

Říčan, P. (2012): The story of a late rider. In: Jacob A. Belzen, Ed.: Psychology of Religion. Autobiographical Accounts. Springer New York Dordrecht Heidelberg London, 167-184.

THE STORY OF A LATE RIDER

The suggestion of Jacob Belzen that I contribute to a collection of autobiographies of outstanding psychologists of religion was a real surprise to me. This field has been—so to say—the love of my late maturity only (I am really a late rider in this sense of the word!), and the amount of work I managed to do here has been quite modest. And yet—on second thought—I accepted. Perhaps—as Jacob believes—my specific way toward as well as in the psychology of religion may be of particular interest to colleagues in the traditionally democratic countries where science, including the science of religion, has developed free and without political or ideological restrictions. Perhaps my unique experience may reveal something substantial about my time, my country and its spirituality or even about the psychology of religion in general. So, here is my story.

But what actually is the task of an author of an autobiography? I believe that his first and last question should be: What sense, what meaning has it all have? What was I actually after, what have been my basic—conscious and unconscious—strivings? What understanding of self and others have I achieved? Let others evaluate my contribution to the psychology of religion. They will be more objective and just than I could ever be. I write my story—basically—as an attempt to understand it myself.

The roots: My church and my family

As a depth psychologist (trained analyst with years of therapeutic experience) I will naturally start in my childhood. Also, this orientation of mine will be responsible for my focus on the inner dynamics of my life. I believe that—especially in the humanities—the work of a creative person may best be understood as an attempt to solve a most pressing inner conflict of him/her. Such an inner conflict, of course, comes to the fore only if we consider the context of significant social forces influencing the subject.

I was born—similarly as my great model, Carl G. Jung whom I will recall repeatedly in this narration—at a Protestant parsonage. My father, equally as grandfather and some uncles (and now, some of my cousins and their sons) have served as ministers or as prominent laymen in their congregations. Our church, called Protestant¹ Church of the Czech Brethren constitutes a small minority in the predominantly Catholic country, which perhaps contributed to the feeling of responsibility for the tradition of the supposedly „only true“ faith among its members. This little church originated from unification of two Protestant churches allowed since 1781 after a long period of total religious oppression by the monopoly of the Catholic Church. The unification was made possible by the fall of the Austro-Hungary ruled by the family of Hapsburg, which was strongly tied to the Catholic Church. The new little church was young and its clergy cherished great hopes connected with newly established democracy in the equally young Czechoslovak Republic founded in 1918 on the debris of the old, reactionary monarchy.

Our parsonage and the church building with a great garden belonging to it where the family lived lay on a little hill above the village. As a child, I felt dimly yet strongly that we were an island of truth and safety in the sea of fallen, superstitious, spiritually decayed majority. This majority was alien and somehow mysteriously dangerous. On the basis of this experience, I understand the fear of Jesuits of the little Jung, as well as his lifelong respect towards Catholicism, perhaps attributable to the influence of the archetype of the Big Mother represented by Rome.

My mother was born Catholic. She converted to Protestantism as a university student and later—only to accomplish the indignation of her hard core Catholic family—she married my father, a zealous minister of the new Protestant church! Yet, she did not break with her family and we were frequent guests in the villa built by her father, a small town physician.

The grandfather's house was situated right opposite the local Catholic church. There I used to hear the songs and to see people going in and out. I also suspect that an aunt (or was it my grandmother?),

¹ Actually called „Evangelická“, but the Czech language distinguishes between „evangelic“, which means a broad stream of Protestantism, and „evangelical“, which has the same meaning as in English.

occasionally took me to that church to compensate a little bit for my growing-up in the “pernicious heresy”. So I probably very early learnt to know the rich inside of the Catholic church (so different from the simplicity of the reformed churches) and the smell of the incense. Could not a bit of my mother’s nostalgia for the lost paradise of her childhood become a part of my lifelong religious sentiment?

