

How to approach and find religiosity when the church does not longer serve as a cliffhanger? What is the crucial aspect of religiosity when it is institutionally unaffiliated?

# The Complexity of Uncovering Religiosity in the Netherlands

Exploring the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity via the field of meaning-making

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# The complexity of uncovering religiosity in the Netherlands

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## Introduction

Within the field of religious studies contemporary religiosity or the present role of religion in a global and/or local context, is one of many intensively researched subjects. Anthropologists visit different countries and engage in fieldwork, historians approach religion from different kinds of view throughout time, psychologists study the psychological dimensions of religion, and sociologists are interested in all kinds of social aspects of religion. However, a combination of different perspectives can be of great value, as well. I hope to gain new insights through the interdisciplinary combination of psychological and sociological approaches within the study of religion, with a particular interest in researching contemporary religiosity in the Netherlands. I wish to focus on the Netherlands because my general interest is devoted to the role of religion and the shape of religiosity within Western countries, which for a great part witnessed a de-Christianization at the institutional level and which is still a popular subject of examination within the field of sociology of religion. Being aware of the diversity among the Western countries, the Netherlands serve as case study, of which the observations might be comparable to some other Western countries and to others not. Nevertheless, some research that has been carried out in Germany and Austria, will be included in this paper for reasons I will mention after I have introduced the subject of this paper: How to approach and find religiosity when the church does not longer serve as a cliffhanger? What is the crucial aspect of religiosity when it is institutionally unaffiliated?

When I started thinking about how I want to approach the broad subject of religion in the Netherlands, demarcation was the most difficult task, especially because the terms Netherlands and religion are incredibly big and complex themselves. My first angle was, however, the topic I already approached in my bachelor thesis<sup>1</sup> and on which I wished to elaborate. I discussed the complexity of defining religion in the context of the secularization thesis and its advantages and disadvantages. Throughout the comparison between studies by Steve Bruce<sup>2</sup> and Erin K. Wilson<sup>3</sup>, I became

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<sup>1</sup> "Secularisme en secularisatie: De complexiteit rondom het definiëren van religie en haar aanwezigheid in de Westerse samenleving" (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory* (Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking religion in global politics* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

increasingly aware of the interconnectedness between, for example, consequences of defining religion, the subjectiveness of one's worldview, and the struggle with normative concepts that invent the category of "the normal". My original plan was to elaborate on the subject of my bachelor thesis with the question whether it would be helpful in the religious studies to leave the "secular-talking" behind us and switch to "post-secular" talking instead, or not. In short, I am interested in the different ways of how to talk about religion in relation to its complexities, consequences and the various advantages and disadvantages in how to approach religion and religiosity in contemporary Western societies. To limit the scope of the subject I decided to focus on the Netherlands as a case study and possibly some recent observations in Germany, since these are the two countries I am familiar with.

In my bachelor thesis, I discussed the complexity of defining religion and religion's presence in contemporary Western countries, based on the two authors Steve Bruce and Erin K. Wilson. The goal was to problematize the relationship between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. On the one hand, I saw that it depends on the definition of religion to argue for its (non)presence. On the other hand, it appeared that the 'secular' is left empty of meaning without the 'religious', since it arose as a term that referred to the things that are regarded as non-religious. While Bruce shows a decline in religion (based on his definition of religion and the relation with modernization), Wilson formulates an argument for 'relational dialogism' between the religious and the 'secular'. Wilson's 'relation dialogism' is based on the assumption that the two elements are often perceived to exist in a binary opposition while they are in reality more fluid and interactive, not always opposing each other and are difficult to strictly separate. Inspired by Wilson's approach I elaborated on the problem of 'secular/religious dualism' and the consequences of considering the secular as 'neutral', 'normal' or 'normative', ignoring the influence of religious ideas on contemporary Western thought. However, as Wilson's title of the book is "After Secularism" we might ask ourselves how to study religion and measure religiosity in this probably post-secular age. I planned to approach this question based on primary literature, especially empirical research data that would provide a base to discuss the findings with theories and concepts about post-secular societies (post-secularism). However, when I started reading Dutch research-reports on religion and/or religiosity in the Netherlands, carried out by different planning offices, I found myself frustrated with the information at some point and aimed to figure out what caused this dissatisfaction.

The question arose whether the approach of the research deserves a critical review and/or that I felt the researchers asked the "wrong" questions. Finally, I ended up with the information that all reports detected a decline in church membership and attendance, and about half of the Dutch population living a religious or non-religious life outside the church walls. What has been dealt with

less is the particular character of unaffiliated religiosity and/or spirituality, and at some point it became unclear where to trace the difference between religiosity-spirituality and non-religiosity/non-spirituality.

New confrontations appeared: the advantages and disadvantages of spiritual or religious self-identification and the need to set up religious and spiritual categories. Or in other words, categories are always exclusive and thus not doing justice to the individual, while on the other hand labels or categories need to be defined to enable us to discuss them and to know what they are not. The other confrontation refers to the question: What is one looking for when one researches religion and/or religiosity in a certain country of which about half the population is no church member anymore? One option is to research the situation of the Christian belief among the church members and the people outside the church. This is exactly what the different Dutch researchers did, but what about non-Christian based religiosity or spirituality? What can one say about this phenomenon, can it be labeled as religiosity or spirituality? What alternative tools to measure religiosity and spirituality are there besides measuring traditional Christian characteristics? Is it the adoption of elements from other religions, for example from Buddhism and Hinduism, or affinity with para-cultural beliefs and practices? At the same time, when the number of people that claim no religious or spiritual identity increased, would there be no need for religion/spirituality or do people simply not feel comfortable with certain labels? Throughout the Dutch research-reports, besides Christian elements, meaning-making and humanism received (a little) attention as sources to find out more about unaffiliated religiosity/spirituality and the boundaries between religion and the secular (non-religion). Seeing potential in finding more information about unaffiliated religiosity and the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity through the field of meaning-making (and humanism), this thesis will elaborate on the relation between meaning-making and religion. I see in the psychological dimension of meaning-making a suitable subject to bridge the gap between religiosity and non-religiosity, and the capability to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of contemporary religiosity in the Netherlands in further research. The aim of this thesis is, then, twofold. On the one hand, to look at the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity based on meaning-making (and humanism) as the source of measurement and supporter to define religion. On the other hand, to find ways to study and measure religiosity and non-religiosity among both, the ones who claim a religious/spiritual identity and those who do not.

This thesis will start with an overview of the present state of Dutch research reports about religion and religiosity in the Netherlands carried out by different Dutch institutions, and continue with the general subject of meaning-making. The field of meaning-making will be further explored by the research into meaning-making among German and Austrian atheists, carried out by the

psychologist prof. dr. Tatjana Schnell and colleagues. Finally, the material will be analyzed concerning its value for further research and the complexities one is confronted with in studying religiosity/spirituality against the background of the research material dealt with in this paper.

## Chapter one: Introduction to the Dutch Reports

In this chapter, I will give an overview of four empirical research reports that focused on religion and religiosity in the Netherlands. The reports are not chosen arbitrary but represent the four organizations or initiatives in the Netherlands, which carried out quantitative and/or qualitative research on Dutch religiosity, and were published in the last 15 years.<sup>4</sup> Based on their respective research questions and methods, the SCP (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau), the CBS (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek), the WRR (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) and the work *God in Nederland* from 1966-2015, present the situation of religion and religiosity (and the general aspect of meaning-making) in contemporary Dutch society. The reports are suitable to comparison among each other because they are all concerned with contemporary Dutch religiosity and are fairly recent. The report of the WRR “Geloven in het Publieke Domein”<sup>5</sup> and the SCP “Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland”<sup>6</sup> were published in 2006, while the CBS report “Religie aan het begin van de 21ste eeuw”<sup>7</sup> was published in 2009, and *God in Nederland 1966-2015* in 2016<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the material covers recent information about at least the last 15 years. However, the reports are originally written in Dutch and they sometimes differ in their use of terminology. To prevent confusion and to make it easier to understand the division of the respondents, I first decided to unify equal respondent-categories under one label without detracting their identity, and secondly to choose a suitable English translation. I adopt some terminology from Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, who published subject-related works in English. I will give a short overview of the affected terminology and which translation will be used.

The challenge of finding the right translation concerns people who call themselves religious but who are neither spirituals nor church members. In Dutch, this group is called the “buitenkerkelijken”, “onkerkelijken” or “ongebonden gelovigen”, and for this paper, the translation will be “unaffiliated believers”. Stark and Bainbridge define this non-membership as containing “a lack of systematic support for belief and a lack of organized social expression of faith”<sup>9</sup>. Another term that needs to be translated is “ontkerkelijking”, implying the decline in church membership or decline in

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<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, there are no fairly recent publications of further Dutch organizations/institutions that carried out extensive research on Dutch religiosity and/or religion in the Netherlands.

<sup>5</sup> W.B.H.J. van de Donk, A.P. Jonkers, G.J. Kronjee, and R.J.J. Plum, *Geloven in Het Publiek Domein: Verkenningen Van Een Dubbele Transformatie* - 13. WRR Verkenning (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Jos Becker en Joep de Hart, and Linda Arnts, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen in Nederland : Verschuivingen in De Binding Met De Kerken En De Christelijke Traditie* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> J.J.G. Schmeets, and Schmeets, *Religie Aan Het Begin Van De 21ste Eeuw*, (Den Haag: Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuis, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* sec.ed. (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Rodney Stark, and William S. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, 1986 revised.ed.).

churchlyness<sup>10</sup>, but is not used as a synonym for secularization, because it refers solely to institutional Christianity. Stark and Bainbridge talk in one of their works about an “unchurched belt” in the United States but I could not find a proper translation that is more clear than de-institutionalization of Christianity, therefore I will stick with the term “secularization”. Finally, for the general difference between believers or spirituals who are either members of a church or Christian movement, I will use the adjectives “affiliated” or “unaffiliated”. In addition, because the group of unaffiliated people sometimes also includes non-religious/non-spiritual respondents, they will be referred to by unaffiliated or unchurched. Throughout the overview of the reports, we will see that the variety and number of labels used by the different researches, depends on their categorization and sub-categorization of the respondents. Moreover, the attention for the reports is allocated based on how much relevant information they carry concerning the subject of this thesis. As one will see, the reports of *God in Nederland 1966-2015* and the WRR will gain the most attention throughout the paper. After the description of the empirical research data from surveys about religion, spirituality and religiosity in the Netherlands, this chapter will end with a comparative conclusion that summarizes the approach and main findings of the reports.

### SCP report 2006

The Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP) is one of the three planning offices<sup>11</sup> in the Netherlands, which conducts social-scientific research on behalf of the government, the First and Second Chamber, the ministries and social organizations.<sup>12</sup> The SCP is one of the few Dutch institutions that has done large-scale research about religion and religiosity in the Netherlands. Their most recent extensive publication is “Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland” (Religious transformations in the Netherlands), published in 2006 and is based on Dutch and European studies that are concerned with religion or religiosity between 1990 and 2004. Therefore, the reader should not be confused with a variety of years coming along. Moreover, the SCP does not only use their own findings, but findings of other researches as the ESS (European Social Survey).

The 2006 report of the SCP describes the position of religion in Dutch society and the developments of the last decades in which the situation of the Netherlands is compared with other European countries. The study was set up against the background of the widely discussed secularization debate and is mainly interested in institutionalized religion (Christianity), especially in

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<sup>10</sup> A term used by Randall Collins in: *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment* (1997), written by Lawrence Alfred Young, 165-166.

<sup>11</sup> The other two planning offices are the Centraal Planbureau (CPB) (Central Planning Bureau) which mainly deals with economic developments and the Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving (Planning Agency for the Living Environment).

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.scp.nl/Organisatie/Wat\\_is\\_het\\_SCP](https://www.scp.nl/Organisatie/Wat_is_het_SCP) (accessed 15 June 2017).



church affiliation, participation in ecclesiastical rituals, religious socialization and the societal prestige of the churches. However, according to the SCP religion is broader than ecclesiasticity and therefore the study includes other religious dimensions such as belief in God or supernatural/metaphysical realities and individual manners of religious practice (e.g.: prayer), the self-definition as religious person, and the belief in Christian doctrines.<sup>13</sup> The introduction of the report is clear about that it does not include an analysis of all the aspects that have been discussed in the light of the secularization debate. For the most part the report is concentrated on a description of a number of changes in religious participation and belief of the Dutch people that manifested themselves since the sixties of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Concerning the results, I will focus on the following questions: how is religiosity measured? What are significant changes of the last decennia? what is the position of the 'paraculture' within Dutch society?

### Religious map of the Netherlands according to the SCP

How can we define the contemporary religious map of the Netherlands according to the SCP? The general observation is that the trend of a decline in church attendance, involvement and membership is still ongoing, even though the rate is differing. This implies that church membership is quite static (percent decrease is low), while church attendance and involvement of the members is further falling. In 2004, 44% (75% in 1970) of the Dutch people is still a church member and 40% regards oneself as a religious person, but only 38% (67% in 1970) of the members attend church at least once in two weeks. But not all churches had an increasing loss in membership, denominations as the *Unitas fratrum* (Moravian Church), some Pentecostal churches and Evangelical churches experience significant growth, partly through immigration. Another group, the unchurched<sup>15</sup>, contains 34% of the Dutch population in 2004, but it is the question whether this a stagnating group, for especially from the young generation (1975-88)<sup>16</sup> so many people already left the churches and it seems that they had their peak in the 90s.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the SCP finds no reason to assume trends that go in a direction against secularization, but I will come back to that point later on.

### Religious beliefs, practices and alternative religiosity

Besides the situation of church membership and church attendance, religious belief, attitude and practice has been questioned. Where does the SCP think to find the answers? In asking about the Bible, prayer, belief in life after death, heaven, hell and religious miracles, as well as about moral

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<sup>13</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> The unchurched call themselves a religious person fairly quickly (21% of the unchurched). (*Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 13).

