Studying Religions as Narrative Cultures: Angel Experience Narratives in the Netherlands and Some Ideas for a Narrative Research Program for the Study of Religion

Markus Altena Davidsen & Bastiaan van Rijn

1. Introduction

Angels are hot. According to the Baylor Religion Survey, a massive 60.4 % of the American population reported in 2007 to "absolutely believe" in the existence of angels; while 55.0 % said they had experienced being protected from harm by a guardian angel (Draper & Baker 2011, 630).[1] Gallup polls furthermore indicate an increase in angel belief in the United States, reporting an increase from 64 % angel believers in 1978 to 72 % in 1994 and 78 % in 2004 (Gardella 2007, 93). Also in Europe, angel belief seems to be increasing—at least in some parts of the continent—though the portion of the population believing in angels remains much lower than in the United States.[2] What is more, since the 1990s, a new 'esoteric' form of angel spirituality drawing on New Thought, Anthroposophy, and Neo-Theosophy and involving practices such as angel healing and angel channeling has taken the West by storm. American Doreen Virtue, British Diana Cooper, and the Norwegian princess Märtha Louise, among others, have trained angel therapists by the thousands, and their bestselling books reach millions of readers and have been translated into a dozen of languages (see Gardella 2007; Gilhus 2012; Kraft 2015). In the Netherlands, Annelies Hoornik established herself as the country's leading angel therapist and angel therapist trainer after Archangel Michael

---

[1] In terms of demographics, Draper & Baker remark that "angelic belief is more common among those of lower socioeconomic status, women, racial minorities, married and widowed respondents, southerners, and rural residents" (2011, 633–34).

[2] In Denmark, for example, the number of respondents answering 'yes' to the question 'do you believe in angels?' went up from 13 % in 1991 (with an additional 7 % being not sure) to 25 % in 2016 (with 15 % saying don't know) (Gallup 1991; Tagmose 2016). These polls suggest that during the last 25 years, the number of Danes who consider belief in angels at least somewhat plausible has gone up from 20 % to 40 %. A Norwegian 1998 poll found that 35 % of the adult population, and 41 % of those aged 15–24, believe in angels (VG 1998).

appeared to her one day in 2000, in jeans and with shining wings, tasking her to spread to her countrymen (more often countrywomen) the wisdom of the angels.

Across the Western world, angel experience narratives constitute the key medium for spreading angel ideas and for constructing plausibility around such ideas. Angel experience narratives report how angels have intervened in the lives of angel specialists (such as Hoornik) or, more often, in the lives of ordinary folk to save them from harm or to offer comfort and support. To understand angel spirituality today as a social and cultural phenomenon, it is therefore useful to adopt a narrative perspective and conceptualize the contemporary angel spirituality milieu—as a 'narrative culture'. In the study of religion, Dirk Johannsen and Anja Kirsch were the first to propose narrative cultures (*Erzählkulturen*) as "a heuristic term to highlight narrative reservoirs, storytelling practices, locations and settings, genre-understandings, and narrative devices within specific cultural contexts, often shared across the boundaries, of self-identified communities" (forthcoming; also 2017 and the introduction to this volume). For the purpose of this article, we define a narrative culture as *a more or less tightly interconnected network of narratives and narrative communications, distributed in some patterned way across a community, together with the beliefs, practices, experiences, and discourses informed by and informing said narratives and narrative communications.* We believe that not only contemporary angel spirituality, but most (if not all) religions can fruitfully be conceptualized as narrative cultures, as can many non-religious phenomena, including ethnic and nationalist cultures of commemoration (e.g., Hogan 2009; Erll 2011; Kirsch 2016), fandoms (e.g., Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002), folk and contemporary 'legend ecologies' (cf. Kinsella 2011, 5; e.g., Ellis 2003; Meder 2006; Bennett & Smith 2011), conspiracy milieus (e.g., Barkun 2003), and popular culture (e.g., Laycock 2013).

Since several of the key terms in our definition of narrative cultures are highly contested, we haste to offer a few clarifications. By *narrative,* we understand with Monika Fludernik "a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose center there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions" (2009, 6). In other words, the category of narrative covers the entire range from "spontaneous conversational storytelling" over traditional folktales to the modern novel, as well as narratives conveyed by visual mediums (Fludernik 1996, 12–13). The category

excludes, however, arguments ('2 + 2 = 4'), descriptions of states ('the cup is blue'), and reports on events that are not the results of goal-directed action ('the king died').

Religion, in turn, we stipulate as that part of culture that assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and/or processes. A religion, conceptualized as a narrative culture, may thus be considered to be any more or less tightly interconnected network of narratives and narrative communications that assumes the existence of supernatural agents, worlds, and/or processes, distributed in some patterned way across a community, together with the beliefs, practices, experiences, and discourses informing and informed by said narratives and narrative communications. In a previous article, one of us proposed that all religious traditions are made up of two dimensions that are sustained by different types of texts: elemental religion, which covers practices, beliefs, and experiences, and is sustained by narratives; and rationalized religion, which covers reflective systems of religious knowledge ('theology'), and is sustained by discursive texts (Davidsen 2016, 525). The advantage of the notion of narrative culture suggested here is that it becomes possible to include narratives and discourses in the definition of religion instead of situating them outside religion proper as mere support structures. More importantly, the present conceptualization retains the insistence on the primacy of the narrative-elemental dimension over the discursive-rationalized.

To avoid any misunderstanding, let us also stress that by the term *beliefs* we understand not only consciously held and explicitly professed convictions, but also those ideas that individuals consider merely "plausible" rather than "absolutely true" (see Grieser 2008, 18–19). In addition, and inspired by the aesthetics of religion, we include in our category of belief also such hopes, hunches, and expectations that may fall short even of the criterion of plausibility and which may not be conscious, but may still prompt practice and induce experiences.[3] Taking the aesthetic perspective on board more generally, we understand religious *practices* to denote not only formal rituals and everyday religious acts (such as praying), but also, for example, "ways of seeing or listening [and of] cultivating the body" (Grieser & Johnston 2017, 16). Similarly, religious *experiences* are taken to include any sensation brought about by "religious aesthetics"—i.e. by practices such as kneeling or fasting,

---

[3] The aesthetics of religion "focuses on understanding the *interplay* between sensory, cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of world-construction, and the role of religion within this dynamic" (Grieser & Johnston 2017, 2; italics in original). On this approach, see also Cancik & Mohr (1988) and Grieser (2015).

by environments such as images and architecture, and by perceptual expectations induced by beliefs (see Grieser & Johnston 2017, 16; Asprem 2017; Luhrmann 2012).

The aim of the present chapter is twofold: to present the key findings of a small research project on contemporary Dutch angel experience narratives, and to distill from this case study the contours of a narrative research program that conceptualizes religions as narrative cultures. The argument proceeds in three steps. First, we offer an overview of angel spirituality in the contemporary West and review the (sparse) academic literature on the topic. Previous studies of angel spirituality have focused on individual countries, especially the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway. We bring these national surveys into dialogue with each other and situate Dutch angel spirituality in an international perspective. We make the argument that angel spirituality constitutes an important aspect of contemporary, lived Christianity in the Netherlands and several other Western countries, and show that the interest in esoteric and therapeutic angel spirituality, involving angel healing and angel channeling, has been growing steadily over the last three decades in the United States and Europe. Second, we present the method and results of our case study of the structure, functions, and strategic use of angel experience narratives within the Dutch angel milieu. The structure of most of these narratives follows the same basic pattern: the protagonist experiences danger or distress, an angel intervenes, and the problem is solved, either immediately by the angel or after a while by the protagonist herself who is now empowered by the knowledge that the angels support her. In many cases, the teller reports that the recognition that an angel has intervened on his or her behalf has had additional long-term positive (sometimes conversion-like) effects. Equally important as this basic pattern is the existence of different genres of angel experience narratives, spanning a 'hierarchy of miraculousness' from subtle 'sign stories' in which the angels merely make their presence known through signs, such as feathers, to stories of lifesaving interventions and full-blown visions. What is more, the various genres each have their own functions within the narrative culture: the subtle sign narratives, for example, steer the perceptual expectations, and consequentially the experiences, of lay believers, whereas revelation narratives, amongst other things, cement the charisma of the field's religious specialists (i.e. the more or less professional angel healers and angel mediums). Lastly, we move beyond the case study to outline a general narrative research program for the study of religion. We formulate the main

tasks of such a research program and reflect on how developing it may benefit the study of religion.