Childhood at the parsonage

I was born the third of five children but I did not play with my siblings very much. Instead, I spent a lot of my time in lonely games and daydreaming. Unlike Jung who in his late memories told about his early strange, mostly dim introspective mystical experiences, I had my most spiritual childhood moments swinging in the top of the largest cherry-tree of the parish garden, in elation or even in an enthusiastic mood. When I die, I do not care for a regular place in the cold family tomb. I want my ash to be scattered in the grass where this tree used to grow seventy years ago. There is my real home, the center of my personal world – and the link between heaven and earth, mentioned repeatedly by Mircea Eliade in his theory of religion.

Since early childhood, I was obliged regularly to attend the Sunday school for children as well as the services for adults where my father preached, week after week. Faith to me was a firm basis of life, unquestionable but rather dull. Obedience and guilt—that was a substantial part of my basic religious experience. And negotiating my little sins with my conscience (actually the Daddy-God of the little boy) was part of my daily routine. However, unlike Jung, I now highly appreciate my father’s influence. In him, I met a strange mix of rationality and pious fearful awe towards Jahveh that made him shrink back whenever his powerful mind met a problem leading to doubts concerning the basic truths of Christianity. I might have inherited this controversy as an inspiration for my personal struggles—in faith as well as in science. In my life and work I probably articulated implicit controversies, doubts and fights of my less rebellious father. A leading Czech Catholic priest who read one of my books said to me lately that he observed repeatedly how I move at the edge between faithfulness to the official Christian doctrine and disquieting deep doubts. Yes, my psychology of religion as a personal business has been posited at this very edge where I still hope to find creative insights.

Back to my childhood: In the dark, heavy years of the World War II my parents’ religious faith was closely tied to the hope that the future ahead of us will bring a radical betterment of the whole life, the end of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the German army, a paradise of freedom and happiness. As children, we shared the quiet yet firm resistance against the Nazi regime as a basic evil of our lives. Parents never talked about politics out of fear that children might betray their views in school. The danger of secret informers was great and penalties for every manifestation of political resistance were severe. On the knob of every receiver, there had to be attached a little red card with a notice saying: „REMEMBER that listening to foreign radio is prohibited and is punishable by prison or even by death”. Every day, my father finished his prayer at the end of our home worship with the words: „In Thy grace, break the power of the liars and brutes and give all the world justice and peace“. After the war, when we learned the full truth about the Nazi atrocities, I was deeply moved and I felt I had to do everything I can not to allow a repetition of something like that. This resolution, of course, was childish (I was twelve at that time) but I think it became a part of my sense of duty, a sacred duty, that has remained a strong characteristic of my inner life. To side with the Good against the Evil has become the most sacred core of my religion. Bad luck for me: Such a burden is no good for the child.

Growing-up under the shadow of Communism

After the war, my father was appointed professor of church history at the theological faculty and we moved to Prague, the capital of then Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). I was an ordinary student of gymnasium, one of the more diligent ones, as family tradition required. I went to church obediently but the lukewarm (or just too sober?) piety of the congregation, to which our family belonged, meant little to me, although moral values and ideals of my father were a commonplace to me at that time.

Communist overthrow in 1948 struck me gravely, although at first I did not realize its significance. My father believed—under the influence of his beloved teacher Josef Hromádka—that communism was

coming as a historical necessity, as a new epoch of the development of mankind, and that all the injustice and severity brought by the new regime, even the cruelty of terror, are just children's diseases of the new, better world that is coming. Also, he believed that Christians should expiate for their failure to bring social justice, to take care of the poor. This monstrous delusion was not obvious from our perspective, for several reasons. First, the new government at first brought a real advancement to the low class as housing, health care etc. concerned. Second, the communist censorship and propaganda was very efficient. Third, the nation was grateful to the Communist Russia for the liberation from the Nazi Germany. And fourth, the ideas of socialism, traditionally strong in the country, were alive among the intelligentsia, including some of the best writers, artists, and teachers. (Even such a master of critical insight as Milan Kundera, as a young man wrote a long poem glorifying a communist idol Julius Fučík.) Also, the ideology proclaimed by the regime exalted youth as a bearer of Progress and predicted liberation from the "obsolete" moral norms, which sounded as a promise to me, an adolescent feeling fettered by enormously strict moral rules of my church, and especially of my family.