<sup>16</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 41;44.

issues like abortion and homosexuality. Finally, they measure alternative religiosity based on specific elements from what they call “paraculture”, which will be mentioned later on. The overall picture affirms that the belief in God is decreasing in comparison to earlier research: in 2002 52% of the Dutch people believe in God, in 2001 the percentage was 58%, and in 1947 still 80%.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, people are not less affirmative about the general belief in life after death (ca. 50%) and 40% do even believe in heaven, but the belief in hell remains low with 26%. A further surprise is that the belief in religious miracles is not declining, 44% thinks that they might be possible.<sup>19</sup> It is, however, not clear what people associate with miracles, it might be the case that it only indicates that there are things that go beyond human rationality. Concerning moral issues, the attitude of the Dutch has not changed much between 1991 and 1998, in 1998 55% of the Dutch are against adultery, 36% against abortion and only 16% against homosexuality (disapproval was measured).<sup>20</sup> The belief among church members in the usefulness of prayer has been declining since 1966, as is the belief that the Bible is the word of God and that Adam and Eve really existed.<sup>21</sup> Among the Dutch population in general, 40% (2002) still believes that prayer is useful.<sup>22</sup> Concerning the different churches and the unchurched, the SCP found that the Catholics are less orthodox than the protestant denominations, the loosely involved church members less than the core members, and the unchurched are the least orthodox of all.<sup>23</sup>

What about alternative religiosity? The SCP mentioned that the Dutch people feel most related to Christianity (65%), closely followed by no belief at all (61%).<sup>24</sup> The feeling of connectedness to other religions (Judaism, Buddhism, Evangelicalism, New Age, Hinduism and Islam) is comparatively and respectively low. Nevertheless, since there are so many people outside the Christian tradition, are there popular alternative ways of being religious? The SCP tries to find alternative religion in what they call the “paraculture”, focusing on the following beliefs: belief in whether amulets bring luck, fortune-tellers can predict the future, stars determine the course of (one’s) life, and prayer healing. Clearly, people who do not believe at all are the least affirmative about these beliefs, followed by ex-believers and with higher degrees of affirmation by those who for sure believe in God. These belief elements are held to be true the most among those who believe in a higher power and those who are recent believers.<sup>25</sup> But the percentage for the para-cultural beliefs is only between the 20% and 30% throughout the Netherlands, at the same time the SCP has not used comparative sources and

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<sup>18</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 10;93.

<sup>19</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 83-84.

the observations are derived from a research of the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) in 1998.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusions and future expectations

One question is left: What conclusion(s) does the SCP draw from their results and what is their hypothesis concerning future predictions about religion in the Netherlands? The report also looked in how far parents are engaged in raising their children religiously or with a specific philosophical orientation. It turned out that almost half of the Dutch people do not raise their children religiously at all and one third put regular effort into it.<sup>27</sup> This aspect is certainly linked to the high percentage of people that left the church during the last decades and is at least less interested in traditional Christian religiosity and participation, which is why an increasing number of young people grow up without a Christian (religious) background. The assumption of the SCP is a “Plafondeffect”, indicating that “because so many young people have turned their back on the churches a probably unchangeable and stable kernel of churchgoers remains, which means that finally the youngest generation unchurched becomes determinative for the whole population.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the SCP argues that even after secularization, Christianity is still not part of the paraculture, which divides society into three spheres: modern science, paraculture, and institutionalized monotheistic religion. Finally, the SCP concludes that while religion is individualized, democratized and less compulsive, there is also spiritual longing that draws on a variety of sources and is hard to capture by traditional religious terms. The SCP regards this kind of religiosity and/or spirituality as a new phenomenon, and describes it as a philosophical or religious patchwork-identity.<sup>29</sup> All in all, according to the SCP, no developments or trends that go against secularization have been observed.

### CBS report 2009

The Statistics Netherlands (CBS – Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek) is one of the main sources for statistical information about the religiosity in the Netherlands. The organization has an autonomous administrative body (ZBO) which means that the CBS operates independently and not under the direct authority of the Dutch ministry. Subjects of interest are those that affect the lives of Dutch citizens directly, such as economic growth, consumer prices but also leisure.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the CBS is concerned with a broad range of coherent factors that play a significant role within Dutch society, and religion is one of those elements.

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<sup>26</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Becker and de Hart, *Godsdienstige Veranderingen*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/over-ons/organisatie>, (accessed 15 June 2017).

“Religie aan het begin van de 21ste eeuw” (henceforth: Religion at the beginning of the 21st century) is a publication of the year 2009 and as far as I know the only statistical research publication by the CBS about religion and religiosity in the Netherlands. The research report maps the religiosity of the Dutch people and the general role of religion within Dutch society. It is based on statistics of the year 2008 and earlier research and literature<sup>31</sup> to demonstrate changes concerning the subject. To give a clear summary and a valid basis to analyze the findings of the report, the focus will be on the following questions: How does the CBS define religion and how does it measure religiosity and the value of religion? What are the main questions they try to answer and where did they find significant correlations in their results?

### Roman Catholics, Protestants, and unaffiliated respondents in perspective

How did the CBS measure and approach religiosity? As the title of the report “Religion at the beginning of the 21st century” already reveals, the aim of the research is to get an insight into the contemporary importance of religion for the social cohesion by looking at the role of religion from different perspectives and finding religious factors and patterns.<sup>32</sup> The CBS decided to focus on certain social and societal activities of the Roman Catholics, Protestants and the unaffiliated respondents. Besides, they also look for religious patterns that are related to age, generational differences, gender and education levels.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the report also includes information about the religiosity of immigrants and the role of religion in connection with integration.

The introduction gives no information about how religion or religiosity is defined but the titles of the table of contents gives the implication, although not used as a synonym, that religion/religiosity is closely linked to Christianity and more specifically with churchanity/ecclesiasticity. The general picture is that 58% of the Dutch population in 2008 accounts for one of the church denominations or philosophical movements. Of this group 29% belong to the Roman Catholic Church, 9% to the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK), 4% to the Gereformeerden, and 4% to the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN). Besides, 4 % is Islamic and 6% has affiliation with another church- or philosophical movement. The remaining 42% call themselves unchurched.<sup>34</sup> Based on individual data the CBS

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<sup>31</sup> The CBS draws for example on earlier CBS research on census and church communities/denominations (1971), the findings by the SCP rapport “Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland (2006)” that I already illustrated earlier, and “Betrekkelijke betrokkenheid” (2008) which is another publication of the SCP. Also on academic literature about religion in the Netherlands, as for example the work *De religieuze kaart van Nederland: Omvang en gezindten vanaf de Reformatie tot heden* (1998), written by Knippenberg.

<sup>32</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 10,

<sup>34</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 3.

linked religiosity to various aspects of social coherence and context<sup>35</sup>, such as: Voluntary work, informal help, social contacts, health and lifestyles, political participation, political views, experienced problems, and trust in institutions as well as social trust.<sup>36</sup> These indicators were linked to churchgoing, membership of religious organizations and volunteering for the church, for example.<sup>37</sup> While church members are more likely to do volunteer work than others, there is no significant correlation between religiosity and national problems, with the exception that churchgoers and believers are more concerned with moral issues than non-churchgoers/non-believers.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, concerning some debate issues there is also a recognizable difference among the different religious denominations, as for example regarding euthanasia the believer and (frequent) churchgoers agree less with this form of life-ending whereas Catholics and non-churchgoers often support euthanasia. Also adoption by homosexual couples, homosexual marriage and the closure of shops on Sundays is disapproved more often by believers and church-goers than by non-churchgoers/believers and Catholics.<sup>39</sup> Religiosity is also measured by churchgoing to say something about the differences among the different denominations. Whereas the gereformeerden the PKN'ers, and the smaller denominations attend church services weekly, the other denominations are less attending, the Catholics the least and from the Hervormden around 50% also attend rarely or never.<sup>40</sup>

### Secularization and churchlyness

In their research, the CBS makes a difference between two processes, on the one hand churchlyness and on the other hand secularization. They find that although secularization is still an ongoing process it has become less rapidly and perhaps even stagnated, while churchlyness is increasingly declining. There is however a difference among the various denominations, some lost many of their members while other movements are growing. As main reason for secularization is referred to the process of individualization, lifting of religious barriers (ontzuijing), the aging of the church-affiliated generation, as well as modernization, secularization and institutional differentiation, and the influence of international migration waves.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the findings of the CBS indicate that unaffiliated people are still attached to belief though it might not be clear what that exactly means. It seems that they wish to believe something and wish to belong somewhere, albeit it does

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<sup>35</sup> The CBS derived data from Permanent Onderzoek Leefsituatie (POLS) (transl. Permanent Research Living Situation), the Nationaal Kiesonderzoek (NKO) (transl. National Electoral Research), and the Survey Integratie Minderheden (SIM) (transl. Survey Integration Minorities).

<sup>36</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 129.

<sup>37</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 78.

<sup>38</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 87.

<sup>39</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 22.

not mean membership of one of the main denominations<sup>42</sup>.<sup>43</sup> It appeared that the number of people who describe themselves as believers but who are not church-affiliated, increased (25% in 2006) compared to some years ago (16% in 1989).

The CBS concludes from these results that “Apparently, it was previously less likely for people to experience belief outside of the church, and belonged more unbelieving people to a church than in the present.”<sup>44</sup> Without further reference the CBS quotes Becker and De Hart to formulate the present religiosity in the Netherlands as being individualized and democratized – people take existential meaning from different sources with less institutional pressure.<sup>45</sup> Based on this perception the CBS speaks of a formal secularization and the de-institutionalization of religiosity/religiousness<sup>46</sup>, implying that religiosity goes along with a strong consciousness and personal choice.

The research, however, gives no more information about what the churchgoers actually believe, practice and what role religion or belief plays in their daily life. Concerning the unchurched it is totally unclear why they are not members of the church – have they left the church or haven’t they been raised religious or in a church and just never joined a church? As already mentioned, the CBS says that the unchurched are still believing something and wish to be part of something, unfortunately they deliver no further information than this short notation and that the unchurched still value ecclesiastical inauguration of marriage and the farewell service at the funeral, information they adopted from De Hart.<sup>47</sup> It is surprising that this is the only information that is given about the unchurched since they mention already in the introduction of the chapter “Kerkelijkheid en kerkelijke diversiteit, 1889-2008”, that the de-institutionalization of Christianity has grown that much that it can be counted as the most important movement (hoofdstroming) since 1989.<sup>48</sup> The title of the research is, of course, “Religion at the beginning of the 21st century”, and justifying the focus on religion in relation with churchliness, health, lifestyle, politics, national problems, and so forth.<sup>49</sup> But isn’t religiosity the most important aspect in measuring or determining the position of religion in the 21st century? People are the ones who engage in religion and determine the role of religion in a society in the first place and not religion as a cultural component itself, or not?

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<sup>42</sup> By main denominations, the CBS refers to the Hervormden, Protestants and Catholics. (*Religie aan het begin*, 13).

<sup>43</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Originally: “kennelijk was men vroeger minder geneigd om het geloof buiten de kerk te beleven en behoorden meer ongelovige mensen toch tot een kerk dan nu het geval is.” (Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 97).

<sup>45</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Referred to De Hart, 2008, and Becker and De Hart, 2006 in: Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Schmeets, *Religie aan het begin*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> The table of contents in *Religie aan het begin* (Schmeets), covers all subjects that have been researched.

## God in Nederland report 2016

God in the Netherlands (God in Nederland, further: GIN) is a research commissioned by the KRO (Catholic Radio Broadcasting) that has been carried out every 10 years since 1966, thus covering a time period of 50 years. God in Nederland (GIN) gives a great overview about the changing religiosity and attitude toward religion in the Netherlands. The survey is done every 10 years and this edition mostly compares the results of 2015 and 2006. The respondents are divided into different groups: church members (also divided by denomination) and the unchurched (unaffiliated believers, unaffiliated spirituals, seculars). The research limits itself to two groups of respondents, the ones who regard themselves as church members and the ones outside the church (the unchurched). People who are connected with another religious community are not included in the research.<sup>50</sup> The researchers of the most recent publication are Joantine Berghuijs<sup>51</sup> from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Ton Bernts<sup>52</sup> from the Radboud Universiteit. The work contains data from 1966 to 2015 and was published in 2016, focusing on religious views and church practices and attitudes.<sup>53</sup>

The content of the research covers information about how the Dutch generally think about religion in society, whether there is, besides secularization, also a process of internal secularization, what the church members and the unchurched believe and how they participate in religion (and spirituality), and what the differences and similarities are between the two groups of respondents. Especially unaffiliated religiosity is discussed based on concepts of “Believing without Belonging”<sup>54</sup>, “Vicarious Religion”<sup>55</sup>, or “Longing without Belonging”. It will be interesting to look at GIN’s findings, main observations, and conclusions in the light of how they approach and define religion/religiosity and spirituality.

## Religious map of the Netherlands according to GIN

The general religious map of the Netherlands looks according to the results of this research as follows: around a quarter of the Dutch people is a church member (12% Catholic, 9% PKN, 4% smaller protestant churches, 1% other Christian churches, 5% Islamic, 2% other non-Christian religions, and

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<sup>50</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Dr. Joantine Berghuijs has a PostDoc position at the Vrije University of Amsterdam at the faculty of theology, and focuses on beliefs and practices in the Netherlands.

<sup>52</sup> Ton Bernts is director of KASKI, the Research Center for Religion and Society at the Radboud University. Bernts has studied cultural and religious psychology, and his expertise is the position of churches and identity-driven organizations within a secular context.

<sup>53</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 38. A concept derived from Grace Davie (1994), referring to the observation of a substantial group of believers outside the church (even though the churches are shrinking).

<sup>55</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 38. Another concept from Grace Davie (2000), implying that the churches lost a great part of their relevance but do still find some support for their public utility and function for the purpose of commemorations, social care and moral broadcasts.

