.

At time 2, we get an autobiographical argument in form of a generalized insight. Renate believes she used to be less tolerant than she is now. It is not clear what she means by this, and she only vaguely refers to tolerating others' opinions. Instead, it becomes clear that she wants to point out a perceived development of freeing herself from those opinions. She was self-conscious about her degree of piety until she realized that she need not justify herself against others but only against God, who will be satisfied with the way she believes. In contrast to what she answers in question 20, she portrays herself as more independent from dogma and the judgment of others. This stance was reached by conversations and formative experiences in form of services and sermons that showed her alternative ways of approaching questions of faith.

At time 3, Renate talks a lot about how she has developed a new perspective on the Bible and, more implicitly, on God. Being well-read, she learned more about the historical background of the Bible and engaged with the Biblical stories and their meaning. She displays a general appreciation of science, emphasizing that this does not harm her faith in God. It becomes clear that Renate still favors the image of God as it is suggested by the Protestant church, and from the choice of words ("you don't care what's going on around you"), it becomes clear that she does not approve of people's rejection of God, implicitly suggesting that this necessarily goes along with self-centeredness. The perspective of a "leading God" is not the main focus here anymore. Instead, Renate talks more about how God has "disempowered" himself by giving the freedom of choice. She even characterizes God as being "incomprehensible" at times, an adjective that is hard to imagine in her earlier statements, but which is also mirrored in her survey answers on the Representation of God Scale, on which she otherwise shows a preference for the image of a benevolent God. Even though her portrayal is more ambiguous than before, she makes it clear that this development for her is a good one and that she feels liberated by this realization.

For more detail on how this image of God is put into practice, it is interesting to look at her different answers to the question "What do you consider mature faith or a mature way to handle existential questions?" Here is her answer from her first interview:

My ideal of a mature faith... Surely doubting as little as possible; to note that you're walking on God's path, that you're doing God's will. [...] Yes, this has developed during the last years, also here in Germany, that I gained more stability, that I don't need to have so much self-doubt. Whether I have the true faith, but, yes, my faith has become more, erm, childlike, to a certain degree. Because I say, I don't have to permanently ask myself if I'm doing God's will, but I just have to do what's obvious, to care for people, and within that I recognized God's will.²⁷ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

This quote reveals a lot about how Renate believes and how she transfers her beliefs into practice. It becomes clear that the God she believes in is a leading God whose will she wants to carry out. A code from the guideline that has been found in this paragraph was "Integrating faith in daily life," since she refers to how she helps other people and links this directly to her faith. In Kaufmann's terms, religion serves as guiding one's action, thereby offering orientation when dealing with everyday problems as well as extraordinary situations (cf. Kaufmann, 1989, p. 84). It is interesting to note that she mentions

a development over the years in which her faith, to her own accord, has become more “childlike.” This is possibly related to her claim in the first sentence to “doubt as little as possible,” an ideal that she has gained over the years which is why she is now feeling more stable in her faith than she did years ago. It can be inferred that she is less concerned with how other people judge the way she believes and is more self-reliant now, a line of thought which is elaborated on in her second interview (see above). While her general belief system does not seem to have changed, one could say that Renate describes a deepening in her relationship to God, which is one trajectory a faith biography might follow over the years. While this answer is more concerned with her own personal way of faith, the answer to the question whether human life has a purpose deals with this topic on a societal level:

We as humans are not only there for ourselves. I believe that we as humans have a purpose. When [...] we are there for other people. Then our life has a purpose. My life has a purpose because I am there for my family. [...] And thereby I get closer to myself as well. [...] [I: Is there something like a plan for our lives?] I do think that God often has a plan for us. That he determines our lives, yes.²⁸ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

Here, Renate draws the image of a leading God who determines the lives of all humanity. The statement is absolute and leaves little room for individual choices. Being there for others and especially being there for her family is what gives purpose to her life, and her thoughts of charity and generativity sound more or less generalized and applicable to everybody.

The answer to the question of mature faith at time 2 is a little different, yet seems to pursue the more individualized form of believing further:

I believe we don't need such a mature faith. A small faith is sufficient, we don't necessarily need to have a magnificent faith. [...] Yes, this feeling to have to show off before God, like saying, “Ah, I have proceeded in my faith”—it is written in the Bible, but... for me it's not so important, I think God embraces us even if we don't climb any steps. It's sufficient to say, “God, thank you for being there,” or, “I believe you're embracing me.”²⁹ (Renate, FDI, time 2)

Renate portrays herself as a faithful woman who has made peace with her self-ascribed “small faith” by this time. She acknowledges that the Bible may say otherwise, but in her belief system it is not necessary to develop in faith and to maybe even “show off before God.” In her description, the God she believes in is utterly benevolent and does not ask great deeds from her. This may even be read as a sort of privatizing retreat, since she vaguely distances herself from the external expectation (which she describes in the quote above) for ‘faith development.’ Renate proclaims a more individual form of believing which is in accordance with what God expects of her more explicitly than at time 1. The Bible, the church, or another authority are not in her focus. However, in her answer to the question about the purpose of human life, she displays an approach that is in line with her Protestant orientation:

We as humans are supposed to preserve the earth, not exploit the earth or the creation. We shall live not simply egoistic, but think of those who come after us, our children. [...] I'm thinking of rich people who only live for themselves and this is not for me, I would say I would not have lived a very good life if I had the feeling I could not be there for other people as well. [...] [I: Are we affected by higher powers?] Umm, yes, by God, I think. But not as if the human is a puppet, instead God is standing above all, but he gave the people a free will so they can decide for themselves if they work for or against God. [...] But in the end, He is there anyway and will save the world somehow.³⁰ (Renate, FDI, time 2)

The difference is that the charity aspect that has appeared at time 1 already now has a direction. It serves the purpose to maintain the earth, which was not made that explicit at time 1 and shows a sense of generativity, which Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1998) has named as a developmental task in later adulthood. Moreover, there is a clearer notion that not all people might act as desired and a distinction between “the rich people” who only care for themselves in a greedy, egoistic manner and others that are closer to Renate’s mindset (that are referred to with an encompassing “we as humans”). She states that only caring for herself would feel like not having lived a good enough life. Regarding God, her image is still that of a leading God, but in this time 2 statement, she acknowledges that God also granted the free will to choose whether they want to act in His favor or not. The conclusion for Renate is that everybody will be saved by God, despite their previous life decisions. Overall, the statement shows more reflection than the first one, leaving open a space for individual decisions, although Renate implies a moral judgment and it is clear what kind of lifestyle she embraces, namely the one that acts in line with her approach of Christian charity, which is an approach she shares with her husband as will be seen later in this chapter.

In her third interview, Renate rejects the notion of a mature faith more rigidly:

I don't even know if there is such a thing like a mature faith. I think you're always searching and there are fluctuations in faith, I believe. And there may well be a time in which you don't believe that much. That's why for me it's questionable how to grow within your faith. I can't comprehend that; of course, as a child, you believe differently than you do as an adult, [...]. But I don't know if you can continue to grow within your faith after that. I don't feel that really. [...] In the Bible, Paul speaks about a mature faith. But I don't know how that works. Perhaps I'm not abstract enough for this. [...] Perhaps some people can claim for themselves to have a mature faith. But I'm rather hesitant about that.³¹ (Renate, FDI, time 3)

This statement looks more like a generalized insight than did the other two. Renate shows how she sees the concept of mature faith in a reflective way. Interestingly, God is absent from that statement and it seems like Renate is more self-confident in presenting her very own observations on how people believe and how she personally lives her faith and even dares to doubt Paul. Some critique can be heard when she says that growth is “questionable.” She does consider that this might be something personal and related to her not being “abstract” enough. Renate’s Protestant modesty and her insecurity—which is prob-

ably due to her self-perceived lack of formal education—shows again, even though she seems a lot more self-assured than she was in the first two interviews.

Yes, our life has a purpose. Because we are God's creatures, it has the purpose that God is saying, "Subdue the earth, preserve it." But we must not destroy the earth. Our life has the purpose to preserve Creation. [...] [I: Is our life influenced by higher powers?] Not by one power. Erm, for me, I can say, God preserves my life. There are surely some who believe in other powers, but I don't believe in those. [I: But you can imagine that they exist, saying that there is possibly more than one power?] Perhaps there are other powers, yes, there are evil powers that have influence. But you should better not succumb to those.³² (Renate, FDI, time 3)

The idea of preserving the earth and Creation is taken up here again, as in her second interview. However, the idea of generativity is less explicit here, as is the delimitation with those who do not pursue this path. Her image of God, again, is that of the Protestant church, clearly stating that it is God's wish for humans to subdue and preserve the earth and that she believes God preserves her own life. In the last sentences she allows the thought that there are other powers, and this is something which did not come up in her other answers.

Renate's faith, and her subjective religiosity has taken a remarkable trajectory over the years. She has become more self-assured and feels less forced by her surrounding to believe in a certain way. By reading books, watching documentaries, and listening to "alternative" sermons, she has, obviously on her own accord, since she does not refer to anyone pushing her in that direction (as it is the case with Gudrun for example) widened her horizon. However, she still moves within the (widened) framework of her Protestant church and still applies a rather strict moral framework, albeit with more and more notion of opinions outside her own field of vision.

7.1.4 Renate's (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

Looking now at the other data we have for Renate, it can be noted that Renate stays within one religious type throughout all of her interviews can consistently be described as stayer in the predominantly conventional type (type 2). The style-aspect maps show that Renate's interviews were consistently rated to be primarily style 3, mutual, indicating that Renate tends to consent to conventions of her own group and focuses on harmonious relationships. However, there are some meaningful exceptions, especially in the aspects *perspective taking* and *symbolic function*. At time 3, she was mainly rated a style 4, pointing to a more reflective and systematic thinking. This is interesting to see because at age 73, Renate is able to think about her relations and her faith in a systematic way, which is an observation that is consistent with what has been carved out above.

The look into her survey data reveals some details that need further explanations:

Table 16: Selected Data from Renate's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Renate	M (SD)	Renate	M (SD)	Renate	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	-	2.63 (1.17)	2.80	2.42 (1.12)	3.25	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	-	4.35 (0.38)	4.60	4.28 (0.51)	4.00	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	-	3.64 (0.75)	3.40	3.57 (0.76)	3.00	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	-	3.67 (0.59)	3.57	3.20 (0.40)	3.57	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	-	3.67 (0.71)	3.57	3.72 (0.59)	3.57	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	-	4.38 (0.38)	3.43	4.17 (0.39)	3.43	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	-	3.86 (0.65)	3.71	3.90 (0.62)	3.57	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	-	3.77 (0.61)	3.43	3.76 (0.51)	3.29	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	-	3.79 (0.68)	3.43	3.86 (0.62)	3.17	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	-	3.42 (0.78)	2.92	3.40 (0.70)	2.75	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	-	3.26 (0.58)	2.83	3.25 (0.58)	2.67	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	-	3.90 (0.47)	2.75	3.89 (0.49)	2.92	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	-	3.74 (0.46)	3.80	3.73 (0.44)	4.17	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	-	3.70 (0.49)	3.17	3.76 (0.51)	3.00	3.78 (0.50)

On the subscales of the Religious Schema Scale, Renate's scores for *ttt* are higher at wave 3 than at wave 2 and are above the average at both times. This is not surprising in itself, since Renate undeniably is a faithful woman who lives mainly by the rules of the Protestant Church and does not generally question what is said in the Bible. Her mod-

erate to low scores on *xenos* may be explained by the fact that Renate has always lived in a relatively homogenous environment even while living in Africa, and presumably never had significant encounters with “the strange.” Therefore, she has not had the opportunity to develop much appreciation for being challenged (and, of course, not every encounter with the strange will lead to a xenophobic attitude) and changed by views different from her own or her willingness to engage with those declining with age. This is in accordance with her low score for *openness to experience*, indicating that while Renate does report opening new horizons for herself in reading additional theological literature, she prefers to stay within a certain realm and would likely not seek to learn about other religions. In the content analysis, it was noted that there is little reference to the “outside world” in general. Generally, low *openness to experience* and high *agreeableness* are associated with strong forms of religiousness and in tendency with older rather than younger adults (cf. Saroglou, 2010, p. 115). Her scores for *agreeableness* are about average at wave 2 and show an increase by wave 3, where she is even higher than the average. Her scores for *emotional stability* decrease slightly and are below the average at both times, which is consistent with her declining scores on the well-being subscales. Renate’s answers position herself lower than the average of the sample, with slightly decreasing scores at wave 3. Her scores on *self-acceptance* are in accordance with her statements in the interviews, saying that her self-esteem is not that high and she is not satisfied with certain life choices, which also aligns with Ryff’s generic description of a “low scorer” on this subscale (1989). The scores for *purpose in life* seem rather surprising, since Renate comes across as a person who takes care of others and is well established in her social circles in her interviews, which might serve as a purpose. Connected with some regrets regarding her (lack of) formal education, Renate may feel that her life does not have as much directedness as she would have wanted it to. However, her comparably high scores on *autonomy* and lower scores on *personal growth* complement the picture that has emerged from the content and narrative analysis. In her time working as a house mother, Renate gained an autonomy that she is still aware of, yet her work never had the goal to gain any personal merits but was always performed with the aim to help others and to fulfill the tasks that God has given her.

The overall image that one gets from Renate is that faith plays a prominent role in her life story. This is supported by her scores on the RSS subscale *ttt*, which indicate a tendency toward a conservative and literalist belief system. Her scores on the NEO-FFI subscale *openness to experience* align well with the observation made by Streib and colleagues (2021) that lower scores on that scale are associated with the predominantly conventional type 2, which is what she is identified as throughout all of her interviews, making her a “stayer” within that typology. It seems reasonable to assume that her low scores on *openness* and *xenos* are both related to that conventional stance.

A contradiction that cannot be fully resolved is that her scores for *emotional stability* are low while she comes across as a woman who seems overall satisfied with the current state of her life in her interviews, even though we hear about remorse regarding her lack of vocational training. It may be hypothesized that an observation from the interviews may also cause some form of instability while regarded as a development: Some of her scores in the style-aspect maps having increased (in the aspects *perspective taking* and *symbolic function*), and she might experience this more individuating-systemic and crit-

ical approach to her faith and her relationships as destabilizing, or at least disturbing in some ways. This theory is supported by the finding above that while Renate describes her faith at time 1 as becoming more and more “childlike” and doubting less as a desirable goal, by time 2, she is starting to realize that her form of believing is becoming more individualized and more deviant from what the church proclaims to be a “good faith.” This realization has manifested by time 3, as she more self-assuredly embraces her own form of a “simple faith” while being conscious of the fact that this may be viewed critically from her environment’s point of view. While it would be far-fetched to talk of a deconversion here, it is still interesting that the Deconversion Study (Streib et al., 2009) found the German deconverts to score lower on emotional stability as well as on some subscales of the Psychological Well-Being Scale. In other words, a more independent way of thinking and looking at things may lead to reduced emotional stability and well-being. At the same time, her image of God has become more versatile. The leading and benevolent God is still there at time 3, but she also acknowledges that this God may be incomprehensible at times. For this timepoint, the God Representation Scale (Johnson et al., 2019) was included in the survey, which confirms the findings from the interview analysis that her image of God most agrees with the benevolent God, and she disagrees with the authoritarian and mystical image of God. Yet, the image of God as ineffable, inconceivable, or unimaginable appeals to her as well. All of this, while for sure signs of a religious development, may contribute to a feeling of less emotional stability, even though Renate perceives her own development as positive.

Other developments that could be observed during the in-depth analysis of the interviews do not mirror in her survey results nor in the structural analysis of her answers. The observation that is most remarkable is that Renate grants her professional self more room over the years. This has to do with her reconstructed identity as an altruistic person who is concerned with helping others and caring for people who are less favored than she is. It was carved out as well that her identity as an individual, maybe even her identity as a woman, gets more attention, especially in her last interview. Her own achievement, i.e. being entrusted with a very responsible job, stands out more openly when she is farthest away from it age-wise.

While being a “stayer” regarding her structural religious development, which is a result that is not generally contradicted by the content analysis, one must remember her statements regarding her secure bonds within her family which provided a positive base for her whole life and her unfaltering trust in a leading God. This case study shows more. While her focus is on leading a life agreeable to God at all points in time, less importance is granted to formalized forms of faith and a more personal form of belief is proclaimed, especially in her last interview. This may be seen as an emancipatory movement, and as turning to a more privatized faith.

7.2 Richard—Christian Charity as a Way of Life

“I can hold a service beneath an umbrella acacia in the African steppe and do not need a high altar and a chasuble, my relationship with God is more down-to-earth.”³³

Richard is eight years older than his wife, 67 years at time 1 in 2004, and therefore 81 years at the time of the third interview. Having grown up in the missionary context as well, he did not initially want to pursue that path himself because he did not want to live together with sick people as it seemed necessary and as he had experienced in his childhood and youth. Instead, he first became a salesman and only later was convinced to go to Africa again and work there as a deacon in a missionary station. His work as the head of the home for the elderly was also influenced by the Protestant Church, and it does not seem exaggerated to state that Richard's life story is also a Christian vita. It is interesting to note that his narration is not as much centered around his marriage than it is the case the other way around. Richard does mention his wife as an important relationship and as a person who influenced him at all timepoints, but he stays vague about any details.

7.2.1 Richard's Life Reviews—Negotiating the Relationship with his Father

When Richard is asked to divide his life into chapters, he focuses on his professional life by adding an emphasis on the searching movements it took to figure out in what direction his life should be headed at time 1:

I would say childhood, time in school going along with that, that was a significant phase in my life, really formative. After school, the time of the vocational training, searching for orientation, or to receive orientation what course my life should take. Then, after the training, erm, the destination route, like, where I would go as a trained person, and then marriage, founding a family and living abroad. Those are the main characteristics. And then coming back to Germany, that should be added.³⁴ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

It becomes obvious that, due to him being eight years older, there was a long time span before he married Renate in which he was “searching for orientation” during which important, life-changing decisions were made. Meeting and marrying Renate does not seem to be irrelevant in this account but only one among many formative experiences, and his focus is decidedly more on himself and his career. This becomes even more apparent at time 2:

The chapters childhood, adolescence/school time, [...]. So, I would divide my employment period into different areas, different periods. That would be the time of vocational training, [...]. Then the first time when I worked in my job, that was a three years period in Africa. Then the time of my vocational training here in Germany, when I became a deacon [...]. And then eight years as a deacon in [African country

Y] in different areas. And then returning to Germany, having a job, or working in the area of old people's welfare here in [part of town Z]. And then retirement.³⁵ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

Interestingly, Richard names the important stages of his life here in a more self-assured way. Those moments of searching or hesitation that were present at time 1 do not reappear here. By being retired for a while and looking back at his life, he may see that everything turned out fine, and he can portray his career in a more definite way while his wife and family are not listed here at all. Overall, his remarks regarding his family are scarce, but he mentions that he and his wife pray together and that she is an important person that has influenced him greatly.

Richard is elaborate about his relationship with his parents. In his case, the relationship with his mother is described as positive, while his father was the more difficult character who he only came to terms with late in his life. When asked about important relationships during his first interview, Richard talks about the special circumstances he grew up in:

Yes, of course there are some, for example I think I had a very strong attachment to my mother. We were [multiple] children, and I was the [second youngest] child, and especially during war time, when existential fears were very strong, and the father wasn't there, the mother was immensely important for me. And she knew how to unfold her motherliness completely and give it to us children.³⁶ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

Being born in the 1930's goes along with having experienced the 2nd World War as a child; and even though Richard was born in an African country in a missionary station, his family could not return there after a visit in Germany because of the war³⁷. In all of his interviews, Richard refers to the topos of being a war child, which implies trauma, deprivation, hunger, and suffering. In the quote above, he uses the topos to clarify his mother's role. In this time of hardship, she was there to comfort the children while the father "wasn't there," which is not specified any further. By contrasting the present state of a caring mother and the absent father, Richard justifies why his attachment to the mother was stronger than it was to the father. Implicitly, there may be a reproach toward his father, whom the child may have expected to be there to protect the family and support the mother. In his time 2 interview, the same theme is taken up again when describing his parents:

I grew up here in [part of town Z] during war time, when bombs fell, and how my mother managed to get us through all this, also in the post-war era... we were [multiple] siblings, and we suffered from hunger. And she was a very delicate woman and very affectionate, and for me she was just a shelter of comfort. And she kept being that till the end.³⁸ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

Here, his focus is more on his mother's capability to get the family through these hard years of war and post-war. The description of her being "delicate" helps to emphasize the extent of her achievements. His mother's status as a "shelter of comfort" is never chal-

lenged, and he has kept that positive image of her up to this day. This image is still very present at time 3:

I had a very, very strong relation with my mother. She was a downright humorous, affectionate mother who made a very, very strong impact on us children. [...] My mother gave me a lot, I have to say that. And she was the haven of peace in our family.³⁹ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

His description at this point is more condensed but still emphasizes the strong impact and the important role his mother had. At an earlier point in that interview when Richard is asked for important relationships, he tells of an episode that refers to the war time:

As a child, I experienced the bomb attacks that were very, very formative for me. Anxiety states, mentally, physically, but also this feeling of... For example, this one episode, we were sitting in our air-raid shelter [...] and the bombs dropped. That was hell of a noise. And how my mother—we were there with my brother and my little sister who was still in the crib—sang songs with us, just to distract us, but also practically as a prayer. That was formative for me, at that time.⁴⁰ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

Here, the effects that experiencing war as a child had on him are named more explicitly than in the earlier interviews. Again, it is his mother who appears in his account of that dark time, and that threatening experience of an air-raid in particular and who gives comfort to her children. Her singing is compared to a prayer and the experience is marked as “formative.” Implicitly, Richard gives a justification for his strong and never-faltering belief in God, since this situation is connected with positive feelings toward his mother and her own adherence to practices of faith despite all the anxiety that went along with it. This is a connection that has not been made in the earlier interviews.

With his father being absent during that traumatic and formative time, it does not come as a surprise that the relation is not described as positive. The relationship experiences a change when the father gets old and moves into the nursing home that Richard and Renate are heads of. At time 1, the description of his father reads as follows:

My father was a bit too big for me, uber-father, who I was afraid of a little since he, in contrast to my mother, never had that relation with me that I would have wished for, he was not at home a lot. He was very authoritarian, so I did not have that much of a positive relationship with him, until he got old and in need of help himself and I helped him, since we basically lived together, and I stood by him. And then our relation got very good.⁴¹ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

Richard names his father’s absence as one of the reasons for the fact that their relationship was not very good. He uses the term “uber-father” to describe how he saw him and contrasts that with his mother, who seemed to have been the complete opposite. Things change when Richard decides to take care of his aging father. The relationship in the last years of his father’s life is described as “very good.” When asked whether the image of

his parents has changed and what are considered possible causes for such a change, he answers:

So, as for my father, that changed because I got older, more reasonable and with age also calmer, quieter, and more content. Because of that, the image of my father has changed a lot.⁴² (Richard, FDI, time 1)

In this reasoning, the change occurred because Richard changed. He got older and calmer, which is related to the changed image he had of his father. It does not seem unreasonable that such a development of himself might contribute to this changed image, yet it is interesting to see that he does not talk about any development of the father that might have led Richard to think differently. At this time point, the whole change is attributed to his own development.

This is different at time 2, when he answers as follows to the same question, after having characterized his father as dominant and authoritarian during his childhood:

Well, I believe that, as for my father, that's because a change of roles happened. Suddenly he was the one in need of my assistance. I was head of the [nursing home] and he came to live with us as a resident and with the years he became weaker and I could stand by him. I could help him, and so we got closer. For sure that was the reason. He didn't have to tell me anymore what to do, instead I could help him and tried to do that with as much affection as possible.⁴³ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

Here, he can name more precisely what has happened between him and his father. The father becoming old and in need of help made it necessary to change the usual roles. Interesting to note is that while Richard only says that they "basically lived together" at time 1, he points out that his father lived, as a resident, in the nursery home that Richard was head of. It may be inferred that Richard assisted his father in a professional role, maybe because he felt the obligation to do so. In this constellation, there was no need (and likely not much possibility) for the father to tell Richard what to do, which presumably took away most of the authority and dominance that had been named as the reasons for their rather distant relationship. The inversion of roles is interesting here, since theoretically, Richard could now have been the authority figure in their relationship, a possibility which he did not take advantage of. Helping and being there for his father made the relationship closer than it used to be, which is an argumentation that can be read in the sense of Christian charity, since Richard makes a strong connection between his faith and his work throughout his interviews. The possibility to help and support his father gave Richard the chance to rearrange this conflict-ridden relationship. It may be added as a side note, in none of his interviews does Richard talk about when and under which circumstances his father actually died, which may be a remnant of the professional role that he partly shed but obviously without getting too intimate and personal.

In his third interview, this situation is unfolded in even more detail:

I have to admit, I did not have the closest relation with my father. For me, he was kind of an uber-father, so. [...] That changed later, when he was a resident [of the

nursing home I managed] in the last years of his life. He was the weaker one then and I was the one who could help him. So, the relationship turned the other way around, you know. But he took that bravely and accepted it and encouraged me in what I did. But as a child, I was always a bit scared of him. He wasn't brutal, not at all, but what was missing was that emotional attachment with him. He was away a lot.⁴⁴ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

The term “uber-father” is taken up again, illustrating the distance between father and son. When describing the last years of his father's life, Richard states that his father was “the weaker one,” which indicates that balance of power was different before and that this balance was relevant for shaping that relationship. Interestingly, this is named directly at time 3 for the first time. And while one might expect a grown-up person to talk about a changed relationship with a parent in a way that suggests more equality between the two persons, it is characteristic that there is still a certain hierarchy. In his childhood, his father was absent, while in old age, he is closer than he ever was before both physically and emotionally. What is important (and new) in this time 3 account is that the father is described to have taken that new situation “bravely.” Richard, being an adult with family and professional responsibilities, finally feels “accepted” or even “encouraged” by his father. This is emphasized even more when he answers to the sub-question of what might have caused a change in the image of his parents:

Well, my relationship with my father changed in his last years of life, you know. And I've got to really give him credit for the fact that he adapted well to his situation, his personal situation, that is. Never complained about how is not as able as he used to be and so on, and that he respected me as the head of the house.⁴⁵ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

Another dimension is added that had not been mentioned before: respect. Richard appreciates the way his father was able to adapt to his new situation and accept his dwindling abilities. On the other hand, Richard also mentions that he received respect from his father for his professional achievements. It is remarkable that that in the last phase of his own life, Richard achieves a new perspective on his father and can see what may have changed in the latter's perspective on his son as well. Implicitly, there is a form of admiration for the father and maybe the possibility to see him as a role model that he had not been while Richard grew up.

Keeping in mind that Richard's father was active in the Christian mission and Richard has also worked with and for the Protestant church for much of his professional life, it seems mandatory to examine the development of his subjective religiosity and the way this mirrors in his professional life.

7.2.2 Richard's Faith and his Professional Life—A Symbiosis

Richard's Subjective Religiosity

Like his wife, Richard did not fill out the questionnaire at wave 1, but his answers from the other timepoints and his interview answers will give a good impression regarding the way he sees himself as a religious person.

Wave 1: The first part of his answer sounds absolute, labeling his own religion as *the* religion. He does this with the parenthesis “for me,” indicating awareness of and tolerance for other forms of faith. When he defines spirituality, this tolerance becomes more pronounced. As the core element of different forms of spirituality, he proclaims the spirit (“Geist” in German) which moves people, but which may take different forms. Overall, and this may explain why he “has his problems” with the terms offered by the question, he seems to see them as a whole and as belonging together and all contributing to how he defines himself. As the most important element for him, he names the communal experience, which has a positive influence on his life and gives stability.

Wave 2: In his free entry, spirituality is associated with practices that are primarily in services, while religion is more generally and more abstractly described as belief in God and Jesus. While he chooses “equally religious/spiritual” in the survey, he states that he is not so much interested in what he defines as spiritual in his interview, for example rigid rituals and ceremonies. He asserts here that his faith is more prosaic without depriving the ritual itself (a service, for example) of its importance and also stating that for others, these trappings may be more significant than they are for him.

Wave 3: His definition for spirituality contains a new dimension that is an everyday relation with God, while religion again serves as the superordinate construct. His self-assessment at this wave is “more religious than spiritual,” which indicates that the spiritual dimension is not as important for him (even though he does stress the importance of services and prayers). The answer to question 20 contains an episode in which he is asked by a stranger whether he is a “religious type.” The actual message of this story remains a bit fuzzy, but the coda is that religion is an important part of his self-conception and also a very conscious decision which anybody can make (“anyone can be religious if they want to”).

Summed up, it seems that his valuation of spirituality seems to change. At time 1, it is indicated that being spiritual is something individual and not necessarily tied to religion. This notion is not taken up again in his other interviews. At time 2, spirituality is described as part of (his) religion. It seems important, however, that Richard characterizes his own faith as prosaic or down-to-earth, which is more abstract than what he says at time 1. The abstraction is even greater at time 3 when he mainly outlines religion as a way of life without (at least in this answer) giving any details about how this is put into everyday practice.

Table 17: Data on Richard's Subjective Religiosity

	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
Richard			
free entries	spirituality: not asked	spirituality: prayer, service with liturgy ⁴⁶	spirituality: piety, worship, everyday relation with God ⁴⁷
self-assessment	religion: not asked	religion: belief in God and succession of Jesus Christ ⁴⁸	religion: belief in God ⁴⁹
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	no data	equally religious/spiritual	more religious than spiritual
	I have my problems with these terms [...]. Yes, of course, I have a religion, and not just any religion, but <i>the</i> religion, for me, it's <i>the</i> religion, or faith. And spiritual, I think we all have elements of spirituality within us, and for one person it works this way, for another person that way. When I experience a celebration, a service, then that's something spiritual, and when someone at the Olympics stands on the podium and receives a gold medal and the national anthem is played—that's something spiritual as well, something that moves him, he senses, that's the spirit, because the spirit moves my emotions. [...] It gives my life an enormous stability, this faithfulness, but also the spirituality, also a communal experience in the congregation when we have our Sunday service, then that's a communal experience which brings us closer together and which influences us in a positive way [...]. Yes, for me this means stability and fulfillment in my life. ⁵⁰	Those terms are in parts connected with negative emotions. [...] I am a human being who believes in Jesus Christ and God. So, rather faithful, I believe what the Bible tells me. But I'm not spiritual, so these things don't play a dominant role for me, like, for example, in the Catholic church this is very prominent in services. I can live without those formalities. And I can hold a service beneath an umbrella acacia in the [African] steppe and do not need a high altar and a chasuble, but my relationship with God is more down-to-earth. [...] I don't reject this, though, and when somebody else considers this important and helpful, I'm like, "Okay, that's good for you." For me, it doesn't play such a big role. ⁵¹	It means a purpose in life, a form of living, the possibility to design my life and have an orientation toward the future. That's important, yes. I once [...] travelled on a ship around South Africa. And there was a man [...] who asked me, "Tell me, are you a religious type?" (smiles) And I told him, "I am a type, but (laughs) religion plays a big role for me, an important role. Whether this makes me a religious type (smiles) I don't know." [...] I think anyone can be religious if they want to. ⁵²

Richard's Image of God

The next step is to look at his image of God and how this has possibly changed over time:

During childhood, I had this piety which was strongly influenced by my mother, or by both parents, because I was a child and they tried to teach us children what God is and what kind of relationship we have with God. After that, after you started to think for yourself, to ruminate, got into conflicts, have doubts and had to deal with those, I started to read the Bible by myself, confirmation class, things like that which helped of course. And later on, existential experiences, like, everyday experiences that shaped me in my relation with God. God for me today means that I know he is my Creator, I know He is with us, even though He is not visible, I know I'm sheltered with Him, and, especially, I know that He will surround me when I die and in death and therefore I won't fall into a dark, deep hole but rather, as we say it, fall into God's hands, so, to go back to Him.⁵³ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

There were times, especially when I was in England to learn English, when I was involved with people from the church sector and I acted in an emotional way which got relativized over the years as I became older and made other experiences. Like, I got more down-to-earth in my relation with God and the Christian faith. [I: How could you describe this emotional way?] By formalities. For example the design of the services, the songs that seemed very emotional to me. [...] But afterwards I became a lot more down-to-earth through personal life experiences. [...] And then of course by meeting people, especially those in difficult life situations, mentally ill, badly off materially, in poor health and, as I mentioned earlier, in the sector of old people's welfare during dying processes [...] that I accompanied—this all helped me with my Christian faith and change occurred there. Like, I don't want to say "fundamentalist," but somehow I found a very real relation with my Christian faith.⁵⁴ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

Of course, in the life of every Christian there are phases in which you have serious doubts, is this all real or do I give in to an illusion that I perceive as pleasant but which is not real? And I noticed that my faith actually is real and is based on things which are existent. [...] When you read the Bible, you get annoyed sometimes and say, "This cannot have happened that way!" And often it didn't happen that way, instead, you have paraphrases of experiences of faith that people had. [...] And it's like that in my faithful life that I constantly have to reevaluate things and also have to newly reflect on experiences I made. [I: What does it mean to you today, your worldview or your image of God?] For me today it means that I look at the world and the really depressing state it's in—and I can endure it. Because I can say, this is not the end. And also my own life, I'm over 80, and I know I don't have many years left, but I can direct my gaze forward and believe in the future of God and I know, when I die, death is not the end.⁵⁵ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

At time 1, Richard refers to his religious upbringing which is followed by an episode of rumination and doubts during puberty and adolescence, which he does not elaborate on. The image of God he now has can best be described as a father or as a benevolent protector, which is an image clearly shaped by his Protestant faith. It is interesting that he talks about concepts regarding dying and death in variations in all of his answers examined herein. This may be explained by his work in the old people's welfare since accompanying

dying people is part of his job. It also points to one of the functions his faith has for him: bridging the uncertainty of what comes after death with the certainty that he will fall into God's hands, which is a symbolism that can be found in other interviews as well (see, for example, Gudrun in chapter 9.1).

At time 2, he starts his account later by skipping the religious socialization as a child and describing his movement from a more emotional form of practiced faith to what he calls down-to-earth. This suggests that the sacred rituals and community praxis of his earlier life are not as important anymore, which aligns with the elaborations analyzed above. With reference to his work in old people's welfare, he stresses that working with sick and dying people has affected his faith, making it deeper and more realistic at the same time. To illustrate his point, Richard tells a story (according to the schema introduced by Labov and Waletzky, 1967) about having faith in adverse circumstances:

Table 18: Richard's Narrative: "Getting Help from God"

Orientation	In [country Y in Africa] we were without any technical equipment, completely on our own. We lived in a hospital with 130 mentally ill people. We did not have a doctor, I'm no doctor, just a nurse, and we were completely shut off from any infrastructure and had to deal with any situation that would happen.
Complication	[...] Since I had a car, I had to take the people to the hospital. [...] And I got stuck with my car in the mud of dirt roads during the rainy season [...], my wife alone in the hospital with the children, night fell and back then there were no cell phones, no mode of telecommunication, and sometimes, I would think, "How do I get through this?" Roads were blocked by fallen trees in the jungle, or by rivulets turned to torrents that overflowed the road and tore away the earth and I had to get through somehow.
Evaluation	And then I really said, "God, I have a situation here, I cannot manage this on my own. Now you have to help me."
Resolution	And it always worked.
Coda	And I told myself that was not some kind of luck or something, but that was really a concrete help that I experienced in a situation in which I did not find a way out myself. ⁵⁶ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

This narrative follows the arc of tension of a redemption story (McAdams et al., 2001; McAdams, 2006c). Starting with a difficult and unfavorable situation, Richard is able to overcome the adversities with the help of God. In this narrative, God is a leading God, and praying is used in a very practical sense, yet only when there is no other way out, and it presents a very concrete result, which is replicable if needed. This narrative illustrates Richard's beliefs, which is without frills, yet based on a certainty that God will help if necessary. This is continuation of his certitude to be caught in God's hands that was mentioned at time 1.

In his third interview, those phases of doubt that were already mentioned at time 2 are emphatically portrayed as normal and necessary, thereby implicitly referring to an assumed model of an enlightened Christianity. The way he talks about the stories of the

Bible not being actual historical reports are quite similar to what Renate tells in her third interview. It can be assumed that they have, especially in the time between the second and the third interview, been involved in intensive reading of possibly theological literature, not unlike Gudrun and Werner who will be portrayed in chapter 9. Richard goes on to stress that he has been at the point where he had to reevaluate decisions or standpoints more than once in his lifetime, thereby displaying more reflectiveness than in his other interviews. As an aside, he interlaces social criticism by referring to the depressing state the world is in. He does not feel able to change anything about that state anymore, but with the help of God and the certainty that there is something beyond this world, he can endure the situation. The image of God displayed here aligns with his answers on the RGS, in which his most favorable representation is that of the benevolent God, while the mystical god does not play a big role in Richard's belief system obviously. Again, he displays his thoughts about dying, but being in his 80s at time 3, these thoughts are referred to his own situation, not attached to his work life any more.

Richard's Work—A Vocation

However, Richard is very detailed about his work at all timepoints, and it becomes clear how much passion and personal involvement he gave in fulfilling his tasks. But he always underlines that he resisted his fate for a while (he describes it as feeling the vocation, but not wanting to follow it), not wanting to follow in his father's footsteps perhaps. He first became a salesman and only later decided to become a deacon and work for the same mission his father worked for as well. At time 1, when he is asked about important decisions, he first says that beyond secular considerations and that he knows that he can always pray and ask God for help. He then shares a narrative (which can again be divided according to the structure suggested by Labov and Waletzky, pointing to an important aspect of his religious identity):

Table 19: Richard's Religious Identity Narrative: "Becoming a Deacon"

Orientation	For example, back then that decision whether I should become a deacon or not. Like I said, I didn't feel like becoming a deacon at all and hence eke out my life with sick people, and therefore I was in a great conflict, because on the one hand I felt somehow that this was my path, that I should take it. On the other hand, I wanted to go into the world, wanted a career as a salesman.
Complication	[...] Then I got a letter from the mission here in [part of town X] asking if I was willing to go to [African country Y] [...].
Evaluation	And of course I was willing, but I knew I would have to undergo a check-up, and then I said, "God, if you want me to join the deaconry, and you know that I don't do that readily, then you can create the possibility for me to get a health certificate for the tropics, and then, if that is the case, I won't object anymore, [...]."
Resolution	So, I was examined and the doctor said, "There are no objections to send you to Africa."

Coda And so, it became clear to me, God can guide and lead my life and he doesn't go beyond my needs and my abilities, but he helps me walk on the path that he chose for me.⁵⁷ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

What he tells here is a story that is exemplary for how close his professional life is tied to his faith. The story begins with his outright unwillingness to become a deacon because he does not want to work with sick people himself having grown up amidst them. The query from the mission causes a great inner conflict, in the process of which Richard turns to God to ask for guidance. Getting a certificate that he is suitable for working in the tropics is interpreted as a signal from God that He really wants him to go to Africa and fulfill the work of the mission there. In his coda, Richard stresses that he did not feel manipulated at any point but experienced God's intervention as helpful, yet adapted to his own needs. This makes this narrative a religious identity narrative sensu Keller et al. (2016), since this story seems crucial to understand how Richard overcame doubt and insecurity on his path toward his religious and professional identity.

In his later interviews, this decision is more connected with personal encounters with certain people who he perceives as an opportunity to reflect, or as people to orient himself by. He names two men who encouraged him to pursue his path as a deacon, and while those conversations are not elaborated on at time 2, there are a few more details at time 3 when he talks about those people in his answer regarding important relationships, especially regarding his training instructor:

One of them was my instructor. I did a commercial apprenticeship in [part of town X]. And he was a deacon, my boss, who promoted my self-confidence and helped me a lot. I had a miserable school time, because of the war time. [...] After the war, we had classes of 70 pupils in one classroom. [...] And war time affected me negatively, mentally, to a great extent, I only realized that afterwards. I had a lot of fears. [...] And my father told me back then: "Boy, I'm taking you out of school. [...] Go and do this commercial apprenticeship." [...] And so I did that. And my boss—that's where I felt I was taken seriously for the first time. [...] And then he told me, at the end of my apprenticeship, "Mr. [surname A], when you're finished, come join us and become a deacon. We need you."⁵⁸ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

Here, one can see the juxtaposition with the father on the one hand, who is portrayed again as authoritarian and who decides what is best for Richard, without asking him for his opinion. On the other hand, there is the instructor who is supportive and takes his apprentice seriously. The miserable situation he escaped is further illustrated by referring to the war child topos again, this time more explicitly stating that he was traumatized by those experiences. In these unfortunate circumstances, the instructor who sees Richard from a different perspective comes across as a savior and someone who can give Richard's life a whole new direction. Perhaps this individual could even be read as being the better father to Richard by being more supportive and more aware of Richard's potential. And while that instructor was mentioned in his earlier interviews as well, he never got much attention. At time 3, however, it is him who paves the way for Richard's

later career in the diaconry by functioning as a role model and as a wise counselor. God as a means for guidance is not mentioned in this account, but it is His worldly staff who helps Richard make the right decisions. This narrative has the features of a redemption story (McAdams et al., 2001) through meeting someone who helped him onto the right path and was fundamental for his own self-image and his mental health.

Nevertheless, his faith and trust in God is omnipresent in his accounts throughout all interviews, and it is often connected to his work. The following passage from his third interview serves to illustrate how his professional stance is interwoven with his self-image as a Christian:

And saying “I’m Christian” means not living on an island of bliss where I am shielded from all these problems. [...] Especially [in] this home for the elderly. Sometimes we had up to 30 cases of people dying. And I never had a relation with the inhabitants like I was the boss who decides everything. Instead I tried to live as a human amongst humans, as a brother amongst brothers and sisters. And to let them feel that as well. Also regarding my employees, [...] I tried to be on the same level and not hover above them. And, yes, that was important, especially regarding my Christian faith.⁵⁹ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

Reading this paragraph, it becomes clear that his job is a real vocation or mission for him. His basic attitude is to not stand above others but encounter them as equals, regardless if it is the inhabitants or the employees of “his” home. How much he sees his job as a mission becomes apparent when taking a look at his answers to the question, “Do you feel that your life has meaning at present?” At time 1, this reads as follows:

My life’s meaning consists in having realized once that God, as the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and therefore also my Creator, knows me, is aware of me, and he gave me a special task in my life, that is helping other people, support them, [...]. Especially when you see the world as a whole in this very chaotic state with its wars and all these things, being there for others who have a special problem and helping them with what is given to me, with my strength, my hands, my feet, also with my money and my time that is at my disposal, so, not use all of this for me alone, but also utilize it for others.⁶⁰ (Richard, FDI, time 1)

At this time point, being able to help people is seen as a gift from God. Richard depicts the image of a leading God and his work can be seen in the tradition of Christian charity. By reference to the “very chaotic state” the world as a whole is in, Richard implies that not everybody adheres to his principles of altruism and charity, making the need for both of them urgent. His God-given gift could also be read as an honor that is not granted to everybody, thereby making Richard special. This implicit criticism becomes more apparent in his statement at time 2:

My personal life has a meaning and this meaning for me is to have helped other people and still can help them, even today. Like, that I’m not all by myself on this earth, but that I’m also there for others. And this realization, which has grown and got more stable in the course of my life’s decades, plays a big role. [...] Now you

could call this a helper syndrome or something, but I just think it's important in the human society. What really bothers me is the egoism that you experience in a lot of places. When people will only see their small environment and not the problems other people around them might have. And I say, "[...] I have received so much in my life that I can pass on some of it." And this really makes my life meaningful.⁶¹ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

The egoism of his fellow humans is the core of his critique. Helping people is what makes his life meaningful, even though he has been retired for some time and now there would be enough space to think of himself more. In contrast to his first interview, when being able to give is an ability that was granted by God, at time 2, this seems to be more of an inherent personality trait or something derived from the fact Richard has "received so much in [his] life," the source of all that he received remaining unclear. There is also his reference to a "helper syndrome," which manifests as anticipating or readopting critique that he must have faced throughout his time of engagement for people in need, since this is a defensive statement that is rather rare in his interviews. What follows may be a justification that he had to put forward regularly. He does not falter, and he seems convinced about his standpoint and sees it as "important in the human society," even though he seems to be aware of possible critical voices. In this light, his time 3 answer regarding that question contains an interesting new aspect:

My life becomes meaningful by being there for others. Yes, I can't put it any other way. However, without bending and saying, "Everything for the other, but nothing for myself," you know? There is this nice saying in the Bible, when Jesus says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And this played a big role for me. I also have the right to rest, to make my life agreeable as well. But I also have the task to help other people so that they can life and make their life agreeable.⁶² (Richard, FDI, time 3)

The main message stays the same: helping people is constitutional for his life meaning. Compared to his earlier answers, what is new is the emphasis on not forgetting oneself in that process. To justify his stance, he cites Jesus with the second part of the double commandment of love, thereby underlining the righteousness of his claim to make his own life agreeable. It is highly speculative to say that he did not live up to that standard before. Nevertheless, it is likely that only in old age Richard realizes the importance of taking care of oneself as well in order to be able to properly take care of others.

7.2.3 Richard's (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

Richard is considered a mover upward in the typology of religious types, moving from being predominantly conventional (type 2) to predominantly individuative-reflective (type 3) between times 2 and 3. His style aspect maps illustrate this movement, revealing that his answers were mainly rated style 3 (mutual religious style) in his first two interviews with some exceptions that were rated style 4 (individuative-systemic). This reflects a conventional approach with values oriented toward harmonious interpersonal relationships and a belief system that is evaluated to be adopted from his religious community without

too much critical reflection. However, this estimation has changed at time 3. Here, all of his answers are rated style 4, indicating that his answers show more ability to reflect on his views and to form an individual opinion that may differ from that of his community.

The survey data available for Richard complements the image from a different angle:

Table 20: Selected Data from Richard's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Richard	M (SD)	Richard	M (SD)	Richard	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	-	2.63 (1.17)	3.20	2.42 (1.12)	2.00	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	-	4.35 (0.38)	4.20	4.28 (0.51)	4.40	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	-	3.64 (0.75)	4.40	3.57 (0.76)	3.20	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	-	3.67 (0.59)	2.86	3.20 (0.40)	2.71	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	-	3.67 (0.71)	4.14	3.72 (0.59)	3.71	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	-	4.38 (0.38)	4.57	4.17 (0.39)	4.00	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	-	3.86 (0.65)	4.14	3.9 (0.62)	3.57	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	-	3.77 (0.61)	4.43	3.76 (0.51)	4.14	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	-	3.79 (0.68)	3.43	3.86 (0.62)	3.14	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	-	3.42 (0.78)	3.00	3.40 (0.70)	3.42	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	-	3.26 (0.58)	3.58	3.25 (0.58)	3.08	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	-	3.90 (0.47)	3.17	3.89 (0.49)	3.00	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	-	3.74 (0.46)	4.33	3.73 (0.44)	3.92	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	-	3.7 (0.49)	3.75	3.76 (0.51)	3.58	3.78 (0.50)

Richard's score on *ttt* has decreased a lot between time 2 and time 3, being above average at wave 2 and below at wave 3. This may hint to an individualization of his beliefs by his possible turning away from an all-too-literal understanding of the Bible to a more privatized form of faith. Interestingly, scores for *xenos* take the same route, which is not as easily understandable. On the Ryff Scale, his scores for *purpose in life* show a slight decrease (as is expected in older age) but are both well above the average. This is in accordance with the impression Richard gives in his interviews. He is a person with a definite purpose in life, which has never been at stake. At the same time, his answers on the subscale *self-acceptance* position him as a person with a rather low self-esteem, which is also not easy to understand in light of his interview answers. In contrast to Renate's survey data, Richard shows rather low scores on *autonomy* and high scores for *personal growth* at wave 2. The latter is in accordance with the finding from the content analysis that showed Richard's emphasis on not forgetting oneself in the process of helping others. Low autonomy scores might be related to the fact that Richard, being older than Renate as well, more strongly perceives the drawbacks that go along with getting older. On the NEO-FFI subscales, one may see that his scores for *openness to experience* well below the average of my sample at both times, which depict him as a person who is not that keen on making new experiences, which may be understandable when considering his age. His *agreeableness* score is high, well above the average at wave 2, and still slightly above at wave 3, indicating the willingness to get along well with other people, even though this readiness seems to decline with older age. His scores for *emotional stability*, while being below average at wave 2, are about average at wave 3. The lower score at wave 2 may be interpreted with the background knowledge that Renate and Richard were at a critical point at wave 2, having to decide where and how they wanted to spend the rest of their lives, which may well have affected their emotional stability.

What can be gathered from these findings regarding the development of Richard's subjective religiosity? Religion runs like a common thread through his whole life. Working in old people's welfare is explicitly justified with his Christian⁶³ faith and remains a personality-constituting factor even in old age long after his retirement, which suggests that his work with old people never was a mere job but a mission. This is a logical continuation of his work in Africa and puts a stronger emphasis on his work in Germany. However, it becomes clear that he encountered the indigenous population with a lot of respect (which points to a xenological pattern of tolerance, respect and esteem as described in Streib & Keller, 2018a, p. 90), which is within the range of what Treutler (2017) reports about attitudes toward the African people of that special mission. This quote from his third interview also gives a good impression of Richard's fundamental ethical principles:

Relations with other people, especially with the African people in Africa. It wasn't hard for me at all to integrate there, to be one of them, and not the European boss [...] and I realized, "Be careful not to deem yourself the super potent guy from Europe while the others have no competences." And so, I made the experience of being together with people, African people, who were to me vastly superior concerning some of their abilities and also their education. That's something you have to realize first in order not to behave like an oaf.⁶⁴ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

This quote hints at a certain appreciation for the strange, and the encounters with those people in general are described as positive and enriching. It is remarkable that this indication for xenophobia (Streib, 2018) is strongest in the latest interview, suggesting that being aware he is in the last phase of his life, Richard has come to the conclusion that his time in Africa changed his way of thinking by being confronted with old, probably inherited, prejudices and overcoming them by the actual encounter with “the strange.” Interestingly, this does not align with his scores on the RSS subscale *xenos*, since it could be assumed that this attitude reflects in his answers in the survey as well. A higher score on *xenos* would also be expected (according to Streib et al., 2020) when looking at his style-aspect maps and his ratings, moving from type 2 (predominantly conventional) to type 3 (predominantly individuative-reflective). In Richard’s case, it can be concluded that some findings from the survey cannot be explained with the help of other methods of analysis. The same may be admitted for Richard’s low scores on *self-acceptance* which are not compatible with his interview statements which depict him as someone who is content with what he has achieved in life at all timepoints. Overall, fitting his high scores on *purpose in life*, his identity was reconstructed as that of a person who gains much satisfaction of his profession and has a stable and positive social life.

Richard has reached a more reflective standpoint regarding the difficult relationship with his father in the course of his three interviews, which, following his mission of helping people, is ameliorated once the father becomes fragile and is taken care of by Richard. But not only the reversed roles are important, but Richard is able to concede that he has developed a new form of his respect for his father in that situation. This position is more nuanced at time 3 than in his other interviews, showing a development and a growing reflectiveness in old age (something which was also visible in his wife’s interviews).

Reflecting his higher ratings in the style-aspect maps of his later interviews, the analysis of his interviews has shown a more individuated form of belief and a more reflective approach to moral questions over the years, especially pronounced at time 3. Exemplarily, this was shown regarding his desire to help people. At time 1, being able to help is a gift from God as well as being an order and an honor. At time 2, the readiness to help is more strongly described to be inherent in his personality. A distinctive new quality is detected in his statement at time 3, namely the necessity to think of oneself by being altruistic but taking good care of oneself at the same time. This is a development regarding important values, which is representative for Richard’s pronouncedly different take at the questions during his third interview.

7.3 Renate and Richard—Comparison and Conclusion

The two single case studies have shown that Renate and Richard are people who lived their lives closely connected to the Christian faith and its concept of charity, showing their roots in a Protestant movement close to the German Pietism of the 17th and 18th century. The analysis has shown Renate to be oriented toward her family and harmonious relationships, which is consistent with the religious styles ratings, and therefore her also consistent religious type 2 (predominantly conventional). However, there are some meaningful exceptions that can be seen in the style-aspect maps, but not in the type

assignment, which points to a more reflective and systematic thinking. This is demonstrated when she talks about the relationship with her mother, which she seems to have reflected more thoroughly by time 3. She can see now that, by her wish to distance herself as much as possible, she was not able to see the good sides her mother had as well. For Renate, there are more uncertainties the older she gets, and she therefore develops her own sense of faith.

Richard's interviews reflect how much he sees his job as a mission. This is a possibly reason why he does not talk so much about his wife and his family. His professional life is portrayed as meaningful and identity constructing and as the main theme for his whole life and personality. The family, which is always in the background, is taken for granted but does not serve as a means to explain how Richard constructs his world in the context of these interviews, which can be assumed to be a rather typical approach for men in the context this couple has lived their whole lives. Both of them have had profound new insights regarding their relationships to their parents and their faith likewise in the last era of their lives, while their family and their marriage have always been a constant.

Renate and Richard both value the fact that they can practice their religion together. While Renate states that she perceives her husband as God's gift and that working together with him made her very happy, she also mentions that he is a kind of mentor for her during her interview at time 1:

I don't have to ask myself constantly whether I'm doing God's will, but I just have to do what is obvious, care for people, and thereby I have recognized God's will. And this always gave me strength, also in conversations with my husband, I don't have to tear myself apart asking whether I'm doing the right thing or not.⁶⁵ (Renate, FDI, time 1)

In this quote, it becomes clear that Renate gains strength and reassurances by talking to her husband about topics regarding her faith. Her trust in God and the continuity and deepening of her faith is apparent here as well as the importance of sharing the same religion with her husband. She also mentions reading books, which might point to an individual study and therefore a more individual forming of an opinion.

In Richard's accounts, there is not much reference to his work as a joint work with his wife. However, he also stresses how important the shared religiosity is for him as shown when he talks about his praying rituals:

We pray, my wife and I, together. Me by myself as well. [...] So, praying plays a big role. And a very important and fundamental role in our Christian faith.⁶⁶ (Richard, FDI, time 2)

Praying and thereby contacting God is described as fundamental for—and this should be stressed—*our* Christian faith." The faith is something that is seen as undoubtedly shared within the marriage. Richard emphasizes here the importance of performing the ritual of praying together. In his time 3 interview, the shared ritual is described again in more detail:

Yes. Erm, first, my wife and I hold a service each morning and each evening and then we read a Biblical saying or a paragraph from the Bible. And then there are interpretations for those, which we read. And we pray, in the morning and in the evening.⁶⁷ (Richard, FDI, time 3)

Beside going to church on a regular basis, holding private services is important for their faith practice. Renate mentioned that in her third interview along with Richard: in the last couple of years, they have adopted the habit of reading Bible interpretations, thereby possibly adding different views to their own.

There is one event during the time 2 interviews that is mentioned by both of them and which might serve to illustrate the ways in which they make important decisions. At this point, the couple had to make plans about their future after retirement. They had to talk about where and how they want to spend the rest of their lives, which was a decision process very present for both of them at the time, since they both answered the question regarding important decisions in a similar manner:

Table 21: Comparison of Richard's and Renate's answers regarding important decisions, time 2

When you have an important decision to make, how do you generally go about making it?	
Richard, time 2:	Renate, time 2:
Now that we're old, we have to think about how things should go on once we're not so independent and fit health-wise and what decisions do we have to make now? My wife and I think about that together and then make the decision. [If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to whom or what would you look for guidance?] Well, I would at least orient myself by my wife. For example, we were discussing the question what happens if we cannot keep this flat here anymore, if one of us is going to be in need of care. What do we do then? We made this decision together and go in this direction now bravely. Like I said, my wife and I agree completely on how we want to do this. ⁶⁸	Then I talk to my husband about it. Usually (laughing) we decide together. [I: Can you give me an example?] Fortunately, I still have my husband, he is a bit older than me and therefore I can orient myself by him. Sometimes there are things that I can't figure out by myself. I talk those through with my husband. [...] For example, how we wish things to be in the future, regarding our old age. Those were the things lately which made you think, since we were involved in the work for the elderly. And you ponder: How do we want to approach this? Like with the funeral, with solutions, how and where we want to live. [...] and we considered this together and weighed pros and cons. ⁶⁹

At this point in their life, their job as house parents has come to an end, and they have to organize their lives during retirement and prepare for the last phase of their lives (Renate even going so far as to talk about plans for their funerals). It can be argued that Richard is now able to turn his focus of attention more on himself or his marriage, since the diversion of his work is not an issue anymore. When reading the two answers, it becomes apparent that they see themselves as important counselors for each other. Both their depictions suggest that the process described is mutual and on eye-level, even though Renate notes that, due to the fact that her husband is a couple of years older than her, she can rely on Richard's experiences (even though there is the restriction "usually,"

followed by laughter, which might point to certain contentious issues she does not want to unfold here). Both are dealing with questions of how they want to live (and die, conclusively) from now on with Renate referring to their shared background of having worked in old people's welfare.

Comparing their approach to the facets of faith that are offered within the study design, it becomes clear that Renate more strongly rejects the term "spirituality" and understands it as "something different than religion," creating more distance between herself and those who would consider themselves spiritual. For Richard, spirituality possibly seems to be an acceptable part of religion, even though he personally "does not need it." Both seem to become more abstract when talking about their religiosity as they age. What unites them is the tendency to proclaim a "simple faith" for themselves, which aligns well with their Protestant, partially pietistic form of religiosity.

Summed up, Richard and Renate share a faith and appreciate that on personal levels. The nuances that are mentioned in the interviews are different, and the emphasis on the marriage is not the same. It may be argued that Richard fulfills the type of the gainfully employed man who finds satisfaction in his job by focusing on his professional life more than on his family. Renate is not unlike other women of her generation. In a similar, conservative, context, she may see herself as being responsible for raising the children while getting a vocational training not being a priority once she is married. However, the luck of being able to work, albeit without pay, together with her husband has done a lot to raise Renate's opinion of herself. As for their faith, it became apparent in the analyses that Richard is more invested with social criticism directed toward the injustices on Earth, while Renate stays within her own realm of experience and directs her more implicit critique more towards people she perceives not to be as altruistic as she is. Both seem to have come to a more individuated form of faith over the years, being able to shed certain beliefs that do not seem fitting for them anymore, perhaps due to their retirement and not being in any focus of attention. Their joint study of texts interpreting the Bible may have been a beneficial factor for this development although this is not made explicit.