2. Angel Experience Narratives in the Contemporary West

We have no good statistics for the Netherlands (or for any other country in Europe) on how many people have experienced being saved or contacted by an angel. The closest we come is a small, private survey that the Dutch general practitioner (and angel believer) Hans C. Moolenburgh conducted in 1982. After each consultation, he asked his patients to respond to a brief questionnaire whose core question was "Have you ever seen an angel face-to-face?" Of the 400 patients interviewed by Moolenburgh, thirty-one (=7.5 %) answered 'yes' to the question and many others volunteered additional strange, spontaneous experiences that they did not attribute to angels (Moolenburgh 1984, 11, 18–20). Admitting that the sample may not have been representative, Moolenburgh cautiously extrapolated that about one percent of the Dutch population may have seen an angel. This is a significantly lower figure than for the United States, but it must be pointed out that Moolenburgh's criterion (seeing an angel face-to-face) was much stricter than the criterion of the Baylor survey (experiencing being saved from harm by a guardian angel)—and he could still imply that about 150,000 Dutchmen had experienced a vivid angel encounter. Moolenburgh included the survey results in a book on angels that he published in Dutch in 1983 (*Engelen*) and which, after having become an unexpected success in the Netherlands, was translated the next year into both German and English.[4] At the end of the book, Moolenburgh asked his readers to mail him their personal stories of angel encounters, and in 1991 he published a collection of 101 of these tales, first in Dutch, and later in English under the title *Meetings with Angels: A Hundred and One Real-Life Encounters* (Moolenburgh 1992).

The angel experience narratives in Moolenburgh's collection were presented in anonymized form, but Moolenburgh ensured his readers that he knew the identity of those who had mailed him and that he could vouch for the sincerity of their experience stories (1992, xiv).[5] The material gives a good impression of how angels were conceived to operate at this time: angel encounters are presented as exceptional and rare and they always occur

---

[4] The references in this section to Moolenburgh's angel survey are to the English edition of the book.
[5] Moolenburgh also included a few stories that were not second-hand experience narratives, but these exceptions were clearly marked.

unexpectedly and unasked for.[6] In Moolenburgh's corpus, the angels appear 52 times to rescue a person (often from death, but it may also be merely from falling from the bike), twelve times to heal, thirteen times to offer support in times of crisis (such as the death of a spouse), and twice to deliver a message; in seventeen stories the angel appears without any clear goal.

While Moolenburgh's first book was exceptional in that it provides (as far as we have been able to tell) the only quantitative survey of angel experiences in Europe, his second book belongs to a whole genre of 'collections of lay angel experience narratives' that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as an important expression of contemporary, lived Christianity and continues to flourish. In Great Britain, Hope MacDonald had published *When Angels Appear*, a collection of 50 angel experience narratives, already in 1982, and this book inspired Hope Price to collect a larger corpus by placing advertisements in various Christian publications (Price 1993). In the United States, several additional collections of angel experience narratives have been published, beginning with the forty stories in Sophy Burnham's *A Book of Angels* (1990) and an additional forty-four stories in the sequel *Angel Letters* (Burnham 1991). Around the same time, Joan Wester Anderson released *Where Angels Walk: True Stories of Heavenly Visitors* (1992), and Eileen Elias Freeman published seven very elaborate angel experience narratives (1993) and set up the AngelWatch Network on the Internet. Collections of angel experience narratives continue to appear at a steady rate in the United States, and recent examples of the genre include *Encountering Angels: True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives Every Day* by Judith MacNutt (2016) and *The Big Book of Angel Stories* by Jenny Smedley (2017). In the Netherlands, two collections of angel experience narratives have been published after the one by Moolenburgh—Hans Stolp's *Als een engel je komt helpen* [*When an Angel Comes to Help You*] (2004) and André Mulder's *De engel van mijn grootvader* [*My Grandfather's Angel*] (2010).

Within the bourgeoning field of lay Christian angel spirituality, one finds many different theological currents, from orthodox and evangelical Christianity (that consider angels to be distant until they come to the rescue unasked for) to various branches of esoteric Christianity (whose highly communicative angels deliver messages through automatic writing or one's inner voice and who can be actively summoned to answer prayers whenever humans so

---

[6] The predominance of spontaneous encounters in the corpus was largely determined, however, by Moolenburgh's personal beliefs and editorial work, as he excluded from the collection all reported angel encounters that had been actively induced by meditation, drugs, hypnosis, or similar means (1992, 47).

desire). In the United States, the esoteric wing of contemporary angel spirituality is dominated by self-identified 'metaphysical' angel therapists who adhere to the New Thought tradition of positive prayer, and add to this that it is the angels who answer the prayers. Alma Daniel, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer presented this view in *Ask Your Angels* (1992), and Trudy Griswold and Barbara Mark further developed the metaphysical position in *Angelspeake: How to Talk with Your Angels* (1995) (see Gardella 2007, 118–21, 123–25). The pivotal figure in the metaphysical angel tradition, however, has been Doreen Virtue, a self-identified "clairvoyant metaphysician" (2002, 193) who "works with the angelic realm" (2005, 191). Virtue's massive production on angels comprises at least twenty-two books (including *Healing with the Angels*, 2005), nineteen Tarot and Oracle decks (including the *Angel Tarot Cards*, 2008), as well as calendars, coloring books, and DVDs. Many of Virtue's books, such as *The Miracles of the Archangel Michael* (2008), are packed with short experience stories told by Virtue's clients, and in addition to her prolific writing career, she has offered workshops on angel healing, angel numerology, angel astrology, and much more. Several hundred individuals have followed Virtue's training program to become a certificated Angel Therapist Practitioner®.[7]

In Europe, contemporary esoteric angel spirituality interweaves the metaphysical Doreen Virtue tradition with various home-grown forms of esoteric Christianity, in particular Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy and Alice Bailey's British Neo-theosophy that both teach that a personal guardian angel accompanies the soul through its various incarnations. The Italian publicist Paola Giovetti's 1989-book *Angeli: Esseri di luce, messaggeri celesti, custodi dell'uomo / Engel—die unsichtbaren Helfer der Menschen*, which stands in the tradition of anthroposophical angelology (see Ahn 1997, 125), became a bestseller in both Italy and Germany and was followed up by several additional books on angels (and related esoteric subjects). In the Netherlands, the anthroposophical tradition is represented by former radio pastor and current esoteric Christian publicist Hans Stolp, whose angel books concern both guardian angels (e.g., 2008) and what one might call 'function angels', such as the relationship angel and the healing angel (1996). In Norway, where Anthroposophy is stronger than anywhere else in the world relative to the size of the population (Gilhus 2017, 141), the chief proponent of contemporary esoteric Christian angelology has been Princess Märtha Louise,

---

[7] According to Virtue's website, a vision of Jesus on January 7, 2017, has "caused [her] to walk away from the new age" and convert to (a more mainstream form of) Christianity (2018a). Virtue's old domain, www.angeltherapy.com, is no longer online, but she continues to produce new angel material, albeit now in a more mainstream Christian wrapping. This change is visible in the title of Virtue's recent book and oracle deck set *Saints and Angels: A Guide to Heavenly Help for Comfort, Support, and Inspiration* (2018b).

oldest child of King Harald V. In 2007, the princess and Elisabeth Noreng opened Astarte Education in Oslo (later renamed Soulspring, but popularly known as *Engleskolen*The Angel School), and authored the bestselling angel book *Møt din skytsengel* [*Meet Your Guardian Angel*] (2009) which was later translated into eleven languages and followed up by *Englenes hemmeligheter* [*The Secrets of the Angels*] (2012). In both books, Märtha Louise and Nordeng convey self-help tips revealed to them by seven named angels and explain how they have talked with angels since childhood. The princess' alternative angel beliefs have caused quite a stir in Norway because they are at odds with the official doctrine of the national Lutheran Church, whose head, as determined by the Constitution, is the King, her father (Gilhus 2012, 2017; Kraft 2015). On the British Isles, a mainline Christian and a Theosophical angel tradition co-exist, with Irish (and Catholic) Lorna Byrne (e.g., 2008) and British Diane Cooper (e.g., 1996) as main proponents of each tradition.[8] Utriainen (2015) remarks that in Finnish angel spirituality circles, Byrne and Cooper are the most widely read authors.[9]

The 1990s boom in angel therapy in the Anglo-Saxon world inspired established and upcoming alternative practitioners in the Netherlands to develop angel-themed practices during the 2000s and 2010s. Two important Dutch angel therapists are Carina Dresschers and Annelies Hoornik, who take turns in writing the monthly angel column for the Dutch paranormal magazine *Paravisie*. Dresschers, who had been a professional medium and orthomolecular clinical psycho-neuro-immunologist since 1979, founded *Stichting Engelenwerk* (Foundation Angel Work) in 2004. From this platform she offers angel prayers, angel services, and angel workshops within a somewhat anthroposophically inspired framework. Hoornik did not emerge as an alternative practitioner until the early 2000s (following a vision of the Archangel Michael in 2000, discussed below), and unlike Dresschers, she is specialized completely in angel therapy. Trained and certified by Doreen Virtue, Hoornik

---

[8] Cooper, who is published by the Findhorn Press, draws heavily on the British Theosophical tradition whose central figure, Alice Bailey, reinstated the doctrine of guardian angels (the existence of whom H.P. Blavatsky had explicitly denied) as part of her broader program of reconciling Theosophy and Christianity. She links her angel teachings to such Theosophical themes as ascension, i.e. the soul's travel to the light through a series of incarnations, Atlantis, and the dawning of a New Age—a term which was, *notabene*, first introduced by Alice Bailey. Cooper expects the "New Golden Age" to break through in 2032. In 2013, she published the collection *True Angel Stories: 777 Messages of Hope and Inspiration* whose cover proudly announces that the Diana Cooper School, that had been founded in 2003 with the vision to "empower people to spread the light of angels, ascension and the sacred mysteries of the universe," now employs 700 teachers worldwide.