68% unchurched).<sup>56</sup> The largest group are thus the unchurched, a percentage that goes hand in hand with the observation that the number of church membership and participation is decreasing, also called a double secularization by GIN.<sup>57</sup> This group again, is subdivided into “unaffiliated believers” who regard themselves not (anymore) as church member but still as believers and sometimes as spiritual, called the “unaffiliated spirituals”, and the final subgroup are the “seculars” who are neither church members nor do they regard themselves as believers or spirituals.<sup>58</sup>

How much relevance do the Dutch people attribute to the role of religion in society? Measured or based on the relevance of religion concerning rites of passage as birth or death, the maintenance of standards and values, commemorations, the raising of children, guidance of how to live together in a society, pointing to social misdeeds, national holidays, for the sake of sobriety, the identity as Dutch or European citizen, and alike<sup>59</sup>, GIN found that the social importance of religion is declining in comparison with the results of 2006. This attitude does also count for the moral role of religion, and even church members think more often that society will not topple when the belief in God would disappear. The reason for decline is in the first place not that people think that religion is not relevant, but the increasing tendency to have no opinion about the subject.

#### *Christianity inside and outside the church*

What about the Christian belief inside and outside of the church? To answer this question, GIN focuses on certain Christian doctrines, experiences, rituals, and their general attitude towards the existence of God. First, they asked whether people believe in God or a higher power, categorizing people into theists, ietsists (somethingism), agnostics, and atheists. The trend shows that there is a decrease in theism and ietsism and an increase in agnosticism and atheism.<sup>60</sup> Among the church members a decline in theism is observed, although the PKN and the smaller Church movements are still above 50% theists, while we find among the RKK more ietsists and agnostics than theists. Generally, atheism is the only category that is barely represented among the church members. Atheism is mostly found among the seculars (46%), while 0% is theist. The “unaffiliated spirituals” and “unaffiliated believers” are mainly ietsists and agnostics, with the difference that the former are more often agnostics while the latter are more often ietsists. Moreover, among the “unaffiliated spirituals” are only 1% theists, while 16% of the “unaffiliated believers” still believes in God. In comparison with the results of 2006, GIN discovers the trend of a general decrease in transcendental beliefs. A growing number of people does not believe that Jesus was the son of God or that the Bible

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<sup>56</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 23-25; 30-31.

<sup>58</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 65.



is the actual word of God, for example. Also, less people believe in life after death. In that sense one can speak of an internal secularization, signifying a shift from transcendental towards a more immanent interpretation of the Christian belief within the Church.<sup>61</sup> However, it does not seem to be the case that people increasingly deny the possibility of Christian belief aspects or doctrines to be true, but instead there is a growth of uncertainty intensifying doubt. This observation is not limited to aspects of belief but is also true for religious practices as praying and the significance of religion or spirituality in one's daily life. What belief or spiritual facets exist apart from Christian faith aspects?

#### *Approaching alternative religiosity and spirituality*

GIN refers to the challenge of measuring spirituality and alternative religiosity in the Netherlands, for there is not automatically a new standard-set of questions to measure alternative "religiosity" along the observation of a decrease in traditional belief and practice.<sup>62</sup> What alternative ways of belief and practice can be found outside institutional religion, and how to measure it? GIN mainly tries to find the answers by a scale of various religious/spirituality describing statements, and asking the respondents about their religiosity/spirituality. In the former, the seculars are included, in the latter not for they claim no religious or spiritual identity.

#### *"New Religiosity" - statements-scale*

The religiosity/spirituality of the respondents (all groups included) is measured by the full or partial agreement to religious and spiritual statements which are headed under the subject "New Spirituality".<sup>63</sup> The "New Spirituality" items are categorized by "self-spirituality"<sup>64</sup>, "seekership"<sup>65</sup>, "Syncretism"<sup>66</sup>, and finally "Connection and Transcendence"<sup>67, 68</sup>.

The findings reveal that unaffiliated believers are most related to "self-spirituality", while "seekership" and "syncretism" are mostly endorsed among unaffiliated spirituals, involving the

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<sup>61</sup> Although GIN observed a trend of internal secularization, it is important to remind that there are differences among the different churches (denominations). Especially among some smaller Church denominations, no internal secularization process was found. The indicators for internal secularization are most present at the RKK, followed by the PKN churches. (Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 66-73).

<sup>62</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 93-94.

<sup>63</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 152-153.

<sup>64</sup> Self-spirituality: Religiosity is not about church attendance, it is personal, and truth is to be found in the inner-self.

<sup>65</sup> Seekership: True religiosity is incompatible with doubt, religion is constantly changing in one's life, religion is more about search than about convictions, questions are more important than answers.

<sup>66</sup> Syncretism: Religion can be drawn from various sources, religion can be collected from the wisdom of different traditions and ideas, depending on what fits you the best, different lifestyles and practices can be combined.

<sup>67</sup> Connection and Transcendence: There is something that connects humans, earth and nature with each other, life is led through a spiritual force that is more powerful than any human being, belief in an afterlife in combination with reincarnation).

<sup>68</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 153.

search for one's inner truth or godly spot and to find the right or personal way to live one's life. Concerning "connection and transcendence", the church members who still attend church are the greatest adherents of vertical transcendence (based on their score on monism and the conviction that their life is led by a spiritual power), whereas horizontal transcendence is particularly present among the unaffiliated spirituals, of whom only 6% think that their life is led by a spiritual power.<sup>69</sup> Of the seculars, 46% thinks one needs to listen to the inner voice (self-spirituality) and 39% agrees that different lifestyles and practices can be combined.<sup>70</sup> In general, and unsurprisingly, the secular score the lowest on most statements.

#### Personal description of one's spirituality or religiosity

GIN takes a further step in clarifying what is meant by religiosity or spirituality, in asking the respondents to describe their religiosity and/or spirituality. Afterwards GIN summarizes its findings, and when asked about their spirituality or belief 79% of the respondents corresponded with one or more of the following terms: God, life, human, church, good, earth, Jesus, heaven, world, something, catholic, upbringing, love, strength, rest, not sure.<sup>71</sup> All descriptions brought together in perspective, GIN concludes that it finds great diversity among the meaning of belief and spirituality. While some people hold on to traditional belief, others clearly distance themselves from that. There are those who have a transcendent interpretation of reality, and those who have a clear secular view. The same diversity counts for the formulation of one's religiosity or spirituality. Some formulate and describe their belief or spirituality very explicit, whereas others are inexplicit or even doubtful about it. About the difference between spirituality and belief, it turned out that spirituality is more related to practical and emotional things, whereas belief is more about convictions. One might say, that belief or religiosity/religion is more concerned with truth and spirituality with finding comfort in the idea of 'more between heaven and earth' with indifference towards questions about truth. However, 32% of the religious and spirituals filled nothing in or said "I do not know". Thus, a third claims to be religious or spiritual but has no idea, or at least no words, to say why or what religiosity/spirituality is or means to them.<sup>72</sup>

#### The various profiles of the respondents

##### Profile "church members"

In the description of their belief and/or spirituality, many church members simply stated "I believe in God", others gave a more detailed outline in which they refer to Jesus as the savior, for example.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 155.

<sup>70</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 101.

<sup>73</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 103.

Some wrote down the entire apostolic creed, or see God as the power of life, or mention the centrality of the church or the bible. But there are also people who find it difficult to describe and attribute their belief to the irrelevance of life if there was no God, that life makes no sense if there is no God.<sup>74</sup> Or that there must be more because coincidence does not exist. In general it was obvious that a specific God-image was rare; rather, people talked about the existence or the belief in God, or what God does. Concerning the meaning of God or belief in their lives, the church members can be identified in their use of the word “life”, associating it with meaning-making, a guideline of how to live or as a supportive element in life.

#### *Profile “unaffiliated believers”*

When the “unaffiliated believers” were asked about their religiosity and/or spirituality, they emphasize their independence of the church.<sup>75</sup> To them, belief and spirituality means that there is more in life and they find it important to have a good relation with their fellow humans and nature. The term God is negatively regarded when associated with tradition, rules and church; instead they prefer alternatives as “something”, “karma”, “reincarnation”, or “energy flows”.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, many “unaffiliated believers” stated in line with the church members “I believe in God” or “I believe in a God”.<sup>77</sup> In general, the religiosity of the unaffiliated believers is featured as distancing themselves from a traditional God-image and the church. God is not about restrictions or rules and no church is needed to get in contact with God. As church members they have generally no specific God-image, and their religiosity is linked to the idea that there is more in life (e.g. afterlife and/or that life has a purpose).

#### *Profile “unaffiliated spirituals”*

When the “unaffiliated spirituals” were asked about their spirituality they mostly select the terms life, good, human and earth, and only thereafter the word God was chosen, a term they distanced themselves of.<sup>78</sup> To them spirituality is described by the importance of personal responsibility in life, especially regarding fellow humans and nature, and/or linked to the belief that there are transcendental forces that influence life of which support/hope can be derived.<sup>79</sup> Others believe in the goodness of humanity, and the value of norms and values, for example.<sup>80</sup> From the given answers spirituality can be characterized by making your own choices from elements of different religious traditions, giving new interpretations to (ancient) beliefs, and searching for direct connection with

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<sup>74</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 103.

<sup>75</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 106.

<sup>76</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 108.

<sup>77</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 106.

<sup>78</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 109.

<sup>79</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 112.

<sup>80</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 110.

one's own experiences.<sup>81</sup> This spirituality draws on different sources such as various religions, psychology, and paranormal subjects. Generally, one part of the unaffiliated spirituals is characterized by the assumption that there is more in life than our physical substance in life (although they do not know exactly what), and the importance of self-knowledge (get to know your true self). The other part of the group is very rational and describes spirituality as providing rest and meditation in a stressful world, it appeases them that in the end everything will be fine.

### The overall picture of unaffiliated religiosity & spirituality

Based on the results throughout their research, GIN discusses the correspondence between existing concepts of unaffiliated religiosity and their findings. The concept of “believing without belonging” is used as labeling Christianity outside the church and refers therefore to the unaffiliated believers. The “unaffiliated believers” are for the most part still affiliated with Christian belief, they are almost equally Christian as the Catholics. However, can we speak of a stable group of “believing without belonging” or of a temporary intermediary group between church membership and non-believing? About 75% of this group was raised Christian and their religiosity is comparable to that of the Church members, though the religiosity of the unaffiliated believers seems to be more privatized, isolated, less intense and less orthodox. Concerning the stability of these unaffiliated believers it is interesting to notice that their nationwide percentage decreased by 9% since 2006, indicating that the category of “believing without belonging” is more temporary, or at least it is expected to decrease even more. Therefore, GIN concludes that this substantial group falls within the process of a receding Christianity in the Netherlands.<sup>82</sup> At the same time today's spirituality, referring first and foremost to the unaffiliated spirituals (who come more often from an already unchurched home), seems to focus mainly on self-transcendence, in the sense of letting go of the concept of the superiority of man, connecting with others, with nature or with everything (holism), to compassion, and cherishment of life. It is a transcendence associated with the reality of life in the here and now.<sup>83</sup> And, although belief in supernatural transcendence is still present among the spirituals, GIN finds itself confronted by the question of the boundaries between belief, spirituality, and the secular. Finally, due to an increasing amount of respondents who filled in the questions with “I don't know”, GIN is reminded of the phenomenon “longing without belonging”<sup>84</sup>, a concept that refers to the uncertainty that prevents people to believe.

Besides the phenomenon of “believing without belonging” and “longing without believing”, GIN talks about hybrid or vicarious religion, as well as the sympathy with humanism. By hybrid or

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<sup>81</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 94.

<sup>82</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 82-83.

<sup>83</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 148. A concept adopted from Staf Helleman (2007).

vicarious religion, GIN refers to religiosity drawn from various sources: 24% of the Dutch feel affiliated with more than one religion, 67% with at least one religion, and 33% do not feel affiliated with any religion.<sup>85</sup> The majority (67-77%)<sup>86</sup> of all respondents agrees on the possibility that religion can spring out of many sources, that one has to gather religion in the wisdom of all kinds of traditions and ideas, and that one can combine different wisdoms of life and practices with what fits best with oneself.<sup>87</sup> The most common combinations are Christian elements with Buddhism.<sup>88</sup> Some elements of eastern religions like yoga, reincarnation and chakras are commonplace today.<sup>89</sup> It is also interesting that only 20% believes their own religion is the only true belief or religion.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, a quarter of the Dutch sympathize with humanism, but it was left out of further consideration in this research because it is a view based on the dignity of people and finds its inspiration in human abilities.<sup>91</sup> Humanism is regarded as a political-moral pursuit for a good life and GIN does not wish to extend the perspective from religion to philosophical life orientations. However, GIN includes meaning-making into their research to find the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity.

### GIN and Meaning-making

GIN includes the meaning-making dimension in its research with the argument that with the decline of traditional religion (Christianity), an important source of meaning-making disappears. Besides, the topic of meaning-making aims to provide more insights into the beliefs and motivations of people, and to find out the interest in transcendental beliefs among the Dutch. Transcendence is often used in relation to the existence of higher power, God, or more generally a different reality than our daily living world. Literally transcendence means: "transcend", referring to a reality that transcends and affects ours. This use of transcendence can be called 'vertical transcendence': connection between top and bottom.<sup>92</sup> Today's spirituality seems to focus more on 'horizontal transcendence', in the sense of transcending oneself, letting go of the concept of the superiority of man, connecting with others, with nature or with everything (holism), to astonishment, to compassion, and cherishment of life. It is a transcendence associated with the reality of life in the here and now.<sup>93</sup> In how far do the Dutch think about meaning-making, and what sources are there apart from transcendental belief?

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<sup>85</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 133.

<sup>86</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 129.

<sup>87</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 129.

<sup>88</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 126.

<sup>89</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 126.

<sup>90</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 139.

<sup>91</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 132-133.

<sup>92</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 148.

<sup>93</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 148.

GIN defines meaning-making as consisting of a cognitive element (understanding), and experience element (sense of meaning), and a pragmatical element (participation in reflection-activities). Based on a list of places or activities such as spiritual groups, religious groups, sport clubs, film-groups, and so on, GIN concluded that questions of meaning-making are first and foremost an individual thing, for 73% of the respondents stated that they are not confronted by meaning-making question in clubs.<sup>94</sup> Concerning reflection-activities, with the exception of burning a candle for something or someone, the participation in such activities is declining. Almost 40% does not participate in any of those activities at all. Even yoga and meditation are only popular among ca. 15% of the respondents.<sup>95</sup> Finally, GIN looked for moments or events in which people experience a feeling of unity to measure the experience-dimension of meaning-making. Besides religion as a source to provide a feeling of connection and belonging, sports matches, commemoration of the Second World War and catastrophes, events with regard to the royal house, and more, are much agreed sources for experiencing unity. GIN puts these findings under the heading of civil religion, but the question remains whether one can call these matters religious at all.