Looking for a leitmotif, the mission to help others that are less privileged can be named as the most important in all of the interviews analyzed here. In Richard's time 3 interview, there is a new notion, emphasizing that this cannot and should not be done at all costs. Self-abandonment is not desirable. This realization, however, cannot be found in Renate's interviews, and it may be hypothesized that this is a difference that can be attributed to her socialization as a woman in a conservative environment in which it was expected of her to marry and raise children instead of prioritizing and pursuing her own ambitions. Nevertheless, it could be established that Renate has managed to create her own sphere of activity.

Notes

- 1 In nursery homes operated by the Protestant church in a diaconal fashion, often a couple would serve as heads of the house. Those were not necessarily trained in geriatric care, the focus was rather on living together in a family-like manner, with a Christian ethos. This has been changing in the last decades in favor of people with

an actual background in the respective field of expertise (for an overview of the history of diaconal welfare for old people, see <https://www.diakonie.de/altenhilfe> (last retrieved 2023-06-16)).

- 2 Gott [steht] über allem, aber er hat den Menschen einen freien Willen gegeben, dass sie selber entscheiden können, ob sie für oder gegen Gott arbeiten. [...] Aber letzten Endes ist er doch da und wird die Welt irgendwie retten.
- 3 Der Tod meines Vaters, als ich zehn Jahre war. Das hat mein Leben sehr stark-, äh, das hab ich immer wieder gemerkt, dass ich das im Nachhinein immer sehr stark empfunden habe. Das war ein tiefer Einschnitt.
- 4 Ich hab zwar schon Leid auch erfahren, eben dadurch, dass mein Vater früh gestorben ist. Aber das hat nie die Beziehung zu Gott irgendwie in Frage gestellt.
- 5 Ja, das ist zum ersten Mal die Kindheit. Dann die Schulzeit. Es war so, dass ich meinen Vater schon sehr früh verloren habe und da ist eigentlich so mit zehn Jahren schon ein Bruch passiert. Dann kam ich auf eine andere Schule. Und da war das so eine Internatsschule. Das war alles in [Land X in Afrika]. [...] Aber ich habe gemerkt, dass der Tod meines Vaters mein Leben sehr geprägt hat, so dass also praktisch da auch eine Zäsur war.
- 6 Die haben mir sicherlich auch sehr viel vorgelebt. Und mir sehr viel gegeben, in meinem Glauben. Ja, das war ein Vorbild. Vor allen Dingen meine Mutter. [...] Wir kommen eben auch aus einer langen Tradition von Christen. [...] Ja, ich bin ihnen dankbar. Dass sie mir das vorgelebt haben.
- 7 Sicherlich, äh, meine Mutter (nach Worten suchend) war eine etwas dominierende Person. Und vielleicht war es für meine Persönlichkeit oder für meine Selbständigkeit manchmal dann ganz gut, dass sie nicht mehr da war. Aber ich trage ihr eigentlich nichts nach. Sie hat sogar mich um Vergebung gebeten. Für alle Fehler, die sie in der Erziehung gemacht hätte. Und das war schon eine sehr wichtige Sache. [...] Und äh danach haben wir sie nicht wiedergesehen, [...] so dass ich froh bin, dass wir das noch so haben aufarbeiten können und ich ihr eben nichts mit Groll nachsehen brauche.
- 8 Ich hatte ein sehr enges Verhältnis zu meinem Vater und meine Mutter war eigentlich so die Bestimmendere in der Familie. Und sie hat mein Leben auch bestimmt. Und das habe ich eigentlich erst später gelernt, dass sie eben, aber eben wahrscheinlich auch durch den Tod meines Vaters, war sie diejenige, die uns erziehen musste und hat eben mein Leben bestimmt und mich dadurch in eine gewisse Unselbständigkeit geführt. [...] Ich habe erst einen Bruch zu meiner Mutter erlebt, als ich verheiratet war. Und dass ich mich da abgenabelt habe von ihr. Sie hat versucht, auch da (lachend) in unser Leben einzuwirken, auch in der Erziehung meiner Kinder, und dass ich mich dann dagegen gewehrt habe. Aber ich habe dann einen versöhnlichen Abschluss gehabt, weil sie hat mich um Verzeihung gebeten. Für die Fehler, die sie bei mir gemacht hatte. Ich habe das zwar in dem Moment, als sie das sagte, nicht so empfunden. Ich sage: „Ich habe dir eigentlich nichts zu verzeihen, aber später habe ich immer gemerkt, ja, wie sie in mein Leben eingewirkt hat. Und so bin ich dankbar, dass wir einen guten Abschluss bekommen haben.“
- 9 [I: gibt es in Ihrer Vergangenheit Beziehungen, die Ihre persönliche Entwicklung entscheidend beeinflusst haben?] Also ich war ein absolutes Vaterkind. Das ist ja

meistens oder oft bei Töchtern und Vätern, ne? Das hat mich sicher auch beeinflusst, obwohl es ja eigentlich relativ kurze Zeit war. Ich denke, sein Humor, seine ruhige Art, die habe ich sicher auch geerbt. [...] [I: Wie würden Sie Ihre Eltern jeweils beschreiben?] Da ich meinen Vater ja nur als Kleinkind gekannt habe, kann ich es schlecht sagen. Ich weiß nur, dass er ein sehr fröhlicher Mensch war, humorvoll, liebevoll. Ich habe ihn eigentlich nie ausfällig erlebt. Meine Mutter war die Strengere, die erzogen hat, die geschimpft hat auch. [...] Aber ich habe leider meinen Vater eben nicht als Erwachsene kennengelernt.

- 10 Sie hat mich auch sicher eine Zeitlang dominiert, obwohl ich das nicht wahrgenommen habe, aber sie hat mein Leben bestimmt. Und als ich dann geheiratet habe, war ich dann plötzlich aus ihrem Einflussbereich heraus und in einem eigenen Einflussbereich. Und ich denke, das war für mich wahrscheinlich auch ganz heilsam. Da ist ein Bruch passiert, mit meiner Mutter. Weil da hatte ich dann meine Kinder und sie hat versucht, dann auch ein bisschen da Einfluss zu nehmen oder mir Ratschläge zu geben oder [...] über mein Leben teilweise zu verfügen. [...] Und das habe ich eigentlich ganz heilsam empfunden, dass sie nachher nicht mehr da war. [...] Und ich habe das erst jetzt vor einigen Jahren gelernt, dass durch den Tod meines Vaters ich mich verantwortlich fühlte als Trösterin für meine Mutter, weil ich die Einzige war, die da war als der Vater starb. [...] Und ich denke, dadurch hatte ich auch nicht die Kraft, mich aufzulehnen gegen irgendwelche Anordnungen [...] [I: Hat sich Ihr Bild von Ihren Eltern im Laufe der Jahre verändert?] Ich habe meine Mutter... ja, als Kind hat man sie natürlich als Autoritätsperson gesehen. Später habe ich sie dann etwas, äh, kritischer gesehen. Naja, nachher ist sie gestorben. Da war ich vielleicht dann manchmal auch zu kritisch, [...], dass ich vielleicht das Gute, was sie hatte, nicht genug anerkannt habe.
- 11 Ja, sicherlich mein Mann. (lacht) Ich glaube, dass auch er für mich ein ganz besonderer Glücksfall war, und durch meinen Mann habe ich sicherlich auch noch sehr viel stärker diese Beziehung zu Gott empfinden können und wahrnehmen können. [...] Ja, ich habe meinen Mann auch als Gottes Geschenk empfunden, [...] dass das auch Gottes Wille war, und dass Gott mir die Liebe auch zu meinem Mann geschenkt hat. Und das war für mich ein großes Glück.
- 12 Mein Mann und ich haben beide eine Missionsgeschichte und unsere Eltern waren schon zusammen gewesen auf einer Missionsstation, von daher kannten die Familien sich. Und das war natürlich eine besondere Fügung, dass wir dann geheiratet haben. [...] Man wusste, wovon der andere sprach und das war schon was Besonderes.
- 13 As a side note, it may be added here that in research investigating the connection between attachment and religiosity, her trajectory is described as the “‘correspondence’ pathway to religion and spirituality,” adopting the generic stance toward belief of her caregivers, see for example, Granqvist (2020, p. 123).
- 14 Ich denke, das liegt sicher auch daran, dass ich eine glückliche Beziehung habe. Und gut eingebunden bin in der Familie. [...] Ich glaube, das ist sicher der Grund, dass ich in einer sehr behüteten Kindheit, vielleicht auch nicht immer, aufgewachsen bin oder in einer, ja, in einer Familie. Auch im großen Verwandtenkreis eine Beziehung habe oder auch durch meinen Mann in seiner Familie gut aufgehoben bin. Und von

- daher stellt sich dann gar nicht die Frage, dass man jetzt irgendwie den Sinn des Lebens infrage stellt.
- 15 Die Arbeit im Altenheim hat so etwas Beglückendes. Weil man dort den Menschen sehr viel Liebe entgegenbringen kann. Und ich habe also sehr viel auch Zuneigung erfahren. [...] Und wir haben uns bemüht, eben die Menschen so anzunehmen, wie sie sind. Und ihnen ein Stück Zuhause zu geben. Und das war eben etwas, was für uns beide auch, meinen Mann und mich, sehr, sehr schön war. Dass wir diese Arbeit gemeinsam tun konnten, ich war zwar nur die Frau des Heimleiters, aber ich war als Hausmutter mit im Haus tätig. Und [...] das war einfach das Beglückende, etwas gemeinsam zu tun.
- 16 Als wir zurückkamen [aus Afrika], war ich zunächst auch erst zu Hause, mein Mann war hier schon stellvertretender Heimleiter. Und dann nach fünf Jahren wurden wir eben gebeten zusammen die Heimleitung zu übernehmen, und da bin ich dann hier mit eingestiegen. Und das war für mich dann auch nochmal eine sehr dankbare Aufgabe, die Dankbarkeit der alten Menschen zu sehen und zu erleben und zu spüren. [...] [I: Und das haben Sie dann hier aber ohne eine spezielle Ausbildung gemacht?] Ohne Ausbildung, ja. Ich hatte eben keinen Beruf und war dann, das hieß hier Hausmutter, damals noch. [...] Damals war das noch, dass das Diakonen-Ehepaar die Altenheime geleitet hat und so waren das die Hauseltern. Wir waren noch jung, wir wären eigentlich eher die Kinder gewesen, aber es war trotzdem sehr, sehr schön.
- 17 Ich habe dann noch ein bisschen hier und da was gemacht, aber eben nicht diese Ausbildung. Und das hat mir ein wenig Minderwertigkeitskomplexe geschaffen, weil ich keine Ausbildung hatte, das Gefühl hatte, ich bin da also nicht so vollwertig (lächelt) als Berufstätige. Deswegen war das ja auch für mich toll hier nachher als Hausmutter. Da konnte ich dann so auf Formularen schreiben „Hausmutter“, dann brauchte ich da nicht „ohne Beruf“ schreiben oder nur „Hausfrau“.
- 18 Spiritualität ist für mich zu abstrakt, ich nenne es Anbetung.
- 19 Spiritualität ist für mich nicht so wichtig. Ich halte es lieber mit dem schlichten Glauben.
- 20 Glaube an Gott.
- 21 Ich würde sagen, gläubig. Spirituell nicht. [I: Was bedeutet das für Sie?] Das gibt mir Halt. Dass ich eben an Gott glauben kann. Dass ich weiß, dass es eine Macht gibt, die mich hält, und dass ich nicht in einem luftleeren Raum bin. (leise) Dadurch Halt habe.
- 22 Also ich würde mich als gläubig bezeichnen. Weil ich eben an Gott glaube und das ist für mich sehr wichtig. [...] Ja, spirituell und religiös, das können eben auch andere Religionen sein. Oder spirituell, ja, das kann zum Beispiel ja solche Esoterik sein oder sowas. Und das ist es für mich nicht. [...] Für mich ist wichtig, dass ich an Gott glaube. [I: Also „Glauben“ verbinden Sie mit „an Gott glauben?“] Ja. Ich meine, natürlich gibt es auch „Glauben an Allah“ oder die Juden glauben auch an Gott, nicht, aber für mich... ich glaube eher an Gott und den Dreieinigen Gott: Jesus, Heiligen Geist und Gott Vater. [I: Also im christlichen Sinne?] Ja.
- 23 Ich habe immer mit diesem spirituellen (lächelt) ein Problem. Ich halte mich eigentlich für glaubend. Man kann das natürlich auch als gläubig bezeichnen, aber ich glaube. Ich glaube an Gott. [I: Und mit spirituell haben Sie ein Problem?] Äh,

da denkt man immer an die Esoterik. (lacht) Oder ich denke daran. [I: Und Sie sagen lieber glaubend als gläubig. Warum?] Äh, gläubig ist so ein schwammiger Begriff für mich. [I: Und was bedeutet dann glaubend für Sie?] Glaubend ist konkret. Ich glaube an Gott. Gläubig ist so allgemein. [I: Und religiös?] Religiös, (lächelt) da kommt einem natürlich der religiöse Fundamentalismus in den Sinn. Äh, würde ich mich nicht so bezeichnen. Denn ich glaube nicht, dass ich so religiös bin. [I: Also mit glaubend, sind Sie da ganz zufrieden?] Ja, bin ich zufrieden. (lächelt) Das reicht mir schon.

- 24 Als Kind hat man eben Gott sehr stark als Vater empfunden. Er wurde einem ja sicher auch so dargestellt. Und dann später... war das für mich eine Autorität, ja, etwas, wo man Halt hatte. Ja. Ich habe eigentlich auch kein richtiges Gottesbild gehabt. Es war einfach eine Instanz, die ich jetzt auch gar nicht so näher beschreiben kann. Aber sicherlich, Gott war für mich derjenige, der einen beschützt, der einen hält, zu dem man Vertrauen haben kann. [I: Was bedeutet Gott heute für Sie?] Ja, immer noch das Gleiche. Also es hat sich da in dieser Beziehung nichts geändert.
- 25 Früher, ich weiß nicht, wie ich das ausdrücken soll... Da war ich vielleicht noch nicht ganz so tolerant wie heute. Aber das hat eigentlich nichts mit der Beziehung zu Gott zu tun, das war eigentlich so mehr, dass man toleranter ist gegenüber Auffassungen von anderen. Also früher war ich zum Beispiel... hatte ich das Gefühl, ich bin nicht fromm genug und da bin ich jetzt heutzutage freier und dass ich mir sage: „[...] Gott hat ein weites Herz. Und ich muss jetzt nicht einen bestimmten Frömmigkeitsgrad haben, um zu Gott zu kommen.“ [...] [I: Erinnern Sie sich, was diese Entwicklung oder diese Veränderung angestoßen hat?] Das sind so Gespräche auch, auch so in den letzten Jahren durch ja, Predigten oder wenn man so Andachten hört, die nicht so fromm sind oder Lesen von Büchern, das hat mich dann doch weitergebracht.
- 26 Früher hat man ja einen kindlichen Glauben gehabt. Der liebe Gott. [...] Und danach später hat man auch vieles nicht so infrage gestellt oder ich nicht so infrage gestellt. Später habe ich mich dann eigentlich mehr auch für die, ja, die Geschichte hinter der Bibel interessiert. Und ich finde es unheimlich spannend auch, die Hintergründe in den biblischen Geschichten zu hören, [...] und das erschüttert meinen Glauben nicht, auch wenn ich weiß, dass die Bibel jetzt nicht eine Chronologie der Ereignisse gewesen ist, sondern eine Geschichte, die Menschen aufgeschrieben haben, um etwas zu verdeutlichen. [...] Für mich ist das kein Gegensatz, dass Gott die Welt erschaffen hat, obwohl ich weiß, da sind die Planeten und das Weltall und so weiter und die Evolution und die Schöpfung, ist für mich kein Gegensatz. [...] [I: Wie ist ihr Gottesbild heute?] Gott ist manchmal auch ein unverständlicher Gott. [...] Ich habe gelesen, Gott hat den Menschen die Freiheit gegeben, und deswegen ist der Mensch frei, ob er sich so oder so entscheidet, für Gott und damit aber auch eben für seinen Mitmenschen da zu sein oder die Schöpfung zu bewahren oder nur selbst im Mittelpunkt steht und Gott eigentlich nicht braucht. Und wenn man Gott nicht braucht, dann schert man sich nicht drum, was um einen herum passiert. [...] Und dadurch hat Gott sich auch ein Stück entmachtet, selber. [...] Und das habe ich eben erst so in den letzten Jahren, auch so in Büchern gelernt. Und das ist für mich so ein Aha-Erlebnis, gibt mir unheimlich auch Befreiung.

- 27 Mein Ideal reifen Glaubens... Sicherlich, dass man möglichst wenig zweifelt, dass man merkt, dass man Gottes Weg geht, dass man den Willen Gottes tut. [...] Ja, das hat sich auch eigentlich in den letzten Jahren entwickelt, oder auch hier in Deutschland, dass ich darin mehr Sicherheit bekommen habe, dass ich nicht mehr so selbstzweifeln brauch. Ob ich wirklich den richtigen Glauben habe, sondern, ja, mein Glaube ist dann auch ein Stück, äh, kindlicher geworden. Weil ich sag, ich muss mich nicht jetzt ständig fragen, tue ich jetzt Gottes Wille, sondern ich muss einfach das Naheliegende tun, mich um die Menschen kümmern, und darin hab ich dann eben auch dann Gottes Willen erkannt.
- 28 Wir Menschen sind nicht nur für uns selbst da. Ich glaube, dass wir Menschen einen Sinn haben. Wenn wir [...] für andere Menschen da sind. Dann hat unser Leben einen Sinn. Mein Leben hat einen Sinn, weil ich für meine Familie da bin. [...] Und dadurch eben dann auch zu mir selber komme. [...] [I: Gibt es so etwas wie einen Plan für unser Leben?] Ich denke schon, dass Gott oft einen Plan hat für uns. Dass er dann unser Leben bestimmt, ja.
- 29 Ich glaube ja, wir brauchen gar nicht so einen reifen Glauben. Ein kleiner Glaube reicht auch aus, also wir müssen nicht unbedingt einen großartigen Glauben haben. [...] Ja, dieses Gefühl, Gott etwas vorweisen zu müssen, dass man eben sagt: „Ah, ich muss jetzt weiterkommen im Glauben“ – es steht zwar in der Bibel, aber ... für mich ist das nicht so wichtig, ich denke, Gott nimmt uns auch an, auch wenn wir keine Stufen emporklimmen. Es reicht aus, wenn wir sagen: „Gott, danke, dass du da bist“ oder: „Ich glaube, dass du mich annimmst.“
- 30 Wir Menschen sollen die Erde bewahren, nicht die Erde oder die Schöpfung ausbeuten. Wir sollen so leben, dass wir nicht nur egoistisch sind, sondern dass wir auch an die denken, die nach uns kommen, unsere Kinder. [...] Ich denke da so an die reichen Menschen, die eben nur für sich leben und das wäre für mich nichts, da hätte ich mein Leben nicht so ganz gut gelebt, wenn ich das Gefühl hätte, ich könnte nicht auch für andere Menschen da sein. [...] [I: Wird unser Leben von höheren Mächten beeinflusst?] Mh ja, ich denke von Gott. Aber nicht so, dass der Mensch eine Marionette ist, sondern dass Gott über allem steht, aber er hat den Menschen einen freien Willen gegeben, dass sie selber entscheiden können, ob sie für oder gegen Gott arbeiten. [...] Aber letzten Endes ist er doch da und wird die Welt irgendwie retten.
- 31 Ich weiß gar nicht, ob es einen reifen Glauben überhaupt gibt. Ich denke, man ist immer auf der Suche oder es gibt immer Schwankungen im Glauben, glaube ich. Und es kann gut sein, dass man eine Zeit hat, wo man nicht so glaubt. Deswegen ist für mich das immer so ein bisschen fraglich, dass man im Glauben wächst. Das kann ich nicht so nachvollziehen, natürlich, als Kind glaubt man anders als als Erwachsener, [...]. Aber dann weiß ich nicht, ob man dann noch weiter wachsen kann im Glauben. Ich spüre das noch nicht so. [...] Auch in der Bibel der Paulus spricht auch immer von reifem Glauben. Aber ich weiß nicht, wie das geht. Vielleicht bin ich da nicht abstrakt genug. [...] Vielleicht können manche das von sich behaupten, dass sie einen reifen Glauben haben. Aber da bin ich eher zurückhaltend.
- 32 Ja, unser Leben hat einen Sinn. Weil wir Gottes Geschöpfe sind, hat es den Sinn, dass Gott sagt: „Macht euch die Erde untertan, bewahrt sie.“ Aber wir müssen nicht

die Erde zerstören. Unser Leben hat den Sinn, dass wir die Schöpfung bewahren. [...] [I: Wird unser Leben von höheren Mächten beeinflusst?] Also nicht von einer Macht. Äh, für mich jedenfalls bewahrt mein Leben Gott. Es gibt sicher manche, die an andere Mächte glauben, aber daran glaube ich nicht. [I: Aber Sie können sich prinzipiell vorstellen, dass es das gibt, weil Sie sagten, nicht nur eine Macht möglicherweise?] Es gibt vielleicht andere Mächte, ja, es gibt auch böse Mächte, die auch Einfluss haben. Aber da sollte man sich vielleicht lieber nicht mit einlassen.

- 33 Ich kann einen Gottesdienst auch unter einer Schirmakazie in der Steppe [Afrikas] halten und brauche dazu nicht einen Hochaltar und Messgewänder, sondern da ist meine Beziehung zu Gott eben sehr viel nüchterner.
- 34 Ich würd sagen die Kindheit, mit Schulzeit, die eine entscheidende Phase meines Lebens waren, sehr prägend. nach der Schulzeit die Zeit der Ausbildung, die Suche nach Orientierung, oder Orientierung empfangen, in welche Richtung mein Leben gestaltet werden soll. Dann nach der Ausbildung, ähm, die Zielrichtung, also wohin ich dann gegangen bin, als, Rausgebildeter und dann eben meine Heirat, und Gründung einer Familie und Leben im Ausland. Das sind so die Hauptmerkmale. Und die Rückkehr nach Deutschland wieder, das käme noch dazu.
- 35 Die Kapitel Kindheit, Jugend/Schulzeit, [...]. Also meine Berufszeit, die würde ich unterteilen in verschiedene Bereiche, verschiedene Perioden. Das wäre also die Ausbildungszeit, [...]. Dann die erste Zeit, als ich in meinem Beruf gearbeitet habe, das war eine dreijährige Zeit in Afrika. Dann kommt auch meine Berufsausbildungszeit hier in Deutschland, also im Diakonberuf [...]. Und dann nochmal acht Jahre als Diakon in [Land in Afrika Y] in verschiedenen Bereichen. Und dann die Rückkehr nach Deutschland, Beruf oder Tätigkeit im Bereich der Altenhilfe hier in [Stadtteil Z]. Und dann der Ruhestand.
- 36 Ja, die gibt es auf jeden Fall, und zwar denk ich mal hab ich eine sehr starke Bindung zu meiner Mutter gehabt. Wir waren [viele] Kinder ich war das [zweitjüngste] Kind, und gerade in der Kriegszeit, wo diese existentiellen Ängste sehr stark waren, und der Vater nicht da war, war die Mutter für mich also ungeheuer wichtig. Und sie hat das auch verstanden, eben ihre Mütterlichkeit voll zu entfalten und uns Kindern eben auch zu geben.
- 37 Much could be said about the mission in Africa at that time, especially the time between 1933, the year of the Nazi takeover in Germany, and 1939/40, when the mission was temporarily suspended due to the beginning of the 2nd World War; however, neither Richard nor Renate really talk about that time or their parents' role and ideology. For that reason, the interested reader might be referred, as a starting point, to Treutler's (2017) dissertation on the Christian mission conception and Nazi-influenced worldview.
- 38 Ich bin hier in [Stadtteil Z] aufgewachsen in der Kriegszeit, in der Bombenzeit, und wie meine Mutter es fertiggebracht hat, uns als Kinder – wir waren [viele] Geschwister – auch in der Nachkriegszeit, wo wir wirklich Hunger gelitten haben, durchzubringen. Und sie war eine sehr zierliche Frau und eine sehr liebevolle Frau und sie war für mich einfach so der Hort der Geborgenheit auch. Und ist es eigentlich auch bis zum Schluss gewesen.

- 39 Zu meiner Mutter hatte ich ein sehr, sehr starkes Verhältnis. Sie war eine ausgesprochen humorvolle, liebevolle Mutter, die uns Kinder also sehr, sehr geprägt hat. [...] Meine Mutter hat mir sehr viel gegeben, das muss ich schon sagen. Und sie war so der Ruhepol in unserer Familie.
- 40 Als Kind erlebte ich die Bombenangriffe, die sehr, sehr prägend für mich waren. Angstzustände, psychisch, körperlich, aber auch dieses Gefühl... Zum Beispiel eine Episode, wir saßen in unserem Luftschutzkeller [...] und die Bomben fielen. Und das war ein Höllenlärm. Und wie meine Mutter und mein Bruder und meine kleine Schwester, die noch in der Wiege lag, da mit uns Lieder sang, um uns einfach abzulenken, aber auch praktisch als Gebet. Und das hat mich schon sehr geprägt, damals.
- 41 Mein Vater war für mich etwas zu groß, Übervater, vor dem ich auch ein bisschen Angst hatte, weil er, anders als meine Mutter, nicht so das Verhältnis zu mir hatte, wie ich es mir gewünscht hätte, er war sehr viel außer Hause. Er war sehr autoritär, und von daher hatte ich also nicht so eine positive Beziehung zu ihm, bis später zum Alter, wo er selber hilfsbedürftig wurde und wo ich ihm dann geholfen habe, weil wir einfach zusammen gewohnt haben, und ich ihm beigestanden habe. Und da ist das Verhältnis dann sehr gut geworden.
- 42 Also, bei meinem Vater hat es sich eben dadurch [geändert], dass ich älter wurde, verständiger wurde und im Alter ruhiger, stiller und auch zufriedener wurde. Dadurch hat sich das Verhältnis und auch mein Bild des Vaters sich sehr stark geändert.
- 43 Also, ich glaube, dass eben bei meinem Vater es einfach dadurch war, dass ein Rollenwechsel auch stattgefunden hatte. Er war jetzt plötzlich derjenige, der meine Hilfe brauchte. Ich war Leiter im [Altenheim] und er kam als Bewohner zu uns und wurde eben im Laufe der Jahre auch immer schwächer und ich konnte ihm beistehen. Ich konnte ihm helfen und dadurch haben wir mehr zueinander gefunden. Also das war mit Sicherheit auch der Grund. Er war nicht mehr derjenige, der mir sagen musste, wo es langgeht, sondern ich konnte ihm helfen und habe eben auch versucht, das so liebevoll wie möglich dann auch zu tun.
- 44 Zu meinem Vater hatte ich nicht das innigste Verhältnis, muss ich sagen. Er war so ein bisschen für mich der Übervater, ja. [...] Was später, er war nachher Bewohner [in dem Heim, das ich geleitet habe], in seinen letzten Lebensjahren, sich sehr geändert hat. Wo er plötzlich der Schwächere war und ich derjenige, der ihm helfen konnte. Also gerade das Verhältnis umgedreht war, nicht. Und er das aber sehr tapfer dann auch angenommen hat und das akzeptiert hat und mich darin auch bestärkt hat. Aber als Kind hatte ich immer so ein bisschen Sorge vor ihm. Er war nicht brutal, absolut nicht, aber es fehlte diese emotionale Verbindung zu ihm hin. Er war auch sehr viel außer Haus.
- 45 Naja, insofern, dass ich da ein anderes Verhältnis zu meinem Vater bekommen habe in seinen letzten Lebensjahren, ne. Und das muss ich ihm wirklich hoch anrechnen, dass er sich in seiner Situation sehr gut eingefügt hat, also seine persönliche Situation. Nie darüber geklagt hat, dass er nicht mehr so kann, wie er früher mal gekonnt hat und so weiter, und dass er mich eben als eben als Leiter des Hauses hier respektiert hat.

- 46 Gebet, Gottesdienst mit Liturgie.
- 47 Frömmigkeit, Anbetung, alltägliche Beziehung zu Gott
- 48 Glaube an Gott und Nachfolge Jesu Christi.
- 49 Glauben an Gott.
- 50 Ich hab ein bisschen Probleme mit diesen Begriffen [...]. Ja natürlich, ich habe eine Religion, und nicht irgendeine Religion, sondern die Religion, für mich ist das die Religion, oder der Glaube. Und spirituell, ich denke, wir haben alle Elemente der Spiritualität in uns, und bei dem einen wirkt es so oder, bei dem anderen so. Wenn ich eine Feier erlebe, einen Gottesdienst, dann ist das was Spirituelles, und wenn jemand bei der Olympiade auf dem Treppchen steht und ne Goldmedaille umgehängt bekommt, und die Nationalhymne wird gespielt, ist es ja auch was Spirituelles, was ihn also irgendwie bewegt, spürt, das ist ja der Geist, denn der Geist bewegt meine Emotionen. [...] Es gibt meinem Leben einen ungeheuren Halt, diese Gläubigkeit, auch die Spiritualität, auch ein Gemeinschaftserlebnis, in der Gemeinde, wenn wir unseren sonntäglichen Gottesdienst haben, dann ist das ein gemeinschaftliches Erlebnis, was uns zusammenbringt und was uns irgendwie auch irgendwie positiv beeinflusst, [...]. Ja, das bedeutet für mich Halt in meinem Leben und Sinnerfüllung in meinem Leben.
- 51 Diese Begriffe sind ja teilweise mit negativen Empfindungen auch verbunden. [...] Ich bin ein Mensch, der an Jesus Christus und an Gott glaubt. Also dann eher gläubig, dass ich glaube, was die Bibel sagt. Aber ich bin auch nicht spirituell, also auch diese Dinge spielen für mich nicht eine dominante Rolle wie das Beispiel, was in der katholischen Kirche ja sehr stark ausgeprägt ist bei den Gottesdiensten. Ich komme auch ohne dem aus, ohne die Äußerlichkeiten. Und ich kann einen Gottesdienst auch unter einer Schirmakazie in der Steppe [Afrikas] halten und brauche dazu nicht einen Hochaltar und Messgewänder, sondern da ist meine Beziehung zu Gott eben sehr viel nüchterner. [...] Ich lehne dies nicht ab und wenn jemand anders das als sehr wichtig und für ihn sehr hilfreich empfindet, sage ich: „Okay, das ist gut für dich.“ Für mich spielt es nicht unbedingt diese Rolle.
- 52 Es bedeutet eben Lebensinhalt, eine Lebensform, eine Möglichkeit, mein Leben zu gestalten und eine Zukunftsorientiertheit zu haben. Das ist wichtig, ja. Ich bin mal [...] mit dem Schiff um Südafrika herumgefahren. Und da war ein Mann, [...] der mich dann fragte: „Sind sie eigentlich ein religiöser Typ?“ (lächelt) Und dann habe ich ihm gesagt: „Ich bin ein Typ, aber (lacht) Religion spielt für mich eine große Rolle, eine ganz entscheidende Rolle. Aber ob ich nun ein religiöser Typ, (lächelt) das weiß ich nicht.“ [...] Ich denke, jeder kann religiös sein, wenn er es denn möchte.
- 53 Aus der Kindheit die Frömmigkeit, die ich hatte oder die sehr stark geprägt war durch die Mutter, durch die Eltern natürlich, einmal dadurch, dass man Kind war und sie versuchten, uns Kindern klar zu machen, was Gott ist und welche Beziehung wir zu Gott haben. Dann danach, nachdem man dann selber anfang zu denken, drüber nachzudenken, in Konflikte geriet, in Zweifel geriet und damit fertig werden musste, dass man selber anfang die Bibel zu lesen, Konfirmandenunterricht, und solche Dinge, die dann natürlich einem weiter geholfen haben. Und später existentielle Erlebnisse, also Erlebnisse aus dem Alltag, die mich sehr stark geprägt haben in meiner Beziehung zu Gott. Gott bedeutet für mich heute, dass ich weiß, er ist

mein Schöpfer, dass ich weiß, er ist bei uns, auch wenn er nicht sichtbar ist, dass ich mich bei ihm geborgen wissen darf, und, ganz besonders dass ich weiß, dass er mich auch im Sterben und im Tod umgibt und dass ich von daher also nicht in ein dunkles, tiefes Loch falle sondern eher, wie wir sagen, in Gottes Hände falle, also zurück zu ihm gehen werde.

- 54 Es gab Zeiten, das war besonders, als ich in England war, um Englisch zu lernen und dort mit Menschen aus dem kirchlichen Bereich zu tun hatte, dass ich da sehr emotional agierte und was sich nachher im Laufe der Jahre, als ich älter wurde und andere Erfahrungen gemacht habe dann, etwas relativierte. Dass ich also nüchterner wurde in meiner Beziehung auch zu Gott und zum christlichen Glauben. [I: Wie hat sich dieses Emotionale dargestellt?] Durch Äußerlichkeiten. Zum Beispiel durch Gestaltung der Gottesdienste, der Lieder, die auf mich sehr emotional gewirkt haben. [...] Aber ich eben hinterher dann doch sehr viel nüchterner geworden bin durch persönliche Lebenserfahrungen. [...] Und dann eben natürlich in der Begegnung mit Menschen in besonders schwierigen Lebenssituationen, sei es, dass sie psychisch krank waren, sei es, dass sie materiell sehr schlecht dran waren, gesundheitlich sehr angeschlagen und hier eben auch, wie ich eben schon sagte, im Bereich der Altenhilfe in Sterbeprozessen [...], die ich begleitet habe, dass mir das eben auch in meinem christlichen Glauben geholfen hat und eine Veränderung da auch stattfand. Also ich will nicht sagen „fundamentalistisch“, aber irgendwie doch eine sehr reale Beziehung zu meinem christlichen Glauben gefunden habe.
- 55 Natürlich gibt es im Leben eines jeden Christen auch Phasen, wo man in große Zweifel gerät, ist das wirklich so, oder gebe ich mich nicht einer Illusion hin, die ich als sehr wohltuend empfinde, aber die gar nicht reell ist? Und ich habe aber gemerkt, dass mein Glaube eben durchaus reell ist und sich auf Dinge stützt oder gründet, die tatsächlich existent sind. [...] Wenn man die Bibel liest, dann kriegt man manchmal die Krise, wo man sagt: „Also, das kann ja gar nicht so gewesen sein!“ Ist oft auch gar nicht so gewesen, sondern das sind Umschreibungen von Glaubenserfahrungen, die die Menschen gemacht haben. [...] Und so ist das eben auch bei mir in meinem Glaubensleben, dass ich immer wieder Dinge neu bewerten muss und auch Erlebnisse, die ich gehabt habe, neu reflektieren muss. [I: Was bedeutet es heute für Sie, also Ihr Weltbild oder das Bild von Gott?] Es bedeutet für mich heute, dass ich im Blick auf die wirklich zu Depression führende Situation in der Welt, dass ich die ertragen kann. Weil ich mir sage, das ist ja nicht das Letzte. Und auch mein eigenes Leben, ich bin also nun schon über 80, und ich weiß, dass mir nicht mehr viele Jahre gegeben werden, aber dass ich eben den Blick nach vorne habe und an die Zukunft Gottes glaube und weiß, wenn ich sterbe, der Tod ist nicht das Letzte.
- 56 In [Land Y in Afrika], wo man bar aller technischen Hilfen war, völlig auf sich eingestellt. Wir lebten in einem Hospital mit 130 psychisch kranken Menschen. Wir hatten keinen Arzt, ich bin nicht Arzt, ich bin nur Krankenpfleger, und wir waren von der Infrastruktur völlig abgeschlossen und mussten mit den Situationen fertig werden, die dort geschahen. [...] Dadurch, dass ich ein Auto hatte, musste ich die Menschen ins Krankenhaus bringen. [...] Wo ich steckenblieb mit meinem Auto im Schlamm der unbefestigten Straße in der Regenzeit [...], meine Frau oben mit den Kindern allein im Hospital war und so, und es wurde Nacht und damals

gab es noch keine Handys, noch keine Telekommunikationsmöglichkeiten und ich wirklich manchmal dachte: „Wie komme ich jetzt hier durch?“ Straßen blockiert waren durch umgefallene Bäume im Urwald, durch Bäche, die plötzlich zu reißenden Strömen wurden und über die Straße rübergingen und den Boden weggerissen hatten und ich irgendwie durchkommen musste. Und da habe ich wirklich gesagt: „Gott, ich habe jetzt diese Situation, ich kann jetzt alleine damit nicht zurande kommen. Jetzt musst du mir helfen.“ Und es hat dann auch immer geklappt. Und ich mir dann auch sagte, das ist nicht irgendwie Glück oder da hat also (lacht) wer Schwein gehabt hat oder sonst etwas, sondern das ist wirklich eine ganz konkrete Hilfe, die ich erfahren habe in einer Situation, wo ich mir nicht mehr helfen konnte.

- 57 Zum Beispiel damals die Entscheidung, ob ich Diakon werden sollte oder nicht. Ich sagte ja schon, ich hatte überhaupt keine Lust Diakon zu werden und mein Leben mit kranken Menschen zu fristen, und ich war da in eine ganz große Konfliktsituation hineingeraten, weil ich auf der einen Seite spürte, das ist aber eigentlich dein Weg, den solltest du gehen. Auf der anderen Seite wollte ich in die weite Welt, wollte als Kaufmann meine Karriere machen. [...] [Dann] kriegte ich einen Brief, von der Mission hier aus [Stadtteil X], die mich fragten, ob ich bereit wäre [...] nach [Land in Afrika Y] zu gehen. [...] Und natürlich war ich bereit, nur ich wusste, ich muss noch mal untersucht werden und da hab ich gesagt: „Gott, wenn du möchtest, dass ich in die Diakonie gehe, und du weißt, dass ich das nicht gerne tue, dann kannst du die Möglichkeit schaffen, dass ich das Tropenzeugnis kriege, und dann, wenn das so ist, werde ich also nichts mehr dagegen einwenden, [...]“ [...] Ich wurde also auch untersucht und der Arzt sagte: „Es bestehen überhaupt keine Bedenken, Sie nach Afrika zu schicken.“ [...] Und da wurde mir eben einfach klar, Gott kann mein Leben lenken und leiten und es geht nicht über meine Bedürfnisse und meine Möglichkeiten hinweg, sondern er hilft mir auch, dass ich den Weg gehen kann, den er für mich ausgesucht hat.
- 58 Das eine war mein Lehrmeister. Ich habe eine kaufmännische Lehre gemacht in [Stadtteil X]. Und da war ein Diakon, mein Chef, der mich in meinem Selbstvertrauen sehr gefördert und sehr geholfen hat. Ich hatte eine miserable Schulzeit, eben durch die Kriegszeit. [...] Wir hatten nach dem Kriege Klassen, mit über 70 Kindern in einem Klassenraum. [...] Und die Kriegszeit [hat] mich psychisch eben auch, im Nachhinein habe ich das erst erkannt, sehr negativ beeinträchtigt. Ich habe viel, viel Ängste gehabt. [...] Und mein Vater hat mir damals gesagt: „Junge, ich nehme dich jetzt aus der Schule raus. [...] Mach eine kaufmännische Lehre jetzt.“ [...] Und das habe ich dann gemacht. Und mein Chef, da habe ich zum ersten Mal gespürt, da nimmt mich einer ernst. [...] Und dann hat er mir gesagt, am Abschluss meiner Ausbildung: „Herr [Nachname A], wenn Sie fertig sind, kommen Sie zu uns und werden Sie Diakon. Wir brauchen Sie.“
- 59 Und wenn ich sage, ich bin Christ, dann lebe ich nicht auf einer Insel der Glückseligen, wo ich abgeschirmt von all diesen Problemen. [...] Auch gerade [...] im Altenheimbereich. Wir haben manchmal bis zu 30 Sterbefälle im Haus gehabt. Und ich hatte zu den Bewohnern nie einfach so ein Verhältnis, als wäre ich hier der Boss, der alles bestimmt. Sondern ich habe versucht, als Mensch unter Menschen, als Bruder unter Brüdern und Schwestern zu leben. Und sie auch das spüren zu lassen. Auch

meinen Mitarbeitern gegenüber, [...] da habe ich versucht, mich einzureihen, aber nicht über ihnen zu schweben. Und, ja, das war schon wichtig, auch gerade im Blick auf meinen christlichen Glauben.

- 60 Der Sinn meines Lebens besteht darin, dass ich einmal erkannt habe, dass Gott als Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde, und eben auch als mein Schöpfer, mich kennt, von mir weiß, und er mir einen bestimmten Auftrag in meinem Leben gegeben hat, nämlich anderen Menschen zu helfen, beizustehen, [...]. Gerade in der Art, wenn man die Welt als Gesamtheit sieht in ihrem sehr chaotischen Zustand mit ihren Kriegen und all den Dingen, da zu sein für andere, die ein besonderes Problem haben, und mit den Dingen, die mir gegeben sind ihnen zu helfen, mit meiner Kraft, mit meinen Händen, meinen Füßen, auch mit meinem Geld und mit meiner Zeit, die mir zur Verfügung gestellt ist, also sie nicht für mich allein zu benutzen, sondern auch für andere auch mit einzusetzen.
- 61 Mein persönliches Leben hat einen Sinn und diesen Sinn sehe ich darin, dass ich anderen Menschen geholfen habe und helfen kann, auch heute noch. Also, dass ich nicht für mich alleine in dieser Welt bin, sondern dass ich auch für andere da bin. Und diese Erkenntnis, die ja im Laufe der Jahrzehnte meines Lebens dann eben auch gewachsen ist und stabilisiert wurde, spielt eine ganz wichtige Rolle. [...] Nun kann man das natürlich als Helfersyndrom oder sowas bezeichnen, aber ich finde, es ist einfach wichtig in der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Was mich furchtbar stört, ist der Egoismus, den man an vielen Stellen erlebt. Wo Menschen also nur ihren kleinen Lebensraum sehen und nicht die Probleme, die andere Menschen rundherum haben. Und ich sage: „[...] Ich habe so viel in meinem Leben empfangen, dass ich davon eben auch weitergeben möchte.“ Und das gibt meinem Leben wirklich einen Sinn.
- 62 Meinem Leben gibt Sinn, dass ich für andere da bin. Ja, das kann ich nicht anders sagen. Ohne dass ich mich allerdings verbiege und sage: „Also alles für den anderen, aber nichts für mich,“ ja. Es gibt ein schönes Wort in der Bibel, wo Jesus sagt: „Liebe deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst.“ Und das hat für mich auch eine ganz große Rolle gespielt. Auch ich habe das Anrecht, mich auszuruhen, auch mein Leben schön zu gestalten. Aber ich habe auch die Aufgabe, anderen Leuten zu helfen, dass sie leben können und ihr Leben schön gestalten können.
- 63 Interestingly, even though it can be presumed Richard belongs to the Protestant church, he, like his wife, only ever talks about *Christian* faith.
- 64 Beziehungen zu anderen Menschen, auch gerade zu den Afrikanern in Afrika. [Es ist mir] überhaupt nicht schwergefallen, mich da einzugliedern, einer von ihnen zu sein und nicht ein europäischer Boss [...] [und mir wurde klar]: „Pass auf, dass du als Europäer nicht meinst, du bist der super potente Mensch und die anderen können gar nichts.“ Und da habe ich eben dann diese Erfahrung gemacht, dass ich mit Menschen zusammen, Afrikanern zusammen war, die mir teilweise haushoch überlegen waren in ihren Fähigkeiten und auch in ihrer Bildung. Das muss man aber erst mal erkennen und dass man da nicht also sich wie ein Tölpel dann benimmt.
- 65 Ich muss mich nicht jetzt ständig fragen, tue ich jetzt Gottes Wille, sondern ich muss einfach das Naheliegende tun, mich um die Menschen kümmern, und darin hab ich dann eben auch Gottes Willen erkannt. Und das hat mich dann eben auch in den Gesprächen mit meinem Mann dann immer wieder gestärkt, dass ich

nicht mich jetzt selbst zerfleischen muss, in Fragen, ob man da das Richtige tut oder nicht.

- 66 Wir beten, meine Frau und ich, zusammen. Ich aber auch alleine. [...] Also das Beten spielt für uns eine ganz große Rolle. Und eine sehr wichtige und elementare Rolle in unserem christlichen Glauben.
- 67 Ja. Ähm, einmal, dass meine Frau und ich jeden Morgen und jeden Abend eine Andacht halten und dann lesen wir ein Bibelwort oder einen Abschnitt aus der Bibel. Und dann gibt es dann Auslegungen dazu, die wir dann lesen. Und dass wir beten, morgens und abends.
- 68 Jetzt ist es im Alter eben so, dass wir uns überlegen müssen, wie geht es weiter, wenn wir gesundheitlich nicht mehr so selbständig sind und fit sind und welche Entscheidung haben wir jetzt zu treffen? Und das überlegen meine Frau und ich uns gemeinsam und treffen dann die Entscheidung. [I: Wenn Sie ein besonders schwieriges Lebensproblem lösen müssen, an wem oder woran würden Sie sich orientieren?] Also ich würde zumindest an meiner Frau mich orientieren. Wir hatten jetzt zum Beispiel die Frage, was wird, wenn wir diese Wohnung hier nicht mehr halten können; wenn einer von uns pflegebedürftig wird. Was machen wir dann? Dass wir diese Entscheidung zusammen getroffen haben und da auch jetzt also mutig drauf zugehen. Ja, also wie gesagt, da bin ich mit meiner Frau sehr eins, dass wir das zusammen dann eben auch machen.
- 69 Dann spreche ich mit meinem Mann darüber. Meistens (lachend) entscheiden wir das zusammen. [I: Können Sie mir ein Beispiel nennen?] Also ich habe ja zum Glück noch meinen Mann, mein Mann ist ja ein bisschen älter als ich und von daher kann ich mich da ein bisschen an ihm orientieren. Das sind manchmal so Dinge, die kann ich nicht alleine lösen. Das bespreche ich mit meinem Mann. [...] Wie das zum Beispiel auch in der Zukunft ist mit unserem Alter, wie wir das haben wollen. Das waren jetzt auch so Dinge, die jetzt so in den letzten Zeiten jetzt auch, wo man sich Gedanken macht, weil wir ja aus der Altenarbeit kommen. Und dass man überlegt: Wie wollen wir das haben? Auch mit der Beerdigung, mit den Lösungen, wie, wo wollen wir leben? [...] Und das haben wir aber gemeinsam überlegt und Plus und Minus abgewogen.

8. Carola—Abandonment and Self-Perceived Growth

“My prayers really went unheard. And since then, I’m finished with this good God. This pain that He put me through, it’s been 17 years, I hold that against Him. I think, when two people really love each other, to tear them apart by death, I will never forgive You that.”¹

Carola² is a woman from Germany who was born shortly after the Second World War, experiencing the post-war era as a child. At her first interview in 2004, she was 56 years old, and she still worked as a teacher. By the time of her second interview in 2013 when she was 65 years old, she had retired. In 2018, at the time of her third interview, she was 70 years old. Being born into a Protestant family, she left the church when she was in her early twenties; however, she seems to have preserved a belief in God for years after that. She was married and has two adult children and a couple of grandchildren who gain importance in the course of her interviews. One of the main complications in her life is the death of her partner who died two years before the first interview. Thus, coping with the death of loved ones is one of her leitmotifs. Another leitmotif could be the struggle she has with care-takers and authorities, especially with her mother and with God.

From Carola’s interviews, one can learn how people reconstruct their own identity and build their own theories about themselves along with how controversial discussions in society are taken up and used in autobiographical reasoning and narrating. Carola talks very openly and explicitly about difficult events in her past and gives extensive accounts regarding her subsequently developed worldview through not only struggling with her past but also with present developments in society which she perceives as threatening. The chapter will show how these different topics of her life relate to each other.

8.1.1 Carola’s Life Reviews—Struggling with Losses and Deprivation

Carola structures her life review answers according to major events in her life, but also oriented toward classic milestones. Her time 1 answer reads as follows:

Yes, I think there are these, I would say common chapters, there is the childhood, then the adolescent phase of development, leaving school, the step into an independent life, starting a family, yes, living for the family basically, raising the children, that was one life chapter. And then the relationship with my partner and those are the 13 years that were essential for me. And another turning point after his death, those past three years, that is also a life chapter where my life proceeded differently than before. [I: If your life were a book, how would you name the different chapters?] Childhood, the loss of childhood, being an adult and responsible for others, children, [...] I may even insert sub-chapters here (laughs). On the one hand worrying about the children, that was not easy. [...] And then on the other hand there's also the joy with the children, their development, the positive development; that would be the chapter "children." And then, I think, my marriage plays a role as well. A marriage that you commit to because you expect it to last a lifetime, then the disillusionment that you were simply wrong. Then my other life partnership, and then the chapter "illness, dying, death" and then the chapter "mourning," those would be the chapters of my life. [I: What marker events stand out as particular meaningful to you?] My father's death, the birth of my children, the divorce, and the death of my partner, yes.³ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

Calling the chapters "common," she structures her life in a rather conventional way, trying to find balance between what society expects of her and what she wants from her life herself. Notably, she names most of the chapters in a negative manner (e.g., "loss of childhood"), indicating that these periods have all been accompanied by concerns and anxiety. It becomes clear that the raising of her children plays a very important part in her life narrative. Her two main relationships, the one with her ex-husband and the one with the partner who died of cancer, are milestones for her as well and point to the two extremes she has experienced regarding long-term relationships. Furthermore, it is interesting that she refers exclusively to her immediate family and loved ones when structuring her life story. Her answer is relatively short and precise, with little emotional evaluation and personal involvement.

Her answer in her second interview is more comprehensive and is presented here in abridged form:

Yes, I can structure my life clearly. There is the first phase, the childhood, when you live your life naively and let yourself be guided and have faith in the people closest to you, like parents or siblings. Then, when you are released into life a bit, that was my second chapter. I had to go from a rural area to [city A] to go to high school; I was ten at the time. Pretty young and had to manage long distances all by myself. [...] And then there was the school that you had to go through and the experiences you make with people [...]. And that was a chapter that was influential for me, the experiences with teachers, how much teachers influence your life, especially your self-confidence, or rather how they undermine your self-confidence. And after graduating I studied to be a teacher. I worked as a teacher till I was 57, and in general I liked that. In the meantime—that was my professional career track—in the meantime, I have to say, there were turning points in the private area. That was when I married and had children. The chapter after that was my divorce and—how do I put it? —bringing up my children until they could stand on their own feet.

Those were very hard times. Then the experience with my partner who got cancer and we had a long time of fighting for his life and he finally died nevertheless and that was a real disruption in my life. Going back in time a bit the first profound disruption in my life was my father's death when I was 20. And then, at the age of 52, I had to endure the death of my beloved partner and that was a severe personal drama and the time of mourning lasted for a long time. In terms of time, those were eight years and then (half laughing, half emotional) an old friend came into my life. That is also a turning point after those years of mourning. And I've been in a happy relationship with this friend for four years now. So, these are my life chapters.⁴ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

The chapters of her life are elaborated in more detail and contain more personal evaluation. Growing up is described as being shoved into the big, cold world, and she puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that she had to be autonomous, not by choice but because it was expected of her. This serves as an autobiographical argument, since those experiences are marked as formative. Most of the people she names are described as obstacles that she had to overcome, which is consonant with her later elaborations. Her partner has a positive influence; however, this relationship is put to a hard test by the cancer diagnosis and the slow and painful death, which indicates that good things are likely to take a turn to the worse. This points to a structure of contamination stories (McAdams, 1993). In the end, it seems that with her new relationship, which is a new chapter that had not existed at time 1, she has turned her story into a redemption story again. The motive of redemption is even stronger in her third interview:

That's interesting because I did write a book once (laughs). [...] Then I would roughly say, kindergarten, which you usually only have scarce memories of, school, graduation. And that was a caesura. Erm... school was really stressful, at my time, you know. The teachers were different, and it was a time of suffering. Because teachers weren't pedagogues back then, but they would pummel knowledge into pupils, like that. [...] Then I studied, and I became a teacher myself. That was really fulfilling, I must say, because I always had nice children, I have to say that. Then another caesura... my divorce. Then, the relationship with my new life partner who would later fall ill with cancer. And who died, after his first surgery, six years later. And that was a really important time in my life. The relationship with him lasted for 13 years, the time of suffering for six years. He died, and in the time after his death, I tried to cope with this very personal drama of farewell and death. [...] Then I really tried, successively, to describe this development from the diagnosis to his death, in chapters. I believe it's about 200 pages, and I had it printed. [...] And when I held it in my hands, it was good for me and I thought, well, and now you've got this memory secured. It cannot be taken away anymore. And when I notice the memory fading, then I can go back and read how it was back then. [...] In the meantime, I got grandchildren and they cushioned the mourning a bit. And then a man stepped (smiles) into my life whom I have known for 50 years. I met him, 50 years ago, in [city A] when I was 19. [...] And he found me on the internet nine years ago. And we've been together since then [...]. So, these are the rough divisions of my life.⁵ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

The first part of this answer contains a turning point which is named explicitly: graduating from school and being free from the capriciousness of her teachers. Less explicit is the “lessons learned” argument, which is made clearer in her second interview. Becoming a teacher herself is a means to try and make it better, and might even remind of post-traumatic growth given the vocabulary used (time of suffering). This motif can also be found when she talks about how she coped with the death of her life partner. By writing down all her memories and feelings and by getting the book printed, she gives the impression of having a straightforward way of dealing with matters like these. This is more explicit than in her second interview, which might be attributed to a more advanced status of coping. Her current relationship is described in more detail in her third interview (though these details have been omitted here for anonymity reasons), stressing the emphasis she has on the redemptive character of her life story.

Comparing her answers, it becomes clear that she has chosen a different path for her story at time 2. She creates the image of a woman who had to endure unfair treatment at multiple points in her life but was lucky enough to become happy again, which is a redemption plot that was not there at time 1. Interesting to note is that her part in that last chapter is depicted as rather passive, since it is literally the man who “came into her life.” Overall it seems that good as well as bad things “happen to her.” Her narrative identity seems to be more self-empowered at time 3, and, she is less invested with the adversities that thread her life in this answer.

Carola’s Relationship with her Mother

While her family of origin is only mentioned in passing during these first outlines, it becomes clear in all of her interviews that the relationship with her mother is one that is constituent for the person Carola is nowadays. Her father is described in a very positive way; however, he died when Carola was 20, which makes the complicated relationship with her mother get a different drive. At time 1, Carola describes her mother as follows:

My mother is the kind of person whom you want to be loved by. And as a child you just love your parents and your mother as well and my mother spread that [love] unevenly, not only in my perception, but also in my brothers’ perception it is rooted that basically my mother only liked boys and not girls. So that’s why I always felt disadvantaged, regarding her love, but like I said, as a child, you love your mother and try to get your mother’s love and I think I never succeeded in that.⁶ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

The first sentence generalizes her own wish to be loved by her mother, making her own ambivalent behavior less open to judgment. By stating that “as a child you just love your parents,” she refers to a normality that she did not deviate from. Instead, her mother is the one who did not behave in a conventional fashion by spreading her love unevenly among her children and discriminating against her daughter because she obviously had the less-preferred gender. Therefore, her attempts were bound to be futile, not by her own fault but by something that could not have been changed by her own will. In terms of the attachment theory, her attachment style could best be described as dismissive-avoidant or ambivalent since she seems to hold a negative disposition toward her mother,

while at the same time shows strong counter-dependency and ambivalent behavior (cf. Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This becomes manifest in her actions after the death of her father when she feels compelled to support her mother:

As my mother became older, she found me pretty useful for stuff that had to be done. I was there a lot for my mother, after my father's death [...] I went back home and shared the marital bed with my mother for three years because I couldn't and wouldn't leave her alone. But then I cut the cord again and still was there a lot for my mother, kept her company and cared for her and so on, but this did not lead to me feeling loved and accepted by her. [...] Instead, I was showered with reproaches. And yes, it was awful, and at one point, when I was about 40 I guess, I made a clear cut and terminated the contact with my mother rigorously. That may be incomprehensible for a lot of people, but I had reached a point where it was like, either she survives or I [...] and I must say, from then on, I felt pretty fine.⁷ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

Still struggling to meet her mother's expectations, Carola moves in with her after her father's death, even going so far as to sleep in the same bed and care for her. Her mother does not appreciate those efforts which leads to Carola terminating the relationship altogether in the end as a possible act of liberation, however, from Carola's account it does not seem as if she is truly free of these bonds, even though her mother has been dead for years by the time of the relevant interview. Instead, she still seems to bear the grudge against her. This is an interesting contrast to Renate (see chapter 7.1.1), who was in a similar situation, yet in the end, she and her mother resolved this differently (see chapter 11 for a more detailed comparison). Carola describes a great distance between herself and her mother on a surface level, but her argumentation suggests that the feeling of deprived love still bothers her.

Unsurprisingly, the story is told again at time 2:

And after my father died, I moved back in with my mother. All brothers had moved out already, I moved into the parental bedroom, into my father's bed. [I: (skeptical?) Hmm.] Well, there's the look of surprise! [I: (laughs) Yes.] Today, I can't fathom that anymore as well, [...]. I did that because I felt sorry for her. [...] The day after my father died, she wanted to hug me, which felt very awkward, and she told me: "You're all I've left now." and I was like: "Oh. Really?" [...] For two years. Then I reluctantly decided to find myself an own flat [...] and that was really, really difficult to get that across to her.⁸ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

In contrast to the situation narrated at time 1, Carola refers to another detail. Her brothers, like herself, all have moved out already, but as the only daughter, she feels compelled to move back in with her mother. The short interaction with the interviewer suggests that she cherishes the moment of shock she is able to elicit with the detail that she shared a bed with her mother for three years. However, the passage sums up Carola's inner turmoil: She feels repulsed by her mother, but she also feels the obligation to help her when she is mourning. Underlying this tension may have been Carola's yearning to finally get the love she had wished for all her life. In retrospect, she seems bitter, and the implicit

evaluation is that her efforts were not successful and her mother was ungrateful and not deserving of her support. In an attempt at a more abstract evaluation subsequent to her account of their last phone call, she tells how she dealt with her mother's death:

Then I started thinking deeply, years after that, and thought, "Did you do her injustice?" Because I believe everybody weaves their own truth. Like, this subjective perception which is so far from the objective truth sometimes, I really questioned myself. [...] And then I talked with other relatives, also with my brothers who reinforced me in my perception and then I thought, "Yes. I should not be sorry to have severed ties with my mother. And I am not sorry and for me, it was the right step and the right decision." And I don't want to hear anybody say, "Oh, but it was your mother." No. She tortured me too much. [...] It's awful to say that, but why should I beat around the bush? [...] And even today, I'm still not sorry. (close to tears) And when I go to the cemetery, I put flowers on my father's side of the grave, on his death anniversary, his birthday and so on, he will always get flowers. My mother never gets any. That serves her right.⁹ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

In the first part of this quote, Carola presents herself as a reflective person who is aware that her own perspective is not objective. Therefore, she addresses other people in her family to calibrate her perception. These "outsiders" in this account serve as authorities who support Carola's perception, giving more credibility to her own account. In a fictitious dialog, she rejects accusations she may have been faced with in real life by pointing out how much she actually suffered under her mother and how much she is traumatized. Her way of coping with these formative experiences is to make the adversities explicit, to not "beat around the bush," which has obviously been perceived as disrespectful by her surroundings sometimes. However reflective she might present herself, the last part of the quote shows how immersed she still is in this unhealthy relationship. Being close to tears, she admits to not taking care of her mother's grave, which is a conscious decision not to bring flowers on anniversaries, as if she means to punish her dead mother: a passive-aggressive act that contradicts her former reflective statements.

