Mysticism, Spirituality and Rational-choice
A critical analysis of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke

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En kritisk analys av Stark och Finkes teoretiska ramverk

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Contents:

Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke presented in "*Acts of Faith...*" that exposes aspects and implications of the framework which imply that the framework ought to be modified. Amongst them, theoretical limitations that has its basis in an emphasis of the transactional aspect of religion (pertaining to transaction of commodities unavailable by other means). The modification suggested is the inclusion of experiential aspects of religion to the intrinsic ends sought by the rational agent choosing religion. Thus the experiential aspect of religion is not to be regarded as a confidence-increasing variable, rather it is at the very center of many religious traditions. Emphasizing the experiential aspect of religion also raises the problem of why individual religiousness and experiences often transforms into socially organized groups. Both of these issues are analyzed with reference to pentecostalism and its emphasis on personal experiences. The analysis of pentecostalism indicate the importance of the inclusion of intrinsic experiential preferences to the framework of Stark/Finke and the validity of the modifications by fulfilling the evaluative criteria of the paper.

1 Chapter One: Rationality of Religion

In the first chapter a background to the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke will be presented and the relationship of the framework to the paradigm of "irrationalism" will be examined. The foundation of the framework of Stark/Finke (micro-sociology) is presented as well as the macro-sociological model of "religious economy" (with its typology of religious niches). Theoretical difficulties regarding the transactional aspect of religion as the only domain of intrinsically preferred choices are presented and analyzed. Religions lacking a deity capable of transactions (such as an impersonal deity) must be interpreted as irrational or irreligious – in conflict with self-understanding. The evaluative criteria of the paper is presented and the framework of Stark/Finke is evaluated in accordance with the criteria.

1.1. Introduction

Research on the very wide human phenomena of "religion" has been conducted with a wide variety of methods in order to achieve a wide variety of ends. Amongst these ends is the goal of increasing the understanding of human religiousness and reaching an answer to the very puzzling question, "What is religion good for?" or "Why do people choose religion?". These questions have commonly been answered by what Stark/Finke choose to describe as the "irrationalist paradigm".[1] In contrast to other domains of social scientific research, the assumption of agent-rationality (commonly called rational choice-theory) has been left out in the domain of religion, sociologists of religion and psychologists of religion have relied upon irrationalist explanations to explain the phenomena (or phenomenon) of religion. Such explanations vary from theories of depravity (religion is caused by poverty or fear of death), alienation (religion is caused by oppression from the ruling class as a scheme), cognitive malfunction,[2] socialization (religion is caused by upbringing in a particular religious culture rather than critical thinking), narcissistic regression, and so on. Common to all these theories is the notion that, ultimately, religion may have an appearance of rationality but at depth, there is a fundamental irrationality and something "wrong" with the society or individual that is religious.[3]

Explanations within the irrationalist paradigm radically differ from the self-understanding of religious practitioners and entails many fundamental assumptions on the ontological status of religious claims. It can only be said to increase the understanding of religious belief/practice within the context of this given ontology (metaphysical naturalism) and

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[1] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 42.
[2] Or rather, by-product of a cognitive system which is non-intrinsic.
[3] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 44.

therefore have the same theoretical problem as explanations based upon a supra-naturalist ontology.[4] However, it is not a theoretical impossibility to refrain from ontological judgments which necessitates a position on the truth/falsehood of religious claims, it suffices that both the believer and non-believer maintain an agnostic approach to truth claims of non-religious systems of belief and religious systems of belief in the study of religion. This means and implies that theories that are logically inconsistent with an ontology or a metaphysical truth-claim cannot be regarded as agnostic with regards to that specific ontology.

To conclude that theories within the irrationalist paradigm are value-free or neutral due to the exemption of religious explanations is a grave mistake due to the fundamental rejection of self-understanding in reductionist explanations, the scholar "knows" more about the religious practitioner than she does about herself.[5] This undermines the empirical data that is available (beliefs of believers are only available by means of their expression of it) and in sociological models or psychological models often reflect a more basic normative view on how society or the psyche is *ideally* organized or constituted. Within the irrationalist paradigm these ideals rarely has a religious dimension, and as a millenarian hope the secularization thesis promised a bright future devoid of the problems and irrational drives motivating religious belief and behavior.[6]

The problems of the irrationalist paradigm extend beyond mere theoretical limitations that hardly concern the more empirical-minded scientist, consistently the implications and predictions of the paradigm have had problems accommodating to empirical data.[7] As a response to the challenges of irrationalist theories, a new paradigm has developed[8] - a variety of theoretical framework with the rationality axiom in common.[9] Contrasting to the assumption of the irrationality of religion, assuming rationality of religion does not necessitate the same ontological assumptions (a support for supra-naturalist ontologies) in the sense of rationality with regards to the probability or truth of religious claims. Rather it is coherent with a wider approach to understanding human culture and behavior in general, without evaluating the truth-value of cultural belief-systems or norms.

The irrationalist paradigm contains both the assumption that religious belief and behavior is irrational in the philosophical sense of false conclusions reached by a failed use of reason[10] and the economic sense of ultimately contradicting the self-interest of an agent.[11]

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[4] Such as "Person X is religious because deity Y has guided him/her".
[5] Durkheimian views of religion exemplify the case, what you believe about, and your worship to deity X is *actually* a projection of society and a worship of society.
[6] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 29.
[7] See: Stark, Finke (2000) p. 52-53. Stark, Finke (2000) p. 74-77. Spilka [et al] (2003) p. 523.
[8] Or so, the meta-narrative of scientific progress tells us.
[9] See R. Stephen Warners (1997) "Convergence toward the new paradigm" *Rational choice theory and religion: Summary and assessment* for further background to the development of the paradigm and its contributors.
[10] This might take the form of a reinterpretation of religious claims to non-religious claims, such as the

Not all theories within the paradigm necessitate both assumptions, the analysis of Freud on religion has both while the cognitive model of Pascal Boyer has only one (a spirits and gods as a by-product of human cognition). Both assumptions of the irrationalist paradigm can be described as incoherent with the self-understanding of major religious traditions. [12]

It suffices within the rationalist paradigm that the agent is acting and believing in accordance with her self-interest (maximize or satisfy her preferences), the paradigm is therefore compatible with a naturalist and supra-naturalist ontology and allows an agnostic approach with regards to the truth of religious claims. A problem connected to the assumption of rationality is that it may conflate with the common concept of genuine altruism within the anthropology of religious beliefs, therefore having the same problem as the irrationalist paradigm with regards to the value of self-understanding. It is only a problem as long as a very narrow concept of human preferences is used and all preferences that are essentially non-selfish are regarded as a charade of altruism with a pure egoism beneath it. The rationality assumption is not equivalent to the theory of psychological egoism because there is no inconsistency in having altruistic preferences (a wish for the success for the Other for example) that are maximized or satisfied and acting within your self-interest. An analysis based upon the rationality assumption does not necessarily lead to conclusions like; "Although you believe you are unselfish in your charity, *actually* you are satisfying your own needs and therefore act in a selfish manner". Although such a conclusion is not impossible a priori it does not follow deductively from the axiom of rationality that this is the case. The rationality-assumption is also common within religious traditions[13] and could be described as a part of the self-understanding of several religious faiths. This strengthens the paradigm of rational choice further according to the evaluative criteria used within this paper and also enable the use of rational choice analysis within phenomenological studies (it does not only concern quantitative studies of macro-sociology).[14]

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notion that religious believers actually worship society and not a deity, a projection of the ego and not something other than the ego or a projection of a parental figure. The believer maintains her sanity, but simply makes a mistake of categories. It might also take the form of an outright denial of the faculty of reason in the believer, such as the memetic notion of religion as a "virus" infecting the mind of innocent hosts.

[11]As Marx clearly implies in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*; "Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower." http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm

[12] However, not *all* religious traditions contain the assumption of rationality in its philosophical and economic sense. A counter-example against the rationality assumption in religious systems is Martin Luther's statement of contempt against Reason; "But since the devil's bride, Reason, that pretty whore, comes in and thinks she's wise, and what she says, what she thinks, is from the Holy Spirit, who can help us, then? Not judges, not doctors, no king or emperor, because [reason] is the Devil's greatest whore." *Martin Luther's Last Sermon in Wittenberg ... Second Sunday in Epiphany, 17 January 1546. Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* (Weimar: Herman Boehlaus Nachfolger, 1914), Band 51:126, Line 7ff)

[13] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 40.

[14] See Lawrence A. Young (1997) "Phenomenological Images of Religion and Rational Choice Theory" *Rational choice theory and religion: Summary and assessment* .

The concept of "paradigm" and the suggestion that the sociology of religion and psychology of religion has both been influenced by and a part of a collective approach of studying religious belief and behavior raises the philosophical question whether the irrationalist paradigm and rationalist paradigm are commensurable. In other words, is it possible to evaluate which of the paradigms is more *true* in any sense or are both paradigms so different that they can only be evaluated within each given perspective and the replacement of one paradigm of another is only a matter of generational shifts (or any other "non-scientific" reason). My opinion (similar to Kuhn) is that the fundamental assumptions of the paradigms are so different that they cannot be compared and evaluated based upon any universal criteria, it is a question of whether one prefers to evaluate religion as any other human affair or make an exemption (therefore I will not attempt to evaluate the different paradigms). Any change in preference might be explained in a number of ways, it is possible that the attitudes of scholars toward religion have changed (which is possible to investigate empirically) or simply that the scholars studying religion have been replaced. As the adage says, Science progresses one funeral at a time. The question whether universal criteria that reach beyond the limitations of paradigms can be formulated might therefore be similar to asking whether universal criteria can be formed for evaluation of two mutually independent languages (in terms of the validity of the languages). For this reason this paper does not have the philosophical question of which paradigm is superior to the other within it's scope, but the usefulness of the rationality paradigm is assumed.

This paper is an analysis of the theoretical framework of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke as it is presented in their book, "*Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*". The paper primarily is an analysis of the micro-sociological foundations of the framework and the implications of the micro-sociological foundation in both the micro-sociology of preferences (mystical experience) and the macro-sociology of religious participation (liberal and ultra-liberal congregations). It is analyzed with the assumption that a new paradigm must *further the understanding of the religious behavior and belief* and not repeat the mistakes of the old paradigm of irrationalism. If the framework is successful depends upon whether it escapes the fundamental assumptions of the irrationalist paradigm stated earlier. In order to achieve a greater clarity with regards to the quality of different theoretical framework it is necessary to determine the battle on a common ground. As such it is clear that universal evaluative criteria need to be formulated and used in order to reach a conclusion whether a certain theoretical framework is successful or not.

1.2. Stark and Finke's theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of Stark/Finke is summarized in "*Acts of Faith...*" by a list of propositions and definitions.[15] As the theory is related to the economic view of human agenthood, it is not surprising that the theory emphazises the role of transaction in religion. The micro-foundation of religion of Stark/Finke can be summarized as; Humans formulate explanations and want rewards, some rewards are impossible to achieve by any natural means and humans therefore formulate explanations concerning the achievement of these rewards. These explanations are non-empirical and entail supernatural entities/forces, which are potential exchange-partners. In order to achieve rewards that cannot be achieved by natural means, humans attempt to manipulate or exchange with these entities/forces. *Homo religiosus* is thus regarded as a sub-category of *Homo economicus*.

Religion is defined as a wide category of explanations of existence and contains the terms of exchange with these entities/forces.[16] Stark/Finke clarify their definition of religion with reference to the definition of Tylor[17] and state unambiguously; "Religion is concerned with the supernatural; everything else is secondary".[18] A compelling interpretation of this statement would be that essence of religion is the supernatural (belief and behavior directed towards it), and anything that is not supernatural in religion is religious due to its connection to the supernatural). "Supernatural" has different ontological, epistemological and phenomenological meanings (such as a very wide definition of transcendence to classical-theistic notions of meta-linguistic or meta-logical transcendence in a deity) and it is not clear what kind of "supernatural" that is intended. However, a phenomenal quality of transcendence does not seem to be intended, due to the emphasis on actual transactions with religious commodities (not available by other means) in the framework of Stark/Finke. Such transactions are commonly believed to take place in interaction with personal entities or forces that transcend human limitations in bringing about wanted goods (gods, spirits), however, for the Tibetan Buddhist, ghosts and demigods are as natural as the sky or the sun. Stark and Finke neither convey a definition of the realm on the other side of the dichotomy (what is nature?). A Japanese Shinto-practitioner may very well regard her Waterfall-kami as a part of the natural world while a Western secularized scholar of religion may regard it as a supernatural entity, there is neither a clarification of the notion – supernatural with respect to *whom*?