Generally, the results indicate that the interest in self-reflection concerning meaning-making is declining, at the same time there is not much difference between the groups of respondents with exception of the seculars. The seculars have clearly less affinity with meaning-making.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately GIN does not further discuss the question of boundaries, but concludes from their findings that we are living in a post-Christian Netherlands in which belief, spirituality and meaning-making have no boundaries. By that is meant that these elements are not concerned with borders between religious and secular.<sup>97</sup> Its second conclusion is that the decline in vertical transcendence is to some degree replaced by horizontal meaning-making. However, it is still unclear where to draw the line between religiosity, spirituality and the secular. Is it therefore necessary to clearly define religion to know what counts as religiosity? I am clearly a supporter of relational approaches, refusing to see the religious and non-religious/secular as clearly separate elements that exist in a binary opposition. Nevertheless, to talk about religiosity and non-religiosity we need to know the difference between the two, otherwise I think the following questions are unanswerable: Is there religion outside the church, is religion constantly changing, the way we talk about religion, or is religion declining?

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<sup>94</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 161.

<sup>95</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 162.

<sup>96</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 160.

<sup>97</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 93.

## Motivaction (WRR) report 2006

As a final institution that published a research-report about religion in the Netherlands, I wish to introduce the WRR. The Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR - Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) has the task of informing and advising the government on issues that are of major importance for society and help to give direction to long-term government policy decisions. Religion and religiosity in the Netherlands is part of their issues of interest and after a period of research, the WRR published its findings in 2006 under the name “Geloven in het publieke domein – Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie” (Believing in the public domain – Exploration of a double transformation). I call their research extensive because their report covers a wide range of subjects regarding religion and comparative material, as for example French laicism and Canadian multiculturalism, as well as an illustration of different religion related approaches, theories and concepts. It is important to note that the WRR did not set up a survey themselves but used findings of different empirical research studies, as for example from the CBS, the European Value Study, World Values Survey (Inglehart e.a.), KASKI, Hindoeraad, Culturele Veranderingen in Nederland, SCP, European Social Survey, Motivaction, and more. I will limit the display of their findings to the report-chapter “Leefstijlen en Zingeving”<sup>98</sup> (Lifestyles and meaning-making) in which Gerrit Kronjee and Martijn Lampert present and interpret the results of a research done by Motivaction<sup>99</sup>. Motivaction used the aspect of meaning-making to bring the believers and non-believers into perspective, with the focus on the following question: “what do people believe who claim to be non-believers and what do people not believe who claim to be believers?”<sup>100</sup>

The report, based on the findings of Motivaction, must be read in the light of the broader question of the whole WRR research into about the relation between religion and the public domain, and in this part the authors argue that we must talk about a transformation of religion instead of secularization. They suggest that the change of religion goes along a general change of society in which we experience a de-traditionalization on different levels. Not only are the churches running empty, people also less identify on the level of class, family or heritage. Instead, people express their

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<sup>98</sup> Gerrit Kronjee and Martijn Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving”, in *Geloven in Het Publiek Domein: Verkenningen Van Een Dubbele Transformatie - 13*. WRR Verkenning (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 171-208.

<sup>99</sup> Gerrit Kronjee is a sociologist who studied at Leiden University and Martijn Lampert is Research Director at Motivaction. As independent research and consultancy bureau, Motivaction researches the values, motives and lifestyle of people and organizations. Motivaction is a research bureau that combines business interests, academic depth and societal motivations and translates them into specific opportunities. (<https://www.motivaction.nl/en/about-motivaction>, accessed 9 October 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Originally: “Waarın geloven mensen die zeggen niet te geloven? En waarin geloven mensen niet die zeggen te geloven?” (Kronjee and Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving”, 171).

identity increasingly in “lifestyles”, or as Featherstone calls it the “Stylization of life”<sup>101</sup>, a society in which esthetics and experience (hedonism) are central. Motivaction calls it “Erlebnisgesellschaft”<sup>102</sup>, a term and phenomenon he adopted from Gerhard Schulze, referring to individuals positioning him- or herself in the collective character of lifestyles. Concerning religion, the question is now whether the religious need or the religious offer changes. Are there other institutions that took over the role of the church, providing the same fulfillment as the transcendental character of religion? In this research the aim is to bring the relation and/or differences among belief, unbelief and meaning-making into perspective.

### Categorization of the respondents

The research into the meaning of life among Dutch citizens, was in 2003 performed by Motivaction among ca. 2000 people, who were asked about meaning-making-related questions. The research was done with open question, without the option to choose between different categories or answers, and thus a “snapshot”. In that way they got to know what people really think or experience concerning meaning/purpose and life, providing a good starting point to say something reliable or authentic about the present. In the research, religion is regarded as one of the sources for meaning-making, among others like for example humanism. And within the religious or transcendental forms of meaning-making they make a distinction between “affiliated believers” and “unaffiliated spirituals”. Besides, they allocated the respondents into six groups, based on their view of life. The first group are the “unaffiliated spirituals”; they see themselves as religious or spiritual but not as a member of a religious or spiritual community. The second are the Christians, who regard themselves as religious/spiritual and are members of a church. The third group are the other affiliated religious people, who are members of a non-Christian religious or spiritual community, mostly Islamic. Then, there is a group of people who are not religious or spiritual, they are the non-religious group and are subdivided into three further groups. Based on their score on the humanistic-values-scale, this group is divided into “non-religious, non-humanistic”, “non-religious, moderately humanistic”, and “Non-religious, humanistic”. To measure the degree of humanism, Motivaction mainly used the value-scale by Schwartz<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving”, 173. Read more about the “Stylization of life” in *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 1991 and 2007) written by Mike Featherstone.

<sup>102</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving”, 173. Read more about “Erlebnisgesellschaft” in *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt/Main etc.: Campus, first ed. 1992), written by Gerhard Schulze.

<sup>103</sup> The scale of Schwartz consists of 10 goal related basic values: Power (“social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources”), Self-direction (“Defining goal: independent thought and action--choosing, creating, exploring”), Stimulation (Defining goal: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life), Hedonism (“Defining goal: pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself”), Achievement (“Defining goal: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards”), Security (“Defining goal:



## Meaning-making among the respondents

Besides the categorization of the respondents based on their religious and humanistic attitudes, they have been asked about what provides meaningfulness in their lives, and how they express this in the choices they make. The given answers were inventoried and ordered along five dimensions with descriptive features, of which only the striking scores will be mentioned.<sup>104</sup> The social/moral dimension was among 50% of the respondents an important source and mostly marked by the significance for family and friends, as well as respect, tolerance, attention for others, work hard, etc. Its expression is mostly characterized by caring for others. Transcendence is, with 38%, the second most important source and defined by belief and spirituality (explicit as in belief in God/Allah, or implicit in believing in something more). This source finds expression in following religious rules, the Bible, Qur'an, church attendance, praying, and meditation.<sup>105</sup> Hedonism/egocentric (17%) implicates pleasure and happiness in life, while leading a conscious life in the 'here and now', being concerned with health.<sup>106</sup> Meaningfulness is attained through positive thinking, having fun, living intuitively, sports, take care of yourself, and so on. The fourth dimension is nihilism and characterized by no belief in anything and no deeper meanings, this, of course, is expressed by doing nothing.<sup>107</sup> The last dimension is other/else, within this dimension trust in oneself or in the future were named, as well as other answers (9%), and 8% had no idea. This dimension is expressed by having no idea or no answer, well-considered choices and carefully thinking before acting.

## Significant sources of meaning-making among the different groups of respondents

Concerning their sources of meaning-making, it was found that the Christians score the highest on transcendence and lower on social/moral, hedonism, and nihilism. Religion or belief in God plays a significant role, as well as loving and caring for others. Generally, this group is characterized by a pious, modest, and dutiful attitude.<sup>108</sup> The unaffiliated spirituals, thus all respondents who see themselves as unaffiliated religious and/or spiritual individuals, are distinct from the affiliated religious people in their distance to doctrines and membership, and a higher score in self-determination and hedonism. Furthermore, this group is characterized by transcendental beliefs,

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safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self"), Conformity ("Defining goal: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms"), Tradition ("Defining goal: respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides"), Benevolence ("Defining goal: preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group')"), and Universalism ("Defining goal: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature"). Shalom H. Schwartz, "An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values" in *Online readings in Psychology and Culture* 2.1 (2012): 5-7.

<sup>104</sup> More details about the characteristics of the dimensions are to be found in table 6.1 on page 178.

<sup>105</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 178.

<sup>106</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 178.

<sup>107</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 178.

<sup>108</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 187.

spiritual orientation, empathic, directed towards harmony with the world, and trust in their own intuition.<sup>109</sup> Their spirituality is expressed by transcendental, intrinsic motivation and intuition<sup>110</sup> Motivation defines this form of religion/spirituality as an alternative, personalized experience of the transcendental. Transcendence is practically useful for one's health and the societal functioning of a person.<sup>111</sup> At least, this is what Motivaction concludes, although I am not sure on which findings their argument is based. Concerning meaning-making and its expression, this groups consults a variety of sources. Among the sources, intuitive development, books about mental coaching, regression-therapists, mediums, talk-groups, etc., are popular. Sometimes these interests are accompanied by the formation of non-institutionalized groups. Nevertheless, the focus is not always on the transcendental, tv-programs such as Dr.Phil and Oprah, mediums as Char and Jomanda, are successful among the unaffiliated spirituals too. And these programs are more about the belief or assumption that every human being has a higher purpose in life to unfold one's talents into wisdom or growth, and not so much focused on transcendence.<sup>112</sup> The main difference with the religious groups is that the non-religious have a stronger focus on the worldly, self-determination, hedonism and nihilism.<sup>113</sup>

While the non-humanistic group scores the highest on nihilism (many had no answer to the question about meaning-making) and hedonism, it is low in tolerance and not really involved in society; the humanistic category is open-minded, tolerant and finds fun and happiness important as sources of meaning-making. Moreover, the non-humanistic group, of course, scores low on all Schwartz-values, while the humanistic group scores high on most values. The group in-between, the moderate humanists, score the highest on hedonism but also high on the social/moral dimension and nihilism. To them, besides family and friends, happiness and fun are likewise sources of meaning-making. And based on the results (of the groups defined along the Schwartz basic values) of their findings Kronjee and Lampert conclude that there has developed a source of meaning-making along religion and spirituality (thus along the transcendental dimension). This new source is a individualistic, hedonistic and materialistic oriented market that is centered on entertainment, brand, experiences, festivals, advertising camps, etc. and provides satisfaction in the here and now but not in a long-term or fundamental way as religion does.<sup>114</sup> This kind of meaning-making is linked to the idea or observation of a lifestyle-society or "Erlebnisgesellschaft". Moreover, we see that the humanistic group also draws meaning from family and friends, happiness and fun.

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<sup>109</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 184.

<sup>110</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 184.

<sup>111</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 185.

<sup>112</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 185-186.

<sup>113</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 183.

<sup>114</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 192.

## The four empirical research reports in perspective

The reports of the CBS, SCP, and GIN are very much related against the background of the secularization debate, and focus mostly on church participation and attendance, with the aim to bring contemporary religiosity among the Dutch into perspective and grasp how the situation of religion has changed throughout the last decades. It is obvious that these three reports still pay a lot of attention to the situation of the church (institutional Christianity) and peoples' thoughts about the relevance of religion in society and aspects of Christian belief/doctrines. In that sense one might say that Christianity, and especially the church, is still taken as the starting point or core marker for research into Dutch religiosity. All reports affirm the further decline of church membership and participation, although the latter is decreasing more rapidly. However, a quite stable core group of churchgoers, especially among the youngest generation, has been recognized. While the SCP focused on religiosity and religion against the background of the secularization theory and therefore compared numbers and percentages among different European countries, the CBS had the same focus but did not enter the level of comparison. Moreover, the SCP included the notion of a paraculture, related to spirituality or alternative religiosity, to which the CBS pays no attention. GIN pays even more attention to alternative religion and wants to know what people believe inside and outside the churches, whether there is a stable group of non-institutional Christian believers and the contemporary situation of spirituality among the Dutch people.

Concerning the categorization of the respondents, all the reports, except from the CBS, identified respondents as religious when they regard themselves as religious/spiritual. The CBS defined religiosity by church membership with the consequence that religion is not only limited to Christianity generally but to membership, and therefore not concerned with convictions in the first place. Of course, one might say that all those who do not distance themselves from membership are still religious, but then we only need to count the numbers in the register. Then, one might further ask about the convictions, rituals, beliefs and meaning of religion to the members and get a religious overview of formal membership. However, this only provides information about the position of the church among its formal members. To give an idea of contemporary religiosity among the Dutch, formal church membership is too limited for an overall picture. Although the SCP asked the respondents for self-identification, they mainly measured religiosity among traditional Christian aspects, such as reading the Bible, praying, church attendance, belief in life after death and miracles, and moral issues like abortion, euthanasia or homosexuality. This, I would argue, is perhaps the right way to measure the popularity or participation in traditional Christianity, but it does provide only so much information about "Religious change in the Netherlands" as the vitality of this traditional Christianity.

In contrast to the SCP and CBS, GIN attempt to obtain more detailed information about church-affiliated religiosity as well as unaffiliated religiosity and spirituality, partly including the seculars who do not regard themselves as either religious or spiritual. The research categorized all respondents based on their stance towards “vertical transcendence” (God or higher power) into theists, ietsists, agnostics, and atheists. The results showed that most unaffiliated believers and spirituals are agnostics or ietsists, that theism declined among the church members, and atheism is mostly found among the secular - of which none is a theist. Furthermore, GIN asked the respondents to explain what spirituality or religion means to them, leaving aside some self-evident meaning of the terms, but find out what people really think and believe, and whether the meaning of terms and words has changed. This, I think, is a valuable step, for it does not only provide information about the meaning of these terms, it provides a glimpse into the beliefs of the atheists, theists, agnostics, and ietsists, as well. Moreover, this approach makes the results particularly verifiable and reliable, and is an authentic glimpse into contemporary religiosity.