When she speaks about her mother at time 3, she starts with the following description:

An important person in my life was my mother. My mother had me when she was 40, which was very old in those days. Nowadays a 40-year-old who has a child is considered young. [...] While my mother for me back then [...] simply was an old woman, just going by the looks. Because you did not usually wear juvenile clothes back then. Erm, it was all just womanly and sedate and, ah, holier-than-thou and all this.¹⁰ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

In this quote, Carola presents herself in contrast to her mother. Her mother is described as elderly and old-fashioned, implying that Carola herself is none of this. This way of creating her narrative identity is very typical for Carola's time 3 interview. By portraying others in a disrespectful fashion, often with reference to their unfavorable outer appearance, she creates distance and emphasizes the unpleasant traits those persons have and implicitly states how much she deviates from those. Her biased descriptions are probably

meant to serve the purpose of interacting with the young interviewer whom she either wants to impress in her favor or provoke. Having introduced her mother like this, the narrative of how she moved back in with her after her father's death is told again with some new details, introduced by an account of how she tried to become more independent when she started her studies:

So, and then I wanted to have my freedom, have a flat together with my friend and [my mother] absolutely did not want that. I did it anyway. [...] My father secretly gave me money, so that I could survive. I had nothing. [...] Well, and one day we came home from university, and I had a note on my door to call home. And then my brother told me that my father had died. Heart attack, in the car, dead. Yes, that was the first really dramatic incision in my life. [...] And, I didn't have any money and I moved back in with my mother. Into, please don't laugh at me now, my father's bed with my mother, the marital bed. Because I felt sorry for my mother who was not able to exist on her own without my father, as it was the case with women back then, [...] she stopped working when she got married, the way it used to be. [...] So, she was financially dependent on my father. And now he was dead. My mother managed the household [...], but other than that, she was clueless. And because I knew that, I felt sympathetic and moved in with her. It was awful for me, really horrible. [...] To put it into one sentence, I had the feeling back then already that I'm sacrificing my young life to my mother. When I had finished my studies and earned money, I gathered courage and rented a small apartment in [city A] and told her indirectly that I would move out. That can't have been easy for her, but I [...] visited her every day. And she would cook for me and do my washing, kept me in dependency, you know. I mean, it was comfortable, but she felt like she was doing me a big favor and, erm... yes, kept me in dependency by that.¹¹ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

The way she tells her story makes it clear that it is meant to come across as a contamination story. No matter how much she struggles to free herself from her mother, she is still pulled back into dependency. It is interesting to note that her argumentation and the way she builds the story has changed considerably in the meantime. Her financial situation has not been mentioned in her other interviews, while now it is named as an additional, and comparably objective, argument for why her father's death hit her so hard and why she was subsequently forced to live with her mother. The inevitability of this action is clearer here than in her other interviews. While the overall evaluation stays the same, we hear a line of argumentation that is new in the middle section. Carola now speaks of a "bigger picture," and she is able to put what her mother went through into a societal perspective, acknowledging that her mother acted within the realms that were offered to women at that time by giving up her work after she got married before and/or during the 2nd World War. This kind of evaluation was not found in the other interviews and hints to an attempt at showing more understanding for her mother but not succeeding in stepping out of this mother-daughter dyad completely, as can be also seen when she talks about her parents' graves again:

And when I go to the cemetery, I basically only take care of my father's grave, (smiles) just so. I feel like I'm doing it for him. And my mother does not have a role in this. I bring him fresh flowers on his death anniversary, on his birthday. And for my mother—I'm just not doing this. Sometimes I wonder, I even don't remember when she died (smiles). That's how it is, just like that. Yes, well, I say it as it is, admit it openly. That's how it is. Should I lie about it? Nope.¹² (Carola, FDI, time 3)

The statement is still defensive, especially given the variations of ascertaining herself at the end of the quote. However, the rejection to take care of her mother's grave has lost its sharp edge a bit. Instead, she tries to appear more neutral and indifferent toward her.

Summed up, we see Carola's life reviews taking a more positive stance over the years. The adversities and hardships of her life still take up space, but the bitterness that is prominent in her first two interviews seems softened at time 3. This might be attributed to the stable relationship she has had for the past years and also to the good relationship she claims to have with her children and grandchildren. However, there still seems to be a lot of investment with lost relationships both with her former life partner and with her mother. And while coping with the death of her life partner in a seemingly adequate way, she is still found to be tied within the unhealthy relationship with her mother. Connected to both of these relationships, yet on very different levels, she describes her relationship with God. Carola was interviewed as a deconvert, having left the Protestant church in her early 20s, although not completely shedding her belief in God after that. However, the death of her beloved partner turned out to be a turning point in this regard. The next paragraph will detail how this has affected her religiosity over the years.

8.1.2 Carola's Subjective Religiosity—Being at Odds with God

Carola's Relationship with God

Given that her image of God and especially her struggle in the relationship with him seems to be in some ways comparable to the struggles with her mother, I will first look into how her image of God has changed over the years:

When you're in an emergency situation, [...] the childlike image of God comes to the foreground again, because I believe, when you pray, you have this hierarchy, this fatherly power, and I'm kind of helpless, powerless. [...] And I remember when my partner fell so ill, that the prayers I prayed were basically very childlike again. [I: Can you say what God means for you today?] Well, He's going to be furious when I tell Him what I think of Him. I don't understand His logic. I know, we are humans and are not supposed to understand it. [...] For example, the suffering in this world, these wars, this butchering, [...], why, why, why does it have to be like that? I can't understand it. [...] Or, like, old people who want to die and can't and children are snatched away from their parents.¹³ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

As a child, you somehow believe in this good God as it is taught, and you are so trusting and don't question anything. Then I experienced the first rift when I was confirmed, or rather when I had confirmation classes. [see Carola's Narrative: "Confirmation Class II" below] Then I formally left the church when I was in my 20s, and I did that with all consequences, but I have to admit: There were feelings of...

like a net has been torn apart. Which I perhaps did have after all, without admitting it. And it took a while, and I thought, “Now you’re rootless.” [...] And I also thought, in order to believe in something or in a God, I don’t need the church. I believed in a God and prayed as well, I admit that. Then, I have to say, there was this severe rift in my life, I really prayed for my partner’s life when he had his surgeries. Like, really desperately praying for his life and still he was taken from under my hands. That’s how I experienced it. I found this so unfair [...] and then I cut off contact with God or some other power and since then I have not prayed anymore. I still hold that against Him—if He does exist. I can’t get my act together. And so my attitude, to live without any God, has become stronger in my life. Even though I have to admit, what I could not abandon completely, and maybe I don’t even want to do that, is believing that there might be something between heaven and earth.¹⁴ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

[starts with Carola’s Narrative: “Confirmation Class III”; see below] So, this was a heavy burden, and I was relieved when it was over. After that, I never stepped into a church again, for me that was a fact, I couldn’t bear it anymore. But I don’t mean to say that I lost my belief in God, like, this childlike, naïve belief that one has. But in my 20s, (smiles) I formally left the church because I told myself: church and belief are not in any way connected. I can believe without the church. [...] Then, I have to say, I’m coming back to my partner’s illness. I struggled hard with God, in Whom I still believed at that time. Because I had believed, or we both had believed, to have found the one big love of our lives. [...] And now this cancer diagnosis, which gave me doubts, you know, I mean, after the disaster with my marriage, to find a person with whom everything is fine and who was then to be taken from me. [...] Back then, I still used to pray. [...] I thought, by praying I could... because the good God cannot be that evil. If I pray that intensely, He cannot do this to me and take this man away from me. But take away this man He did, [...] and my prayers really went unheard. And since then, I’m finished with this good God. This pain that He put me through, it’s been 17 years, I hold that against Him. I think, when two people really love each other, to tear them apart by death, I will never forgive You that. So, this is my relationship with the good God. I broke contact with Him like I did with my mother. [...] Yes, I have to live with that, even though sometimes I cannot completely reject the notion that there may be something between Heaven and Earth. I would say, there is still this little corner inside my head, which I have to acknowledge, that there might be something more.¹⁵ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

At all timepoints, Carola mentions the childlike faith in God she used to have at earlier in her life. At time 1, praying for her is associated with a sort of naïveté, surrendering to God, and hoping for his support. The disappointment that she felt when prayer did not save her beloved partner is very palpable in her answer. The anger she holds seems to be on a very personal level, and God is spoken of as a person who would be displeased to learn that Carola questions his decisions and his logic. This is a concrete image, even though she pursues these thoughts further on a more abstract level by admitting that she is not supposed to understand this (her wording implying criticism and distance toward this statement), and finding more general examples for God’s incomprehensible actions through a human’s perspective.

At time 2, she also reminisces about her former childlike belief. Her experiences during confirmation class are named as the reason for the first rift with the church. These experiences appear in different forms in all of her interviews and will be looked at in more detail below. The feeling of being deprived of (her) roots is named here directly, however ending with the realization that she can still believe in God without the church, which indicates a path of individuation that was pursued for a while. The time of her partner's death plays a crucial role for her, and her futile attempts at praying for his life is elaborated on more intensely here than at time 1, which supports the motif "emotional suffering" (which is one of the deconversion criteria described by Streib et al., 2009) as her main reason for turning away from God. Even more strongly than at time 1, the discontinuation of contact is portrayed as a personal feud in which is neither able nor willing to make the first step for a possible reconciliation. Interestingly, a reconciliation seems to be at least something she thinks about, which was not the case at time 1. This notion is supported by the last sentence of this quote in which she allows the thought of a possible afterlife and an undefined higher power.

At time 3, Carola starts with an account from her confirmation class again. Her belief in God, even following the formal termination of her church membership, is described as naïve and childlike again and marked as normal ("the childlike, naïve belief *that one has*"). This time, the situation with her partner and the emotions associated with this relationship (referencing to previous suffering in her marriage) take up more space than in the other interviews and serve the purpose of underlining the appropriateness of her reaction and the termination of contact with God. Most interesting in this paragraph is that Carola directly compares the termination of the relationship with God to that with her mother. This emphasizes the observation from the other two timepoints that the relationship with God is experienced as a personal one. God is not an abstract higher being but a caregiver that disappointed and abandoned Carola in times of need. However, she still holds to that rather abstract belief that there might be something after death.

This analysis has shown how Carola equates different types of relationships. Being abandoned and exploited by her mother is portrayed in a similar fashion as being abandoned and disappointed by God. The relationship to God is present at all timepoints and is described as a "bad" relationship. Even though she claims to be neither religious nor spiritual at waves 2 and 3 as shown in the table below, there is a lingering belief in something higher, which is closely connected to the question of what comes after death. Her belief in God and the question of whether he does exist takes up considerable space in her thoughts during these interviews. As an addendum to those findings from her interviews, a look into her answers on the God Representation Scale at time 3 reveals that her image of God is more authoritarian and ineffable and is concurrently less benevolent compared to the whole sample.

Carola's Subjective Religiosity

Turning now more directly to the data on her subjective religiosity, one can see how she answers when directly asked for a statement regarding her self-assessment.

Table 22: Data on Carola's Subjective Religiosity

Carola	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	<p><i>spirituality</i>: not asked</p> <p><i>religion</i>: not asked</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: There may be something between heaven and earth¹⁶</p> <p><i>religion</i>: Indoctrination¹⁸</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: I never really comprehended, unfortunately, what exactly spirituality means.¹⁷</p> <p><i>religion</i>: Religion for me is indoctrination.¹⁹</p>
self-assessment	<p>more religious than spiritual</p>	<p>neither religious nor spiritual</p>	<p>neither religious nor spiritual</p>
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	<p>I do consider myself faithful, even though I'm at odds with the good God, but that doesn't mean I don't believe in him. [I: What does it mean for you?] That there is a meaningful existence after our lives, that our lives on earth were meaningful [...]. And on the other side, I must say: to know that there is nothing after death, [...] that's such a disenchanting realization that some people may not be able to live with it [...], but I guess I'm speaking for myself here. [...] I never believed that at any point. I'm scared it might be like that, but I do wish that there is an existence after death.²⁰</p>	<p>After all that I've told you here, how would you sort me? I would exclude religious. [I: I would spontaneously say you are quite a bit spiritual.] Nope. Although, spiritual, I never really know what that means. [...] [I: Perhaps believing in something higher, somewhat vague?] Umm, yes, then I'm spiritual. [I: So, and what does it mean for you?] That's my religion, let's say it like that. When you stretch the term a lot. That's what plays a role beyond this real, current life perhaps. I mean, our life is finite, and you may not like it [...]. And you think about these things and if that is spirituality, yes... then I'm spiritual. And that's a small drawer in my life, let's put it like that. [...] Though I rather feel like spirituality is something bigger, more bombastic, and that's not how I feel.²¹</p>	<p>I think [spirituality] is such a cotton-soft term. [...] You know, like little balls which are thrown into thin air and are supposed to have a meaning. And that's the thing with spiritual, erm, I really don't know what to do with this. What exactly is spiritual? Religion? Of course, I have a concept. I also have a concept of faith. But spiritual? When I do yoga and sit there and howl at the moon or something, is that spiritual? That's not my cup of tea.²²</p>

Wave 1: In the survey at wave 1, Carola states that she is “more religious than spiritual.” In her interview answer, she opts for the term “faithful,” which comes as a surprise given the fact that she has elaborated on how she felt abandoned by God during the time when her life partner was dying. Rightfully she says that being at odds does not equal not believing. In her justification, she refers to the question of whether there is a life after death. For her, to have an answer to that question is of great importance, and, avoiding generalities, she says that at least she could not live with the certainty that there is no afterlife. She underlines her thoughts with a little dialog between her and her life partner:

And my life partner and I talked about this of course, and he was a totally rational man [...] and would not be bothered by any spiritual shenanigans, [...] but when we talked about these things [...], I told him, “And where will you be when I die?” And then he told me, “Then I’ll come and pick you up.” [...] He must have believed in a life after death. I also believe that this impending death brought back this faith to him.²³ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

This short sequence illustrates what she elaborated on in a more abstract way before. Being faithful for her is a means to cope with the fear of death and is something comforting. However, the faith she had in God at the time did not have the desired result, and the struggles she had with God are still very present for her.

Wave 2: Here, Carola labels religion as “indoctrination” and also states to be “neither religious nor spiritual.” Her definition of the term “spirituality” is vague, but quite fitting to what she says in the interview. However, the answer is a bit problematic, since she struggles with the questions and the terms offered to her and asks the interviewer for definitions for an assessment. Even though the interviewer tried to stay as neutral as possible, her choice for calling herself “spiritual” may have been influenced by that careful estimate. However, the question of what comes after death and her uncertainty regarding the answer is still used as an explanation why she holds certain beliefs. By saying she holds this form of spirituality in a “small drawer,” she implies that it does not play a role for her everyday life at the moment. The struggle with God is not taken up in this answer.

Wave 3: Religion is labelled as “indoctrination” again in her free text entry. The small addition of “for me” hints to the assumption that Carola is aware of different perspectives. Her regret that she does not know what spirituality is mirrors in her answer in the interview. Again, she tries to convince the interviewer to define the terms for her. In her reflections, she makes it clear that she looks down on those who define themselves as spiritual, and it seems as if she is over-generalizing her own concerns with this term, which is supported by the fact that she uses rather pejorative examples to make her point (“howling at the moon”). As described previously, she decides to present herself mainly in contrast to others by saying what she is not.

At time 3, Carola does not speak about the concept of a life after death in this answer, which is a first and obvious observation from the analyses above. At time 1, she still seems to hold some kind of belief in God and still considers herself faithful or religious, this notion has disappeared in her other statements. However, it was carved out from her

“image of God” answers above that she is still highly invested in the relationship with God. It can be argued that Carola does not consider this dispute she has with God as connected with her own religiosity or spirituality. This might be seen as further evidence for the above argument that the relationship with God is a very concrete, personal one and still persists even though the rift with the Protestant church happened early in her life already. To emphasize the injustice that has been done to her, Carola refers to experiences during her time as a confirmer at all timepoints. These are embedded in her accounts of her religious development, serving a similar purpose at all times though the stories differ. One can observe variations of one leitmotif here, as will be shown in the next subparagraph.

Narratives: “Confirmation Class”

When asked to reconstruct her religious biography, Carola falls back to memories from her adolescence. Interestingly, they can all be labelled as a narrative from confirmation class, but they are not the same story; however, all fulfill the criteria for the structure of a narrative as defined by Labov and Waletzky (1967). Here is Carola’s first one:

Table 23: Carola’s Narrative: “Confirmation Class I”

Orientation	I remember this experience that really cut to the quick at that time. I was about 13 at the time I guess, quite naïve in general, and I remember
Complication	we had this church service and us confirmeres sat in the first rows, it was a small parish, [...] and I remember I had just gotten new shoes and so I crossed my legs because I was so proud of the shoes [...] and looked at them. [...] And I was all absorbed in my contemplation and then noticed the pastor reprimanded me from the pulpit, in front of the whole parish, saying I should behave properly and how dare I sit like this [...].
Evaluation	I just remember wishing for the earth to open so I could disappear, afterwards I knew that everybody knew that it was me who had been addressed, [...]
Resolution	Actually, I wasn't conscious of any guilt, I wasn't aware I had done anything bad, but the pastor suggested that it was bad what happened there.
Coda	That was so severe that the church never became dear to my heart anymore, putting it cautiously. ²⁴ (Carola, Narrative Interview, time 1)

Her narrative speaks of humiliation and of being embarrassed in front of a group of people. Clearly, Carola does not take any blame for that situation. She portrays herself as the innocent child who was treated unjustly by an authority figure with this personal disappointment leading to a distance to the whole institution which will never be overcome. The narrative has the form of a contamination story, starting with a rather positive memory of shiny new shoes and ending with a public rebuke and Carola turning away from the church in consequence. She brings up a different episode from that time during her second interview:

Table 24: Carola's Narrative: "Confirmation Class II"

Orientation	Then I actually experienced the first rift when I was confirmed or rather when I had confirmation classes.
Complication	Because I was going to school here in [city A], I didn't have the possibility to attend the classes with other confirmees. So, a former classmate from elementary school and I, we were the only ones who had the confirmation classes in the afternoon.
Evaluation	The two of us [...] with this pastor that just languidly told us something about God and the Bible and bullied us with things that we had to learn by heart. From time to time, his false teeth would fall out and it was all very, very awkward for a young girl of 14.
Resolution	And it did not bring me any closer to religion. And so, after confirmation, I decided, "You will never go into this church again."
Coda	And I never did because I thought, "I am not close to the church, the institution 'church' is not close to me, it did nothing for me." ²⁵ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

At first glance, this is a completely different story. Looking closer, one can see that elements of humiliation are found in it as well, even though they are not so bluntly displayed as in the first one. Carola is forced into an outsider's role (due to the fact that she went to school not in her home town but in the next bigger town and therefore could not attend confirmation class during school time) and had to take the classes together with just one other person. This individual was a male former classmate, which is presumably awkward and unpleasant as a teenager. Moreover, the pastor (who is logically the same pastor as in the first story) is languid, mean, and exposes Carola to the embarrassment of losing his false teeth over and over again. Like in the first story, it is a single authority person who has the power to determine Carola's future relationship with the church, not only by his actions, but also by his looks and unfavorable habits. This overall situation leads Carola to the conclusion to never go to church again.

In her third interview, her narrative related to confirmation class reads as follows:

Table 25: Carola's Narrative: "Confirmation Class III"

Orientation	So, I was not brought up in a religious fashion. My mother was Catholic, we kids were Protestant, like my father. We never went to church, but as it was customary at that time, you were confirmed. That's just the way it was.
Complication	And I had the misfortune that I went [...] to school in [city A] with a former classmate. That meant that confirmation classes for us did not take place in the morning, in the first two lessons, [...] that's why we got extra confirmation classes in the afternoons. [...] When the weather was most beautiful and everybody else was at the swimming pool [...]. Two people, [.] and I, we sat opposite this pastor, who would regularly lose his false teeth, and who was very languid.

Evaluation	Awful. I have really horrible memories of this man. I don't know, but he was a man of the church and he should have convinced others of his cause. But the opposite was the case. I only yearned for my confirmation, which, by the way, put us under a lot of pressure. We had to learn lots and lots of stuff by heart. Also with the threat there would be a public hearing in the church, in front of the whole presbytery, the auditorium in the church. Like, the churchgoers, and we would be tested. A terrible fear. [...] And then always the threat, "And if you don't succeed in the test, you fail and will not be confirmed." [...] So, that was a terrible burden and I was glad when it was over.
Resolution	I never went to church after that,
Coda	for me that was a fact, I cannot bear that anymore. ²⁶ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

Carola gives some background information regarding her family's religious background; indicating that, while not being brought up in a particularly religious fashion, the cultural norm required that the children be confirmed. Adding to the inconvenient necessity, there are the equally unfavorable circumstances under which the classes are taking place. Not only does she have to endure them with a single classmate, she also misses socializing with her peers. All of these details provide the frame for Carola's narrative, making it clear that the whole experience was unpleasant. The description of the pastor is similar to previous interviews but not the main reason for her discomfort during this time. What is in her focus this time is the fact that she felt scrutinized while being under immense pressure. The idea to be tested and potentially humiliated in front of the whole parish still horrifies her. Interestingly, public humiliation is the main theme of her first narrative as well but in quite a different appearance.

In sum, what can be seen here is not the retelling of the same story in the classical sense. Rather, what can be found are certain motifs taken up again that help transport a narrative identity: a young girl as the victim of humiliation done to her by authority figures. In all of these stories, the actual content of Carola's faith is not a matter of discussion. It is the worldly representative, the authority figure, who repels her and drives her away from the church. In the end she finds a culprit, in this case the priest, for her dismal situation, and this represents another leitmotif. This sheds an interesting light on the way Carola structures her world and might point to a certain way of arranging values. This will be examined more closely in the next paragraph where I will take a more detailed look at Carola's morality and her view on society.

8.1.3 Carola's Morality and her View on Society—A Critical View on the Current Situation

Carola is a former teacher. She retired between time 1 and 2, so it is not surprising that when she talks about values and commitments, her former profession and, in the most recent interview, the relationship with her grown-up children and her grandchildren take up considerable space. She puts great emphasis on the positive feedback that she got from her pupils and the good relationship she has with her family. Thereby, she creates the narrative identity of a person who is capable at and successful in forming young

people in a positive way, which reinforces the motif of generativity permeating her interviews. When she talks about values, what reappears is the emphasis on authenticity and honesty:

Virtues that I value, like, authenticity, that you stay yourself, that you don't bend, also has to do with honesty, credibility, moral courage is something I hold very dear, yes, these are things that are important for me. I don't mean to suggest that I always succeed, but those are honorable goals after which to strive, although you won't achieve them. [...] I try to be honest or I try to stay myself, not to bend just because some social currents expect that from me, and I stick by it and have the audacity to be loyal to myself.²⁷ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

In this answer, it becomes clear how much Carola values authenticity with this being a major pillar of her moral foundation²⁸. She is aware that her goals cannot be always achieved, neither by herself nor by any other person. Staying true to herself is another important virtue for her as well as to not bend to any authority or social current. These may be considered sensible claims that she potentially will have taught her pupils and children as well. When asked how religious conflicts can be resolved, her answer at time 1 is tolerance:

Well, by tolerance. I think you don't have to agree, I have to let the other have his faith and respect it. As long as he is happy and content and it fulfills him and gives meaning to his life, then I just have to be tolerant because I think that's the priority.²⁹ (Carola, FDI, time 1)

This is a generic statement and a plea for letting the other live without an attempt at actually trying to understand them. Agreement is not necessary in her eyes and is probably hard to achieve. While her statements at time 1 regarding societal questions are short and without giving any further insights or examples while pleading for tolerance and acceptance in a rather abstract way. These questions gain momentum at time 2. When asked what mature faith is in this interview, she argues with authenticity:

I would say I uphold values and perhaps values are of existential meaning. For example, sincerity, honesty, and authenticity. [...] When I create values and try to live by them, which does not work out always. I know that too.³⁰ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

Here, she shows an awareness that these values are sometimes hard to uphold as shown at time 1. This may be connected with the modest realization that she, too, is fallible. The emphasis is that it is still important to have values. Regarding tolerance, her answer to the last question of the interview starts in a similar fashion as her time 1 answer; however, she continues in a different manner:

With tolerance. I let the other live in his worldview. I refuse to accept any form of radicalism and acts of missionary work. I don't want to be missionized and I don't want to missionize others. In my view, with a larger amount of tolerance conflicts could be resolved easily. By just admitting, "You may believe what you want. I do

not believe it. But I take the same right for me. I also want that to be accepted and that nobody tries to convert me.”³¹ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

While starting with a general plea for tolerance, this answer goes further, especially when compared to her time 1 statement. It is an appeal against unwanted missionization and about drawing a strong line against who have a religion or worldview she deems fundamentalist. It still contains elements of tolerance (“believe what you want”), but the stronger point she makes is that she wants to be left alone regarding other people’s views. She seems unwilling to engage with opinions that are different from her own, which was already indicated in her time 1 answer to that question. Nevertheless, while she might see herself as a very tolerant and empathic person, and while in her first interview social criticism is not very prominent (and in a rather vague example refers to unethical employees of telephone companies), it plays a big role in her second and third interview and influences the way she thinks about moral questions. When she is asked about ideas and matters of great concern, she ponders for a while as if hesitating, and she then starts elaborating on a topic that she has been reading about a lot and that she is obviously pre-occupied with: the rising influence of Islam and the radicalization of Muslims. Before she dives deeper into the topic, she sets a preamble:

I want to send ahead something, to prevent painting a biased picture of myself when I comment on that. I don’t actually consider myself xenophobic, the man I once married was [nationality R]. My present life partner is [nationality T]. My son’s friends are international, [...].³² (Carola, FDI, time 2)

Being aware of the fact that what she is going to talk about is controversial and that her standpoint is probably not what the interviewer expects it to be, she defensively tries to clarify that any accusation that might come to mind must be wrong. She self-assuredly claims she cannot be xenophobic because she knows a lot of non-German people and looks at them with a positive attitude (except for the ex-husband, who gets mentioned in the quote above nevertheless, since his nationality obviously has nothing to do with her reasons to divorce him). She is following here a well-established argumentation pattern outlined by van Dijk (1992): the denial of xenophobic opinions, first by distancing oneself from this socially unaccepted label, usually followed by an emphasized “but.” Thus, after that introduction, Carola talks about books she has read and how those have shaped her view of the world:

Well, I really don’t consider myself xenophobic, but when you read that book [Neukölln is everywhere] and I also read two other books, by Udo Ulfkotte who has dealt with this problem and who is well-acquainted with the orient and the lifestyle there because he has lived there for a long time, I get really scared about how it’s going to be. Not for me anymore, but for my children and grandchildren, when you know the tactics how radical Muslims try to take over the world. And then I feel having a tendency that I did not have in the past. But that’s really only about radical people.³³ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

The books she refers to have been discussed controversially in German media for being right-wing populist,³⁴ a discourse she probably is aware of, given that she presents herself as a well-read and intellectual person who is interested in current politics and societal discussions, yet she does not mention it in her interview. Instead, Ulfkotte is ascribed superior knowledge since he “has lived [in the orient] for a long time,” a topos granting him authority due to personal experience that makes it difficult to contradict the theses of his books. What exactly it is that makes her afraid of the future remains unclear, besides a reference to the topos of Islam claiming leadership of the Western world. In her argumentation and with the explicit intention of not appearing xenophobic, Carola constructs different types of outgroups. There are the “allies,” who are the others that are similar to the own in-group, such as the partner from a European country, which may be seen as the “good” others. And there are the “dangerous” others who are inherently violent and incompatible with Carola’s in-group: radical Muslims (Zick et al., 2012). Interestingly, her fears here are connected with a part of her personality that is strong in her narrative identity. She is not afraid for herself but for future generations, so a different sort of generativity is taking over here, which is a more abstract one that is concerned with circumstances beyond her control. The concern for loved ones is also expressed in a series of episodes in which she describes troublesome incidents connected to non-German people who were ill-meaning toward friends and family members. Thereby, she creates thematic coherence and biographical continuity (cf. Habermas, 2011). The topic is closed by a very impressive coda:

Don’t put me in the extreme right-wing corner. I believe I do not belong there, and I don’t want to be there either. But I don’t want us to have to endure many things that just aren’t right. So.³⁵ (Carola, FDI, time 2)

Again, she emphasizes that she does not want to be categorized as right-wing, thereby meeting possibly expected criticism by the interviewer (and, implicitly, by the liberal society) in a defensive manner. The criticism coming from “the left” is not explicitly discussed in this interview, but this may be exemplified by her declaring Claudia Roth, a German Green Party politician who is known for her liberal and migration friendly course, as her “enemy.” It seems as if the tolerance that she demands in her answer is confined to her in-group or her family and others who think alike, while those who are in the “outgroup” are viewed more ambivalently and critically. Remarkably, these topics that take up so much time in the second interview were not present at all in the first interview. What happened? A profound change of her social environment does not seem to be a reason, even though there has been a major change in the form of her retirement. When the interview was conducted in 2013, in the German society along with other European countries, the increasing attractiveness of right-wing populist opinions could be observed, praising traditional values and communities as well as national strengths. In light of this development, right-wing populist parties have gained influence not only in Germany, and corresponding opinions have become more socially acceptable (Zick et al., 2019). Since Carola retired between the first and the second interview, she now has the time to read that literature and presumably to watch relevant TV shows. In her accounts, Carola comes across

as someone who might be accessible to these kinds of political interpretations, although she does explicitly distance herself from them.

In her time 3 interview, these tendencies become more explicit. When asked about actions that are always right under any circumstances, she first elaborates on her concept of fairness:

Yes... I always feel drawn to fairness. Like, you try to encounter people with fairness. Even though you don't agree with one thing or the other, but to attempt to engage in a fair way. Even though they may make you angry sometimes, you know. So, I think fairness is basically an important term in my life. Whereas tolerance, I am going a bit astray here. (smiles) I don't know if this will come up later, but I try to be honest with myself here. I believe I have a lot of tolerance, my son said this once, "Mom, it takes a long while for your patience to wear thin." I believe that too, I can be very patient, but there are situations, that has nothing to do with family, friends, that's more about the political spectrum ... Period.³⁶ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

What is interesting to see here is how much she emphasizes fairness, but the concept itself stays empty, and what treating people in a fair way actually means to her remains fuzzy. For her, this is a type of action that is always right. Then she brings up the concept of tolerance, which she sees as a related concept but which she evaluates differently as emphasized in this paragraph. This may be seen as consciously deviating from an implicit norm that sees tolerance as a desirable goal. Letting her son speak, she makes it clear that she is undoubtedly a patient person. This introduction makes what is about to follow more intense, since her default mood is a different than what she will display in the following statement. She discusses with the interviewer whether or not it is appropriate to go on with what she wants to say, making clear that it is going to be off-topic and, presumably, controversial. For context, German society was concerned with so-called refugee crisis starting in 2015, when ten thousands of people fled from war, especially from Syria. The German chancellor Angela Merkel became famous for her unambiguous statement, "We can do it!" While there was sympathy and helpfulness within German society toward the refugees, there was also the countermovement of people claiming to be "overrun" by "waves of refugees." The right-wing party AfD gained strength and votes in this time. In 2018, when Carola's third interview took place, the situation was less acute, yet the topic seems to concern her still. Before she goes into detail, she gives a summary and sends ahead a preamble:

I believe, and my tolerance is strictly limited in this respect, that we cannot overcome this so-called refugee problem with the possibilities that we have at the moment. I believe I can substantiate this a bit, perhaps you now have, in your head, that corner, and with that assumption I'm put into the nazi corner or radical right and right-wing populist and so on. [I: No, no, I'm just listening.] You're just listening, right? [I: Yes.] Fine. But I know that young people think differently. I just have to send ahead one thing. My son and I, we totally exclude politics, [...]. We are totally contrary in our opinions. [...] I try to understand my son, while he does not try to understand me, that's what I assume at least. Erm, I always had a really open

house at home. And my son had a large room in the basement for himself and his many friends of different nationalities.³⁷ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

She starts with a generic form of social criticism, stating that the “refugee problem” cannot be resolved with the methods at hand as she sees the issue. She does not, however, elaborate on the alternatives. After this start, it seems important for her to insert a parenthesis: as in her time 2 interview, she wants to make sure she is not put into the right-wing corner. During this interview, she directly addresses the interviewer and may assume that the interviewer would do as she seems to fear and dismiss her opinions due to clashes in political and social ideology. The assertion that the interviewer is just listening does not convince her. She even displays mild arrogance when stating, “young people think differently.” To make her point more strongly, she transfers this general assumption onto a personal experience, i.e. that with her son who is, as can be inferred, also one of those “young people.” When talking about this ongoing dispute she has with her son, she makes it clear that her tolerance for his opinions exceeds his, since he does not try to understand her standpoint, making her the more open person from her perspective. This is supported by what she shares next: that her son benefitted from this openness when he was younger since he was allowed and encouraged to invite all of his friends, regardless of their nationality. Carola therefore emphasizes her own tolerance, inferring that what she is going to say about the refugee situation should not be understood as coming from the far right, but instead from a person who is open and friendly toward foreigners (which is supported with further arguments), yet takes a critical stance with that topic:

But a flooding of our country, as you can see it everywhere, in the cityscape, the reasons and how they get here and why they come here and so on, all that left aside. I just think our society is changing drastically, and not only for the best. [...] My friend, same age as me, three black young men... they approached her, had their mitts on her already and said to her, “Ah, white woman, not circumcised, good mattress.” And really had their paws on her. Those kinds of experiences. [...] That’s basic thinking. I’m in a good position, but still I’m aware of things, I know things, realize what is happening, am aware how my grandchild is doing in school, by what kind of people harass him, who puts pressure on him, who blackmails him, who steals his phone and so on and so forth. My son, who, undercover, let’s put it like that, accuses me of having a racist attitude, [...] he sees the structure in his son’s class in a very, very critical light meanwhile. [...] I’m just too old to naively let myself fall into this transformation of our society and to say, “Oh, it’s all wonderful and multicultural and global and so on.” No.³⁸ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

She starts with the image of a society that is being flooded by refugees or, more generally, strangers. While this language is reproduced by others, this is a set of terminology that comes from the right-wing populist spectrum, implying that “the strangers” are a mass rather than individuals and flood over the country with an unstoppable force, and Carola states that she is not interested in talking about the motifs of those coming here. Her observation that society is changing drastically is supported by a series of episodes in which her friend or her family were threatened with violence or even victims of violence by the hands of people who are described as “black” or otherwise marked as out-group. And

even though she has mentioned the differences between her son and herself regarding this topic, she tells the interviewer that her son is finally realizing that there are manifest problems. In the last sentence of this quote, she criticizes those who naively speak of a multicultural society without being aware of the dangers which she, Carola, denounces. This paragraph contains social criticism toward different out-groups: the “strangers” that are responsible for the transformation of the society, and those who are not as woke as Carola is and let those transformations happen. She is showing a self-presentation by contrast again, as is seen at many points in her time 3 interview. Interestingly, while she still makes use of a certain rhetoric, she does not reveal what she reads these days, at least in the context discussed in this paragraph. One of the few direct references she makes is to Michel Houellebecq’s “Submission,” a book that had been controversially discussed a few years ago. Its content was perceived by some as Islamophobic, while others praised it for its satiric genius. Carola gives a very brief summary of the content of the book by saying “it is alarming, how in France Islam is gaining predominance and how the population is subdued” (which is, to say the least, a rather abbreviated presentation). This book comes to her mind after issuing the following elaboration:

I don't mind Turks for example, I just object to this Islamism with these veiled women in which men really force them under those tents. That's something that I'm afraid of. Then they get children [...] non-stop. They will take over our country, just by getting more children. For me that's a simple calculation. You cannot stop this anymore. And I don't object to Turks or veiled women living among us. But, one day we'll be the minority. Because there's something I accuse our governments of, and I experienced it myself when my children were younger: It was made damn hard for families to raise children. That German families cannot afford to have children anymore, that's because these families aren't supported enough. [...] If you made it easier for families, childcare, more money, so they can afford this, also single mothers, that they don't fall into this poverty, [...] then German people would have more children. This would maybe create an equilibrium. But now we are creating an imbalance in favor of the Mussulmen who get child after child after child. It's a simple calculation. In 2050, if you're still alive then, go take a look around. I don't know how this can be stopped. Now I've shocked you, right?²⁹ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

Carola is reproducing a right-wing narrative in which the “Mussulmen” (a term used in a pejorative way in the German language) replace the German population due to higher rate of procreation. Referring to a “simple calculation,” her argumentation does not need any further evidence, since its implications should be clear to the reader/listener. While this part of her elaboration stays abstract with vague references to subdued women, she has a practical example that is connected with personal experiences of how German families are prevented from having more children. Her criticism here is directed toward the government that does not support German families enough and only inadequately provides circumstances which would encourage German people to have children. While her critique is surely justified (even more so, looking back, regarding the time in which Carola had her children), it does not become clear why all of these unfavorable circumstances should not affect non-German people. The last remark of this quote is directed toward the interviewer, assuming that they will not only disagree with what she has just said but will

be shocked by her bluntness. This is an interesting observation that weaves through her interviews. She seems to flirt with the idea that she is non-conformist and rebellious, that she dares to speak truths. She senses how much she deviates from the interviewer's opinions (and, more generally, from the expectations society might have of an educated, open woman), and this is also part of her narrative identity.

More of her concept of tolerance and the source of her knowledge is revealed in the answer to the last question of the interview:

I think everybody just has to tolerate the other's view. You just have to put up with it. I have opinions which I can't convince other people of. [...] I also have to come to terms with my son. [...] But he's the only one in my surrounding, friends, relatives, [...] you may not believe me, but they all think like me. My son is the only one who is on the other side. [...] Guess how often I read on the internet who was stabbed or shot. It's really the foreigners. Serbs, Croatians, Afghans, Syrians, women being butchered... Now don't tell me those are isolated incidents! There is this site on the internet, einzelfaelle.de, go there and see how many isolated incidents there are in this country. And who are the perpetrators. [...] And I don't want to repeat all the time, "Yes, German people do that as well." Yes, I know. [...] It's just this spectrum, this culturally alien, who are not compatible with our culture and who breed, erm, and who call us, I call myself Christian here as well, unbelievers that have to be eliminated. You cannot tolerate this. So. Period.⁴⁰ (Carola, FDI, time 3)

What becomes clear is that she is demanding tolerance: for her way of thinking, as radical as it may seem, and for her fears. Mentioning her son again, she puts him outside her own group of like-minded family and relatives, stating he "is the only one who is on the other side." Here, she emphasizes that her standpoint is not especially radical, and it is her son who is deviating. Then she turns her thoughts again to her fears, which are predominantly the influence of radical Islam. She talks about honor killings and about women being stabbed by citing a website that lists all those "isolated incidents." Needless to say, the goal of this site is to point out that those incidents are in no way isolated, but they instead show a pattern of Muslim violence. The term "isolated incidents" is used by the right-wing populist movement in an ironic way to pointedly call attention to the fact that "do-gooders" deny any form of connection and therefore structural problems. Carola does not discuss this background critically and instead adopts the term to make her point. At the end of this quote, she associates herself with a group that she has rejected throughout the rest of the interview: the Christians that are being called unbelievers and with whom she obviously feels sympathetic. With an emphatic "Period." she closes her statement, making it clear that she does not wish to be contested.

Carola's development in this aspect is interesting. At time 1, her statements are generic and contain a plea for tolerance, which is not substantiated. Her main focus is on her family and friends and their well-being with the trait of generativity being prominent. This remains an important factor for her narrative identity throughout her other interviews, too. It seems like she sees the integrity of this family threatened by a force coming from the outside. Initiated by a societal discourse that has a critical view on the migration politics of the government and an anxious view on the development that goes along with the society becoming more diverse, Carola sees Muslims and the

Islam as possible—and actual—perpetrators, and she not only fears for her immediate surroundings but for society as a whole. It seems that at time 3, she is certain to have knowledge that is superior to those of others, which is manifested in her comments toward the young interviewer. On the other side, she is defensive, going by the assumption that one cannot say anything critical about foreigners, migrants, or refugees without automatically being called a racist. This was found to be a common sentiment within the German society (see, for example, the so called “Mitte-Studie” in which Zick et al. (2019, p. 166) found more than half of the participants agreeing to that statement). These opinions represent something that has become stronger in Carola’s narrative identity over time: a self-presentation by contrast. By comparing herself with her son who does not agree with her opinions, Carola makes her narrated image more accentuated. The fact that she very openly admits to having those opinions that clearly deviate from the expectations the interviewer or the liberal environment she lives in might have may point to another hypothesis: as has been found in people that sympathize with conspiracy theories (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2017), Carola’s statements imply a desire to be seen and to see herself as unique and special or to be different. As Imhoff and Lamberty argue, “conspiracy theories seem to hold the promise of being a set of political attitudes that guarantees that one will be seen as having an independent, if not necessarily accurate, mind” (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2017, p. 732). And while it is not for certain that Carola could be called a follower of conspiracy myths, elaborations on the Muslims taking over the (Christian) European society just by “breeding” certainly do belong in that realm.

Another answer from the “Mitte-Studie” to the question why people adopt right-wing views or feel attracted to conspiracy myths is that people who tend to agree to right-wing populist statements are often found to be people who feel like they are not in control of their own life, which is a feeling that may be caused by the sudden death of a loved one (or by a feeling of abandonment) as well as by societal upheavals (cf. Zick et al., 2019, p. 207). By finding easy, unambiguous answers to important questions, they try to take back control over their lives. This might serve as a bridging explanation for the findings of the content analysis of Carola’s interviews, since the narrative identity carved out here is ambiguous. One has the image of a person who is open, caring, and exemplifies getting along well with everybody. Inversely, Carola comes across as a woman who is sometimes bitter and who is looking for a culprit, which is found in the person of the priest and in the uncountable mass of strangers, Muslims, who seemingly threaten her way of life and that of the people she cares for. Taking into account the knowledge that losses of different kinds play a major role in her life reviews across all time points, one can see these xenophobic tendencies as a means to cope with the fear of losing loved ones or of seeing people she cares for suffer. The “wave of refugees” may be the enemy she has to fight in order to keep them safe.

8.1.4 Carola’s Religious and Moral Development—Triangulating the Data

Observing the other data accumulated for Carola and recalling the emotional narratives and controversial viewpoints that characterize Carola’s interviews, a look into her survey data is surprising:

Table 26: Selected Data from Carola's Survey Answers

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Carola	M (SD)	Carola	M (SD)	Carola	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	1.60	2.63 (1.17)	1.00	2.42 (1.12)	1.00	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	4.00	4.35 (0.38)	4.00	4.28 (0.51)	4.20	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenophobia/inter-religious dialog</i>	3.40	3.64 (0.75)	3.20	3.57 (0.76)	3.20	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	3.57	3.67 (0.59)	3.00	3.20 (0.40)	3.29	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	3.43	3.67 (0.71)	3.86	3.72 (0.59)	3.86	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.00	4.38 (0.38)	4.14	4.17 (0.39)	4.14	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	4.29	3.86 (0.65)	4.29	3.90 (0.62)	4.14	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	3.86	3.77 (0.61)	4.57	3.76 (0.51)	4.00	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	3.29	3.79 (0.68)	3.71	3.86 (0.62)	3.86	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	2.92	3.42 (0.78)	3.58	3.40 (0.70)	3.67	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	3.17	3.26 (0.58)	3.25	3.25 (0.58)	3.17	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	3.92	3.90 (0.47)	3.83	3.89 (0.49)	3.92	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	3.58	3.74 (0.46)	4.00	3.73 (0.44)	3.67	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	3.83	3.70 (0.49)	3.75	3.76 (0.51)	3.50	3.78 (0.50)

Most of her scores are close to the means of the whole sample or at least within the standard deviation. Interesting, are her scores on the Religious Schema Scale especially taking into account her elaborations above. While her scores for *ftr* and *xenos* are slightly lower than the means of the sample, her scores for *ttt* are considerably lower and even decline between wave 1 and 2. As this subscale measures the extent to which people believe in the texts of their religion/belief in a literal way and points to an absolutistic and exclu-

sivist stance toward the religious teachings (Streib & Klein, 2014), this result emphasizes how much Carola rejects any form of fundamentalist religion. However, her scores on *fr* and *xenos* do not completely add up with her statements about Muslims, yet they do mirror Carola's presented narrative identity of a woman who is open and tolerant since she has welcomed the "international" friends her son brought home and vehemently rejects to be called racist or xenophobic. The survey answers may reveal socially desirable response patterns, which can also be seen in her interview answers. The passages that are perceived as most controversial are preambled with statements of appeasement which make clear that Carola recognizes this ambiguity that has been described above and becomes apparent in her survey answers. It might be hypothesized that Carola herself is not able to bridge that gap in her own standpoints completely.

On the subscale *purpose in life* of the Ryff Scale, we see that her score has increased considerably between waves 1 and 2. Having in mind that Carola retired early from her job as a teacher between these two points of measurement, it can be speculated that she has been trying actively to fill that gap and that she is finding meaning in new tasks. Moreover, she has become a grandmother in that time which might add to that feeling of having meaningful tasks to do. Her scores on *self-acceptance* (Ryff Scale) and *emotional stability* (NEO-FFI) increasing steadily over time can be explained with the fact that the death of her beloved partner was recent at the first point of measurement with Carola still in mourning. By wave 2, she had met her new partner and found a new meaning and a new perspective for her life aside from caring for her grandchildren.

In the structural analysis of her interviews in accordance to the *Manual*, Carola is classified as a "stayer" within the religious types over all timepoints. Her ratings show a tendency for style 3 (mutual religious style) consistently with a clear majority of conventional answers at time 3. At times 1 and 2, one can see nearly half her answers rated style 4 (individuating-systemic), which indicates that she seems to oscillate between a desire for consent with her own social group and the ability for critical and autonomous thinking in her earlier interviews, which is considerably less visible at time 3. It is interesting to note how Carola's ratings shift in *morality*. At time 1, her answers have been rated between styles 3 and 4, and at the other timepoints, the rating of style 3 is unambiguous. Overall, it can be stated that her ability to critically reflect and think in abstract ways is displayed least in her last interview, as has been made explicit especially in 8.3.1. Overall, the classification as a constant religious type 2 (predominantly conventional) and thus her in-group orientation and conventional approach to questions of morality is consistent with the results of the content analysis. The finding adds to the picture that Carola, even though she claims to be a tolerant and self-critical person, in the structure of her answers shows a different picture.

Looking back on what I found out about Carola, one can see the portrait of a woman who has faced a lot of adversities in her life. Being raised by a mother who preferred her sons and expected Carola to take care of her, Carola was faced with expectations from family and society that did not meet the ambitions and hopes she had for her own life. In the same fashion as she describes the strained relationship with her mother, she describes her struggle with God and her faith. It has become clear that she is still caught up in them to a considerable extent while she quite rigidly states to have terminated those relationships actively. Her trust in God is forever betrayed when her prayers do not help

to save her partner. This untimely death is perceived as a terrible and unjust faith, and it has been found that this is not uncommon in long-term couples, even though they often theoretically had time to come to terms with this thought (cf. Coleman et al. (2015) for longitudinal studies of couples who had to deal with the loss of a spouse at one point). In addition to the loss of her partner, she also retires and has to find a new structure and meaning for her life. Carola has to find a new frame of reference for herself, and here, it seems that her efforts go in different directions. She is a very active and loving grandmother with good relationships within her family and her social surroundings, but she seems to see her children and grandchildren as well as her friends and the greater society threatened by the influence of Islam in the Western world. It might be argued that inner anxieties and conflicts are turned outward against unspecific enemies, as has been hinted at above when her xenophobic tendencies were analyzed. It seems as if the books and theories she refers to in her second and third interview are an attempt at finding stability or at getting answers for rather unspecific questions and fears. This might be mirrored in the development of her scores on the Ryff Scale. Having overcome a time of intense grief, Carola seems more at ease with her current living situation, which is a statement that first seems to contradict her vigorously expressed concerns about societal developments. However, it might also be possible that in being able to name culprits, she gains stability and a more valued sense of self, which is an interpretation supported by her improved score on self-reported self-acceptance. Being a deconvert, Carola's case may illustrate a *delayed search for a new frame of reference* (Streib et al., 2009), a frame that gives her a stability that she had lost in the upheavals of her life years after abandoning the church and feeling abandoned by God.

Overall, Carola seems to adopt a more black-and-white view over the years. She seems to look back at her life with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction, even though she seems to be satisfied with her overall situation in the present. In her third interview, the narrative identity she creates is that of a self-effective woman who has, despite multiple atrocities she was faced with, achieved in creating a meaningful life, which can be seen in the way she tells her stories that often have the form of a redemption story, especially at wave 3. She feels she has freed herself from the bonds of the church and does not rely on God anymore. Here, she is the master of her own narrative. Her scores displayed in the table above indicate that she sees herself as a rather stable person, which is an impression that is contradicted in the analysis of her interviews in which multiple traces of insecurity could be found. Summed up, the leitmotif for Carola's life story might best be described as "being abandoned by caregivers and growing through it." This growth might be strongly argued and disputed looking at her accounts from an analytical perspective, yet it seems that from her own point of view she has grown stronger, more autonomous, and fiercer.

Notes

- 1 Meine Gebete [sind] wirklich ungehört [ge]blieben. Und seitdem habe ich dann auch mit dem lieben Gott abgeschlossen. Dieser Schmerz, der mir damals zugefügt wurde, es ist jetzt 17 Jahre her, das habe ich ihm übel genommen. Ich denke,

wenn Menschen sich wirklich lieben, die auseinanderzureißen durch den Tod, das verzeihe ich dir nie.

- 2 Carola has been portrayed as well in Bullik, Steppacher, and Keller (2022b), albeit only covering her first and second interview. Parts of that chapter analyzing her first two interviews have been taken and adapted to fit the focus of this case study here.
- 3 Ja, ich denke das ist einfach so diese, sie sind schon auch die gängigen Abschnitte, das ist die Kindheit, ja die pubertäre Entwicklungsphase, Beendigung der Schulzeit, der Schritt in ein selbstständiges Leben, Gründung der Familie, ja, Leben eigentlich für die Familie, die Kinder großziehen, das war ein Lebensabschnitt. Und dann die Beziehung mit meinem, Lebensgefährten, und das sind eigentlich diese dreizehn Jahre, die für mich eigentlich auch sehr wesentlich gewesen sind. Und nochmal so 'ne Zäsur nach seinem Tod eben, diese vergangenen drei Jahre, das ist einfach auch nochmal ein Lebensabschnitt, wo mein Leben auch so ganz anders verlaufen ist als vorher. [I: Angenommen es wäre ein Buch, welche Kapitel, müsste es enthalten?] Kindheit, der Verlust der Kindheit, erwachsen sein und Verantwortung zu tragen für andere, Kinder, [...] da würde ich das vielleicht sogar noch irgendwie mit Untertiteln (lacht) versehen. Einmal auch die Sorge um die Kinder, das war nicht ganz leicht. [...] Und dann auf der anderen Seite eigentlich auch die Freude mit den Kindern, die Entwicklung, die sie machen, die positive Entwicklung, also das wäre das Kapitel Kinder. Und dann, ich denke, meine Ehe spielt auch noch ne Rolle, ne Ehe, die man eingeht, weil man ja davon ausgeht, dass sie lebenslang hält, dann eigentlich diese Ernüchterung, dass man, einfach, sich schlicht geirrt hat. Dann meine andere Lebenspartnerschaft, und dann das Kapitel Krankheit, Sterben, Tod und dann noch das Kapitel Trauer, das wären so diese Kapitel in meinem Leben. [I: Welche Ereignisse sind rückblickend besonders bedeutsam?] Der Tod meines Vaters, die Geburt meiner Kinder, die Scheidung und der Tod meines Lebenspartners, ja.
- 4 Ja, das kann ich ganz klar gliedern, mein Leben. Und zwar die erste Phase ist die Kindheit, wo man ja doch noch eigentlich sehr unbedarft ins Leben geht und sich führen lässt und auch Vertrauen in die engsten Menschen hat, wie Eltern oder auch Geschwister. Dann, wenn man schon ein Stückweit ins Leben entlassen wird, das war dann so mein zweites Kapitel. Ich musste dann so vom Land hier in [Stadt A] zum Gymnasium gehen, das heißt, da war ich zehn. Auch noch relativ jung und dann ganz alleine selbstständig auch weite Wege machen. [...]. Und dann die Schule, die man durchläuft und Erfahrungen, die man auch da macht mit Menschen, [...]. Und das war ein Kapitel, das mich sehr geprägt hat, die Erfahrung mit den Lehrern, wie weit Lehrer das Leben prägen, insbesondere das Selbstbewusstsein oder auch mit anderen Worten, das Selbstbewusstsein untergraben. Und nach dem Abitur habe ich studiert auf Lehramt. Das habe ich bis zu meinem 57. Lebensjahr gemacht, habe das eigentlich auch gerne gemacht. Zwischendurch, das ist meine berufliche Laufbahn, zwischendurch muss ich sagen gab es dann im privaten Bereich Zäsuren. Das war dann, als ich geheiratet habe und Kinder gekriegt habe. Das Kapitel danach war meine Scheidung und das, wie soll ich das sagen, das Durchbringen meiner Kinder, bis sie dann eben soweit waren, auf eigenen Beinen zu stehen. Das war auch eine sehr schwere Zeit. Dann meine Erfahrung mit meinem Lebenspartner damals, den ich dann hatte, der an Krebs erkrankt ist und wir eine lange Zeit

des Kampfes hatten um sein Leben und er ist letztendlich dann doch gestorben und das war für mich wirklich ein Bruch in meinem Leben. Wenn ich nochmal ein Stück zurückgehe: Der erste, wirklich tiefgreifende Bruch in meinem Leben war der Tod meines Vaters, als ich 20 war. Und dann mit 52 erlebte ich dann eben nochmal den Tod meines geliebten Lebenspartners und das war natürlich für mich ein ganz persönliches Drama und die Trauerzeit hat sehr lang angehalten. Wenn ich das zeitlich eingrenze, waren das acht Jahre und dann ist (halb lachend, halb emotional) ein früherer Freund in mein Leben getreten. Das ist eigentlich auch wieder so eine Zäsur nach diesen Jahren der Trauer. Und mit diesem Freund bin ich seit vier Jahren eigentlich glücklich liiert. So, das ist so diese Kapitel in meinem Leben.

- 5 Das ist interessant, ich habe nämlich mal ein Buch geschrieben (lacht). [...] Dann nehme ich mal ganz grob, Kindergarten hat man nur wenig Erinnerungen, Schule, [...] Abitur. Und da war eigentlich eine Zäsur. Ähm ... die Schule war schon wirklich damals Stress, zu meiner Zeit, ne, da. Die Lehrer waren einfach noch anders und es war eine harte Leidenszeit. Weil Lehrer keine Pädagogen waren, sondern Wissensetrimmer, so. [...] Dann habe ich studiert, dann bin ich Lehrerin geworden. Das war eigentlich auch erfüllend, muss ich sagen, weil ich immer nette Kinder hatte, das muss ich auch sagen. Dann eine andere Zäsur, als ich geheiratet habe, zwei Kinder bekommen habe. Dann die nächste Zäsur ... meine Scheidung. Dann, die Verbindung mit einem neuen Lebensgefährten, der dann allerdings an Krebs erkrankte. Und nach seiner ersten Operation, sechs Jahre später, gestorben ist. Das war also eine ganz wichtige Zeit in meinem Leben. Die Beziehung mit ihm dauerte 13 Jahre, die Leidenszeit sechs Jahre. Er ist dann gestorben und in der Zeit nach seinem Tod habe ich dann so versucht auch dieses für mich ganz persönliche Drama des Abschieds und des Todes irgendwo zu verarbeiten. [...] Dann habe ich wirklich angefangen, sukzessive, diese Entwicklung von Diagnose bis zum Tod in Kapiteln zu beschreiben. Ich glaube, es sind 200 Seiten, ich habe das auch drucken lassen. [...] Und als ich es dann in den Händen hielt, dann war das gut für mich und dann habe ich gedacht, so und jetzt hast du diese Erinnerung fest. Die kann dir niemand mehr nehmen. Und wenn man merkt, Erinnerung wird blass, dann kann ich immer wieder nachlesen, wie war das damals noch. [...] Mittlerweile habe ich dann auch Enkelkinder gekriegt, die dann auch so die Trauer etwas abgefedert haben. Und dann ist ein Mann in mein (lächelt) Leben getreten, den ich 50 Jahre schon kenne. Den habe ich hier vor 50 Jahren in [Stadt A] kennengelernt, da war ich 19. [...] Und der hat mich dann vor neun Jahren im Internet wieder aufgespürt. Und seitdem sind wir wieder zusammen [...]. So, das sind so die groben Einteilungen meines Lebens.
- 6 Meine Mutter ist auch diese Person, von der man geliebt werden will. Und als Kind liebt man einfach seine Eltern und eben auch seine Mutter und meine Mutter hat das ein bisschen sehr ungleichmäßig verteilt, nicht nur in meinem Bewusstsein, sondern auch im Bewusstsein meiner Brüder ist das so verankert, dass meine Mutter eigentlich nur Jungen gerne mochte und keine Mädchen. Von daher habe ich mich eigentlich immer so'n bisschen benachteiligt gefühlt, also von ihrer Liebe, aber wie gesagt, als Kind liebt man seine Mutter und ringt um die Liebe der Mutter und ich glaube, dass mir das nie ganz gelungen ist.