Under these circumstances, I struggled with the ordinary personal problems of adolescence, largely confused politically, ideologically as well as spiritually, unaware of how much I was losing. I found no real teacher or spiritual leader, and no such person found me. Erik Erikson would probably describe me as an adolescent in a moratorium—temporarily unable to go ahead in his development.

A strange student of theology

At the age of eighteen, I had to choose what to do after the graduation from gymnasium. I dimly felt that I would like to study languages or biology, perhaps medicine. To my great surprise I suddenly came to feel an urgent vocation (which I believed to be the voice of God) to study theology and to become a minister! Although I was a member of a group of young Christians at that time and regularly went to their meetings, I did not like the idea at all. I was shy, had very limited ability to work with people, was incompetent as music concerns, and my interest in religious activity was rather lukewarm. Nevertheless, I felt that it was absolutely necessary to obey. So I went to that faculty, in spite of the frantic antireligious propaganda of the regime and very bad practical prospects of a career. Later, however, I started "receiving" other inner commands demanding absolute obedience, which I was not able to carry out. So I permanently felt guilty, yet at the same time I felt I had a special privilege of direct contact with God, a unique spiritual experience. My professors, as well as ministers to whom I listened and with whom I was in touch at that time, spoke very little about experiences of this kind, so I felt somehow superior to them and, on the other hand, also lonely because I was not able to share my feelings and ideas with anybody. When asked whether he believed in God, Jung once said: "I do not believe, I know!" At a primitive, childish level, I had the same gnostic certitude. I did not understand that I was playing a strange neurotic inner game with myself. It took me years to overcome the tyrant inside—and to accept that I am an ordinary man, not somebody specially elected.

Although I suffered hard (probably at the edge of a psychotic breakdown) I was able to observe and to analyze my inner experience rationally—thanks to the training in introspection and to the equipment with relevant concepts not unusual in ministers' children.

I believe that my fundamental psychological setup developed during these lonely years. I wondered why my teachers apparently knew so little about things obviously so important to the life of faith, theoretically as well as practically. Now I know: The reason was that the school where I studied was dominated by the dialectic theology of Karl Barth. (At the time of my studies perhaps this trend was already degenerating into a rigid version of the old Protestant orthodoxy.) While liberal theology of the 19th century actually generated the psychology of religion, Barth warned urgently that psychology is useless and even dangerous to theology and, of course, to the Christian spirituality.

During my studies I was naturally attracted by revivalist movements with their emphasis on inner experience. I got in touch with some Pentecostals in Silesia whom I found fascinating but also threatening to my inner balance, so I did not dare to evolve this contact. The boom of the Charismatic movement in Prague, which would have been more acceptable to me, came only much later.

What else? Of course psychology!

As an obedient son and a loyal church member I completed my studies of theology. To the surprise of my father, my teachers and my colleagues (last, but not least, of my girlfriend), I refused to accept a position in the clergy and—I dropped out. It was probably a belated move of my desperate adolescent struggle for personal identity in the effort to break the childish emotional dependence on my parents. “Coming out” as an atheist was a big and traumatic moral problem to me. The grievousness of this problem was multiplied by the fact of the external oppression of churches. “You are a cowardly defector!”—such an accusation and self-accusation was all too obvious. The fact that I was a very ambitious young man made my guilt feelings even worse.

I was able to break up with the family and with the church community, I could also quit my private prayers but, of course, my values, ideals, attitudes and emotions mostly remained unchanged. So I had some kind of a personal “religion after religion” or “nonreligious spirituality.” This concerned my political orientation (resistance against political and ideological pressure towards conformity in the interest of professional career) as well as my professional ethos and sense of responsibility.