Whereas the SCP, CBS, and GIN share the aim of bringing contemporary religiosity in the Netherlands into perspective, Motivaction and GIN share their interest in the blurring boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity. Both focus on meaning-making to find answers, though in a different way. GIN is confronted by the difficulty to detect the boundaries between religion, spirituality and the secular, while Motivaction aims to bring the relation and/or differences among belief, unbelief and meaning-making into perspective with the support of humanism as a non-religious lifestyle. However, their approaches will be compared and analyzed later on for I would first like to introduce meaning-making as an angle to approach contemporary religiosity, based on its ability to bridge the gap between religiosity and non-religiosity. This will be followed by an overview of the research findings of Professor Tatjana Schnell, who is specialized in the subject of meaning-making. Finally, with that basis of knowledge within this mainly psychological field, the approaches of GIN and Motivaction can be put into context and enable to reflect on their approaches more extensive.

### Meaning-making as an item to measure religiosity

Meaning-making is a very broad field that has overlapping characteristics with religion and it is impossible to separate the two straightforward. One can regard the two as existing equally next to each other with overlapping features or, as I shall do for this thesis, regard religion as one of the many sources for meaning(-making). As such, we can include religiosity and spirituality in further research and at the same time look at what people believe or live for (what moves people) who do or do not regard themselves as religious or spiritual. Well, since it is obvious, regarding the results of the surveys, that we seem to live in a time-period in which the religious profile is clearly changing and

in a certain way also declining, we can choose between different manners of approaching the subject. For a long time, the discussion is or has been around the secularization theory and further theories that try to explain the contemporary role of religion and religiosity in, especially Western countries, as we have seen earlier with the Dutch reports. Perhaps a focus on the borders between religiosity and non-religiosity through meaning-making related to the research-findings, will provide more or different insights into contemporary religiosity. Religiosity has been researched on different levels, but what do we know about the people that are categorized or self-declared unaffiliated believers or spirituals, atheists, agnostics and seculars?

Under the general aspect of meaning(-making) religion can be seen as one of the sources next to other sources that (serve to) provide meaning in life. To bring the increasing group of non-religious Dutch citizens into perspective at the level of meaning-making, we enter the psychological domain. Psychology has done more fieldwork about meaning-making than any other academic field and for the interest of this paper the studies by Tatjana Schnell et al. about meaning-making will supply ideas to bring the non-religionists into perspective. I think that the level of meaning-making is a good starting point or alternative way to bring into perspective all those who turned their backs to the church, to religion in general, or never turned them towards religion. By finding out more about those who claim to be non-religious I expect to get more insights into contemporary religiosity. Are there characteristics other sources of meaning share with religion? Is religion even significant as a source of meaning? What makes a source of meaning religious or non-religious? This question is very difficult, since this asks for an essentialist definition of religion and moreover, what is it we would like to know about all the people who are non-religious? Tatjana Schnell might provide an interesting takeoff to approach these questions with her study about meaning-making in a “godless universe”.

## Chapter two: Tatjana Schnell – Researching Meaning-Making

The psychologist Tatjana Schnell carries out research about meaning-making in an atheist world among German-speaking people in Germany and Austria, with special attention for atheists. Schnell explores the content of meaning-making, explains why people are confronted by it, refers to the problem of measuring it, and presents how she tries to improve the reliability and accurateness of research tools. Some articles and reports<sup>115</sup>, as well as her 2016 published work *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*<sup>116</sup>, will help to get a comprehensive impression of her work and findings. It will be dealt with the definition and importance of meaning-making and various available sources of meaning, how the category of the religionists and non-religionists is determined, and of course the findings of the research(es) that have been carried out by Schnell and colleagues.

### Categorization of the respondents

As will be mentioned, Schnell approaches the field of meaning-making with different techniques, and therefore the respondents are in one study categorized based on self-definition<sup>117</sup>, and in another based on church membership and non-affiliation.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, Schnell and her colleagues use already constructed categories people would be divided into. Being aware of the plurality of different labels to signify certain attitudes toward religion, besides “religionists/spirituals”, the categories “nones”, “agnostics”, and “atheists” are maintained. The “nones” include “all those who are - for various (unknown) reasons - not church members - and a wide range of worldviews can therefore be assumed.”<sup>119</sup> Agnosticism is defined as “the view that the metaphysical question of god is unanswerable”<sup>120</sup>, and to define atheism Schnell et al. build on the Wucherer-Huldenfeld’s conception of an atheist as somebody “...who claims to categorically reject, to be sceptical or just indifferent to or ignorant of any religion and idea of the numinous.”<sup>121</sup> They chose for this working definition, to leave open the possibility of a positive relation between atheism and the numinous. Generally, atheism is defined as the denial of the existence of the divine and/or god(s) (German

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<sup>115</sup> Tatjana Schnell and W.J.F. Keenan, "Meaning-making in an atheist world," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33.1 (2011): 55-78. Tatjana Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity (DoS): An open inventory to measure facets of secular identities," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 25.4 (2015): 272-292. Tatjana Schnell, "Existential indifference: Another quality of meaning in life," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 50.3 (2010): 351-373.

<sup>116</sup> Tatjana Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns* (Berlin Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2016).

<sup>117</sup> In “Dimensions of Secularity” (2015) religiosity is based on the self-description as a religious person according to the question: irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person or a convinced atheist? (Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 273).

<sup>118</sup> In "Meaning-making", the respondents were categorized into religionists (church membership), atheists (identified when scored a 0 on personal religiosity and belief in the supernatural), and nones (no affiliation but also no atheists). (Schnell and Keenan, "Meaning-making", 63).

<sup>119</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 67.

<sup>120</sup> Blackburn (2008); Gessmann & Schmidt (2009) in Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity", 275.

<sup>121</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 60.

philosophical dictionary), and according to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy as “either the lack of belief that there exists a god, or the belief that there exists none”<sup>122</sup>.

### Defining meaning-making & sources of meaning-making

The crucial point about meaning is that it can be fulfilled or left empty. Acquiring an answer for what meaningfulness and its antagonist crisis of meaning consists of, Schnell defines meaningfulness as assessing “a fundamental sense of purpose, orientation, coherence, and belonging”<sup>123</sup>, while a crisis of meaning can be described as “the evaluation of life as frustratingly empty and lacking meaning.”<sup>124</sup> This led Schnell to argue for “purpose”, “orientation”, “coherence”, and “belonging” as the four criteria to assess meaningfulness. However, although one might think that we experience an either/or status, this is not always the case, for the awareness of meaningfulness is often unconscious. Implying that we are not always sure whether the mentioned things are the desired source(s) or the actual source(s) that are experienced as meaningful.<sup>125</sup>

Leaving us with the unconsciousness of what provides significance and meaning in our lives, gives Schnell reason to argue that simply asking about our sources of meaning is not specific or reliable enough. Therefore, Schnell suggests to combine qualitative and quantitative research methods, in this case the ladder-technique which repeatedly asks the question “why” to lead one to the deepest meaning of one's convictions (which is based on the ultimate meanings technique of Dmitry Leontiev).<sup>126</sup> This qualitative approach relates to the point that meaningfulness and thus sources of meaning are determined by a particular person in a particular situation attributed to a thing, action or happening. The origin of meaning is, then, the process of evaluation by the individual. Moreover, meaningfulness is often related to the perception of a surplus of something significant, as well as when action is linked with certain aims. Significantly, the process of meaning-making is not due to the individual alone but also to the individual as a bearer of universal human values existing in a transcendental and overlapping connection.<sup>127</sup> This is why the sources of meaning can differ in various environments and places, and why meaningfulness is perceived in different ways. Here comes the qualitative research into play, examining some general sources of meaning (that emerged during qualitative research), based on the Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire

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<sup>122</sup> Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity", 275.

<sup>123</sup> Tatjana Schnell, “The Sources of Meaning and Meaning in life Questionnaire (SoMe): Relations to demographics and well-being”, *The Journal of Positive Psychology* Vol.4, ISS.6, (2009): Abstract.

<sup>124</sup> Schnell, “The Sources of Meaning”, Abstract.

<sup>125</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 12-13.

<sup>126</sup> Dmitry Leontiev is professor at the HSE University faculty of Social Sciences (School of Psychology). Read more about his ultimate meanings technique in his article "Approaching Worldview Structure with Ultimate Meanings Technique." (*Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 47, no. 2 (2007): 243-66).

<sup>127</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 30.

(SoMe)<sup>128</sup>. Twenty-six sources of meaning<sup>129</sup> have been identified, which are again divided into four different dimensions, contributing to a differentiation between religious and non-religious sources.<sup>130</sup> The qualitative research part is able to determine the “depth” of life meanings, placing the sources into a ranking order of the capability to provide meaningfulness. The top-ten sources in providing meaningfulness are the following: Generativity, care, religiosity, harmony, development, social commitment, attentiveness, unison with nature, creativity, and community.<sup>131</sup> Has religion any special status?

### Religion (transcendence) as a Source of Meaning-making

The results found that self-transcendence, and in particular vertical self-transcendence (religiosity and spirituality), has a particularly meaningfulness-intensifying function.<sup>132</sup> Why is this the case? Schnell gives the explanation that religion as well as spirituality refer to the existence of a transcendental reality with which people can get in contact and which goes along with a “relief function”, for meaningfulness is not tied to human skills. Meaning(fulness) does not need to be created, but it is.<sup>133</sup> At the same time vertical self-transcendence does support worldly affiliation as well, because it provides a sense of belonging and connectedness through century-old tradition and/or nature, humanity in general, or the entire cosmos.<sup>134</sup> The belief that there is someone who always watches or walks with you (and possibly judges you later), can also strengthen the purpose of one's actions.<sup>135</sup> Moreover religion/spirituality provides orientation because they integrate norms and values as guidelines, and they are suited to create coherence by offering a “vereinheitlichenden Lebensphilosophie” (unifying life-philosophy) and the ability to integrate even profound experiences meaningfully into one's own biography.<sup>136</sup> However, coherence and plausibility structures seem to be particularly important when speaking of “meaningfulness-intensifying function”, for an interesting difference is found among spirituality that rejects religion, and spirituality that integrates religion.

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<sup>128</sup> “The SoMe is a comprehensive inventory of sources of meaning, derived from qualitative studies that explored in depth the meanings underlying people's action, thought, and experience (see Schnell, 2009a, 2014). Sources of meaning are defined as “values in action,” motivating commitment to and direction of action in different areas of life (Leontiev, 1982; Schnell, 2009b; Schnell & Becker, 2006, 2007).” (Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 283).

<sup>129</sup> 26 sources of meaning: Social commitment, explicit religiosity, unison with nature, self-knowledge, health, generativity, spirituality, challenge, individualism, power, development, achievement, freedom, knowledge, creativity, tradition, practicality, morality, reason, community, fun, love, comfort, care, attentiveness, and harmony. (Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 64).

<sup>130</sup> The four dimensions: Self-transcendence, self-actualization, order, and well-being and relatedness. (Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 64).

<sup>131</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 54.

<sup>132</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 69.

<sup>133</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 70.

<sup>134</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 70.

<sup>135</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 70.

<sup>136</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 71.



The former are more likely to be addicted to drugs and suffer more frequently from anxiety disorders, phobias, and other neurotic disorders, suggesting that non-religious spirituality is very idiosyncratic.<sup>137</sup> According to Schnell, the explanation for this result might be that these people link faiths and rituals from different traditions to one another, requiring that the context must be produced by the individual him- or herself. This “experiential validity” lacks the possibility to rely on strong plausibility structures and communities.

### Popular sources of meaning-making among the various respondents

Concerning the particular sources of meaning-making, the findings in *Psychologie des Lebenssinns* show that highly-religious persons place emphasis on health, nature and generativity, while highly spiritual people invest especially in social commitment, self-knowledge, harmony and creativity.<sup>138</sup> For the religious persons (not for the spirituals) it also applies that the higher the (vertical and horizontal) self-transcendence, the lower the self-realization.<sup>139</sup> Generally the religionists, when defined by church membership, score the highest on unison with nature, development, practicality, morality, reason, community, care and harmony. The score of explicit religiosity has a high standard deviation, implying that explicit religiosity is an important source to some and to others not.<sup>140</sup> The none, are a quite heterogeneous group when we look at the standard deviations, nevertheless it seems that the most popular sources among them are harmony, care, community, and development. To some of them unison with nature and community is very important. However, this group is so broadly defined that we do not know how many of them are unaffiliated believers, spirituals, or agnostics. We only know that they are no atheists and no church members. What do we get to know about the atheist people, who clearly seem to distance themselves of religious or spiritual aspects?

### Meaning-making among the non-religious

In her study about atheism and meaning-making, Schnell finds that atheists reported lower meaningfulness than religious persons and non-religious persons who do not regard themselves as atheists. Nevertheless, atheists suffer as seldom (4%) as everyone else under a crisis of meaning.<sup>141</sup> Comparing the lifestyles of the various groups of respondents with each other, Schnell finds that agnostics and atheists regard a self-responsible and ethical-value-oriented lifestyle as equally important as the religionists and spirituals.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 71-72.

<sup>138</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 71.

<sup>139</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 71.

<sup>140</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 64.

<sup>141</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 64.

<sup>142</sup> Schnell, *Psychologie des Lebenssinns*, 74.

As expected, the correlation between atheism (and agnosticism) and vertical transcendence is negative, “indicating that neither belief in a personal god nor belief in a higher power are relevant sources of meaning.”<sup>143</sup> The results of Schnell and Keenan<sup>144</sup>, published in “Meaning-making in an atheist world”, indicate that the main sources for atheists to assess meaningfulness seem to be commitment to self-knowledge, freedom, knowledge, individualism, and comfort.<sup>145</sup> Self-actualization is thus the most popular dimension. However, this is the observed general trend among atheists taken as a homogenous group. Since Schnell decided to focus on atheists as one group of non-religionists, she explored whether they can be distinguished, and found three subtypes of atheists based on different patterns.