- 7 Meine Mutter konnte mich immer in ihrem Alter dann gut gebrauchen für Dinge, die man erledigen musste. Ich bin sehr viel für meine Mutter da gewesen, bin nach dem Tod meines Vaters [...] wieder nach Hause zurückgegangen und habe dann auch über drei Jahre das Ehebett mit meiner Mutter geteilt, weil ich sie nicht alleine lassen konnte und wollte. Dann habe ich mich aber wieder abgenabelt und war trotzdem sehr viel für meine Mutter da, bin bei ihr gewesen und habe mich um sie gekümmert und so weiter, aber das hat eigentlich nicht dazu geführt, dass ich mich irgendwo von ihr geliebt und angenommen fühlte. [...] Sondern ich wurde mit Vorwürfen dann überhäuft. Und ja, es war dann schon schlimm, und ich habe dann zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt, da war ich dann ich schätze um die 40, einfach mal n ganz scharfen Schnitt gezogen, und habe den Kontakt zu meiner Mutter rigoros abgebrochen. Ist für viele sehr unverständlich, aber ich war an einem Punkt angekommen, wo ich gesagt habe, entweder überlebt sie oder ich [...] und ich muss sagen, von da an ging's mir eigentlich ganz gut.
- 8 Und ich bin dann mit dem Tod meines Vaters wieder zu meiner Mutter zurückgezogen. Alle anderen Brüder waren schon zu Hause weg, ich bin ins elterliche Schlafzimmer gezogen, ins Bett meines Vaters. [I: (skeptisch?) Mhm.] Na, Sie gucken ganz groß. [I: (lacht) Ja.] Heute fasse ich das auch nicht mehr, [...]. Das habe ich getan, weil sie mir leidtat. [...] An dem Tag, nachdem mein Vater gestorben war, wollte sie mich in den Arm nehmen, mir [war] das sehr unangenehm und sie sagte dann zu mir: „Jetzt habe ich nur noch dich.“ Da habe ich auch gedacht: „Ach! Jetzt.“ [...] Gut zwei Jahre. Habe mich dann mit Bauchschmerzen entschieden, mir eine eigene Wohnung zu suchen [...] und dann war das ganz, ganz schwierig, ihr das zu vermitteln.
- 9 Dann bin ich in mich gegangen mal Jahre später und habe ich gedacht: „Hast du ihr eigentlich Unrecht getan?“ Weil ich nämlich glaube, jeder strickt sich seine eigene Wahrheit. So diese subjektive Wahrnehmung, die ist von der objektiven Wahrheit manchmal so weit entfernt, dass ich mich wirklich infrage gestellt habe. [...] Und dann bin ich mal ins Gespräch gekommen mit ... anderen Verwandten, auch mit meinen Brüdern, die haben mich in meiner Wahrnehmung bestätigt und da habe ich auch gedacht: „Ja. Dass ich mit meiner Mutter gebrochen habe, das sollte mir nicht leidtun. Tut mir auch nicht leid und das war für mich der richtige Schritt und die richtige Entscheidung.“ Und ich mag auch nicht hören, wenn jemand sagt: „Oh, das ist aber doch deine Mutter gewesen.“ Nein. Dafür hat sie mich zu viel gequält. [...] Es ist schrecklich, dass man sowas sagt, aber was soll ich drumherum erzählen? [...] Und es tut mir auch heute nicht leid. (den Tränen nahe) Und wenn ich zum Friedhof gehe, stelle ich meinem Vater die Blumen auf seine Seite, zum Todestag, zum Geburtstag und so weiter kriegt er immer Blumen. Meine Mutter nie. Das hat sie jetzt davon.
- 10 Eine wichtige Person in meinem Leben war meine Mutter. Meine Mutter hat mich bekommen, da war sie 40, was für damalige Zeiten schon sehr alt war. Heute eine 40-Jährige, die ein Kind kriegt, die ist jung. [...] Während meine Mutter für mich damals [...] einfach immer eine alte Frau [war], einfach von der Optik her. Weil man damals sich nicht jugendlich gekleidet hat. Ähm, es war alles so fraulich und betulich und, ah, Moralin sauer und all sowas.

- 11 So und jetzt wollte ich einfach meine Freiheit haben, mit meiner Freundin zusammenziehen und [meine Mutter] wollte das absolut nicht. Ich habe es getan. [...] Mein Vater hat mir immer Geld zugesteckt, damit ich überleben konnte. Ich hatte nix. [...] So und dann kamen wir einmal vormittags aus der Uni nach Hause und da hatte ich einen Zettel an der Tür, ich sollte Zuhause anrufen. Da sagte mir mein Bruder, dass mein Vater gestorben sei. Herzinfarkt, im Auto, tot. Ja, das war der erste wirklich dramatische Einschnitt in meinem Leben. [...] Und, ich hatte kein Geld und bin zu meiner Mutter zurückgezogen. Bin zu meiner Mutter, (lächelt) jetzt lachen Sie mich nicht aus, ich bin in das Bett meines Vaters gezogen, ins Ehebett. Weil mir meine Mutter leid tat, die ohne meinen Vater irgendwie gar nicht existenzfähig war, wie das bei Frauen früher war, [...] hat mit Eheschließung, wie das damals war, aufgehört zu arbeiten. [...] Also, sie begab sich auch in die finanzielle Abhängigkeit meines Vaters. Und nun war der gestorben. Meine Mutter wuppte den Haushalt, [...], darüber hinaus hatte sie von nichts eine Ahnung. So und weil ich das wusste, hatte ich Mitleid, bin dann zu ihr zurückgezogen. Es war furchtbar für mich, ganz schrecklich. [...] Um das in einem Satz zusammenzufassen, ich hatte das Gefühl damals schon, dass ich mein junges Leben meiner Mutter geopfert habe. Als ich mit dem Studium fertig war und dann auch Geld verdiente, habe ich also wirklich den Mut gefasst, habe mir ein kleines Apartment hier gemietet in [Stadt A] und habe ihr dann über Umwege irgendwie klar gemacht, dass ich ausziehen werde. Das war für sie auch wohl nicht leicht, aber ich [...] fuhr jeden Mittag zu ihr dann. So und sie kochte dann für mich, machte die Wäsche, hielt mich auch in Abhängigkeit dadurch, ne. Und meinte, gut, es war bequem, aber sie meinte, sie tut mir dann den großen Gefallen und, ähm ... ja, hielt mich dadurch in Abhängigkeit.
- 12 Und wenn ich zum Friedhof fahre, dann mache ich eigentlich immer nur das Grab meines Vaters, (lächelt) so. Ich habe das Gefühl, ich tue es seinetwegen. Und meine Mutter spielt da keine Rolle. Ich bringe ihm auch frische Blumen zu seinem Todestag, zu seinem Geburtstag. Und für meine Mutter- das tue ich einfach nicht. Manchmal überlege ich, ich weiß gar nicht mehr, wann die gestorben ist (lächelt). So ist das, ist so. Ja, gut, ich sage das, gebe das ehrlich zu. Es ist so. Soll ich lügen? Nee.
- 13 Wenn man doch in Notsituationen gerät, dann schiebt sich ja eigentlich so wieder [...] dieses kindliche Bild von Gott [vor], denn ich glaube, wenn man betet, hat man irgendwo diese Hierarchie, diese väterliche Macht, und ich bin irgendwo hilflos, machtlos. [...] Und ich kann mich auch erinnern, als mein Lebensgefährte dann so schwer krank wurde, dass diese Gebete, die ich dann gebetet habe, eigentlich auch wieder sehr kindlich waren. [I: Können Sie noch sagen, was Gott heute für Sie bedeutet?] Tja, der wird mir ganz böse sein, wenn ich ihm sage, was ich von ihm halte. Ich verstehe seine Logik nicht. Ich weiß, wir sind Menschen und wir sollen's ja angeblich nicht verstehen. [...] Zum Beispiel das Leid auf dieser Welt, diese Kriege, dieses Abgemetzelt, [...], warum warum warum muss das so sein? Ich mag's nicht verstehen. [...] Oder auch alte Menschen, die sterben wollen, die können nicht sterben und Eltern entreißt man ihre Kinder.
- 14 Als Kind glaubt man irgendwie an diesen lieben Gott, der einem vermittelt wird und man ist ja so vertrauensselig, man stellt nichts infrage. Dann habe ich den ers-

ten Bruch eigentlich erfahren, als ich konfirmiert wurde oder besser gesagt, als ich meinen Konfirmandenunterricht hatte. [...] Dann bin ich mit Anfang 20 aus der Kirche ausgetreten und ich habe das zwar ganz konsequent getan, aber ich muss ganz ehrlich sagen: Es haben sich so Gefühle eingestellt von ... da ist so ein Netz zerrissen. Was ich ja vielleicht doch hatte, ohne es mir eingestehen zu wollen. Und das hat so einen Moment gedauert, dass ich dachte: „So, du bist jetzt wurzellos.“ [...] Ich habe mir auch gedacht, um irgendetwas zu glauben oder an einen Gott zu glauben, brauche ich die Kirche nicht. Habe an einen Gott geglaubt und habe auch gebetet, das gebe ich auch zu. Dann, muss ich sagen, gab es diesen gravierenden Bruch in meinem Leben, ich habe also wirklich um das Leben meines Lebensgefährten gebetet, als der seine Operationen hatte. Also wirklich ein Verzweiflungsbeten um sein Leben und er ist mir dann ja quasi doch unter den Händen weggenommen worden. So habe ich das empfunden. Ich habe das als so ungerecht empfunden [...] und dann habe ich mit Gott oder irgendeiner Macht oder was auch immer gebrochen und seitdem bete ich nicht mehr. Das nehme ich ihm, sollte es ihn wirklich geben, übel. Bis heute. Ich kriege auch die Kurve nicht. Und dann hat sich meine Einstellung, ohne irgendeinen Gott zu leben, eigentlich auch verfestigt in meinem Leben. Wobei ich sagen muss, was ich noch nicht ganz abgelegt habe, vielleicht auch gar nicht will, ist, dass ich trotzdem glaube, dass es da etwas geben könnte zwischen Himmel und Erde.

- 15 Also das war eine Wahnsinnsbelastung und ich war froh, als es vorbei war. Da bin ich nie wieder in die Kirche gegangen, das war für mich Fakt, das ertrage ich nicht mehr. Ich will aber nicht sagen, dass ich damit so meine Gottgläubigkeit verloren hätte, so diese kindlich naive, die man dann hat. Ich bin dann aber mit Anfang 20 (lächelt) aus der Kirche ausgetreten, weil ich mir gesagt habe: Kirche und Glaube hat nix miteinander zu tun. Ich kann auch glauben ohne Kirche. [...] Dann, muss ich sagen, komme ich wieder zu der Erkrankung von meinem Lebensgefährten. Da habe ich also mit dem Gott, an den ich damals noch geglaubt habe, sehr gehadert. Weil ich in ihm ja wirklich, oder wir beide glaubten, die große Liebe unseres Lebens gefunden zu haben. [...] Und nun diese Diagnose Krebs, das hat mich schon arg zweifeln lassen, ne, ich meine, nach dem Desaster mit meiner Ehe nun einen Menschen zu finden, mit dem alles gut lief und der mir dann noch genommen werden sollte. [...] Damals habe ich auch wirklich noch gebetet. [...] Ich habe gedacht, durch die Gebete kann ich da ... denn der liebe Gott kann ja nicht so böse sein. Wenn ich so intensiv bete, dann kann er mir das nicht antun und diesen Menschen nehmen. So, diesen Menschen hat er mir aber genommen, [...] und meine Gebete [sind] wirklich ungehört [ge]blieben. Und seitdem habe ich dann auch mit dem lieben Gott abgeschlossen. Dieser Schmerz, der mir damals zugefügt wurde, es ist jetzt 17 Jahre her, das habe ich ihm übel genommen. Ich denke, wenn Menschen sich wirklich lieben, die auseinanderzureißen durch den Tod, das verzeihe ich dir nie. So, das ist jetzt mein Verhältnis zum lieben Gott. Ich habe mit ihm gebrochen wie mit meiner Mutter. [...] Ja, ich muss damit leben, wobei ich manchmal schon so nicht so ganz von der Hand weisen kann, dass es nicht irgendetwas zwischen Himmel und Erde gibt. Also ich würde sagen, da gibt es bei mir noch so ein Eckchen im Kopf, wo ich das doch vielleicht so einräumen muss, dass da doch noch was sein könnte.

- 16 Es gibt es vielleicht etwas zwischen Himmel und Erde.
- 17 Ich habe leider nie ganz begriffen, was genau Spiritualität bedeutet.
- 18 Indoktrination.
- 19 Religion ist für mich Indoktrination.
- 20 Ich halte mich eigentlich schon für gläubig, obwohl ich ja mit dem lieben Gott nun hader, aber das heißt ja nicht, dass ich nicht an ihn glaube. [I: Was bedeutet das für Sie?] Dass es nach unserem Leben einfach auch noch ein sinnvolles Weiterexistieren gibt [...]. Und auf der anderen Seite muss ich auch sagen: zu wissen, nach dem Tod ist gar nichts mehr, [...] das ist eigentlich ne so ernüchternde Erkenntnis, dass manche nicht gut weiterleben können [...], aber da spreche ich jetzt wahrscheinlich doch auch eher so für mich. [...] Das habe ich eigentlich glaube ich zu keinem Zeitpunkt geglaubt. Ich habe Angst, dass das so sein könnte, aber ich wünsche mir schon, dass es eine Existenz nach dem Tod gibt.
- 21 Nach dem, was ich Ihnen jetzt alles erzählt habe, wie würden Sie mich denn einsortieren? Ich würde religiös ausschließen. [I: Ich hätte spontan gesagt, Sie sind durchaus ein bisschen spirituell.] Nee. Wobei bei spirituell weiß ich immer nie so genau, was das ist. [...] [I: Vielleicht eher an was Höheres glauben, unkonkret oder so?] Mhh, ja, da bin ich spirituell. [I: Also und was bedeutet das für Sie?] Das ist meine Religion, sagen wir mal so. Wenn man den Begriff mal ganz weit fasst. Das ist das, was jenseits des wirklichen, aktuellen Lebens vielleicht noch eine Rolle spielt. Ich meine, dass unser Leben endlich ist, dass mag man zwar nicht gerne haben [...], aber irgendwo im Hinterkopf ist das einfach. Und mit diesen Dingen beschäftigt man sich und wenn das Spiritualität ist, ja, ... dann bin ich spirituell. Und das ist so eine kleine Schublade in meinem Leben, sagen wir mal so. [...] Habe für mich dann aber eher so das Gefühl, dass Spiritualität mehr sowas Großes, Bombastisches ist und so empfinde ich mich da nicht so.
- 22 Ich denke, [Spiritualität] ist so ein ganz watteweicher Begriff. [...] Wissen Sie, so Bälle. Die werden manchmal in die Luft geworfen und sollen so eine Bedeutung haben. Und genau ist das mit spirituell, ähm, da weiß ich wirklich nichts Konkretes mit anzufangen. Was ist jetzt genau spirituell? Religion? Klar habe ich eine Vorstellung davon. Auch von Glauben habe ich eine Vorstellung. Aber spirituell? Wenn ich Yoga mache und da sitze und irgendwie den Mond anbelle oder, ist das spirituell? Aber damit habe ich nix am Hut.
- 23 Und mein Lebensgefährte und ich haben natürlich auch darüber gesprochen und das war ein ganz nüchterner Mann [...] und mit irgendwelchem spirituellen Killefitt konnte der weiß Gott nichts anfangen, [...] aber als wir über diese Dinge sprachen [...], da habe ich zu ihm gesagt: „Und wo wirst du dann sein, wenn ich sterbe?“ Und dann hat er zu mir gesagt: „Dann komme ich und hole dich.“ [...] Er muss auch an ein Leben nach dem Tode geglaubt haben. Ich glaube auch, dass dieser drohende Tod ihm diesen Glauben zurückgebracht hat.
- 24 Da hab ich auch ein Erlebnis in Erinnerung, das mich damals sehr tief getroffen hat. Ich war, schätze mal, damals 13, eigentlich auch noch sehr unbedarft, und ich erinnere mich, wir hatten also diesen Gottesdienst, wo wir Konfirmanden vorne in den ersten Reihen saßen, es war ne kleine Gemeinde, [...] und ich erinnere mich, dass ich damals neue Schuhe bekommen hatte und hatte dann, weil ich so stolz war auf

meine Schuhe, hab ich dann das eine Bein über das andere geschlagen, [...] und habe mir dann meine neuen Schuhe betrachtet. [...] Und ich war also ganz versonnen in meiner Betrachtung und kriegte dann mit, dass also dieser Pastor von seiner Kanzel mich zurechtwies, vor dieser gesamten Gemeinde, ich sollte mich mal anständig benehmen, und wie ich denn da säße [...]. Ich weiß nur, dass ich mir gewünscht habe, der Erdboden möge sich auf tun und ich darin verschwinden, ich wusste auch hinterher, alle wussten, dass ich gemeint war, [...]. Ich war mir im Grunde genommen keiner Schuld bewusst, wusste auch nicht, was ich Schlimmes getan habe, aber der Pastor hat mir das ja irgendwo suggeriert, es war was Schlimmes, was da abgelaufen ist. Das war schon so einschneidend, wo mir also die Kirche nicht mehr ans Herz gewachsen ist, sag ich mal vorsichtig so.

- 25 Dann habe ich den ersten Bruch eigentlich erfahren, als ich konfirmiert wurde oder besser gesagt, als ich meinen Konfirmandenunterricht hatte. Da ich hier in [Stadt A] zur Schule ging, hatte ich nicht die Möglichkeit, mit den anderen Konfirmanden in diesen Unterricht zu gehen. Das heißt, ein früherer Klassenkamerad aus der Volksschule und ich, wir waren die einzigen, die dann nachmittags den Konfirmandenunterricht hatten. Zu zweit [...] mit diesem Pastor, der uns eigentlich nur gelangweilt irgendetwas von Gott erzählte und von der Bibel und uns drangsalierte mit Dingen, die wir auswendig lernen mussten. Ihm fiel dann teilweise immer so ein- sein Gebiss runter und es war alles für so ein junges Mädchen von 14 sehr sehr unangenehm. Und es hat mich eigentlich Religion nicht näher gebracht. Und dann habe ich also beschlossen nach der Konfirmation: „In diese Kirche gehst du nie wieder.“ Und das habe ich auch wirklich nicht getan, weil ich dachte: „Die Kirche ist mir nicht nahe, die Institution ‚Kirche‘ ist mir nicht nah, sie hat mir nichts gegeben.“
- 26 Also ich bin nicht sehr religiös erzogen worden. Meine Mutter war katholisch, wir Kinder waren aber evangelisch, mein Vater auch. Wir sind nie in die Kirche gegangen, aber wie das damals war, man wurde konfirmiert. Das war einfach so. Und ich hatte das Pech, dass ich damals [...] mit einem anderen ehemaligen Klassenkameraden in [Stadt A] zum Gymnasium [ging]. Das bedeutete, der Konfirmandenunterricht fand bei uns nicht morgens statt, in den ersten zwei Stunden, [...] deswegen kriegten wir extra Ersatzkonfirmandenunterricht nachmittags. [...] Der war dann bei schönstem Wetter, wenn andere im Freibad waren [...]. Zwei Personen, dieser [J.] und ich, wir saßen dann dem Pastor gegenüber, dem immer so das Gebiss gelegentlich runterfiel, der sehr gelangweilt war. Schrecklich. Ich habe ganz furchtbare Erinnerungen an diesen Mann. Ich weiß nicht, der war ja nun ein Kirchenmann und eigentlich sollte er doch die Menschen davon überzeugen. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall gewesen. Ich habe nur meine Konfirmation herbeigesehnt, wo wir dann so im Übrigen noch wahnsinnig unter Druck standen. Wir mussten ganz, ganz viel auswendig lernen. Auch mit der Androhung, es gab eine öffentliche Prüfung in der Kirche, vor dem ganzen Presbyterium, vor dem Auditorium in der Kirche. Also die Kirchenbesucher und dann wurden wir geprüft. Eine Wahnsinns Angst. [...] Und dann immer die Drohung [...]: „Und wenn du die Prüfung nicht schaffst, fällst du durch und wirst nicht konfirmiert.“ [...] Also das war eine Wahnsinns Belastung und ich war froh, als es vorbei war. Da bin ich nie wieder in die Kirche gegangen, das war für mich Fakt, das ertrage ich nicht mehr.

- 27 Tugenden, die ich wertschätze, das ist so ja Authentizität, dass man eigentlich man selbst bleibt, dass man sich nicht verbiegt, hat auch was mit Ehrlichkeit zu tun, Glaubwürdigkeit, auch Zivilcourage ist was, was ich sehr hoch halte, ja das sind Dinge, die sind mir sehr wichtig. Ich will nicht behaupten, dass mir das immer gelingt, aber das sind schon so sehr erhabene Ziele, nach denen man so streben kann, wird man nicht erreichen. [...] Ich bemühe mich darum ehrlich zu sein oder ich bemühe mich, ich selbst zu bleiben, mich nicht zu verbiegen, bloß weil es irgendwelche Strömungen gesellschaftlicher Art von mir verlangen oder wollen, und auch dazu stehe und auch den Mut dazu habe zu mir selbst zu stehen.
- 28 This is a dimension that was not described by Graham and colleagues (2011) in their model of moral intuitions; rather, it was a new finding from the material in the course of the development of the ATLAS.ti coding guideline.
- 29 Och, durch Toleranz. Ich finde, man muss sich nicht einig sein, ich muss dem anderen seinen Glauben lassen und respektieren. Wenn er damit glücklich und zufrieden ist und ihn das erfüllt und ausfüllt, und seinem Leben auch einen Sinn gibt, dann muss ich einfach Toleranz walten lassen, da ich denke das ist Priorität.
- 30 [I: Wie sieht Ihr Ideal reifen Glaubens aus oder eine reife Antwort auf Fragen mit einer existentiellen Bedeutung?] Ich würde sagen, ich halte Werte hoch und vielleicht sind Werte auch eine existentielle Bedeutung. So zum Beispiel Ehrlichkeit, Aufrichtigkeit, Authentizität. [...] Wenn ich mir Werte schaffe und auch versuche, danach zu leben, was nicht immer gelingt. Das weiß ich auch.
- 31 Durch Toleranz. Ich lasse den anderen einfach leben in seiner Anschauung. Also ich wehre mich gegen jede Radikalität und jede Missionierungstätigkeit. Ich möchte nicht missioniert werden und ich will andere auch nicht missionieren. Ich denke, mit einem größeren Maß an Toleranz könnte man einfach solche Konflikte lösen. Indem man einfach dem zugesteht: „Du darfst ruhig glauben, was du willst. Ich glaube es nicht. Aber ich nehme das gleiche Recht für mich auch in Anspruch. Möchte auch, dass das respektiert wird und dass man nicht mich versucht, zu bekehren.“
- 32 Ich möchte noch vorausschicken, damit das Bild von mir nicht, wenn ich mich dazu äußere, einseitig erscheint. Ich halte mich eigentlich nicht für fremdenfeindlich, mein Mann, den ich mal geheiratet habe, war [Nationalität R]. Mein jetziger Lebenspartner ist [Nationalität T]. Die Freunde von meinem Sohn sind international [...].
- 33 Also ich halte mich wirklich nicht für fremdenfeindlich, aber wenn man das Buch [Neukölln ist überall] gelesen hat und ich habe jetzt auch noch zwei andere Bücher von dem Udo Ulfkotte, der sich mit dem Problem beschäftigt und der sich also im Orient und mit der Lebensweise sehr gut auskennt, weil er auch lange da gelebt hat, dann wird mir wirklich Angst und Bange, was uns hier mal blühen könnte. Mir nicht mehr, aber meinen Kindern und Enkelkindern, wenn man die Taktik kennt, mit denen radikale Muslime versuchen, die Welt zu übernehmen. Und dann merke ich einfach an mir eine Tendenz, die ich früher nie gehabt habe. Das geht jetzt aber wirklich nur um radikale Leute.
- 34 For a synopsis of different reviews of the book “Neukölln is everywhere,” see <http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/heinz-buschkowsky/neukoelln-ist-ueberall.html>

- (last retrieved: 2021-05-19). For a discussion of Ulfkotte's work, see Jaschke et al. (2004).
- 35 Packen Sie mich nicht in die rechtsradikale Ecke. Ich glaube, da gehöre ich nicht hin und da will ich auch nicht hin. Aber ich möchte nicht, dass wir uns viele Dinge gefallen lassen müssen, die einfach auch nicht rechtens sind. So.
- 36 Ja ... ich hab's wieder immer mit Fairness. Also dass man versucht, Menschen mit Fairness zu begegnen. Auch wenn einem das eine oder andere nicht passt, aber sich drum zu bemühen, fair mit ihnen umzugehen. Auch wenn sie irgendwo einem gerade mal bitter aufstoßen, ne. Also ich denke, Fairness ist eigentlich ein wichtiges Wort in meinem Leben. Wobei Toleranz, da befinde ich mich so gerade da etwas auf Abwegen. (lächelt) Ich weiß nicht, ob das noch angesprochen wird, aber da bin ich auch ganz ehrlich zu mir selbst. Ich glaube, ich habe viel Toleranz, mein Sohn hat mir das mal gesagt: „Mama, bis dir der Draht aus der Mütze geht, das dauert ganz schön lange.“ Glaube ich auch, dass ich ganz viel Geduld haben kann, aber es gibt Situationen, das hat nix mit Familie, Freundeskreis, nix zu tun, das hat mehr so mit dem politischen Spektrum zu tun ... Punkt.
- 37 Ich glaube, und da ist meine Toleranz mittlerweile sehr begrenzt, dass wir dieses sogenannte Flüchtlingsproblem nicht bewältigen können mit unseren Möglichkeiten, die wir im Moment haben. Ich glaube, ich kann das auch ein bisschen konkretisieren, vielleicht haben Sie in Ihrem Kopf jetzt gerade die Ecke, wo Sie die Prämisse so in die Nazi-Ecke reinpacken oder rechts außen und rechtspopulistisch und so weiter. [I: Nee, nee, ich höre erst mal nur zu.] Sie hören nur zu, ne? [I: Ja] Gut. Ich weiß aber, dass junge Leute anders denken. Ich muss mal eines auch noch vorausschicken. Mein Sohn und ich, wir klammern Politik total aus, [...]. Wir sind wirklich in unseren Ansichten absolut gegensätzlich. [...] Ich versuche, meinen Sohn auch zu verstehen, wobei er nicht versucht, mich zu verstehen, das unterstelle ich einfach mal. Ähm, ich hatte immer ein sehr offenes Haus bei mir Zuhause. Und mein Sohn hatte einen großen Kellerraum für sich und sehr viele Freunde unterschiedlichster Nationalitäten.
- 38 Aber eine Flutung unseres Landes, was man auch ja überall sieht, im Stadtbild, die Ursachen und wie die hierherkommen und warum sie hierherkommen und so weiter, das alles mal außen vor. Ich denke nur, unsere Gesellschaft verändert sich derart und nicht nur zum Guten. [...] Meine Freundin, so alt wie ich, von drei schwarzen jungen Männern ... die kamen auf sie zu, hatten die Griffel schon an ihr und haben zu ihr gesagt: „Ah, weiße Frau, nicht beschnitten, gute Matratze.“ Und hatten wirklich die Pfoten schon an ihr. Das sind so Erfahrungen. [...] Das ist Basisdenken. Ich habe es ja hier noch gut und trotzdem nehme ich ja die Dinge wahr, ich weiß was, kriege mit, was passiert, kriege mit, wie es meinem kleinen Enkel in der Schule geht, von welchen Leuten er angemacht wird, welche ihn unter Druck setzen, welche ihn erpressen, welche ihm das Handy geklaut haben und so weiter und so weiter. Mein Sohn, der mir ja so undercover, sage ich mal, den Vorwurf macht, dass ich eine rassistische Einstellung hätte, [...] der sieht die Zusammensetzung in der Klasse seines Sohnes mittlerweile sehr, sehr kritisch. [...] Ich bin einfach zu alt geworden, um blauäugig in eine solche Umformung unserer Gesellschaft noch mich

reinfallen zu lassen und sagen: „Oh, es ist alles wunderbar und Multikulti und global und so weiter.“ Nein.

- 39 Ich habe ja auch nichts gegen Türken oder so, ich habe einfach was gegen diesen Islamismus mit diesen verschleierte Frauen, wo die Männer die wirklich unter diese Zelte zwingen. Das ist was, wovon ich mich fürchte. Dann kriegen die Kinder [...] am laufenden Meter. Sie werden unser Land einnehmen, indem sie mehr Kinder kriegen. Das ist für mich ein Rechenexempel. Das können Sie nicht mehr verhindern. Und ich habe nichts dagegen, dass auch Türken oder auch verschleierte Frauen unter uns leben. Nur, wir werden irgendwann in der Minderheit sein. Denn einen großen Vorwurf mache ich unseren Regierungen, Und das habe ich schon erlebt, als ich kleine Kinder hatte: Man hat es Familien verdammt schwer gemacht, Kinder großzuziehen. Dass deutsche Familien sich keine Kinder mehr leisten können, das hat damit zu tun, dass diese Familien nicht genügend unterstützt werden. [...] Wenn man es Familien leichter machen könnte, die Betreuung, mehr Geld, dass sie sich das auch leisten können, auch alleinerziehende Frauen, dass sie nicht in diese Armut fallen, [...] dann würden Deutsche auch mehr Kinder kriegen. Dann würde man vielleicht ein Gleichgewicht schaffen. Aber so schaffen wir ein Ungleichgewicht, absolut zugunsten der Muselmanen, die Kind, nach Kind, nach Kind kriegen. Es ist einfach zu rechnen. 2050, wenn Sie noch leben, dann gucken Sie sich mal um. Ich wüsste nicht, womit man das noch stoppen kann. Jetzt habe ich Sie schockiert, ne?
- 40 Ich denke, da muss jeder die Ansicht des anderen einfach tolerieren. Das muss man hinnehmen. Es gibt einfach Dinge, da kann ich andere Leute nicht von meiner Ansicht überzeugen. [...] Muss mich mit meinem Sohn ja auch arrangieren. [...] Aber das ist der einzige Mensch in meinem ganzen Umfeld, Freundes-, Verwandtenkreis, [...], glauben Sie mir vielleicht nicht, die denken so wie ich. Mein Sohn ist der einzige, der auf der anderen Seite ist. [...] Was meinen Sie, wie oft ich im Internet lese, wer wieder abgestochen wurde, erschossen wurde. Es sind wirklich Ausländer, Serben, Kroaten, Afghanen, Syrer, wo gerade mal wieder die Frauen abgeschlachtet wurden ... Jetzt sagen Sie mir nicht, das sind Einzelfälle! Es gibt eine Seite im Internet da, einzelfaelle.de, da gucken Sie mal, wie viel Einzelfälle es in diesem Land gibt. Und wer diese Täter sind. [...] Ich will auch nicht immer sagen müssen: „Ja, Deutsche tun das auch.“ Ja, weiß ich. [...] Es ist ja auch nur dieses eine Spektrum, dieses kultur-fremde, die nicht kompatibel sind mit unserer Kultur und die sich vermehren, äh, und uns, ich bezeichne mich auch nochmal als Christin, als Ungläubige bezeichnen, die eliminiert werden müssen. Das kann man doch nicht tolerieren. So. Punkt.

9. Gudrun and Werner—Changing Affiliations, Persisting Beliefs

Gudrun and Werner are a couple from Germany who have been interviewed three times in the course of 15 years. After the 2nd World War, they lived as children in the newly founded German Democratic Republic (GDR) and fled to West Germany with their families in the 1950s. Both got acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) as children in the GDR because their mothers got involved with the group. Werner and Gudrun met at a Witness congregation in West Germany as young adults, and while he states that he was never "150% convinced" of the Witnesses' doctrine, she claims to have been a very staunch member. After years of marriage and a late and unexpected child, doubts toward the Witnesses' doctrine accumulated, especially articulated by Werner, and finally led to them both deconverting from that denomination in 1977, after having discussed controversially the Witnesses' prediction of Armageddon for 1975. Later, they started attending services of a Charismatic church, which is a group they were in the process of leaving at the time of the first interview. By time 3, Werner and Gudrun have entered the life phase of advanced old age and are currently dealing with the drawbacks that go along with that.

Werner and Gudrun look back at a long time period of a joint life and jointly lived faith, which went along with affiliations to different religious groups.¹ However, each of them takes a fundamentally different approach to this important part of their lives, which naturally coincides with conflicts. The chapter will first portray Gudrun and her perspective followed by Werner. After this, both will be compared allowing the identification of meaningful differences and defining commonalities.

9.1 Gudrun—God as a Pillar of Strength

“I just have a deep relationship with Jesus and especially, this has just developed over the last years, I discovered the father. And I can say ‘Abba,’ ‘Father’ and experience fatherly love. That makes me very happy.”²

When Gudrun³ was first interviewed in 2003, she was 68 years old. She was raised as a Jehovah’s Witness and met her future husband in the context of that community. After that deconversion, they started attending services of a charismatic church for a while. Gudrun cherished the personal encounters that went along with that new engagement, while her husband soon started questioning those teachings and rituals. Gudrun followed her husband when he turned away from that group, even though she still misses the interactions with other people. At the time of the second interview, Gudrun is 78 years old, and she and her husband are involved in a kind of self-study of the Bible. Gudrun also maintains a close relationship to a women’s Bible study group without, and even despite, her husband. Five years later, at the age of 83, Gudrun was interviewed for a third time. She still maintains contact with that group, even though the drawbacks that go along with old age start taking up more and more space. Not unexpectedly, in her second and third interview, she reports health problems that weren’t relevant at age 68. Her role as a grandmother comes into focus and therefore generativity is a factor in her thinking as well, which was not prominent in her first interview with her daughter being grown-up but not yet a mother herself.

9.1.1 Gudrun’s Life Reviews—Different Emphases

In her first interview in 2003, Gudrun spends some time on accounting her life with and without the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which may partly be explained by the fact that the study her interview was part of had a focus on deconversion stories. As can be illustrated with the following quote from her narrative interview, it seems as if she did not play an active role in that process:

And we were, since ’75, in a controversial discussion with each other. [...] And I think that was part of the reason why we managed this exit so effortlessly. [...] Because I was the convinced one and felt my husband drifting away more and more. But, yes, what can I say? I have tried to keep him. And I worked with counter arguments. My husband then ordered all kinds of literature. And I sensed, when I held the first book in my hands, that it is over now. And then I read it all myself, and funnily, in that instance, it fell like scales from my eyes. [...] I was still like, “Yes, but this is the truth.” But then it was really like, “It is over now.”⁴ (Gudrun, Narrative Interview, time 1)

According to the Witnesses’ doctrine, human history was supposed to end in 1975, making place for Christ’s millennial reign. With that date in mind, a lot of Jehovah’s Witnesses would not want to make any plans for after that, and some would, as Gudrun tells it,

even refuse to redecorate their homes, let alone decide to have children. Using the biblical metaphor “like scales from my eyes,” Gudrun describes a moment of enlightenment that she has thanks to the careful preparations by her husband. Her efforts to keep him in the group are described as futile and, eventually, she is convinced and leaves the religious group with him with her exclamation “It is over now” sounding resigned and like she was over-powered in that process. However, at the beginning of the quote, she acknowledges that the process of discussions with her husband made their exit easier in hindsight.

It is noteworthy that she only talks about her deconversion experience when she is directly asked for it by the interviewer at time 2. The way she portrays her husband’s role in the process is very similar, but there is a new element that was not mentioned at time 1:

And then there was this time of upheaval with the Witnesses and this end-of-time scenario in '75, [...] when we started contemplating a lot, especially my husband, I worked strongly against all this back then. For me, it was plainly the truth, the Witnesses. That was the right thing. [...] Oh yes, and then there were these colleagues, who were active in their parish, pious people, I would say. And they made me realize that they are perfectly normal people, nice people. And then I became pregnant at age 42, [...]. And this was the starting signal for our exit from the Witnesses. The pregnancy played a big role in this process. [...] My husband has always been the leading one and he was always the first to notice when there was a fly on the ointment (laughs). With the Witnesses, he was the one who got us out, I must admit that.⁵ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

Here, she talks about her colleagues she got along with so well, even though they were not Witnesses. This suggests an autonomous moment within her deconversion process, a revelation she made on her own, and a certain openness and tolerance toward people who may not share her exact faith (even though it seems that her horizon is mostly limited to the realm of faithful people). The pregnancy as an important factor is mentioned here for the first time. What lies beneath this might be the topos of a certain conventionality, since a pregnancy is bound to go along with changes on multiple levels and might therefore help to explain their radical step. Again, Gudrun admits that their exit was mainly her husband’s achievement with her working against it, albeit without convincing arguments. Her position in these discussions is reduced to her being convinced that the Witnesses’ doctrine was “the right thing,” which unsurprisingly is not a satisfying argument for her husband as will be seen in Werner’s case study.

Let’s see how she talks about her time with the Jehovah’s Witnesses at time 3:

In the meantime, we deconverted from the Witnesses, I just forgot to mention that, that comes in between. That was in the 70s. I was over 40 and suddenly became pregnant. And somehow this was one of the triggers that made us say—. Well, it was especially my husband who always had problems with the Witnesses. From the beginning, he would say: “If I marry this one, I will also be married to the Witnesses.” So he indirectly always blamed me for everything more or less, that’s how I feel it. I always say: “But you married me, not the time with the Witnesses.” (laughing) But that’s how it was. Well, he was always bemoaning this because he

sensed he surrendered himself to a cause, which he didn't want to do. But I have to add, I'm basically a person who is easy to influence. When I hear something that seems interesting, I'm like, "yeah, okay," when (smiling) I hear something else, then it's like—. But, like I said, the enthusiasm later after the deconversion from the Witnesses and then this Charismatic scene here, this had a great influence.⁶ (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

At this timepoint, the deconversion from the Jehovah's Witnesses has become an anecdote among other, more important life events. It is interesting to see how the emphasis of this narration has changed again. The pregnancy as a trigger is mentioned as well, but what gets more attention is the strained relationship with her husband. She returns to the beginning of that relationship to illustrate how being a member of the Witnesses has overshadowed all those years of marriage. It seems like a theme that has weaved its thread through their whole marriage with her husband constantly referring to that initial "mistake" of marrying her despite her membership in that group. (The complicated relationship with her husband will be discussed in more detail in the following section.) Again, one does not learn much about why she stayed within that group, and her belief system remains unspecified. What one does hear is that she is a person who is ready to believe and even describes herself as credulous, giving a biographical background information which serves as an autobiographical argument. This might serve as an explanation for her general readiness to adapt to new groups and adopt their beliefs and even attempts at taking away some of the blame by naming this personality trait as something that is constant throughout her biography and therefore not changed easily. Also, this quote illustrates a way Gudrun looks at herself that has developed over the years. She is more conscious of her own personality and seems to embrace what her husband might describe as a weakness by making it her own. This adds a momentum of autonomy to Gudrun's self-presentation that was not present at time 1 and started coming to the surface at time 2. By being able to follow Gudrun reconstructing her own biography at three different points in time, one is able to see how this subjective recollection of her past changes over time as well. Gudrun is a brilliant example for a person who is the master of her own history, even though some of the new insights occur at a rather late point in her life time.

Looking at the times and circumstances Gudrun was raised in, this is not necessarily natural. The women of her age cohort were not usually taught to be autonomous, and the role of women in society in the 1950's and 1960's was still relatively conservative and traditional in Germany. However, Gudrun completed a vocational training and claims to have always earned money from her professional labor. In her second interview, she talks about this part of her life. When asked for important events, she discusses her job because it provided the opportunity to meet different important persons, which she relished. What is remarkable about this is that the parts of the interview where she talks about her professional activity always go along with some statement concerning her autonomy:

And then I had this job, started as a small lab assistant because they needed one and I thought, "This is a chance" and then took over that position and was appointed

for [job A] by the company [X]. [...] And that time was very formative for me because I had a group of colleagues and experienced an (sighs), ah, unbelievable freedom, especially thanks to the colleagues and the work that I had there. [...] I grew into that. I was an autodidact because I didn't know much of the things, [...] and had to work my way through many projects. [...] And especially some very difficult things, I got myself into it and then it worked.⁷ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

Working as a woman at that time was not the norm in West Germany, especially when children were involved. The majority of the women maintained the household or worked part-time at the most, thereby being dependent on their husbands' income and support.⁸ Accordingly, she is proud of what she built for herself. She managed to climb the career ladder out of her own efforts. Labeling herself as a (very successful) autodidact is a direct and very positive self-characterization which emphasizes how proud she is, in hindsight, of what she has achieved in her career. Moreover, she gives credit to her colleagues for providing her with the supportive surroundings to experience a feeling of freedom outside of her religious community and her marriage. This part of her life is something that she did not discuss in her first interview and certainly not with this sort of evaluation. It could be hypothesized that this re-modeling of her life narrative, and a re-definition of her life as a whole might be a late attempt at re-writing her own history with the implicit question being, "How do I want to be remembered?" This could be explained with thoughts of generativity by thinking of her own daughter and her children, since not only the decline of one's own body becomes more prominent in old age, but also, as Erikson (see Erikson & Erikson, 1998) puts it in her explanations on the concept of "gerotranscendence," the possibility to expand one's sense of self "to include a wider range of interrelated others" (p. 124). This interpretation is supported by what she tells about that part of her life in her third interview:

And so I got the chance to work as a photographer with company [X] [...]. I have to repeat this, that was the best time of my life in this company. Great colleagues, great team spirit, interesting tasks. As a photographer, I was responsible for anything you can think of. I had to take pictures of products, in the lab, in research, technology, but also anniversaries and the company's newspaper. So, like, a broad variety. And that was really varied and great.⁹ (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

This recollection is more condensed than in the second interview and puts a focus on her own achievements. She seems very proud of the variety of tasks she was responsible for and which she accomplished all by herself. At this timepoint, not only was the time at the company "formative," but even "the best time of my life." This might be an exaggeration, painting the past in more happy colors with growing temporal distance, but it is still interesting to see how this very secular workplace obviously overshadows, in a positive way, all her other experiences in a positive way.

Overall it seems that Gudrun is aware of the fact that she has reached the last season of her life and sees all the drawbacks that go along with that. She speaks of becoming deaf and about the fear that some kind of dementia is looming on the horizon. Perhaps she sees her chance at leaving a legacy for her descendants that is more her own, making

her life review more autonomous and less focused on the joint life with her husband and more on her own autonomous achievements.

As has been suggested above, the relationship with her husband seems to be of importance, also regarding her affiliation with religious communities. The next section will therefore take a closer look at that relationship.

9.1.2 Gudrun's Relationship with Werner—Growing Independent with Age

The difficult marriage with her husband is mentioned in Gudrun's interviews with varying and intensifying explicitness. She is vague about her marriage at time 1, even though she does admit to having lived through some difficult times:

Times of crisis, of course, there were some, in our marriage. [...] I cried a lot during my marriage. [I: What happened to you at these times?] I can say I always found my way back, found comfort, even when push came to shove. You get more sensitive and petty with age. I can go to God with all of this and hold it out to him and I feel all comforted and carried and I know there is a way. [...] [I: How have these experiences affected you?] On the one hand, I am bound to God, more than ever. On the other hand, more importantly, I learned to forgive the one who hurt me and that was a feeling of great liberation.¹⁰ (Gudrun, FDI, time 1)

Her marriage is described as crisis-ridden, and she mentions being hurt and crying often. But what takes more room is the way she copes with this situation and the difficult husband. To that end, she has a stable relationship to God, even though this relationship is described as being "bound," implying that there is a certain dependency, presumably due to the lack of other reliable relations, and she knows she can rely on Him to be comforted. On the foundation of this security, she has developed a way to forgive her husband when he does not treat her well. This is a rather vague description, and by speculating about a potentially higher level of sensitivity going along with older age, she takes part of the blame for the situation. We do not learn anything about any attempts to confront her husband, to understand him, or to change him or the situation. This topic gets more attention at time 2:

There were times of crisis during the marriage. (long pause) When I really thought I have to run away. (laughs) But the good thing between the two of us is that we could always reconcile with each other and nowadays it's like ... I have to be honest with you, my husband sometimes is ... He had an awful childhood and a really bad time during adolescence; he cannot love. He cannot show me with one gesture that he likes me. He just can't. He can't. He puts it like that himself, he can't. And so it's like, he often insults and hurts me. Because he has such a rough attitude. (laughs while speaking) I don't know if I'm allowed to say that here, but that's the way it is. And the thing is, I pray for being able to see him as Jesus sees him. Because Jesus loves him. And he loves Jesus. I know that. And so, the love for him is given to me. And I can better deal with his manners. I'm astonished myself sometimes: in the past, I would sulk for days when there was a bad phase like that. And I was offended and did not talk to him anymore. That's not the case

anymore. I can now immediately, let's say, swallow it, but I know that does not come from myself; that is something that's given to me. And that's an answer to my prayers: "Grant me the love that I need for him right now." (claps her hands) Because, actually, he is a poor guy, when you know where this all comes from, in what kind of iron armor he's trapped and can't get out of, ... (long pause) ... he is just a human, a human of intellect, and I owe him a lot. I know I would not have made such a development without him.¹¹ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

Again, she admits to having lived through hard times during her marriage and even mentions thoughts of leaving. The fact that she is laughing when she is talking about the hardships of her marriage and the parenthesis of "I don't know if I'm allowed to say that here" suggests that she does not feel comfortable talking about that to a stranger, which implies that this is a very private and sensitive topic; however, she decides to open up about that anyway, which might be seen as a way of coping with the situation. Gudrun also talks about reconciliation, which implies that there may be efforts made from Werner's side as well. What takes up more room than in her first interview is her attempt to understand her husband's unloving nature and find reasons for his inability to show affection. Naming his abusive childhood as the reason behind his behavior serves as an autobiographical argument (by proxy) and implies important biographical background information; moreover, what she hints at is a vicarious life story (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018), which serves the purpose to reinforce her patience and compassion and leads her to trying to justify her husband's behavior and defend him and herself against a possibly critical interviewer, who might have questioned her decision to stay with him. Emphasizing that "he puts it like that himself, he can't" suggests that the conflict is tackled by the couple on a regular basis, which is new information (or simply was not the case at time 1). Her way of coping with this ongoing difficult situation is described in more detail and is justified within both her own and her husband's shared belief in Jesus. Praying helps her to forgive him, and she feels endowed by God with the ability to love. Thereby, the role her faith has in her daily life becomes apparent. It is not only consolation, but a practical means of coping with contingency (Kaufmann, 1989). Interestingly, this point is made stronger by her explanation of a self-perceived development in which she was not always able to take this forgiving stance, but over the years, she seems to have grown within her faith and her marriage. To wrap up the paragraph that deals with crisis during her marriage, she pleads for sympathy for her husband and stresses his good sides by pointing out the benefits his intellectual approach to things has had on her and her personal development.

At time 3, when asked for crises, she speaks about her marriage again:

Yes, times of crisis, during the marriage. My husband always got his way against my will and did things I could not comprehend. [...] But I had to understand that—and I must say, I only got to really understand that recently, even though I always knew it: He had a very bad childhood. He really suffered under his father, from these circumstances with divorce and everything. And that harmed him to the bone. And that still haunts him today. And I had to understand that he had this lovelessness within him and ... he cannot show love. [...] But the other side is that I have now internalized this. I used to bemoan this, since, as a woman, you want to get affection, [...]. But I know anyway that he stands by me and he appreciates and likes me.

And I understood that he needs a lot of love. And I have to gather the strength to love him as he is. (laughs) Yes, and I have to tell you that, I have always been a stubborn person. I stood up against that, I fought with him, had battles and discussions without end. But I know that it's no good. And I now feel like this is a great gift, even though really bad confrontations lie behind us. [...] And I can now reach out to him and hug him. And I notice that this is good for him. (laughs) Yes, that's a great gift for me to be able to do that. I wasn't always able to, though. Back in the days, I used to stop talking to him for three days when something bad had happened. But now I can say it: Forget it! But of course, that takes a lot of energy again and again.¹² (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

At first, she points out again how much influence her husband has had on her and how imbalanced her relationship has been over the years. The realization that Werner's childhood is the reason behind his behavior is characterized as a mandatory development ("I had to understand that [...] I only got to understand that recently"). The insight into the degree of harm these childhood experiences have done to her husband seems more profound than at time 2. On the other hand, she grants herself more room and admits that she would have hoped for more frequent gestures of affection, thereby referring to a generalized cultural concept of how one would wish to be treated "as a woman" to underline the naturalness of that wish. She also hints to a changed perception of that situation. While she used to bemoan this lack of kindness, she is now able to see that he appreciates her anyway. Most interesting here is the way she portrays herself. While at time 2, she described herself as "offended" and having "sulked for days," she now says she has always been a "stubborn person" who stands up to her husband. This grants herself a more active and less victimized role and paints a picture of a more autonomous, even rebellious woman, which fits well with her concluding sentence saying that this takes a lot of energy. Out of her own effort, she is now able to shape her marriage without diminishing the effort it took and still takes to do so. God or any other form of transcendence is not present in this account, which is a difference to those from time 1 and 2.

Consistently over the years, her husband is described as the leading person in their relationship and makes important life decisions for them both, especially when it comes to questions of religion, which can be exemplified with this quote from her first interview when Gudrun talks about the Charismatic group they were still attending at that time:

Oh yes. He has more problems with that [group]. He sees that more rationally perhaps. I can excuse some things. I see the human beings behind all of it and think that they don't mean harm. I mean, I say things sometimes and make mistakes too. Perhaps my husband is able to judge it all better. I don't know. But—. Well.¹³ (Gudrun, Narrative Interview, time 1)

This illustrates the difference between Gudrun and Werner, as Gudrun sees it: while Werner takes a more critical perspective and gets wary when he senses flaws in the teachings for example, Gudrun can accept those more easily because she sees the persons behind all this and can forgive mistakes. From her interviews, it can be concluded that she probably would not have left any of the religious communities out of her own accord because she always valued the community itself higher than their actual teach-

ings. This contrast becomes more accentuated over the years, as can be seen in this quote from Gudrun's time 2 interview:

My husband basically always is the leading one and is always the first to notice the fly on the ointment (laughs). With the Witnesses, he was the one who got us out, I have to admit that. The same goes for the Charismatic movement, where he again was the one who said, "Listen, something's not right here" and that's ... yes. I felt really comfortable there and for me that was a slump because he really worked against it to free me from these activities and ... for me that was—(quietly) it is still a very hard time. I cried a lot. Because I always thought I'd lose my faith and have nothing left. Because I always thought, "That's it! That's the only way to cultivate or practice your faith ... within that community."¹⁴ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

Here, the contrast is interesting between the way their exit from the Witnesses is described ("he got us out") and the way she talks about having to leave behind the Charismatic group, in which she felt comfortable and which was important for her way of practicing her faith since this always was connected with a community in Gudrun's estimation. In this quote, the hard times she mentions are not directly attributed to her husband's rigid regime but more closely connected with the fear of losing her faith. Even though the following analysis will show that Gudrun's faith has stayed constant in its core independent from any formal or informal group membership, the fear she voices underlines that she would probably have been able to ignore or accept some intellectual controversies for the sake of a stable and harmonious community. By time 3, it seems Gudrun has found a way to meet this need for community, not without a certain degree of satisfaction:

He has always shaped me. And what my husband said was to be done. There was no room for objection. And so I often surrendered for the sake of peace and quiet and did what he told me to. And like I said, a lot of that was right and good, but at the moment I'm fighting, I have to say that, to get out of this tight attachment. He has the greatest problems with the fact that I meet other women, because he doesn't know what is happening there. And he (smiles) just doesn't understand that all we do is chat.¹⁵ (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

While she still emphasizes the role Werner has played in shaping her opinions and decisions, thereby also conceding that some of it was in fact for her benefit, at this late stage in her life, she is currently fighting to free herself from this constellation by showing a degree of autonomy and emancipation that also became visible in the other quote from her time 3 interview above. In her last sentence, it seems that she relishes the fact that she has a community that her husband is not (and, given the nature of the group, could never be) part of and that he does not understand by having created a space just for herself and her needs.

9.1.3 Gudrun's Subjective Religiosity and her Image of God

Gudrun's Subjective Religiosity

It is undebatable that Gudrun is a faithful woman, yet her self-identification changes slightly. At wave 1, she states in the survey that she is “more religious than spiritual,” and at wave 2, she chooses to identify as “equally religious and spiritual.” At wave 3, she chooses “more religious than spiritual” again. Unfortunately, she only gave her definitions for “spirituality” and “religion” at wave 2 (at wave 1, the “free entries” were not yet part of the survey). Together with her answer to question 20 in the FDI (“Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?”), it is possible to get a multi-faceted impression of the way she views her own religiosity over the years.

Wave 1: In the interview, she firmly rejects the term “spiritual” to characterize herself. While she considers being religious too closely connected with fanaticism, calling herself faithful seems too weak. Yet, that is the term she opts for in the end, filling it with the core principles of Christian faith and calling herself a “convinced Christian.” This makes her self-assessment in the survey as “more religious than spiritual” questionable, indicating it was probably chosen due to a lack of alternatives.

Wave 2: Her affirmation for the term “religious” is very emphatic. She finds all of the terms offered fitting to describe her. She goes one step further and says she would not even mind being called “pious,” which she obviously considers to be stronger than “religious” and marked with a negative connotation. More important for her is the fact that she feels connected to Christianity. Her answers align smoothly with her survey data, since she self-identified as “equally religious and spiritual” and, in her free entries, defines spirituality and religion as different aspects of the same phenomenon with the former being the more personal practice and the latter the superstructure.

Wave 3: In this quote, Gudrun explicates what being religious means for her: believing and trusting in God and in Jesus. This has not been directly named in her previous statements and sheds light on her image of God, which is that of a leading and benevolent God whom she can rely on. “Spiritual” is not taken up in this answer, and consequently, her self-assessment in the survey identifies her as “more religious than spiritual.”

Table 27: Data on Gudrun's Religiosity

	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
Gudrun			
free entries	spirituality: not asked	spirituality: mental connection with God, by praying ¹⁶	spirituality: not answered
self-assessment	religion: not asked	religion: unification of people who think about God and the world ¹⁷	religion: not answered
answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	more religious than spiritual	equally religious and spiritual	more religious than spiritual
	[I: Do you consider yourself religious, faithful, or spiritual?] (Laughs) Definitely not the last one. Erm, I'd rather not choose religious because religious people—that's something fanatic. [...] Well, that's what I link that to. [I: Would faithful be the correct term then?] Faithful almost sounds too weak for me (laughs). [I: Okay. How would you characterize yourself then?] Convinced Christian. (Laughs) Faithful, I believe in God. I believe in the resurrection. ¹⁸	[I: Do you consider yourself religious...] Yes! [Or either spiritual or faithful?] Everything. A bit of everything. [...] So, I am faithful, I am spiritual [and religious.] [I: And what does that mean for you?] [...] I like being in this role. And if someone points the finger and says "See, here comes the pious woman," then I don't care about that as well. [...] But yes, in general, religious fits better. [I: That means you feel connected to Christianity.] Yes. ¹⁹	Religious, yes. Well, yes, that's very pronounced. So, the last question was—faithful? Faithful belongs to that as well, right? [I: Exactly, faithful, and also spiritual was in the question, yes.] I believe and... and this faith, that there is one God and that Jesus will face us as a person, as savior, as brother, and whatever, shepherd. This makes me religious, believing in Him. (smiles) Yes. [I: What does that mean for you?] This carries me, yes, that's good. ²⁰

Overall, the statement from her second interview sounds more self-confident than that from her first. Interesting to note is that in her first interview, she rejects being “spiritual.” For Gudrun with her rather conservative religious background, this seems to be a term she cannot identify with since for her, it is presumably associated with new age or esotericism. Over the years, it seems that Gudrun has detached herself a bit from labels of any sort. While at time 1 and 2, she is preoccupied with putting some distance between her and other people (e.g. those who are “religious” at time 1 or those that would point the finger and call her “pious” at time 2), she seems to be more focused on herself and the content of her personal belief. Her definitions of spirituality and religion at time 2 seem technical, yet mirror what she talks about in the interview. At this time, her self-assessment, which was different than before and after, generally displays her affiliation with religiosity but does not satisfyingly express how she sees herself. For Gudrun, this means that her religiosity is less determined by her affiliations and more by her personal and strongly felt belief in God and Jesus. As has become apparent in the *Relationship* paragraph above, Gudrun used to cherish and now misses a form of community praxis which would probably be part of her religious life if it was not for her husband.

Gudrun’s Image of God

That being said, it is interesting to see if and how Gudrun’s image of God has changed over time. As has been indicated above, she sees God (and Jesus) as someone she can rely on, but the emphasis changes over time:

I seem to have a basic trust, it came to me naturally. [...] So, I have a religious background. [...] Basically I can say, there was always... Even with the Witnesses I always had times, I have to admit that, times of need or problems or times of crises. In which I got no answer from God. I prayed and everything just stayed the same. [...] But this basic trust, it just remained. [I: What does God mean to you today?] That He is the Creator and my Father. I can say, “Abba,” “Father.”²¹ (Gudrun, FDI, time 1)

I just have a deep relationship with Jesus and especially—and this is a development of the last few years—that I discovered the Father. And that I can say “Abba,” “Father” and experience fatherly love. That makes me very happy. [...] [I: And it hasn’t always been like that?] No. It was even, when I was in camps or workshops—, [...] and I remember struggling with one of the group leaders, “I want to experience this closeness as the others experience it and I don’t hear anything and [...] I never, never had this experience.” And I always said, “This has to be given to me. I have to experience this as well. [...]” And there never was anything. And when I had parted ways with this whole topic, I suddenly sensed Jesus’ proximity. And now there’s this development toward the Father, let’s say, for the last two to three years. [...] I just feel sheltered and have this deep certainty that I am guided and that He stands by me and especially I often experience that he hears my prayers. Especially when I’m in a difficult situation.²² (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

So, my worldview itself has... I mean, for example I always believed (smiles) in the evolution theories and, I mean, not in the six days, but [...]. And this realization about the evolution and so on, that knocked me off my feet, so to say. Insofar my worldview has changed. [...] I mean, in the beginning I had problems sometimes,

but now, for me that's crystal clear just what it's like. And my image of God is not affected at all by all of this, because that has always been my support; I knew I was in Jesus' hands and that I knew I was sheltered and held. [...] When I left the Witnesses for example there was this moment of liberation, gosh!, that's the man! And he will hold you. And it has been like this in all phases basically. And now, reading Eugen Biser, who says in the end: what the Church needs to recognize is that it has to abandon this punishing God and has to recognize that He is a God of infinite love. [...] And that's totally convincing for me.²³ (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

In her first interview, Gudrun reveals a biographical background information that serves as a strong autobiographical argument throughout her entire interview. She has a religious socialization which is responsible for the basic trust she has carried all of her life, even in times of adversity when she did not get any response to her prayers. The prevailing belief in God as her Creator obviously still helped her through these hard times.