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[15] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 277.
[16] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 278.
[17] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 89.
[18] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 89.

This is the fundamental basis of the micro-foundation provided by Stark/Finke, other dimensions of religion such as rituals, religious experience, mystical experience[19] and prayer increase confidence in religious behavior and beliefs rather than providing the basis for religion.[20] Based upon the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke, the claim that people choose religion because of experiences provided by/facilitated by religious communities is incorrect. Rather people choose religion because of promised rewards, and any experiences that follows increases confidence in the delivery of the promised rewards. This may seem rather irrelevant, but it has important implications in the analysis of religious communities that do not have any promised rewards or the importance of rewards is denied/ muted. The "good" available in religion is restricted to the interaction with divine agents as a compensator for goods not available by any natural means.

The macro-sociological foundation contains the notion of a "religious economy" with categories of economy applied to religious phenomena such as, capital, firms, monopolies, supply/demand and market niches.[21] Religious groups, or firms, are analyzed based upon a typology of tension or antagonism in relation to the outsiders of the group (which could be society in broad terms).[22] Different firms belong to niches of a varied tension with society, from ultra-liberal with a very low degree of tension with society to ultra-strict with very high tension. Stark/Finke also grades the level of commitment in relation to the tension-typology, ultra-liberals are more irreligious than conservatives, with increasing strictness the more "religion" you get.[23] This entails that liberal congregations are "less" religious than conservative congregations[24].

1.3. Evaluative criteria of the analysis

In order to conclude the validity of the framework of Stark/Finke it is necessary to formulate/use explicit evaluative criteria. These evaluative criteria are based upon the evaluative criteria of Kimmel that have a phenomenological foundation, but are equally valid to a sociological deductive theory and perhapse even more suitable than other foundations due to the inherent subjectivity of data available to the researcher belonging to the rational-choice tradition.

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[19] Stark/Finke mix religious experience and mystical experience within the framework and make no clear distinction between them. Stark, Finke (2000) p. 110.
[20] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 106.
[21] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 280-286.
[22] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 143
[23] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 209-213.
[24] Or as it is formulated in the description of the conservative niche; "Here are people who take their religion *quite seriously* and are willing to endure some degree to sacrifice and stigma on its behalf..." [My bold] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 211.

The four evaluative criteria[25] used within this analysis are as follows:

1. A theory that purports to explain religious behavior and beliefs must be capable of precisely identifying and demarcating the phenomena it aims to explain. There must be precise demarcation standards in order to achieve a clarity sufficient for a successful theory.
2. A theory of religious behavior and belief needs to rest upon a coherent theoretical foundation and result in coherent explanations, achieving what the theory purports to achieve.
3. Any theory that is dependent upon subjective experience and interpretation in its foundation or implications, need to show regard for the validity of self-understanding.
4. Any theory that purports to be a theory of religious behavior and beliefs must be capable of advancing and extending the understanding of the field.

Comment on criteria 1: The criteria also implies that it is insufficient to restrict and and demarcate a phenomenon based upon *aspects relevant to one's analysis* rather than covering the entire phenomena. If that is the case one ought to be implicit in one's use of stipulative definitions and demarcations rather than attempting an essentialist approach. If the phenomena is impossible to clearly define with an essentialist approach it is not suitable to eliminate aspects that cannot be covered with an essentialist definition. It therefore suffices that the demarcation is clear with regards to what hypothesis are formulated and the validity of the hypothesis is restricted to the stipulated field of research.

Comment on criteria 2: The need for coherent explanations is manifest due to the problem of inconsistent analysis of specified and restricted contexts in which the theory is tested. The coherence of explanations is an addition to Dr. Kimmel's evaluative criteria necessary for the purposes of this paper. It is only by the implications of the theoretical framework the validity of the theory is known due to the absence of epistemological and metaphysical consequences of the theory (a strict agnosticism is used with regards to the validity of religious claims).

Comment on criteria 3: This is also the case in a rational choice analysis in which *motives and preferences* are assumed. Due to their subjective nature it is not sufficient to conclude that the subject is an idealized H*omo economicus* and thereby escape the problem of self-understanding, rather, when research is performed, it always entails a particular context or agent.[26] It is also necessary that the validity of self-understanding is consequent and consistent, regardless of the particular beliefs or behavior the subject of

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[25] Kimmel (2008) p. 25.
[26] See; Neitz, Mueser "Economic man and the sociology of religion: A Critique of the Rational Choice Approach" *Rational choice theory and religion: Summary and assessment* (1997).

the study has. An ultra-liberal Goddess-worshipper's self-understanding is as important and informative as the self-understanding of a conservative Christian. Respecting the self-understanding of a particular "brand" of religion while disrespecting another amounts to apologetics and stated bluntly, bad science. Invalidating and ignoring the self-understanding of religious practitioners hardly makes understanding what "religion is good for" easier – as the failures of the irrationalist paradigm might teach us. This is because self-understanding effects the conceptualization of subjective explanations – which is an important source of information for the scholar. Rejection of subjective explanations and self-understanding in any social-scientific field has behaviorism as its end-point consequence and is subject to the limitations of the behavioristic paradigm.

Comment on criteria 4: It is a plausible demand that any theory within a new paradigm succeeds where the old paradigm failed. Otherwise the risk is significant that mistakes will be repeated and the change of descriptions and conclusions remain a mere transformation rather than progress. "Success" or "progress" is here defined as accomplishing, fulfilling and complying with evaluative criteria 1-3.

These four criteria provide the basis for evaluating the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke and also provide solid goals for any modification suggested to the framework. Any modification suggested in the paper will be evaluated based upon these criteria. From these criteria it can be deduced that they are influenced by a phenomenological approach to science, this is no problem with regards to the analysis since there is no necessary contradiction between rational-choice theory and the phenomenological approach to the study of religion. Phenomenology has never been a part of the irrationalist paradigm/tradition and can never be a part of it as long as it is phenomenology.[27] A demonstration of the incompatibility between the evaluative criteria and the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke will follow, showing that the theory needs a modification in order to acclaim validity.

1.3.1. Establishing Precise Demarcation Standards

The theoretical framework of Stark/Finke contains a demarcation between religion and non-religion – a concern with and belief in the supernatural.[28] The problem is that a lot of what we call "religion" or is self-described by the practitioners as religion do not emphasize the supernatural. The anomaly does not disappear because the phenomena is excluded from one's analysis, it is merely hidden in the shadow of faulty reasoning. This does not mean that religion cannot be defined as a concern for the supernatural, it only means that the supernatural is not the essence of all things usually called religion. There is a fundamental difference between essentialist definitions and stipulative definitions and

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[27] Due to the contradiction between religious claims and social-scientific/psychological theories in the irrationalist paradigm. The irrationalist paradigm entails an abandonment of epoché in order to reduce religion to what is "Real" – according to the paradigm.

[28] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 89.

in formulating definitions it ought to be clear what one wants to achieve. Because Stark/Finke do not provide any basis for interpreting their statement as a mere stipulative tool in order to understand certain aspects of religion, one must assume that it is the essentialist approach that is used.[29]

If Stark/Finke have an essentialist understanding of religion, it can be said that they have not achieved precise demarcation standards. This is due to the fact that any anomaly has been eliminated a priori due to the definition and there is no scope within the theory to claim that non-believers in the supernatural could be described as religious. Groups such as "World Pantheist Movement" can not be analyzed within the model of Stark/Finke despite their official credo,[30] ethical commands[31] and what could be described as a lithurgical calendar.[32] The existence of such groups is utterly inexplicable within the model of Stark/Finke and must be delegated to the realm of the profane and analyzed on different terms than any other religious group, even though they differ from non-religious or anti-religious groups in their belief that Nature is God. It might be the case that Stark/Finke are willing to bite the bullet, but the question is whether scholars of religion are willing to limit their field of study to groups that maintain supernatural beliefs and "correct" the understanding of these religious practitioners. Even though Stark/Finke provide us with a basis for accepting the importance of deities within a religion that commonly is viewed as "naturalist"; Buddhism[33], it is dubious that the belief in supernatural entities is the essence of any religion except a deist, liberal, 1900-century Protestant Christianity. At least, it is not the deities of folk-Buddhism that constitutes the very essence of Buddhism without which it would not be Buddhism. This this does not mean that "Buddhism" as a scholarly concept has a genuine essence that Stark/Finke have missed by their definition, indeed "Buddhism" could be as much a scholarly construction as "Hinduism".

There is no clear definition of the opposite of the "supernatural", and one must ask what the supernatural is super to? The clarity of the concept "nature" is by itself dubious due to the historical roots of the separation between nature and its superior. Any animistic system of belief has no distinction whatsoever between what is natural and supernatural and a panentheistic belief system neither has such a distinction. In order to accept such a limit one must be affected by a theistic tradition that clearly separates the Creator from the created and have a certain perspective on the world common to modernized and secularized contexts (such as science). In the same manner Durkheim defined religion by the "sacred" and offered no definition of the "profane", Stark/Finke define religion by the "supernatural" and offer no definition of "nature". Just like Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard

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[29] This is especially clear in their typology of religious niches mentioned in page 8 of this paper. The more supranaturalist you get, the more religious you get – in accordance with the framework of Stark/Finke.
[30] http://www.pantheism.net/manifest.htm
[31] http://www.pantheism.net/practice.htm
[32] http://www.pantheism.net/calendar.htm
[33] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 89.

described the Durkhemian definition of the "sacred" one might describe the Starkian/Finkian definition; "vague and ill-defined".[34] This indicates that the framework of Stark/Finke does not contain precise demarcation standards and therefore fail in fulfilling the evaluative criteria of this paper.

1.3.2. Theoretical Consistency

Within the scope of transactional aspects of religion, there is no doubt that Stark/Finke have a remarkable consistency and clarity. The appendix of propositions and definitions contains a consistent economic interpretation of religious behavior. However, in the analysis of religions with a lack of any clear transactional aspect the framework becomes self-destructive. In order to explain the existence of liberal or ultra-liberal congregations Stark/Finke refer to preferences, the practitioners simply want "less" religion than others.[35] It is not clarified why they want religion at all, rather than abandoning belief all together.

My suggestion is that it is not clarified due to the incompatibility between the existence of such congregations and the model of Stark/Finke. In order to consistently explain their behavior and beliefs one must resort to the tradition of irrationalism, that is, if the framework of Stark/Finke is all there is to rational-choice theory. Since the religion of a ultra-liberal does not promise her any clear other-worldly rewards and there is no being within the system of beliefs that can bring about such rewards – the ultra-liberal is ultimately irrational in attempting any religious exchange. With a different taxonomy, such as psychological models of religious orientation, it is also dubious that the framework of Stark/Finke does not result in the evaluation of a certain religious orientation is more "religious" than other forms (which is a normative, rather than descriptive description). If the ultra-liberal is rational, it is due to preferences that are non-religious (similar to the description of the irrationalist paradigm).

The question is whether such a conclusion entails an inconsistency within the theoretical framework or it is a conclusion at conflict with the original goal of the framework. Since the theory is a proposed rational-choice model for religion one might say that it is inconsistent since it does not accept the wide variety of religions as religion. The claim that ultra-liberal and liberal practitioners have a weaker preference for religion, but are nevertheless rationally religious, begs the question why they want religion at all. The micro-foundation provided by Stark/Finke does not give us a clue, since any preference for other-worldly rewards would lead to the choice of a religion that promises such rewards. Worldly rewards can neither, since the belief in divine intervention in the world (such as miracles) is even more remote than other-worldly rewards in the belief-

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[34] Evans-Pritchard, E.E (1960) p. 12.
[35] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 209.

systems.[36] Thus it seems that either ultra-liberals/liberals are religious without any rational religious preference, but that they either are irrational or have preferences that are "non-religious" in religious actions (as if other forms of religion lacked this).

The case is the same for any believer in universalist[37] doctrines that are common in liberal and ultra-liberal contexts, since the believer already accepts her unconditional salvation there is no reason for the person to act in any way commended by the tradition. In fact there is no reason – in the scope of the framework of Stark/Finke – for such a person to be religious at all – but we still observe people gathering and engaging in worship despite such beliefs.[38] Indeed it is possible to get the services provided by universalists in other social firms such as the Seclar Humanists. If the framework of Stark/Finke mainly explain conservative and ultra-strict religion the width of the model is severely diminished and it is misleading to the describe it as a rational-choice model of *religious* behavior and belief in general. Hence it can be said that the theory does not fulfill the evaluative criteria of theoretical consistency.