[9] Esoteric angel spirituality is also spreading outside of the West. In Japan, for example, more than sixty angel practitioners in the Doreen Virtue tradition (mostly middle-class, middle aged women in the Tokyo metropolitan area) offer their services on http://doreen.jp/. We are indebted to Kanako Sugawara and Giam Shir Lee Akazawa for pointing this out to us.

has set up her own angel school in the Netherlands (*Engelencursus*; Course on Angels) and has become the most influential angel therapist in the country. Hoornik issues certificates to angel healers and angel mediums who complete her courses, and her website recommends 154 certified Aquarius Angels® Healers (Hoornik 2019). In addition, Hoornik organizes a yearly Dutch Angel Day and has published her own instruction books on angels, *Engelen: Ontmoet de Aartsengelen en je eigen Beschermengelen* (*Angels: Meet the Archangels and Your Own Guardian Angels*; 2009), *Engelen Helen op Fysiek, Emotioneel, Mentaal en Karmisch Niveau* (*Angels Heal on the Material, Emotional, Mental, and Karmic Levels*; 2010), *Engelen en de ziel: Werk samen met de Engelen aan je zieledoelen* (*Angels and the Soul: Work on Your Soul Goals Together with the Angels*; 2011). Her latest book, *Berichten van de Aquarius Angels* (Hoornik 2015), consists of channeled messages from the Aquarius Angels, a group of healing angels led by Archangel Raphael that is unique to Hoornik's angelology. Though Hoornik initially acquired much of her authority through her connection with Doreen Virtue, the angelology described in her books represents a more practical form of alternative religiosity that remixes various New Age ideas without standing in a particular tradition of esoteric Christianity (i.e. New Thought, Anthroposophy, or British Theosophy).[10] In Hoornik's book on angel healing, we read of karma, auras, mantras, and chakras, and about how angels and Atlanteans held the spiritual knowledge that Hoornik now shares with the reader, but there are only few traces of the New Thought cosmology and use of affirmations that characterize Virtue's work. Instead, what Hoornik takes from Virtue is the description of healing in terms of household metaphors—for example, Archangel Michael can be called upon to bring his 'Heavenly Vacuum Cleaner' (*Hemelse Stofzuiger*) to remove negative energy from one's body or house (Hoornik 2010, 207; cf. Virtue 2008, 135).[11]

As can be glanced from the overview in this section, esoteric angel spirituality is in vogue in the West, but academic research on the phenomenon is very sparse and has largely been limited to identifying the main publications and most important angel specialists in various national contexts (US: Gardella 2007; Norway: Gilhus 2012; 2017; Kraft 2015). We have also two ethnographic examinations of angel spirituality in practice, namely Marco

---

[10] In this respect, Hoornik's mode of angel therapy seems similar to that of Märtha Louise and Noreng in Norway.
[11] Similarly, Hoornik does not discuss complex theosophical notions, such as soul ascension and cosmic evolution which are central for Cooper, but she adopts from Virtue the idea that souls set certain 'soul goals' for themselves prior to each incarnation, and that tough experiences such as sickness and loss are predetermined by these soul goals and have as their higher aim to achieve spiritual development (Hoornik 2009, 46, 151–53, 156–61, 169–82; 2011 *passim*).

Uibu's (2012) study of meaning-construction on the Estonian online forum "The Nest of Angels" and Terhi Utriainen's (2015) discussion of how Finnish women use the figure of the angel to integrate Christian and New Age beliefs and practices. Yet, we do not understand very well how angel narratives and beliefs, experiences, and practices relating to angels come together to form a coherent narrative culture. To enhance our understanding of contemporary Western angel spirituality in particular, and of the mechanics of narrative cultures in general, we therefore took it upon ourselves to carry out a case study of narratives and narrativity in contemporary Dutch angel spirituality.

3. Dutch Angel Spirituality as a Narrative Culture

Our first task was to collect a corpus of recent angel experience narratives, to supplement the older collections by Moolenburgh and Stolp. We mainly collected angel experience narratives from the esoteric-therapeutic part of the milieu. We harvested sixteen angel experience narratives written by specialists and lay believers from the paranormal magazine *Paravisie* (circulation 13,400 per month), and added to this corpus thirty stories told by lay believers to Annelies Hoornik and recounted in her books *Engelen* (2009) and *Engelen Helen* (2010), as well as sixteen stories from Carina Dresschers' website (n.d.a; fifteen told by clients and one by her husband). These 62 stories together constituted our small corpus. As the following step we analyzed the corpus, with special attention to the content and functions of the narratives, and compared it to the older material. Concretely, we analyzed (1) how the narratives construct angels as heavenly helpers, (2) how narratives provide plausibility and rationale for the beliefs, practices, and experiences of angel spirituality, and (3) how specialists use narratives of various kinds to enhance their own charisma and manage the expectations of lay believers.

3.1. What Angels Do: The Narrative Construction of Angels as Heavenly Helpers

Most fundamentally, angel experience narratives are first-, second-, or third-hand testimonies of how angels have intervened to help individuals in need. All angel experience narratives in our corpus therefore follow the same basic three-phase structure: (1) an initial situation in which the protagonist finds him- or herself in a negative initial situation, (2) a liminal situation in which an angel intervenes, and (3) a final situation in which the problem has been resolved.

The most fully developed angel experience narratives double the three-phase structure. On the *episode level*, these narratives recount how (1) the protagonist experiences a very concrete negative situation such as sickness or immediate danger, how (2) an angel intervenes, and (3) how the situation is resolved. On the *autobiographical level*, we hear how (1) the protagonist experienced a feeling of meaninglessness or severe chronic problems prior to the angel encounter; how (2) the angel encounter occurs, and (3) how the protagonist, as a result of the comprehension that angels are watching and supporting us, is relieved of her existential anxiety and problems and experiences increased happiness and wholeness.[12] A good example of a fully developed angel experience narrative is recounted by Maria Felling in *Paravisie* (Schoer 2011). Having been haunted by demons since her youth, Felling tries to commit suicide but is saved by a man who disappears mysteriously (episode level). The helper turns out to be the Archangel Raphael. Realizing that the angels support her, Felling succeeds in combating her demons, and urged by Raphael, she sets up shop as alternative therapist to help others too (autobiographical level).

Many of the stories in our material, however, are 'incomplete' compared to the full schema. Some stories recount only the concrete angel encounter (episode level), whereas others focus mainly on the angel encounter's long-time effects (autobiographical level). Angel encounter narratives that include the autobiographical level may lack an explicit indication of a negative initial situation, but even in these cases the protagonists typically report a change from a neutral to a positive condition. In structural terms, we can say that while both the episodic and autobiographical levels of the angel experience narrative have three phases with the angelic intervention as the liminal turning-point, the valence of the initial and final phases differ. On the episode level, the angel intervenes to change a negative concrete condition (-) to a neutral condition (0). On the autobiographical level, the encounter experience changes a negative or neutral condition (-/0) to a positive condition (+). The structure of the prototypical 'full' angel experience narrative is reproduced schematically in Figure 1 below.

[Place illustration 4.1 (S) here]

Figure 4.1 Structure of the Prototypical Angel Experience Narrative

---

[12] We find the emphasis on long-term effects of angel experiences also in the older Dutch material— Moolenburgh even considered long-lasting positive effects a necessary precondition of a 'real' angel encounter (1992, 201–02).

Even if all angel experience narratives follow the same basic structure, the manner of angelic intervention varies widely. We may therefore sort the narratives in our corpus into two broad genres, narratives of direct intervention and narratives of indirect intervention. Each of these genres can again be divided into subgenres.

Narratives of direct intervention include what we term rescue narratives and revelation narratives. In *rescue narratives,* an angel appears momentarily to offer (often lifesaving) support before mysteriously disappearing again. Here is a typical example from Moolenburgh's collection: two little girls are cycling down the street, when suddenly they get a sense of foreboding. A man in overalls appears, telling them to turn around and go away. Later it turns out that a little further up on the girls' intended route, a child molester was waiting (Moolenburgh 1992, 112). Rescue narratives are also found in newer material. In the 25 angel experience narratives in Stolp's 2004-collection, an angel prevents an accident on two occasions, and appears, less spectacularly, to offer comfort, relieve loneliness, and save marriages in fifteen other stories. In addition, Dresschers included rescue narratives in two of her six columns for *Paravisie* in 2015 (2015a, 45; 2015b, 32). In one of these stories, a general practitioner hears a voice (later identified as belonging to an angel) that urges him to take a taxi rather than his own car to an emergency delivery. The baby is saved because of this, for the next day the engine of the GP's car turns out to be broken (Dresschers 2015b, 32). Interestingly, the most spectacular rescue narratives are told on behalf of somebody else and emphasize the episode level (an angel solves a concrete problem) over the autobiographical level (the encounter's long-time effects). Therefore, and despite the fact that tellers always reassure their readers of the factuality of their stories, it is difficult to judge whether we are dealing with a (more or less edited) second-person experience narratives or—perhaps more likely with a third-hand, scripted legend.