In her second interview, Jesus is more in the focus while God is again directly named as Father. Gudrun describes a development that she supposedly went through regarding her own image of God. It is interesting to see here that her development toward seeing God as a fatherly figure is connected with her leaving certain contexts (which she does not name directly, but since she narrows it down to the last two or three years it seems plausible to assume that the Charismatic parish was “the whole topic” she parted with). She describes how she longed to have that experience like “the others” and was never granted her wish. Possibly this describes a sort of alienation with the group because she feels like an outsider. Interestingly, when she describes what God does for her, it is not that different from what she talked about at time 1. Nevertheless, in reconstructing this important part of her life, for Gudrun it feels like there has been a substantial change which has happened rather recently.

Her statement at time 3 takes a very interesting new direction. She goes well beyond her statements from time 1 and time 2 by framing her belief in a more general statement regarding a more scientific worldview. She describes a development in her own mindset, admitting to having had problems with integrating knowledge about the evolution theory at first. That being said, her main point is that this knowledge has not changed her image of God as a benevolent and supporting God. She ends her statement citing a person that has become an authority for her and her husband in recent years: Eugen Biser, a German Catholic fundamental theologian and philosopher, whose writings they have been studying intensely. She strongly affirms his appeal to the Church to embrace the image of the loving God, something she has done all of her life.

Summed up, we see that Gudrun's faith, especially her beliefs in God and Jesus, have stayed constant over time. While one may argue that it is not possible to know about her actual image of God during her time with the Jehovah's Witnesses and one has to rely on her retrospective, there is still a consistent description over 15 years, which involved search trajectories and deconversions (turning to and away from the charismatic parish and now, more recently, the turn toward the more scientific study of the Bible), which, however, did not shake the core of her belief system.

Apart from her personal image of God, being part of a community seems deeply important to Gudrun. The following quote serves to illustrate this. She talks about the time after the Jehovah's Witnesses, just before they joined the Charismatic group:

So, yes, we lived as good church Christians. But I always had the feeling somehow that I lacked something. It should go further. And moving here was, as I like to put it, an act of providence. [...] And we came here into this parish and had this house fellowship with whom we met regularly. And there were a lot of heated discussions that were very open. [...] And then the parish offered faith courses. And I went there and my husband attended the second as well. And that was like the revitalization of our faith. And that was my very great (laughs) peak phase. [...] We met great people again, [...] I think that was important for us to make this experience where, let me put it that way, you have a (laughs) different dimension in opposition to dutifully going to church on Sundays, instead that was—and for me today still basically is—a lively service. Where it's not only rigid and strict, but where you are free to stand up or sit down while singing. Where there's just freedom. You can move depending on how you feel.²⁴ (Gudrun, Narrative Interview, time 1)

She mentions a “lack of something,” which, in other words, could be described as a “loss of religious experience.” This phenomenon was found to be one of the possible reasons driving people to deconvert from their religious community (Streib et al., 2009). In this case, it is the motivational factor to join a new group after they lived as “normal” Christians for a while. It becomes clear here that two things are important for Gudrun: a community or people she can talk to and have a good time with and experiencing her faith by literally celebrating church services. For her, the experience dimension of faith plays a big role.

Gudrun's Morality

Gudrun can be clearly counted as a faithful Christian, and her answers concerning morality mirror the Christian framework she has lived in all of her life. Still, subtle changes can be observed that suggest an opening toward other lines of thought, despite her older age. For illustration, here are her answers to the question, “Are there certain moral opinions that you think everybody should agree on?”:

Yes, I could say yes. And those are, let's say, the principles of the Bible. That is, Commandments, I would say, we should respect them. There are certain things that have always turned out to be harmful for humankind, [...] that never turned out to be positive. Even though nowadays, the liberties—I'd say, especially those in the sexual area—are perceived as great and as liberation, be it so. But in the end, it doesn't turn out to be positive for humankind. [I: Do you mean the Ten Commandments for example?] I mean, roughly, the Ten Commandments cumulated. You shall love God above all else and you shall love your neighbor like yourself. And if I love my neighbor, I don't do him any harm. I don't kill him, I don't rob him, and so on. This is all contained in that. And Jesus summed it up with those two Commandments.²⁵ (Gudrun, FDI, time 1)

She refers to the Ten Commandments and, more precisely, to the double commandment of love as it is advocated by Jesus. He is cited as an authority, and she finds this approach undebatable. Even though she is vague about the liberties that only cause harm, it can be deduced that she looks critically at the developments in the areas of sexual liberation, etc. She is oriented toward immutable authorities and shows little appreciation for lived realities that differ too much from her own, especially in terms of sexual self-determination. When she talks about conflicts at time 1, her main solution is to find a way on the basis of the Bible's sayings or by praying, thereby granting priority to religious benchmarks instead of others. This has changed somewhat in her second interview, in her answer to the same question:

I think we have the Bible and we have the Ten Commandments. But I think there are also new things that you deal with a lot these days, that you reconsider a lot of points and understand things differently and certain things—, well, in the past, homosexuality for me was a topic that I totally rejected. I see that differently today. This is also a development and you understand that differently nowadays. [...] Those are things that you reconsider. And so, there are principles that make you think: “Okay, perhaps you have to accept that as it has developed now” and you understand that differently. Or better. [...] Well, well. So, what I think is, we don't stand still. It is a constant process where something new is explored, for example the new biblical studies of the last 30 years, how this has developed so much and new insights about Commandments and laws and such.²⁶ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

The Bible and the Ten Commandments are still named as crucial moral instances. But in this answer, her horizon has widened to include the thought that there are new developments that should be considered as well, her struggling for words indicating that this is a territory she is not that firm on. Interestingly, this time the topic of sexual freedom is brought up again more directly. She now looks at homosexuality, which she admits to have rejected in the past, from a more differentiated perspective. In the years between time 1 and time 2, it seems that Gudrun has learned to keep certain dialectics in tension, and she knows about different values, and that knowledge is fluent and subjected to change. These are insights that point to a gain in wisdom (see, for example, Staudinger & Glück, 2011), even though she still mainly operates within her Christian frame of reference.

At time 3, the topic of homosexuality is taken up again:

[I: Are there certain moral opinions that you think everybody should agree on?] I wish. But it's not possible. And I believe that there are so many different views. And especially, what keeps coming up, the topic of homosexuality or something like that. I mean, well, I used to have a lot of problems with that and it's difficult when you see, as a person who feels in a normal way, someone developing in the wrong direction. But I cannot judge that because in the meantime I've learned that there are so many contributing factors for a human to lean into this or that direction. And therefore I cannot say this or that is right or wrong. Period.²⁷ (Gudrun, FDI, time 3)

Her initial statement (“I wish.”) indicates a yearning for a clear structure or an authority that sets the moral standards that can and should be followed. But what follows is the recognition that there are too many different viewpoints and contributing factors to be taken into account, which makes it impossible to determine what is right and what is wrong. While at time 1, the codes for her answer were “orientation toward fixed authorities” and “priority of religious rules compared to other moral rules,” the latter is widely missing in her answer at time 2. Instead, the code “struggle with moral questions” was assigned, indicating her attempt at looking at other viewpoints as well. Her time 3 answer, even though still cautious, might be read as a statement or as a demand for tolerance. The development is apparent and striking. While still clearly staying within her Christian frame of reference, Gudrun seems more and more to be able to consider other viewpoints as well. Looking at her style-aspect maps, we see that all of these answers have been rated stage/style 3 (mutual religious style), which seems appropriate since Gudrun clearly refers to a norm from which others might deviate. Yet, the content analysis shows the development that is possible even while staying within one style.

9.1.4 Gudrun’s (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

All of Gudrun’s interviews have mostly been rated style 3, indicating a conventional mindset focusing on inter-personal relations and relying on the opinion of a limited group of people. The aspect that stands out the most is *perspective taking*, where Gudrun has shifted from style 2–3 (time 1) to style 3–4 (time 2) and then a fairly stable style 4 (individuaive-systemic) at time 3. What could be deduced from this finding? *Perspective taking*, as it is defined in the *Manual* (Streib & Keller, 2018), “defines the way in which the person constructs the self, the other, and the relationship between them” (p. 20). Gudrun seems to have moved from a simple and interpersonal form of perspective taking to a form where she is (at least partly) able to take a third-person perspective and to construct possibly different views. Another noteworthy observation of the structural analysis is the stability of her ratings, which are visible in the aspect of *locus of authority*, signifying that she tends to justify authorities on the basis of implicit and interpersonal values in concordance with her social group. A similar picture is presented when investigating how Gudrun discusses moral questions which for her means meeting interpersonal expectations and emotional needs instead of discussing them in a more abstract or societal perspective. When confronted with theoretical and abstract questions in the aspects *form of world coherence* and *symbolic function*, Gudrun takes a concrete and conventional stance, exhibiting more trust in established authorities and in-group opinions than on self-ratified or critically negotiated views. However, there are meaningful exceptions when we look at the ratings from a developmental perspective. When asked whether she would call herself religious, spiritual, or faithful (question 20), she was rated a style 3 at times 1 and 2, indicating a conventional approach to question of faith and an appropriation of symbols that is influenced by authorities (cf. Streib & Keller, 2018b, p. 53). At time 3, her answer was deemed too short by the rater, though he tended to call it a style 4, acknowledging her attempt at systematic thinking. As for the ratings regarding her answers to question 4, i.e. her image of God, a substantial development can be noted with her first answer being rated style 2 (instrumental-reciprocal), her second style 3, and her third answer

style 4. For her overall religious type, it can be stated that she is classified as a “mover upward,” going from type 1 (substantially ethnocentric, meaning that 5 or more answers of her interview were rated style 2) at time 1 to type 2 (predominantly conventional, indicating that the frequency of style 3 ratings is higher than of style 4 ratings) in the other two interviews.

A look into her survey results will focus on yet another side of her personality.

Table 28: Selected Data from Gudrun's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Gudrun	M (SD)	Gudrun	M (SD)	Gudrun	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	-	2.63 (1.17)	2.60	2.42 (1.12)	2.40	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	-	4.35 (0.38)	4.20	4.28 (0.51)	4.80	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	-	3.64 (0.75)	3.20	3.57 (0.76)	4.20	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	2.86	3.67 (0.59)	3.00	3.20 (0.40)	3.14	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	4.14	3.67 (0.71)	3.43	3.72 (0.59)	3.14	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	3.71	4.38 (0.38)	4.00	4.17 (0.39)	3.86	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	4.14	3.86 (0.65)	4.00	3.90 (0.62)	4.00	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	3.57	3.77 (0.61)	3.57	3.76 (0.51)	3.57	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	3.57	3.79 (0.68)	3.86	3.86 (0.62)	3.71	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.75	3.42 (0.78)	3.42	3.40 (0.70)	3.08	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	3.25	3.26 (0.58)	3.67	3.25 (0.58)	3.33	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	2.92	3.90 (0.47)	3.33	3.89 (0.49)	3.00	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	4.00	3.74 (0.46)	3.75	3.73 (0.44)	3.92	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	3.50	3.70 (0.49)	3.83	3.76 (0.51)	3.64	3.78 (0.50)

She does not have any results on the subscales of the Religious Schema Scale at wave 1 because this scale was developed after the first part of the Deconversion Study (which Gudrun was part of) had ended. At waves 2 and 3, her score for *ttt* is within the standard deviation of the sample range, indicating that Gudrun does not put too much trust in the literal meaning of religious teachings. She shows a remarkable increase on *xenos* between waves 2 and 3 indicating that her average openness for the “strange” has become more advanced in old age, which is suggested, albeit not very explicitly, in her last interview when she discusses her stance toward homosexuality.

As for her results on the subscales of the Psychological Well-Being Scale, it is interesting to note how her scores on *autonomy* increase with a simultaneous drop in *environmental mastery*. And even though these changes are subtle and mostly within the standard deviation of the sample, this might contribute to the finding from the content analysis that, while Gudrun undoubtedly feels the impact of old age and the declining independence in everyday life, she has gained a mental autonomy regarding her faith and her marriage. She tries to tell her own story as an individual, and she is more direct in criticizing certain things her husband has done. Moreover, she puts more emphasis on herself as a person independent from her husband when talking about her job and her achievements in that area. However, looking at her results on the NEO-FFI subscales, one can see that her scores for *emotional stability* decrease over time, indicating that the autonomy seems to come at the price of decreased stability. Her scores on *openness to experience* are low, which may be explained by the finding from the interviews that she is an outgoing type who likes to be part of a community, she prefers to spend her time with people she shares interests and worldviews with. In general, Gudrun’s statements seem to have gained self-confidence and individuality. She seems to position herself as more independent from others’ opinions and does not try to fit herself into predefined categories that much in her later interviews. This may be partly explained with an involuntary alienation from the religious groups she cherished mainly because of the community aspect, but which she left due to her husband’s intellectual doubts. Consequently, she is more focused on her own personal and constantly strong belief in God. This development toward a more individualized and more reflective faith is mirrored also in the style assignments for the question 20 (see above).

As for her relationship with her husband and with other people, she may have developed a more critical stance toward her husband over the years. But, at the same time, she has also built up an argumentation that explains his behavior by adopting a vicarious life story of Werner’s violence-ridden childhood, and therefore makes it easier for her to deal with that. In her later interviews, she is less willing to neglect social interactions with people she benefits from and has therefore established a life outside her marriage. While based on a shared Christian faith, these other relationships may differ regarding their orientation. While she does not talk about whether she has discussions with those people regarding their respective beliefs, she seems to be proud of the fact that she can see the human being behind all that and is able to appreciate what they can offer on a relationship basis. Interestingly, she sums this up at time 2 when being asked when she feels most in union with the universe:

Yes, I don't know. I always think I am that kind of human who rests within herself, sort of. I have this certainty of faith, I am consonant with myself and with my environment and my gift is to be able to approach everybody openly and that I can handle the people that I meet and also from my circle of friends even if they are really difficult. That I can take others as they are and embrace them lovingly, even though they may have an oppositional opinion.²⁸ (Gudrun, FDI, time 2)

This is a strong statement and a very direct self-characterization. With this statement she positions herself in opposition to her husband who rejects and leaves groups if they do not meet his ideological expectations. This seems to be a development of recent years as she did not appear that independent from her husband's views in her first interview. This may be a hint of a late realization that she has her own needs that are different from her husband but are of equal importance. This is supported by the fact that she explicitly defends the last remaining groups she is a part of against her husband's wishes, which are groups of people that are independent from her marital bounds and also the religious communities and still (or even therefore?) serve as support and comfort and give stability.

Gudrun was one of the cases presented in the book on deconversion that followed the first part of this study. At the time, she was characterized as someone whose family and social network were more important to her than the actual doctrine of a single religious community (for her complete case study, see Streib et al., 2009, p. 203ff.). In that case study, she was classified as *synthetic-conventional*, respectively *mutual*, which in the terminology and logic of the religious types would now be classified as substantially ethnocentric, given the fact that five of her answers were rated stage/style 2 (instrumental-reciprocal). In her other interviews, she was rated to be a type 2, which is predominantly conventional. This indicates that Gudrun's subjective religiosity is not linked to specific groups that she attends or teaching she is offered but is stable on its own in need of lived experiences granted for example by religious groups.

In this case, the analysis has carved out that development does not stop in older age (which goes along, for example, with Joan Erikson's (Erikson & Erikson, 1998) extension of the life cycle, adding a ninth stage dealing with old age). The change that could be reconstructed from the content analysis of her interview answers can be described as development in the terms of the hierarchical model of religious styles and types. Gudrun has left several religious groups across the course of her lifetime, which was largely involuntarily because while she cherished the feeling of community within those groups, she followed her husband when he started having intellectual doubts. Gudrun shares some of these doubts; however, it might be hypothesized that she would not have left any of those groups out of her own accord. These changes of her religious environment have not substantially changed the contents of Gudrun's personal beliefs. They have made Gudrun more independent from a certain belief system and more focused on her own strong belief in God.

9.2 Werner—Seeking Personal Enlightenment

“As a person enlightened by scientific Biblical studies, I must say: Faith, yes, but please keep in mind that it’s not orthodoxy, as it is often practiced and understood.”²⁹

Werner is 64 at the time of the first interview, thus a bit younger than his wife, and he has recently retired. At time 3, he is 79 years old. He talks about his own physical problems related to his age but seems more concerned with his wife’s progressing hearing impairment. While his wife seems engaged in supporting their daughter while she attends university and later when she is a mother herself, Werner seems more focused on distributing knowledge concerning faith and religious groups. He states that he used to attend meetings of former Jehovah’s Witnesses as a speaker and telling others how he and his wife came to leave that group. Currently, he is an avid writer of reader’s letters to local newspapers.

9.2.1 Werner’s Life Reviews and his Religious Journey—A Life Shaped by Faith

Werner’s life reviews are very closely connected with his religious trajectory and also with his relationship to Gudrun. However, I will focus on those life reviews and take a closer look at his relationships in the next paragraph. To separate his life reviews from his accounts on his religious development is not possible since he ties his autobiography closely to his religious journey in all interviews.

Werner starts his life review with an interesting observation:

I’d say childhood, basic trust in childhood, that’s how I would name one chapter. That is an important point that we have in advance over all the Witnesses that were born into the sect. We were given a basic trust in childhood. [...] All I remember is that my mother used to say when I went to kindergarten that I should pray. And that’s what I did, “Dear God, please let there be an air raid warning again today so that we can go to the bomb shelter again.”³⁰ (Werner, FDI, time 1)

Starting with the fact that he was shaped by his upbringing and by the fact that he gained a basic trust in his childhood, Werner stresses an important difference between himself and people who were born into the Jehovah’s Witnesses, assuming that this would not align with the development of basic trust, which is one of the many places in Werner’s interviews where a snide remark or an aside will communicate his ongoing moral criticism of the religious community that he left behind. When talking briefly about his childhood, he connects his religious upbringing and his experience as war child, stressing both the soothing factor of his faith and his pragmatic approach (praying for air raids to be able to skip school). In the FDI, his accounts on his life with the Witnesses are short at this timepoint, since they had been elaborated on in his narrative interview (the following quote, albeit shortened already, is rather extensive; events that are described in a similar fashion in later interviews will therefore be left out in following quotes):

So, the beginning of my acquaintance with Jehovah's Witnesses was about 1949, 1950, through my mother who had a severe life crisis back then. [...] And then the first Witnesses stood in front of her door. And they were, after the War, a real phenomenon. Because they were able to claim, "We were the only Christians who were sent to concentration camps for our conscientious objection to military service. Or rather, they murdered us because of that." So, they had a good reputation and when my mother got back on her feet, she went to their congregations. [...] In 1950, they were prohibited in the GDR because of the strict anti-Communist route they followed. [...] and so they carried on in the underground. The Witnesses are used to working from the underground. That's what they did in the Third Reich. They are really experienced in this respect. Like, meeting in a conspiratorial fashion. [...] And then the marriage was divorced. [...] And then the youth welfare came and denounced her right to legal guardianship because she was a Witness. And I was supposed to go to a youth home. And that's why she induced the flight. [...] Okay, we were recognized as refugees and then flown to [town F] [...]. And I have to say that was the point when I noticed that things were serious now. We had literature. Books, especially things like the Watchtower and Awake! [...] And then we had to study at home and go through it in the congregation and read it again. [...] And I was like, "My goodness, that's going to be fun." And it did become funny. [...] And then there was missionary service. [...] And I hated it. Like, [...] molesting people early in the morning with something they didn't want to know. [...] And I had meanwhile met my wife, that is, as a Witness. [...] And yes, one got to know each other a bit better and that's what started my personal disaster because a clique with young Witnesses developed. [...] And I was fully back on track.³¹ (Werner, Narrative Interview, time 1)

The way he talks about the reasons why his mother was attracted to the Jehovah's Witnesses is remarkable. The severe life crisis that she went through at the time serves as an implicit argument and a "good reason" for being more open for the promises of the Witnesses, implying that she did not know the full implications of membership in this group. Moreover, the position of the Witnesses was different in post-War Germany than they are in the modern context. It was known that they consequently denied military service under the Nazi regime and were taken to concentration camps because of their opposition. As a result, they briefly had a somewhat positive reputation, making the community less contestant at that time and attractive for Werner's mother due to their oppositional stance in the Third Reich. The following prohibition and the resulting secrecy implicitly fulfill the topos of a tight-knit community by tying the members more closely together, strengthening their solidarity, and making it harder to escape. This is reinforced by the help received through the Witnesses during their flight to West-Germany. In Werner's account of his approach to the study of the Witnesses' literature, however, it becomes clear that, even at that young age, he was having doubts concerning this approach. Werner aims to portray his younger self here as a critical mind, combining intellectual doubt with moral criticism when it comes to the missionary service that he is obliged to do, even though he claims to have hated everything about it, from showing up on people's doorsteps early in the mornings to trying to talk to them about things they had no interest in (and which he did not support either, obviously). Thus, having made

clear that he had, in his adolescence, already distanced himself from the sect, the meeting of his wife interrupts his “silent” farewell from the sect, the circumstances that evolved after that first meeting being labeled as a personal disaster for Werner. The paragraph dealing with relationships will take up that situation in more detail.

Summed up, a considerable portion of this life review circles around the Jehovah’s Witnesses, mentioning their emotional manipulation and possible hypocrisy, his whole time in the sect serving as an autobiographical argument, a formative experience that has significantly influenced the way he sees the world. This becomes clear throughout all of his interviews and is illustrated for example in the following little narrative which he tells when asked about marker events:

Table 29: Werner’s Narrative: “A Story of Shame”

Orientation	A tiny thing, that’s been haunting me since then. [...]
Complication	Erm, in [the congregation in town R], a young sister, a Witness, was excluded because she had a child, a child out of wedlock. And for the Witnesses that is, at least was at that time, a reason for exclusion. And when this young woman came [to the building] with her pram, which was for sure carried up the stairs by someone from outside and not by a Witness, [...] anyway, we let her pass by without greeting in the stairwell of the Witnesses’ building.
Evaluation	[...] And I’m still ashamed of that today. This still haunts me.
Resolution	That I was that indoctrinated, even though we both felt uncomfortable with this behavior.
Coda	So, this would be one thing that stuck with me, that it’s not congruent after all, because a hardliner wouldn’t have pangs of remorse. ³² (Werner, FDI, time 1)

With the orientation, Werner emphasizes that it was a rather everyday experience which is re-evaluated in retrospective at this time. This introductory sentence makes clear how great the distance is between his narrated self and the narrating self. The cause of the incident, the excluded “sister,” is marked as a conventional occurrence in the framework of the Witnesses’ rulebook. His own behavior is concurrently marked as conventional, since he was a Witness at the time. Thereby, he justifies what he did and anticipates dissent. By referring to an under-determined “we,” he takes away some of the individual blame, since he was then part of a group or a collective and acted according to the rules of the collective when ignoring the young mother. However, his evaluation shows the deep impact this situation has had on him and how much he distances himself from his behavior at the time. He condemns what he did back then and thereby emphasizes his change of mind. By stating that he was indoctrinated he, removes personal blame since being indoctrinated can be seen as a “good reason” for his shameful behavior in his current view. However, his coda suggests that he never was as bad as some of his fellow Witnesses, paving the way for a more positive look also on his younger self. At the same time, this creates coherence when having in mind that he later will be the driving force behind the deconversion of himself and his wife and mother.

The answer to the first question is long in his second interviews. He frequently interweaves stories that serve the purpose to point out something bad that has happened to him and elaborates in more detail on the different stations he and his wife had on their religious journey. For the sake of comparison, the first part of that answer is most interesting:

Yes, my life section was heavily shaped by the affiliation with the special-status religious community of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Nowadays, you don't say 'sect' anymore, but, more noble, 'special-status religious community.' And this life section was heavily shaped by this until my exit. [...] Then (sighs) I felt freedom, the intellectual freedom that I had after that. [...] What is interesting: I was brought up in an atheist fashion, see? This means I did not have any religious affiliation at all. And when my mother blundered into this sect because of a personal life crisis, [...] the Witnesses stood in front of her door and they used to have a great support back then. [description of flight] [...] And basically, when I had finished my vocational training, I was on the verge of leaving. I was uninterested in other religions and this whole rubbish. And then I met my wife and blundered into it again. [...] So, this is one chapter ... I have to tie it to religion. I can't really do this related to jobs. I had multiple changes in job positions, [...] but the life chapters I would rather tie to my religious development.³³ (Werner, FDI, time 2)

In his introduction, Werner makes it clear that he wants to be seen as a well-read person. Pointing out the semantic difference between 'sect' and 'special-status religious community,' he refers to a discourse in Germany in which the term 'sect' was heavily debated in the 90s and early 2000s, since it is usually used in a pejorative way (in English, it might be more comparable to the term 'cult') in German. An enquete commission employed by the German parliament recommended using the more neutral term 'special-status religious community' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1998). Werner tries to create a common ground, assuming the interviewer will know about that debate and will maybe even be impressed by Werner's knowledge. There is an interesting contradiction to his account in the first interview. While at time 1, he talks about his mother advising him to pray, and at time 2, he states he grew up as an atheist. He then spends some time elaborating how he and his mother became part of the Witnesses' community and their flight to West-Germany (similar to his account during the Narrative Interview at time 1). By the time Werner had finished his vocational training, he was finished with that religious community and religion in general. It is portrayed less as a love story and more as a fatal incident that he met his future wife in the Witnesses' context and was pulled back into it. After having started like this, he briefly ponders whether a division of his life in relation to his professional career might be an option, but he discards this thought. Regarding his self-presentation, at time 2 Werner puts more emphasis on his rebellious attitude ("I was uninterested in other religions and this whole rubbish") and his well-read manner. This becomes an even more prominent theme at time 3:

So, first, member of a sect for 25 years, Jehovah's Witnesses. Blundered into it as a child, because of my mother, not of my own accord. And then got married in the sect and thus stayed, until, after 25 years, there was the awakening. The realiza-

tion that the sect is totally wrong theologically. That was one chapter, the second chapter—I'll tie this to religion, one could also opt for job. The second chapter was the exit from that community, from the sect. Then the birth of our daughter. And due to the birth also turning to the Protestant regional church. Becoming a member there. And then, due to a relocation, and with a new pastor in the parish, the Charismatic orientation became important. And we were enthusiastic, went to lectures, congresses. And then there was the third awakening, namely the realization that this Charismatic orientation also leads to a dead end, you stand still intellectually. And that was a third awakening, by listening to theological lectures, a completely new perspective on the Biblical texts, to examine them from a scientific perspective, to question them, to compare with non-Biblical texts, be it Assyrian, Babylonian, or Egyptian historiography. and this led to a further awakening, so that I feel saddle fast in theology today. And I notice that when talking to pastors, it's on one level. Well, those would be the chapters, my life chapters, theologically.³⁴ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

His account is much more condensed than at time 1 and 2. In short, precise sentences, he sums up the way his life has taken and states that those are his life chapters from a theological perspective in the end (he then moves on to speak about his professional life as well). There are no hidden accusations in Gudrun's direction regarding their marriage, which made him stay within the sect much longer. As the only reason for his deconversion, he names intellectual doubt or the realization that "the sect is totally wrong theologically." Using the term "blundered into it" emphasizes that entering into the sect wasn't the result of careful, rational considerations but instead happened out of impulse or need for stability, especially in his mother's case. It is interesting to note that his intellectual doubt and his reason for leaving the Witnesses after 25 years is labeled with the term "theologically." While at the other timepoints, Werner makes it more than clear that he had those intellectual doubts, at time 3, he obviously has found a term that sums up those doubts and gives his exit a reputable and educated frame, making the difference between getting into and out of the sect even more prominent. He goes on to describe their deconversion trajectories (cf. Streib et al., 2009) first as an integrating exit (as members of the regional Protestant church), then as an oppositional exit, when they start to attend Charismatic congregations. However, this new orientation raises doubts in Werner after a while, too. In what is described as his "third awakening," he is currently engaged with a theologically informed study of the Bible, which could be labeled as a heretical exit. In this paragraph, Werner presents himself as a well-read person who is able to discuss theological matters on a peer level with pastors, which emphasizes his achievement and intellectual capability.

Summed up, one can see motifs that weave through all of his interviews. Becoming a Jehovah's Witness was not his fault, he soon started having doubts and an intellectual examination of the Witnesses' doctrine is the driving force behind his deconversion, and he is the one who takes matters in hand and initiates their exits (this will become clearer in the next paragraph). The consistency in his accounts may be attributed to the fact that he has told this deconversion story frequently over the years and not only in the context of the interview situations. His self-presentation in all of his interviews is remarkably direct, and he puts a lot of emphasis on his intellectuality and tries to create a common

ground with the interviewers, whom he assumes to be theologically and psychologically proficient. In general, a more indirect and modest way of characterizing oneself is the norm, and too-direct self-praise is often frowned upon. Thus, Werner's form of presenting his narrative identity here is an exception in the whole sample that was analyzed for this work. Interestingly, the topics he refers to change over interviews (from a sociopolitical discussion at time 2 to a theological one at time 3); however, they all serve to create a thematic coherence as described by Bluck and Habermas (2000), not only for one point in time, but over a period of 15 years.

Werner's deconversion from the Jehovah's Witnesses cannot be read separately from his relationship with his wife. In the next paragraph, I will compare his different accounts regarding this process in more detail.

9.2.2 Werner's Relationship with Gudrun—A Joint Religious Journey

The first thing that can be noticed is that Werner's elaborations regarding their relationship aren't as numerous and are often more indirect than Gudrun's. In his first time FDI, he talks about difficult times in their family life in the context of a crisis that is prominent in all of his interviews, which is related to a job change along with personal disappointments and resulting in an early retirement. Regarding the time after the job change which brought along all those intricacies, Werner tells the following:

And those were one and a half really difficult years. I was closer to suicide than anything else. My wife can tell you a thing or two about it. My daughter as well. Laughter was forbidden. From Sunday afternoon on, I could not bear any fun, any joke, nothing. Because Monday was looming. [...] [I: Looking back, what would you say happened to you at that time and what influence did these experiences have?] I descended from my high horse. I got really small. As a purchaser in a big firm, agents pay court to you. I had a good standing there. [...] And then you come home with a feeling of elation. And I used to mistreat my wife back then. This feeling of elation had affected me there. I treated her with condescension. But she had a job herself and would comment on that, because she had a good name too in her firm. But this snootiness was thoroughly driven out of me. That was a really unpleasant trait I had.³⁵ (Werner, FDI, time 1)

It is unclear how literal Werner's reference to suicidality should be taken, but it clarifies that this job crisis had a great impact on his life as a whole (and it can be noted that Gudrun does not mention that crisis at all, which might suggest that she for herself does not attribute her husband's behavior to that unpleasant job situation). By mentioning his wife and his daughter, he acknowledges the influence this state of his had on the family life. This also alludes to a reflective manner in which this time has been handled in the interim. Werner is currently aware about his family's suffering at that time. With astonishing openness, Werner talks about how he felt then and with the phrase "I descended from a high horse" adds a notably self-critical tone, even admitting to having treated his wife unfairly. By pointing out that Gudrun had a job herself and "a good name too," he shows an appreciation for her that he may have lacked at that time. Interestingly, he portrays his wife as someone who would talk back when he was treating her with condescension.

This character trait appears in Gudrun's time 2 and time 3 interviews but not at time 1, so Werner seems to perceive his wife as more self-confident, successful and independent than she did at that time. His final words of that quote show remorse for his arrogant manner in an open and reflective way. This whole paragraph suggests that Werner has "learned his lesson" (cf. Habermas & Köber, 2015) and implies that he has changed his behavior toward his wife and his general (arrogant) attitude ever since.

It is interesting to note that at time 2, this connection between the job crisis and any conflicts in his family is not made. But in his reflections, he shows a self-critical approach and talks about the effects this has had on him:

As for crises, the really bad crisis was the job change [...], this crisis lasted for about two years. [I: How did these experiences affect you?] This experience has made me a skeptic regarding personal relationships. I always question them and, like, don't let them become too close because that might lead to the next disappointment. [...] So, I'm not the exuberant, joyful person I used to be, I'm skeptical about how everything's going to be.³⁶ (Werner, FDI, time 2)

Again, this account could be labeled as an autobiographical argument with the connotation of "lessons learned," since what he learned from these disappointments in his professional life is to be skeptical toward people in general. A self-perceived development is described from being a "joyful person" to a skeptic. Here lies great potential for conflict with his wife, since she notably is a very sociable person to whom it is important to connect with others and who is ready to trust easily. However, at this point in Werner's interview, the connection is not made and neither made explicit at other points.

A reference with a slightly different connotation is made at time 3 when Werner talks again about unfortunate episodes in his work life:

So, the biggest crisis was the last job change to this factory of firm [X], world market leader, yes, that was such a ... failure, you know ... unbelievable. I was in a real crisis then ... I can't begin to describe that. Yes, and then of course, as always, when I was feeling comfortable in a firm, when things were going well and I had established myself and led a department, yes. Suddenly, it was like, relocated. Yes. And I was bound, place-bound. Also because of my wife who had a very good professional position at firm [Y], [...] got around a lot. She was known all over town. And she had a really, really awesome position there. And I was like, you can't risk that...³⁷ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

Werner's story resembles a contamination story (McAdams et al., 2001) in which he is repeatedly in a good professional position and an unspecified higher force deprives him of it, as the firms he worked for tended to relocate. And while there is no direct reference to any relationship-related conflicts, Werner points out that because of his wife's professional position he was not able to follow the firm to their new location. The passage is ambivalent regarding his implicit feelings towards his wife. There seems to be a certain dependency which prevents him from pursuing his career (and which eventually makes him unhappy and depressive), presumably leading to a certain tension. Yet there is some admiration discernible from Werner's words when he describes Gudrun's position as "re-

ally, really awesome” and herself being “known all over town.” In the end, it seems like it was his decision to tone down his own ambitions in favor of his wife’s secure employment.

Another thing that is remarkable in Werner’s interviews is that he acknowledges his wife as his most important relationship and counselor. When asked how he would go about making an important decision, Werner answers, at time 1:

So, first of all, my wife. Like, we read and we try to solve everything together. Second, we offer it to God, just like this. And we don’t have any human counselors, unfortunately.³⁸ (Werner, FDI, time 1)

This description sounds harmonious and based on a shared faith and an unfaltering trust in God. The last sentence implies that neither Werner nor Gudrun have any other meaningful relationships outside their marriage, which Werner finds regrettable. Interestingly, in his narrative interview at time 1, Werner talks about a conflict between the two spouses which might account for their lack of other relationships:

We read together every day. We have a plan for reading the Bible. [...] I say to my wife, who is emotionally still attached to various people, I say to her, “Wife, I can’t go back to that level, cannot immerse myself like that anymore into that Charismatic hustle and bustle and the Charismatic services and so on. I can pay a visit once in a while. But I cannot cheer and clap my hands as always, as it is common practice there. I just can’t.” In that case, we differ.³⁹ (Werner, Narrative, time 1)

While the act of reading the Bible together is described in a way that appears harmonious, Werner turns to a conflicted topic of their relationship at that time. Their breakup with the Charismatic community is not complete and it becomes obvious that Werner was the driving force behind that, talking about the Charismatics’ practices in a rather contemptuous way. While they still share a similar faith, their ways of practicing it seem to differ, or deducing from other statements in both of their interviews over the years, especially their level of tolerance toward other religious people and their flaws. Werner’s last sentence suggests that he can leave that topic be for the moment and can tolerate Gudrun’s affection for those Charismatic practices.

In his third interview, Werner takes up that thread again:

My wife, like I said, attends that pious circle and a prayer circle ... to my annoyance (laughing), I have to admit that. [...] And then my wife has those religious connections with two prayer circles, which I’m not overjoyed about, to be honest. She knows that, but they provide contacts here. And that’s good for her and so I think, “Oh well, so be it.”⁴⁰ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

Despite Werner’s annoyance, Gudrun has kept her habit of attending different groups. The above quote suggests that there have been discussions among the two and it seems like Werner has admitted defeat in the end, illustrated by the way he laughs when he talks about his exasperation as well as his concession in the end, “so be it.” Werner has given up his resistance realizing that these groups are good for his wife, even though he still has

a skeptical stance toward this kind of practiced faith. He also seems to realize that this kind of community gives Gudrun a benefit that he cannot obtain, which becomes apparent when he is asked about who he turns to for counselling when he has an important decision to make:

Oh, toward my wife (laughs). Yes, I don't have anybody else. We speak openly about everything and don't have any secrets or reservations. Everything is discussed openly. [...] But a pastor in that sense—I don't have that ... unfortunately. My wife may have that within her circle.⁴¹ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

Again, he emphasizes that his wife is his most important counsellor, and he depicts a discussion culture which is open and without restrictions, which again implies a high degree of appreciation for his wife. Like in his first interview, Werner regrets that he does not have any other form of counselling, spiritual or other. Connected with that regret is explicit envy for his wife who has that form of exchange within her prayer circles. While he may criticize those circles, he is aware of the benefit they have for his wife (and might have for him as well as he not repulsed by them on an intellectual level). There may be more to the incomprehension observed by Gudrun in her last interview. In this late stage of his life, Werner may realize that driving away all social contacts has made him a lonely person, which makes him appreciate Gudrun's presence more.

As for their joint religious journey, what first catches the eye is the way Werner describes the circumstances of when he met his later wife in his first interview, especially keeping in mind how much Gudrun values the personal encounter with other people:

And yes, one got to know each other a bit better and that's what started my personal disaster because a clique with young Witnesses developed who drove to the nearby town after going from door to door on Sundays [...]. And there one had lunch and studied the Watchtower together. Of course. And then, in the evening, one attended the assembly together. Like that. And so I was back on track. And then I got to know my wife better, so to say. [...] And then thinking about an exit was not an option anymore. On the contrary, I had to—that's of course the next step—let myself be baptized. That was inevitable. Because [my wife] was warned against me, I was a maverick or just not the right company for her. She was like a loyal, good, eager sister, while I was just tagging along⁴² (Werner, Narrative Interview, time 1)

The language he uses in the beginning of this quote (“one got to know each other...”) creates the biggest possible distance between his current self and the young Werner that is the protagonist of his narration. This stylistic choice adds to the impression that Werner considers these events as a series of bad decisions that he would not repeat today. For Werner, the personal encounters that Gudrun cherishes so much are “fatal,” and his description sounds as if he involuntarily got into a vicious circle that draws him “inside” again, so that he is even persuaded to be baptized. In retrospect, meeting his wife was connected for Werner with getting dragged deeper into the community he had wanted to get away from originally. The portrayal of himself as a maverick and his wife as an eager sister has the effect of manifesting the complicated position they were in, but this also implies that their marriage was destined to be difficult given the fundamental difference

in their ideology. This depiction is in concordance with what Gudrun says in her third interview (see above), when she talks about her husband blaming her for making him stay with the Witnesses. When Werner talks about how they got out of the sect, it becomes clear that he was the driving force at time 1:

[...] there was this huge volume by Kurt Hutten, Brooders, Seers, Enthusiasts. [...] A magnificent book. And he describes the structures and what is happening there 100% accurate. [...] and my wife was like, "This is the end!" [...] And it really was the end. Erm, I gave her a book to read, but funnily I knew, intuitively, when we leave this behind, we'll have a mental vacuum. And I will have to fill that vacuum. I will have to [...] I know it's wrong what I'm saying right now. But I will have to perform a brainwash on [my wife and my mother]. I know that one should say indoctrination today. Because brainwashing is something that is done to prisoners of war [...] and is associated with violence, torture, and so forth. I don't need to tell you that, of course. [...] That means I processed the teachings of the Watchtower Society for nights on end. [...] On the one hand to get it myself and I made my women read it over and over again and told them, "Read it and check this and that teaching." [...] My wife says today, "You wouldn't have gotten me out otherwise if not by disproving their teaching."⁴³ (Werner, Narrative Interview, time 1)

Werner is the one who prepares the exit for his wife and mother, or as he refers to them, his "two women." As a parenthesis, he discusses with himself whether or not the term "brainwash" is appropriate for what he did to fill the mental vacuum. By this, he achieves portraying himself again as well-read and familiar with the terminology; however, he still opts for the more controversial term in the end, which is another piece in his self-portrayal as an independent thinker who will not let himself be restricted by any stipulation. He prepares everything and provides literature that he has critically selected. He takes the position of the leader without whom an exit would not have been possible. In his narration, his wife grants him respect for that, which is stressed with a direct quote that Werner assigns Gudrun. This gives his words more credibility and at the same time avoids an all-too-directly positive self-portrayal. Overall, his wife plays a very passive role (and is even summed up in the more general term "my women" at one point during the interview), while Werner takes all the credit for their exit.

This looks a little different at time 2:

And life-changing of course was the detachment, that was a fight which lasted for about a year. A mental fight, to detach ourselves from the Witnesses. Because my wife advocated and defended them, saying, "They have to realize at one point that what they are writing is crap." [...] And we discussed this on every hike. [...] I had to get books. I got all the books that existed by ex-Witnesses. Among them was a very good book from the Protestant Office for Worldview Questions on Sects, Brooders, Enthusiasts which was totally on point. [...] And I was like, "That's it! Exactly!" [...] One day, I came home with a pile of books under my arm and my wife just thought, "This is the end!" And that's what it was. And then I sat down for weeks and disproved [the Witnesses teaching] in textbook fashion and gave everything to my women again and again, and at some point, the exit was made.⁴⁴ (Werner, FDI, time 2)

Again, Werner portrays himself as teacher who passes on his knowledge to “his women” in a patriarchal manner. The number of books that he has read at the time is given some importance here again. Yet, there is a difference in his account, even though it is a subtle one: Werner grants Gudrun a more active role this time, albeit on the “wrong” side with the “wrong” arguments. He still portrays her as a discussion partner who obviously challenges him to get those books and inform himself. She is convinced by his arguments in the end, which is an even bigger achievement given the fact that Gudrun had been defending the Witnesses’ teachings vigorously before. Interesting to note are certain phrases that reappear literally, and the overall dramatic composition is very similar which suggest that this is one of those narratives that gets told repeatedly and becomes part of the bigger life story.

Having noted that Werner’s portrayal of Gudrun has changed slightly between time 1 and time 2 (that is, in the course of ten years) while the main story line has stayed the same, his account at time 3 comes as a surprise:

I had, back then, prepared a written draft about the wrong teachings of the Witnesses. [...] And it was tedious work back then, no internet, nothing, to acquire information about the Witnesses and then I sat down for nights and prepared written drafts, typing on a typewriter. And then my wife read that and we came to the conviction that, yes, it’s a fallacy, a *fata morgana*, this truth sect. And then we wrote an essay letter together addressed to the Eldest of the congregation which said, “We declare our exit.”⁴⁵ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

What catches the eye is the subtle way he addresses the interviewer’s youth by pointing out that at the time that he was doing his research, he could not rely on the internet and had to use a typewriter instead of a computer. Here, Werner may be assuming that the interviewer might not be aware of this fact. Regarding the process of leaving the Witnesses, Werner is still the one who does the main part of reading and writing, yet this account looks like their exit was a joint decision and a joint effort, which cumulated in a jointly written letter to the congregation and omitting all the drama that was in the foreground in his other interviews.

In the last phase of his life, Werner has arrived at seeing his wife as an equal partner, which is an observation that aligns with the change in Gudrun’s own self-presentation which has become more self-confident and independent over the years. This may also partly explain why she now can talk more freely about the difficulties in her marriage. While she has a life of her own with prayer groups and a group of women she meets with, she seems to realize that her husband does not have many other contacts besides his wife. Therefore, it could be suspected that both of them might realize that Werner is perhaps now more dependent on Gudrun than the other way around.

While being constant in his self-portrayal, Werner displays a remarkable development regarding the way he looks at his wife. While his focus is on their conflict-ridden marriage in the first two interviews by self-applying the term *maverick* and his wife an eager sister at time 1, he seems to have adjusted his opinion in his third interview. Over the years, he realizes that his wife is his most important and only counselor and that her way of approaching religiosity or cherishing the community for the sake of trade-offs re-

garding the teachings means that she still has those communities and can benefit from having other people around her. In the last phase of his life, it appears that Werner has come to reconsider and maybe even regret some of the harshness that he has displayed towards his wife and religious communities in his life.

The next paragraph will examine closely if and how this development can be found also in his subjective religiosity as portrayed in the interviews and in selected data from the surveys.

9.2.3 Werner's Subjective Religiosity—Finding his own Personal Relationship with God

Werner's Subjective Religiosity

Below, the assembled data of Werner's survey answers and his interview statements can be found. Note that his free entries are more comprehensive than his wife's, especially at wave 3.

Wave 1: He does not give any definitions of "spiritual" or "religious" in the survey or the interview, therefore it can be assumed that his self-assessment in the survey as "more religious than spiritual" is but a mere approximation and the not-ideal option that fits best. In the interview, he talks about his faith in God, who is described as benevolent and leading, which reveals a deep trust in an afterlife.

Wave 2: His definitions of "spirituality" and "religion" seem to differ regarding their formalization. Even though, in the survey, he states he is "more religious than spiritual," the term he chooses in the interview is "faithful." His definition there has a strong moral claim, which reaches beyond the clerical realms since he refers to dictators that will also have to give account before the Last Judgment. So, a moral benchmark is set for which he appears calm and implicitly takes up his claim in engaging with questions of worldview and religion from his free entries, showing he does both.

Wave 3: His definition of "spiritual" is consistent in both his free entry and his interview answer, and he marks this term as reserved for people who are not religious. He opts for "faithful" to describe himself but emphasizes that he does not wish to be understood as orthodox. With an example from everyday politics mixed with religion, he lines out what orthodoxy means for him. By pointing out that he has educated himself in a scientific way, he implies that he is beyond that literal understanding of the Bible. His definition of "religion" in the survey relays that he sees the engagement with questions of ultimate concern as a core of being religious and that religion offers answers that are beyond scientific reasoning. It might be hypothesized that he sees his personal scientific study of the Bible as a satisfying combination of both approaches.

Table 30: Data on Werner's Religiosity

Werner free entries	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
self-assessment answer to Q20: Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	spirituality: not asked religion: not asked	spirituality: Having a spiritual interest and cultivating it. Engaging with questions of worldview. ⁴⁶ religion: Contemplating religious questions, e.g. the question of theodicy. ⁴⁸	spirituality: I personally rather dislike this term. This mindset is strange to me. It rather fits humanism than a religious way of thinking. ⁴⁷ religion: Religion for me means the search for a sense of one's own existence. Being discontent with the extinction of one's own existence. Religion (no matter which one) offers answers to questions that science cannot answer. ⁴⁹ more religious than spiritual
	more religious than spiritual Faith for me means that I consider things to be true that I have so far believed only. Like a life in another world. Being sheltered, that He accepted me. That's being faithful for me. Yes, I have to put it in a nutshell: if you ask me now, "What do you think, should you die tonight, will you go into God's kingdom?" And my answer would be a confident "Yes." ⁵⁰	more religious than spiritual Faithful. That means I feel responsible for my deeds. And that also means that I have to give account for all my doings. Has nothing to do with hell. Just give account to the Last Judgment. That can be a very, very painful matter, when you are confronted with sins-by-omission where you could have effected something good, but didn't. Not even to mention Adolf Hitler or Stalin, who have millions of people on their conscience. They will be confronted with their deeds as well. That is faithful to me. ⁵¹	I don't like any of these terms. "Spiritual" is rather for people who are not faithful, I think [...]. As a person enlightened by scientific Biblical studies, I must say: Faith, yes, but please keep in mind that it's not orthodox, as it is often practiced and understood. I'm about to write a reader's letter, which is about a [right wing party] deputy who was cited in the pious magazine "Name A." [...] So, and there are people who read this and say, we take it as it is. And he is faithful as well, for sure, but I differ from faithful people like that. I contradict him. ⁵²

At time 1, Werner's answer to question 20 is exclusively personal, and he talks about his own belief and experience of a benevolent, leading God and his trust in an afterlife. At the other time points, there are more references to society, combined with moral claims and evaluations, which indicates that his agenda has changed. It becomes clear in this short analysis that Werner is not content with just being faithful for his own sake, but he feels superior toward people who he deems less "enlightened." In the forced-choice survey question, his self-assessment as "more religious than spiritual" seems unfitting when looking at his interview answers, though it does confirm his mistrust against "spirituality," which he defines to be rather for non-religious people. His free entry at wave 2 also suggests that "spirituality" is more engaged with questions of worldview, and this could be linked to his rejection of the politician's text he talks about at time 3 (casually distancing himself from the right-wing party as well). Conversely, his free entry for religion at wave 3 takes up a topic of his time 2 answer, regarding "questions that science cannot answer," which could mean the question of what happens when one dies and Werner's belief in a Last Judgment. Summed up, and taking together the different data displayed above, Werner can be described as a faithful person who is not satisfied with just believing as he ages; instead, his answers come along with a firm moral rulebook and the wish to convince others of his standpoint (exemplarily manifested in the reader's letter he mentions at time 3). How has this influenced the way he describes his image of God at the three different timepoints?

Werner's Image of God

Below, one can find Werner's answers to the question on how his image of God has changed over the years:

As a child, I was imparted a loving God, one to have trust in. Then, as a member of the Witnesses, I was imparted an authoritative God who is alert, registers, rewards, punishes, depending on your behavior. A frightening image of God. [...] With the Charismatics it happened, and we highly appreciate this, that we dared to enter into a personal relationship. It's a bit strange and there are clever books about that, to say, "So, if God is the Lord in your life, then he is not only the Lord in your living room where everything is tidy; he's then also the Lord backstage where the hidden objects lie [...]." This means, the skeletons have to be dragged out of the closet if you really want to enter into an open relationship. And I have to add [...], I find it difficult to address God as Father, even though that's what Jesus taught us, "Pray, Father in heaven". [...] Anyway, we like to pray to Jesus and our image of God is set strongly on Jesus, due to that disturbed father relationship, even though it's not problematic for us to call God Father.⁵³ (Werner, FDI, time 1)

The worldview with the Witnesses was the judging, punishing God, the controlling god, you know? Who sees everything and registers everything, an absolutely authoritarian image of God, really, like really unrealistic. [...] That changed when we went to the regional church and had those conversations with the pastor, [...] then, the image of God was softened, [...] But there was a new image when we entered into the Charismatic community. There, we got a very, very naïve image of god. In the Charismatic community, there is a strong belief in miracles. [...] And the exit from that community, led to me saying, "I want to engage with faith on a scientific

level." [...] The image of God has changed substantially, since I don't have that belief in miracles anymore, but instead I say: The things we read about in the Bible [...], we have to consider the context in which this was written. [...] And so this image of God ... the Almighty, the punishing, judging God who monitors everything ... that has changed completely. [...] I have a casual image of God, I can believe in God in an uninhibited way, talk to God without any uptight mental contortions.⁵⁴ (Werner, FDI, time 2)

[This] changed once when we left the sect. Then, it was the worldview of the sect, only we are on the right path, everybody else will be exterminated, you know? [...] A significant change happened due to the theological orientation based on science [...] that conveyed a substantially different religious worldview. A different perspective. Away from the confinement, away from the word-for-word belief. [...] In the sect, we were always confronted with the punishing God, who punishes disobedience. Who keeps vigil over our life like a policeman. That is an awful image of God. And it was obsolete with the exit from the sect. But it came back a bit by the Charismatic movement which also has a narrow image of God, more or less believing in Biblical inspiration. And this was completely changed (smiles) to the opposite nearly with the freedom that we now have through research, teachings (smiles) in a theological sense. [...] The question of God is often discussed as the question of theodicy. [...] For me, I solved this question by saying: even though the profession of faith says, "God is almighty, I believe in the almighty God." I don't believe in God's almightiness. I believe in God's commiseration, in Jesus' commiseration, who demonstrated that himself. But not in God's almightiness, not anymore. Of course, this doesn't align with the course of my Protestant church who speak their profession of faith, devoted and obedient, but that's my summary.⁵⁵ (Werner, FDI, time 3)

At time 1, Werner describes his movement from the loving God of his childhood to the frightening God that was conveyed by the Witnesses, interweaving a moral criticism against the sect's teachings. Werner's then-current image of God is highly influenced by the Charismatic community. This emphasizes the personal relationship with God they have at time 3 and the (renewed) belief in Jesus. This stands in stark contrast to the proclaimed belief system of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in which Jesus does not really play a role. His definition of an open relationship with God is very vivid and concrete, underlining his fascination and appreciation for this new form of faith in which there are no taboos, and honesty seems to play a big role. While this belief in Jesus appears to be in accordance with the teachings of the Protestant Church this is a major individualizing development in Werner's own reconstruction of his changed image of God. His difficulties with the concept of God as father are closely connected with his disturbed image he has of his father and may represent a lack of attachment.

In his second interview, Jesus is not named as that important anymore, and this may be due to the fact that their separation from the Charismatic community is complete—at least for Werner. Instead, Werner describes the transition his image of God has taken over the years from the punishing God of the Witnesses to believing in miracles during their time with the Charismatic group, which applies a strong criticism of the Charismatic faith here that was not present in the first interview. At time 3, he claims to hold a

“casual” image of God, outlining a relationship on eye level in which there is no need for false pretense. The description of the relationship sounds similar to that of time 1, but the label is different, and God as Father is not present in this account either. His turn toward a more scientific approach to his faith is suggested here but is not nearly as elaborated upon as at time 3.

In the third interview, his alienation from all the faith communities Werner has belonged to over the years becomes apparent. The image of God and the worldview conveyed by both the Witnesses and the Charismatic community is rejected and described in a derogatory way. Moreover, the Protestant Church and their profession of faith are judged negatively as well, thereby underlining Werner’s individualizing ways of shaping his image of God. In Werner’s current mindset, the image of God is influenced by his engagement with theological literature and a scientific approach to the Bible, moving away from a literal understanding of the Holy Scripture to a personal interpretation of God’s ways. Through these actions and processes, Werner may be concluding that commiseration is God’s main character trait. In the survey, his answers on the Representation of God scale suggest that his image of God is mostly benevolent and ineffable (in both subscales, he scores higher than the average of my sample), while the authoritarian and the mystical side of God are still present in a moderate way. This way of engaging with his beliefs is making him rather content, since he is audibly smiling when talking about it, which may be due to the fact that he now feels liberated from the boundaries of any institutionalized form of religion.

The way he describes his image of God aligns well with the reconstruction of his religiosity above. Coming from a fundamentalist and rigid religious background, Werner puts a lot of effort in pointing out how his image of and relationship with God is very individual and better informed than that of his Protestant church. The interview quotes above show that at time 2 and 3, his desire to distance himself from other people who do not seem to realize that an orthodox faith is misleading. He presents himself as non-conformist and as outspoken against those rules and views that he deems wrong. Thereby, he has the air of a missionary and this might be a heritage of his socialization with the Witnesses, even though Werner would probably deny that. However, it can be stated that he moved away from something if it did not seem fitting anymore during his lifetime. Through this process, Werner finally arrives at an image of God and a theology that meets his standards and leaves him satisfied. This maybe one more reason for his changed manner and his gentler and more appreciating tone toward Gudrun, relating to his accounts on his wife and their marriage.

9.2.4 Werner’s (Religious) Development—Triangulating the Data

Werner is an experienced storyteller, and in his interviews, I found many implicit argumentation strategies, noticeably more than in most other interviews. The way he uses topoi, autobiographical arguments, and other strategies suggests that Werner is aware of the effects those have on his listeners. The main character traits that Werner attributes to his narrative identity are those of a non-conformist who notices earlier than most people when there is “a fly on the ointment” as Gudrun states in her interviews. He is self-assured and makes it clear during all timepoints that he considers his religious and

worldview-related ideas as the right ones, having come to his respective conclusions by thorough intellectual engagement. As for his self-presentation, it could be established that this remains stable over time.

When it comes to his deconversion story at times 1 and 2, it becomes clear that this is a story he is used to telling with his narrative being more honed and pointed the second time than during the first interview. At time 3, this story experiences a significant change, gets less attention in the overall interview, and includes a change in the way he talks about Gudrun, who is his most important relationship. This altered view on relationships is mirrored in his style aspect maps in which the ratings for *perspective taking* and *social horizon* shift from mainly style 3 (mutual) to mainly style 4 (individuating-systemic). Overall, Werner's first two interviews were mainly rated stage/style 3, classifying him as a predominantly conventional type 2. It is remarkable that the questions dealing with *morality*, *locus of authority*, and *form of world coherence* were mostly rated style 3, indicating that while he may have left various religious traditions criticizing them for their absolutistic tendencies, he refers to conventional models of explanation when it comes to those topics. This is still visible in his time 3 interview and may lead to the assumption that this is a stable trait of Werner's. Notable, however, is the tendency for style 4 in *symbolic function* in his second and third interview. Here, it can be deduced that he is able to translate symbols into concepts and ideas and thereby, while possibly still following his own ideology, going beyond a style 3 approach that would see symbols strongly influenced by authorities as for example the church. Most interesting is his shift from style 3 to style 4 in the aspects *perspective taking* and *social horizon*. It seems as if Werner has managed to widen his horizon and to arrive at a more systemic view on his life and his relationships in his old age. As for his religiosity, Werner is very focused on his personal belief at time 1. In the other interviews, his statements contain many references toward society and questions of moral relevance. Knowing that he was the driving force behind the couple's exit from the Jehovah's Witnesses, it comes as no surprise that he directs that desire to convincing people of his standpoint and of what he deems the right thing to do or to believe. Aiming to reach a greater audience, he writes letters to the local newspaper and attends gatherings as a speaker to share his deconversion process. It becomes clear that Werner went a long way and had to shed some chains on that route to finally arrive at a personalized relationship with God in which he meets Him rationally and as intellectual equals. The answers to question 20 and regarding his image of God were both rated style 3 at time 1, pointing to a conventional approach. At times 2 and 3, all of the answers to those questions were rated style 4, paying tribute to the fact that Werner's argumentation appears to be more individualized and more reflective and less influenced from authorities or groups as it was the case at time 1. He is classified as a "mover upward" like his wife, albeit his first two interviews were calculated to be type 2 (predominantly conventional) while the third was type 3 (predominantly individuating-reflective, meaning that the frequency of style 4 ratings exceeds that of style 3 ratings).