1.3.3. Showing regard for the Validity of Self-understanding

Although Stark/Finke show far greater regard for the self-understanding of religious practitioners than what has commonly been the case in the irrationalist paradigm, the regard shown is rather inconsistent. It is dubious that any ultra-liberal believer would accept the notion that she "barely want religion at all"[39] and the liberal believer "want real religion, but they want it to be very permissive in terms of sacrifice".[40] Neither would a moderate believer accept the notion that she does not want an "especially strict faith – one that involves many duties and prohibitions", such a description is typical for a complete outsider that evaluates faiths irregardless of self-understanding. This changes however in the description of conservative, strict and ultra-strict religions which Stark/Finke seem to have a preference for; "Here are people who take their religion quite seriously and are willing to endure some degree to sacrifice and stigma on its behalf",[41] and "there is no lack of intelligence and sophistication in this niche",[42] and "Here are people for whom this world is of limited interest, who attempt to focus on the supernatural to the fullest extent possible, and who find frequent means to demonstrate their devotion, often by rejecting worldly joys and pleasures.".[43]

One might ask whether the praise of more strict religions has its basis in the scholarly

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[36] See Gary J. Dorrien (ed) (2001) *"The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900".* Westminister John Knox Press.
[37] Belief in actual universal salvation, however one defines salvation.
[38] For example, the Unitarian Universalist Association. http://www.uua.org/
[39] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 209.
[40] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 211. The comment implies that ultra-liberals do not want "real" religion. Is it within the realm of scientific scholarship to determine what "real" religion is?
[41] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 211.
[42] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 212.
[43] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 212

criticism of strict religions and praise of liberal beliefs mentioned in the book.[44] Despite the possible validity of their claims, it does not justify disregarding the self-understanding of believers from traditions that have been historically praised in scholarship. It reflects a mere shift of extreme and normative positions rather than the attempted neutrality. Stark/Finke do seem to care about the self-understanding of believers that are understandable within their theoretical framework and be rather dismissive towards believers that do not fit within their theoretical framework. Stark/Finke do not show regard for the validity of self-understanding consistently and therefore fail in fulfilling this evaluative criteria.

1.3.4. Extending the Understanding of the Field of Study

Stark/Finke have highlighted many important aspects of religion previously neglected and many of the problems with previous psychological and sociological research on religion (including the concept of a paradigm of irrationalism). They have provided a new perspective for analyzing and interpreting religious belief and behavior with concepts and categories from a field not typically associated with religion and have thus contributed to the possibility of inter-disciplinary studies of the subject stretching beyond anthropology or cultural studies. They have also enlightened several serious biases and motives of traditional social-scientific research on religion and therefore contribute to a more reflexive approach toward religion. However the framework of Stark/Finke does not entirely remove many of the old problems and is still liable to result in irrationalist explanations of religious belief and behavior. Such tendencies does not mean that one ought to throw out the baby with the bathwater and return to pure irrationalist explanations of religion. Rather it can be said that Stark/Finke have extended the understanding of the field of study, but not as much as the understanding of the field of study could be extended. It does not suffice that old biases are replaced with new ones, rather, to extend understanding any biases need to diminish by means of respect for self-understanding (and by means of epoché regarding the truth-value of the faiths in the process).

Because the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke fail to accomplish evaluative criteria 1-3, the last evaluative criteria has neither been fulfilled. Although in relation to theories of the irrationalist paradigm the framework may have been a significant breakthrough, there is no doubt that in order to fulfill the 4 evaluative criteria mentioned the framework needs a significant modification.

2 Chapter Two: Spirituality, Mysticism and Rational-choice

In the following chapter Mysticism will be analyzed in relation to rational-choice theory

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[44] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 19.

and the importance of mystical and religious experiences for any study or analysis founded in the tradition of rational-choice. Furthermore the relationship between spirituality and religion will be analyzed as it is connected to a preference for alternative states of consciousness and how socio-religious systems incorporate and control such preferences. The need for a modification of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke will be clear since it contains an invalid simplification of much more complex relations. Modifications will be formulated and evaluated based upon the evaluative criteria mentioned in chapter 1.

2.1 Definition and distinction between a Mystical and Religious experience

Stark/Finke define mystical experience as, *"some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a god or gods".*[45] No distinction is made between religious experience and mystical experience, even though they are commonly defined in different ways and are not synonymous in this sense.[46] A mystical experience may be religious or not and a religious experience may be mystical or not.[47] The definition of Stark/Finke may cover experiences of both religious and mystical nature, but not all religious or mystical experiences involve some sense of contact with any specific deity or deities. Spiritualistic meetings where famous artists like Elvis Presley or 2Pac are invited and practitioners experience their presence hardly counts as "contact with a god or gods" but within the context of spiritualism (as a religion) it might be considered a religious experience. Neither would a Thoureauian mystical experience of unity in Nature be a "mystical experience" according to Stark/Finke, despite any profound implications it might have – even religious (by leading to devotion in a pantheistic or panentheistic community).

Religious experience may be defined as experiences identified as religious by communities[48] commonly called - by themselves our by outsiders – religious. The tautology of the definition does not imply that it is invalid since it is a purely stipulative definition aimed towards making the phenomena of study distinguishable from other phenomena not intended in the study. Rather than asking, "what *is* a religious experience?" one might ask "for the purposes of my study, how may I make use of the concept religion?". This raises the question whether the stipulative approach or essentialist is more valid in the study of religion. A deeper analysis of this question is not within the scope of this paper but it is commendable for the author to make the assumptions of the paper explicit. The problem with the essentialist approach towards the

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[45] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 110.
[46] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 247, p. 299.
[47] Kimmel (2008) p. 99. Even though Stark/Finke operate within the sociology of religion there is a need for a solid foundation of psychology within a rational-choice theoretical framework. Without a solid empirical foundation any discussion regarding preferences in agents will remain speculative and conjecture-based. Therefore it is important also for the sociologist to make distinctions between different mental states rather than highlighting any given type of experience in a rather unspecified manner, foreign to the field it concerns (psychology).
[48] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 247.

study of religion is that an essentialist definition of religion often results in either making the concept "religion" so narrow that it excludes many phenomena commonly referred to as "religion"[49] or so wide as to cover phenomena not commonly referred to as "religion"[50]. The use of essentialist definitions can have a profound implications in the study of phenomena since it changes the position of the scholar studying the phenomena, rather than evaluating with an awareness of one's actively constructed concepts one might have a natural attitude towards the concepts as being "out there".

Rather than claiming that a mystical experience of unity with nature is a non-mystical and non-religious experience (regardless of the self-understanding of the experiencer) the scholar using stipulative definitions is aware that such categories are her constructs and that such experiences are only non-mystical and non-religious within her contextual restraints. Within the realm of stipulative definitions the scholar might also take care that any definition or category used is corresponded by an acceptance by the religious self-understanding. However if it remains an impossibility due to the nature of the study, the use of stipulative definitions and categories does not necessarily violate the self-understanding of the religious practitioner as long as it is clarified that any definition/category used is valid only within the framework and scope of the study (rather than saying anything at all about their conception of it within their naïve realist perspective). This is a significant difference between the essentialist and the stipulative approach, the essentialist must "find" an essence either in the experience of a number of phenomena or in the "world" while the stipulative approach entails a mere constructivism valid only by pragmatic standards.

Mystical experience, however, often is defined in an essentialist manner since many scholars on mysticism affirm the existence of a common-core in all mystical experiences. This is believed and done without eliminating the non-mystical religious experiences from the psychology of religion since it is placed in the category of "religious experience". Thus an essentialist definition of mysticism does not result in an increased limitation to the field of psychology of religion and neither does it violate the self-understanding of the experiencer (one does not delegate her to the realm of the "profane" as is the case with Stark/Finke). Mystical experience has been defined and categorized in a number of ways, among them is the categorization of the influential philosopher Walter Terence Stace;

> The most important, the central characteristic in which all fully developed mystical experiences agree, and which in the last analysis is definitive of them and serves to mark them off from other kinds of experiences, is that they involve the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness. It

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[49] Which the definition of Stark/Finke is a good example of.
[50] So that it covers human cultural life in general or domains of culture which are differentiated from religion in Western culture such as sports, music or sexuality.

should be carefully noted that only fully developed mystical experiences are necessarily apprehensive of the One. Many experiences have been recorded which lack this central feature but yet possess other mystical characteristics. These are borderline cases, which may be said to shade off from the central core of cases. They have to the central core the relation which some philosophers like to call "family resemblance.[51]

An experience of complete unity (devoid of diversity) or of unity in diversity is not equivalent to some sense of contact with a deity. Neither is the "feeling of presence" commonly described as mystical equivalent to some sense of contact with a deity. In fact the very notion of a mystical complete unity is incoherent with the definition of Stark/Finke. For the introvertive Mystic, there is no given deity to transact with, no division and no distinction between one object and another. In fact there are no experiential content within the experience but a pure consciousness event. For the extrovertive Mystic there may be both God and Man in the experience but a fundamental unity of the two is experienced, a unity in contradiction to many religious systems that emphasize the difference between a Creator and it's Creation[52] or a Supreme Divine Personality and it's lesser servant.[53]

Religions that do not have any theoretical framework for explaining such a mystical unity or that are dominated by individuals denying the validity of such mystical experiences, the experiencer might be a challenge and considered a threat against the religion/dominating individuals. An individual Mystic like Mansur Al-Hallaj[54] is far from the "confidence" increasing mechanism of mystical experience described by Stark/Finke. This entails that instead of determining the role of mystical experience in "religion" (in general) one needs a specification. We need to ask what kind of religion and what kind of mystical experience is intended when describing mystical experience as confidence-increasing. For the believer in Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta system, there is no doubt that an introvertive mystical experience would increase her confidence in the theology of Adi Shankara since the unity of Atman (the transcendental Self) with Brahman (and the illusory nature of the material and psychic world) is the foundation of the system. However a Western female experiencing this unity would probably doubt the notion of Adi Shankara, that only Brahmin males may attain the knowledge of Brahman.[55] Although there is a charm in simple ideal-type theories of religion that do not bother to concern themselves with the vast complexity of mankind's religious systems, the falsification of such theories is within the reach of a simple undergraduate student such as myself. Even sociological theories that have a deductive appearance must stand in

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[51] Stace (1960) p. 14-16
[52] This is a common case in many versions of the Abrahamic faiths where the fundamental difference between JHWH/God/Allah and his Creation is emphasized.
[53] This is the case in the theology of ISCKON and the Gaudiya Vaishnavism it is a part of. Inspired by Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vedanta system emphasizing plurality and difference rather than unity and Oneness (monism). See Ferdinando Sardella (2010) *Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati: The Context and Significance of a Modern Hindu Personalist.* Reprocentralen, Faculty of Arts, University of Gothenburg.
[54] Massignon (1983) p. 73-97.
[55] http://www.reflectionsindia.org/article.php?nav=16

relation to the plurality and complexity of the history of religions, especially if the aim of the theory is to understand "religion".

Mystical experience is placed among phenomena increasing confidence in other-worldly rewards,[56] but because of the mix between mystical and religious experience in the framework a clarification is needed to evaluate this claim. There is no doubt that for a Catholic, a *religious* visionary experience[57] of Mary increases the reliability of Catholicism.[58] But for a Vaishnavite a mystical experience of complete unity with all there is may decrease the confidence in Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vedanta system. In the unlikely scenario of an evangelical Christian experiencing a vision of Shiva together with Parvati it is questionable if that experience could be described as increasing confidence in the truthfulness of Christianity and its promised rewards in the afterlife. It might be argued that it is implausible for the Christian to experience such a vision due to the lack of facilitation by means of learning and emulation of roles (according to Hjalmar Sundéns role-theory)[59] but even a remote possibility of decreased confidence due to religious experience must be covered by a theoretical framework with high aims.[60] The position of Stark/Finke regarding the function of mystical experience resembles the position of Steven T. Katz, in that mystical experience is viewed as – generally - conservative.[61] The historical fact that many mystics have had a turbulent relation with religious institutions because of their "heretical" views is a clear challenge to the notions of both Stark/Finke and Steven T. Katz. [62]

Neither does the framework of Stark/Finke explain solitary religious devotion devoid of clear congregations, commonly referred to as "spirituality" or "independent" mystics[63]. For these practitioners mystical experience seems to have an inherent and intrinsic value regardless of any other-worldly rewards that might be obtained by their practice.[64] It seems that for some, religion can not be about achieving goals and obtaining rewards impossible by any natural means, since such an aim with religion would imply the irrationality of the practitioners (they do not believe in anything that could bring about

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[56] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 106

[57] The very fact that Stark/Finke choose to emphazise visions in their description of mystical experience indicate the Americentrism of their book. The importance of *visionary* experience in contrast to other sensesory experiences has been established as a characteristic of American culture in folkloristics by Alan Dundes, See Alan Dundes (1980) "Seeing is Believing". *Interpreting Folklore.* Indiana University Press p. 86.