After a year spent as an educator of apprentices in a factory house (painful but enormously useful experience for a boy who had used to live in a glass-house!), I managed to get clerical work in the laboratory of the newly founded Institute of Psychology of the Charles University in Prague. I hoped that in science I will find meaning of life that I could not find in religion. The director recognized me as a promising candidate of the study in this field and helped me to dribble through to the faculty, first as an “irregular”, later a regular external student. I was also allowed to work independently on small research projects in the laboratory of the Institute. It was the time when psychology was already accepted by the leaders of the Communist Party, but with great caution: it was and remained suspect of “ideological contamination.” Therefore, we were obliged to go in the footsteps of the “Soviet Marxist psychologists,” preferably following the lines of the Pavlovian psychology (“the physiology of the highest nervous activity”, as it was called), and to avoid anything that might be criticized as a “bourgeois pseudoscience.” My first project concerned with the analysis of finger movements in typing, another with recognition of various visual patterns presented tachyoscopically .

For me, this was another moratorium I badly needed: The subject of study had little to do with anything related to humanities, i.e. to the field where I experienced my psychospiritual crisis. In the objectivity of science, I hoped to find a refuge at the time of confusing inner turmoil. Everything was purely objective, amenable to statistical analysis of data. Not for long! After some time, when the director felt that a political and ideological thaw was coming (early sixties), he encouraged me to do research on ability testing, later also on questionnaires and other methods of personality research. Now I was already a step closer to human soul.

When I was 31, the director of our institute, to whom I am due for introduction into critical thinking in psychology, suddenly died. At this moment, my craving to go deeper was strong enough to drive me to clinical psychology. I switched to a department of psychiatry with which I already had been in touch on the basis of a small research project. This department was famous for group psychotherapy, then an entirely new field in the Czech psychiatry. Here I learned, among other methods, psychodrama. The stay at this department was extremely instructive and enriching. Unfortunately, the boss of the department, a highly competent man, was too dominant and authoritative for me to accept him as a leader and teacher of clinical work. After less than a year, I left him and accepted a position in a small laboratory of clinical research at the university.

During my clinical intermezzo, I also acquired—marginal, yet important—experience with LSD, then considered a promising medical drug and an honorable method of research in depth psychology. A young Czech physician Stanislav Grof, up to that time untouched by philosophy or religion, after a single application of the drug immediately dedicated his whole professional career to the research of the influence of hallucinogenic agents on human psyche. A little later, after he emigrated from Czechoslovakia to USA, he became one of the founders of the transpersonal psychology. His books, now rather influential in the Czech Republic, strongly suggest that he became a leader of a spiritual movement of a certain kind, perhaps classifiable as a lukewarm humanistic religion. Interestingly, the group of his followers applying his method of holotropic breathing (a surrogate of the prohibited LSD) in our country strongly reminds of a sect or cult.

– With my religious life up to the intake of LSD, it was not such an overwhelming and decisive experience for me as it was for Grof but nevertheless, I was strongly encouraged to self-exploration in the spirit of the depth psychology.

America—a dream and a disappointment

Now came my great, long dreamed-of chance: America! I was promised a position of a research assistant in the Laboratory for Personality and Group Analysis—and I managed to obtain (it was in the year 1966, during a real political thaw in our country and my ideological “sins” became temporarily irrelevant) a permission to accept that position for a year. I had been fascinated by the method of factor analysis, of which Raymond B. Cattell, my new temporary boss, was a recognized world master number one. I admired this man very much. I hoped to learn from him how to excel in the field and how to impenetrate some anticipated secrets of human personality. I was disappointed again. The great man was past his noontide, the work in the laboratory had become a routine and much of the research was done to develop diagnostic methods ensuring commercial success of the company governed by the practical-minded Mrs. Cattell. Instead of focusing and going in depth in a narrow field, professor Cattell kept trying his beloved method in a broad range of fields, including factors of motivation of laboratory rats!

In the spiritual desert I experienced during my American year, I found an oasis – the work of Erik Homburger Erikson. In his theory of the eight ages of man (which I recognized much later as a myth in the best, Jungian sense of the word) I found a bridge between the science of psychology and religion, or spirituality. I was not the only one: This bridge has served to generations of American college students to whom his *Childhood and Society* was (and perhaps still is) recommended as one of the most eye-opening books.