Looking at his scores in the survey data, one can see a more nuanced impression of Werner's personality traits and his well-being:

Table 31: Selected Data from Werner's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Werner	M (SD)	Werner	M (SD)	Werner	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	-	2.63 (1.17)	2.20	2.42 (1.12)	2.20	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	-	4.35 (0.38)	4.80	4.28 (0.51)	4.80	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	-	3.64 (0.75)	3.80	3.57 (0.76)	4.00	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	4.14	3.67 (0.59)	3.57	3.20 (0.40)	3.00	3.15 (0.40)
<i>environmental mastery</i>	4.00	3.67 (0.71)	4.00	3.72 (0.59)	3.43	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.57	4.38 (0.38)	4.29	4.17 (0.39)	4.29	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	3.29	3.86 (0.65)	2.71	3.90 (0.62)	2.86	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	3.43	3.77 (0.61)	3.57	3.76 (0.51)	3.14	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	3.71	3.79 (0.68)	3.86	3.86 (0.62)	3.00	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.33	3.42 (0.78)	4.08	3.40 (0.70)	3.00	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	2.42	3.26 (0.58)	3.00	3.25 (0.58)	2.75	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	3.00	3.90 (0.47)	3.17	3.89 (0.49)	3.17	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	2.75	3.74 (0.46)	3.17	3.73 (0.44)	3.17	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	4.08	3.70 (0.49)	4.08	3.76 (0.51)	3.45	3.78 (0.50)

On the RSS, it becomes apparent that Werner does not trust in a literal understanding of religious texts given his rather low scores on *ttt*. This is also something he has made clear in all of his interviews. His scores on *ftt* and *xenos* are moderate to high, indicating an open approach to worldviews different from his own. However, as can be seen on the NEO-FFI subscale for *openness to experience*, this curiosity seems to be limited, presumably, to people who also hold some kind of religious worldview, while he does not seem to take more secular standpoints into account. As for his scores on well-being, one sees his

scores on *purpose in life* declining over time. And while this may be expected in older age, it is surprising that Werner would state he lacks a sense of meaning in his life. However, it might be hypothesized that by looking at his situation from the perspective of having a defined sense in life, the lack of community might lead to those scores. A similar explanation can be found for his low score on *self-acceptance* at time 3. He may not feel as satisfied with himself and his situation as he used to, and this may correspond with the realization that, in contrast to his wife, he does not have any meaningful contacts outside of his marriage and maybe is slowly coming to regret certain decisions he has made which led to breaking bonds with friends (mirrored in his low scores on *positive relations with others*). This interpretation is in accordance with the finding that *self-acceptance* does not change with age, but in interplay with (negative) life events (Tibubos et al., 2019). Declining scores for *autonomy* and *environmental mastery*, theoretically explicable with old age, seem more related to the topic of a lack of sense and community while also aligning with his declining score on *emotional stability*. And while his score slightly increases in the last two waves, it can also be seen that *agreeableness*, i.e. the desire and the ability to get along well with others, is not Werner's strongest personality trait.

We get an image of Werner as a person who is constantly seeking personal enlightenment, which leads to him leaving groups that do not meet his standards anymore, but which does not enhance his personal well-being. Instead, this desire seems to keep him restless and unsatisfied. Additionally, as can be derived from his milder view on his wife and her way of believing and living her faith, it can be concluded that Werner sees a different, more satisfying way, which he does not seem to be able to achieve.

9.3 Gudrun and Werner—Comparison and Conclusion

The conflict-ridden relationship that is omnipresent in Gudrun's accounts (note that this is the one thing she mentions first when asked for crises) and gets more attention and reflection in the course of the interviews, is mentioned more subtly and in a different context in Werner's interviews. Indeed, in his first interview, he admits to having had a severe crisis related to his job which made him unbearable for his family. Otherwise, he seems ignorant toward Gudrun's unhappiness (at least in the interviews), which is explained by his difficult childhood and adolescence in Gudrun's second and third interviews. This is a line of argumentation which is never directly addressed in Werner's interviews. Instead, his "skeptical" stance is explained by his disappointments during his working life. When in Werner's interviews conflicts within their marriage are addressed, they more often refer to the beginning of their relationship, blaming Gudrun for drawing him back into the sect.

Accordingly, there is a difference to be observed regarding the tone they talk about each other. While Gudrun is either critical or compassionate regarding her husband's flaws (depending on whether or not she is focusing on the reasons for his behavior being grounded in his childhood), Werner appears conceited when talking about how he made his wife come to realize the misdirection of the groups she was following. Conversely, he talks about Gudrun with a considerable amount of respect and appreciation, especially when it comes to her own professional life. Moreover, he underlines the way they discuss

everything among each other, which is without “secrets and reservations.” This culture of discussion is not described in such a direct manner by Gudrun, even though it becomes clear in her later interviews that they do discuss their relationship problems openly.

From all of the interviews of both spouses, there is no doubt that Werner is perceived as the leading person in their relationship. He talks about how he has “opened her eyes,” especially when it comes to questions of faith with both of their deconversions having originated in Werner’s intellectual doubts toward the respective doctrine and moral criticisms of the communities. For him, this is not problematic, having good reasons for his decisions and therefore being convinced of doing the right thing. His wife, while seeing his point regarding the wrongness of certain teachings, (even though this may be mainly due to severe persuasive efforts by Werner,) suffers because of the ensuing lack of community. This indicates that she does not share Werner’s moral concerns to the same extent and instead values the communal practice of faith more highly than the differences that Werner perceives. Interestingly, Werner seems to realize in his last interview that exactly those communities that he used to demonize give Gudrun an advantage over himself since she has other people to talk to while he does not have any other meaningful relationship beside his wife as he freely admits in his last interview. Gudrun seems to sense these mixed feelings and portrays them as jealousy, not without a note of satisfaction.

Despite all the differences outlined here, it also becomes clear that a shared faith and a shared practice of faith are the basis for their long-term relationship. In her first interview, Gudrun states:

I know these religious disputes sufficiently, since I see things differently, from an emotional angle, in contrast to my husband, who sees it more rationally. But we always come to the point that ... Because my husband also has a relationship with God, like I have. And so we both can confidently hold it out to God and say, “Help us to get back on one track.”⁵⁶ (Gudrun, FDI, time 1)

The ability to go to God with all of their difficulties together seems to be the core of their marriage. In this quote, God serves as a form of counsellor who stands outside of the dyad and is neutral yet benevolent toward both of them. However, the quote also points out that the way their faith is perceived individually and subjectively differs.

Comparing their respective paths of living their faith, it becomes clear that Gudrun and Werner, despite sharing a common base, go in different directions regarding what is important for them and how they practice their religiosity. Gudrun’s religiosity becomes more individualized over the years and she seems less concerned with others’ opinions. While this may be seen as an improvement, it becomes clear through analysis that this process for her happened involuntarily. Due to following her husband when he wanted to leave the groups behind, she is now deprived of a lot of social contacts she used to cherish. Yet, she keeps some bonds in form of her prayer circles and old friends. In contrast to his wife, Werner has more of a moral claim, and he is convinced that his way of pursuing new and deeper knowledge of his faith is the right one. Thereby, he adopts a missionary stance at times, which his wife lacks completely.

Summed up, it seems that the two spouses are two sides of one coin: Gudrun is sympathizing with the emotional side and the benefits of being religious. Her leitmotif, which is constant over the years, might be “God as a pillar of strength.” Werner represents the more rational, intellectual approach to being religious, and his leitmotif might best be described as “Seeking (and teaching) personal enlightenment.” This seems to be a gap within their shared faith that is hard to overcome, even though it seems that Gudrun is more willing to hear about Werner’s arguments and integrate them within her own faith system.

Notes

- 1 Gudrun and Werner’s faithful journey has also been portrayed in Bullik (2022).
- 2 Ich habe einfach eine tiefe Beziehung zu Jesus und vor allen Dingen, das hat sich eigentlich erst jetzt auch in den letzten Jahren so entwickelt, dass ich den Vater entdeckt habe. Und „Abba“, „Vater“ sagen kann und die Vaterliebe erfahre. Da bin ich ganz glücklich immer.
- 3 Gudrun was part of the Deconversion Revisited book project as well, so parts of the analysis of her first two interviews can also be found in Bullik, Steppacher, and Keller (2022a).
- 4 Und wir waren, man kann sagen, so ab ’75, schon in ner heftigen Diskussion miteinander. [...] Und ich denk, dass das auch mit alles dazu beigetragen hat, dass wir dann diesen Ausstieg auch so problemlos geschafft haben, eigentlich. [...] Weil, ich war die Überzeugte und ich spürte, wie mein Mann immer mehr abdriftet. Aber, ja, wie soll ich sagen? Ich hab schon versucht, ihn zu halten. Und hab immer auch noch mit Gegenargumenten gearbeitet. Mein Mann, der hat dann auch Literatur, alles Mögliche, bestellt. Und da spürte ich dann, als ich da so dieses erste Buch in Händen hielt, jetzt ist aus. Ich wusste, jetzt ist es vorbei. Und dann habe ich das aber selber gelesen, und komisch, das war in dem Moment, fiel’s mir wirklich wie Schuppen von den Augen. [...] Es war wohl dieser Prozess, der dahin geführt hat. Ich war immer noch, ja, es ist ja die Wahrheit. Aber dann war das wirklich: „Jetzt ist vorbei.“
- 5 Und da kam in der Zeit dieser Umbruch bei den Zeugen mit der Endzeitgeschichte ’75, [...] wo wir ganz stark ins Nachdenken gekommen sind, vor allen Dingen mein Mann, ich habe ja da noch heftig dagegen gearbeitet. Für mich war das halt die Wahrheit, die Zeugen. Das war halt das Richtige. [...] Ach ja, und dann hatte ich Kolleginnen, die kirchlich sehr aktiv waren und eben ich sage jetzt mal fromme Leute, wo ich eben auch kennengelernt habe, dass das eben ganz normale Menschen sind und nette Menschen sind. Und dann kam, dass ich schwanger wurde mit 42, [...]. Und das war dann das Signal des Ausstiegs bei den Zeugen. Also die Schwangerschaft hat da eine große Rolle mitgespielt. [...] Mein Mann ist immer eigentlich da der Federführende und der hat immer als Erstes irgendwo gemerkt, wenn wo der Hase der Pfeffer (lacht) liegt. Der war bei den Zeugen da derjenige, der uns rausgeholt hat, muss ich sagen.

- 6 Zwischendrin war ja der Ausstieg von den Zeugen, das habe ich jetzt vergessen, das kommt noch dazwischen. Das war in den 70er Jahren. Und zwar, ich war über 40 und wurde plötzlich schwanger. Und das war irgendwie mit ein Auslöser, dass wir gesagt haben, also, vor allen Dingen mein Mann war derjenige, der schon- er hatte ja schon immer Probleme mit den Zeugen. Er hat von Anfang an gesagt: „Wenn ich die heirate, bin ich mit den Zeugen auch verheiratet.“ Also er hat indirekt mir immer, empfinde ich das so, mehr oder weniger die Schuld gegeben. Ich sage immer: „Du hast mich doch geheiratet und nicht die Zeugenzeit.“ (lacht) Aber es war so. Naja, er hat da sehr gehadert, weil er gespürt hat, er liefert sich einer Sache aus und was er eigentlich nicht wollte. Ich muss auch dazu sagen, ich bin eigentlich ein Mensch, der, ja, sehr leicht auch zu beeinflussen ist. Wenn ich was höre, was mich interessiert, dann sage ich: „Jau, okay“, wenn (lächelt) ich was anderes höre, dann ist es wieder-. Aber, wie gesagt, die Begeisterung dann später nach dem Ausstieg von den Zeugen und dann hier die charismatische Szene, die hat mich nochmal ganz stark beeinflusst.
- 7 Und da habe ich eine Stelle gehabt, fing da an als kleine Laborantin, weil die da eine gesucht haben und habe ich gedacht: „Das ist eine Chance“ und habe dann die Stelle später übernommen und war dann die [Beruf A] von der Firma [X]. [...] Und die Zeit war sehr prägend für mich, weil ich da einen Kollegenkreis hatte und eine (seufzend) ach, ungeheure Freiheit erlebt habe gerade durch die Kollegen und durch die Arbeit, die ich da hatte. [...] Ich bin da auch reingewachsen. Ich war dann auch Autodidakt, weil ich vieles überhaupt nicht gelernt hatte, [...] und habe mich da in viele Projekte reinarbeiten müssen. [...] Und gerade diese zum Teil sehr schwierigen Sachen, da habe ich mich halt reingefuchst und dann ging das.
- 8 Spending the first part of her life in the newly founded German Democratic Republic might have influenced Gudrun's stance toward working women, though, since gainful employment for both sexes was much more common in and supported by the GDR government (see for example Sammet and Bergelt (2012) reviewing figures that support this hypothesis). This part of her biography might also serve as an explanation for her loyalty to Jehovah's Witnesses since, in the GDR, this community was prohibited, and parts of her family were sent to jail due to their membership.
- 9 Und da bekam ich dann die Chance, bei der Firma [X] [...]. Ich muss immer wieder sagen, das war die schönste Zeit meines Lebens in der Firma. Tolle Kollegen, toller Zusammenhalt, interessante Aufgaben. Also ich habe als Fotografin da alles machen müssen, was es gibt. Ich musste Produkte fotografieren, ich musste im Labor, in der Forschung, in der Technik, dann Jubiläen und, ja, Werkzeugung. Und ach, eben ein breites Band. Und das war wirklich abwechslungsreich und toll.
- 10 Natürlich, Krisenzeiten, in unserer Ehe, waren immer wieder da. [...] Ich hab in meiner Ehe viel geweint. [I: Was ist da mit Ihnen passiert?] Ich hab dann eigentlich immer wieder zurückgefunden, Trost gefunden, und das ist auch, wenn jetzt das hart auf hart mal geht. Man ist jetzt im Alter noch dünnhäutiger und empfindlicher. Ich kann damit zu Gott gehen und kann ihm das hinhalten und ich fühl mich dann getröstet und getragen und ich weiß, es gibt nen Weg. [...] [I: Welchen Einfluss hatten diese Erfahrungen?] Dass ich einerseits wohl in diesen Momenten auf Gott geworfen bin, mehr denn je. Dass ich auch vor allen Dingen gelernt hab, demjenigen zu

- vergeben, der mir wehgetan hat und hab dadurch ne ganz große Befreiung erfahren.
- 11 Krisenzeiten gab es in der Ehe. (lange Pause) Wo man wirklich gedacht hat, jetzt muss ich davonlaufen. (lacht) Aber das Gute bei uns beiden ist, dass wir immer wieder uns dann versöhnen konnten und in der jetzigen Zeit ist es so ... also ich muss Ihnen ehrlich sagen, mein Mann ist manchmal ... der hat ja eine furchtbare Kindheit und hat eine wirklich schlimme Zeit in der Jugend erlebt; er kann nicht lieben. Er kann es mit keiner Geste mir zeigen, dass er mich mag. Das kann er nicht. Er kann es nicht. Das sagt er auch, er kann es nicht. Und dann kommt es eben, dass er mich auch oft beleidigt und mir sehr weh tut. Weil er also eine sehr grobe Art hat dann. (lacht, lachend weiter) Ich weiß nicht, ob ich das sagen darf hier, aber es ist so. Und jetzt kommt es, dass ich drum bete, dass ich ihn so sehe, wie Jesus ihn sieht. Denn Jesus liebt ihn. Und er liebt Jesus. Das weiß ich. Und da wird mir die Liebe zu ihm geschenkt. Und ich kann dann mit dieser Art immer besser umgehen. Ich staune dann manchmal selber: Früher war das so, dass ich dann tagelang auch geschmollt habe, wenn mal wieder irgend so eine schlimme Phase war. Und ich war dann beleidigt und habe mit ihm nicht mehr geredet. Das ist nicht mehr der Fall. Ich kann das sofort, ich sage jetzt mal wegstecken, aber ich weiß, dass das nicht von mir kommt; dass mir das geschenkt wird. Und das ist eben auch die Gebetserhörung immer wieder: „Schenkt mir die Liebe, die ich jetzt für ihn brauche.“ (klatscht) Weil er ist ein ganz armer Kerl im Grunde genommen, wenn man weiß, wo das herkommt, in welchem Eisenpanzer er drinsteckt und nicht rauskommt, ... (lange Pause) ... er ist halt auch ein Mensch, ein Verstandesmensch, und ich habe ihm unheimlich viel zu verdanken. Ich weiß, dass ich ohne ihn nie so eine Entwicklung durchgemacht hätte.
- 12 Ja, das ist, die Krisenzeiten sind in der Ehe. Mein Mann hat sich halt auch immer gegen meinen Willen durchgesetzt und hat Dinge gemacht, die ich nicht nachvollziehen konnte. [...] Aber was ich begreifen musste und das, muss ich sagen, das habe ich eigentlich auch jetzt erst so in letzter Zeit richtig begriffen. Obwohl ich das immer gewusst habe. Er hatte eine ganz schlimme Kindheit. Er hat unter seinem Vater gelitten, unter den Umständen mit Ehescheidung und so weiter. Und da ist er wirklich bis ins Mark geschädigt. Und das geht ihm bis heute nach. Und ich musste begreifen, dass er diese Lieblosigkeit und dieses in sich hat und ... er kann keine Liebe zeigen. Also mein Mann kann mich nicht in den Arm nehmen. [...] Und das musste ich begreifen, da ist irgendwie eine Blockade, ich denke immer, der braucht (lächelt) in Führungsstrichen auch da noch Heilung. Aber die andere Seite ist, dass ich das jetzt wirklich verinnerlicht habe. Und man hadert ja, als Frau möchte man ja Zuneigung, [...] Ich weiß aber trotzdem, dass er zu mir steht und mich auch auf meine Art ja schätzt und mag. Und ich habe begriffen, dass er unheimlich viel Liebe braucht. Und ich muss diese Kraft aufbringen, ihn zu lieben so wie er ist. (lacht) Ja und das muss ich Ihnen sagen, ich war ja auch ein eigensinniger Mensch immer auch. [...] Ich bin gegen angegangen, ich habe mit ihm gekämpft und dort Gefechte und Diskussionen, ohne Ende. Aber ich weiß, dass es nix bringt. Und das empfinde ich jetzt so als ein großes Geschenk, wenn auch schlimme Auseinandersetzungen hinter uns liegen. [...] Und dann kann ich auf ihn zugehen und kann ihn in den Arm nehmen.

Und ich merke, dass ihm das ja dann auch gut tut. (lacht) Ja, das ist für mich ein großes Geschenk, dass ich das kann. Ich konnte das früher nicht. Früher habe ich drei Tage auch nicht mehr mit ihm geredet, wenn was Schlimmes war. Aber jetzt kann ich das: Schwamm drüber. Und das kostet natürlich auch immer wieder viel Kraft.

- 13 Ja, ja. Er hat da mehr Probleme mit. Er sieht das vielleicht auch viel nüchterner. Ich kann manches dann auch entschuldigen. [...] Ich seh dann den Menschen, der dahinter steht und denk, der macht das nicht böseartig. Ich mein, ich rede ja auch mal und mache da was falsch. [...] Vielleicht, dass mein Mann da manches besser einordnen kann. Ich weiß es nicht. Aber-. Gut.
- 14 Mein Mann ist immer eigentlich da der Federführende und der hat immer als Erstes irgendwo gemerkt, wenn wo der Hase der Pfeffer (lacht) liegt. Er war bei den Zeugen derjenige, der uns rausgeholt hat, muss ich sagen. Und auch da in der charismatischen Bewegung war er derjenige, der gesagt hat: „Du, da stimmt was nicht“ und das ist ... ja. Ich habe mich sehr wohlgefühlt und das war für mich ein Einbruch, weil er dann sehr dagegen gearbeitet hat, dass ich auch von diesem ganzen Umtrieb da frei werde und ... das war für mich eine- (leise) ist eigentlich eine sehr schlimme Zeit. Da habe ich sehr viel geweint. Weil ich immer gemeint habe, ich verliere meinen Glauben und ich habe dann nichts mehr. Weil ich immer gemeint habe: „Das ist es! Und nur so kannst du deinen Glauben pflegen oder ausüben ... in dieser Gemeinschaft.“
- 15 Er hat mich ja immer geprägt auch. Und was mein Mann gesagt hat, das wurde gemacht. Da gab es keinen Widerspruch. Und da habe ich mich auch oft ausgeliefert, um des lieben Friedens Willens und habe gemacht, was er sagt. Und wie gesagt, es war manches richtig und gut, aber im Moment kämpfe ich, muss ich sagen, aus dieser engen Bindung raus. Er hat größte Probleme, dass ich mich mit Frauen treffe, weil er da nicht mitkriegt, was da passiert. Und er (lächelt) kann das nicht begreifen, dass wir bloß quatschen.
- 16 Geistige Verbindung im Gebet mit Gott.
- 17 Vereinigung von Menschen, die über Gott und die Welt nachdenken.
- 18 [I: Halten Sie sich für religiös, gläubig oder für spirituell?] (lacht) Das letzte nicht. Äh, religiös möchte ich eigentlich auch nicht, weil, religiöse Menschen, das ist ja auch irgend so was Fanatisches. [...] Also so, das verbinde ich jetzt damit. [I: Wäre gläubig dann das Wort?] Gläubig klingt mir fast zu schwach. (lacht) [I: Ah ja. Wie würden Sie sich dann bezeichnen?] Überzeugter Christ. (lacht) Gläubig, ich glaube an Gott. Ich glaube an die Auferstehung.
- 19 [I: Halten Sie sich für religiös, ...] Ja! [I: oder auch für spirituell oder für gläubig?] Einfach für alles. Von jedem was. [...] Also ich bin gläubig, bin spirituell [und religiös.] [I: Und was bedeutet das für Sie?] [...] Ich fühle mich in dieser Rolle gut. Und wenn jemand mit dem Finger zeigt und sagt: „Guckt, da kommt eine Fromme“, dann macht mir das auch nichts aus. [...] Aber ja, religiös ist an sich richtiger. [I: Das heißt, Sie fühlen sich dem Christentum verbunden.] Ja.
- 20 Religiös, ja. Also, ja, das ist schon ausgeprägt. Also, die letzte Frage war ja, gläubig? Gläubig gehört ja da auch mit rein, ne? [I: Genau, gläubig auch und spirituell hieß die Frage, ja.] Ich glaube und ... und dieser Glaube, dass es einen Gott gibt und dass

- Jesus ... uns als die Person gegenübertritt als Erlöser, Bruder und was auch immer, Hirte, das macht mich dann religiös, dass ich dann an ihn glaube. (lächelt) Ja. [I: Was bedeutet das für Sie?] Das trägt, ja, das ist gut.
- 21 Ich hab eigentlich, das ist mir wohl in die Wiege gelegt worden, Urvertrauen. [...] Also ich komm aus einem religiösen Hintergrund. [...] Eigentlich kann ich sagen, es war kontinuierlich immer, auch bei den Zeugen hab ich immer Zeiten gehabt, das muss ich sagen, Notzeiten oder wenn Probleme waren und Krisenzeiten. Von Gott keine Antwort bekam. Ich hab da gebetet und es blieb alles so. [...] Aber dieses Urvertrauen, das blieb. [I: Was bedeutet Gott heute für Sie?] Dass er der Schöpfer und mein Vater ist. Ich kann sagen, „Abba“, „Vater“.
- 22 Ich habe einfach eine tiefe Beziehung zu Jesus und vor allen Dingen, das hat sich eigentlich erst jetzt auch in den letzten Jahren so entwickelt, dass ich den Vater entdeckt habe. Und „Abba“, „Vater“ sagen kann und die Vaterliebe erfahre. Da bin ich ganz glücklich immer. [...] [I: Und das war früher eben nicht so?] Nein. Es war sogar so, dass ich in manchen Freizeiten oder Seminaren-, [...] und ich weiß noch, wie ich da mit der Leiterin gerungen habe, „ich möchte mal die Nähe so erfahren, wie das andere erfahren und ich höre nichts und [...] ich habe das nie, nie diese Erfahrung gemacht.“ Und ich habe immer gesagt: „Das muss mir ja doch geschenkt werden. Ich muss es doch auch erleben. [...]“ Und es war nie was. Und als ich dann weg war von dieser ganzen Sache, da spürte ich plötzlich die Nähe Jesu. Und dann jetzt die Entwicklung zum Vater hin, sagen wir mal so seit zwei, drei Jahren. [...] Ich fühle mich einfach geborgen und ich habe eine tiefe Gewissheit auch, dass ich geführt werde und dass er mir beisteht und vor allen Dingen auch, dass ich oft so das Erlebnis habe, dass er meine Gebete erhört. Gerade wenn ich in einer schwierigen Situation bin.
- 23 Also das Weltbild als solches hat sich... Ich meine, ich habe zum Beispiel immer an die Evolutionstheorien (lächelt) geglaubt und ich meine, zwar nicht an die sechs Tage, aber [...]. Und diese Erkenntnis, die neuste Erkenntnis über die Evolution und so weiter, das hat mich dann auch vom Hocker gerissen, sage ich mal. Insofern hat sich das Weltbild schon geändert. [...] Ich meine, zum Teil hatte ich Probleme, am Anfang, aber jetzt, das ist für mich sonnenklar, wie das jetzt ist. Und mein Gottesbild ist dadurch in keiner Weise betroffen, weil das für mich sowieso immer mein Halt war, dass ich wusste, dass ich in Jesu Händen bin und dass ich von ihm geborgen und gehalten mich weiß. [...] Wo ich von den Zeugen bin zum Beispiel, da war das plötzlich dieses Befreiende, Mensch, der Mann, der ist es. Und der hält dich. Und das ist in allen Phasen eigentlich geblieben. Und jetzt durch dieses Lesen von dem Eugen Biser, der dann am Schluss sagt, was die Kirche und überhaupt erkennen muss, dass sie weg muss von dem strafenden Gott und erkennen muss, dass er ein Gott der unendlichen Liebe ist. [...] Und das leuchtet mir völlig ein.
- 24 Und ja, wir lebten als gute Kirchenchristen. Ich hatte aber immer irgendwo ein Gefühl, dass mir irgendwas fehlt. Es müsste noch weiter gehen. Und der Umzug hierher war ja auch ich sag immer, ne Fügung. [...] Und wir kamen dann hier in die Gemeinde und hatten dann diesen Hauskreis, wo wir uns regelmäßig getroffen haben. Und da eben auch viele heiße Diskussionen waren, die sehr offen waren. [...] Und dann wurden hier in der Gemeinde Glaubenskurse angeboten. Und da bin ich

dann hingegangen und beim zweiten hat dann mein Mann mitgemacht. Und das war für uns dann Neubelebung unseres Glaubens. Und das war meine sehr tolle (lacht) Hochphase. [...] Wir haben wieder tolle Leute kennengelernt, [...]. Ich denk, dass das auch für uns wichtig war, diese Erfahrung zu machen, ja, ich sag jetzt mal, wo man, das ist (lacht) ne andere Dimension noch mal wie das sonntags brav in die Kirche gehen, sondern das-, und das war für mich und ist es eigentlich heut noch, ein lebendiger Gottesdienst. Wo das nicht steif und streng zugeht, sondern wo man frei ist, auch äh, ja, beim Singen aufsteht oder sich hinsetzt. Wo einfach eine Freiheit ist. Wie man sich fühlt, so kann man sich da bewegen.

- 25 Ja, da könnte ich sagen, ja. Und das sind, sagen wir jetzt mal, die Grundsätze der Bibel. Also Gebote, da würde ich sagen, die sollten wir beachten. Es gibt bestimmte Dinge, die sich immer zum Schaden für die Menschen dann ausgewirkt haben, [...] die sich nie als positiv ausgewirkt haben. Obwohl man heute, die Freiheit, ich sag jetzt mal, gerade auch im sexuellen Gebiet, als toll empfindet und als Befreiung, es mag sein. Aber es wirkt sich für die Menschen letztlich nicht zum Positiven aus. [I: Meinen Sie jetzt die zehn Gebote zum Beispiel?] Ich meine, im Groben, die zehn Gebote zusammengefasst. Du sollst Gott über alles lieben und deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst. Und wenn ich meinen Nächsten liebe, tue ich ihm nichts Böses. Ich töte ihn nicht, ich stehle nicht und so weiter. Das ist ja da drin. Und Jesus hat es eben in diesen zwei Geboten zusammengefasst.
- 26 Ich denke, dass wir die Bibel haben und dass wir die zehn Gebote haben. Aber ich denke, dass es eben auch das Neue, womit man sich jetzt ja immer mehr beschäftigt, dass man doch auch in vielen Punkten was neu überdenkt und neu überlegt und manches doch anders versteht und bestimmte Dinge-, also früher war für mich zum Beispiel Homosexualität ein Thema, was ich total abgelehnt habe. Ich sehe das heute anders. Das ist ja auch eine Entwicklung und man versteht das heute anders. [...] Das sind Dinge, wo man umdenkt. Und so gibt es eben auch Grundsätze, wo man manchmal denkt: „Naja, musst du das doch so annehmen, wie es sich jetzt entwickelt hat“ und versteht es dann auch anders. Oder besser. [...] Ja, ja. Also ich denke immer, wir stehen ja nicht still. Es ist doch immer wieder ein Prozess, wo was Neues erforscht wird, jetzt die neue Bibelwissenschaft in den letzten 30 Jahren, was sich da Neues entwickelt hat und neue Erkenntnisse über Gebote und Gesetze und so weiter.
- 27 [I: Und gibt es moralische Grundsätze, über die wir uns alle einig sein sollten?] Schön wäre es. Aber ist nicht möglich. Ich denke auch, es gibt da so unterschiedliche Auffassungen. Und gerade jetzt auch das, was immer wieder noch hochkocht, das Thema Homosexualität oder sowas. Ich meine, gut, da hatte ich ja auch mal ganz große Probleme und es ist schwierig, wenn man das sieht als normal fühlender Mensch, der entwickelt sich jetzt ja da in die falsche Richtung. Aber ich kann da nicht drüber urteilen, weil ich inzwischen auch weiß, dass es so viele Faktoren eine Rolle spielt, dass ein Mensch in die oder jene Richtung kippt. Und er ist deshalb kein schlechter Mensch. Und deshalb kann ich das, ja, nicht sagen, so oder so ist richtig und falsch und Punkt, aus.
- 28 Ja, ich weiß nicht. Ich denke immer, ich bin so ein Mensch, der in gewisser Hinsicht in sich ruht. Ich habe so eine Glaubensgewissheit, ich bin mit mir im Einklang und

- mit meiner Umwelt und meine Gabe ist es auch, dass ich auch auf jeden zugehen kann und dass ich die Menschen, die mir begegnen und auch aus dem Freundeskreis und wenn sie noch so schwierig sind, dass ich mit denen umgehen kann. Dass ich die annehme und trotzdem liebevoll in den Armen nehmen kann, obwohl sie vielleicht gegenteiliger Meinung sind.
- 29 Als jetzt bibelwissenschaftlich aufgeklärter Mensch muss ich eben sagen: Glauben ja, aber bitte beachten, dass es kein Wortglaube ist, wie er oft praktiziert und wie er oft verstanden wird.
- 30 Ich würde sagen Kindheit, Urvertrauen in der Kindheit würde ich ein Kapitel überschreiben. Das ist der wichtige Punkt, den wir allen Zeugen voraushaben, die hineingeboren worden sind. Wir haben als Kinder ein Urvertrauen in der Kindheit vermittelt bekommen. [...] Ich weiß nur, dass meine Mutter immer gesagt hat, wenn ich in den Kindergarten gegangen bin, ich soll beten. Das habe ich dann gemacht: „Lieber Gott, lass heut wieder Fliegeralarm sein, dass wir wieder in den Keller können.“
- 31 Also der Beginn meiner Bekanntschaft mit den Zeugen Jehovas war etwa 1949, 1950, durch meine Mutter, die damals in einer schweren Lebenskrise war. [...] Und dann kamen die ersten Zeugen an die Tür. Und die hatten damals, nach dem Krieg, ein großes Phänomen. Weil sie für sich in Anspruch nehmen konnten: „Wir waren die einzigen Christen, die für unsere Wehrdienstverweigerung ins KZ gegangen sind. Beziehungsweise uns haben sie auch hinrichten lassen.“ Hatten also damals einen guten Ruf und als meine Mutter dann einigermaßen wieder auf die Füße kam, ging sie da mit in die Versammlung. [...] 1950 wurden sie in der DDR verboten. Wegen ihres sehr stark antikommunistischen Kurses, den man verfolgt hat. [...] und dann ging es im Untergrund weiter. Das sind die Zeugen ja gewöhnt, dass sie dann im Untergrund weitermachen. Das haben sie im Dritten Reich auch schon gemacht. Da haben sie große Erfahrung drin. Dass man sich also konspirativ, getroffen hat. [...] Und dann wurde die Ehe geschieden. [...] Und dann kam das Jugendamt und hat ihr die Erziehungsberechtigung als Zeugin Jehovas abgesprochen. Und ich sollte in nen Jugendheim. Und da hat sie dann die Flucht eingeleitet. [...] Gut, wir sind als Flüchtlinge anerkannt worden und sind dann ausgeflogen worden nach [Stadt F] [...]. Und da muss ich jetzt sagen, da kam dieser Punkt, wo ich merkte, das wird jetzt ziemlich ernst. Wir hatten ja Literatur. Bücher, vor allen Dingen den Wachturm und Erwachet. [...] Und dann muss man das also daheim studieren und wird es in der Versammlung noch mal durchgenommen und noch mal gelesen. [...] Und [ich dachte]: „Meine Güte, das kann ja heiter werden.“ Und es wurde heiter. [...] Und dann kam noch dazu, [...] Missionsdienst. [...] Und ich fand es furchtbar. Also die [...] Leute früh belästigen mit irgendwas, was sie gar nicht wissen wollten. [...] Und ich hatte meine Frau zwar kennengelernt, das heißt, eben als Zeugin. [...] Und ja, man lernte sich dann doch nen bisschen näher kennen und dann begann das für mich persönlich Verhängnisvolle, dass sich ein Freundeskreis mit jungen Zeugen bildete. [...] Und da war ich wieder voll drin. [...]
- 32 Eine ganze Kleinigkeit, die mir bis heute nachgeht. [...] Äh, in [der Versammlung in Stadt R], wurde eine junge Schwester, eine Zeugin ausgeschlossen, hatte Gemeinschaftsentzug, weil sie ein Kind gekriegt hat, ein uneheliches Kind. Das ist für die Zeugen, zumindest damals, Grund zum Ausschluss. Und als diese junge Frau

mit ihrem Kinderwagen, den sicherlich irgend nen Außenstehender getragen hat und kein Zeuge, [...] jedenfalls, wir haben sie im Treppenhaus des Zeugengebäudes grußlos an uns vorüber ziehen lassen. Und dafür schäme ich mich heut noch. Das geht mir bis heute nach. Dass auch ich so indoktriniert war, und wir uns beide nicht wohlgefühlt haben mit dieser Verhaltensweise. Also, das wäre mal nen Punkt, der mir irgendwo hängen geblieben ist, dass es irgendwo doch nicht deckungsgleich ist, denn ein Hardliner hätte keine, hat keine Gewissensbisse.

- 33 Ja, also, stark geprägt wurde mein Lebensabschnitt ja durch die Zugehörigkeit zu der religiösen Sondergemeinschaft der Zeugen Jehovas. Heute sagt man ja nicht mehr „Sekte“, sondern sagt vornehm „religiöse Sondergemeinschaft. Und dieser Lebensabschnitt war stark geprägt bis eben zu meinem Ausstieg. [...] Dann (seufzt) war die Freiheit, die geistige Freiheit, natürlich zu spüren, die man dann hatte. [...] Das interessante ist: Ich bin eigentlich atheistisch erzogen worden, ja. Das heißt, ich hatte überhaupt keine religiöse Beziehung. Und als meine Mutter dann in diese Sekte hineingeraten ist aufgrund einer persönlichen Lebenskrise, [...] dann kam ja die Zeugen an die Tür und die hatten damals ja einen großen Rückhalt. Sie waren diejenigen, die unter Hitler den Kriegsdienst verweigert haben, [und deswegen] im KZ waren. [...] Und dann kam die Ehescheidung und ihr wurde das Erziehungsrecht abgesprochen und ich hätte also dann in ein Heim gemusst und dann ist sie in den Westen geflüchtet, weil sie hatte schon damals Kontakt nach [Stadt F], und zwar die Zeugen hatten damals organisiert, dass Westleute Ostleute sozusagen als Paten übernehmen. [...] Und ich war eigentlich, als ich meine Lehre beendet hatte, war ich eigentlich schon auf dem Absprung. Ich war uninteressiert an weiteren Religionen und diesem ganzen Quatsch. Und lernte aber dann da meine Frau kennen und bin dadurch wieder hineingeraten. [...] Also da ist der Abschnitt ... ich muss es doch an der Religion festmachen. Beruflich kann ich es eigentlich schlecht festmachen. Ich habe mehrfach einen Stellenwechsel gehabt, [...] aber die Lebensabschnitte würde ich eigentlich lieber an meiner religiösen Entwicklung festmachen.
- 34 Einmal 25 Jahre Mitglied in einer Sekte, der Zeugen Jehovas. Bedingt als Kind hineingeraten durch die Mutter, also nicht von selber. Und dann in der Sekte geheiratet und dabei eben geblieben, bis nach 25 Jahren das Erwachen kam. Die Feststellung, dass die Sekte theologisch total danebenliegt. Das war der ein Abschnitt, der zweite Abschnitt, ich mache es jetzt an Religionen fest, man könnte es auch Beruf ändern. Der zweite Abschnitt war dann Austritt aus der Gemeinde, aus der Sekte. Dann Geburt unserer Tochter. Und bedingt durch die Geburt auch dann eine Hinwendung zur evangelischen Landeskirche. Und dort eben Eintritt. Und dann eben durch Ortswechsel, kam dann auch mit dem neuen Pfarrer in der neuen Gemeinde, die charismatische Ausrichtung zum Tragen. Und man war begeistert, man hat Vorträge besucht, Kongresse besucht. Und dann kam das dritte Erwachen, nämlich die Erkenntnis, auch diese charismatische Ausrichtung führt in Sackgassen, auch geistig bleibt man stehen. Und es kam ein drittes Erwachen, nämlich durch hören von theologischen Vorträgen, eine völlig neue Sicht der biblischen Texte, auch aus der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive zu untersuchen, zu hinterfragen, zu vergleichen mit außerbiblischen Texten, sei es assyrischer, babylonischer oder ägyptische Geschichtsschreibung. Und das hat eben nochmal zu einem weiteren Erwachen ge-

- führt, sodass ich mich heute theologisch sattelfest fühle. Und ich merke das auch in Gesprächen mit irgendwelchen Pfarrern, es ist eine Ebene. Gut, das wären Abschnitte, meine Lebensabschnitte theologisch.
- 35 Und das waren anderthalb ganz schwierige Jahre. Da war ich eher dem Selbstmord nahe als allem anderen. Meine Frau kann nen Lied davon singen. Meine Tochter auch. Lachen war verboten. Also ab Sonntagmittag konnte ich nichts mehr gebrauchen, keinen Spaß und kein Witz und nix mehr. Da stand dann der Montag vor der Tür [...] [I: Was würden Sie rückblickend sagen, was ist damals mit Ihnen passiert und welchen Einfluss hatten diese Erfahrungen?] Ich bin von einem hohen Ross heruntergestiegen. Ich wurde ganz klein. Ich hatte ja als, als Einkäufer in einer [großen] Firma werden Sie ja hofiert, von den Vertretern. Da sind Sie wer. [...] Und da sind Sie immer mit einem Hochgefühl heimgekommen. Und da habe ich auch meine Frau mies behandelt. Dieses Hochgefühl und so hat sich auch hier ausgewirkt. Hab sie auch so von oben runter behandelt. Aber sie war ja selber berufstätig und sie konnte das dann kommentieren, weil sie in ihrer Firma was war. Aber das, diese ist mir da gründlich vergangen. Die Hochnäsigkeit oder, oder dieses-. Da habe ich irgendwo ne sehr unangenehme Eigenschaft.
- 36 Und die Krise, die richtige, schwere Krise, war der Stellenwechsel [...], die Krise hat etwa zwei Jahre gedauert. [I: Welchen Einfluss hatten diese Erfahrungen so?] Diese Enttäuschung hat mich jetzt zum Skeptiker gemacht, was persönliche Beziehungen anbelangt. Die wirklich sehr zu hinterfragen und eben ja, sie nicht zu eng werden zu lassen, weil da könnte ja die nächste Enttäuschung kommen. [...] Also ich bin nicht mehr der überschäumende, freudevolle Mensch, bin skeptisch, was alles so passieren kann.
- 37 Also die größte Krise war der letzte Berufswechsel in diese [Fabrik] von Firma [X], Weltmarktführer, ja, das war eine solche ... Pleite, also das ... unvorstellbar. Also da war ich in einer riesen Krise ... und kann man gar nicht beschreiben. Ja und dann natürlich, und auch wie immer, wenn es mir in einer Firma gut ging, wenn es gut lief und hatte sich wieder etabliert und hat eine Abteilung geführt, ja. Plötzlich heißt, verlagert. Ja. Und ich war gebunden, ortsgebunden. Auch durch meine Frau, die eine sehr gute berufliche Stellung hatte bei der Firma [Y], [...], überall ist sie rumgekommen. Sie war bekannt wie ein bunter Hund. Und sie hat eine ganz, ganz tolle Stelle da gehabt. Und da habe ich mir gesagt, kann man nicht riskieren...
- 38 Also erstens mal meine Frau. Also wir lesen, wir versuchen es immer gemeinsam zu lösen. Das zweite, dass wir's Gott hinhalten einfach so. Und menschliche Berater haben wir eigentlich keine, leider.
- 39 Wir lesen auch jeden Tag gemeinsam mal was. Wir haben also nen Bibelleseplan. [...] Ich sag zu meiner Frau, die gerne mit dem Herzen noch so an verschiedenen Leuten hängt, und ich sag: „Du Frau, ich kann nicht mehr auf diese Stufe zurück, dass ich mich wieder hineinfallen lasse, in das ganze charismatische Getriebe und die charismatischen Gottesdienste und so weiter. Ich kann mal nen Besuch machen, kann mal hingehen. Aber ich kann nicht mehr jubeln und Händeklatschen und wie immer, was da so gang und gäbe ist. Kann's nicht mehr.“ In dem Fall unterscheiden wir uns.

- 40 Meine Frau geht wie gesagt in so einen frommen Kreis und so einen Gebetskreis ... zu meinem Ärger, (lachend) muss ich sagen. [...] Und dann hat meine Frau eben noch religiöse Beziehungen in zwei Gebetskreisen, wo ich ehrlich gesagt nicht begeistert bin. Das weiß sie auch, aber sie hat dadurch auch Kontakte hier im Ort. Und das tut ihr gut und da denke ich: „Na ja gut, soll es so bleiben.“
- 41 Oh, an meiner Frau (lacht) Ja, ich habe sonst niemand. Wir sprechen offen darüber und haben da keine Geheimnisse und keine Berührungsängste. Das wird alles offen besprochen also [...] Aber einen Seelsorger in dem Sinn, habe ich da nicht ... leider. Meine Frau vielleicht dann eher mit ihrem Kreis.
- 42 Und ja, man lernte sich dann doch n bisschen näher kennen und dann begann das für mich persönlich Verhängnisvolle, dass sich ein Freundeskreis mit jungen Zeugen bildete, die nach dem sonntäglichen Haus-zu-Hausziehens [...] in den Nachbarort fuhren, [...]. Und da aß man zu Mittag. Und gemeinsam Wachturm studiert. Natürlich. Und dann ist man abends gemeinsam in die Versammlung. So. Und da war ich wieder voll „drin.“ Und dann hab ich meine Frau näher kennengelernt, sozusagen. [...] Und da war an Ausstieg nicht mehr zu denken. Im Gegenteil, ich musste mich dann auch-, das ist ja der nächste Schritt, taufen lassen. Das war unabdingbar. Weil, sie wurde gewarnt [...] vor mir, ich also sei Querdenker oder sei einfach nicht der richtige Umgang für sie. Sie war ne treue, brave, eifrige Schwester und ich war halt so'n Mitläufer.
- 43 [...] da war der dicke Wälzer dabei vom Kurt Hutten, Grübler, Seher, Enthusiasten. [...] Ein Superbuch. Und der beschreibt die Strukturen und das, was sich da abspielt, 100% genau treffend. [...] Und meine Frau: „Das ist das Aus!“ [...] Und das war's dann auch. Äh, ich hab ihr dann auch 'n Buch zu lesen gegeben, aber komischerweise, ich wusste, intuitiv, wenn wir da rausgehen, haben wir ein geistiges Vakuum. Und dieses Vakuum muss ich wieder füllen. Ich muss [...] mit meiner Frau, [...] Ich weiß, ist falsch was ich jetzt sage. Aber ich muss mit ihnen jetzt auch eine Gehirnwäsche vornehmen. Ich weiß, dass es heute Indoktrination heißen muss. Weil Gehirnwäsche ist ja etwas, was man an Kriegsgefangenen macht [...] [und] mit Gewalteinwirkung, Folter oder so zusammenhängt. Also, muss ich Ihnen ja nix erzählen. [...] Das heißt, ich habe mich dann nächtelang und habe die Lehren der Wachturmgesellschaft aufgearbeitet. [...] einmal, um es selber zu kapieren und habe es meinen Frauen immer wieder zu lesen gegeben und habe gesagt: „Lest mal des und prüft mal des und die Lehre und die Lehre.“ [...] Meine Frau sagt heute: „Du hättest mich nicht anders rausgekriegt als mit Widerlegung ihrer Lehre.“
- 44 Und dann einschneidend war natürlich dann die Loslösung, das war ein Kampf, der dauerte ungefähr ein Jahr. Ein geistiger Kampf, uns von den Zeugen loszulösen. Denn meine Frau hat das vertreten und verteidigt und hat gesagt, die werden doch irgendwann mal kapieren, was sie da für einen Mist schreiben. [...] Und darüber haben wir auf jeder Wanderung [...] diskutiert. [...] Ich musste mir Bücher besorgen. Habe mir alle Bücher besorgt, die es damals von Ex-Zeugen gab. Unter anderem gab es ein sehr gutes Buch von der evangelischen Weltanschauungsstelle über Sekten, Grübler, Enthusiasten, das das völlig auf den Punkt gebracht hat. [...] Und da habe ich gesagt: „Das ist es! Genau das!“ [...] Ich kam eines Tages mit dem Stapel voll Bücher unterm Arm heim und dann dachte meine Frau: „Und jetzt ist es aus.“ Und so

- war es dann auch. Und dann habe ich mich wochenlang hingesetzt und habe dann auch mal das lehrmäßig widerlegt und habe das meinen Frauen immer wieder gegeben und irgendwann kam dann der Ausstieg.“
- 45 Ich habe ja damals eine Ausarbeitung gemacht über die falschen Lehren der Zeugen. [...] Und ich hatte dann mühsam damals, kein Internet, nix, mühsam Informationen beschafft über die Zeugen und habe mich dann nächtelang hingesetzt und Ausarbeitungen gemacht, mit der Schreibmaschine getippt. Und das hat dann meine Frau gelesen und wir sind dann zu der Überzeugung gekommen, ja, es ist ein Irrtum, eine Fata Morgana, diese Wahrheitssekte. Und dann haben wir gemeinsam damals einen Aufsatzbrief geschrieben an den Versammlungsaltesten und der hat besagt: „Wir erklären unseren Austritt.“
- 46 Geistiges Interesse haben und pflegen. Sich mit Weltanschaulichen Fragen auseinandersetzen.
- 47 Mit diesem Begriff kann ich persönlich nichts anfangen. Diese Geistesrichtung ist mir fremd. Sie passt wohl eher zum Humanismus als zur religiösen Denkweise.
- 48 Religiöse Fragen durch zu denken z.B. die Theodizee-Frage.
- 49 Religion heißt für mich die Suche nach einem Sinn des eigenen Daseins. Eine Unzufriedenheit mit dem Verlöschen des eigenen Seins. Religion (egal welche) bietet Antworten auf Fragen, die die Wissenschaft nicht beantworten kann.
- 50 Glaube heißt für mich, dass ich die Dinge für wahr halte, an die ich bisher nur glaube. Also an ein Leben in einer anderen Welt. Aber ein Geborgensein, dass er mich angenommen hat. Das ist für mich gläubig sein. Ja, ich muss es jetzt mal so auf den Punkt bringen: Wenn Sie mich jetzt fragen, „Was glauben Sie, wenn Sie heute Nacht sterben, werden Sie in das Reich Gottes eingehen?“ Da antworte ich mit einem zursichtlichen „Ja.“
- 51 Gläubig. Das bedeutet, dass ich mich verantwortlich fühle für meine Taten. Und das bedeutet auch, dass ich für mein Tun und Lassen Rechenschaft ablegen muss. Hat nichts mit Hölle zu tun. Einfach nur Rechenschaft ablegen im Weltgericht. Das kann eine sehr, sehr schmerzhaft Angelegenheit werden, wenn Sie konfrontiert werden mit Ihren Unterlassungssünden, wo Sie vielleicht Gutes hätten bewirken können, und nichts bewirkt haben. Abgesehen davon reden wir jetzt mal nicht über Adolf Hitler und Stalin, die Millionen von Menschen auf dem Gewissen haben. Die werden auch mit ihren Taten konfrontiert. Das ist für mich gläubig.
- 52 Da gefällt mir eigentlich nix davon. Also spirituell ist ja eher für, denke ich mal, für nicht Gläubige gedacht. Gläubig, gläubig ja, aber nicht wortgläubig. Also gläubig mit gewissen Einschränkungen. [...], als jetzt bibelwissenschaftlich aufgeklärter Mensch muss ich eben sagen: Glauben ja, aber bitte beachten, dass es kein Wortglaube ist, wie er oft praktiziert und wie er oft verstanden wird. Ich sitze gerade an einem Leserbrief, da geht es um den AfD-Abgeordneten, der zitiert wurde in der frommen Zeitschrift "[Name A]". [...] Also und das sind eben diese Menschen, die das lesen und sagen: So nehmen wir das. Und der ist bestimmt auch gläubig, aber ich unterscheide mich dann von solchen Gläubigen. Ich widerspreche ihm.
- 53 Als Kind wurde mir [ein] lieber Gott vermittelt, zu dem man ein Vertrauen haben kann. Dann wurde mir in der Zeugen-Mitgliedschaft ein autoritativer Gott vermittelt, der aufpasst, der registriert, der belohnt, der bestraft, je nach Verhaltensweise.

Ein furchterregendes Gottesbild. [...] In der evangelischen Landeskirche ist mir ein liberales Gottesbild vermittelt worden, [...]. Bei den Charismatikern [kam es dann], was wir ihnen ja sehr hoch anrechnen, dazu, dass wir uns in eine persönliche Beziehung hineingewagt haben. Es ist schon etwas merkwürdig und es gibt da auch gescheite Bücher drüber, wenn man sagt: „Ja, wenn Gott der Herr in deinem Leben ist, dann ist er nicht nur der Herr hier im Wohnzimmer, wo alles schön aufgeräumt ist, dann ist er auch der Herr (hinter?) der Bühne, wo die versteckten Dinge liegen [...]“ Das heißt, die Leichen müssen aus dem Keller geholt werden, wenn man in eine wirkliche, offene Beziehung treten will. Und da muss ich jetzt noch dazusagen [...], [es] fällt mir heute schwer, Gott als Vater anzusprechen, obwohl Jesus uns das ja so gelehrt hat „Betet, Vater im Himmel“. [...] Also jedenfalls, wir beten gern zu Jesus und haben auch, wie gesagt, unser Gottesbild hat sich jetzt stark auch auf Jesus fixiert, bedingt durch dieses gestörte Vaterverhältnis, wobei wir aber gar keine Probleme haben, Gott als Vater anzureden.

- 54 Das Weltbild bei den Zeugen war der richtende und strafende Gott, der kontrollierende Gott, ja? Der alles sieht und alles registriert, ein absolut autoritäres Gottesbild, völlig, also völlig unrealistisch auch. [...] Das wurde dann anders, als wir dann in die Landeskirche gingen und unsere Gespräche mit dem Pfarrer, [...] da wurde das Gottesbild natürlich abgemildert, [...]. Aber es kam zu einem neuen Gottesbild beim Einstieg in die charismatische Szene. Da kam es zu einem sehr, sehr naiven Gottesbild. In der charismatischen Szene ist ja auch eine sehr große Wundergläubigkeit vorhanden. [...] Und der Ausstieg aus dieser Szene, der führte ja dann dazu: „Jetzt will ich mich mal wissenschaftlich mit Glauben auseinandersetzen.“ [...] Und das Gottesbild hat sich jetzt nochmal wesentlich verändert, dass ich nicht mehr diese Wundergläubigkeit habe, sondern, dass ich eigentlich sage: Wir können die Dinge, die wir hier in der Bibel lesen, [...] wir müssen auch die Umstände, unter denen das geschrieben wurde, den Kontext, beachten. [...] Also ich habe ein legeres Gottesbild, unverkrampft kann ich an Gott glauben, mit Gott reden ohne irgendwelche krampfigen geistigen Verrenkungen zu machen.
- 55 [Das] hat sich einmal verändert, als wir die Sekte verlassen haben. Da war eben das Sektenweltbild, nur wir sind auf dem richtigen Weg, alle anderen werden vernichtet, ja? [...] Eine entscheidende Veränderung kam durch die neue theologische Ausrichtung auf wissenschaftlicher Basis, [...] die uns nochmal ein völlig anderes religiöses Weltbild vermittelt hat. Also eine andere Sichtweise. Also weg von dieser Enge, weg von diesem Wort-für-Wort-Glauben. [...] In der Sekte hatten wir ja immer diesen strafenden Gott vor Augen, der also das Ungehorsam bestraft. Der also wie ein Polizist über unser Leben wacht. Das ist ein furchtbares Gottesbild. Das wurde natürlich dann hinfällig mit dem Austritt aus der Sekte. Aber es kam ein bisschen dann wieder rüber durch die charismatische Bewegung, die auch ein enges Weltbild hat, die an die Verbalinspiration mehr oder weniger glaubt. Und das wurde dann auch nochmal völlig verändert fast (lächelt) ins Gegenteil mit der Freiheit, die wir jetzt durch Forschung, Lehre (lächelt) im theologischen Sektor haben. [...] Die Gottesfrage wird ja oft als Theodizee-Frage behandelt. [...] Die [Frage] habe ich für mich gelöst, indem ich sage: [...] Auch wenn es im Glaubensbekenntnis steht, „Gott ist allmächtig, ich glaube an Gott den Allmächtigen.“ Ich glaube nicht an die

Allmacht Gottes. Ich glaube an das Mitleiden Gottes, das Mitleiden Jesu, das er ja selber demonstriert hat. Aber nicht mehr an die Allmacht Gottes. Damit liege ich natürlich nicht auf der Linie meiner evangelischen Landeskirche, die ihr Glaubensbekenntnis treu und brav spricht, aber das ist mein Resümee.

- 56 Ich kenn diese religiösen Auseinandersetzungen zur Genüge, weil ich es vom Gefühl her auch anders sehe als mein Mann, der es vom Verstand her sieht. Aber wir immer wieder doch auch an den Punkt kommen, dass ... Weil ja mein Mann ja auch ne Beziehung zu Gott hat, wie ich auch. Und dass wir das beide irgendwie dann sicher Gott hinhalten können und sagen: „Hilf uns doch dabei, dass wir wieder auf eine Schiene kommen.“

10. Marion—Focusing on Life and Death

“And when you ask yourself in your last seconds, ‘Have I lived my young life as I wanted it to?’ And if you can answer this question for yourself in a woke state, then you’ll change. Because you’ll live more in the Here and Now.”¹

Marion was a woman of 64 years when she was first interviewed for the study of Spirituality in 2011, and her case has been portrayed in the book displaying results of this study (Keller & Wollert, 2016). At time 3, she is 73 years old. Marion has grown up in post-war Germany, but the war and its effects do not play a big role in her accounts at times 1 and 2. Before she went to university to study pedagogics, she got pregnant and had to marry given the social pressure at the time. During her time at university, she experienced the student protest movements and surges of women rising up and demonstrating for equal rights. Marion worked as a teacher for several years and traveled the world on a spiritual search after her children left the house. This search eventually led her to Poona, India, where she lived in an ashram for a time. Currently, she works as a therapeutic clown primarily in hospices, which has greatly influenced the way she thinks about death. Her interviews are characterized by a palpable vitality and serenity, which is not diminished by the fact that her age is slowly taking its toll.

10.1.1 Marion’s Life Reviews—Looking Back on Life, Looking Forward to Death

Marion’s Life Reviews

Marion’s answers to the first question of the interview are very comprehensive at all time-points and often drifting to a more abstract level of observation and more general remarks on human life. Many themes that are important in understanding her personality are mentioned as well, which is why parts of these first answers are excluded and will appear in the following paragraphs.