[58] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 111.

[59] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 255.

[60] Exceptions as well as the "norm" matter in developing theories with strong validity.

[61] Kimmel (2008) p. 96.

[62] Kimmel (2008) p. 100-103.

[63] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 339.

[64] A good example of this kind of faith is that of Aldous Huxley. Even though Huxley participated in the Vedanta tradition through Swami Prabhavananda it seems that mystic states of awareness was an intrinsic goal for him. This is indicated by his fervent support for the use of drugs despite the criticism he faced by traditionalists and the very fact he died in a mystical state induced by LSD, rather than chanting "Aum" or any other traditional expression of Hinduism. See Huxley, Horowitz (ed.), Palmer (ed). (1999) *Moksha:*

such rewards). This calls for a modification of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke in order for different preferences to be accommodated and a further analysis of why and how mystical and religious experience might have preferences on their own terms rather than serving the purpose of increasing confidence in religious systems.

2.2 Mystical experience and preferences

Have you ever felt the urge or need to be a part of something greater than yourself? To unite with the environment around you – social or natural? Any such preference might result in joining a political party, a Chess-club, a rock-n-roll band, a religion or any number of social groups. The experience of unity in any such social formation has restrictions due to the very *social* nature of any such social formation, the unity – even within the walls of a monastery – is a limited unity. If you were to find out that there is an experience of unity and transcendence devoid of any such limits by either experiencing it yourself or finding out about it by second-hand reports, would you attempt to repeat that experience or experience it for the first time? Although an empirical quantitative investigation of the question would be interesting, it is difficult to doubt that such an experience is wanted and desired by most members of our species since considerable effort is taken by so many to reach such experiences.[65] Given that there is a preference for mystical experience, what implications does it have for a rational-choice theory of religion? Or given that there is a preference for alternative states of consciousness in general, what implications does it have?

Emphasizing the preference for mystical experience may result in reductionistic interpretations of religion[66] and invalidate the self-understanding of religious practitioners, but with due caution and respect for the religious language it is not necessary. Indeed, any joyful experiences of unity with any given deity might be interpreted within traditions in different ways not in conflict with orthodoxy.[67] In the conclusive cases of Mystic-against-Religion the self-understanding of the mystic is the only relevant self-understanding, since the mystic is deemed as an outsider to the faith.

A preference for mystical experience means that agents will attempt to satisfy or maximize (depending on what criteria of rationality is used) that preference by rational means (by use of their intelligence and information available) and avoid as many costs as is possible while satisfying or maximizing the preference. This means that for some, the easiest way to satisfy the preference is chosen while for others – with a stronger preference or other preferences in conflict with the preference – another path of action is taken. Different facilitators are evaluated in different ways in different societies, while

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Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience. Park Street Press. p. 257.
[65] From Western psychadelic-users, Indian *yogis*, mountainclimbers to intense Pentecostalists.
[66] Such as, "Religion is a facilitator of alternative states of consciousness – no more, no less".
[67] Often the condemnation of a mystic within religious traditions has different aspects than the experience-versus-dogma. In the example of al-Hallaj or Meister Eckehart, politics and power-interest is also relevant.

use of psilocybin has significant risks and costs - in most Western countries the use of repetitive Mantras or meditation does not have the same risks and costs. Given that all human agents have a preference for mystical experience, this does not mean that it would have the same end-result in different environments and contexts. In a society where mystical experience is pathologized and sanctions against mystics is used, the costs and risk of the mystical endeavor are large and one might expect that the agents attempting to maximize their preference have a strong preference, that is stronger than any preference for safety or acceptance.

For the analysis of religious "firms", the aspect of religion as a facilitator of alternative states of consciousness (such as mystical experience) is neglected in the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke. Assuming that there is such an aspect to religions, what implications does such an assumption have? First and foremost, that religions will not be neutral in respect to other facilitators of alternative states of consciousness. Either they will contain restrictions upon other facilitators or incorporate them within their systems in order to avoid competition. The fact that religions from all over the world contain either restrictions or incorporation of other facilitators[68] is a compelling support for the notion of religion-as-facilitator. This does not mean that the religious practitioner might as well choose listening to music instead of religious services, but the very fact that religious services often contain music or liturgical singing suggests that restrictions might not always serve religious institutions as much as incorporation serves religious institutions.

Indeed the position of religion-as-facilitator might be strengthened by incorporating as many facilitators as possible – because it leads to the impression that it is religion that is the most successful facilitator and maybe, the only true facilitator. The notion that religion is one facilitator among many does not mean that it is reduced to a facilitator just like music and dance are not reducible to one another or reducible to a trigger – indeed music and dance are so much more. To interplay between facilitator might also contribute to strengthening the effect of the facilitators, a claim which is empirically testable.[69] The often tense relationship between sexuality and religion might also be explained by such approach, rather than by the traditional functionalist analysis of behavioral norms in religions.[70]

Other alternative states of consciousness such as religious ecstasy or out-of-body experiences are important for rational-choice for the same reason that mystical experience is important. As long as there is a preference for the mental state rational agents will try to satisfy or maximize the preference in one way or another. If for some reason, anybody chooses religion due to such a preference, a limitation as strong as the one suggested by

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[68] Such as, sexuality, architecture, music, dance, drugs, fasting, sleep-deprivation and stress.

[69] By investigation of questions such as; Does "profane" music effect the listener as much as religious-orientated music?

[70] The ecstacy and joy provided by sexual intercourse might compete with the ecstacy and joy provided by religion and thereby diminish the interest in religion of the promiscuous. Some religious systems incorporate sexuality outside any legitimized context like marriage and thereby avoid any such competition.

Stark/Finke means that these agents must be interpreted in a way conflicting with the empirical basis. If a believer firmly states that she is involved in religion in order to experience an intimate relation with a deity, the believer does not really want other-worldly rewards unavailable by secular means (such as a place in Heaven) – at least if one has the slightest respect for the believers self-understanding. This does not mean that one must explain where that preference originated from and ultimately reduce it to a transactional relationship. Indeed, any such attempt begs the question where the preference for transactions came from.

The theoretical framework of Stark/Finke may be modified by merely recognizing that religion is many things rather than one thing, and has many substantial features and functions. Religion is a multi-dimensional and multi-functional phenomenon, and among it's functional features we find a facilitator of alternative states of consciousness.

Thus it seems that "religion" should be described by the analogy of "family resemblance" rather than by an evaluation through an essential feature. The common features between World Pantheist Movement and Assemblies of God may be few to none, but that does not mean that they can't be a part of a greater family with more differences within the family than with other families.

This is not in conflict with the claim of Stark/Finke, that religion is transactional and provide (or claims to provide) rewards that are not achievable by any other means. Rather it is an extension of their system and it helps us to avoid the conclusions of Stark/Finke in violation with the evaluative criteria of the paper. Rather than demarcating religion in an essentialist manner, this stipulative demarcation highlights certain aspects of religion. It might be asked how religion is distinguished from other facilitators, but since no essence is attempted to be found – there need not be any crystal-clear demarcation between religion and other facilitators. It suffices that the concept 'religion' is distinguishable from the concept of music or sexuality (for example), and for their own good I hope the readers of this paper can distinguish between religion and other facilitators (otherwise inconvenient situations might occur). In this sense, it is only by pragmatic standards of truth that stipulative definitions gain their validity.

This definition may be evaluated based upon the four evaluative criteria mentioned in Chapter One. First and foremost it provides a precise demarcation of a certain aspect in religion that demarcates it from other aspects, rather than demarcating "religion" from the "non-religious". It rests upon a coherent theoretical foundation by avoiding the essentialist approach of Stark/Finke, anomalies do not result in a complete falsification of the system. It also shows respect towards self-understanding by avoiding any pathological descriptions of the experiences (such as hallucinations). It also extends the understanding of the field of study by highlighted a neglected domain within rational-choice theory.

If the framework of Stark/Finke is modified at this basis, it is not obvious that "mystical experience" ought to be analyzed as confidence-increasing. Neither is it obvious that it ought to be considered in other terms. Since the case differs depending on what kind of experience and in what kind of context the experience takes place, it can be said that sometimes mystical experience increases confidence in religious systems and sometimes does the exact opposite. The relevance of mystical experience is however clear since remaining indifferent towards it, after experiencing it, is improbable.

2.3 Spirituality and rational-choice

"Believing without belonging", consumption of New-Age services by a middle-class lady, and an independent user of psychedelics going through an astral-journey to the spiritual planes. How does any of these categories fit with the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke? Defining what "spirituality" is, entails many problems since normative ideals are easy to mix with descriptive ideals in such attempts. For the purposes of this paper, spirituality is: *religious activities and beliefs outside the realm of denominations/religious firms*.

This definition differs with the attempts to define spirituality on the basis of a difference between the religious state of mind and the spiritual.[71] This is because, according to the rational-choice model, self-interest is the basis for any kind of religion, regardless how much a religion encourages self-sacrife - it will compensate for that sacrifice by worldly (like mystical experience) or otherworldly rewards.[72] The collective nature of many (or most) religions does not entail that the individual agent is disregarded within these religions in contrast to a self-affirming individualistic spirituality. Such a claim might well be regarded as normative since the ideal-types involved do not accurately represent the complexity of the issue at hand. Religions with many ideals of collective nature do not disregard the individual and her interests altogether, that would necessitate a complete breakdown of the religion – given the correctness of rational-choice theory. Neither would the New-Age movement survive if the agents involved in it overlooked the need for social organization with all ethical and theological restraints it implies. A stance for pluralism, universalism and "eclecticism" is a stance after all.

The definition might be in violation with the self-understanding of some spiritual people not viewing their own practices and beliefs as "religious" in any sense.[73] But since the definition is stipulative, there is no question to whether it is defined with the intent of demarcating "real" objects in "reality". Since there is no such intent, the definition does not invalidate or stand in violation with their self-understanding, since they operationalize and demarcate religion/spirituality with other standards and with other aims than that of

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[71] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 5.
[72] Otherwise it is doubtful that the religions would successfully reproduce.

the context of scientific exploration. The definition avoids any ambiguous demarcation of inner experience that is devoid of clear demarcation to other religious experiences. A religious experience outside the realm of religious denominations and congregational control (such as within a catholic monastery) is thus a "spiritual" experience

This is by no means any normative ideal of any sort, and it might be synonymous to the notion of "folk religiosity" outside clerical control in some contexts, but clerics may also be involved within the "spiritual" realm leaving any clear demarcated group-identity. Such religion has been described with many negative terms such as "syncretism", "magic" or even more denigrating, "pick and mix".[74] But this is not an attempt to positively evaluate spirituality and show it supremacy over "religion" in any way, and hopefully it will not be understood in such a way. Rather such religion serves as a counter-example to the conservative religion Stark/Finke positively evaluates and is important to cover within a rational-choice theoretical framework due to its differences with traditional organizational religion. It might even be viewed as a different model of organizing religion, more similar to modern economic transactions (consumption) than voluntary associations.