After I returned from America, I was offered a highly prestigious position in the newly founded Institute of Psychology of the Academy of Sciences (the political and ideological thaw continued). Here I proceeded in the research on personality, greatly indebted to Cattell. My book *Psychology of Personality* (1971, 6th edition 2009), however, already reflected also the ideas of humanistic psychology and particularly of Erikson. The formulations had to be cautious and religion was only mentioned in passing, since in 1971 censorship was back again but some of the perceptive readers said: Hasn't this book been written by a minister?

The lucky disaster

The year 1971 (I was 38) brought another turning point in my career. This time, it was not my choice. Political checkups, started by the “normalized” Communist party in 1969 at the highest floor of the system, got down to the ordinary scientific workers of our Academy, including, of course, also the non-parties. I was found politically unacceptable and was fired. A real disaster to a researcher with the highest ambitions. And yet—nothing better could have happened to me! Thanks to good friends (incidentally: zealous members of the church I left years ago) I found refuge in the health service. Here the political pressure was not as strong as in the Academy of Sciences and I was even allowed to teach medical doctors and clinical psychologists (although at the University and in the leading professional journals my name was on the black list).

Yes, it was good luck, although it took me a long time to recognize that. From the best teachers available in the field of clinical psychology now I had the chance to learn how to use diagnostic methods creatively, how to work with a broad range of patients and how to advice people in various crises.

My personal “religion after religion”

During the seventies of the last century, although busy in clinical psychology, I still stuck to the idea that my main professional achievement should be in the theory of personality. Here, I was particularly attracted by the fashionable, though protean, concept of the Self. However, instead of analyzing cautiously the role of the concept in the general social awareness and in the science understood as a social phenomenon (as I would proceed today), I was trying “to take the fortress by a front run”, to capture the true Center, or Core of personality, actually the Soul. I dreamt of a unique synthetic theoretical work done from the armchair. Unconsciously, I hoped to discover some basic Truth of psychology, to satisfy my personal need

of something certain and safe, of the proverbial “firm point in the universe”. I believe that such a motive, hidden behind “purely scientific efforts” is not uncommon in psychology, perhaps also in other sciences.

I studied hard and I learned much but this pet dream of mine remained sterile, partly because there was no adequate forum where I could have discussed my ideas. No domestic journal would have printed Říčan, even if I wrote “marxistically”, i. e., if I cited—no matter if only formally—Soviet psychologists considered ideologically unobjectionable. And, of course, there was no chance that I would obtain the permission to send such stuff to be published abroad; sending a paper abroad without the permission of authorities would be dangerous to the professional career.

My search for a surrogate of religion in psychological theory had a counterpart in my training in psychotherapy. Relatively late, at the age of forty, I started my training in group psychotherapy. This activity was considered ideologically suspect by the communist watchmen. And really, the understanding of an individual as a unique human being, as an end in itself, common in the Czech training psychotherapeutic communities, stood in sharp contrast to the (pseudo)Marxist view of the individual as a means in the process of building up a better future, or as the proverbial wheel in the super machine of Society. Also, the depth-psychological orientation, which was influential among clinical psychologists, was only half tolerated by the official establishment in psychology and psychiatry. And, on top of this, a number of active Christians were among the leading figures of the Czech psychotherapeutic movement. All this contributed to our feeling that we were bearers of values and ideals most needed for a moral and spiritual renewal of the society degenerated under the pressure of the communist evil.

The small groups, in which we did our training, provided us with an experience of intimate interpersonal relationships similar to relationships in the small religious communities typical of the revivalist movements. My nostalgia for the human closeness combined with spiritual mutuality in small religious groups made me to experience the training with great personal intensity. I still believe that interpersonal intimacy—not only of an erotic kind—may attain the intensity of an ecstatic spiritual experience; dominant aspect of such an intimacy may be gratefulness, admiration, self-sacrificing love to a suffering human being – perhaps even terror similar to the terror of a god torturing his/her victim with utmost cruelty (Rican, 2003). I think these ideas developed Maslow’s well known concept of peak experiences.