In her first interview, she outlines her life as follows:

Childhood, adolescence, then there is a chapter with my personality, kind of estranged, so to speak, and then aging is coming back to me as a person. [! : Okay. What does that mean, “personality, kind of estranged?”] Well, as a child, I was close to myself. As an adolescent too, sort of, and then I became this [Marion], like, my life took a different, totally different course which wasn't in any way connected with what I actually am in life. [...] So, what is meaningful for me is that I have always been a creative, highly sensitive person and when I was a child, that was more of a nuisance, like the people or the grown-ups could hardly handle that and that's why it's important that I created a space for myself, like, not a virtual one, but a space of my own in which I was at home, so to say. I find that important. External events, like, I grew up in a very bourgeois home. When I'm telling this with little emotion, this does not mean I'm holding back something, like, there are feelings actually, but they aren't relevant anymore. I have worked through these, therapeutically and during my lifetime, and also spiritually.² (Marion, FDI, time 1)

Even though Marion starts by naming conventional life chapters, she quickly switches to a more abstract consideration of her life. Everything that happened between her adolescence and the beginning of the phase she calls “aging” is labelled as “estranged.” This includes, as will become apparent when she continues to tell her story, her life as a young mother, her divorce, and raising two boys as a single mom. She believes that she would have had different tasks in life and that getting married and having children was just something she “fell into.” However, her account does not sound as remorseful as may be expected. Instead, she focuses on the way she handled her life and her own peculiarities. With the help of therapists and by engaging with spirituality, she was able to create a space of her own in which she can be as creative as she wants and needs to be and in which she feels accepted the way she is. This had not been the case growing up in a home that she calls bourgeois, though she does not go into detail what this meant for her. Her childhood experience is briefly summed up as being a “nuisance” for not adjusting to the grown-ups' expectations. This infers that Marion was a lonely child who was not “seen.” This is also supported by the fact that she had to therapeutically work through her childhood, which, eventually, led her on her spiritual path.

In her second interview, the outline is even more abstract with the beginning of her elaborations serving as a generalized insight into her autobiography:

Yes. In sections. Yes and no. Sections of development. I'll be 70 soon, and looking back, I say, “No,” since I realized that everything has always been there, it's just that a human being is not able to process these realizations. So, it's both: Every stage of development has some focus and still I believe that we do not change, but we learn something new. [! : And thinking about your own life?] Yes, it's the same for me and my own life. I guess the older I get, I'm making experiences that I have already made as a child, like in nature or something, but such archaic experiences that I made as a child and later occasionally, but which I did not pay attention to, but do so now, I take my time for them, and now looking back I understand them. So, I could also say: No. On a deeper level, there were no sections. Just on the first

level of looking at it, there were a lot of things that are ascribed to puberty, or to being a child or being married.³ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

Here, she makes clear that she is aware of a conventional division of life chapters but for her, this is just a superficial way of looking at her life (however, she does section her life after this prolog). On a deeper level, she states that everything has been there from the very beginning, and it just takes people some time to realize those things. It remains vague how this process of realization actually happens or what she defines as development, but it becomes clear that Marion thinks about awareness frequently, implying also that there are parts of one's own realm of experiences that may not be accessible and which only later gain importance. This is interesting when looking at the answer to the first question in her third interview. Here, themes come to the surface that had not been part of her life story in the first two interviews:

Definitely the usual chapters, childhood, adolescence, being an adult, aging. Then one category, family and job. Then faith and spirituality. That would probably feed into the single chapters. [...] Like, an important topic for me is being a woman, how am I situated within society? What kind of impressions are there about women? [...] [I: Looking back, what events are somehow meaningful?] [...] Well, I grew up as an only child, born in 1946, when the war was just over. Made experiences with tanks in the streets and strangely looking... like, people of a different skin color. In a village in those years, that was something special. [...] And, erm, I did not make the experience to have nothing to eat. We lived in a village and were a family of the middle class, I would say. We had a pig and such things, so we always had enough to eat. That's why I did not experience much of the suffering of the post-war time. What I find important is that in my family, we did not talk about war traumas and what role our fathers and grandfathers played in the Third Reich for example. And I thought about this a lot later. [...] And my mother was a woman who, as she got old and was not all sane anymore, talked about how Hitler wasn't all bad, he built the roads and so on. So that came up again, making me think, well, that has not been worked through, I guess.⁴ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Her answer starts by naming conventional chapters of a life, followed by categories that seem to be cross-sectional, tapping into the horizontal timeline laid out before at different points in time or overlapping it. The topic of being a woman is named explicitly for the first time, even though it was brought up more implicitly in her earlier interviews already. However, it should be mentioned that this may be one of those topics or experiences that she spoke about at time 2: something that has “always” been there (or for a long time at least) but that is only now gaining importance or can finally be assessed with the needed abstraction or maturity. Another example for this is the way she talks about her childhood. Unlike at time 2, her earlier lifetime experiences are clearly described during this interview. This time her childhood is depicted from a different perspective with a historical filter over her own account. Growing up in post-war Germany had not been made the subject of discussion before, but here it is elaborated on a personal and a societal level. Experiences of strangeness when she, as a child, encountered the US-American soldiers in the streets of her home village serve the purpose to point out that it was unusual for

her and the people around her. Moving on, she refers to a common theme in post-war Germany of not having enough to eat, only to point out that she was not affected by this. The “bourgeois” family is a middle-class family by definition, and this represents a subtle change in wording by focusing more on what it provided her and not its deprivations. However, her next strand of thought focuses on the lack of communication within her family regarding personal involvement and consequences. The realization that the position of family members and politicians toward the Nazi regime was consequently kept under wraps was one of the driving forces for the so-called “68ers” student protest movement in Germany which Marion joined when she went to university after having had her two children. Her family’s failure in working through this topic is exemplified with her mother’s statements about Hitler’s achievements regarding the road system (an argument that is unfortunately common in discussion, feeding into the topos of “it wasn’t all bad”). Marion draws a picture of her family as caring on the surface and as neglecting on a deeper level, even though this is not made explicit here by recalling personal experiences but by viewing her situation in a more generalized perspective.

Comparing those three answers, it becomes apparent that Marion was capable of abstract thinking at time 1 and has refined the ability to share personal insights over the years. It might be argued that an emotional evaluation is missing from her accounts even though it can be inferred from her statements, which is a fact that was addressed proactively in the first interview where she stated that the feelings she has have all been processed during therapy. Overall, Marion gives the impression of a woman who has lived a life of ups and downs but has found a way to deal with the hardships that she was presented with. The narrative identity she displays in the interviews can best be described as serene and satisfied with herself in a positive way. This character trait can be seen in how Marion approaches the topic of death. She has been working as a clown in hospices and studied palliative care, yet she has made her own personal experiences when she took care of her mother during her last years.

Being a Clown and Thinking about Death

At time 1, she mentions this work as a clown right at the beginning during her life review:

And another huge change that changed me a lot and made an impact is that I started working in a hospice and at the same time trained as a hospital clown. [...] Or a clown for people with dementia, like, I play theater with people, I don’t act to be the clown, I am the clown, that’s something different. That’s when I finally learned that everything that constitutes spirituality, never mind what direction, can be found on every street corner. With every hobo, every disabled person, with everyone who considers themselves normal and these are the most significant points and that’s where I am right now.⁵ (Marion, FDI, time 1)

Making it clear that becoming a clown was a turning point in her biography, she emphasizes that this role is about authenticity. She is not acting, but she *is* a clown when she is with those people with dementia. Thereby, she learned a lot about spirituality, namely that spirituality is not something outerworldly, or out of reach. Instead, spirituality is something that can be found in everyone and everything. This will be discussed in more

detail in section 10.1.3 Here, it is sufficient to say that her way of approaching the topic of death as well as of spirituality is constituent to her personality. This is emphasized when she talks about crises and, more importantly, the way she handles those crises:

And what really got me out of all this is the fool, the clown, because that's pure love. What the red nose opens with children and with old people, even by those who suffer from dementia, those are gifts that we receive from God, or Buddha, or the universe, I don't care. And now that I'm older this takes up more space and we have, my friend and I, devoted ourselves to this and we call it [The Art of Aging] and that is not possible without this spirituality and we implement this. We make films about this, we have a well visited website and we implement this artistically, but always under the aspect of affection. Like, we do not focus on one religion or something like that, but on what is ethically important and we live by this.⁶ (Marion, FDI, time 1)

In the original German quote, she uses the female forms of both fool and clown in passing, which underlines the importance of being a woman. This quote gives a good insight into Marion's thinking: she is ready to give a lot of herself, to engage with people using a universalist approach, which is not tied to any special denomination or worldview. This universalist approach contains a personal, ethical codex, which is not elaborated on here. The fact that she is getting older is met with a coping mechanism that embraces this new era in her life by engaging with different forms of art. It becomes clear that doing this with and for others also helps Marion to find serenity, and she draws a lot of joy and vitality from these activities. Marion takes a very active and open path toward aging without taboos and with focus on the positive aspects. This approach can also be found in the way she talks about death:

Death belongs to life. For me, that's not just an empty phrase, but it is often used like that. [...] Of course, I have, like everyone, I would say, wishes regarding my death, but I don't believe that anything will happen after death, [...]. So, I have this spot in the forest cemetery and it's so beautiful there between the roots of the trees and maybe a primrose will grow there or something. So, the image that maybe something continues after death is consoling for people and that's why a lot of people need that, I guess. But I don't need this anymore, like, this is more of a humorous image, a primrose growing from my ashes, you know, like a metaphor. [...] If I should die tomorrow, that would be okay. Like, I'm saying this now. You always have to add, I know that if that tomorrow came, I would want all the chances to renounce this thought. That's the thing with patient decrees. Like, you write that down theoretically, and everybody supports you to do that, and then everybody's eager to fulfill your wishes and don't notice that the almost dying person maybe wants water or a crumb of bread anyway. So, I'm well aware of the fact that I don't know, that one cannot know what will happen in the future. All we can do is speculate.⁷ (Marion, FDI, time 1)

Marion starts her answer to the question regarding death with a statement that is, as she openly admits, often used as an empty phrase. However, she takes the meaning of this phrase literally. With this start, she gives a self-presentation by contrast, which is

something she does regularly throughout all of her interviews. She talks about the plans that she has made (reserving a spot under a tree for her urn) by choosing a made-up female form of the German word for death while clarifying that she is fully aware of the fact that she cannot influence this after her death. Moreover, she is also aware that those plans and wishes might change when she is actually faced with death, and she is open-minded enough to consider this possibility. Here, one sees the display of an awareness of uncertainty which is one among many criteria for wisdom (see, for example Baltes et al., 2002, Grossmann et al., 2020). She seems critical toward all-too-set rules and keeps an open mind for what may happen, while being mindful toward herself and others.

At time 2, her work as a clinic clown is not mentioned. Instead, she talks about taking care of her mother who has died about two years before the second interview took place. In her first answer, she gives a first insight into what this meant for her:

And the most incisive and for me most impressive experience was taking care of my mother till her death. Because that made my whole life complete. And when my mother died, about 1.5 or two years ago, since then, that was the most serious thing: I am not afraid of life anymore, I really dive into encounters and I learned what being "quiet" is like. And through all my life, I have worked through this artistically somehow.⁸ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

It is unusual to state that experiencing and accompanying the death of one's own mother made one's life complete, but for Marion, it seems oddly fitting. This formative experience has confirmed what she has talked about in her first interview. Death is a part of life, and it can make life more livable. By having her art as a means of coping, Marion shows that she is able to integrate adverse experiences and turn them into something positive. She elaborates on the impact this experience has had on her when she talks about the relationship with her mother (which will be presented in more detail in the next paragraph):

Since she is dead and I don't have that responsibility anymore, even though I took it, I mean, I never thought that I would have the strength to do this. And I'm not only talking about the physical side, but also about, yes, what's happening inside your head. And I would not want to miss this experience, at the same time, [...] I want to have the option to die in a self-determined way. [...] I have found my possibility, if I want to. And since I have this possibility, I feel free. This helps me to maybe endure more of what stands before us, I mean, also as a society, what we are able to endure. This is not all bright and shiny and I don't envy you your youth. But I can still say: devil-may-care. Like, I wouldn't be so flippant, I do feel responsible and I pick up any paper that a kid will let fall to the ground [...]. So, I see myself as responsible for what I do. But I want to decide about my death as I do about my life! [...] It's nothing I'm keeping secret, I'm pretty open about this, on the contrary, and there are people who will come to me when they have questions about this. How do I see it? And who will ask my counsel in their inner conflict. And I don't give any counsel. I cannot do that. All I can do is show them the possibilities that I see. The rest is up to them. You get humble. When I see

myself as a human in this universe, then this is not even a flyspeck.⁹ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

She openly mentions the physical and emotional stress that went along with taking care of her mother. For her, the consequence of this is to wish for and work toward a self-determined death. Here, she clearly depicts her position of feeling responsible for society, which is a form of generativity that is more encompassing than merely passing on something to one's own children. Conversely, she is quite straightforward with her own wishes and not willing to make compromises. Her surroundings regard her as a counselor, which she sees with mixed feelings since she cannot advise someone regarding their own life as she states. Instead, all she can do is make people aware of different possibilities. Again, this is a humble stance, and she realizes the relative nullity of one's own existence and the limitedness of one's own knowledge and expertise. She states that this cannot be the cause for stagnation but instead of initiating change when it seems possible. However clear Marion appears in the way she talks about death, she also leaves open the question of what exactly happens after death:

Like birth, death is a chance to expand human experiences and whether we use them or not is up to every individual's judgment. Like I said before, it is also a passage into... not into other worlds, but in, I'll put it like that, everything that goes into a life will come out of it, like the seasons and maybe also—that's maybe another airy idea—maybe also particles of ourselves, quantum physics has this idea, they support it, in which particles of ourselves reconnect with... But that's just a play of thought or something and when death seems unbearable, I think one should treat yourself to excursions like these because that will help wrap the fear with a little bit of humor.¹⁰ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

Her statement starts by connecting the beginning and the end of life by naming both of them a chance for experience, which does not align with everyone's experiences as she asserts. The picture she paints shows Marion's sense for spirituality, even though she does not name it here directly, yet it is tied to quantum physics, which gives it more credibility in her mind. In other words, what she describes is a circle of life in which no energy is lost and which may be regarded as true both from a scientific as well as a religious or spiritual point of view. For Marion, this is a play of thoughts and something she engages with or assumes that other people engage with when the thought of death as something final does not seem bearable.

At time 3, she again speaks about her status as a clown:

I'm a geriatric clown. [...] Like, you have a psychological, philosophical, artistic training as a clown. [...] And I really earnestly studied this for some years. And the difference is [...] my friend and I did not go to the children, but we engaged with the reactions of people with dementia. And also went to nursery homes, and we also work in hospices. [...] We go to dying people, to hold hands as well as, to put it bluntly, to present ourselves as fools. It's astonishing how this silly figure creates a very delicate sort of joy in these suffering people.¹¹ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

It is interesting that she emphasizes the professionalism of her training a lot more than at time 1. This clarifies that it was not a mere hobby but something serious, valuable, and done with considerable effort. While she talks about the positive reactions her work elicits in the dying and suffering, it becomes clear as well how much this work and these reactions mean to her. At the time of the third interview, she has resigned her clown role, but when wrapping up her long answer to the first question, she recalls this work by stating:

And these [...] things are crucial in life, making me a content old woman. Of course, with quirks and limitations, at my age of health wise nature as well, but to have a satisfaction in the frames, the possible frames that are still available. For me, that's of great value. Oh, and these 25 years I spent working with dying and old people or sick people, this has formed a viewpoint of, we look at life from the end. So, that makes a lot of things a lot easier.¹² (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Marion has still kept her joy in life, even though she does not omit the limitations that she experiences in old age. The interview shows a serenity and a self-satisfaction, which is also derived from her work with the dying. This made her look at life from a different angle and appreciate more of what she has at the moment. She elaborates on that thought when she is asked about death directly:

Oh, that is my pet project. Death belongs to life like birth. Death is just a passage into something that we do not know. [...] I have a thing for myself, I want to be buried in a forest cemetery, I already have a spot there, and my ashes should serve as fodder for, whatever, a cow or a squirrel and then I'll be defecated all naturally and fertilize the earth. And from this earth will grow another tree under which someone else will lie. And then comes the squirrel and—you get the gist? That's what I mean by passage. And where we go to... In my opinion, no energy in our world is lost. The sum of all forms of energy [...] is constant, it only varies in... like these theories that any matter is nothing but information, for example. [...] And we as humans are afraid of death because we have excluded it from our society. And I wish that it can be introduced into our society again. And we're on a good way, there are lots of people who take care of that. [...] And then it is a great teacher. [...] You can't know this, I mean, I wish you all the best until you're 95. But just as an example, you ride your bike, and tomorrow, something happens. And when you ask yourself in your last seconds, "Have I lived my young life as I wanted it to?" And if you can answer this question for yourself in a woke state, then you'll change. Because you'll live more in the Here and Now. [...] And that's caused by the engagement with death and dying.¹³ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Starting with the statement that death is her "pet project," Marion underlines her unconventional (and sometimes slightly eccentric) approach to things. The theory she unfolds about the amount of energy remaining unchanged and shows, while also being vaguely adapted to scientific theories again, a belief in an all-connectedness, which sounds spiritual. As in the second interview, she is connecting a rational and emotional approach. Her more abstract elaboration is illustrated with a very concrete example showing that she is

able to think on different levels and present her knowledge in different ways. Regarding society, she sees the fact that death is a taboo and not part of everyday life as problematic. Again, she uses a vivid example to make her point by directly addressing the young interviewer, which is another noteworthy feature of her third interview. She often engages directly with the interviewer and shows interest in him and his life. To this end, she occasionally leaves the prescribed structure of the interview, but she often returns to the relevant questions at hand. This is more frequent than in her other interviews indicating a higher degree of generativity. This is remarkable knowing that the third interview was, in contrast to her other interviews, conducted via telephone (which makes the interaction between interviewer and interviewee harder usually). Referencing his young age, she plays the mind game of what would happen should he die the next day. The question she poses in his name, “Have I lived my young life as I wanted it to?” is crucial for her own approach to life. Marion has, in all of her interviews, shown a great vitality and the willingness to “seize the day,” but only in this interview it becomes as apparent what is behind this way of life. Her engagement with dying people has made her realize the value of life and has changed the way she lives it.

“Looking back on life, looking forward to death” is the slightly provocative heading chosen for this sub-chapter. Does Marion actually look forward to death? Probably not, but she is not afraid of it either. At the age of 64 and across interviews, Marion displays a view on the end of life that shows signs of a dialectical thinking, which can take into account abstract theories but also personal, emotional, and spiritual ideas as well as the perspective of others and the limitation of her own horizon. Her life review has shown as well that there are parts in Marion’s life that she does not discuss easily. The relationship with her children appears strained, and the relationship with her mother has not always been easy. The next paragraph will go into more detail regarding these relationships.

10.1.2 Marion’s Relationships—Being a Daughter and Being a Mother

Marion and her Mother

Compared to most of her other answers, Marion is brief when she talks about important relationships. Her father having died when she was in her late 20s, Marion talks about her mother when she is asked about the relationship with her parents. At time 1, her mother is still alive and described as follows:

My mother is 92 now and I have decided- like, she is totally fit, as much as you can be at this age. Of course she needs all sort of help. And when the time comes that she cannot live anymore, I will be there. I won't care for her physically, I want to be there emotionally, as a free choice. [...] [I: How has the image of your parents changed over the years?] Yes, a lot. You know, all these pubertal phenomena, and even as a grown-up I felt infantilized by my mother, I couldn't stand up against that. But now it's like, I did not become her mother, I took care of that, but we are like one elderly and one old woman. Like, this symbiosis, it never goes away completely, that would be an illusion, but it's agreeable between the both of us.¹⁴ (Marion, FDI, time 1)

The overall description is positive, even though Marion admits to having felt infantilized by her mother even as an adult. She appears to be very reflective when she talks about the symbiotic elements that remain in her relationship with her mother. In general, she seems to adopt a forgiving stance and is willing to take care of her mother should the necessity occur. The current relationship, albeit described only briefly, seems to be friendly, and the free choice to nurse the mother can be taken as a sign of good will and the readiness to deepen the bond.

By the time of the second interview, Marion's mother has died. Marion has kept her promise and took care of her mother, and the effects this time had on her concerning her attitude toward death and dying have been described above. It is interesting to see how the assessment of the relationship with her mother has been changed:

The relationship between my mother and I has always been cool, very distanced, and I think my mother basically stayed a child, basically I took care of my mother when I was still a child, but it was always difficult, just a difficult relationship.¹⁵ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

The words she uses are more direct and more critical than at time 1, not only regarding their relationship which is described as consistently distanced but also regarding the overall personality of her mother. She mentions having to take care of her mother when she was still a child herself, something that was not mentioned at time 1. However, the time she took care of her mother was influential for her in a good way:

This distance remained, and it is still there... But, I notice how my voice changes when I speak about it, my throat gets a bit clammy. I'd say, because I decided to—how shall I put this? She allowed me to accompany her to death. And I'm grateful for this. I do not love her. Even now I don't. And she always tried to take influence on my life. [...] For me, I never thought I'd have such strength to do this, and I don't mean the physical side, but also, yes, what happened inside my head. And I would not want to miss this experience.¹⁶ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

Marion openly admits to being emotionally touched when she talks about the difficult relationship, which is another reflective moment in her interview. At the same time, it is interesting that she states the relationship is still regarded as distanced, and love for her mother is denied. Notable is the way she struggles for words when talking about the time her mother was dying. Starting the sentence with "I decided to," she changes it to "she allowed me too," which might indicate a certain dependency or an act of matronizing (a term that I'm sure Marion would approve of!). In a more positive way, this sense of dependency could be interpreted as a concession made by her mother to admit her daughter's help. This may be a mixture of both, and the most important outcome of this constellation is Marion's positive coda in the end, stressing the importance of this experience for herself.

At time 3, more time has passed since her mother's death, and this shows in the description of her, as can be demonstrated by a collection of quotes from different answers of Marion's third interview:

So, my mother was a very difficult person. If I made a careful diagnosis today, she was rather a borderline personality. That didn't exist at that time. This explains a bit why no or only very unstructured relationships were possible and I have struggled my whole life with borders, with distance and closeness. For me that's always kind of difficult. That really shaped me. I'd say that's the main imprint. [...] And I have desperately hated my mother. And this love-hate remained until I was, I think, my personal maturity- well, I guess, till I was 60. Yes. [...] Loving her only began after I started nursing her. Before that, this would not have been possible between us. [...] What is interesting is: I basically nursed her to death, (smiles) to put it sloppily, (laughs) but that shows there has been a lot of reconciliation within me.¹⁷ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Marion is more direct with the characterization of her mother than in the other interviews. Even though she calls it a “careful diagnosis,” the implications of calling her a borderline personality are clear and hint at unstructured relationships and the inability to keep them alive. For Marion, this could mean that she could not rely on a secure bond with at least one of her parents as a child (her father is, however briefly, characterized as “absent” and a “wimp”). She openly admits to showing character traits like her mother when it comes to relationships in her life as well. Yet, distancing herself from her mother by characterizing her as “difficult” and her feelings toward her mother as “love-hate” is only part of the truth Marion displays here. She also speaks of love that she developed in later years, which is interesting since she denies having ever felt love for her mother in her second interview. This reframing of feelings could be part of the reconciliation process she hints at in the last sentence of the quote. It seems plausible to assume that Marion is now able to integrate all the mixed feelings she has toward her mother and, as a result, adopt a truly forgiving stance.

Marion and her Children

The difficulties in keeping up relationships and the missing role models in being a parent come to the surface when Marion talks about her two children. Being a very young mother and a single mother later on was challenging, but Marion admits that having children had not originally been on her agenda:

Coming now to the incisions that were serious regarding my personal development, so to say. I knew, that thing about marriage and family, I didn't know this wasn't my cup of tea. I slithered into it. Looking back, I'm not sure if I were married, but I probably had not had children, not because I don't like children, but because I realize that I have other tasks in life, like that. And a serious incision was that my younger son, when he was 18 or 19, fell ill with a [psychological disorder] and then I realized that something is not right with our family system, [...] that this system didn't work, I realized I was symbiotically connected with my mother and that was a big part of this heteronomy [...]. I have always read a lot, but only then, for the first time, I really started to deal with guilt, with atonement.¹⁸ (Marion, FDI, time 1)

Getting pregnant at age 19 was unintentional, and it is implied that she would have chosen a different path for her life had she had the choice. The mental illness of her younger son makes her consider the wider circumstances of the family system, bringing her back to the unhealthy symbiotic relationship with her own mother, which is partially to blame for what happened with Marion's son. She remains vague about what exactly she means when she talks about guilt and atonement, but it becomes clear that this crisis was a formative experience for her and made her read more on that topic in order to learn about her own identity.

In her second interview, Marion goes into more detail regarding the effects her yearning for freedom and an independent life had on her children. She started travelling for long periods when the boys were older (it remains unclear when exactly this started) and did not want to commit to a serious long-term relationship anymore being divorced from her children's father (at one point, she was married for a second time, but this marriage is only mentioned in passing during all of her interviews). In her life review she starts with them moving out from their mother's home when her thoughts return to her children:

Then, when the children left the house, these are also crucial points in which not only the children detach themselves, but the mother has to do that as well and that was a very painful process, even though I always thought I was so relaxed. But I wasn't at all, in retrospect. [...] That's a bit unorganized now, but I've been doing this [travelling, living an independent life] since I was thirty, my children aren't too happy with me, like, I'm aware of that, because I never was the mother they would have needed, probably. That weighed me down for quite some time, but they became, by their own accord, two grown up men, with all limitations and expansions, who can be proud of themselves. [...] So, I guess I did all that partly on the backs of people I was responsible for. And that's a drop of bitterness, but I cannot change it. But, admittedly, talking about this right now touches me deeply.¹⁹ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

In the beginning of this quote, Marion presents herself as a reflective person who can describe a self-perceived development without the fear of losing face. This openness remains characteristic for what she shares about the relationship she has with her children. Having emphasized the importance of leading this free, independent life, she also admits that this life came at the price of not being the mother her children would have needed. This has the effect that she and her children seem to be distanced, yet master their lives. She admits to being emotionally touched when she talks about this, and it is remarkable that she can switch seemingly easily between praising her autonomous, potentially hedonistic lifestyle and describing the downsides this lifestyle has had on her children. It can be assumed that although she seems to be talking frankly about this, there is much more emotion and drama hidden behind those comparably neutral words. This becomes more obvious when she talks about how her son fell mentally ill during her answer to the question regarding crises:

My younger son fell [mentally ill] when he was 19, which does not surprise me, like I said, we're all nuts in my family, [...] and my younger son couldn't bear his life

anymore, just like his mother in many moments, and fell [mentally ill], and today, if you don't know about it, you won't notice it, he has his handicaps and has to take meds, but he has become a great man. But for a long time, I thought he would be better off if I weren't there anymore. That's so distorted, psychologically, I went to therapies, I was able to get help, like that. So, in the end, those thoughts remained thoughts only, but I have struggled with this topic for a long time.²⁰ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

She explicitly takes (part of) the blame for her son's illness on different levels. She jokingly refers to the whole family being "nuts," but, on a more serious note, she admits that she has had moments when her life did not seem bearable anymore. These moments are mentioned in her interviews over the years; however, they are not prominent and are often turned into a "lesson learned." This seems to be an important character trait in Marion: making an effort at seeing the positive side of everything without omitting the negative. Regarding her son, she admits to feeling remorse and regret, but she concludes that he is managing his life just fine.

At time 3, she gives a little more context on her circumstances when she got pregnant:

I got pregnant at age 19 and had my first child. We had to marry back then, that was out of the question. I was 19, my husband 20, and we always think we are awfully grown-up at that age, but basically, it was clear that this would be a total mess. It had to. Only in the rarest of cases something like that would turn out well.²¹ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

The context of this quote is that the German society at this time (mid-60s) demanded that a pregnant woman got married. Contraception and abortion were problematic topics at that time, and even though Marion talks about the women's rights movement in the third interview, she does bow to the societal expectations. That "this" (by which she might mean either the marriage or having children or both) will not turn out well is portrayed as a natural consequence, thereby relieving her of some of the guilt. An inner conflict can be detected between the avid advocate for women's rights and the teenage mother. Marion is both, and she lets both of these aspects of her personality stand next to each other. When asked for meaningful relationships, she goes into more detail regarding her two sons:

Furthermore, definitely the experience of raising kids. And especially when this does not go smoothly, and with my yearning for freedom... I did not really consciously decide to have kids, they were just there and I had to deal with that. And thus, I was always in conflict with my desire for freedom. [...] Like, with my urge to move around the world, you're pretty limited for quite a while. And if you ask my sons, for sure I really wasn't such a great mother. But we cannot really talk about this, unfortunately. From my side, the interest would be greater, but my sons have basically settled in their lives, and that's how it is. I would have wished for reappraisal, for their own good as well. But that's very difficult. It was always difficult and it still is now. They became two great men that handle life well. And that's a lot. So,

obviously it wasn't all that wrong, seeing they've developed this way, I contributed my fair share, I'd say.²² (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Marion obviously has little desire to paint her motherhood in mellow colors. It becomes clear that the children were a burden by limiting her desire for freedom. However, taken together her answers in the interviews holistically, this does not mean that she does not care for them, even now that they are adults. Here, her focus is on her wish for talking about the hardships of their childhood, which she deems to be important for them as well as for herself. The conclusion, however, seems to be more defensive than in past interviews: The fact that both boys have grown to be “great men” must necessarily mean that she did something right. This might be an attempt to encounter skepticism by the interviewer, but it might also be an argument that she had to bring forward when faced with accusations by her sons.

Being a daughter and being a mother are the two kinds of relationships that take up the most space in Marion's interviews. These relationships are characterized by a difficult balance between being close and being distant. While the overall impression of Marion is that of a woman who is satisfied with her place in life, this topic seems to catch her off-balance a bit. Over the years, she has developed strategies how to talk about all this by being honest and clear and admitting mixed feelings, yet she also brings these conversations to an abstract level, which may help her discuss them from an impersonal, analytical footing.

The other meaningful relationship she talks about in her interviews is the female friend she lives with in a platonic yet spiritually connected relationship. With her, Marion shares the work as hospice clown, and the two women deal with their own aging in diverse artistic ways, which seems to be part of the spirituality Marion hints at. To explore this, the next paragraph will deal with Marion's worldview and her moral stance in more detail.

10.1.3 Marion's Spirituality—Finally Finding God?

Marion's Subjective Religiosity/Spirituality

Marion does not belong to a specific religious denomination. Being raised Protestant but without enthusiastic participation on her parents' side, she made her first real encounter with religion when she attended confirmation class. There, she encountered a priest who was willing to engage with his pupils and who encouraged Marion to ask her challenging questions. However, this did not lead to her becoming religious. When her children were older, Marion continued her self-titled “search for God” and went to India to live in an ashram for a period. In her first interview, she calls herself a “sannyasin with heart and soul.” In her further interviews it seems as if Marion has quilted her own spirituality. Keller and Wollert (2016, p. 327) have called Marion an “accumulative heretic,” referring to Streib et al. (2009), which seems fitting now by having a longitudinal perspective on Marion's subjective religiosity/spirituality. In the following table are assembled the different data that were gathered regarding the question of how Marion assesses her own spirituality:

Table 32: Data on Marion's Subjective Religiosity/Spirituality

Marion	wave 1	wave 2	wave 3
free entries	<p><i>spirituality</i>: Living everyday life intently and emphatically, mindfulness in this moment, self-reflectiveness, daily zen meditation, to be there for other animate beings (without helper syndrome), kill no animal and eat it, the middle path of Buddha and Buddhist psychology²³</p> <p><i>religion</i>: believing, not knowing, dogma, personified god (does not exist in my opinion). Church—a dead end, too few personal freedoms, but new straight-forward approaches are worth engaging with. I welcome encompassing dialogs a lot.²⁶</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: Living in the Here and Now, following own ethical guidelines, living personal moral values. Knowing about the embeddedness into nature and its circular flow²⁴</p> <p><i>religion</i>: restriction, unquestioned set of rules, immaturity²⁷</p>	<p><i>spirituality</i>: Lively experience and reflection of the present moment, also by drawing on past experiences, and a creative connectedness to something higher²⁵</p> <p><i>religion</i>: Religion is a human construct with rules and norms that restrict me and patronize me. That applies to all religions²⁸</p>
self-assessment	more spiritual than religious	more spiritual than religious	more spiritual than religious
answer to Q20:	I can't separate this. I don't want to separate this. I'm very sure that at a certain point everything is the same. I'm not talking about institutions, those are manmade. I'm talking about my belief that, in the end, we all dream the same.	I'm just a curious person. That's a driving force within me. I was born to ask questions, and the older I get, the more questions... and as long as it is that way, this world is fine for me. I am nothing and I can't answer all this. [...] I really know that I have ideas, but I know nothing. And you don't realize how relieving that is: (laughs)	So, with a bit of frowning, spiritual. I think you cannot separate these things. I relate to all of them a bit, but mostly to the spiritual direction. Well, and that's why I'm having my problems with this question, with the preciseness of this question. [...] [I: What does it mean for you?] Nothing. I don't care. Not every child must have a name. I think, honestly, this question for me is a bit superfluous. [I: That's interesting because there are quite a lot of people for whom this is really important.] Yes, I respect that. [...] I always answer from my point of view. We both know that. And that other people, if I had a conversation with someone, that would be a great possibility to talk with each other about this, another opportunity for an encounter. ³¹
Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual, or faithful person?	Whether this has a beard or yin and yang or whatever. I have the feeling we would all meet at that point [I: And how would you call that?] Love, because that's universal. [...] All spiritual people act lovingly, at least they should if they take it seriously. When we treat nature lovingly, then it is preserving and with this mindfulness. [...] For example, this traditional fool contains all three elements [...] Like, I'm bubbling over with fantasy how to put this into praxis, to do something about faith as a clown or as a fool. [...] [I: So, a religious and spiritual fool who devotedly lives with love?] Yes, exactly. With all mistakes and everything that's attached. [I: And what does this mean to you?] [...] That I'm a content, very often happy person. [...] And for me that's the highest point that can be reached as a human. ²⁹	you don't realize how relieving that is: (laughs) [...] If I want to, I can retreat and say, I don't want to have anything to do with all of this. You cannot do that. That's the advantage of getting old. [...] And this separation of intellect and feeling, as it is traditionally done in our study programs [...], may be a positive fantasy, [...] but what they represent are people who do not participate in life, only with their heads. ³⁰	

Wave 1: Marion's wave 1 definition of spirituality is the most comprehensive of all three waves. The concepts she names lean toward Buddhism combined with what sounds like a strive for autonomy when she emphasizes the value of helping others with the addition of "without helper syndrome." This autonomy is also present in her definition of religion in which she criticizes strict dogmas and the missing opportunities for personal freedom. Interestingly, she ends this definition with a look into a possible better future in which dialog might open the chance for rapprochement. Since this is not yet achieved, it seems logical that Marion self-identifies as "more spiritual" in all of her surveys. In the interview, she takes an approach that encompasses being religious as well as being spiritual and faithful, claiming that they are all the same in the end and lead to the same core concepts, which she calls love. Her statement clarifies that she thinks in superordinate categories, which are not concerned about the boundaries of a single religion and advocate social fairness. When thinking about these concepts, Marion's mind immediately starts thinking about how to creatively implement her thoughts in the person of the clown or fool. For her, this figure is the ultimate representation of how she approaches the topic of faith. The stance described by her makes her happy and self-content, and she states that she sees no need for any further development for herself.

Wave 2: The contrast between her definitions of religion and spirituality becomes more easily accessible: living according to one's own ethical principles versus unquestioningly following a strict set of rules. In her interview answer, she deviates from the terms offered to her yet succeeds in elaborating what she may mean by "living personal moral values:" being open, curious, and humble. Aging helps her in achieving this state. Lastly, her plea is to not separate emotion and intellect and criticizes temporary science and humanities in which this separation is the case. While Marion does not explicitly refer to any religion-related form here, it becomes clear that what she describes is a good answer to the question she was asked since this is her personal definition of being spiritual in that moment.

Wave 3: Here, being in the present is what constitutes spirituality for her, which is similar to what she had written at wave 2. Moreover, the connection to the past is emphasized, hinting at possible learning processes as well as the connection to something higher. No positive light is shed on religion, and it is seen as rigid and constricting with the possibility of dialog and renewal that was mentioned at time 1 not being repeated. However, it is an essential part of her interview answer. Marion reluctantly opts for the term "spiritual" but emphasizes that she does not like the strict distinction that is made with the terms offered to her and rejects the precision of them. To this end, she indirectly opts for a more encompassing understanding. When the interviewer points out that many people find the distinction helpful and necessary, she emphatically states that this is only her point of view and argues for dialog and open encounters.

Marion's Image of God—A Late Development

It is clear that Marion does not favor any organized form of religion. Over the years, she has refined the way she defines her spirituality, which is currently encompassing and open for dialog. This demonstrates curiosity, serenity, and firmness in her own stand-

point. However, Marion describes something that can be labelled as a spiritual journey in all of her interviews. At time 1 she talks about this search like this when she is asked about her image of God:

It was more about the higher power when my kids were grown-ups. [...] Then there was this whole esotericism boom and I'm still a bit ashamed that I fell for this. [...] I quickly found this very superficial, and I still think it is, even though I still think there's some beauty in dealing with these objects and that's something we have in every religion and every spirituality, a bit of rituals and the worship of objects, and of course that's good for the soul in any case. Nevertheless, I tried to see it more abstract and the question whether there is a god or not was never in my mind consciously. I never asked this, I was rather searching.³² (Marion, FDI, time 1)

In a distanced fashion, she talks about the time period when she “fell for” esotericism, which are practices she currently rejects while acknowledging the value certain rituals and artifacts may hold for people, which links this to a more generalized idea of religion. In contrast, she quickly favored the more abstract ways of looking at things. Here as elsewhere, her narrative identity is presented as open and curious with the searching character of her movements emphasized at the end of this quote without putting the search for a god in the focus. In hindsight, she may characterize her past self as agnostic, even though she does not use this term. Interestingly, at time 2, she frames this differently:

I have desperately searched for God. That started during puberty with a lot of questions, then, like with everybody, when I had a crisis... [...]. In times of crisis [...] I went into a Catholic church, I sat everywhere, I talked to people of the church, that was nice, like, when you have questions, you are generally welcomed by men and women of the church, but it always remained empty. [...] There were more questions than answers. And I have stopped believing in miracles in the meantime, and now I come to the point where I am right now: I don't need a god. [...] Like, I don't miss a god.³³ (Marion, FDI, time 2)

In contrast to her time 1 statement, she says that she “desperately searched for God.” Directly connected to this search are crises that made her look for answers and hope for support, both of which she did not find. Instead, she had to learn to live with the abundance of questions that remained with intellectual doubt, which led her away from the church and from her search for God. In turn, this led her to the conclusion that she does not need a god, which is a different nuance than at time 1.

At time 3, her engagement with spirituality is prefaced with an autobiographical argument:

My self-worth was at rock-bottom, because of my upbringing and all this, in other words, I hardly had any self-esteem or it was rather fragile. And by engaging with spiritual things a lot has changed over the years. And I already talked about a few things, these changes, these journeys, inner journeys as well as decidedly outer journeys. And these experiences have just made me more mature.³⁴ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Her biographical background and her lack of self-esteem due to the circumstances of her upbringing is suggested to be the main reason why she embarked on her spiritual search, which is a different argumentation than at time 2 when she named single crises as the starting point for this search. The spiritual search combined with the extensive journeys she took when her children were older are named as formative. Adding to this more general outline, Marion tells a story about a recent experience which has, surprisingly, changed the way she thinks about God:

Table 33: Marion's Narrative: "A Deeper Connectedness"

Orientation	And until two years ago I did not want to [...] concern myself with God, consciously. I did not want to make a decision. I found life so exciting, without God.
Complication	Two and a half or three years ago, this changed with a current encounter. I did a training in initiatic process guidance. That's like, we sit, according to Indian example, but careful!, that's not esoteric, but we use this, as it was used in many traditions, also in Europe, we sit in a circle and palaver, I'd say. [...] And we do this in nature. [...]
Evaluation	And that's where, I don't want to say I met God. Like, this word, it's used on so many levels, but for me, I found the solution and say: It is love. And it is a love that does not bind. I don't say, if you do this or that, I don't love you anymore. Instead, the superbness of nature. Then I sat on a Spanish island, 800 meters above the sea. And when you sit there day and night, this is holy. [...] I cannot describe this with words. Those are all limiting and for me that's—I'd like to stick with that word—holy.
Resolution	And I took that home, two years ago, and that's always within me. And that's how I live my life now. [...] I have this certainty as well as the humility that this world or everything is a lot bigger than myself. And at the same time grows a form of trust, I could say, that everything is right this way.
Coda	That has nothing to do with not having a clear view on what is not good here, never mind where, and still, it's a different, a deeper connectedness. ³⁵ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Marion reveals here that she did not want to engage with God, which is consistent with the status quo she reports at time 2. However, during a training that she participated in (which she describes in more detail in her interview by emphatically distancing herself from a possible accusation of being esoteric), she had an experience, which is marked as formative due to the impact it had on her mind. And even though she relativizes her statement "I met God" immediately, it becomes clear that her consciousness has gotten a new layer through this experience. This new layer is the certainty that there is something bigger than herself, which was not stated this directly in her other interviews. This may be a syncretism, or the accomplished form of accumulative heresy, a possible higher being alongside a clear mind and an awareness of the outside world with a feeling of connectedness with both of them. The "god" Marion refers to vaguely is, in her survey answers to the RGS, described mainly as mystic and ineffable, which adds to the blurry description she gives here.

Marion's spiritual journey can be traced through all of her interviews. However, the emphases she sets are slightly different each time. Organized religion in any form never appealed to Marion, even though she tried to find access in times of crises but was repelled and disappointed each time. Her solution is to engage in a form of spirituality that is encompassing and that has love in its center while being content with the fact that she cannot know the answer to every question. That way, Marion is able to combine her appreciation for science with her emotional approach and the readiness to engage in dialog and stay curious. At the age of 73, Marion is willing to understand other people's opinions and can, as she states, tolerate otherness.

10.1.4 Marion's Development—Triangulating the Data

Looking now at the structural evaluation of Marion's interviews, one sees that Marion was classified as a mover downward, from being a type 4 (emerging dialogical-xenophobic) at time 1 to a type 3 (predominantly individuative-reflective) at the other time-points. While at time 1, nearly half of her answers were rated style 5 (dialogical), and this is the exception for her other interviews. The raters of these interviews found her able to think systematically and critically yet often with an ideological background lacking the openness a style 5 would require. Despite all the openness displayed in her answers, this is consistent with my findings from the above analysis since it seems that there are (invisible) boundaries or blind spots, even though Marion can still be considered a thoughtful, reflective person. She is able to think "outside the box" and often shows tendencies for a style 5 thinking where she considers other perspectives and emphasizes her conviction that her own knowledge is limited as is acknowledged in the scoring sheets of her time 2 and 3 interviews.

Taking a look into her survey results, this interesting pattern of interpretation gets another layer:

Table 34: Selected Data from Marion's Survey Results

	wave 1		wave 2		wave 3	
	Marion	M (SD)	Marion	M (SD)	Marion	M (SD)
Religious Schema Scale						
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	2.80	2.63 (1.17)	2.80	2.42 (1.12)	2.60	2.60 (1.11)
<i>fairness, tolerance, and rational choice</i>	4.60	4.35 (0.38)	4.20	4.28 (0.51)	4.80	4.56 (0.40)
<i>xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	4.40	3.64 (0.75)	4.60	3.57 (0.76)	5.00	3.75 (0.72)
Ryff Scale						
<i>autonomy</i>	3.71	3.67 (0.59)	3.43	3.20 (0.40)	2.86	3.15 (0.40)

<i>environmental mastery</i>	4.43	3.67 (0.71)	4.43	3.72 (0.59)	4.29	3.68 (0.57)
<i>personal growth</i>	4.86	4.38 (0.38)	4.86	4.17 (0.39)	4.86	4.31 (0.40)
<i>positive relations with others</i>	4.71	3.86 (0.65)	4.43	3.90 (0.62)	4.14	3.94 (0.65)
<i>purpose in life</i>	3.57	3.77 (0.61)	3.71	3.76 (0.51)	3.57	3.64 (0.50)
<i>self-acceptance</i>	4.14	3.79 (0.68)	4.71	3.86 (0.62)	4.29	3.88 (0.63)
NEO-FFI						
<i>emotional stability</i>	3.08	3.42 (0.78)	4.08	3.40 (0.70)	3.17	3.40 (0.68)
<i>extraversion</i>	3.67	3.26 (0.58)	4.00	3.25 (0.58)	3.33	3.20 (0.56)
<i>openness to experience</i>	4.83	3.90 (0.47)	4.50	3.89 (0.49)	4.83	3.92 (0.58)
<i>agreeableness</i>	4.08	3.74 (0.46)	4.00	3.73 (0.44)	3.67	3.78 (0.51)
<i>conscientiousness</i>	3.08	3.70 (0.49)	3.25	3.76 (0.51)	2.92	3.78 (0.50)

On the Religious Schema Scale, Marion shows moderate scores for *ttt*, which is surprising considering that she does not follow any special denomination and does not show any sign of fundamentalist ideas. Her *xenos* score is, at all timepoints, at least one standard deviation higher than the average of my sample, indicating an appreciation for dialog and encounters with the strange, often mentioned in her interviews as well.

As for her scores on the Ryff Scale, it can be said that Marion's score on *autonomy* drops at time 3, which might be related to her becoming older and more fragile as she mentions in the interview. The other scores on the subscales align with the narrative identity she displays in her interviews. Marion is a person who is interested in *personal growth* and in gaining knowledge, a trait that is stable over all timepoints. After a life that had its crises, she has come to accept and even love the way she is, arriving at a level of *self-acceptance* that is higher than the average.

Her score for *emotional stability* is slightly lower than the average at waves 1 and 3 and somewhat higher at wave 2. The reasons for that are only speculative even though a certain instability can be inferred from Marion's interviews, especially when she talks about the strained relationships with her children. A high score for *openness to experience* is not surprising given the elaborations above. Interestingly, while Marion claims to be mindful and taking care of her environment, her scores on *conscientiousness* are considerably lower than the average of the sample. It might be hypothesized that Marion's focus has been on her own well-being for a long time period, and she does not have any obligatory commitments anymore. This low score may also point to a mild form of hedonism, which Marion

hints at when she talks about the extensive journeys she took that were not appreciated by her children.

Summed up, it has become apparent that Marion is a person who has had to deal with some hardships in her life. Having had her children at a young age, she later felt the need to catch up on what she had missed during adolescence. She started travelling, which is marked as important for her personal development; however, this occurred at the expense of neglecting the relationship with her own children. There is a shadow on the narrative identity Marion constructs over the years. She presents herself as humble, self-satisfied, open, curious, and wise in some parts. The relationship with her children is not presented in a varnished way, even though these parts of her interviews are briefer than others. The impression is that Marion tends to avoid this topic for the sake of the more positive aspects of her life and her spirituality. This might explain why the raters of the later interviews favored the individuating-systemic style 4 since, at least in some parts of her interviews, it becomes apparent that the displayed openness has its boundaries.

However, the most remarkable impression one gets from Marion is that of a woman who is satisfied with what she has achieved in life and who can look at herself and others with clemency. She appreciates the good things in life and has “found God,” as she claims at time 3. She has come to the conclusion that the main goal for her is to make daily life sacred or holy, which is exemplified in this quote from her last interview:

Seize the day... I'm sitting here talking to you on the phone. In between, I fumble with the computer mouse or so... and that is holy, the Here and Now is what counts for me. What was yesterday is gone, never to come back. And what's tomorrow, we don't know. [...] So, I don't have the feeling I absolutely have to do something or catch up on something. That's a question of age and a question of contentedness. [...] Everything else is of no relevance to me. I know that it exists, but it's not important for me.³⁶ (Marion, FDI, time 3)

Marion has learned that life does not often turn out as planned and has therefore concluded that it is the present that counts the most, which might be another contributing factor for her low scores on *conscientiousness*. That being said, Marion has created her own spirituality, taking pieces of different religions and worldviews and made them her own with different emphases in each interview. This change is mirrored in her survey answers regarding the question whether she considers herself atheist. This is affirmed at wave 1 while at wave 2, she opts for “non-theist.” At wave 3, she neither identifies as atheist nor non-theist. Instead, she chooses the statement “I believe there is a reality beyond scientific reasoning.” She is, and that is characterizing for her as well, well aware that her own horizon is limited and that others might have a perspective substantially different from her own. Her work as a clown with the sick and dying shows that she does not shy away from the confrontation with difficult topics and that she can productively process these experiences and turn them into a positive view on herself, her life, and her death. Looking for a possible leitmotif, it becomes clear that this is complex. Marion would probably be content with “Prepare yourself to die and then live in the present.”

Notes

- 1 Wenn Sie in Ihrer letzten Sekunde sich fragen: „Habe ich mein junges Leben wirklich so gelebt, wie ich das wollte?“ Und wenn Sie sich diese Frage im wachen Zustand beantworten können, dann werden Sie sich verändern. Weil, Sie leben mehr im Hier und Jetzt.
- 2 Kindheit, Jugend, dann kommt ein Kapitel mit meiner Persönlichkeit fremd sozusagen und dann kommt das Altern wieder zu mir persönlich zurück. [I: Ok. Was verstehen Sie darunter, unter Persönlichkeit fremd?] Also, als Kind war ich mir nah. Als Jugendliche auf eine gewisse Weise auch und dann wurde ich diese [Marion], also mein Leben nahm andere, völlig andere Bahnen, die mit dem, was ich eigentlich im Leben bin, nichts mehr, fast nichts mehr zu tun hatte. [...] Also was für mich bedeutsam ist, dass ich immer ein kreativer hochsensibler Mensch war und zu meiner Zeit als ich Kind war, war das eher störend, also die Menschen oder die Erwachsenen konnten kaum damit umgehen und darum finde ich das wichtig, dass ich mir einen Raum geschaffen habe, also einen sozusagen nicht virtuellen, aber einen eigenen Raum geschaffen habe, in dem ich dann zu Hause war sozusagen. Das finde ich bedeutsam. Äußere Ereignisse, also ich bin aufgewachsen in einem sehr kleinbürgerlichen Haus. Wenn ich das mit wenig Emotionen erzähle, liegt das nicht daran, dass ich da was zurückhalte, also dazu sind Gefühle da durchaus, aber die sind nicht mehr relevant. Also ich habe die therapeutisch und in meinem Leben verarbeitet u. a. eben auch spirituell.
- 3 Ja. In Abschnitte. Ja und Nein. In Entwicklungsabschnitte. Und wenn ich jetzt so – ich werde bald 70 – wenn ich so zurückblicke, dann sage ich „Nein“, weil ich festgestellt habe, dass alles immer schon da war, nur man ist als Mensch nicht in der Lage, diese Erkenntnisse zu verarbeiten. Also von daher beides: Jede Entwicklungsstufe hat irgendwelche Schwerpunkte und doch glaube ich, dass wir uns nicht irgendwie verändern, sondern dazulernen. [I: Und wenn Sie über Ihr eigenes Leben nachdenken?] Ja, das ist für mich und mein Leben genauso. Ich finde, je älter ich werde, dass ich Erfahrungen mache, die ich als Kind schon gemacht habe, so in der Natur oder so, also solche archaischen Erlebnisse, die ich als Kind gehabt habe und die ich immer zwischendurch gehabt habe, aber nicht beachtet habe, aber jetzt beachte, mir die Zeit nehme dafür, und jetzt im Rückblick das auch verstehe. Von daher könnte ich auch sagen: Nein. Es hat keine, im tiefer liegenden Sinne, keine Abschnitte. Nur so auf der ersten Schicht des Hinguckens hat man natürlich ne Menge an Dingen, die man der Pubertät oder dem Kind sein oder der Ehe zudiktiert.
- 4 Also auf jeden Fall die üblichen Kapitel, Kindheit, Jugend, Erwachsensein, Altern. Dann eine Kategorie Familie und Beruf. Dann Glaube und Spiritualität. Das würde sicher manchmal reinfließen in die einzelnen Kapitel. [...] Also ein wichtiges Thema ist für mich Frau sein, wie bin ich in der Gesellschaft unterwegs? Was gibt es für Eindrücke über Frauen? [...] [I: Welche Ereignisse sind rückblickend irgendwie besonders bedeutsam?] [...] Gut, also als Einzelkind aufgewachsen, 1946 geboren, also als der Krieg gerade zu Ende war. Und Erfahrungen gesammelt mit immer noch Panzern auf der Straße und fremdartig aussehenden- also Menschen anderer Hautfarbe. So auf dem Dorf zu den damaligen Jahren war das schon was Besonderes. [...]

Und, hm, also ich habe nicht die Erfahrung gemacht, dass wir nix zu Essen hatten. Wir lebten auf einem Dorf und waren so eine Mittelschichtsfamilie, würde ich sagen. Es gab ein Schwein und solche Dinge, dass wir also immer zu Essen hatten. Von daher habe ich so von der Not der Nachkriegszeit nicht so sehr viel mitgekriegt. Was ich wichtig finde ist, dass auch in meiner Familie überhaupt nicht über Kriegstraumata und welche Rolle spielten unsere Väter und Großväter im Dritten Reich zum Beispiel? Das hat mich später sehr beschäftigt. [...] Und meine Mutter war auch eine Frau, die, als sie alt wurde und nicht mehr so ganz fit im Kopf war, darüber gesprochen hatte, also der Hitler war gar nicht so schlecht, der hat ja die Straßen gebaut oder sowas. Da kam das wieder hoch, wo ich dachte, naja, hat man nicht dran gearbeitet, ne.