Even though the group-nature of religious denominations or congregations provide a great strength it might be a weakness in a culture where sectarianism is viewed negatively. Stark/Finke emphasize the denominational and religious groups strongly despite their contempt for functionalist theory, and it is a weakness due to the strength of non-denominational religion in both America and Europe. Without any clear and "monolithic" community serving as plausibility-strengtheners,[75] New-Age stores are still visited and various sacred objects and books are consumed. The preferences involved are, without doubt, plenty and it serves as an exact opposite of the strict and ultra-strict religious communities described by Stark/Finke.[76] The "holistic milieu" differs so radically from the "congregational domain"[77] that they might be regarded as different types of economies. There is no clear and obvious distinction between being "inside" and "outside" and often the only demand imposed for practitioners can be summarized as; money. Religious services are provided by various practitioners to consumers who can choose what they want to believe and apply in a manner free from the control common in denominations (which is true even regarding liberal congregations). No common identity is necessitated by the practitioners activities. In some sense, the practitioner in the holistic milieu is never a part of the communal life often facilitated by "traditional" congregational religion.[78]

For some reason it seems stranger that someone could practice religion alone (without

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[73] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 399
[74] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 32.
[75] There is no distinct, social, unit from which the individual is seen as a part of.
[76] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 212.
[77] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 8.
[78] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 4.

any community) than that someone could play music alone or dance alone. There is – however - no reason why a person could not represent the supply and demand side of religion simultaneously or have an open relationship with the supply-side – coming and going as she wishes (without free-riding). Indeed the social organization of religion may by itself be a problem for some categorizing themselves as "spiritual" and the supply-side serving these agents cannot be any of the congregational types mentioned by Stark/Finke (from ultra-liberal to ultra-strict). The idea that it is the social nature of many religions that causes many of the problems religion has been associated with (conflicts) might draw individuals to domains where their preferences can be satisfied without having to pay the cost of abandoning another preference (one might regard the informational background to the choice as false but it is irrelevant in the analysis of rational choice).

There seems to be a similarity between the more limited form of spirituality[79] common in the late-modern/post-modern West and the independent mystics mentioned earlier (the universalist and perennialist mystics). To enhance the understanding of these mystics it is necessary to discuss and clarify the relationship between the two. The independent mystics could be regarded as spiritual mystics, combining a preference for mystical experience and a preference for the autonomous spirituality maintained in relationship to established (or denominational/congregational) religion. The independent mystics of today may share a lot more with the renegade mystics of former days than what has been said.[80] Rational-choice may help us understand the sometimes tense relationship between the two and also provide hints by involving preferences of the "profane" world (such as power and institutional reproduction).

The emphasis on experiences[81] and the close relationship between self-help and postmodern spirituality indicate that preferences for well-being and happiness are not secondary to any "essentially" religious preference described by Stark/Finke. Rather goals such as self-fulfillment and happiness are achievable without any involvement in religious activities, but for some reason, such preferences may lead to religious beliefs and behavior. An attempt to show the unique aspects of religion (such as the emphasis on the supernatural in many religions) does not mean that rational agents resort to other social domains instead of religion if any such "uniquely" religious preference is lacking. Spirituality in the post-modern (or late-modern) West shares the experiential preferences (joy, self-satisfaction)[82] that mystical experience might have as a result and points toward an important aspect of religion, both in the holistic milieu and congregational domain; *Religion is a multi-dimensional and multi-functional phenomenon, and among it's functional features we find a facilitator of happiness and joyful experiences.*

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[79] Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 335
[80] The "perennial psychology" mentioned by Forman and Parsons need not be a necessary prerequisite for the realization of the "renegade" mystic or the independent mystic. It suffices that the mystic stands outside the congregational domain and insists on formulating and propagating the unitive experience experienced.
[81] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 29.
[82] Heelas, Woodhead (2005) p. 4.

Combining the facilitation of alternative states of consciousness, the facilitation of happiness/joyful experiences and the empirical foundation of religion directed towards these aspects indicate that the framework of Stark/Finke is far to narrow to explain *religion*. A religion that strongly emphasizes the two aspects mentioned above might indeed be considered "non-religion" from the perspective of Stark/Finke. Religion thus seems to be devoid of any common-core primary function and essence.

For a rational agent with a preference for joyful experiences and happiness (which rational agent does not have these preferences?), religion might be a suitable way to satisfy such preferences. However not all agents direct themselves toward religion in order to satisfy such preferences, such examples might be explained by conflicting preferences (such as a strong preference for truthfulness and an informational background where the truthfulness of religious claims is in question). Highlighting such an aspect of religion opens our understanding of the great variety of religious systems and the facilitation of such experiences should suggest incorporation or control of other triggers. Indeed the common claim of many religious systems, that the mundane/profane life offers no long-term happiness in contrast to the religious life suggests that is the case. Whether this is the case or not is not within the scope of the paper, but the fact that religion often stands in relation to other facilitators of joy suggests that in order to successfully compete with other facilitators, religions either have to incorporate such facilitators or prohibit and stigmatize others (such as enjoyment of gossip).

For individuals with no preference for neither the community or dogma of congregational religion and with a preference against such a common identity, the most rational choice is to maintain the facilitation but labeling it with other terms so that it avoids being identified as religion. As such it is not strange that terms like "spirituality" have been contrasted to religion, despite the obvious family resemblance. It might even go so far as to secularize religious practices altogether, and offer meditation/yoga (or any other religious practice) with purely secular-scientific terms (promoting well-being or offers relaxation). This does not suggest that the "religiousness" of these practices have been eliminated due to the maintained family resemblance, contrary to the self-understanding of the practitioners the scientific analysis requires stipulative definitions by which the phenomena can be analyzed. The problem of the analysis of Stark/Finke is the that gasp between "belief" and "belonging" is not clarified and solved and there is no explanation of the fact that a lot of people choose to believe in certain religious claims while maintaining a distance towards the congregational domain. The fact that a lot of religion is used within non-religious contexts is not explainable by the assumption that the essence of religion is interaction with and belief in supernatural beings. Indeed, religion seems to provide many this-worldly rewards that are difficult to achieve by other means without supernatural content, otherwise why would even anti-religious groups emulate and imitate norms and functions of religious communities (for example, funeral services provided by secular humanists).

2.4 Conclusions of the analysis of Mysticism and Spirituality

The analysis has indicated the restrictions of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke by highlighting certain aspects of religion that are neglected or placed in the periphery of their analysis. By neglecting or viewing central aspects of religion as periphery in contrast to the emphasis on transactions, the understanding of religion is diminished and it does not further the understanding of the field of study. It does not suffice to suggest that it is not within the center of religions due to an a priori elimination of the religions where such aspects are central. The analysis of this chapter primarily emphasized religions that emphasize experiential dimensions of religion in contrast to other dimensions, such as dogmatics or ethical prohibitions. This does not mean that the experiential dimension of religion is superior or primary in any sense in contrast to its ritual-social or ethical-social dimensions. Rather this dimension was chosen because it indicated the need for a modification of the framework of Stark/Finke.

The limited scope and lack of clear distinctions in the analysis of mystical experience does not enhance the quality of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke. In fact it leads to a diminishing of certain aspects of religion as secondary or periphery. If a religion emphasizes experiential rewards rather than other types of transactions with the natural or supernatural, then such a religion is merely focusing on a confidence-increasing mechanism of religious systems rather than the "essence" or inner core of all religion (the supernatural). The exceptions are far to strong and plenty for a theoretical framework with high aims to neglect them. Even though mystical experience may have a conservative result (that the experiencer remains within her tradition and it strengthens the faith of the tradition), a theory proposing to cover "religion" cannot neglect the analysis of the opposite effect. A proposed modification that highlights the "mystical" aspect of religion has been suggested as a tool for the rational-choice analysis of Mysticism. Many important questions can be formulated by use of the definition and by attempting to cover the complexity of religion – the depth of the rational-choice analysis may become deeper:[83]

1. What is the relationship between mystical experience and confidence in religious systems? Why does it sometimes increase confidence and sometimes decrease confidence?

2. To what extent do alternative states of consciousness affect religious or non religious individuals in terms of preferences and the maximizing of such preferences?

3. Are alternative states of consciousness to be regarded as information (for the person experiencing them) or as preference? If it is information, what kind of preferences can be

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[83] The questions raised will be used in the analysis of Pentecostalism.

maximized by the knowledge achieved by such experiences and how does the information affect other preferences?

4. What type of religious system is appealing to agents with a preference for alternative states of consciousness and contrary?

5. By what means do religious firms compete with other facilitators of alternative states of consciousness?

6. What are the crucial causes of a religious firm either incorporating another facilitator or restricting another facilitator?

7. What is the role of psychology of religion with regards to the analysis of preferences? Or in other terms, how can the micro-sociology of religion and the psychology of religion enhance our understanding of the preferential basis of religious choices?

The analysis has also shown the importance of not neglecting religion as it is practiced outside the congregational domain that Stark/Finke emphasizes. The experiential emphasis of the late-modern/post-modern Spirituality and the experiential emphasis of "traditional" mystical traditions (within the congregational domain) indicate a proximity between the two that is not clear within the framework of Stark/Finke. Neither mystical traditions nor spirituality are analyzed as separate domains of religion and hence it is not possible to evaluate the commonalities nor differences between the two from the perspective of their framework. Such an evaluation is important in order to show commonalities between different religious niches and clarify that they overlap in more aspects than the "supernatural" essence of religion. The analysis also indicates that some theoretical problems have been overlooked in the analysis of Stark/Finke. There is no clear-cut connection between religion and congregations that is self-explaining. The fact that religion is – to a large extant – socially organized in groups demarcated by emic criteria is something that demands an explanation and is of particular relevance to a rational-choice theory (since both individual agents and the social organization of agents is assumed to be rational).

Religions with an experiential emphasis differ from religions with an emphasis on transactions (between a deity and its worshipper) and to assume that "genuine" religion is constituted and has its essence in transactions leads to significant problems in the understanding of "experiential religion". The role of religion in facilitating experiences that agents have preferences is important to understand not only in "experiential" religion" but also "transactional religion" where it may very well serve the purpose proposed by Stark/Finke (as confidence increasing). The proposed definition of religion as a facilitator of joyful experiences and happiness (experiential aspects of religion again) also enables us to ask important questions for enhanced understanding of religion;

8. How do preferences, information and rationality in maximizing preferences result in

the social organization of religion? Is it merely a result of the increased plausibility in collective beliefs/behavior (socialization) or is there a rationality in the process from individual to the collective?

9. What are the differences and commonalities between the congregational domain and the holistic milieu, and in what sense do they overlap? May the two be regarded as different "economic" systems with different means of providing services as well as different means for reproduction?

10. How do religions facilitate happiness (or joyful experiences)? What is the relationship between religions and other facilitators and why do different niches of religion vary in their stance towards other facilitators?

11. If religion can be supplied and demanded by the same agent, why is it often supplied and demanded by different strata (priest – congregational member)? What relationship is there between cost/benefit in either creating ones own religion or accepting religious claims of another?

12. What is the relationship for a preference for happiness in relationship to religion? Assuming religion does facilitate happiness, why are not all people religious?

3 Chapter Three: Rationality and the pentecostal revolution

In this chapter pentecostalism will be analyzed by questions enabled by the modification of the theoretical framework of Stark/Finke. The conclusions and suggestions of the analysis of mysticism and spirituality will be used to increase the depth of the rational-choice analysis of pentecostalism. The experiential aspect of religion, will be analyzed as a transaction and the experiences provided by the pentecostal congregations are regarded as "goods" consumed by the demand-side. The analysis supports the claim that the framework of Stark/Finke needs to be modified and open the possibility of experiential preferences in religious choices.

3.1 Background

During the early decades of our last century, a spiritual awakening begun that has changed the religious landscape of Christianity. With an emphasis on personal religious experience and avoidance of theological liberalism, Pentecostalism has been a challenge to other conservative congregations (such as self-described fundamentalists). Pentecostalists and evangelicals share a millenial fervor and hope for major divine interventions in days soon to come. The rewards expected by pentecostalists and evangelicals both entail divine intervention in "this world" and the belief in a deity capable of delivering such rewards. Harvey Cox categorizes pentecostal religiousness in three different categories (with a perennial foundation); primal speech, primal piety and

primal hope.[84] Primal speech or ecstatic utterance are both behavior and experience and diverges both from our "normal" behavior (or every-day behavior) and our "normal" experiences. Cox's description of ecstatic experience as, "one in which the cognitive grids and perceptual barriers that normally prevent people from opening themselves to deeper insights and exultant feelings, are temporarily suspended."[85] is surprisingly similar to the description of a facilitator of mystical experience (changing the ego-boundary or Deikman's concept on deautomatization). Primal piety consists of basic forms of religious expression that has been emphasized by pentecostalists, whereas other forms of christianity has de-emhpasized them (or emphasized other forms of expressions – such as Bible-reading – more). Trance-states, religious healing, dance, religious visions and religious interpretation of dreams[86] are commonplace and are all relevant to the stipulative definition on alternative states of consciousness. Primal hope is common to both pentecostalists and other conservative christians such as evangelicals, the utopian hope for a better future. This primal hope takes the form of a fervent millenialism and a hope for a radical transformation of the world (the Second coming).