Revelation narratives are narratives of direct intervention in which the angel does not act in a physical way but appears in a vision and/or delivers a message of consolation or spiritual teachings by means of an audition or through automatic writing. On her website, Hoornik writes that she in 2000 started to receive visions from Archangel Michael who asked her to quit her IT job and work instead with the angels. A more elaborate version of Hoornik's revelation story was published in *Mijn Geheim* (*My Secret*), a journal specialized in extraordinary life stories of ordinary people. Hoornik here explains to journalist Sofie Rozendaal how the first vision of Michael happened unexpectedly while she was sitting on the

couch. He appeared suddenly, casually dressed in jeans and leather jacket but suffused with light, and showed her the big, white wings on his back (Rozendaal 2014).[13] In contrast to the other genres of angel experience narratives, revelation narratives thematize mainly the autobiographical, long-time effects of the angel encounter—in Hoornik's case, her career turn towards angel therapy.

Narratives of direct intervention are attention-grabbing, but the bulk of our corpus is comprised by narratives of indirect intervention. Many of these narratives can be classified more precisely as *sign narratives*. This genre is characterized by the subtlety of the angels' presence and the supporting rather than the saving role of the angel. Hence, the three phases of a typical sign narrative on the episode level are: (1) the protagonist finds him- or herself in a non-life threatening, yet negative, initial situation, such as emotional distress, (2) an angel intervenes via a sign, such as a feather, which is interpreted as angelic comfort and support, and (3) the problem is resolved, often as a result of action taken by the angelically empowered protagonist. An example of a sign narrative (in which the angels actually solve two problems) comes from one of Hoornik's students. The student was driving home from Hoornik's Angel Conference workshop but was still in doubt whether the angels really exist (minor distress #1). She therefore decided to ask the angels for irrefutable proof of their existence. Soon, however, she forgot the question because she had lost her way completely, despite her navigation system being on (minor distress #2). Without any reason to do so, she suddenly looked to the right and there saw an image featuring two angels (sign from the angels). Immediately, she felt reassured of the angels' existence (resolution of distress #1) and right after she found her way home as well (resolution of distress #2) (Hoornik 2009, 124).

Another type of narrative of indirect intervention is the *prayer-response narrative*. Here (1) the protagonist finds him- or herself in a crisis, (2) asks the angels for help, and (3) overcomes the crisis with the help of the angels—but without an angel ever making its presence known directly. A typical example from among the many prayer-response narratives on Dresschers' website (n.d.a) tells of a 52-years-old woman who had failed the driver's license exam five times, prayed to the car angel, and succeeded in her sixth attempt.

---

[13] Those specialists, such as Dresschers, who do not report a vivid 'calling experience' à la Felling and Hoornik claim instead to have been speaking to angels since earliest childhood. Olav Hammer identified the same two strategies of charismatic biography construction (natural talent and initiation) in his study of the epistemologies of knowledge in the theosophical current (2001, 406–09).

3.2. Angels Are Real: The Narrative Construction of Plausibility

Angel experience narratives not only convey ideas about what angels do (i.e. they offer signs of support, respond to prayers, and occasionally come to the rescue unasked for) they also engage in the narrative construction of the plausibility of those ideas. That is to say, the narratives seek to construct angels as real beings with existence in the actual world outside the narrative discourse. To do so, the angel experience narratives in our corpus employ two different strategies.

The first strategy of plausibility construction, which we may refer to as the *testimony strategy*, is found in all those angel experience narratives that present themselves in a straightforward manner as 'evidence' or 'proof' of the existence of angels and of their capacity and willingness to help.[14] The testimony strategy is found in several of the genres of angel experience narratives identified in the previous section. Prayer-response narratives profess not only that the concrete events of the story happened (e.g., that one first failed the driver's license exam and later passed it), but also testify to the fact that (the teller believes that) it was angelic intervention that secured the ultimate success. Such narratives construct plausibility by presenting the miraculous prayer-response as 'proof' of angelic intervention. Another variant of the testimony strategy is found in those sign narratives in which the angels offer a sign in response to a concrete human request (as in the example of Hoornik's undecided student discussed above). Such 'sign-on-demand' narratives cater in particular to skeptical recipients, as they communicate the teller's own 'conversion' from angel-doubt to angel-belief which the reader is now invited to emulate. The testimony strategy is at work, too, in revelation narratives, such as Hoornik's encounter with Michael. Indeed, revelation narratives do much to construct angels as real beings, for it is only in revelation narratives such as Hoornik's that angels appear straightforwardly as characters who speak and act in the story and introduce themselves unambiguously as angels.

Another group of angel experience narratives construct plausibility not by presenting themselves as proof (the testimony strategy), but by involving the reader in an argument that infers that an angel must have been at work. We call this the *inference strategy*.[15] Within our corpus, the inference strategy is found in those angel experience narratives where angels act

---

[14] Davidsen (2016, 530–32) identifies this strategy as one of several veracity mechanisms that religious narratives may use to construct plausibility. He refers to this particular veracity mechanism as the "matter-of-fact effect."

[15] Johannsen (2011, 83–85) has discussed this strategy of plausibility construction (without providing a name for it) in the context of Norwegian folk storytelling. Drawing on cognitive narratology, he shows how it works at the cognitive level.

on their own initiative and not in response to human requests. These narratives do not follow a fully chronological structure, but typically consist of two parts: first the account of a special episode in which something mysterious happens; then a reflective part that identifies the agent behind the mysterious event as (perhaps, probably, certainly) an angel. The reflective part is most developed in unsolicited sign narratives, for in these narratives it has to be inferred *both* that something supernatural is at work at all (e.g., that the feather is not just a feather) *and* that the agent at work is, in fact, an angel. Also in rescue narratives, where angels appear and act as characters in the story, it is usually only later reflection that reveals the nature of the helper as angelic. In the child molester story from Moolenburgh's collection discussed above, for example, it is not immediately clear that the man in overalls who saves the girls is an angel. His identity as an angel is constructed only in the reflection on 'what really happened' that the narrator presents after discussing the episode itself. We have the same pattern in Dresschers' story of the GP who has a mysterious audition that is only later identified as the voice of an angel. In our corpus, we also observe a difference between second-hand and first-hand rescue stories in the certainty that tellers attribute to the identification of the helper as an angel. Second-hand narratives, like those published by Moolenburgh and Dresschers, conclude with relative certainty that the helper was an angel, whereas first-hand narratives tend to be more cautious and may have the qualification as angel hover ambiguously between the ontological and the metaphorical. For example, Hieke Talsma-Watzema, a lay contributor to *Paravisie*'s *Mijn Verhaal* (*My Story*) column, tells how she was stranded with her family on a German highway due to maintenance works. Then, out of nowhere, appeared a woman in a nurse uniform who escorted them towards their destination, a ferry, and got them there just in time to get the last spot on the parking deck, thereby preventing a long delay. Talsma-Watzema concludes her story with an expression of gratitude to her family's helper: 'the experience of the journey back without having to rush has been very special and will stay with us forever. And that because there live 'angels' on this Earth' (Talsma-Watzema 2012, 39; our translation; cautious single quotes in the original).

All angel experience narratives, and especially those that make use of the inference strategy, leave room for the reader to weigh the evidence and decide for him- or herself whether an angel really was at work or not. In other words, it would be imprecise to simply say that angel experience narratives express belief in angels and reinforce such belief. Such may indeed be the case, but more fundamentally angel experience narratives are constructed,

to paraphrase Linda Dégh's definition of the legend (2001, 97), to entertain debates about beliefs, or, to speak with Alexandra Grieser (2008), to gauge the plausibility of such beliefs. The various angel experience narratives and the strategies of plausibility construction they make use of are summarized in table 1 below.

[PLACE ILLUSTRATION 4.2 (S) HERE]

Fig. 4.2 Strategies of Plausibility Construction in Angel Experience Narratives

It is not only the variance within the catalogue of angel experience narratives that is significant; it is just as important that despite their differences in content and strategy, *all* angel experience narratives in our corpus share a common function. They all convey certain core ideas about angels, namely (i) that angels are real, (ii) that angels are there to help people, and (in most cases) (iii) that angels are spiritual beings.[16] This is a crucial point, for the idea that angels are spiritual persons with special powers and an intention to help provides the raison d'être for contemporary angel spirituality. This idea determines people's expectations, configures their experiences of angels, and, within the esoteric wing of contemporary angel spirituality, structures such practices as angel healing and angel channeling. We here hasten to reiterate that these 'core ideas' (one of us has elsewhere referred to them as 'assumptions' or 'primary beliefs'; cf. Davidsen 2014, Ch. 5) have a structuring function on the whole narrative culture even if they are not accepted as absolute truths by those involved. What matters is that the core ideas that angels are real, helpful, and spiritual are accepted as plausible enough to regulate perception, prompt further engagement, and stimulate reflection.