One group is called the “low-commitment” atheists, who are generally low engaged with all sources of meaning making, and especially from the optimistic and life-affirming ones such as “generativity, creativity, unison with nature, and attentiveness.”<sup>146</sup> Moreover they show the lowest degree of assessed meaningfulness and with 30% the highest percentage of crisis of meaning. Schnell and Keenan think however, that *“this cluster might have captured individuals in a transitional state of crisis...the critical awareness of a lack of meaning, resulting in disengagement and non-involvement, is likely to be followed by restructuring of meaning.”*<sup>147</sup>

The second group are the “Broad-commitment” atheists who demonstrate higher commitment to the sources of meaning, particularly to well-being and relatedness.<sup>148</sup> Obvious was their distance from conservative and value-oriented sources of meaning such as “tradition, practicality, morality, generativity, and reason.”<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, this group shows more of an existentialist philosophy than natural-scientific positivism, referring to the distinction between rationalist and non-rationalist orientation in life, which according to Schnell must be further explored.

The final group are the “self-actualizing” atheists and crisis of meaning is totally absent among them, *“This type of atheist seems to be settled in its knowledge-based worldview, untouched by crisis of meaning. Nevertheless, they experience lower degrees of meaningfulness than religionists and even nones. This might be attributable to a lack of breadth, balance, and depth in sources of meaning.”*<sup>150</sup> In addition to their shared disinterest in conservative sources (as with the broad-

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<sup>143</sup> Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity", 288.

<sup>144</sup> William J.F. Keenan is scientifically engaged with religious studies and works at the Liverpool Hope University and Nottingham Trent University.

<sup>145</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 55.

<sup>146</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 73.

<sup>147</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 73.

<sup>148</sup> Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity", 274.

<sup>149</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 74.

<sup>150</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 74.

commitment type), the self-actualizing atheists also show little interest in “cultivating relationships (love, care, community, fun),...or in a mindful approach to life (attentiveness, harmony).”<sup>151</sup> Based on the results, Schnell concludes that “shared disbelief does not imply mutual commitments...”<sup>152</sup>

### Exploring secular identities and philosophical orientations

Besides the exploration of the main sources for meaning among atheists, Schnell focuses on differentiating and measuring secular identities with a focus on different attitudes and orientations towards life. She does this by using a dimensional approach (Dimensions of Secularity - DoS<sup>153</sup>). This dimensional measurement helps to reproduce individual complexity by allowing for different degrees of agreements and takes ambivalence into account. This open inventory aims to succeed in bridging the binary opposition (no either/or) between for example self-declared atheists and transcendental attributes. Therefore, Schnell identifies atheism and agnosticism as attitudes toward deity, while scientism, personal responsibility and humanism count as philosophical orientations.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, in a second study the dimensional approach is linked with the SoMe for the purpose of validation of the DoS. Five groups are taken into account: indifferents, religionists, spirituals, agnostics, atheists.

Again, the findings show a negative correlation between atheism, agnosticism and vertical transcendence, although the agnostics do take a more cautious position regarding the metaphysical question of the existence of a higher reality or god and the possibility of numinous experiences. Because the correlation between agnosticism and vertical transcendence was more moderate, Schnell et al. assume that there might be as many agnostic unbelievers as believers, and as many spiritual as non-spiritual agnostics.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, beside the negative correlation of vertical transcendence with atheism and agnosticism, it appeared that both stances do not necessarily “exclude the presence of irrational beliefs, but rather are directed against institutionalized and dogmatic religion and spirituality.”<sup>156</sup> Regarding the philosophical orientations represented by scientism, humanism, and personal responsibility, the results indicate that humanism correlates moderately positive with religious belief, spirituality, and numinous experiences.<sup>157</sup> Personal responsibility correlated slightly negative with religious belief and religious belonging, but was not substantially different among the five groups. And although the scientism scores were higher among

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<sup>151</sup> Schnell and Keenan, “Meaning-Making”, 74.

<sup>152</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 274.

<sup>153</sup> Read more about the DoS in Tatjana Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity (DoS): An open inventory to measure facets of secular identities,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 25.4 (2015): 272-292.

<sup>154</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 283.

<sup>155</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 282.

<sup>156</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 277.

<sup>157</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 279.

the atheists and agnostics, it showed no negative relation(ship) to vertical transcendence, indicating that trust in science “does not necessarily contradict trust in god or a higher power”.<sup>158</sup>

### Existential indifferent respondents

Throughout the research concerning meaning-making, a recognizable group of indifferent respondents was discovered as well. The seemingly existentially indifferent people are characterized by “a low commitment to all sources of meaning; they demonstrate particular disinterest in self-knowledge, spirituality, explicit religiosity, and generativity...and, whereas their mental health (depression, anxiety) is comparable to that of individuals who experience their lives as meaningful, their psychological well-being (positive affect, satisfaction with life) is considerably low”.<sup>159</sup> One might think that a lack of experienced meaningfulness goes along with a crisis of meaning. This is not necessarily true, for being in a crisis of meaning one must suffer from the absence of meaningfulness, which is not the case among the indifferents. What are the main characteristics of the existentially indifferent people? Again with the SoMe, Schnell found that low self-knowledge is typical for this group. This characteristic indicates that confrontation with personal strength and weaknesses is not important. When one looks again at the definition of meaningfulness as “a fundamental sense of meaning, based on an appraisal of one’s life as coherent, significant, directed, and belonging”<sup>160</sup>, which is attained through “purpose”, “orientation”, “coherence”, and “belonging”, determining actions and goals, it can be concluded that among the indifferent group

*“a gap between the level of goals and that of sources of meaning can be assumed: because of a lack of self-knowledge and little interest in their needs and motives, goals are being pursued without orientation toward more general sources of meaning. None of these is credited with centrality in the lives of the existentially indifferent. Sources of meaning, thus, cannot enrich actions, cognitions, and experiences; life remains without a deeper meaning and fulfillment.”<sup>161</sup>*

According to Schnell, one of the main factors for the absence of meaningfulness is thus the lack of self-knowledge. This lack of self-knowledge, on the other hand, can be explained from an existentialist perspective as indicating

*“a refusal to deal with the existential givens, such as freedom, responsibility, pain, guilt, and death. The existentially indifferent deny the confrontation with the paradoxes of living: being free but limited;*

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<sup>158</sup> Schnell, "Dimensions of Secularity", 288.

<sup>159</sup> Schnell, "Existential indifference", 351.

<sup>160</sup> Schnell, "Existential indifference", 354.

<sup>161</sup> Schnell, "Existential indifference", 366.

*being capable and expected to expand but also to constrict. Angst is thus avoided but with it also the chance to become one's true self.*"<sup>162</sup>

Regarding other factors, the indifferent position was most common among younger people who were still in education, and among singles.

### Concluding remarks on Schnell's findings

What can be concluded from Schnell's approach? Although religion and spirituality, or better to say vertical transcendence as a source of meaning, seem to be the source that can provide the deepest level of experienced meaningfulness, there is no reason to assume that non-religious people experience a crisis of meaning more often or tremendously lower levels of meaningfulness. We can draw from the findings that there are non-religious sources of meaning that have the compatibility to provide a meaningful experienced life, especially the dimension of "self-actualization". Moreover, it appears that atheists do not necessarily always reject vertical transcendental aspects. Therefore it would be interesting to elaborate on atheists attitude towards religious aspects in more detail. It seems also that there are no significant negative correlations between the philosophical orientations scientism and humanism, and belief in vertical transcendence. Finally, the observation of an existential indifferent group leaves us with the question whether this is a transitional state, and/or whether experiencing meaningfulness is an intrinsic longing of humanity.

In the light of the interest in the complexity of studying and uncovering religiosity, the following chapter will discuss and compare in more detail the work carried out by Tatjana Schnell together with the approaches of the Dutch reports. There will be special attention for meaning-making, existential indifference, horizontal and vertical transcendence, humanism, and the dilemma with defining religion.

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<sup>162</sup> Schnell, "Existential indifference", 366.

## Chapter three: Comparison & Analysis of the Dutch Reports and Schnell's Findings

Throughout the reports of the SCP, CBS, WRR (Motivaction), GIN, and Schnell we saw different approaches to gain information about contemporary religion, religiosity, spirituality, unaffiliated religiosity, and meaning-making. In this final chapter, the reports will be compared and analyzed based on remarkable findings and their relevance for the thesis subject to explore the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity via the field of meaning-making.

First, the aspect of meaning-making and its popular sources will be examined, followed by a closer look at the relationship between humanism, religion and meaning-making. Second, the phenomenon of existential indifference and the increase in having no opinion about religious aspects will be reviewed. And finally, the complex task of defining religion/religiosity will be explored, a topic of which its concern accompanied us throughout this paper, of which its necessity is adduced repeatedly throughout the paper. The concern of this topic has come up several times throughout the paper. The aspects are led by two interconnected questions: What do we get to know about (non)-religiosity through meaning-making and humanism, and how to deal with or determine the boundaries. The latter will be discussed by the question of "how to define religion" to know what can count as religious/non-religious.

In the conclusion, then, I will turn back to the leading questions of "How to approach and find religiosity when the church does not longer serve as a cliffhanger? What is the crucial aspect of religiosity when it is institutionally unaffiliated?"

### Meaning-making and meaningfulness in perspective

Before discussing the approaches of meaning-making by the different reports, the identified popular sources of meaning-making will be brought into perspective. Do the reports identify similar or quite diverse sources of meaning-making?

#### Popular sources of meaning-making

According to Schnell's findings the most popular sources to assess meaningfulness among the atheists seemed to be self-knowledge, freedom, knowledge, individualism, and comfort. On average, the religionists score the highest on all sources of meaning but they differed quite much in their score on explicit religiosity, and the self-actualization dimension. Highly religious persons, however, seem to have a particular affiliation with the self-transcendence dimension. The existential indifferents on the other hand show low interest in all sources. GIN found that although 57% of the seculars do not participate in the mentioned meaning-making individual rituals, still 30% burn a

candle for someone and 12% like to go to some place to dwell on everything.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, experiencing unity with other Dutch people during certain events<sup>164</sup>, there are no striking differences between religious, spiritual or secular people, to all of them some events provide a feeling of unity with one another. Motivaction defines the non-religious along a humanist value scale and finds the general trend of a stronger orientation towards worldly aspects, self-determination, hedonism and nihilism. The unaffiliated spirituals score the highest on the social/moral dimension<sup>165</sup>, followed by spirituality. Whereas the Christian respondents score the highest on transcendence (religion and belief in God) and experienced meaningfulness through love, caring for others, following religious rules and church attendance.<sup>166</sup>

Is there a general trend? First of all, GIN's approach of sources of meaning-making is of another kind than the ones of Schnell and Motivaction. Schnell, as well as Motivaction, talk about dimensions, which makes it easier to look for similarities to see whether a general trend can be identified. Among the respondents, both find that the highly religious (Schnell) and the Christians (Motivaction) have the strongest affiliation with transcendental aspects. Taken together the group of religionists (Schnell) and the Christians (Motivaction), they might also equal each other but the information is not profound enough to be sure. However, these results provided by Schnell, are based on the group of religionists being church members. This might explain why the distribution among this group is so obvious regarding explicit religiosity and self-knowledge, for membership does not equal belief or regular church attendance. My point is, therefore, that this group itself might be heterogeneous. Finally, the non-religious group (non-humanistic, moderate humanistic, and humanistic subgroups) detected by Motivaction has similarities with both, the existentially indifferent (Schnell) and the atheists (Schnell). The non-humanistic and existential indifferent are both characterized by disinterestedness, while the (moderate) humanistic groups and the atheists particularly share their affiliation with the self-actualization dimension, and the hedonistic aspects of the well-being and relatedness dimension.

### Approaching meaning-making

In the most fundamental sense, Schnell defines meaning-making along crisis of meaning and meaningfulness, the latter is attained by the four criteria "purpose, belonging, coherence, and belonging". This leaves open the question which sources have the potential to fulfill meaningfulness. Especially through her technique of laddering, the depth of sources can be better explored. Whereas Schnell has special attention for meaning-making among the non-religious, GIN uses meaning-making

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<sup>163</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 162.

<sup>164</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 165.

<sup>165</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 184.

<sup>166</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 187.

to look at the boundaries between religion and the secular. GIN observes that the seculars clearly have less affinity with meaning-making. However, still 49% of the secular feel the need to think about the meaning of life, while 62% are not so much interested in the subject.<sup>167</sup> The numbers refer to some kind of ambiguity, and I wondered whether the reason might be that GIN makes no difference between the longing for experiencing life as meaningful (at the individual level), and the question about the general meaning of life, a difference Schnell takes into account. Instead of the depth of meaningfulness, GIN focuses on activities and rituals (at the individual and collective level) to explore the individual and/or communal value of meaning-making, as well as on the feeling of unity to measure the experience-dimension. When we compare the approach of GIN with the four dimensions and twenty-six sources of meaning (SoMe), some similarities can be found. For example in the SoMe, tradition counts as source of meaning-making which could be expressed by the ritual of burning a candle (GIN). The activities and the moments the Dutch experience a feeling of unity (GIN) could thus be assigned as explicit expressions of the suggested sources of meaning by the SoMe. Nevertheless, a remark might be added concerning GIN's measurement of meaning-making, or better to say their chosen sources for it. I am not quite sure whether 'burning a candle' is really a meaning-making activity, for it might have less to do with finding or experiencing meaning in life than simply remembering or honoring something or someone. It might be simply a coping mechanism for grief (symbolic action).

The boundaries of meaning-making related aspects must be clear as well, and a solution might be to link the activities to a scale to measure the activity's significance to the individual. As Schnell argues "...meaningfulness and thus sources of meaning are determined by a particular person in a particular situation attributed to a thing, action or happening. The origin of meaning is, then, the process of evaluation by the individual. Moreover, meaningfulness is often related to the perception of a surplus of something significant, as well as when action is linked with certain aims."<sup>168</sup> At this point, the approach of Motivaction might add a valuable contribution to the approach of meaning-making.