The pentecostal awakening has had the effect of bringing about a similar awakening in different protestant denominations and even the Roman-Catholic church has emulated the praxis of pentecostal religion.[87] The extant of the impact of the experiential emphasis of pentecostalism is underestimated if it is evaluated without regard for how other denominations have been influenced and affected. As suggested by the assumption of a preference for mystical experience, facilitation matters. Would not pentecostal praxis facilitate experiences other congregations fail to facilitate, there would be no need to emulate their praxis. It also suggests that the assumption of a "mystical preference" is valid, otherwise the charismatic movement would fail to spread within existing traditional (or "mainline") congregations (if there was no demand for the experiences, there would be no demand for the facilitators).[88]

Cessationist evangelicals and continuationist charismatics differ on many accounts other than the theological question whether spiritual gifts are effective and given from God after the apostles or not – the belief in spiritual gifts changes the congregational life.

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[84] Cox (1996) p. 82

[85] Cox (1996) p. 86

[86] Cox (1996) p. 82

[87] Anderson (2006) p. 144.

[88] That is, if there is no intrinsic preference for the facilitators. To make a distinction between a preference for a facilitator without the experiential outcome and a preference for a facilitator with the experiential outcome is artificial and incoherent due to the essential characteristic of the facilitator. A facilitator must facilitate in order to be a facilitator, but because a facilitator may be a facilitator in a restricted context it is possible to have a preference for the other experiential outcomes of the facilitator. Music is a good example of a facilitator that may involve many preferences other than a preference for mystical experience. The fact that it facilitates mystical experience does not diminish that many other preferences are involved in the choice of listening to/playing music (although some may listen to or play music solely to achieve mystical experiences). However, for the phenomenologically inclined rational choice-theoretician there are only preferences for experiences (a preference for glossolalia is still a preference for the experience of having glossolalia rather than glossolalia in itself – beyond any limitation of an experiencing subject).

Although the charismatic service may have an informal and implicit structure that may be discovered by sociologists of religion, for the worshiper that is used to a formally structured service that is repetitive over consecutive time, the service may very well seem more impulsive, unstructured and maybe – alive.[89] The singing, the sermons, the personal testimonies of conversion are all directed towards experiencing God. [90] This does not entail that other forms of services are not directed towards experiencing God, but it is a question of what kind of experience of God that is sought. The standing, arm-waiving, shouting pentecostalist speaking in tongues and closing his eyes differs from the sitting, psalm-singing, solemn, serious, high church anglo-catholic and – no doubt - the experience of the divine also differs.
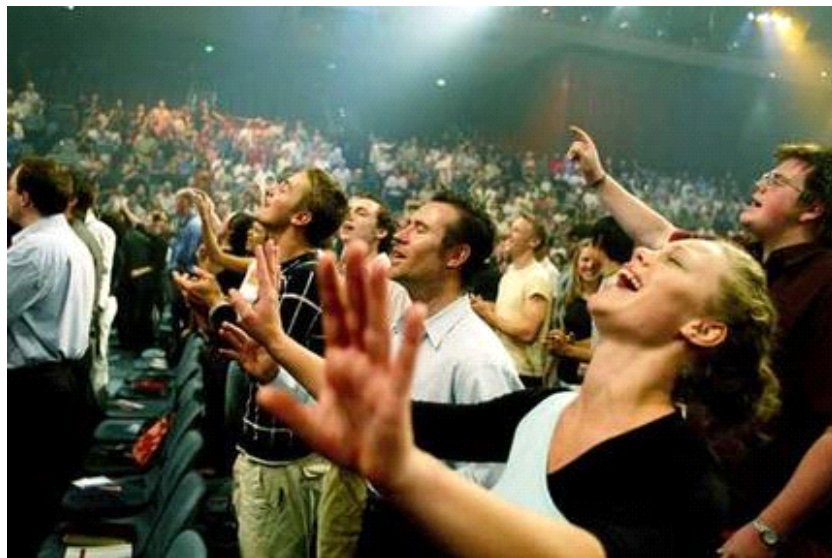
Although fundamentalists and pentecostalists share a common concern for belief in biblical authority, the importance of religious (traditionalist) ethics and traditional christian dogmas[91] - the relationship entails tension. Because of their similarities, the limitation of the particular demand-side of the religious economy (the "conservative" niche) creates tension.[92] Non-charismatic evangelical congregations must compete with charismatic congregations, sharing similar doctrines and views while the latter has an experiential emphasis (with services not supplied by non-charismatic evangelicals). Speaking in tongues (glossolalia), being "slain by the Spirit" (or achieving a trance-state), oft-returning healing ceremonies and religious visions are services the evangelicals do not

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[89] As an outsider to both traditions, my first impression of a charismatic service was one of disorder and anarchy (an impression that changed with time). In contrast, more "traditional" services left no major element of suprise outside the formalia provided.
[90] Anderson (2006) p. 204
[91] Such as the biblical account of Creation.
[92] Cox (1996) p. 75.

emphasize/provide to the same extent (or de-emphasize or altogether deny).

The Pentecostal and charismatic movement is a good example of religion emphasizing experience. Both the experiences of the religious mystic and the joyful experiences of the post-modern/late-modern "spiritualist" (and their emphasis on individuality and reaching the divine "directly") have commonalities with the pentecostal/charismatic movement. The ineffability of mystical experiences and the pentecostal attempt at transcending language through a divine intervention (or baptism by the Spirit) raises the question whether each pentecostal, communicating with the divine through a non-conceptual frame deserves the title "mystic" (this does not imply that one mystic path is superior to another path).[93]

The possibility of a non-denominational charismatic community (or a charismatic ecumenical movement) also raises the question whether charismatics ought to be recognized as "spiritual", despite that many charismatics and pentecostalists belong to denominations and organize themselves in the manner of non-charismatic organizations. If by "spiritual" the inner experiential dimension of religion is intended, it is clear that pentecostalism/charismatics both emphasize this dimension, but according to the stipulative definition of this paper they cannot be regarded as "spiritual" due to the congregational structure of the religion (and there is definitely clerical control). In spite of the close proximity between the pentecostal and charismatic movement, for the purposes of this paper (analysis of the model of Stark/Finke) it is more suitable to analyze pentecostalism in relation to competing, non-charismatic facilitators of experiences that there are preferences for (such as joyful experiences/happiness and mystical experience/alternative states of consciousness).

Given the emphasis on the transactional dimension of religion, an analysis based upon the assumptions of Stark Finke would emphasize the millenialist dimension of pentecostalism (due to the rewards promised to the believers and followers in the eschatology and soteriology). Even though the milllenial expectations are central to the pentecostal movement, indeed the experiential dimension of pentecostalism is legitimized by an eschatology where divine intervention is expected (glossolalia and other gifts of the Spirit as a sign of the end of our time). The problem is that it is not fervent millenialism alone that attracts followers, otherwise there would be no need for the forms of worship offered by pentecostal congregations. Indeed many fundamentalists share the concern of pentecostalism regarding the last days and any competition between the two with regards to clientele must take more aspects into consideration.

To regard the experiential dimension of pentecostalism as confidence-increasing to the promises of divine reward given diminishes the role of alternative states of consciousness in the pentecostal movement. Indeed, the eschatology provided by the pentecostalists may

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[93] Cox (1996) p. 92.

be regarded as confidence-increasing to the practices and experiences pentecostalists have. The suggested modifications of this paper to the framework of Stark/Finke indicate that there is no need to create a problematic dichotomy between the two, rather the experiences and promises pentecostalism gives can be intrinsically sought and have their own individual preferences. It is not a problem to assume that the relationship between the two differs between agents, and for that reason respect for self-understanding is an easier task. To rely on a deductive axiom that is not represented by the purposes explained and expressed by followers (that essentially, the pentecostalist wants to make buisness with her deity) is in conflict with the evaluative criterion of respect for self-understanding.

3.2 Pentecostalism, mysticism and rationality

To exemplify the importance of experiential aspects of rational choices (preferences as well as information), questions with relevance to deepening rational-choice analysis of religion are answered with the example of pentecostalism.

1. *What is the relationship between mystical experience and confidence in religious systems? Why does it sometime increase confidence and sometime decrease confidence?*

Since the pentecostalist tradition contains several facilitators of mystical experience, it is not strange that mystical experience is discussed and admitted in pentecostal settings.[94] The experiential emphasis of pentecostalism (religious experience) also indicates that the experiential states provided by the pentecostal tradition increases confidence in the pentecostal tradition (if pentecostalists didn't actually make/help people experience being healed, feeling unity with the Spirit, etc, the confidence of the adherents would be too low for the movement to reproduce, even less expand). The increased confidence that is plausible in the context of pentecostalists experiencing a mystical experience does not entail that – in reality – pentecostalism achieves what the believers claim it does. It suffices that the believers *experience* the phenomena as corresponding to the promised reward, and that the experiential preference is satisfied/maximized. Because the pentecostal theological tradition gives plausibility and recognizes the experiences of the believers, it increases confidence in the tradition. The tradition is said to contain "facilitators" but not that it is the cause to the experiences because of the risk of suspending respect for the believers self-understanding (that it is by divine intervention the experiences of the believers appear). If the pentecostal tradition, and the supply-side of the religious economy belonging to it, did not support the experiences of the believers it would entail tension in the experiential emphasis of both.

For the cessationist a mystical experience, within the interpretive framework of Cessationism, will significantly lower the confidence in her cessationist creeds. Even

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[94] Cox (1996) p. 133.

though the cessationist may cover such experiences under demonic influences, if the experiencer has a joyful and peaceful experience of unity – it diminishes the importance of what the experiencer probably experienced as an important and significant event. Whether the experience increases or decreases confidence thus depends on what stance the belief-system takes regarding the experience and how plausible these stances appear for the experiencer.

2. *To what extent do alternative states of consciousness affect religious or non religious individuals in terms of preferences and the maximizing of such preferences?*

Alternative states of consciousness may affect the pentecostalist in a number of ways, but the notion that the states will have a significant effect on the experiencer is easier to sustain than the claim that it directs the believer to a particular conclusion (or conceptual frame). Indeed the experiencer of mystic unity may describe it in Buddhist terminology or a Sufistic one rather than the Pentecostal, but for the Christian with significant religious capital within her tradition such an experience is more rationally explained in accordance with the available means. Despite any firm assertion of the distinction between particular aspects of experience such as the world, the individual and God, the mystical experience provides a more monistic realm of experience. The dwelling of the Spirit in the world might be regarded as semi-panentheistic or panentheistic and thus provides a frame of reference for the experience of unity with the divine. Thus any experiencer using the available means to interpret the experience and is positively responded for the experience (and the experience is positive) by a theoretical framework where the experience is regarded as a sign rather than curse, achieves a reward both intrinsically within the positive experience and the positive feed-back provided. A believer in pentecostalism is provided with both and thus increases the plausibility of a preference forming for the experience (if there was none before the experience itself).

3. *Are alternative states of consciousness to be regarded as information (for the person experiencing) or as preference? If it is information, what kind of preferences can be maximized by the knowledge achieved by such experiences and how does the information affect other preferences?*

Within the experiential realm of the pentecostalist, if one regards the mystical experiences as "information" relevant to rational choices rather than an intrinsic reward with its specific preferences, the experiences of alternative states of consciousness provide a background for the satisfaction of preferences. An agent with the preference for a relaxed state of mind rather than stressful experiences may use the knowledge communicated through mystical experience as a means of coping in situations that diverge from the preferred states. For the pentecostalist, the information/knowledge provided by mystical experiences may be used to maximize preferences that involve the transactional aspect of religion. The experience may have many effects upon other

preferences, if the satisfaction provided by the experience (and the experience is contextualized in a tradition where non-religious preferences are discerned) is significant in comparison to that of other experiences. Preferences not involving such a "peak experience" may decrease or their importance might be changed by the stronger preference for mystical experience.