Later, when I started my training in psychoanalysis, I met there a similar spirit and ethos. Psychotherapy was considered a noble, idealistic undertaking, an effort to help people by discovering the truth and meaning of their individual lives while bringing little social recognition or personal benefit to the psychotherapist. And really, unlike in the free countries where psychotherapy meant rather a safe, remunerative job, there were many honest idealists among us who practiced psychotherapy as a real vocation. So here I found an extremely interesting, spiritually stimulating and also cohesive community—reminding of religious groups I left many years before. Nevertheless, I still missed my spiritual home, and at the age of 56 I finally returned to my “church of origin” and became an active member of one of its congregations. The return was not without pain but perhaps my renovated position liberated me from taking science too seriously, as a tool, not as an idol or an aim in itself.

Inspired by the work of Erik Erikson, I prepared a book on the life-span development called “The way through life,” which had to lie at the publisher waiting for the collapse of communism until autumn 1989 to be published. It is not a book on the psychology of religion or spirituality as such but the ideas of personal identity, psychospiritual crisis or vital faith (in a broad sense of the word) belong to the core of this volume. It has been my most successful book, still read and sold—now, of course, urgently requiring a revision to make its spiritual message more explicit.

All doors open—better late than never

The nineties brought dramatic changes in the lives of many of us here in the Czech (up to 1993 Czechoslovak) republic. I was no longer a *persona non grata*. There were no obstacles for me to advance academically (as associate professor, later full professor). I was elected the first President of the post-communist era of the Czechoslovak Psychological Society. I even had the chance to return to the Psychological Institute of the Academy of Sciences after almost 20 years of “exile”—and as the director! I was not very successful in this function; a good boss should become a boss in his thirties, at last. But after

my term was over I enjoyed very much the possibility to do research full time, and with adequate funding. I studied human aggression, especially among children. When I reached the age of sixty, I felt I might discontinue my activity in empirical research and I asked for a grant on a theoretical project called “Satisfaction from the suffering of another human being”. The best part of the results was a study on the religious context of causing suffering to a human being. That was actually my first work classifiable as psychology of religion.

Meanwhile, I was trying to do something for my church by helping with the education of future ministers at the faculty where I had studied decades before. So I told my students about the contribution of Erikson, Jung, Freud, and other thinkers to the study of religion. I also trained their communicative skills and I even managed to work with a quasi-therapeutic group of those who were interested in this type of experience. At the same time, I wrote about the problems of religious people as patients in clinical practice, about psychological aspects of charismatic groups, I examined psychologically future ministers to warn the church authorities against their possible problems in ecclesiastical service, and also beginning chaplains of the Czech army.

The acceptance I met at the theological faculty was less warm than I had hoped. I was tolerated as a part-time “volunteer” for several years but students received no credits for their work with me and, of course, I got no official recognition (including money) for my efforts. The Barthian influence was still strong and psychology was found suspicious, especially when it became clear that I find it important to study and teach the genuine *psychology of religion* as an independent, authentic science, not only *religious psychology* as a discipline auxiliary to theology or to the work of the church. However, there are two non-Catholic theological faculties at the Charles University in Prague, and the other one—more liberal—asked me to teach regular courses of the psychology of religion their students of religion who do not intend to become ministers. This part-time job brought me new stimuli and young collaborators so that I returned—better late than never—also to empirical research in the Academy of Sciences, now oriented towards the psychology of religion and spirituality. My monograph “The psychology of religion and spirituality” (2nd edition, 2007), based mainly upon my teaching and research experience has been recognized the standard Czech work in the field.

The nineties in the Czech Republic – a fancy religious landscape

Since the beginning of the nineties, the formerly Communist countries experienced a boom of various religious movements. Evangelists and missionaries were coming from the East and West, even from the South and North. After 40 years of atheistic oppression and vacuum in the public space, many people were extremely sensitive and open to (“unvaccinated” against!?) various sorts of religious propaganda, at various levels of cultivation and authenticity. Christian revivalists and Pentecostals, worshippers of Krishna, Buddhists and adherents of Yoga, Jehova Witnesses, and many other sects and cults now preached their messages openly and they attracted numerous converts.