Motivaction puts religion and humanism as sources of meaning-making next to each other. In its approach a difference is made between sources providing meaningfulness in one's life, and how one expresses this in the choices one makes.<sup>169</sup> Motivaction thus particularly links (together) experienced meaningfulness to behavior and actions, and might therefore be seen as the bridge between the approaches of GIN and Schnell. I think of the link between sources and expression of meaningfulness

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<sup>167</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 160.

<sup>168</sup> I quote myself from page 30 of this paper.

<sup>169</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 177.



(meaning-making) as very important, for I believe that one's behavior is at a certain point always linked to one's beliefs or what people wish or expect to get out of life (related to meaning-making). Here, it might be interesting for further research to explore on the significance of different lifestyles in contemporary time.

As Schnell found differences among the atheists, so does Motivaction confirm, based on the humanist scale, that the non-religious people are not a homogenous group when it comes to aspects of meaning-making and social lifestyles and attitudes towards life.<sup>170</sup> When one looks at the humanistic value scale of Schwartz and the twenty-six sources of meaning (SoMe), the overlap between (measuring) humanistic values and sources of meaning seems to be convincingly strong. The dimensions of the Schwartz value-model (openness to change [hedonism, stimulation, self-direction], self-transcendence [universalism, altruism/benevolence], conservation [conformity, tradition, security], self-enhancement [hedonism, achievement, power])<sup>171</sup> and the five dimensions of meaning-making (social/moral, transcendence, hedonism/egocentric, nihilism, and other) can easily be linked with the dimensions of the SoMe: Vertical and horizontal self-transcendence, self-actualization, order, and well-being and relatedness.<sup>172</sup> The main difference and perhaps the only difference between Schnell and Motivaction might be their approach and some terminology, but in substance they are quite similar. One might conclude therefore that there are two overarching dimensions or sources of meaning-making, the religious/spiritual dimension and the humanist dimension. Within these dimensions are sub-dimensions or sub-sources of meaning to get more detailed information. The use, relevance, significance of the sub-sources again, is linked to one's worldview which, I think, can best be measured by a variety of attitudes towards the question of the "otherworldly", such as: agnosticism, ietism, atheism, spirituality, theism.<sup>173</sup> Of course, there might be sources of meaning that are not related to humanistic aspects or religious aspects per se, as for example activities that simply give pleasure and fall under the dimension "well-being and relatedness" (SoMe). However, all aspects of these dimension are linked to 'being or doing together', relationships might therefore be a third overarching source with different sub-sources to experience or express meaning.

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<sup>170</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, "Leefstijlen en zingeving", 183.

<sup>171</sup> Shalom H. Schwartz, "An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values" in *Online readings in Psychology and Culture* 2.1 (2012): 9-10.

<sup>172</sup> Katie M. Lavigne, et al. "The personality of meaning in life: Associations between dimensions of life meaning and the Big Five." *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8.1 (2013): 43.

<sup>173</sup> This approach might make no sense in all countries, but we are talking about the Netherlands (and some findings in Germany).

## Meaning-making, Humanism, and Religion

Motivaction chose humanism as the counter or alternative life-orientation to religionists and spirituals. Probably not in an oppositional way but rather to measure their non-religious world-view or lifestyle. Can humanism help to determine the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity? Can we attain more insights about religiosity through humanism?

### Humanism and horizontal transcendence - same or different?

Motivaction detected a group of people who are non-institutional believers and/or spirituals and who do not conform to doctrines while still cherishing transcendental (spiritual) orientation. They are characterized by empathy, focused on harmony with the world around them and trust in one's own intuition. These characteristics strongly remind one of what GIN called horizontal transcendence, and it would be interesting to know in how far the detected unaffiliated believers/spirituals of the research by Motivaction are committed to vertical or horizontal transcendence. I value the distinction GIN made between vertical and horizontal transcendence very much, for it not only provides insight into how people claim terms as religious or spiritual outside institutional walls, but it also brings up the question of whether spirituality/religion is changing. Is horizontal spirituality and/or religiosity still to be called as such or do we have to simply state that this is not spirituality or religion anymore and is the percentage of unaffiliated spirituals/believers lower than it was thought to be?

When horizontal transcendence is included in religion and spirituality, the otherworldly (vertical transcendence) is not religion's essential element when human self-centeredness is religious/spiritual as well. The other option is that something otherworldly, or vertical transcendence, is captured within the human (body) itself. However, in that case we need to know whether humanity is sacralized (the human himself/herself is of supernatural or metaphysical substance)<sup>174</sup> or people are self-centered in a non-supernatural way, for example profane self-realization. After all, it might be the case that people like to claim the term spiritual because it sounds mysterious and wise, or they want to make it special that they focus on themselves, or for other reasons. However, it might be very difficult to get more clarity about why people claim the term because we enter the domain of the construction of the human. By that I mean, some might take it for granted that humans exist of body, soul, and mind/spirit, but others might not, or assume a different construction.<sup>175</sup> Do people regard themselves as spiritual when they assume that they have a soul or spirit that gives them, for example, a feeling of connection with the world around them or provides a

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<sup>174</sup> Perhaps the field of theosophy and anthroposophy might provide interesting insights concerning the sacralization of humanity.

<sup>175</sup> Ancient philosophers, like Aristotle in *The Metaphysics*, already discussed the human construction and it is a topic especially discussed within the field of philosophy of religion.

source to get to know your “true” self? I do believe in body, soul and mind/spirit, but I do not regard these elements as spiritual, other people might as well or not. At the same time, as long as horizontal transcendence is not clearly pronounced, one might ask whether there is a difference between horizontal transcendence and humanism, based on the definitions and the findings of the reports.

Motivaction speaks of humanist positions, but they do not actually define humanism, they simply state that the non-religious respondents are divided into subcategories based on their score on a scale that connects with humanism.<sup>176</sup> GIN goes along with the definition of the Dutch Humanist Association (Humanistisch Verbond) that “humanism is a philosophy of life based on human dignity and finds its inspiration in human abilities. It is a politically-moral endeavor and includes the pursuit of a good, beautiful and meaningful personal life.”<sup>177</sup> Schnell uses humanism as “an ethical, value-based approach to life and society”, referring to the definitions of humanism as “any philosophy concerned to emphasize human welfare and dignity (Blackburn, 2008, p.171)”<sup>178</sup> and “Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethnic lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity. (American Humanist Association, 2014, para. 1)”<sup>179</sup>. All definitions share that humanism is centered on humans life and humanity, in the sense of human’s dignity and “this-worldly” human abilities. Looking at the definitions of humanism used by GIN and Schnell, the use of humanism in the context of meaning-making and religion seems to refer to humanism as human-centeredness, and it can be assumed that Motivaction is in line with GIN and Schnell in that respect. Also because the Schwartzwaarden (values) scale fits the category of human-centeredness.

Furthermore, comparing the definition(s) of humanism with self-transcendence as it is defined by the SoMe<sup>180</sup> (and in line with GIN), their resemblance<sup>180</sup> is obvious. Humanism might not necessarily be linked to unison with nature, but both humanism and horizontal transcendence are characterized by a strong focus on the welfare and dignity of humanity and one's individual life. Where is, then, the difference between religious and non-religious respondents? Are they simply religious because they claim the label as religionist or spiritual, and/or are the ones who claim no transcendental-related identity actually religious?

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<sup>176</sup> Kronjee and Lampert, “Leefstijlen en zingeving”, 176.

<sup>177</sup> Originally: “Het humanisme is een levensbeschouwing die uitgaat van de waardigheid van mensen en haar inspiratie vindt in menselijke vermogens. Het is een politiek-moreel streven en omvat het streven naar een goed, mooi en zinvol persoonlijk leven.” (Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 132).

<sup>178</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 275.

<sup>179</sup> Schnell, “Dimensions of Secularity”, 275.

<sup>180</sup> Characterized by unison with nature, social commitment, generativity, care, health. (Lavigne, “The personality of meaning in life”, 43).

I do not mean that people can only be either humanist, or religious, or spiritual. I simply wish to refer to the point that boundaries are complex but to a certain degree necessary, and to call horizontal transcendence as belonging to the religious/spiritual category challenges the task to define or see the boundaries. It is clear, however, that vertical-transcendental religiosity has declined, due to the decrease in church membership, church attendance, metaphysical beliefs, and the popularity of horizontal transcendence among a visible percentage of church members and unaffiliated believers and spirituals. Does this mean that religion and spirituality are declining, or simply changing?

### Existential indifference & having no opinion

In the former paragraphs, meaning-making and humanism have been discussed in the context of respondents who stated to engage or disengage with certain sources of meaning or humanistic values. However, throughout the researches of GIN, Motivaction, and Schnell, another phenomenon has been discovered. While GIN and Motivaction recognized a conspicuous percentage of people who had no opinion about certain questions or said they do not know, Schnell noticed a group who seem to be existentially indifferent. Although “having no opinion” is not necessarily a synonym for indifference, there might be parallels. After all, existential indifference might be a precursor or consequence of “having no opinion”, or the other way around. The question then is rather the cause or reason for both positions.

GIN detected a growing percentage of people who stated “I do not know/no meaning” concerning religious questions and suggests that this might be due to an atmosphere of uncertainty, relativity and modesty (unable to claim the non-existence of the supernatural), which again might be due to a range of competing truth claims. Another or additional reason might be that people have difficulty to translate individual religious/spiritual experience into language. This might be no surprise, since more and more people are not raised with religious symbols and/or language.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, GIN also received answers revealing that some were not sure whether they do believe or actually long to believe in something.<sup>182</sup> Interestingly enough, the percentage of uncertainty or having no opinion is growing among the religious/spirituals *and* the non-religious (in this case seculars). Even though some percentages are still low, the point is that they are growing in comparison with 10 years ago. Is the growth of ‘having no opinion’ indeed related to uncertainty, and if so, what is hiding behind the uncertainty? The growing percentage of agnosticism<sup>183</sup> might affirm the assumption of uncertainty as an explanation, since agnosticism is typically characterized by uncertainty towards the metaphysical.

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<sup>181</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 113.

<sup>182</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 114.

<sup>183</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, 1966-2015, 65.

But even the increase of atheism<sup>184</sup> might be an explanation, as in that people avoid or reject to think about religious aspects at all. On the other hand, the lack of opinion might, instead of or in addition to uncertainty, be due to an indifferent attitude towards religion and/or meaning-making questions. Since GIN also looked at meaning-making it would have been interesting to know whether there is a positive correlation between having no meaning about religious issues and having no interest in thinking about meaning-making-related questions. Here, the research of Schnell among the existentially indifferent respondents might be a valuable approach in future research to clarify the question.

Unfortunately, the research by Schnell is not repeatedly carried out over a longer period, which makes it impossible to detect a growth, decline or consistent percentage of existentially indifferent people. However, as mentioned earlier, this group is characterized by a lack of self-knowledge, avoidance to reflect on life, causing a lack of motivation and enrichment of one's actions, experiences and goals - as Schnell said "...life remains without a deeper meaning and fulfillment".<sup>185</sup> The same might be true for the "non-religious, non-humanistic" group identified by Motivaction, which is mainly characterized by nihilism and hedonism. Being not interested in one's meaning in life is in essence the same as nihilism, is it not? And the popularity of hedonism among this group can be easily related to superficial pleasures that are not related to actions, experiences and aims with profound and thoughtful motivations.

The(se) respondents with a lack of meaning and/or of a combination of non-humanistic, non-religious and existentially indifferent attitudes should receive attention in future research. When the lack of meaning is present among all groups of respondents, though to different degrees, what are the consequences for how people lead their lives? Based on the findings I assume that a growth of uncertainty (among other factors, due to a decline in a dominant societal monolithic worldview concerning existential questions, or plurality of belief-options and worldviews), might lead to a disinterestedness in forming an opinion (perhaps to avoid the confrontation with a feeling of impotence and cluelessness), which again becomes covered in an attitude of existential indifference. At the end, individual lifestyles and the consequences of a lack of meaning and opinion about life, might have (far-reaching) societal consequences when it influences how people lead their life, does it not?

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<sup>184</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *1966-2015*, 65.

<sup>185</sup> Schnell, "Existential indifference", 366.

## The complex Relation between Religiosity and Non-religiosity

Finally, the complexity of defining religion does play an essential role in determining the boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity. While GIN does not clearly define religiosity - although it links religiosity (and spirituality) to the church, belief in God and paranormal/supernatural aspects - Schnell and Motivaction determine religion as a source of meaning-making by (vertical) transcendence.

### Boundaries between religiosity and non-religiosity

A discussion of religion might take different shapes in different cultures with different worldviews and belief systems. In the light of the interest of this thesis in the complexity of uncovering religiosity in the Netherlands based on the research reports discussed above, the discourse of defining religion takes place against the background of a long history of institutional or church-based society of which a decline has been recognized for at least a century. Defining religion within the field of religious studies in this case, is thus not meant to be globally applicable or relevant. To me the aspect of defining religion and religiosity is relevant for, and depending on what one would like to know. Which in this thesis comes down to the following: Is there religiosity or Christianity outside the church? And if so, what does it look like, is it changing or is it no religion anymore? What can we say about the changes within and/or away from a form of religion that we have known for a long time?

Is it the case, and if so, is it correct when the value of religion is assumed to be such a sui generis aspect of humanity, ascribing some essentialist value to religion, that the assumption prevails that there must be some kind of replacement for church- or Christian-based religion? One way of approaching this question is by focusing on “Knowing what drives people” when they leave the well-known religious concept (Christianity, church), on the one hand. After all, it would make no sense at all if religion was just for a long time something popular but needless and does not ask for replacement - without longing there is no need for replacement. At the same time, if we can talk about change, than there must be some kind of essential element in religion/religiosity. And on the other hand, we need to define what counts as religion and what not. Especially in regard of the blurriness between humanism and horizontal transcendence, as discussed above. This task demands to find or determine an element as the essence of religion, and thus including and excluding the one or other as being (non)religious. Or to put it another way, “any attempt to define religion is an act of power, and all definitions provoke counter-definitions.”<sup>186</sup>

Over time, a lot of definitions of religion have been published. This is why I chose to limit the source of information to the manageable overview *Religion in the Contemporary World: A*

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<sup>186</sup> Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World*, 3.