4. *What type of religious system is appealing to agents with a preference for alternative states of consciousness and contrary?*

According to the model of rational-choice, a rational agent with a preference for alternative states of consciousness will maximize this preference. This entails that the agent will use facilitators that are as effective as possible without interfering with other preferential dimensions. From the demand-side of the religious economy, this type of agent wants a religion that is effective in its facilitation of alternative states of consciousness.[95] Such a facilitation does not only mean that the religious tradition contains facilitators of alternative states of consciousness (even though that is also within the scope) but the religious traditions may – by themselves – be facilitators (by doctrines stimulating its adherents to altered states of awareness and consciousness). If there has been no supply of religious traditions that do encourage and facilitate alternative states of consciousness (or emphasize it far more), it would entail that a tradition affirming these would find support by the demand-side of the religious economy (that is, the agents within the economy that have a preference for mystical experience). Whether this is what has taken place in many parts of the world where christians from non-charismatic or "main-line" churches have assumed a pentecostal christianity is difficult to evaluate because of the content lost in quantitative research (that the phenomenological rational-choice researcher see as relevant). Thus, regardless of the similarities between "traditional" evangelicals and pentecostalists, it seems that the experiences provided by pentecostalists and experienced by pentecostalists is important to the extent that schism was an initial approach of the movement.[96]

This does not mean that the agent wants religion for the purpose of facilitation of mystical experience alone, even though the agents share a common preference and expectation from a religion (that satisfies their preferences), the result of the preference/information/maximization may vary significantly depending on preferences regarding different domains of human existence than religion (such as aesthetics or social support).

5. *By what means do religious firms compete with other facilitators of alternative states of consciousness?*

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[95] Unless the agent wants a religion because of other preferences – this is an ideal-type in isolation of any contextal restraints.
[96] Anderson (2006) p. 45.

Because of the wide variety of pentecostal congregations, it is difficult to determine any given way that other facilitators will be responded to. Incorporation as well as restrictions are almost intrinsically bound to the existence of any religious system that provides alternative states of consciousness. In pentecostal services music is used as well as other facilitators, while sexuality is an area of restriction (as is the case with most Christian congregations with an emphasis on marriage and the construction of a family). For the pentecostalists in "Christian territory", the existence of a religious capital within the Christian tradition entails many restrictions as well as incorporation of techniques that have been accumulated through centuries (such as congregational singing). A strong competition towards other facilitators is accomplished by many approaches. It is religion that often provides a context and an interpretive framework for experiences of alternative states of consciousness. In other cases pathological descriptions may be used, as well as aesthetic ones or sexual. What kind of interpretive framework that will be used depends on both availability and the information available to the agent that has a preference for an understandable realm of experience.

6. *What are the crucial causes of a religious firm either incorporating another facilitator or restricting another facilitator?*

The reasons for restricting or incorporating certain facilitators may vary significantly. Certain traits are common however, such as restriction of sexuality. The pentecostal restrictions upon sexuality also have other relevant causes (such as the Christian tradition it partakes in), which makes it more difficult to discover any particularly crucial aspect of restricting or incorporating the facilitator. The difficulty in finding crucial aspect is by itself an interesting answer to the question, because the choice of restricting or incorporating a facilitator may have taken place without any of the believers ever recognizing it as such (such as neglecting one facilitator while more actively using another). This means that preferences – even if the agent herself is unaware of it – will affect their choices, the preferences may be a part of their awareness but the agents lack the awareness of that preference (not being aware about what one is aware of). The pentecostalist need not understand how and why to restrict a facilitator herself, it suffices that the pentecostalist actually does it within a rational choice model (conclusions must not conflict with the believers self-understanding). Crucial causes are thus difficult to distinguish because it often depends upon the self-understanding and awareness of the agent, if the preferences are "hidden" in the unkown consciousness of the Other, there is no way for the scholar to account for them.

7. *What is the role of psychology of religion with regard to the analysis of preferences? Or in other terms, how can the micro-sociology of religion and the psychology of religion enhance our understanding of the preferential basis of religious choices?*

In the case of pentecostalism, psychology of religion can distinguish between mental states and what constitutes a "need" or "urge" based upon either a scientific empirical foundation or upon a cognitive foundation (as well as between natural needs and those aquired through nurture). Results from psychological studies (about glossolalia or more general about ecstatic states) necessarily affect the analysis because of their empirical orientation, and in order to "idealize" the particular pentecostalist to a more universal one (ideal-type and essential "pentecostalist"), there must be a solid basis for the simplification entailed (which has its advantages as well). Psychology of religion provides the rational-choice analyst with an empirical basis purported to explain what believers have preferences for. The rational choice analyst's model of that believer helps her draw conclusions by testing the model's plausibility by empirical methods. Psychology of religion can also make distinctions between "irrational" and "rational" beliefs based upon a rational-choice foundation and an analysis of the preferences with the believer (anything that is in conflict with real or self-perceived self-interest is irrational). This will give them distinctions based upon a coherence-theory of truth (rationality) rather than a given ontology assumed as sole criteria of rationality.

3.3 Pentecostalism, spirituality and rationality

To exemplify the importance of organizational aspects of rational choices (preferences as well as information), questions with relevance to deepening rational-choice analysis of religion are answered with the example of pentecostalism.

8. *How do preferences, information and rationality in maximizing preferences result in the social organization of religion? Is it merely a result of the increased plausibility in collective beliefs/behavior (socialization) or is there a rationality in the process from individual to the collective?*

The congregational organization of religion may be described as a confidence-increasing practice (due to the strength of the plausibility-structures involved in social networks). This could mean that the congregational organization of religion has been supreme for centuries because it increases the plausibility of the beliefs within the group and therefore seem more credible than religion organized in different manners (such as client/consumer relationship). Nevertheless it is not sufficient as an explanation to why pentecostal congregations exist rather than individual pentecostalists practicing their faith in isolation. Explanations that view the social organization less as rational process will see the existence of such confidence-increasing practices as the product of something similar to natural selection (where religions not organized in such a manner fail or do not survive for as long as religions organized within congregations and as a distinct social unit). The adherents later become socialized by learning to affirm and reproduce the religion to others, without referring to any kind of rationality in the process.

In the case of pentecostalism, it is not easy to describe what kind of preferences, information and rationality in the choices of agents, that were significant for the changes within its development. Within the Asuza Street community, it would have been hard to find out that the changes that did occur happened, and even more difficult to find out what kind of preferences were involved in a community of a large number of agents. These difficulties indicate that any analysis that purports to explain a process within a growing congregation (or fellowship) must model the agents even more detailed than the original rational-choice model itself sets restrictions and describes the agents. A certain number of preferences must be assumed with the majority and certain preferences must be regarded as of lesser importance for the agent. The analysis would thus never be more than approximate with a large number of agents, because of the inexhaustible details of relevant aspects to the analysis.

The awakening and revival at Azusa Street had an enormous impact despite the openness provided to people of different color,[97] increased strictness or failure by slackness do not explain the effect of the community in Azusa Street (these two are emphasized by Stark/Finke).[98] In fact, it is difficult to distinguish the Azusa Street awakened community as a distinct social unit that evangelized and reproduced its pentecostal religious practices to other communities and therefore reproduced itself. As the Book says: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. ".[99]

This does not mean that the process has no rationality from individual to collective (to even larger collectives), but claiming that there is rationality to it entails a methodological holism and the larger debate regarding structure and agency. If we approach the religious traditions with functionalist sunglasses, we will find preferences and information and agency to the collective as a whole (rather than by the sum of its parts). If we approach the religious traditions with rational-choice sunglasses, we will find such things with the individual due to the methodological individualism that often is assumed implicitly to rational-choice theories.

9. *What are the differences and commonalities between the congregational domain and the holistic milieu, and in what sense do they overlap? May the two be regarded as different "economic" systems with different means of providing services as well as different means for reproduction?*

Pentecostal congregations share many common features with the holistic mileu. First and foremost they both share an experiential emphasis and have religious practices leading to alternative states of consciousness (in the holistic milieu, yoga for example). In this sense

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[97] Cox (1996) p. 45-47.
[98] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 205-208
[99] KJB John 3:8

they share content despite their differences in the social structure of the groups. Seen from a Durkheimian perspective, the social purposes of religious rituals seem to conflict with the differences of social structures between the groups. Indeed, if the states wanted in both types of social structure would be the same, there could be no notion of the social nature of the object of worship. Thus the holistic milieu and pentecostal congregations seem to compete with similar goods to be offered (mystical experience, alternative states of consciousness deemed as positive by the experiencer).

Although similar in the goods offered, the pentecostalist offers more with a larger cost. The transactional aspect of religion with regards to "religious" goods such as promised divine intervention or eternal life, offers the pentecostalist a significant advantage over the holistic practitioner. The holistic practitioner however, has less restrictions for the costumer than the pentecostalist. There is no congregational control for the slacking costumers (or church-goers in the case of pentecostalism) for the holistic milieu, despite the freedom of religion in many parts of the world – there is stronger social pressure upon behavior in some religious gatherings than others. Thus the cost for getting involved in a pentecostal congregation seems higher than buying a tarot-reading once a month by a fortune-teller. The latter practice would probably be called "magic" according to the framework of Stark/Finke,[100] but if it is a part of the religion of a person – such a description entails a violation of the self-understanding of the person. There is no doubt that the levels of tension are higher for the pentecostal congregations than the holistic milieu, which sometimes is distinguished from religion completely to a category of spirituality (according to them, religion and spirituality are mutually exclusive).

The holistic practitioner and the pentecostalist both share goods that are administered by different means and in different forms of social organization. They do not seem to be different types of economies because they are possible to combine to some extent and they interact with each other. Pentecostal criticism of New-Age or other conceptual frames of the holistic milieu and the reverse indicate that they are different systems with competition between them (although a market economy may be in conflict with a planned economy, the two systems as absolute opposition have never existed). Because the congregational domain as well as the holistic milieu are scholarly constructs rather than self-descriptions of the practitioners, why would the rational-choice analyst ignore domains of religion beyond traditional congregations (by traditional I mean structurally, not in content) and restrict herself to analysis of a religious economy that is wholly constituted of christian or christian-like congregations (such as unitarians)? The agents choosing a pentecostal congregation or meetings in the holistic milieu is still able, in a free country, to participate in a free market with no enforced monopoly.

The means of reproduction is likely to be different, but still similar, because the holistic milieu and the pentecostal movement both reproduce outside the realm of family (the rise

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[100] Stark, Finke (2000) p. 106

of pentecostalism cannot be explained by the larger number of children which pentecostalists breed). Both may very well reproduce by means of social networks and friendship, thus restricting the gap between the constructed holistic mileu and the constructed congregational domain. There does not either seem to be a need to refer to any supernatural explanations in order to understand the rise of both religious groups.[101]

10. *How do religions facilitate happiness (or joyful experiences)? What is the relationship between religion and other facilitators and why do different niches of religion vary in their stance towards other facilitators?*

Pentecostalism (the supply-side of it) has/uses many aspects that are involved in facilitating happiness or joyful experiences to its adherents. The congregational structure of the organization provides a social network for the adherent, the religious rituals facilitate alternative states of consciousness, the music/architecture/the sermons provide aesthetic experiences and the very content of the pentecostal beliefs provide the adherent with several "compensators" not achievable by other means (such as signs of the love of God to the adherent). Thus it provides several goods, not all restricted to the transactional aspect. The supply-side (and the demand-side) of pentecostalism has incorporated many facilitators of joyful experiences, although the explicit explanation for these facilitators may rest in belief in biblical authority (and biblical prescriptions/descriptions of the early church) the facilitators nevertheless are there and have the same implications thought-out beforehand or not.

According to Stark/Finke, strictness is a vital part of the success of a religious movement.[102] Strictness often concerns other facilitators of experiences that the community facilitates by its practices and beliefs[103] and in that sense constitute the real competition (other groups with consumers with different preferences do not have the same competition). The success of pentecostalism is difficult to explain on the basis of overall strictness of the movement, indeed if strictness was the key to success it would be difficult to explain the differences in the development of evangelicalism and "fundamentalism" and why pentecostalism has succeeded and superseded evangelicalism (internationally).