One form of reflection that angels may be subjected to, like the supernatural exchange partners of any religious tradition, is conscious 'ontology assessments', i.e. systematic reflections on who and what they really are.[17] Ontology assessments are not found in the angel experience narratives themselves, but specialists work such reflections into their essays and books on angelology. As such, ontology assessments belong to the province of

---

[16] The general (but mostly implicit) consensus seems to be that angels comprise a class of superhuman beings who have always been angels and will always continue to be angels, but two stories in our corpus depart from this norm by presenting angels as deceased close relatives. In the first case, the angel who has taught the teller how to experience the unconditional love of the angels, is no one else than the teller's own deceased sister who had become an angel after passing over to the other side (Van Doorne 2011, 73). In the second case, the deceased wife of a sceptic turns into an angel and goes on to show him signs and tell him strategic information, such as what gifts to give to his new wife (Vermeulen 2011). The idea that humans (may) transform into angels after death is also found in the teaching of angel specialists, such as Doreen Virtue (2005, 91, 94–95).

[17] On the notion of ontology assessment, see Davidsen (2014, 131–37).

rationalized religion and have little influence on actual practice. It does not bother lay practitioners that some specialists view angels in Christian terms as 'mighty beings of light and love [who] are there for you personally' (Dresschers 2013a; our translation), whereas others describe them in metaphysical terms as impersonal entities—Patty Harpenau talks of angels as 'intelligent fields' (2012, 17) or, in an interview with Art Schroer, as 'frequencies without wings' (Schroer 2012, 34). The specialists may well be dead serious about these rationalized angelologies, but the abstract talk of 'beings of light and love' and 'wingless frequencies' do not, in contrast to experience narratives, provide descriptions and perceptual cues that may shape future angel experience or provide a rationale for interacting with angels. All this suggests that whereas angel experience narratives affect elemental religion (beliefs, practices, experiences) directly, the function of rationalized angelology is merely to bolster the narrative-elemental core of angel spirituality with a general aura of legitimacy.

Given the primacy of angel narratives over rationalized angelology, it is not surprising that even specialist discourse on angels tends to revolve around elemental angel belief.[18] In her first book on angels, Hoornik even lets the angels themselves emphasize the three constitutive ideas of angel spirituality in a direct salutation to the reader: 'We Angels have been present on this planet for many years [=angels are real], but we are mostly invisible for humans [=angels are spiritual beings]. […] Our task is to give you as much support, love and advice as possible [=angels help]' (Hoornik 2009, 6–7; our translation). Hoornik's book contains some comments on angel ontology (e.g., angels are the 'direct offshoot[s] of God or of the Divine Energy'; 2009, 10; our translation), but it is characteristic for the field that Hoornik's strength lies not in logical reasoning about ontology, but in metaphorical explanations of what angels do. As already mentioned, her metaphors are often household metaphors. For her, healing and health are matters of 'spiritual hygiene' (Hoornik 2010, 101–03) and negative emotions produce 'spiritual waste' that sticks around in one's house (and particularly in waterbeds) (Hoornik 2010, 206–08). It is when much spiritual waste has accumulated that one should ask Archangel Michael to come clean the house with his Heavenly Vacuum Cleaner (Hoornik 2010, 207).[19]

---

[18] It is also remarkable (and ironic) that the editors of *Paravisie* have illustrated the most abstract angelological articles with easily decodable symbols such as feathers and wings, thereby tying the rationalized accounts ('frequencies without wings') to the narrative-elemental core of angel spirituality.

[19] All Dutch angel specialists draw on a combination of conventional Christian and esoteric discourses in their rationalized angelology, but unlike their American colleagues they negotiate the combination of the two discourses very carefully. It is particularly striking that many Dutch angel therapists consciously try to free the

3.3. What Can the Angels Do for Me? The Narrative Construction of Charisma

The two main specialists in our corpus, Annelies Hoornik and Carina Dresschers, claim to have experienced vivid encounters with angels involving miracles, visions, and auditions. As we have seen, Hoornik professes to have seen Archangel Michael—shining and in jeans—and she also claims a special cooperative relationship with Archangel Raphael's Aquarius Angels. In a similar fashion, Dresschers claims on her website to 'literally hear the voices of intelligences and light beings, such as angels and masters', and to be, since 'her mystical passion experience in 2007 a mystic, a considerably enlightened human being' (n.d.b.; our translation). In her first angel column for *Paravisie*, she even brags of how she, when she was seventeen, speeded down a snowy hill where other people had just crashed, trusting her guardian angel Ismael on the backseat of her moped to get them safely through (Dresschers 2013b). Dresschers and her husband, Mark de Gast, also teach a special 'Earthing and Closing Method' (*Aarden en Afsluiten Methode*) that Dresschers claims was exclusively revealed to her by Her Spiritual Guides (Dresschers n.d.b). By contrast, the narratives which the two specialists tell about the angel experiences of their clients involve much less pageantry—these stories are usually of the sign and prayer-response types in which the angels intervene only indirectly. Two things seem to be going on here: specialists use revelation narratives (involving direct angelic intervention) to construct their own charisma, and they use sign and prayer-response narratives (with merely indirect intervention) to construct 'attention regimes' that manage the perceptual expectations of the lay believers.[20]

That angel specialists seek to establish a charismatic hierarchy should not come as a surprise. They need to do it. Because they teach that *everyone* can have (frequent) contact with the angels (namely through signs), specialists who wish to sell their therapy or healing services, as well as their books and courses, have to maintain the appearance of standing in a more intimate relation with the angels, involving direct communication. In other words, the inclination towards *shared charisma* within contemporary angel spirituality (i.e. everyone may

---

angel from its conventional associations with Christianity, church, and religion. Immediately after identifying angels as 'direct offshoot[s] of God or of the Divine Energy' (2009, 10), Hoornik, for example, goes on to state that in the context of angels one can better avoid the very word God (and talk instead of Divine Energy) because the religious connotations of 'God' (i.e. connotations of old-fashioned and submissive worship) makes it undesirable to use the word.

[20] Johannsen and Kirsch (forthcoming) and Johannsen (this volume) discuss in more detail how narrative cultures may create attention regimes.

receive signs from the angels, be healed by them, or even learn to channel them) is offset by an opposite inclination towards *restricted charisma* (i.e. only the specialists have been contacted by the angels themselves and asked to act as the angels' representatives here on earth).[21] Perhaps the contemporary angel spirituality milieu even owes some of its success to this delicate balancing of shared and restricted charisma.

At the same time, by not promising too much, Hoornik and Dresschers engage in an efficient management of expectations. There are two aspects to this. On a social level, Hoornik and Dresschers induce modest expectations in their readers and clients. Rather than promising visions and miracles, thereby setting people up for potential disappointment, angel specialists tell people to expect only little things—signs and support. Furthermore, on the perceptual level, Hoornik and Dresschers attune their clients to a particular way of perceiving the world. With their narratives, books, and workshops, the specialists teach clients to recognize particular everyday events—such as finding a trampled bird feather—as signs of reassurance from the angels, and to interpret the small successes of everyday life as further proof of the angels' support. In our own study we have not been able to investigate how angel believers practice their skills in perceiving angels, but Marco Uibu has shown how the users of the Estonian online forum 'The Nest of Angels' (2012) share experiences and support each other's interpretations of various events as signs from the angels. As Uibu shows, learning oneself to perceive the presence of the angels is a skill and one that support from a community can do much to facilitate. In her excellent study of magicians and neo-pagans in London, Tanya Luhrmann (1989) uses the term interpretive drift to refer to the gradual process through which new initiates learn to perceive successes as results of magical ritual and random occurrences as meaningful signs. We propose that in the case of contemporary angel spirituality, the process through which angel believers learn to recognize signs of angelic agency, constitutes a perfect example of this interpretative drift.[22]

3.4. Dutch Angel Spirituality as a Narrative Culture: A Brief Summary

---

[21] The terms shared charisma and restricted charisma are from Wessinger (2012).
[22] Also the contributions by Wilkens and Johannsen in this volume discuss how (a) narratives raise (b) certain expectations that, in turn, (c) stimulate particular perceptions and interpretation of experiences, leading (d) to a consolidation of belief. While neither Wilkens nor Johannsen uses the term 'interpretive drift' to analyze this chain of events, it strikes us that we are discussing the same phenomenon.

Our small pilot investigation of contemporary Dutch angel spirituality has revealed a number of interesting facts worth reiterating. Most fundamentally, we have established that within this milieu narratives serve as a principal vehicle for the dissemination of core ideas about what angels are and what they can do, i.e. that angels are real, that angels are there to help people, and that angels are spiritual beings. These core ideas about angels are also disseminated through books, workshops, and healing sessions authored or hosted by angel specialists, but angel narratives reach a much larger audience because they are also published in general spirituality magazines such as *Paravisie* and made public online. Consequently, individuals who become involved in contemporary Dutch angel spirituality have usually first encountered the milieu through the medium of narrative. It is because narratives play a crucial role for the dissemination of angel ideas and for the inception of initial interest that we may qualify Dutch angel spirituality as a narrative culture. Second, we have found that in contemporary Dutch angel spirituality a particular type of narratives, namely the experience narrative, occupies center stage. Biblical stories and medieval legends about various (arch)angels loom in the background, but, in striking contrast with angel spirituality in the United Kingdom and the United States, these narratives are rarely told or even invoked in the Dutch context. This is probably because Dutch angel spirituality, compared to the UK and the US, is more 'secularized' in Wouter Hanegraaff's (1999) sense of being dis-embedded from any particular religious tradition (here Christianity).

