

# Summary

Western secularisation has pushed church and religion to the margins of society and has turned religion for the most part into a private affair. A next step in this development is, according to the author, a doubled secularisation, thereby reducing what is religious into a secular phenomenon. Not just society but man himself and his existence is being secularised. Along goes a demythologisation of the Apollonian man, who considers himself godlike, positioned above everything that is alive. This demythologisation enforces the notion that people are part of the biosphere and that their truth and worldview can be typified as a secular *panta rei*. Having a religious experience people can know themselves united with all that is living and experience an optimal happiness.

These religious experiences however are traditionally linked to religion and make up an important element of it. One of the consequences of the secularisation is that together with the throwing away of the water of church and religion the religious experience is also flushed away. Unjustly, in the author's opinion. The happiest moments in the life of a human being are of a religious nature. The highs and lows in our existence have a religious quality.

The organised religions do not have a monopoly regarding religious experiences. To clarify this stance some contemporary religious experiences are dealt with against the historical background of the western secularisation process. First two mystical experiences are described: one of a Fleming and the other of an American, which can be named as atheistic mysticism. Some features are noted so as to show that these, less pronounced experiences, are to be seen in other contemporary experiences which are characterised as peak experiences or experiences of optimal happiness. A mystical experience in this context is considered an extremely religious experience, in which the same pattern can be found.

Secondly it is investigated how much the features of these experiences coincide with earlier mysticism, handed down to us from within the different religions and belief systems. These mystical experiences are branded as exceptional and transcendent, showing features matching the contemporary experiences as described earlier. Partly on this basis the author arrives at a number of shared characteristics of religious and mystical experiences, in doing so giving them a broader foundation. Among those characteristics are the accompanying feelings of unity and being united, a loss of sense of ego and intense happiness.

Many theologians and philosophers presume that religious experiences form the base of religion. As the religious experiences of Abraham, Moses and the prophets are at the base of the Jewish religion, those of Jesus and Paulus shape the

basis of the Christian religion and those of Mohammed the Islam. The experience of the Buddha led to Buddhism as a consequence. This already implies that such experiences do not necessarily have to be part of a religion, in a way transcend it and can be viewed as separate from religion.

Of importance then is the question of where those experiences come from; how to explain the religious tone of these experiences, as there is a connection between the significance and the explanation of a phenomenon. For this reason also, following developments from within different professional areas there is a search for possible causes and background factors. New insights from neurology and psychology point towards the primacy of emotions and feelings, towards the subordinate role that awareness plays in the functioning of the human organism and the complexity of human experience. This may shed a different light onto a religious experience, different from the traditional explanation of the various belief systems. Developments within the realm of physiology make it clear that every second millions of bits of information are taken in by our senses, while we are only able to handle forty bits per second at most. This means that there is a vast difference between what the senses get in and send through to the brain and what we experience. Put differently, the bandwidth of the linguistic consciousness is much less than the bandwidth of the physiological taking in. This may put question marks on the ways of explanation of religious experiences as done in the past. Linguistic-philosophical connotations also add to the question marks. Language, in Heidegger's phrasing, constitutes 'the house of being'. The question then is raised how much of that being is constituted by this house, how much of experience is made into experience. It shows that without language one cannot speak about experience.

Contemporary insights from different disciplines hand over new hunches as to the origins of the religious sense. They may shed new light on their background and causes. Some of these developments do, according to the author, point towards the religious aspect of the experience as being a certain emotion, able to give access unto a different and deeper consciousness. Interdisciplinary investigation is needed, involving the cooperation of biologists, neurologists, physicists, psychologists and philosophers in order to not only test this hypothesis but also to explain further the backgrounds and implications of the human experience and especially to be able to explain the how and why of the mystical and religious experience.

Next to the plea for more and especially interdisciplinary investigation, somewhat in the style of William James is halted at what religious experiences bring about. From the characteristic features it is shown that these bring forth a certain transcendence. Experiences of unity and being united and of loss of the sense of ego, as well as experiences of bliss where time plays no role can point to a transcending: a transcending of boundaries, with intense possible consequences. As it turns out, a unifying and innovative force emanates from this transcendence.

The author mentions a vitalising transcendence here, delivering a kind of 'knowing' of a different order than cognitive knowledge.

The transcending quality of the religious emotion attempts also to partly explain why many of our ancestors could not find an explanation of the religious sense in 'everyday' reality and pointed at a super or extra-human world. In so doing they were able to find an explanation, verbalising what was too much for them to understand. That gave them a hold. People do clasp onto words and sayings while in fact they are pole-vaulters who should use the word as a pole to reach a certain height. To reach even higher they should let it go and throw that pole away. That is what seems to happen in the religious experience.

The consequences of doubled secularisation implies a complete different perspective for churches and belief-systems, where heaven and hell are totally embedded within this existence. Their rules and regulations however remain for the most part important. The pilgrimage through this existence is not to be found in the holding on to or glorifying of one's own ego. To forget oneself for the sake of others, to know oneself linked to the whole and absorbed in something that is bigger than the cognitive sense of self fit in with the mystical heritage of religion as well as with doubled secularisation. It doesn't then have to do with a clamping onto old or new truths but with a prudent acceptance of the relativity and temporary nature of it and with an intuitive sense of what is real and authentic.

To humanists, agnostics and non-believers this secularisation means more attention to their own emotions and a certain comparison of the rational and cognitive ability, those being not the strongest forces given to us by evolution. From a connection with all that is alive, norms and values can be developed to serve an ethical system different from the present imperialistic and individualistic morality. To be open to deeper layers of consciousness and other forms of knowledge can change the ways of the world. Seen in that way the religious sense is different from what we think.