- 5 Und eine noch mal eine gewaltige Veränderung, die mich sehr verändert und geprägt hat, ist dass ich Hospizmitarbeiterin geworden bin und zur gleichen Zeit eine Ausbildung als Klinik-Clownin gemacht habe. [...] Oder Clown und Menschen mit Demenz, also ich spiele mit Menschen Theater, also ich spiele nicht den Clown, ich bin die Clownin, das ist was anderes. Da habe ich endgültig gelernt, dass alles, was Spiritualität ist, egal in welcher Richtung, einfach an jeder Straßenecke zu finden ist. Bei jedem Penner, bei jedem behinderten Menschen, bei jedem der sich für normal hält und das sind die entscheidendsten Punkte und da bin ich jetzt.
- 6 Und was mich wirklich aus dem allen rausgeholt hat, ist die Närrin, also die Clownin, weil das ist Liebe pur. Was die rote Nase öffnet bei Kindern und bei Alten, selbst bei den an Demenz erkrankten Menschen, das sind Geschenke, die von Gott, von Buddha, aus dem Universum, ist mir völlig egal. Und jetzt in meinem Alter wird das immer mehr und wir haben dann, also meine Freundin und ich, haben uns diesem verschrieben und nennen das [Die Kunst des Altwerdens] und das geht nicht ohne diese Spiritualität und wir setzen das um. Wir drehen inzwischen Filme darüber, haben eine gut besuchte Website und setzen das künstlerisch um, aber immer unter diesem Aspekt des Liebevollen. Also, wir legen uns nicht fest auf eine Religion oder irgend so was, aber auf das, was ethisch wichtig ist so und danach leben wir auch.
- 7 Der Tod gehört zum Leben. Das ist für mich nicht nur eine Floskel, aber die wird oft benutzt. [...] Natürlich habe ich, wie jeder Mensch, sag ich mal, Wünsche an meine Todin, aber ich glaube auch nicht, dass nach dem Tod irgendwas passiert, [...]. Also ich habe einen Platz in einem Friedwald und ich finde es wunderschön da zwischen Baumwurzeln und da entsteht vielleicht ein Himmelschlüsselchen oder irgend so was. Also die Vorstellung, dass nach dem Tod irgendwas weitergeht, ist sehr tröstlich für Menschen und darum, glaube ich, brauchen viele Menschen das auch. Aber ich brauche das nicht mehr, also das ist so eine humorvolle Vorstellung, aus meiner Asche wächst ein Himmelschlüsselchen ne, wie so eine Metapher ne. [...] Wenn ich morgen sterben müsste, wäre das okay. Also das sage ich jetzt. Da muss man auch immer sagen, ich weiß, dass wenn das Morgen einträte, dass ich auch bitte noch alle Chancen haben möchte, diesen Gedankengang zu ändern. Das finde ich ist so eine Geschichte bei den Patiententestamenten. Also, dann schreibt man das theoretisch auf und alle unterstützen einen, das zu tun und dann sind nachher alle ganz eifrig dabei diese Wünsche zu erfüllen und merken gar nicht, dass der fast Sterbende

- vielleicht doch Wasser oder einen Krumen Brot möchte. Also das ist mir wohl auch klar, dass ich, ja, das man nicht weiß, was in der Zukunft passiert. Wir können nur spekulieren.
- 8 Und das einschneidendste und für mich beeindruckendste Erlebnis war die Pflege zum Tode meiner Mutter. Weil das hat mein ganzes Leben rund gemacht. Und als meine Mutter vor eineinhalb, zwei Jahren dann verstorben ist, seitdem, das war wohl das allergravierendste: Ich habe keine Angst mehr vorm Leben, ich greife wirklich rein in Begegnungen und ich hab gelernt, was „still“ ist. Und das ganze habe ich immer mein Leben lang irgendwie künstlerisch verarbeitet.
- 9 Seitdem sie tot ist und ich diese Verantwortung nicht mehr habe, sie aber übernommen habe, also, für mich habe ich nie gedacht, dass ich solche Kräfte haben würde, das zu tun. Ich rede jetzt nicht nur von den körperlichen, sondern auch von, ja, was alles im Kopf stattfindet. Und ich möchte diese Erfahrung nicht missen, gleichwohl möchte ich [...] diese Option haben, selbstbestimmt zu sterben. [...] Ich [habe] meine Möglichkeit gefunden, wenn ich es denn will. Und da ich diese Möglichkeiten habe, fühle ich mich frei. Das hilft mir auch, mehr vielleicht auszuhalten, was noch so auf uns zukommt, so, ich meine jetzt auch so gesellschaftlich, was wir verkraften können. Das ist ja nicht alles rosig und ich beneide Sie nicht um Ihre Jugend. Ich kann immer noch sagen: Nach mir die Sintflut. Also, so flapsig wäre ich nicht, ich fühle mich auch schon verantwortlich und ich hebe im Kleinen jedes Papier auf, was ein Kind hat fallen lassen [...]. Also, ich sehe mich schon auch als verantwortlich für das in dem, was ich tue. Aber meinen Tod bestimme ich genauso selbst, wie mein Leben! [...] Also es ist nichts, was ich verheimliche, wo ich auch offen mit umgehe, im Gegenteil, es gibt inzwischen Menschen, die zu mir kommen, weil sie Fragen dazu haben. Wie ich das sehe. Und die mich mit ihrer Zerrissenheit auch um Rat fragen. Und ich gebe keinen Rat. Das kann ich nicht. Ich kann ihnen nur Möglichkeiten, die ich sehe, eröffnen. Alles andere müssen sie selbst machen. Man wird bescheiden. Wenn ich mich sehe als Mensch in diesem Universum, dann ist das doch nicht mal ein Fliegenschiss.
- 10 Wie die Geburt ist für mich der Tod eine Chance, menschliche Erfahrungen zu erweitern und ob wir sie nutzen oder nicht, ist in das Ermessen eines jeden Einzelnen gestellt. Wie ich vorhin schon sagte, ist das auch nur ein Übergang in... nicht in andere Welten, sondern in, ich sag mal, so wie alles ins Leben hineinkommt und wieder rausgeht, wie die Jahreszeiten und vielleicht sind auch – das ist jetzt wieder eine reine Spinnerei – vielleicht sind auch Teilchen von uns, in dieser Quantenphysik gibt es eine Strömung, die das vertreten, werden Teilchen von uns, die sich dann wieder verbinden mit... Aber das ist jetzt nur eine Gedankenspielerei oder so und wenn der Tod unerträglich wird, finde ich, dann sollte man sich solche Ausflüge gönnen, weil dann kann man die Angst mit so nem bisschen Humor verpacken.
- 11 Also ich bin Geriatrie-Clownin. [...] Also sie haben eine psychologisch, philosophisch, künstlerische Ausbildung zum Clown. [...] Und ich habe das nun wirklich ernsthaft gelernt, einige Jahre. Und der Unterschied ist, [...] meine Freundin und ich sind nicht zu Kindern gegangen, sondern wir haben uns mit den Reaktionen von demenzerkrankten Menschen beschäftigt. Und sind also in Altenheime gegangen, und auch, wir sind Hospizmitarbeiterinnen. [...] Wir gehen auch zu Sterbenden,

- also sowohl zum Händchen halten, um es mal so salopp auszudrücken, als auch als Narr da hinzugehen. Es ist erstaunlich, was in den leidenden Menschen diese komische Figur so einer ganz feinen Art von Freude macht.
- 12 Und diese [...] Dinge sind so das Entscheidende im Leben, dass ich eine zufriedene Alte bin. Natürlich mit Macken und Einschränkungen, in meinem Alter auch gesundheitlicher Art, aber eine Zufriedenheit innerhalb der Rahmen zu bekommen, der möglichen Rahmen, die noch zur Verfügung stehen. Das halte ich für ein hohes Gut. Ach und diese 25 Jahre in der Tätigkeit, dass wir ja viel mit Sterbenden und alten Menschen oder kranken Menschen zu tun hatten, hat so eine Sichtweise geprägt von, wir betrachten das Leben vom Ende her. Also, das erleichtert vieles, so.
- 13 Oh, das ist ja nun mein Steckenpferd. Der Tod gehört zum Leben dazu wie die Geburt. Der Tod ist ein Übergang in etwas, was wir nicht kennen. [...] Ich habe eine Geschichte für mich, ich möchte gerne in einem Friedwald, den Platz habe ich schon, eingebuddelt werden und meine Asche dient als Futter für, was weiß ich, eine Kuh oder ein Eichhörnchen oder sowas. Und dann werde ich verdaut in dem Eichhörnchen und dann werde ich ganz natürlich wieder ausgeschieden und dünge den Boden. Und aus dem Boden wächst wieder ein Baum, unter dem jemand liegt. Dann kommt das Eichhörnchen – Sie verstehen, was ich damit sagen will? Also das meine ich mit Übergang. Und wohin wir gehen... also nichts an Energie, nach meiner Meinung, nichts an Energie in unserer Welt geht verloren. Die Summe aller Energieformen [...] ist konstant, die variiert nur im... wie diese Theorien, dass Materie ja auch nur Information ist zum Beispiel. [...] Und dass wir Menschen Angst [vor dem Tod] haben, weil wir ihn ausgegliedert haben in unserer Gesellschaft. Und ich wünsche mir, dass er wieder Einzug halten kann in unsere Gesellschaft. Und da sind wir auf einem guten Wege, da gibt es viele, die sich darum kümmern. [...] Und dann ist er ein großer Lehrmeister. Sie wissen nicht, also ich wünsche Ihnen alles Gute, bis Sie 95 werden. Aber nur ein Beispiel, Sie fahren mit dem Fahrrad, morgen passiert was. Wenn Sie in Ihrer letzten Sekunde sich fragen: „Habe ich mein junges Leben wirklich so gelebt, wie ich das wollte?“ Und wenn Sie sich diese Frage im wachen Zustand beantworten können, dann werden Sie sich verändern. Weil, Sie leben mehr im Hier und Jetzt. [...] Und das bewirkt die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Tod und mit dem Sterben.
- 14 Meine Mutter ist jetzt 92 geworden und ich habe mich entschieden- also, die ist total topfit noch, also wie man in dem Alter so sein kann. Natürlich braucht sie diverse Hilfe. Und wenn es soweit ist, dass sie nicht mehr kann, werde ich da sein. Also ich werde sie nicht körperlich pflegen, ich möchte emotional da sein und das aus freien Stücken. [...] [I: Wie hat sich das Bild von Ihren Eltern im Laufe der Jahre verändert?] Ja, einfach sehr. Diese ganzen pubertären Erscheinungen kennt man ja und auch als Erwachsene habe ich mich sehr bevormundet gefühlt von meiner Mutter, konnte mich lange nicht wehren dagegen. Aber es ist jetzt so, ich bin auch nicht ihre Mutter geworden, darauf habe ich jetzt sehr geachtet, sondern wir sind eine ältere und eine alte Frau. Also diese Symbiose, also ganz weg geht sie nie, also das wäre ja eine Illusion, aber es ist angenehm mit uns beiden so, ja.
- 15 Die Beziehung mit meiner Mutter und mir war immer sehr kühl, sehr distanziert, und ich denke, meine Mutter ist eigentlich immer Kind geblieben, so, eigentlich war

- ich die Versorgerin meiner Mutter schon als Kind, aber es war eben immer schwierig, also, es war einfach eine schwierige Beziehung.
- 16 Diese Distanz ist geblieben, die ist auch jetzt immer noch da... Aber, also ich merke, wie sich meine Stimme dann verändert, wenn ich darüber spreche, dann wird es etwas klamm im Hals. Ich sage mal, also dadurch, dass ich mich entschieden – wie soll ich das formulieren? Sie hat mir erlaubt, sie in den Tod zu begleiten. Und dafür bin ich ihr dankbar. Ich liebe sie nicht. Auch jetzt nicht. Und sie hat immer versucht, sich in mein Leben zu mischen. [...] Für mich habe ich nie gedacht, dass ich solche Kräfte haben würde, das zu tun, ich rede jetzt nicht nur von den körperlichen, sondern auch von, ja, was alles im Kopf stattfindet. Und ich möchte diese Erfahrung nicht missen.
- 17 Also meine Mutter war ein sehr schwieriger Mensch. Wenn ich heute vorsichtig eine Diagnose stellen würde, war sie eher eine Borderline-Persönlichkeit. Das gab es damals nicht. Das erklärt so ein bisschen, dass keine oder sehr unstrukturierte Beziehungen stattfinden konnten und ich mein Leben lang immer nicht ganz natürlich mit Grenzen, mit Distanz und Nähe umgehen kann. Das ist für mich immer ein Stückweit schwierig. Das finde ich sehr prägend. Also ich würde sagen, das ist die Grundprägung überhaupt. [...] Und meine Mutter habe ich verzweifelt gehasst. Und diese Hassliebe ist auch geblieben, bis ich, glaube ich, so mit meiner persönlichen Reife- och, ich glaube, bis ich 60 war. Ja. [...] Also, das mit dem Lieben, hat ganz eindeutig erst angefangen, nachdem ich sie gepflegt habe. Vorher wäre das zwischen uns nicht möglich gewesen. [...] Das Interessante war, ich habe sie sozusagen zu Tode gepflegt, um es (lächelt) mal wieder salopp auszudrücken, (lacht) aber das zeigt schon, es hat viel Versöhnung in mir gegeben.
- 18 Jetzt komme ich zu den Einschnitten die gravierend waren auch in Richtung persönlicher Erweiterung sozusagen. Ich wusste, das mit Ehe und Familie, ich wusste nicht, dass das nicht mein Ding ist. Ich bin da ja reingerutscht. Aus heutiger Sicht würde ich das, wäre ich wahrscheinlich, verheiratet weiß ich nicht, aber ich hätte vermutlich keine Kinder, nicht weil ich Kinder nicht mag, sondern weil ich merke, dass ich andere Lebensaufgaben habe und so. Und ein ganz entscheidender Einschnitt war, dass mein jüngerer Sohn mit 18 ungefähr, 19, an [einer psychische Erkrankung] erkrankte und da ist mir klar geworden, dass irgendwas in unserem System Familie nicht stimmt, [...] dass dieses System nicht funktionierte, da habe ich erkannt, dass ich sehr symbiotisch verbunden war mit meiner Mutter und dass das auch einen großen Teil dieser Fremdbestimmung ausmachte [...]. Ich habe immer schon viel gelesen, aber da habe ich das erste Mal wirklich angefangen mich mit Schuld, mit Sühne [zu beschäftigen].
- 19 Dann als die Kinder aus dem Haus gingen, das sind auch nochmal entscheidende Punkte, wo man, wo ja nicht nur die Kinder sich loslösen, sondern Mutter muss das auch und das war ein sehr schmerzhafter Prozess, obwohl ich immer dachte, ich wäre so locker. Aber das war ich überhaupt nicht, im Nachhinein betrachtet. [...] Das ist jetzt ein bisschen durcheinander, aber ich glaube, und das mache ich eigentlich schon seitdem ich dreißig bin, meine Kinder sind nicht so sehr glücklich mit mir, also das ist mir auch klar, weil ich immer nie so die Mutter war, die sie gebraucht hätten, wahrscheinlich. Das hat mich auch eine ganze Weile belastet, aber sie sind

aus sich heraus zwei erwachsene, mit allen Grenzen und Erweiterungen, zwei Männer geworden, die sich sehen lassen können. [...] Also, insofern habe ich das schon auch auf dem Rücken von Menschen, für die ich verantwortlich war, teilweise gemacht. Und das ist auch ein Wermutstropfen, aber ich kann es nicht ändern. Also, es ist schon so, dass mich das, auch wenn ich jetzt so darüber spreche, sehr tief berührt.

- 20 Mein jüngerer Sohn wurde mit neunzehn [psychisch krank], was mich nicht wundert, wie gesagt, wir sind alle Spinner in der Familie, [...] und mein jüngerer Sohn hat das Leben auch nicht ausgehalten, genau wie seine Mutter an vielen Stellen, und wurde [psychisch krank], und ist heute, also, wenn man es nicht weiß, merkt man es nicht, er hat sein Handicaps und muss auch Medikamente nehmen, aber ist ein toller Mann geworden. So. Aber da hatte ich lange diese Phase, dass ich dachte, wenn ich nicht mehr da wäre, würde es ihm besser gehen. Also das ist dann ja auch so ne psychologische Verdrehtheit, ich hab dann Therapien gemacht, ich war in der Lage, mir Hilfe, zu holen, so. Also, insofern ist es bei diesen Gedanken geblieben, aber ich habe mich lange mit diesem Thema beschäftigt.
- 21 Ich bin mit 19 schwanger geworden und habe mein erstes Kind bekommen. Wir mussten damals heiraten, also das stand außer Frage. Ich war 19, mein Mann war 20, wir meinen dann zwar immer, wir sind so furchtbar erwachsen, aber dass das in die Hose ging, ist eigentlich klar, ne. Das muss irgendwie. Also in den seltensten Fällen ist sowas gutgegangen.
- 22 Weitere Punkte sind auf jeden Fall die Erfahrung, Kinder zu erziehen. Und vor allen Dingen, wenn das dann nicht rundläuft, und mit meinem Freiheitsdrang... Ich habe mich nicht wirklich entschieden, Kinder zu bekommen, sondern sie waren eben einfach da und man muss damit zurechtkommen. Und damit stand ich immer im Konflikt, mit meinem Bedürfnis nach Freiheit. [...] Also mit meinem Drang, mich in der Welt zu bewegen, das ist ja dann erst mal ganz schön eingeschränkt. Und ich bin mit Sicherheit auch, wenn Sie meine Söhne fragen würden, nicht wirklich so eine tolle Mutter gewesen. Also wir können leider wenig darüber sprechen. Von mir aus wäre das Interesse größer, aber meine Söhne haben sich irgendwie mit ihrem Leben eingerichtet, und dann ist das eben so. Ich hätte gern mir Aufarbeitung gewünscht, auch in ihrem Interesse. Aber das ist sehr schwierig. Gestaltete sich immer schwierig und ist es auch noch. Sind zwei Top-Männer geworden, die gut im Leben zurechtkommen. Das ist ja schon mal eine Menge. Und offensichtlich war dann ja doch nicht alles so ganz so verkehrt, wenn die sich so entwickelt haben, muss ich ja auch einiges dazu beigetragen haben so.
- 23 Den Alltag aufmerksam u. emphatisch leben, Achtsamkeit in diesem Augenblick, Selbstreflektion, tägliche ZEN-Meditation, für andere Lebewesen da sein (ohne Helfersyndrom), kein Tier töten und essen, den mittleren Weg des Buddha und budd. Psychologie.
- 24 Leben im Hier und Jetzt, eigenen ethischen Richtlinien folgen, persönliche moralische Werte leben. Wissen um die Einbettung in die Natur und ihrem Kreislauf.
- 25 Lebendiges Erleben und Reflektion des gegenwärtigen Augenblicks unter Zuhilfenahme der vergangenen Erfahrungen und ein kreatives Angebundensein an etwas Höheres.

- 26 Glauben-nicht wissen, Dogma, personifizierter Gott (gibt es m.E. nicht) Kirche- eine Sackgasse, zu wenig persönliche Freiheit, aber neue, offensive Ansätze lohnen eine Auseinandersetzung. Übergreifende Dialoge begrüße ich sehr.
- 27 Einengung, unhinterfragtes Regelwerk, Unmündigkeit.
- 28 Religion ist ein menschliches Konstrukt mit Regeln und Normen, die mich einengen und bevormunden. Das gilt für alle Religionen.
- 29 Das kann ich nicht trennen. Das will ich auch nicht trennen. Ich bin sehr sicher, dass ab einen gewissen Punkt das alles gleich ist. Also ich rede nicht von den Institutionen, die sind menschengemacht. Ich rede davon, dass ich glaube, dass wir alle letztendlich von demselben träumen. Ob das einen Bart hat oder Ying und Yang oder ich weiß nicht. Ich habe so ein Gefühl das wir uns an diesem Punkt alle treffen würden. [I: Und wie würden Sie das nennen?] Liebe, weil das ist universell. [...] Alle Menschen, die spirituell sind, verhalten sich liebevoll, sollten sie zumindest, wenn sie es ernst nehmen ja. Wenn wir liebevoll mit der Natur umgehen, dann ist das erhaltend und mit dieser Achtsamkeit. [...] Zum Beispiel in dieser traditionellen Närrin sind alle drei Elemente drinnen [...]. Also da sprudelt bei mir gleich die Phantasie wieder, wie ich das umsetzen könnte, als Clownin oder Närrin was über Glauben zu machen. [...] [I: Also sozusagen eine religiös spirituelle Närrin, die hingebungsvoll mit Liebe lebt?] Ja genau. Mit allen Fehlern und allem, was dazu gehört, ja. [I: Und was bedeutet das für Sie dann?] [...] Dass ich ein zufriedener, sehr oft glücklicher Mensch bin. [...] Und das ist für mich das Höchste, was ich als Mensch erreichen kann.
- 30 Ich bin einfach ein neugieriger Mensch. Und das ist eine Antriebsfeder in mir. Ich bin geboren zum Fragen stellen und je älter ich werde, umso mehr Fragen... und solange das so ist, ist für mich diese Welt in Ordnung. Ich bin nix und ich kann das auch alles nicht beantworten. [...] Ich weiß wirklich, dass ich Ideen habe, aber wissen tue ich gar nichts. Und Sie glauben gar nicht, wie entlastend das ist. (lacht) [...] Ich kann mich, wenn ich will, zurückziehen und sagen: Ich will mit dem allen nichts mehr zu tun haben. Das können Sie nicht. Das ist der Vorteil des Alterns. [...] Und diese Spaltung von Intellekt und Gefühl, wie das traditionell in unseren Studiengängen so üblich ist [...], kann eine positive Phantasie sein, [...] aber das, was sie darstellen, sind Menschen, die nicht am Leben teilnehmen, nur mit dem Kopf.
- 31 Also mit ein bisschen Stirn krausziehen, spirituell. Ich finde, dass man diese Dinge nicht so trennen kann. Ich würde mich bei allem so ein bisschen zuordnen, aber am meisten in der spirituellen Richtung. So und deswegen hatte ich gerade so ein bisschen Probleme mit der Frage, mit der Präzision dieser Frage. [...] [I: Was bedeutet das denn dann für Sie?] Gar nix. Das ist mir egal. Also es muss nicht jedes Kind einen Namen haben. Also ich finde, ehrlich gesagt, diese Frage so ein bisschen, für mich, eher überflüssig. [I: Ja, das ist ja auch interessant, weil es durchaus nicht wenig Leute gibt, denen das ganz wichtig ist.] Ja, ich respektiere das, ja. [...] Ich antworte auch immer nur aus meiner Sicht der Dinge. Das wissen wir ja auch. Und dass andere Menschen-, wenn ich mit jemandem ein Gespräch führen würde, wäre das vielleicht eine tolle Möglichkeit, auch mal miteinander darüber zu sprechen dann, auch wieder eine Begegnungsmöglichkeit.

- 32 Dann ging es eher in die höhere Macht, als meine Kinder erwachsen waren, größer waren. [...]. Dann kam ja auch hier diese ganze Esoterikwelle und ich bin immer noch ein bisschen beschämt, dass ich da auch drauf mitgeschwommen bin. [...] Fand dann das sehr schnell sehr oberflächlich, und nach wie vor auch finde, obwohl es schön ist mit diesen Objekten umzugehen und das haben wir ja in der Religion und in jeglicher Spiritualität, also Rituale und so eine Art Objektverehrung so ein bisschen und das ist natürlich was Gutes für die Seele in jedem Fall. Trotzdem habe ich das immer so ein Stückweit abstrahiert und die Frage ob es Gott gibt oder nicht, die hat sich mir nicht bewusst gestellt. Ich habe die auch so nie gestellt, sondern ich war eher auf der Suche.
- 33 Ich habe Gott verzweifelt gesucht. Das fing in der Pubertät an mit ganz vielen Fragen, dann ist das wie bei jedem Menschen so, immer wenn ich ne Krise hatte... [...]. In Krisensituationen [...] bin ich auch in ne katholische Kirche gegangen, ich hab mich überall hingeworfen, ich hab mit Menschen der Kirchen, wir konnten immer ganz gut, also, wenn man Fragen hat, ist man bei Gottesmännern und -frauen ja auch immer erst einmal willkommen, aber es ist immer leer geblieben. [...] Es blieben immer mehr Fragen als Antworten. Und so hab ich dann auch aufgehört, an Wunder zu glauben inzwischen, und jetzt komme ich zu meinem jetzigen Punkt: Ich brauch keinen Gott. [...] Also, ich vermisse keinen Gott.
- 34 Mein Selbstwert war durch meine Erziehung und dieses Ganze, eher im Keller, mit anderen Worten, ein Selbstwertgefühl hatte ich so gut wie gar nicht oder war sehr brüchig. Und durch diese Beschäftigung mit spirituellen Dingen hat sich sehr viel getan im Laufe der Jahre. Einiges habe ich dazu ja schon gesagt, diese Veränderungen, diese Reisen, sowohl innere Reisen als auch ganz klar äußere Reisen. Und diese Erfahrungen haben mich einfach reifer gemacht.
- 35 Und bis vor zwei Jahren wollte ich mit Gott, [...] mich ganz bewusst überhaupt nicht [beschäftigen]. Ich wollte keine Entscheidungen treffen. Ich fand das Leben so spannend, auch ohne Gott. Vor, ich glaube, zweieinhalb Jahren oder vor drei Jahren hat sich das verändert nochmal mit einer aktuellen Begegnung. Ich habe nämlich nochmal so eine Fortbildung gemacht in initiativistischer Prozessbegleitung. Das ist, wir sitzen, nach indianischem Vorbild, aber Vorsicht, das ist nicht esoterisch, sondern wir nutzen dieses, was es in vielen Traditionen gegeben hat, auch in Europa, im Kreis zu sitzen und zu palavern, sage ich mal. [...] Das machen wir in der Natur [...] Und da ist mir, ich will jetzt nicht sagen, Gott begegnet. Also dieses Wort, das wird so vielschichtig benutzt, aber ich habe für mich die Lösung gefunden und sage: Es ist Liebe. Und zwar eine Liebe, die nicht anbindet. Ich sage jetzt nicht, wenn du das und das tust, dann liebe ich dich aber mehr. Sondern, die Großartigkeit der Natur. Dann habe ich auf einer spanischen Insel auch so gesessen, 800 Meter über dem Meer. Und wenn Sie Tag und Nacht da sitzen, dann ist das heilig. [...] Also mit Worten kann ich das nicht beschreiben. Das sind alles Eingrenzungen und das finde ich – und bei dem Wort würde ich gerne bleiben – das ist heilig. Und das habe ich mit nach Hause genommen vor zwei Jahren und das ist immer in mir. Und so lebe ich jetzt mein Leben. [...] Ich habe sowohl diese Gewissheit und so eine Demut, dass diese Welt oder dieses alles, sehr viel größer ist als ich. Und gleichwohl wächst so eine Form von Vertrauen, kann ich sagen, dass

alles richtig so ist. Das hat nichts damit zu tun, dass ich nicht einen klaren Blick habe, was alles nicht läuft hier, egal wo, und doch ist es ein anderes, ein tieferes Angebundensein.

- 36 Lebe den Tag... Jetzt sitze ich hier mit Ihnen und telefoniere. Zwischendurch spiele ich mal an der PC-Maus rum oder... und das ist heilig, das Hier und Jetzt ist für mich das, was zählt. Was gestern war, ist vorbei, kommt nie wieder. Und was Morgen ist, das wissen wir nicht. [...] Also, ich habe da nicht ein Gefühl, ich müsste irgendwas noch unbedingt machen oder unbedingt nachholen. Das ist eine Frage des Alters und das ist eine Frage der Zufriedenheit. [...] Alles andere ist für mich nicht von Relevanz. Ich weiß, dass es das alles gibt, aber für mich ist das nicht wichtig.

11. Synopsis and Outlook

The case studies presented above show that the approach in focusing on content and narrative particularities and then triangulating these findings with results from the structural analysis and selected survey data is useful to portray the single cases in a multifaceted way. The longitudinal perspective could be laid out when comparing the data assembled for each timepoint. The single trajectory of each case may allow for comparisons between cases in order to find characteristics that may apply to more than one case as well as to determine which parts of a person's trajectory may be idiosyncratic and not comparable to others at the point of this research. Further research may still find similarities. As a first step at comparing inter-individually and as an answer to my research question asking "*How does the look on the other spouse change over time? How does the "same story" differ depending on who is telling it (and when)?*," the men and women of each couple were analyzed regarding their stance toward each other and the role that religion might play in this in the frame of the respective case studies. That way, the dynamics of the relationships could be approached in a fruitful way, which is one of my main research interests. As has been indicated at some points in the case study chapters, the cases offer the possibility to explore further lines of comparison and therefore also the chance to answer my research questions with regard to all of the case studies. The following sections will explore these lines and, additionally, find answers to the research questions on an inter-individual basis.

11.1 Talking about One's Life and about Relationships

As a first approximation, I would like to address the observation that the participants differ regarding the amount of personal information they are willing to share. Some are very talkative and willingly and extensively talk about their life, their relationships, etc. Others require more encouragement and prefer to leave out certain topics completely. Nadine presents as taciturn when asked to report on her life and on important people. It seems like she is trying to avoid the questions, and one does not learn much about her past. When the questions allow for more abstract answers, she gets more elaborate. Moreover, she openly talks about her spiritual experiences and the circumstances that

led to her having them. Being of a similar age, Bianca reports on what it means for her to raise children but does not go into detail regarding her relationship with her husband. Neither of them talks about their education and their professions. This is different for Gudrun and Renate who both spend time reminiscing on their work life. This is an interesting observation since it might have been expected that the younger women, who are part of the Generation Y (and therefore expected to attach value to having a good job and a professional career; cf. Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2014) and presumably well-educated, would put more focus on their professional life as identity-constituting. Renate and Gudrun, who grew up during and after WWII and who experienced a society in which a woman in the (paid) working world was the exception, seem to find some pride in the fact that they had jobs which they actually liked and in which they were successful and appreciated. Therefore, their work biographies might constitute a deviation from the cultural life script of their time and accordingly might be worth telling (cf. Bruner, 1990). Interesting as well is a look at gender differences: while it has been suggested that women's narrations are more elaborate and more emotional (Fivush & Zaman, 2015), this cannot be confirmed for the three men that were analyzed here. Jannis talks about his reconversion experience in a very emotional and experience-oriented fashion, while his wife sounds more analytical. And while Richard's mode of narrating may be classified as rather prosaic, Werner's accounts contain emotional valuation and some vivid narratives. In general, the level of abstraction and of analytical reasoning seems to grow with age, which is often combined with a growing empathy and consideration of other opinions. This may suggest the presence of wisdom (*sensu* Erikson, 1998, 1959), even though this has not been thoroughly investigated in my analyses. Carola is an exception with her form of argumentation and wisdom-related content seeming to decline over the years (even though she names good and important relationships and shows great interest in the welfare of her grandchildren) and is replaced by a distrustful demeanor focusing on the potentially dangerous sides of society.

For all three couples, it can be stated that the women talk more about their children (and grandchildren) than the men do, even though this is not entirely consistent on a gendered basis. Renate is brief in mentioning her children, and Gudrun likewise does not talk much about her daughter and her grandchildren. However, Gudrun's pregnancy is important to her story since it marks a turning point in their JW membership. Bianca, Carola, and Marion openly discuss the relationships with their children and emphasize the importance of caring for them. There is hardly any mentioning of the children in the fathers' interviews. More diverse is the way the respective partner is discussed. While Richard hardly mentions his wife and children at all, Werner's account for Gudrun has an ambiguous role as being both an antagonist (when she argues against his efforts to leave the sect, for example) and a role model (especially in the last interview when he reluctantly admits to being jealous of his wife and her multiple social contacts while he is rather lonely). For Jannis, his wife is of great importance in his accounts since she appears at the same time as his reconversion experience. Bianca, on the other hand, hardly talks about her husband. Marion and Nadine both share little to no information about romantic relationships, while for Carola, the relationship with her ex-husband and her partner are prominent and occupy considerable space in the interviews. Summed up, the impor-

tance of relationships seems to differ within the cases studied here, but neither gender nor age seem to stand out as potential explanation for this.

As another note concerning relationships, there are some interesting observations regarding the participants' parents. First, one may note a similarity between Renate and Carola who both lost their fathers at a young age (and both talk about them in an affectionate way) and felt compelled to take care of their mothers in the years after. Both state that it was difficult to be responsible for their mothers when it should have been the other way around (even more for Renate, who was still a child when her father died). These circumstances may be interpreted as having had a negative impact on the mother-daughter relationships for many years. Yet, Renate at some points is able to forgive and to come to a "good conclusion" before her mother's death. Conversely, Carola remains irreconcilable even after the mother is dead and consciously decides against bringing flowers to the grave. Relating this finding to the two women's overall accounts, it may be hypothesized that Renate is situated in secure circumstances with stable relationships which allow her to adopt a more forgiving stance toward the mother who may have done her injustice. Carola's situation seems more unstable overall, as she reports an unpleasant divorce and later the death of her beloved partner. Moreover, she seems to feel threatened by the outside world and subsequently seems less able to forgive or show empathy. The role attachment may play in people's religiosity and especially their image of god was not explored here in detail, but it seems plausible to assume that what Granqvist (2020) has called the *correspondence pathway* can be found in Renate: "[...] via generalized working models of self and others, securely attached religious individuals often represent God as a correspondingly sensitive (i.e., reliably security-maintaining) attachment figure" (p. 123). For Carola, an insecure, dismissive form of attachment she has nurtured growing up with her mother is finding its sequel in her ambivalent relationship with God. Another interesting parallel in the case studies is that both Marion and Richard took care of an elderly parent until their death. In Richard's case, he could adopt a professional stance toward his father who lived his last years in the nursery home which Richard was head of. Richard reports that by having his father close and being able to care for him, he could redefine the image he had of the father and reconcile their relationship, which had been difficult before. This might be interpreted as an interplay of his profession and his religiosity. Marion talks in a similar manner about the relationship she had with her mother, also finding that by caring for her when she got old, she could forgive some of the injustices she remembers from her childhood. Comparing these two stories, it seems that Marion's overall approach is more self-determined, while for Richard, there may have been some amount of felt obligation, since it may have seemed obvious to have his father move in Richard's nursery home. In both cases, the late reconciliation is motivated by a change of perspective and a change of hierarchy with Marion and Richard now being in charge and the respective parent being in a dependent situation.

Lastly, looking specifically again at the research question "*How does the look on the other spouse change over time? How does the "same story" differ depending on who is telling it (and when)?*": The case studies have brought to light the different ways the spouses talk about each other and the subtle differences that can be found in their accounts of a joint life. The most obvious changes could be observed when looking at Gudrun and Werner. Gudrun consistently describes Werner as the one who makes the important

decisions. Accordingly, when she talks about their life, it is always Werner who leads the way, whether out of religious groups or into a more private book study. All the same, her portrayal of Werner changes, and she becomes more open in her critique toward her husband while displaying more understanding for the roots of his behavior. Werner does not conceal the fact that he is the decider in their marriage, at least not in his first two interviews. In the third interview, he talks more favorably of his wife and even portrays the exit process from the JW as a joint one. The other couples are less open regarding the discussion of their partner. As has been lined out in chapter 7, Renate emphasizes the good fortune she had when meeting Richard, even though this meant she did not even start her vocational training. In her interviews, the fact that she was able to work as the head of the nursery home together with her husband is always highlighted. This may be a compromise she committed to and which she is content with. Richard does not mention this, even though he likes to talk about his work in general and seems to see it as important and identity-constituting. But Renate's presence and contribution are taken for granted (which may be seen as a silent appreciation, and is probably in line with the traditional religious values Richard grew up with), and she is not prominent in his accounts. Other than this point, the way they talk about their life seems harmonious and not subject to much change. For Bianca and Jannis, it was lined out that Jannis talks more about his wife than the opposite. This seems to be due to the fact that meeting his wife and finding his faith happened basically at the same time, which stresses the importance of the relationship for Jannis in the context of his newfound religiosity. Accordingly, his wife (and her family) are mentioned as important relations when he talks about living his faith. Bianca is putting focus on being a couple while having small children in a more abstract manner. And while building a new house and the stress that goes along with that is discussed in her second interview, this does not play a role in Jannis's interviews. It seems as if there is not a "same story" in these individual revelations with the emphases being different throughout all of their interviews. However, both give the impression of a happy, harmonious marriage.

11.2 Discussing (Non-)Religiosity

Taking a closer look at the topic of religiosity, a case in which age does seem to play a role is the different way this religiosity is displayed in Renate and Bianca. Both women have had a religious socialization and do not report any greater disturbances in their faith. While Renate shows a calm, intrinsic religiosity, Bianca seems to be more "in discussion" with her environment, both in the form of being challenged (by peers) and in the form of challenging herself (by formulating explicit social criticism toward a secular society that she deems lacking moral values). The case study has shown that being religious was the norm rather than the exception in Renate's surroundings, since she has spent her life within the realms of the Protestant church, so she presumably did not meet much criticism coming from the outside. Bianca was an adolescent in the 1990's and obviously experienced a lot of skepticism toward her religiosity within her closer environment as well as the wider society being more secular, which leads to her having a more critical view on her surroundings. Taking Gudrun into the comparison as well, one can see she

is ten years older than Renate and holds a faith that can be described as deep and unfaltering, which aligns with both Renate and Bianca. It is interesting to note that Gudrun talks about a book study which grants her new access to her faith on a more scientific basis. Renate mentions something potentially similar without going into as much detail as Gudrun. As one may see in the case study, Gudrun has gone through a couple of different religious groups in her lifetime, whereas Renate has stayed within the realms of her (pious) Protestant faith. While this book study may just be a logical extension of her faith or something that can easily be integrated for Renate, for Gudrun, this seems like a new step within her faith biography. Unlike Renate (but similar to Bianca), Gudrun always had to justify her beliefs and her denomination toward the greater society, since neither JW nor the Charismatic group she attended belong to the accommodating groups in Germany (see Streib et al. (2009) for a characterization of accommodating (integrated) and contestant groups), but also in opposition to her husband who she was in heated discussions with regarding their exit from the Witnesses. Both of these circumstances (and her background as a JW who of course promote reading the Bible) may have led to the desire to put her faith on solid ground, something she does together with her husband. That being said, an interesting observation is that two of the non-religious women (Nadine and Marion) claim to have read the Bible from the beginning to the end in their adolescence. This could be a sign that also non-belief seems to come with the need for justification, at least as part of the quest they went through. Both Nadine and Marion have engaged with multiple different religions, yet have concluded that none of them provide sufficient answers. It is interesting to observe the way the three non-religious women report on their contact with organized religion in their childhood/adolescence. Nadine talks about a Catholic grandmother and a Catholic kindergarten, yet states that neither had any significant influence. Marion and Carola both talk about confirmation class, and while Marion enjoyed them because of the chance to have an interesting and interested vis-à-vis with the pastor, for Carola, her accounts on this time serve the purpose in showing how she was humiliated and was driven away from the church as an institution. Even decades after these experiences and the traumatic experience of her partner dying, she holds an anger against both the church and God.

One aim of this study was to strengthen the models of religious styles and types, thereby getting a clearer picture of *“how subjective religiosity changes over time.”* As Table 35 shows, the cases analyzed show a variety of possible moving trajectories while also revealing that nearly half of the cases do not move at all, at least when looking at the types only. Trajectories for religious types have been described in Keller, Bullik et al. (2022) already, albeit for two timepoints only, with the addition of a column that names the deconversion narrative that was found to be most applicable for the longitudinal perspective unfolded in the book summed up by that chapter. Accordingly, the below table will also account for the leitmotifs that were found in the case studies and which will be discussed in a comparative perspective in the next section.

Table 35: *Religious Types, Moving Trajectories, and Leitmotifs*

	religious types (per wave)	movement (time 1—time 2; time 2—time 3)	leitmotif(s)
Bianca	constantly type 2	stayer	“Negotiating Catholic faith within a secular society”
Jannis	constantly type 2	stayer	“Negotiating Catholic faith within a secular society”; “Becoming faithful again”
Nadine	type 3; type 2; type 3	mover downward; mover upward	“Searching for authenticity and a spirituality without a faith”
Renate	constantly type 2	stayer	“Unflinching trust in a leading God”
Richard	type 2; type 2; type 3	stayer; mover upward	“Christian charity as a way of life”
Carola	constantly type 2	stayer	“Abandonment and self-perceived growth”
Gudrun	type 1; type 2; type 2	mover upward; stayer	“God as a pillar of strength”
Werner	type 2; type 2; type 3	stayer; mover upward	“Seeking personal enlightenment”
Marion	type 4; type 3; type 3	mover downward; stayer	“Prepare yourself to die and then live in the present”

And even though one sees many of the cases classified as “stayers” here, the case studies and the extensive content and narrative analyses have shown that there is change happening, even though this does not lead to a different religious type in all cases. Bianca has been described as a devout and strict Catholic, yet while raising her children within this faith tradition, she necessarily engages with the outside, more secular world and has to adapt expectations and deal with controversies. The assessment of her religiosity has shown that her dogmatic approach is permeated by some more pragmatic considerations and more room for the “other” at time 3, albeit without much movement toward a xenosophic stance. Carola’s trajectory has been described as becoming more radical and judgmental, which does not show in her type assignment. Instead, a constant orientation toward an in-group and toward conventional, sometimes dogmatic approaches can be found in this constant type 2 (predominantly conventional). A look at her style-aspect maps reveals that the ratio of style 4 assignments (individuating-systemic) declines over the three timepoints which is in accordance with the finding from the content analysis.

The type assignment can show movement even when the psychometrics show none. Richard has proven to be a good example of a person who remains within a faith tradition his whole life (and who never had any serious doubts) yet still evolves within this tradition, having achieved a more abstract understanding of religion while becoming more pragmatic or “down-to-earth.” In his last interview, he shows some signs of a development toward xenosophia. A similar trajectory could be traced for Gudrun and Werner (albeit from different starting points, i.e. different types), who identified as Protestant throughout all waves and both show a development regarding their own religiosity. While Gudrun moves from a mythic-literal understanding to a conventional one in the model

of the types, the content analysis has shown that she has also become more independent regarding her beliefs. In his later interviews and survey data Werner adopts a form of religiosity that also takes into account society and is therefore more systemic and abstract. As for the non-religious cases, Nadine can serve as an example for development in young in middle adulthood. Constantly not stating any religious affiliation, Nadine makes an upward movement in her third interview while moving downward between times 1 and 2. This reflects the increased ability for more abstract thinking and a movement toward a xenosophic mindset. Lastly, Marion's characterization as "mover downward" between times 1 and 2 can be justified with the assumption laid out in the content analysis that despite her openness, there are inner boundaries that she does not seem to want to cross and ways of thinking she does not want to take into consideration. In her first interview, she seemed to have surpassed some of those boundaries; however, in her later interviews, she seems more comfortable with an individuating-reflective type 3 approach of clear-cut explanation and a preference for her own viewpoint.

As has been hinted at above, I could not find a specific difference in being religious that could be specifically attributed to gender. It seems obvious to assume that Gudrun's and Renate's life stories in general are typical for women of their generations. However, this is not an observation that is limited to religiosity. The women analyzed here, both those who identify as religious and those who don't, show a variety of different approaches to questions of meaning-making and religiosity or worldview (and so do the men). Mostly, they become more self-confident over time in the way they portray their religiosity and seem to feel less need to defend their own stance toward the outside world (i.e., the secular society), Bianca and Carola being exceptions through seemingly wanting to protect their loved ones from the outside world.

11.3 Comparing the Religious and Non-Religious Women

My study design, respectively the case selection, was based on the idea to compare the way the couples talk differently about their beliefs and their jointly lived faith. In addition, I have analyzed women of the same age group who identify as non-religious as a maximal contrast. The comparison above has taken into account this perspective of comparison in some parts. However, this section will summarize meaningful differences and similarities in the women's narrative identity and their developments.

Nadine and Bianca were both in their early 20s when they were first interviewed. Both are rather reluctant to talk in detail about their lives, important relationships, or their professions. It is interesting to observe that they both have struggled with their environment growing up, although in different ways: Bianca was challenged for being openly religious in a mainly secular environment. Nadine has reportedly often felt not belonging to her peers, and she has read the Bible at a young age searching for her place in life, not finding it within the religious field. Both of them become lively when they talk about their religious or spiritual experiences. The case studies have shown change in their interaction with the outside world, in Bianca's case forced by her children and a friendship with a non-religious person. Nadine seems more self-driven in this regard, mostly motivated by curiosity. Accordingly, their development in terms of religious styles

is different, and we see a movement upward toward a xenosophic religious style in the structural analysis of Nadine's interviews, while Bianca is classified as a stayer who remains within a conventional framework.

Renate and Carola, being of similar age too, put a lot of emphasis on their important relationships. Renate talks a lot about Richard and how her personal as well as her professional life is tightly connected to his. She does not elaborate much on her children and grandchildren, which Carola, on the other hand, does. Carola also talks a lot about her deceased life partner and her current partner, and she describes both of these relationships in an affectionate and emotionally rich way. Both women have lost their father at a young age, and both of them had to take care of their widowed mothers afterwards. Here, an interesting difference can be seen. Carola's account is focusing on the rejection of her mother, while Renate finds a more forgiving stance over the years. This is mirrored in the leitmotifs that have been carved out for them in which the theme of abandonment is very prominent in Carola but not in Renate. Both being stayers in the religious type 2 (predominantly conventional), they broaden their horizon by reading books which, however, mainly serve to confirm their worldviews. Renate finds comfort and stability in her unfaltering trust in God, Carola is in dispute with a God she perceives as not helpful. In sum, Carola seems more unstable than Renate and one can find a lot more confrontation and struggling in her interviews.

Gudrun and Marion have chosen different paths for their lives. Marion has freed herself from relationships she did not perceive as meaningful anymore (i.e. the two husbands she divorced), Gudrun is very loyal to her husband even though she elaborates on his flaws and the unhappy parts of her marriage. She even mentions moments in which she thought about "running away" which, for some reason, she never did. This makes Marion come across as more self-determined even though Gudrun also displays an emancipatory moment when she continues to attend the prayer groups that her husband despises. Regarding their religious/spiritual journey, both women have joined and left different groups. They both remain curious and want to expand their knowledge. But the case studies were able to show that Gudrun always puts God in the center of her faith and sees Him as a "pillar of strength" as reflected in her leitmotif. It is less certain if there is a constant like that in Marion's life too, most likely this would be herself. In their last interviews, Gudrun and Marion were both classified as the predominantly individuative-reflective type 3, although Gudrun has made a movement upward while Marion originally started as type 4, emerging xenosophic.

Summed up, there may be more differences than commonalities when looking at these women's biographies on the surface. However, some structures can be found that are similar in each of these case comparisons. The religious pathways offer a more straightforward framework which does not mean (as seen in Gudrun's case) that these will always suffice or be the right ones for a whole life. The non-religious women struggle more to find their place in life and to determine how to make sense; yet they also see less need to emancipate themselves from relationships or dogmas that they grew up with. In that regard, my case selection has served the purpose to show the breadth of possible trajectories even in this fairly small sample.

11.4 Narrative Identity and Leitmotifs—Discussing the Results

Last but not least, I turn to the questions circling around narrative identity: *How does the narrative identity change over time? How is a religious narrative identity created?* Narrative identity was found to be mostly stable, yet changing in important nuances. This is reflected by the leitmotifs that were administered in each case study being in the title and/or in the conclusion and which are shown in Table 35. Starting with Bianca, her narrative identity was outlined to be that of a devout Catholic who argues in favor of her beliefs with intellect rather than with emotion with her leitmotif being “Negotiating Catholic faith within a secular society.” This remains relatively stable over time. Her husband’s leitmotif is not that different, yet he has the additional, important, motif of “Becoming faithful again.” Both of them substantiate their standpoints by telling narratives that strengthen their religious identity, which creates coherence and credibility by using autobiographical arguments. Coming from a different perspective, Marion tells a narrative when a new experience serves to justify a self-perceived change in her religious/spiritual identity at time 3. During a retreat, she had the revelation that there is something bigger than herself, and this leads her to not call herself atheist anymore. Even though there is this change or a widening of perspective, a leitmotif could be identified that remains constant throughout all her interviews: “Prepare yourself to die and then live in the present.” In her interviews, she creates the narrative identity of a person who is curious to see what happens after death, and despite this fascination, she is very focused on living her life in the best way possible by having experienced that life often does not turn out as planned. This fascination with death can also be found in Nadine’s accounts, even though her approach is less experience-oriented and more analytical. The spiritual experiences that she reports often occur in relation to that topic (her own wish to die or the friend in a coma), and they are presented in the form of narratives, which is remarkable since Nadine otherwise prefers a less vivid language. This underlines the importance of these narratives and serves to show that they are an important part of the narrative identity Nadine wants to convey. While the term “pragmatic agnostic” was found to be fitting for her earlier interviews, the red thread that weaves through her interviews is the search for authenticity and the aspiration to live a life without a predefined label. Comparable to Marion and also engaged with the topic of death stands Carola. She, too, had to face diverse atrocities. Opposite to Marion, this has led her to adopt a black and white worldview. Carola perhaps aims at creating the narrative identity of a self-efficient person who has surfaced stronger out of all the injustices she was confronted with. However, the impression that I got when analyzing her interviews was different: Carola comes across as bitter, unforgiving and even slightly spiteful. She seems insecure and is still involved in old relationships with her mother and God, even though she portrays this as independence. Carola’s promoted leitmotif may be that of a growth that is the result of having dealt with hardships, even though this growth is not perceptible in her accounts.

Richard’s leitmotif is the (Protestant) Christian charity that has shaped his life with the narrative identity that he displays being that of a faithful and altruistic person for whom this charity is not just an empty phrase but an actually lived reality. However, in his last interview, a notion is added of self-care being important, and going along with that is a more differentiated take at moral questions. Werner is mainly striving for per-

sonal enlightenment, and when he takes society into perspective, it is mostly with the educational ambition of teaching others right from wrong. Looking at their respective wives, it is interesting to see that Renate and Gudrun, who are the eldest women of the cases portrayed here, show a significant shift in their narrative identity: both grant more importance to their professional life and show a personality that appears to be more independent from formalized forms of faith and, in Gudrun's case, from her husband. They both value community and find security in it, be it within the family or within a religious group. Their trajectories can be described as late emancipatory movements. Having arrived at the last chapter of their lives, they both may be aware that they are able to shape the way they will be remembered by their children and grandchildren, even though this generative aspect is not formulated in their interviews. Both of their leitmotifs are versions of "Relying on God," and it seems that they can step out a bit and modestly present their own life achievements with this security.

The cases under study present varieties of narrative identities in their interviews and religious narrative identities, which is a facet that cannot be treated separately in this context. By telling their life stories and by thinking about the interview questions, they create coherence by often linking personal background information to a current situation or to moral standpoints. This linkage may use autobiographical reasoning as a means to convey a picture of themselves, which represents a narrated self that is positioned with regard to the person telling the story from today's perspective. In general, what McAdams (2011) has found in his study could be reproduced here as well: life narratives rose in complexity over time, and the topics the participants dealt with became more varied. As one has seen in Carola's narratives dealing with her experiences during confirmation class, the content may change, but the overall emotional tone and the "message" that was meant to be conveyed remained similar. In other cases, a profound change in both content and emotional valuation could be traced such as Werner's experiences with JW, which, however, is not mirrored in the leitmotif that was identified in his interviews. Accordingly, narrative identity is still subject to dynamics that may happen also in later life while being stable in its core. It could be established that there are some events that are repeated each time which may contribute to the finding by Camia and Habermas (2020) that especially older events were remembered and contribute to the hypothesis that the self-concept and narrative identity is stabilized over time from a different methodological perspective. There are also narratives that draw attention in one interview and are not mentioned again in the next. In some cases, as in Carola's narratives from confirmation class, they are replaced with similar stories serving the same purpose and conveying the same message or intention. Nadine's story of her friend who was in a coma is not taken up again at all in her third interview. It may be that this relationship was very present for her at the time of the second interview but was not important at a later date. Another possibility is that her (unconscious) agenda for the interview was different at time 3. The way autobiographical reasoning is implied in the life stories may hint, as McLean et al. (2020) have suggested, to the extent of how much a narrative is integrated into the overall life story and the reference to one's own biography indicating an awareness of change and development. This may suggest the occasional ability and reflectiveness to also think about low points as integral parts of one's life.

What can be gathered from the analyses shown in the case studies? It has become clear that there are changes that happen in the course of a lifetime whether these changes be subtle or profound. A person that may appear constantly pious, like Renate, may still find a new form of being religious that is less oriented toward the teachings of their church in the last phase of her life. They may find a form of faith that is more personal, and this may lead to a form of tolerance as a consequence, as one has seen in Gudrun. She has developed a stance toward the strange over the years—homosexuality being one example that was shown in the chapter—that is milder and less judgmental. Gudrun would probably not seek the encounter with homosexual people as she prefers to stay within her own, well-known group. Yet, she has come to an understanding that there may be other truths than her own and that she, and her own beliefs, are not threatened by the existence of other forms of religion or other ways of life. It would be too bold to call this *xenosophia*, but this finding shows that tolerance can develop in later life. This constitutes a plausible development to what has been termed “synthetic-conventional heresy” in her first portrayal in the Deconversion study (cf. Streib et al., 2009, pp. 203ff). From another perspective, Carola’s case demonstrates a reduction of tolerance and the appearance of an in-group/out-group thinking and an overall subtle movement downward regarding religious styles. Carola has shown the greatest gap between her narrated/reported self and her narrating self. In the surveys, she appears fairly tolerant and open, and she reports to be an agreeable person who does not hold prejudices against foreigners and who has grown as a person in the face of the adversities she was confronted with in her interviews. However, the analyses in the chapter have shown that she makes use of right-wing populist language and topoi and that she is still struggling with conflicted relationships and disappointments. As a hypothetical thought, how would she react when faced with the results of my analyses? Would she outright reject them, since she does not see herself this way? With the other cases, I am rather confident that they would overall approve of their portrayals, but would they be surprised about developments that I found when looking at their accounts from a longitudinal perspective?

11.5 Recommendations for Future Research and Concluding Remarks

The topic of attachment has come up in several case studies but has not been the focus of my research questions. Attachment has already been shown to be of importance for the development of *xenosophia* (cf. Streib et al., 2018), a secure attachment laying the foundation for “the perception and experience of something strange or alien as something to explore freely, promoting high chances of a productive—*xenosophic*—solution” (p. 15). This can tentatively be detected in the case studies of Renate and Richard and also in Carola’s, which suggests that an attachment style that seems insecure may lead to a fearful and hostile attitude. There might also be some similarity in the attachment to significant others and to God, as has been suggested by Granqvist (2020). Looking into this phenomenon in more depth and by applying a thorough qualitative analysis and considering quantitative data as well, more light may be shed on the question of how both radicalization happens and how development toward a truly tolerant attitude can be achieved. This also points to the desideratum of researching the emergence and

development of wisdom in the longitudinal data. This, too, has been pointed out in some cases but was not investigated thoroughly. However, this would be a meaningful contribution to fully understand the life cycle and might add valuable qualitative analyses to the field of wisdom-related research.

A question that could not satisfyingly be answered is whether results correspond to (reported) gender differences in the way religiosity is accounted for in the interviews, since the results portrayed here showed a picture with many variations. This can be explained with the small sample size and also with the fact that the three men under study display a great variety of religiosity, with Werner being mostly intellectually curious, Richard rather pragmatic while being a firm Protestant, and Jannis focusing on his re-conversion experience and therefore the emotional and experiential dimension of religiosity which is not addressed by the other two. The religious women seem to doubt less, and their searching movements are not as fully elaborated as those of their husbands; yet, they show different facets of religiosity and how this can develop in adulthood.

The women who were chosen for their non-religiosity are difficult to compare since they all chose different pathways. Two case studies in Streib and Hood (2024) focus on trajectories of non-believers (Steppacher et al., 2024; Bullik et al., 2024), the latter comparing Nadine with an atheist from the US part of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga sample with both showing further variations of non-belief and ways of meaning-making and moral considerations that are not tied to any form of organized religion. This conclusion opens a line of research that gains momentum in a world that is more and more secularized. However, it is not advisable to look at the religious and non-religious in completely separated ways as this study has shown, since a comparison between those groups may reveal interesting parallels.

Furthermore, the existing data calls for an implementation of a cross-cultural perspective that was not considered here (but has been addressed in other publications of the Bielefeld/Chattanooga project; see Streib & Hood, 2024; Streib et al., 2021; Streib & Hood, 2016; see also Keller et al., 2018; Bullik et al., 2020), which is worth exploring further since it offers a multitude of options for comparison. It has been stated that the form of redemption stories is especially prevalent in the US-American society (Dunlop et al., 2016; McAdams, 2006) and investigating systematically whether there are cultural differences in this respect seems like a path well worth exploring. This is also true for the different ways of being religious or non-religious that occur in Germany and the USA since previous research has shown meaningful differences already. A research design like the one applied here, especially with the focus on the different data on subjective religiosity as was shown in the case studies, might be helpful in identifying differences on different levels and might help to create a typology of possible religious and non-religious pathways on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Overall, the broad and open approach applied here by combining different methods for answering my research questions has proven fruitful and inspiring. The case studies have shown that there is merit in analyzing personal trajectories in a longitudinal perspective, and I was able to show similarities among the cases without neglecting individual particularities. This could only be achieved with an approach that decidedly put the individual into focus. Having the opportunity to analyze accounts of married couples enabled me to gain insight into what role religion may play in a relationship. I was

able to carve out that living their faith together was constituting for all couples and that they all report praying together (as a couple or with their children) and reading the Bible and/or attending services and other community events together. So, even though there are fundamental differences in the way they approach questions of faith in other parts (as is seen most prominently in the comparison of Gudrun and Werner, of course), the communal aspect and the fact that they share the same faith is of great importance for all three couples that were portrayed here.

Applying a perspective that was inspired by different disciplines, merging linguistic, psychological, and sociological instruments has helped me portray the development of narrative identity and subjective religiosity over a meaningful period of the adult lifespan. I have shown the breadth of the sample by choosing religious as well as non-religious cases and thus portraying a great variety of pathways and meaning-making processes, which is an important finding that might help when looking at perspectives for pastoral care as well as psychotherapy. Those results may serve as a basis for further research that focuses on religious development over the lifespan based on the autobiographical accounts of the people and captured by a research design that takes into account multiple perspectives.

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Appendix: BiNCCS (Bielefeld Narrative and Content Coding Scheme)

Content Code List

Category	Sub-category	Code
BZ: RELATIONSHIPS	Parents/Caregivers	Caring for parents
		Deprivation
		Distancing from parents
		Parents as ideologues
		Parents as victims
		Parents as perpetrators
		Idealizing
		Positive description
		Understanding
		Role models, orientation
	Strangers/Others	Intolerance towards the other
		Stereotypes, prejudice, (positive) racism, exoticism
		Xenophobia
		Xenosophia
	Children	Generativity
		New definition/development of relationship
		Giving meaning
		Support/friendship
		Unfulfilled wish to have a child
		Loss of relationship

BZ: RELATIONSHIPS	Partner	Shared religion/worldview
		Changing relationships
		Wish to have a partner
		Dependency
		Marriage as duty
		Harmonious relationship
		Conflict-ridden relationship
		Loss of relationship
		Opportunity to reflect, widen horizon, mirroring
	Social surroundings	Deprivation/Isolation
		Community as inherent value
		Conflict-ridden relationship
		Opportunity to reflect, widen horizon, mirroring
		Support, consolation, stability
		Role model, ideal
		Shared values as basis (homogeneity)
		Bad influence
		Shared values as basis (homogeneity)
		Bad influence

MORO: MORAL ORIENTATION (taken and adapted from Graham et al., 2011)	Authority/respect
	Authenticity/honesty/integrity
	Fairness/reciprocity
	Fairness/reciprocity_categorical imperative, golden rule
	Fairness/reciprocity_pluralism, debate, freedom of speech
	Fairness/reciprocity_social fairness
	Social criticism
	Harm/care
	Harm/care_engagement for the poor and underprivileged
	Harm/care_Christian charity
	Harm/care_demanding tolerance
	Individualism
	In-group/loyalty
	Purity/sanctity
	Social Criticism
	Priority of religious rules compared to other moral rules
	Feminism/role of women in society
Humanism	
Pluralism, debate, freedom of speech	
Religion as an epistemic problem	

WG: TRAJECTORIES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT	Motifs for faith development	Disaffiliation
		Emotional suffering
		Hope for support and healing, search for meaning
		Individuation
		Intellectual doubt
		Loss of religious experience
		Moral criticism
		Moral criticism_(emotional) manipulation
		Moral criticism_hypocrisy
		Moral criticism_hierarchy, suppression
		Personal enlightenment
		Search for ritual and community
	Trajectories	Accumulative heretic
		Heretical exit
		Integrating exit
		Continuity, deepening
		Oppositional exit
		Privatizing exit
		Religious switching
		Secularizing exit
Spiritual search		

RSW: RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL, WORDLVIEW IDENTITY	Faith experience	Trust (in god)
		Directly experiencing transcendence
		Inner harmony
	Beliefs	All-connectedness
		Belief in Jesus
		Concepts regarding death
		Energies (horizontal transcendence)
		Belief in undefined higher power (vertical transcendence)
		Higher plan, intelligent design
		Scientific reasoning
		Syncretism (vertical/horizontal transcendence)
		Image of god_leading god
		Image of god_judging god
		Image of god_benevolent god
		Image of god_god as father
		Image of god as dictated by church and dogma (vertical transcendence)
		Image of god_being at odds with god
	Image of god_personal relationship	
	Practices of faith	Artifacts and cult objects
		Contacting the transcendence
		Making daily life sacred
		Sacred rituals
		Integrating faith in daily life
	Social embeddedness	Practices of faith as community practices
		Privatized practice of faith
		Religious socialization
		Secularism
DEMO: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS /DESCRIPTIVES	Deconvert	
	Education	
	LGBTIQ*	
	Migration	
	Religious affiliation	
	Single motherhood	
	Teenage pregnancy	
	Reference to psychological disorder/treatment	

SIS: IMAGE OF SELF, IDENTITY, PRESENTATION OF SELF	(Pragmatic) agnostic
	Mindfulness, taking care of oneself
	Autonomy
	Well-read
	Professional life, job
	Caring, altruistic
	Serenity, self-satisfaction
	People person, sociable
	Faithful, devout
	Capable, successful
	Open
	Victim, traumatized
	Posttraumatic growth
	Being shaped by upbringing
	Rebellious, nonconformist
	Know oneself, reflective
	Religiously unmusical
	Search for identity
	Superiority of ones one religious, spiritual ideas
	Dealing with aging and death
	Atheist
	Creative
	Hedonism and indulgence
	Insecurity, fearful
	Humility
Introvert	
Nerd	
Political, socially aware, critical	

Narrative Code List

CAMOCO: CAUSAL-MOTIVATIONAL COHERENCE	Autobiographical Arguments (taken from Habermas and Köber, 2015)	Biographical background
		Development status
		Formative experience
		Generalized insights
		Lessons learned
		Turning points
		Contamination story
	Redemption story	
TYPE OF TEXT		Chronology
		Episodic narrating
		Meta communication
		Narrative
THECO: THEMATIC COHERENCE (taken and adapted from Bluck and Habermas, 2000; Habermas, 2011)		Orientation towards cultural models
		Stability-maintaining self-event connections