Given the nature of Dutch angel spirituality, we focused our analysis on angel experience narratives and made three notable discoveries. First, we found that all angel experience narratives in our corpus share the same three-phase structure: (1) An initial situation in which the protagonist finds him- or herself in some kind of crisis, such as emotional distress or immediate danger, is followed by (2) a liminal climax in which the angel intervenes, and (3) the resolution of the problem. Some angel experience narratives recount how an angel intervenes to solve a concrete problem (episodic level), others focus on the life-transforming long-time effect of the angel encounter (autobiographical level), and yet others include both narrative levels. Second, we found that the manner of angelic intervention in the various experience narratives varies a great deal, but that the variation is patterned and that five genres of angel experience narratives may be discerned: in rescue narratives and revelation narratives angels intervene directly, in prayer-response narratives and in sign narratives (which we divide into unsolicited and sign-on-demand narratives) the intervention is merely

indirect. We also found, third, that angel experience narratives make use of two different strategies of plausibility construction. Revelation narratives, prayer-response narratives, and sign-on-demand narratives present themselves as simple proof of angelic activity (the testimony strategy), whereas rescue narratives and unsolicited sign narratives invite the recipient to reflect on a series of seemingly miraculous facts and infer for him- or herself that an angel must have been at work (the inference strategy). Finally, we concluded that angel specialists strategically employ narratives to enhance their own charisma and to manage the social and perceptual expectations of their clients. Autobiographical stories about how archangels 'called' them to become angel therapists or about how angels have always guided them are used by specialists to set their own angel relation off from what their clients can reasonably expect. At the same time, specialists publish sign and prayer-response narratives from laypeople both to make belief in angels plausible for their clients and to impress them with certain perceptual expectations that, in turn, set an interpretive drift in motion towards a perceptual state attuned to sensing the angelic in everyday life.

We have not yet had a chance to compare our findings to similar cases, but we hypothesize that several of our findings may hold up also in other contexts. In particular, we hypothesize that the five narrative genres identified in our case study constitute the (main) logical types of experience narratives in narrative cultures centered on benign, intermediary beings (angels, but also saints, djinn, spirits, etc.). We further hypothesize that narrative cultures formed around benign intermediaries will tend to employ all the various narrative genres and both strategies for plausibility construction (testimony and inference) in concert, and that the fact that all these narrative genres and strategies are found in Dutch angel spirituality marks it as a healthy narrative culture fit for future survival. Finally, we hypothesize that experience narratives are also used in other narrative cultures to construct charismatic hierarchies and manage (perceptual) expectations.[23]

4. Towards a Narrative Research Program for the Study of Religion

We hope that our case study on Dutch angel spirituality has illustrated how narratives and narrative communication—i.e. the content and structure of narratives and the way narratives

---

[23] In early Islam, for example, it was believed that only true prophets (such as Muhammed) could receive direct and reliable communications from the archangels, whereas the angelic communications that ordinary folk might receive would stem from the djinn (conceptualized as earth-bound angels) and be imprecise (because the djinn do not possess perfect knowledge) and indirect, and hence in need of interpretation (Jaques 2018).

are told and shared—may play a crucial role in the constitution of religious practices, attention regimes, experiences, and beliefs. At the same time, our case study has obviously far from exhausted the relevant research questions that may be raised from a narrative perspective in the study of religion and religions. In this final section, we therefore take the opportunity to move beyond our case study to propose a new research program for the study of religion that places narratives and narrativity at center stage.[24] Concretely, we formulate two main tasks for a narrative research program and reflect on what the study of religion, as an academic discipline, may gain from developing such a program.

One core task for the narrative research program that we propose would be to orchestrate a comparative-explanatory study of how religious narratives work. Most fundamentally, this task would involve studying the content, structure, plausibility strategies, and social functions of the full range of religious narratives, from the conversational to the canonical. Moreover, the new ambition should be to advance beyond individual case studies to study religious narratives comparatively and systematically, and to explain any identified patterns in the light of general theories of the narrative nature of cognition and action. One issue we need to understand better is how, and under which circumstances, religious narratives and religious storytelling may be persuasive. We touched upon this issue a little bit in the discussion of the two 'plausibility strategies' that tellers of angel experience narratives may employ, but more systematic work has been done in other contexts.[25] Another problem is how different types of narratives and storytelling may work together within a given narrative culture. In fact, we are here dealing with a battery of research questions, including how experience narratives (or 'memorates') may draw on motifs and scripts from authoritative narratives and, in turn, how experience narratives may solidify over time and turn into authoritative narratives (on these dynamics, cf. Honko 1964 and Wilkens this volume); and how experience narratives may draw on fiction, such as when self-identified Elves re-experience previous lives in Middle-earth, and how fictional narratives about the supernatural can come to be treated (more or less) as non-fiction (on these dynamics, see Davidsen 2014). In the present chapter on the narrative culture of Dutch angel spirituality, we have not touched upon the issue of how different types of narratives work together, but it is clear that

---

[24] Ours is, of course, not the first attempt to formulate a narrative approach for the study of religion. The reader is invited to consult also Johannsen (2013), Grieser (2013), Jensen (2016), and Johnston (2017b).

[25] For recent overviews of strategies and mechanisms that may enhance the plausibility of religious narratives see Davidsen (2016), Johannsen & Kirsch (forthcoming), and Johnston (2015; 2017a; 2018).

it would be relevant to analyze how authoritative angel stories (especially from the Bible) provide content and plausibility for everyday angel experience narratives. It would also be interesting to study the role of fictional narratives in Dutch angel spirituality, especially since Peter Gardella has shown how the television shows *Highway to Heaven* (1980s) and *Touched by an Angel* (1990s) played a crucial role in rehearsing central angel ideas and in mobilizing people to involve themselves in angel spirituality in the United States (2007, 110–17).[26]

The second main task for a narrative research program in the study of religion would be to investigate how theories of the narrative nature of human cognition (including perception) and action may help us understand religion better. As this is not the place to review and evaluate all theories that might be relevant for this Herculean endeavor, we will restrict ourselves to point out just a few potential avenues for further exploration. One such avenue is provided by Jerome Bruner's (1986) distinction between two modes of thought: the narrative mode which comes naturally, and the paradigmatic (or logico-scientific) mode which has to be learned. For Bruner, the narrative mode produces "good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts [and] deals in human or human-like intention and action" (1986, 13), whereas the paradigmatic mode of thought "attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation" (1986, 12). Merlin Donald (1991) similarly argues that in the evolution of human consciousness, a narrative (or mythic) stage preceded the current theoretical stage. He adds that our brains are still fundamentally narrative and that theoretical thinking is possible only due to the development of writing and external memory storage systems, such as books.[27] Slightly differently from Donald, but complementary with his account, Bruner (1990, 45) and Read & Miller (1995, 143) have further suggested that human cognition is narrative *because* it is geared towards detecting, explaining, and plotting agency and intention in human action.[28] In other words, stating that human cognition and action are narrative, and stating that human cognition and action are social, are more or less the same thing.

---

[26] On the central role of fiction as a vehicle for spreading alternative religious ideas and for providing plausibility for such beliefs, see also Partridge (2004, Ch. 6).

[27] On the narrative nature of human thought, see also Fisher (1987), Perron & Danesi (1993), Turner (1996), Fludernik (1996), and Herman (2009).

[28] For these two references, we are indebted to Petra Bleisch Bouzar (2013, 179). Further indications of the narrative nature of human cognition are our propensity to anthropomorphize and think in experientially grounded metaphors (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

Applying these general ideas to the concrete case of religion, a narrative research program may posit that the narrative-elemental dimension of religion, i.e. the narrative mode of thought and the beliefs, experiences, and practices structured by it, are logically, developmentally, and evolutionarily primary to the rationalized-discursive dimension of religion, i.e. systematic religious reflections governed by the paradigmatic mode of thought and their entextualizations.[29] When religion is seen in this light, it is not at all surprising that religious beliefs revolve around supernatural exchange partners, that religious narratives present examples of exchanges with such supernatural partners, and that religious practices, in turn, let real people of flesh and blood 'live the myth'. It follows from this that a narrative approach is in a strong position to promote the synthetization of existing theories of religion—in particular, cognitive theories of religious beliefs and sociological theories of religious practice, two kinds of theories that are at present rarely brought into dialogue with each other.[30] For example, from a narrative perspective, Pascal Boyer's (2001) point that successful religious ideas involve minimally counter-intuitive, inference-rich agents, means nothing else than that human beings, given their narratively disposed cognitive make-up, prefer religious ideas that are good to think with and may be used to craft a good story. Similarly, when sociologist of religion Martin Riesebrodt (2010) argues that "interventionist practices," i.e. exchanges with supernatural beings, constitute the most fundamental element of any religious tradition, a narrative scholar of religion can only concur and will find it logical to assume that religion, as any other aspect of culture, is fundamentally organized around goal-directed action (in the case of religion, the distinctive characteristic being merely the inclusion of supernatural exchange partners).[31] A methodological corollary to the theoretical aims sketched here would be to shift the empirical focus of the study of religion from discursive-rationalized religion ('theology') to narrative-elemental religion and to the interplay between the two religious dimensions. By conceptualizing religions as narrative cultures, this volume has already taken an important step in this direction.