*Sociological Introduction*<sup>187</sup>, provided by Alan Aldridge, who is former Reader in the Sociology of Culture at the University of Nottingham.

Concerning the question “how to define religion”, Aldridge suggests that one way to answer the question might be to determine the origin of the word “religion”, which is derived from the Latin word “religio”. However, this is a problematic task for there is no single interpretation, and two suggestions stand out as rivals according to Aldridge. One being Cicero, who argued that “religio” derives from “relegere”, meaning “to read again” or “to retrace”, implying that religion involves “retracing, studying, cultivating and transmitting the customs, practices and traditions of one’s ancestors...religion implies cultural identity, so religion and culture are inseparable.”<sup>188</sup> The other, Lactantius, suggested that “religio” derived from “religare”, meaning “to bind again” and referring to the connection between religion and active faith. In his interpretation religion and culture are separable and the definition is related to Christianity, “religion is the transcendence of culture...religion puts fallen humanity into communion with God”.<sup>189</sup> Thus, one interpretation is incredibly broad and the other about “reconciliation (with God)” and therefore very theological. In the context of this study, I suggest to follow the translation of “religare” by Lactantius without the explicit link to Christianity. Then, “religare” would still mean “to bind again”, but perhaps in the broader sense, to bind (again) with the metaphysical/supernatural world.

Besides the confrontation with the original meaning of the term, all approaches to define religion are accompanied by the aspect of “exclusion” and “inclusion”. Inclusive definitions are often accused of making all people religious whether they claim to be or claim not to be religious. Some might argue that humanity is religious by definition, but why then, discuss religion and religiosity when non-religion or non-religiosity does not exist in the end? Therefore, I am inclined to advocate an exclusive definition of religion.

Exclusive definitions are rather substantive than functional, “defining religion by what it is, not by what it does...they do not drag in footballers, rock stars...nor do they close down the question of religion’s decline or growth.”<sup>190</sup> Core terms are super-human, super-empirical, world above, world over, supernatural and so on. However, “the drive to include all religious traditions is the reason why sociological definitions of religion, even ones that claim to be substantive and exclusive, are extremely broad, incorporating abstract terms such as ‘super-empirical’.”<sup>191</sup> The problem lays, thus,

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<sup>187</sup> Alan E. Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World : A Sociological Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

<sup>188</sup> Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World*, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World*, 3.

<sup>190</sup> Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World*, 29.

<sup>191</sup> Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World*, 29-30.

in the sociological aim to be universal in scope, but is it optimistic or unrealistic to think one can find a way to avoid parochialism and ethnocentrism? I do not think so, which is why I am interested in a restricted definition of religion within the discussion of boundaries between (non)religion/(non)religiosity, meaning-making, atheism, agnosticism, and many more concepts that are related to the religious background of the Netherlands. Based on the reports I have read, their approach and measurement of religion, I think that the essential element of religion should be “vertical transcendence” and therefore interrelated with “belief”, for this metaphysical question is scientifically not provable. This essentialism, of course, has consequences for my view on all reports that have been discussed throughout this paper, and shapes my evaluation and interpretation of the approaches and suggestions for future research.

### “Vertical transcendence” as the essential characteristic of religion

When vertical transcendence is the ultimate boundary marker between religion and non-religion, a great part of unaffiliated spirituals and believers do not count as falling under the religious label. In this case the difference between horizontal and vertical belief and spirituality serves as a suitable boundary-marker. People, whether they call themselves believers or non-believers under various labels, then, are religious when they believe in something beyond the empirical world. With this definition of religion, self-declared agnostics, ietists, atheists, affiliated and unaffiliated spirituals and believers, as well as humanists and seculars, might be religious or not religious, in the end what counts is their attitude towards vertical transcendence. What people wish to gain from life, our motivation, actions, and aims, what we value in life and how we wish to lead our lives, is related to how we see the world. Whether we believe that life is limited to all we see around (empirical world) us without belief in metaphysical existence and/or intervention (energy/power), can make a great difference in how one lives his/her life. However, it becomes more complex when we look at the people who might not believe in something more specific but simply think or assume there might be more in life or believe in an afterlife than what they see around them. Vertical transcendence might then rather be a possibility due to the “awareness of the limits of our knowledge or imagination” or to “hope”, than to the belief or conviction of the existence of vertical transcendence.

Based on the findings of GIN and Motivaction there is a growing number of people who either have no opinion about religious questions or cannot express what they do believe. GIN, for example, found among the unaffiliated believers and spirituals, statements like: “I don’t know whether I believe something or actually long to believe something”. Taking a step away from defining religion towards its function, Schnell found that vertical transcendence as a source of meaning is characterized by depth and that people might find comfort in the idea of being part of a larger whole. In that sense it might be interesting to research what people do believe, what are their sources of



meaning-making, and to develop a scale that measures “longing” in a more complex and perhaps indirect way, than asking people whether they like to think about the meaning of (their) life. This might provide more insights in whether unaffiliated believers and spirituals really do believe or long for believing, and isn’t there anything the existentially indifferent long for? Is “seekership” religiosity? After all, the moment one searches for religiosity or being religious is not necessarily the same. Finally, the research should include the church members as well, for people do not necessarily believe when they are church members.

## Conclusion: Desire and Longing?

This master thesis is concerned with the complexity of studying and uncovering religiosity with the overarching question of “How to approach and find religiosity when the church does not longer serve as a cliffhanger? What is the crucial aspect of religiosity when it is institutionally unaffiliated?”

The research questions of this paper must be understood against the background of a once church-based Netherlands. The interest of this paper is in line with those works that aim at discovering present religiosity among the Dutch who still are church-affiliated and those without religious institutional affiliation. One might raise the question: Why still focus on Christianity and non-Christianity, while there are also other religious communities in the Netherlands? As mentioned above, according to the findings of the researches the second largest religion in the Netherlands is Islam with ca. 4% of the Dutch population. At the same time there seem to be no remarkable numbers of Dutch who convert to Islam. Moreover, although some Buddhist elements have found their way into Dutch society, pronounced adherence has not taken over in great numbers. What has been observed, and gave me reason to restrict myself to Christianity and what we find outside the church regardless of other religions, is the great number of people who distance themselves from the churches and did not join any other religious group. Especially throughout the reports of the CBS, SCP, and GIN we saw the affirmation of the de-institutionalization of Christianity. Today a smaller number of Dutch people are church members, and within institutionalized Christianity one might speak of an internal secularization in so far as attendance is declining and the immanent (profane) interpretation of beliefs is increasing. However, the internal secularization is not true for all Christian denominations, displaying to the heterogeneity of institutionalized Christianity. Nevertheless, among the Dutch only about 25% are church members, whereas around 68% are either unaffiliated religionists and/or spirituals or just “seculars”.

The main attention of this paper is related to this high percentage of people outside the Church. Some issues one is confronted with are: The self-evidence with which researchers are looking for religiosity outside institutionalized Christianity, the difficulty of approaching religion as something that changes, and the related complexity of defining religion. Also, when religion has for so long inseparably been linked to organizations and institutions, how to approach it outside institutions? Can one be sure that the institution is not its central element? And is it only because we assume religion to exist outside institutional affiliation, that we find it? Among other aspects, the interaction between defining the content of some terms and labels, and people claiming certain labels and redefining them, makes the research of religiosity very difficult. Schnell alternately asked the respondents in one study for self-labelling and in another study she categorized the respondents

based on their answers, enabling her to search for belief and spirituality among the atheists. Combining the two helps to bring into perspective how people think of themselves and what they actually believe, for example. However, regardless of the categorization of the respondents, the general trend throughout the findings of the various reports shows that horizontal transcendence is very popular. This horizontal transcendence is focused on the 'here and now', primarily concerned with oneself, less about finding truth but about experiences, and living in harmony with man and nature. Besides the religionists and spirituals, among whom vertical transcendence is a popular source of meaning, the meaning-making dimension of self-actualization and well-being and relatedness are generally popular, as well as hedonistic life-stance. At the same time a remarkable amount of people is not really interested in religion, spirituality, or meaning-making and is characterized by nihilism and having no opinion about it.

In this thesis, I brought into perspective the approaches and findings of recent researches after religion or religiosity in the Netherlands. My aim is to illustrate some complexities of the general study of religion, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the respective approaches. Are there general trends to discover, and in how far do the different approaches complement or equal each other? What can be useful in further research and what observations deserve further attention? Apart from the measurement of Christian aspects inside and outside the churches, especially GIN and Motivaction (WRR) thought to gain more insights about religiosity and non-religiosity through an additional focus on meaning-making and humanism. What boundaries can be drawn between religious and philosophical life orientations, and what can we say about religiosity based on the discussed material? This question relates to the boundaries between religion, spirituality, and the secular. Throughout this thesis we saw the similarities between humanism and horizontal transcendence, and adding the arguments for defining the essential element of religion (and spirituality) as being "vertical transcendence", I argue that there is a group of self-declared religionists and spirituals within and outside the church that get excluded from the religious/spiritual category. Therefore, the trend of a decline in vertical transcendental beliefs towards horizontal (immanent and/or humanistic interpretations of beliefs and/or sources of meaning-making), can be seen as a decline in religiosity and spirituality among the Dutch. At the same time, among the people who claim a religious or spiritual identity, GIN found an attitude of "longing" to believe. Moreover, GIN and Motivaction observed a remarkable percentage of people who declared to have no meaning or said "I don't know" regarding questions of belief, spirituality, religious aspects, and meaning-making. It would be interesting to further investigate this phenomenon, perhaps under the topic "desire and longing".

Desire as the passive wish to believe something or to engage with the subject of meaning-making, perhaps to find out whether under the attitude of existential indifference people do desire for the possibility to experience meaningfulness, for example. Is an existentially indifferent attitude caused by doubt or uncertainty that meaningfulness or belief is attainable at all? Longing in turn, refers to the conviction or optimism that there is to be found meaningfulness or vertical transcendental belief, actively searching for it. The latter referring to those who are uncertain whether they actually believe something or long to believe. Of course, there might be other terms to point out the difference between activity<sup>192</sup> and passivity<sup>193</sup> (or even unconsciousness and awareness) towards spirituality, religiosity, and/or meaning-making. Moreover, I want to emphasize that I am not arguing that existential indifference or neutrality towards religious, spiritual, and meaning-making aspects is necessarily non-existent. I would rather like to know more about those who actually long for something, and whether there is something underlying to an existential indifferent attitude.

Focusing on desire or longing, all respondents with no opinion and/or existentially indifference concerning religion, spirituality, and meaning-making, could be included. What do people desire and long for in life? In that sense I would suggest to extend research that includes meaning-making within studying religiosity. Especially the technique of laddering, mentioned in the paragraph about Schnell's approach, might be very useful to examine the longings or desire of people more deeply.

The field of meaning-making can be helpful to filter out the influence or position of religion and spirituality in one's life. Why meaning-making? Actions, rituals, moral, and thoughts can be interpreted as either religious or non-religious by people, which is also one of the reasons I argued for 'vertical transcendence' as essential element of defining religion. At the end, what counts are the motivations and meaning we ascribe to our thoughts, actions, and rituals that determine their kind, or not? At the same time, when we regard vertical transcendence as an essential element of religion in the Netherlands, we might at some point find ourselves limited to the research about spirituality, Christianity and Islam<sup>194</sup> for they are the most represented (transcendental) religions/worldviews in the Netherlands. But when the majority of the Dutch live their life without any of these religions or spirituality we might switch our focus to the broader aspect of meaning-making of which religion is only one source among others. Meaning-making helps to reveal "what drives people", and is therefore a valuable contribution to the research questions "How to approach and find religiosity when the church does not longer serve as a cliffhanger? What is the crucial aspect of religiosity when

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<sup>192</sup> Active, based on the assumption or optimistic hope that belief or meaningfulness can be attained.

<sup>193</sup> Passive, implying that there is no active search for belief or meaningfulness caused by a pessimistic attitude, doubt or uncertainty that there is belief or meaningfulness to be found.

<sup>194</sup> The other religions find too low percentages of followers in the Netherlands to focus on them when the aim is to look at the situation or position of transcendental belief among the majority.

it is institutionally unaffiliated?” How many people draw on vertical transcendence as a source of meaning-making and what particular beliefs and actions are attached to them?

However, I am aware that ‘vertical transcendence’ as the essential aspect of religion is not unproblematic, for it recognizes neither church members automatically as religious or spiritual, nor those who claim to be religious or spiritual. Nevertheless, I think positive of this aspect for I am not pleased with the hypothesis that religiosity and religion necessarily decrease because institutional religion has declined. Or the other way around, that the Dutch have been very Christian until the Twentieth Century. Rather, I would like to refer to identity formation and lifestyles, at this point. As Motivaction suggests that *“the change of religion goes along a general change of society in which we experience a de-traditionalization on different levels. Not only are the churches running empty, people also less identify on the level of class, family or heritage. Instead, people express their identity increasingly in “lifestyles” or “Erlebnisgesellschaft”, as Schulze called it.”*<sup>195</sup>

I will not argue that the constantly changing environment we find ourselves in does not influence beliefs; my point is that we get deeper insights into contemporary religiosity when we research the beliefs, convictions, desires, and longings of people in spite of the patterns of identity formation and lifestyles of our society. At the same time, identity formation and lifestyles should gain more attention in further research because they are interconnected to how people shape their lives and how religiosity and spirituality is expressed, alongside vertical transcendental beliefs. Then, the church is an embodiment of religion but not religion itself, and regarding the question of decline or change of religion we can only say that the church as embodiment has lost its popularity. The church can be an embodiment of tradition, nostalgia, history, and other things among religion, or even be interconnected with religion. But to declare a person as religious because someone is a church member is to me unsatisfactory and also not useful if we look for religion outside the church. The aspect of meaning-making (exploring the significance and beliefs of people), vertical transcendence as essential element of religion, and lifestyles taken together, I think, will provide insights into how many religionists and spirituals are there. Not only among those who claim such a label but also among the agnostics, atheists, indifferents, etc. Moreover, meaning-making might also provide insights about popular embodiments or expressions of religion and spirituality in contemporary Dutch society.

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<sup>195</sup> I quote myself from page 22-23 of this paper.

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