Rather than stating that the key to success for the pentecostal and evangelical movement is "strictness" it might be safer to claim that the key to success is the ability of the supply-side to accommodate the demand-side with satisfaction/maximization of their preferences. That there is an intrinsic preference for strictness with religious costumers cannot explain why some prefer a more "slack" religion, without claiming that they are less religious. There is a risk in such descriptions because they easily conflict with the

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[101] For example how rapid growth is possible without mass-conversion: Stark, Finke (2000) p. 127
[102] See; Warner "Convergence toward the new paradigm: A Case of Induction"" *Rational choice theory and religion: Summary and assessment* (1997).
[103] If one agrees with the assumption of this paper, the importance of experiences for rational choices.

self-understanding of the religious practitioners and adherents. To avoid such conclusions one must not diffuse the preference for strictness with a preference for religion because they do not overlap, a religion that demands little of its followers does not mean that the followers are less "religious" by conforming to the religion. In fact, slackness according to one tradition may be a central tenet of another tradition (the absence of high church ceremonies may make pentecostalism seem more ritually "slack" but for the pentecostalist, the informal nature of worship is central).[104]

The relationship between pentecostalism and facilitators outside its boundaries is not consistently clear, restrictions upon the lives of the adherents are there but no common, overlapping sectarianism is there. Pentecostalism as well as evangelicalism vary in the organizations and groups that constitute the movements with regard to strictness (not all evangelicals are like the Plymouth Brethren and not all pentecostals are as strict as the Church of God with Signs Following) thus the strictness cannot explain the overall success of the movements (they both vary over the niches of the religious economy). The variation of strictness does indeed indicate that some have a preference for strictness while others do not, and the success of the pentecostal movement have other relevant explanations. Stephen Warner describes the variety of approaches taken by congregations to satisfy its consumers preferences as "structural flexibility"[105] as accommodating a wide variety of preferences other than strictness and religious compensators (only available by divine intervention).

11. *If religion can be supplied and demanded by the same agent, why is it often supplied and demanded by different strata (priest – congregational member)? What relationship is there between cost/benefit in either creating one's own religion or accepting religious claims of another?*

Without recognizing that there is an intrinsic preference to the social organization of religion with many agents, it is difficult to explain how a religious organization has been so successful that it has effected many domains outside the realm of religion (similarities between catholic church-bureaucracy and the modern nation state). Indeed the social nature of religion is often taken for granted and is axiomatically assumed within many accounts of religion, but may also be a consequence of the focus upon elite-religion within the study of religion. But even outside the elite, folk religion also contains organization but based upon other social groups (such as the family), the social structure of religion even extends to private prayer and meditation (where creeds or mantras, formulated by a social elite within the religion is pronounced). Within the pentecostal homes, if a prayer meeting is agreed upon, one would expect the worship that take place to be *communal* rather than as isolated individuals partaking in whatever prayers they

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[104] Because of the centrality of the Spirit of God and the spontoneaus outporing of it.
[105] See; Warner "Convergence toward the new paradigm: A Case of Induction"" *Rational choice theory and religion: Summary and assessment* (1997). p. 92.

individually prefer. To regard the social structure of religion as a by-product in order to reduce the preferences involved in the analysis does not suffice to explain the almost universal feature of religion (what kind of universal preferences must result in social structure despite its not being intrinsically sought?).

Within the rational-choice analysis, claims like the one of Durkheim that purport to explain the social nature of religion by reducing it to the social, do not suffice as explanations (within the evaluative criteria of this paper they also are in conflict with religious self-understanding). Neither do group-level evolutionary theories on religion suffice in order to understand why the supply-side creates such institutions and the demand-side partakes in them and choose to constitute them. That strong and united groups defeat groups that are weak with an individualization that is in conflict with the reproduction of the group, does not explain why one would organize religion socially to begin with. Since the category is a scholarly construction, there is no difficulty in understanding why religion and the social almost always connected. Before the construction of the concept of religion, religion and "culture" in general (even before the distinction between culture and nature) there was no religion nor culture. But such an explanation is only possible given that one recognizes the stipulative approach rather than the essentialist; for the essentialist it is a theoretical problem that must be explained and responded, but for the constructivist the problem is removed by recognizing its foundation in the discourse on religion rather than anything remotely connected to religion *sui generis* or "religion in-itself".

Religion, as social constructs, are generally only accepted in a non-pathological sense after a significant number of individuals have accepted the tenets or practices within their given religion. Beliefs and practices of an individual agent that are distinctive to such an extent that they can be regarded as "religious", will more likely be categorized as psychopathological (the historical examples are many even within religious traditions, such as Muhammed or Jesus). This does not mean that all religion is is a mass organized form of pathology (as many within the irrationalist paradigm would agree upon) but rather that the social categorization of phenomena also effects the scholar attempting to understand the phenomena (social categories often invented by earlier generations of scholars). Because of the pathologization the cost for inventing ones own religion is significantly higher than corresponding to the generally accepted forms of religion (even extreme forms that are categorized as "sectarian" religion). Combining such risks with the religious capital of a believer or community of believers, new religions often are connected to older religions and makes the history of religion seem more like a tree than a vacuum where quantum particles arise spontaneously.

12. *What is the relationship for a preference for happiness in relationship to religion? Assuming religion does facilitate happiness,[106] why are not all people religious?*

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[106] http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1015870,00.html, Spilka [et al.] (2003) p. 499. A

Given that religion contributes to happiness[107] and and facilitates it, it seems strange that not all rational agents would prefer it and choose it. Especially since a happy life is something very common to have a preference for, why are religious choices different from the choices of the agents choosing marriage because of the happiness it facilitates? Information is one of the foundations of rational choices. If an agent with a preference for happiness does not believe that religion would make her happier the agent would not choose religion on that basis. If the agent affiliates religion with unwanted states such as psychopathological conditions, it is even more probable that the agent will be uninterested in choosing religion. An agent with a strong preference for coherence and logical support of the beliefs of the agent may be either religious or non-religious, because faith does not necessarily conflict with reason (reason in the philosophical sense rather than economic).

Many religious adherents as well as anti-religious adherents (such as secular humanists) would argue that the opposite to the opinion themselves adhere to is a position that is unreasonable and thus unmaintainable, but because they do not share basic axioms for their perspective of the world[108] it is difficult to determine in any way who is more reasonable and for what reasons. Even if the secularist had a basis for believing that religious claims are false, the secularist could still make use of the benefits available in religion by participating in the communities and "play" religion (as a hypocrite, which may be more common than thought), but the open secularists may even be anti-religious in relation to religious individuals (secularist/atheist missionaries such as Richard Dawkins or Cristopher Hitchens belong to this category).[109]

One possibility is that secularists simply lack a preference for happiness, but it seems highly implausible (due to the prominent similarities between secularists and religious people – similarities that are improbable if the secularists did not want to be happy). Most probably, the secularist has information that suggests that religion is indeed harmful and does not provide happiness to the adherents and by a preference for happiness the secularist chooses not to belong to a religion. Indeed to comply with the evaluative

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popular image of religion that might indicate the fall of the irrationalist paradigm.

[107] It is difficult to determine that religion *causes* happiness, the statistics may as well indicate correlation. It is also difficult to determine what constitutes "happiness" but from a constructivist point of view happiness is something constructed or created by the scholar, reader or culture instead of being a given universal state. Assuming that self-underrstanding is important in evaluating states only available to the experiencer, happiness may thus be described in terms of the self-understanding of the studied person/group (whether they regard themselves as happy or not). Religious individuals may very well view "happiness" differently than non-religious groups, but respect for self-understanding means that as a constructed category, both are equally "right" or "wrong".

[108] Metaphysical and ontological assumptions as well as epistemological, not possible to determine on an empirical ground.

[109] Hitchens (2007) "*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*". It is not only a stance on the reliability of religious claims but an also a normative evaluation of the consequences of religion.

criteria of this paper (respect for self-understanding) it is impossible to claim that the secularist does not want to be happy. To explain why some people choose not to believe in religion, information seems to be a key ingredient, other explanations seem counter-intuitive and would be in conflict with self-understanding

In the case of pentecostalism, ecstatic states that include happiness may be facilitated but happiness is also facilitated by other means such as, providing an interpretive framework for the life of the adherent and thereby makes the world understandable (thus more easy to cope with) and providing a community and strengthening and expanding the social network of the adherent. All kinds of services offered by the pentecostal supply-side that facilitate happiness and joyful experiences are in some sense in competition with other facilitators of the very good consumed by the demand side. The pentecostal supply-side must manage to exclude competition through various means, for example making the sermon so interesting that the next-generation of church-goers do not spend their time texting on their cell-phones in sermons instead of listening to the preacher. In order for religion to become a primary concern in the life of the rational-agent preferring happiness, it must also accomplish in giving the rewards promised. If being an adherent to pentecostalism does not result in the maximization of ones preferences, the supply-side risk loosing its aims with the adherents (the maximization of participants to a maximum of involvement – within missionary faiths). It is therefore possible for other facilitators to be more effective in satisfying the preference than the religious one (which may explain slacking or religious free-riding). In order to satisfy the preferences of the adherents and expand, the pentecostal congregations must make adherents happy or satisfied – otherwise someone or something else will make the religion bankrupt in a free market (that is, for both the religious economy and freedom in respect to other facilitators in other domains of society such as art).

4 Chapter Four: Conclusions

The analysis has exemplified that rational choice need not be restricted to the transactional aspect between the divine (supernatural) and the agent. Indeed restrictions to such a view is fiercely ontological in its scope and allows for no alternative methodologies such as phenomenology to use its tools or conceptualizations. Because restrictions to the transactional aspect (and viewing it as the essential feature of religion) means that religions not conforming to the transactional aspect or the restricting itself to it will be interpreted in violation to the self-understanding of the religious practitioners and adherents.

Restricting rational-choice to the transactional aspect of religion also entails that religions with a strong transactional aspect has no other competitive advantage over other groups with the same strong aspect (pentecostalism vs. fundamentalism). Indeed without the experiential aspect of religion as a possible wanted good with many preferences, the

analysis of religion is limited to a stricter framework of what may "count" as religious and excludes many phenomena from the scope of the sociology of religion and religious studies in general. An exemplification of an evaluation on a rational-choice analysis on the rationality of the pentecostal revolution will indicate what aspects have improved by expanding the realm of religion to the realm of experience in extension to the transactional aspect. The role of a preference for the communal or social nature of worship has also been clarified by the analysis of the relationship between pentecostalism and spirituality.

4.1 Establishing Precise Demarcation Standards

The demarcation standards of the analysis were founded upon the use of stipulative definitions and explicit constructivist assumptions (regarding the validity of the conceptual framework used in the analysis) rather than an essentialist approach. The demarcation standards highlighting certain aspects of religion and using them for an analysis of rational-choice enlightens our view of these aspects. The two aspects of facilitation in religion were demarcated and operationalized and used in the analysis, exemplifying how regarding experiences as "goods" deepens our understanding of religious choices.

4.2 Theoretical Consistency

Because of the addition of experiences to the goods offered by religious supply-side, the understanding of the pentecostal tradition is extended beyond an analysis of the transactional aspect of pentecostalism. This addition is not in conflict with the most basic assumptions of rational-choice with Stark/Finke, rather it is clear that what is recognized as "confidence-increasing" may sometimes be intrinsically sought because of its specific preferences. Thus religions and denominations all across the niche of the religious economy can be analyzed without judging one part of the niche as "more" religious than any other. Neither does one need to conclude that ultra-liberals hardly want religion and the conservative niche also has its experiential dimensions that can be regarded as intrinsically preferred (thus the ultra-liberal and conservative may share content in some dimensions while differing on others).

4.3 Showing regard for the Validity of Self-understanding

Respect and regard for the validity of self-understanding has been assumed throughout the paper, the analysis has been used as a criteria for the validity of conclusions drawn from theoretical assumptions and definitions. Total correspondence to the self-understanding and respect of the believer is an high aim that most certainly has not been accomplished in this paper, but hopefully it is has improved the analysis of Stark/Finke

and in this sense establishes a deeper understanding for the believers. To not accept the believers self-understanding is similar to the irrationalist paradigm-irrigard for taking religious sources at face-hand, which may make the theoretical interpretations closer to the empirical content than any speculation with regard to the "*true*" intents and motives with the religious agent.

4.4 Extending the Understanding of the Field of Study

By highlighting the status of experiences as "goods" within the religious economy apart from religious compensators and expanding the theoretical width of the rational-choice model of Stark/Finke, one might say that it extends the understanding of the field of study. The problems of Stark/Finke in satisfying the evaluative criteria 1-3 has been diminished by removing the severe restriction of the definition of "religion" and through the suggestion of experiential goods. The analysis of the social organization of religion also extends the understanding of the field of study by highlighting another dimension of religion that is individualized and not within the scope of religious niches of Stark/Finke (religion that is not denominational). This makes understanding the great variety of religion easier by not simplifying the analysis to the extent that important dimensions and distinctions are lost. By analyzing further distinctions between religious groups and individuals in terms of plurality, the understanding of these religious groups and individuals is furthered rather than by simplifying the model but only reaching an ideal-type suitable for a few forms of religion (such as conservative Christianity). In order to understand the pentecostal awakening, transactional aspects of religion do not suffice as an explanation. In one sentence; experience matters.

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