---

[29] The concept-pair narrative-elemental/discursive-rationalized may be considered more or less synonymous with the concept-pairs cognitively optimal/cognitive costly (e.g., Whitehouse 2004) and theologically incorrect/theologically correct (e.g., Slone 2004), both of which are widely used in the cognitive science of religion.

[30] In a recent bibliometric study of the cognitive science of religion, John Balch (2018) found almost no citation overlap between the cognitive science of religion and the sociology of religion, and flagged cooperation between these two fields as a major desideratum for the future. The related ambition of using the notion of narrative to link cognitive and cultural theories of religion has been formulated by Geertz & Jensen (2011).

[31] To advance further along this route, it might be helpful to develop a theory of religious practice as enacted narratives, as called for by Flood (1999, 117–42) and Ryan (2013).

The two main tasks sketched so far do not exhaust the research problems that may be taken up by a future narrative research program. For example, we also need to theorize how and why narratives, beliefs, practices, and experiences cluster together to form religious traditions. Is it, for example, the adherence to a shared 'core myth', as suggested by Loyal Rue (2006, 126), that defines the borders of a given religious (or cultural) tradition? It will also be relevant to study transfers of scripts and motifs across narrative cultures (religious and non-religious), and to identify patterns in the hegemonic relations between narrative cultures (e.g., the Dutch angel movement borrows from the American angel movement, but Dutch ideas are not picked up in the United States). In addition, if we want to understand how religious beliefs and experiences may be influenced by narratives and storytelling, we need a broad approach to cognition that takes emotions and perception very seriously, as has been convincingly argued by Feldt and Johannsen's contributions to this volume, and by the aesthetics of religion more generally. Finally, and to add more of a historical perspective, a narrative research program should study how religious historiographies change over time, with the aim of discovering general patterns of narrative transformation over the course of religious history, as well as the cultural and cognitive mechanisms that drive such transformations.

References

Primary Sources

ANDERSON, JOAN WESTER. 1992. *Where Angels Walk: True Stories of Heavenly Visitors*. New York: Ballantine Books.

BURNHAM, SOPHY. 1990. *A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present, and True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives*. New York: Ballantine Books.

BURNHAM, SOPHY. 1991. *Angel Letters*. New York: Ballantine Books.

BYRNE, LORNA. 2008. *Angels in My Hair*. London: Century.

COOPER, DIANE. 1996. *A Little Light on Angels*. Findhorn: Findhorn Press.

COOPER, DIANE. 2013. *True Angel Stories: 777 Messages of Hope and Inspiration*. Findhorn: Findhorn Press.

DANIEL, ALMA, TIMOTHY WYLLIE & ANDREW RAMER. 1992. *Ask Your Angels*. New York: Ballantine Books.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. 2013a. "Iedereen heeft een beschermengel," *Paravisie* 28 (12): 37–37.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. 2013b. "Engel op de brommer," *Paravisie* 28 (12): 39–39.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. 2015a. "Wachterengelen," *Paravisie* 30 (2): 45–45.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. 2015b. "De huisarts & de engel," *Paravisie* 30 (10): 32–32.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. n.d.a. "Wonderen-Verhoringen." Accessed November 2, 2018. https://www.stichtingengelenwerk.com/engelen/wonderen-verhoringen/67-wonderen-verhoringen.

DRESSCHERS, CARINA. n.d.b. "Wie is Carina." Accessed November 2, 2018 https://stichtingengelenwerk.com/medium-carina/wie-is-carina.

FREEMAN, EILEEN ELIAS. 1993. *Touched by Angels: True Cases of Close Encounters of the Celestial Kind*. New York: Warner Books.

GALLUP. 1991. "Er der mere mellem himmel og jord..." Berlingske Tidende and Gallup Instituttet. Accessed February 9, 2019. https://tns-gallup.dk/sites/default/files/2018-11/ug_1991_41.pdf.

GIOVETTI, PAOLA. 1989. *Angeli: Esseri di luce, messaggeri celesti, custodi dell'uomo*. Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee.

HARPENAU, PATTY. 2012. "Engelen zijn hip," *Paravisie* 27 (12): 17–17.

HOORNIK, ANNELIES & FRANS VERMEULEN. 2009. *Engelen: Ontmoet de Aartsengelen en je eigen Beschermengelen*. Uithoorn: Karakter Uitgevers.

HOORNIK, ANNELIES & FRANS VERMEULEN. 2010. *Engelen Helen op Fysiek, Emotioneel, Mentaal en Karmisch Niveau*. Capelle aan den IJssel: Uitgeverij Angelo.

HOORNIK, ANNELIES & FRANS VERMEULEN. 2011. *Engelen en de ziel: Werk samen met de Engelen aan je zieledoelen*. Capelle aan den IJssel: Uitgeverij Angelo.

HOORNIK, ANNELIES. 2015. *Berichten van de Aquarius Angels*. Capelle aan den IJssel: Uitgeverij Angelo.

HOORNIK, ANNELIES. 2019. "Aquarius Angel Healers." Accessed February 9, 2019 http://www.aquariusangels.nl/aquarius-angels-healers.

MACDONALD, HOPE. 1982. *When Angels Appear*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company.

MACNUTT, JUDITH. 2016. *Encountering Angels*. Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books.

MÄRTHA LOUISE & ELISABETH SAMNØY [Noreng]. 2009. *Møt din skytsengel*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.

MÄRTHA LOUISE & ELISABETH NORENG. 2012. *Englenes hemmeligheter: Deres natur, språk og hvordan du åpner opp for dem*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.

MOOLENBURGH, HANS C. 1984. *A Handbook of Angels*. Saffron Walden: The C.W. Daniel Company.

MOOLENBURGH, HANS C. 1992. *Meetings with Angels: A Hundred and One Real-Life Encounters*. Essex: The C.W. Daniel Company.

MULDER, ANDRÉ. 2010. *De engel van mijn grootvader: Over engelverhalen van nu*. Zoetermeer: Meinema.

PRICE, HOPE. 1993. *Angels – True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives*. London: Macmillan.

ROZENDAAL, SOFIE. 2014. "Engelen bestaan," *Mijn Geheim*, April 2014, 68–72.

SCHROER, ART. 2011. "Met Engel Raphaël won Maria haar strijd tegen entiteiten," *Paravisie* 26 (9): 74–76.

SCHROER, ART. 2012. "Angelologie," *Paravisie* 27 (5): 33–35.

SMEDLEY, JENNY. 2017. *The Big Book on Angel Stories*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

STOLP, HANS. 1996. *Wat engelen ons doen*. Baarn: Uitgeverij Ten Have.

STOLP, HANS. 2004. *Als een engel je komt helpen: Engelervaringen van onze tijd*. Deventer: Uitgeverij Ankh-Hermes.

STOLP, HANS. 2008. *Mijn beschermengel en ik*. Deventer: Uitgeverij Ankh-Hermes.

TAGMOSE, AMALIE. 2016. "Hver fjerde dansker tror på engle." Danmarks Radio. Posted December 5, 2016. https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/kultur/tro/hver-fjerde-dansker-tror-paa-engle.

TALSMA-WATZEMA, HIEKE. 2012. "Mijn verhaal," *Paravisie* 27 (10): 39–39.

VAN DOORNE, ANNEMARIE. 2011. "Mijn verhaal," *Paravisie* 26 (9): 73.

Vermeulen, Frans. 2011. "Koos veranderde na haar overleden in een engel," *Paravisie* 26 (7): 13–15.

VG. 1998. "Flest kvinder tror på engler." Posted March 18, 1998. Updated February 25, 2003. https://www.vg.no/forbruker/i/wEe91P/flest-kvinner-tror-paa-engler.

Virtue, Doreen. 2002. *Earth Angels: A Pocket Guide for Incarnated Angels, Elementals, Starpeople, Walk-Ins, and Wizards*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House.

Virtue, Doreen. 2005. *Healing with the Angels: How the Angels Can Assist You in Every Area of Your Life*. London: Hay House.

Virtue, Doreen. 2008. *The Miracles of Archangel Michael*. London: Hay House.

Virtue, Doreen. 2018a. "An Update on Doreen's Changes," Posted August 8, 2018. http://doreenvirtue.com/2018/08/08/an-update-on-doreens-changes/.

Virtue, Doreen. 2018b. *Saints and Angels: A Guide to Heavenly Help for Comfort, Support, and Inspiration*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House.

Secondary Sources

Ahn, Gregor. 1997. "Engel-Mode und Mode-Engel: Aspekte der Transformation christlicher Engeltraditionen in Texten des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 11, 107–28.

Asprem, Egil. 2017. "Explaining the Esoteric Imagination: Towards a Theory of Kataphatic Practice," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 17 (1): 17–50.

Balch, John. 2018. "Using Bibliometrics to Understand the Past 25 Years of CSR," Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, 17–20 November, 2018.

Bennett, Gillian & Paul Smith, eds. 2011. *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*. In the series *New Perspectives in Folklore* 4, Carl Lindahl & Margaret Miles, series editors. London: Routledge. First published by Garland Publishing 1996.

Bleisch Bouzar, Petra. 2013. "Narrative der persönlichen (religiösen) Erfahrung – narratologische Analysen in der Religionswissenschaft," in *Konstruktionsgeschichten: Narrationsbezogene Ansätze in der Religionsforschung*, edited by Gabriela Brahier & Dirk Johannsen, 173–90. Düsseldorf: Ergon Verlag.

Boyer, Pascal. 2001. *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts That Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. London: Basic Books.

BRUNER, JEROME. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. The Jerusalem-Harvard Lectures. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

BRUNER, JEROME. 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

DAVIDSEN, MARKUS ALTENA. 2014. *The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-based Religion*, PhD diss., Leiden University. Available here: https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/29078.

DAVIDSEN, MARKUS ALTENA. 2016. "The Religious Affordance of Fiction: A Semiotic Approach," *Religion* 46 (4): 521–49. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2016.1210392

CANCIK, HUBERT & HUBERT MOHR. 1988. "Religionsästhetik," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, edited by Hubert Cancick, Burkhard Gladigow & Matthias Laubscher, vol. 1, 121–56. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

DÉGH, LINDA. 2001. *Legend and Belief: The Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

DONALD, MERLIN. 1991. *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

DRAPER, SCOTT & JOSEPH O. BAKER. 2011. "Angelic Belief as American Folk Religion," *Sociological Forum* 26 (3): 623–43.

ELLIS, BILL. 2003. *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends we Live*. Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi.

ERLL, ASTRID. 2011. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, 2. aktualisierte und erweiterte Auflage. Stuttgart: Metzler.

FISHER, WALTER R. 1987. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

FLOOD, GAVIN. 1999. *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London & New York: Continuum.

FLUDERNIK, MONIKA. 1996. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge.

FLUDERNIK, MONIKA. 2009. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London: Routledge. First published in German as *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, 2006.

GARDELLA, PETER. 2007. *American Angels: Useful Spirits in the Material World*. In the series *CultureAmerica*, Karal Ann Marling & Erika Doss, series editors. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.

GEERTZ, ARMIN W. & JEPPE SINDING JENSEN, eds. 2011. *Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative*. London: Equinox.

GILHUS, INGVILD SÆLID. 2012. "Angels in Norway: Religious Border-crossers and Border-markers," in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, edited by Marion Bowman & Ülo Valk, 230–45. Sheffield: Equinox.

GILHUS, INGVILD SÆLID. 2017. "Angels: Between Secularization and Re-enchantment," in *New Age in Norway*, edited by Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Siv Ellen Kraft & James R. Lewis, 139–56. Sheffield: Equinox.

GRIESER, ALEXANDRA. 2008. *Transformationen von Unsterblichkeit: Zum Wandel religiöser Plausibilitätsmuster in der Moderne*. In the series *Tübinger Beiträge zur Religionswissenschaft* 6. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

GRIESER, ALEXANDRA. 2013. "Response: Erzählte Gemeinschaft. Zur Multi-Funktionalität kollektiver Narrative und der dynamischen Rolle von Religion," in *Konstruktionsgeschichten: Narrationsbezogene Ansätze in der Religionsforschung*, edited by Gabriela Brahier & Dirk Johannsen, 319–33. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag.

GRIESER, ALEXANDRA. 2015. "Aesthetics," in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, edited by Robert Segal & Kocku von Stuckrad, vol. 1, 14–23. Leiden: Brill.

GRIESER, ALEXANDRA K. & JAY JOHNSTON, eds. 2017. *Aesthetics of Religion: A Connective Concept*. In the series *Religion and Reason* 58, Gustavo Benavides, Michael Stausberg & Ann Taves, series editors. Berlin: De Gruyter.

HANEGRAAFF, WOUTER J. 1999. "New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian's Perspective," *Social Compass* 46 (2): 145–60.

HAMMER, OLAV. 2001. *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*. In the *Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions* XC, series editor Wouter J. Hanegraaff. Leiden: Brill.

HERMAN, DAVID. 2009. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

HILLS, MATT. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.

HOGAN, PATRICK COLM. 2009. *Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

HONKO, LAURI. 1964. "Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1, 5–19.

JAQUES, R. KEVIN. 2018. "Dreams, Revelation, and Visiting Spirits: An Early Muslim Cosmology of Divine Communication." Presentation held at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, 17–20 November, 2018.

JENSEN, JEPPE SINDING. 2016. "Narrative," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Stausberg & Steven Engler, 290–303. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JENKINS, HENRY. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

JOHANNSEN, DIRK. 2011. "No Time to Philosophize? Norwegian Oral Tradition and the Cognitive Economics of Belief," in *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography*, edited by Jesper Sørensen & Luther Martin, 77–87. London: Equinox.

JOHANNSEN, DIRK. 2013. "Einleitung: Konstruktionsgeschichten," in *Konstruktionsgeschichten: Narrationsbezogene Ansätze in der Religionsforschung*, edited by Gabriela Brahier & Dirk Johannsen, 9–16. Düsseldorf: Ergon Verlag.

JOHANNSEN, DIRK & ANJA KIRSCH. 2017. "Religiöse Identitätsbildung," in *Erzählen: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, edited by Matías Martínez, 274–80. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.

JOHANNSEN, DIRK & ANJA KIRSCH. Forthcoming. "Narrative Strategies," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Cultural and Cognitive Aesthetics of Religion*, edited by Anne Koch & Katharina Wilkens. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

JOHNSTON, SARAH ILES. 2015. "Narrating Myths: Story and Belief in Ancient Greece," *Arethusa* 48 (2): 173–218.

JOHNSTON, SARAH ILES. 2017a. "How Myths and Other Stories Help to Create and Sustain Beliefs," in *Religion: Narrating Religion*, edited by Sarah Iles Johnston, 141–56. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

JOHNSTON, SARAH ILES. Ed. 2017b. *Religion: Narrating Religion*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

JOHNSTON, SARAH ILES. 2018. *The Story of Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

KINSELLA, MICHAEL. 2011. *Legend-Tripping Online: Supernatural Folklore and the Search for Ong's Hat*. Jackson: University of Mississippi.

KIRSCH, ANJA. 2016. *Weltanschauung als Erzählkultur: Zur Konstruktion von Religion und Sozialismus in Staatsbürgerkundeschulbüchern der DDR*. In the series *Critical Studies in*

Religion/Religionswissenschaft (CSRRW) 2, Gregor Ahn, Oliver Freiberger, Jürgen Mohn & Michael Stausberg, series editors. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

KRAFT, SIV ELLEN. 2015. "Royal Angels in the News: The Case of Märtha Louise, Astarte Education and the Norwegian News Press," in *Handbook of Nordic New Religions*, edited by James R. Lewis & Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, 190–202. Leiden: Brill.

LAKOFF, GEORGE & MARK JOHNSON. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

LAYCOCK, JOSEPH. 2013. "Where Do they Get These Ideas? Changing Ideas of Cults in the Mirror of Popular Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (1): 80–106.

LUHRMANN, TANYA M. 1989. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

LUHRMANN, TANYA M. 2012. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Vintage Books.

MEDER, THEO. 2006. *In graancirkelkringen: Een etnologisch onderzoek naar verhalen uit de grenswetenschap*. Amsterdam: AUP.

PARTRIDGE, CHRISTOPHER H. 2004. *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, Vol. 1. London & New York: T&T Clark International.

PERRON, PAUL & MARCEL DANESI. 1993. *A.J. Greimas and Narrative Thinking*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

READ, STEPHEN JOHN & LYNN CAROL MILLER. 1995. "Stories Are Fundamental to Meaning and Memory: For Social Creatures, Could It Be Otherwise?", in *Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story*, edited by Robert S. Wyer, 139–52. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

RIESEBRODT, MARTIN. 2010. *The Promise of Salvation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Translated from German, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen: Eine Theorie der Religion*.

RUE, LOYAL. 2006. *Religion is Not About God: How Spiritual Traditions Nurture our Biological Nature and What to Expect When They Fail*. New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press.

RYAN, MARIE-LAURE. 2013. "Ritual Studies and Narratology: What Can They Do For Each Other," in *Ritual and Narrative: Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, edited by Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp & Gregor Ahn, 28–49. Bielefeld: transcript.

Slone, Jason. 2004. *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't*. Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Turner, Mark. 1996. *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Uibu, Marko. 2012. "Creating Meanings and Supportive Networks on the Spiritual Internet Forum 'The Nest of Angels,'" *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 6 (2): 69–86.

Utriainen, Terhi. 2015. "Combining Christianity and New Age Spirituality: Angel Relation in Finland," in *Handbook of Nordic New Religions*, edited by James R. Lewis & Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, 158–72. Leiden: Brill.

Wessinger, Catherine. 2012. "Charismatic Leaders in New Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, edited by Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein, 80–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitehouse, Harvey. 2004. *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.