As a researcher and as a teacher of the psychology of religion, I found this eruption of religious and spiritual phenomena extremely interesting and instructive to my students. New religious groups were mostly composed of young people, often deeply involved in their religious life and radical in their social behavior inspired by it. Contact with them was really fascinating.

Some of the converts, of course, soon were disappointed or felt abused by their gurus in a specific way and were trying to escape out of their new commitments. Often they found it extremely difficult to get rid of the ties to the leaders as well as to the communities they had chosen and identified with. Exit counseling offered opportunities to observe dramatic inner fights as well as interpersonal conflicts of highest intensity. I was lucky to have an opportunity to cooperate with Prof. Vojtíšek, a top specialist in this area who knew the religious landscape of the country in depth and in detail. We published some papers together. Later, Prof. Vojtíšek founded Dingir, a semi-popular journal specialized in the religious landscape of the Czech Republic to which I still occasionally contribute. This journal now aspires to acquire recognition by the scientific community and raises its demands on authors accordingly.

At the Hussite Theological Faculty, I taught the theory of the psychology of religion but, at the same time, I instructed students to observe what happens in various religious communities, to describe it

psychologically and to discuss their observations in a group. During the first semester of my course, they were required to contact a Christian or, if they are Jews, a Jewish community, during the second semester, a culturally distant group. In other seminars, we practiced some simple methods of meditation and students had a chance to discuss their experience with them in a group. This kind of work proved stimulating to the teacher as well as to the students. Though I am retiring now, I remain in contact with my successor as a consultant and I enjoy seeing how the work I started develops.

The non-religious spirituality?

The Czech Republic is a uniquely secularized country, even in the context of Europe where only a small minority of population still supports churches. In a little ironical joke combined with a small sigh we sometimes call our country “the godless Czech basin” (the main part of the country is a basin geographically).

Already at the beginning of the last century, Jung interpreted the obvious crisis of the European Christianity, not as a consequence of a simple loss of spirituality or of interest in religion but as a *transforming crisis* that will result in something qualitatively new. Human soul, he used to say, is genuinely religious and the loss of old forms provides a unique chance for Europe to be enriched by sort of eruption from the depth of the collective unconscious. The catastrophes of Nazism and Communism, he believed, were basically of religious nature. But the real, positive revival of religion is still ahead!

Jung did not live long enough to witness the contemporary religious landscape with the continuing decline of most of the Christian churches (and their dramatic growth in some parts of the world), a statistically marginal (though perhaps important) growth of Buddhism and other Eastern religions – and a broad stream of religion degenerated into an eclectic mix of superstition, at a cultural level barely surpassing the mud of an indifferent agnosticism and atheistic hostility towards any organized religion. To be personal again: I saw the country church building where my father had served faithfully for 11 years deserted – without any visible hope of renewal.

Shall we look for the first manifestations of an underground lost river of spirituality with the hope that it will change into a grandiose spring of a new, unheard-of stream of renaissance of religion and–through it–of the whole culture, as Jung suggested?

When we observe – from the European perspective – the mainstream religious life in America, we cannot resist an impression that religion there often is a commonplace, a matter of routine, of a well-established technology and social engineering and mass-manipulation. Where are the doubts, the inseparable shadow of faith, where is the painful yet omnipresent mystery of the Evil? Sometimes I feel (and I am not the only one with this feeling) that a stubborn Nietzschean atheist or an agnostic who says he cannot believe is humanly closer to me than a self-secure fundamentalist or a happy-go-lucky easy-going churchgoer. At such moments, I sense a unique hope in this honest quest of us Europeans.

From these personal reflections, it may be easy to understand my interest in the discussions about the concept of spirituality, particularly in the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* at the end of the nineties. Piedmont’s Spiritual Transcendence Scale caught my attention and inspired my thinking as well as my empirical research. In an extensive article “Spirituality – the story of a concept in the psychology of religion”, published in the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* (2004) I analyzed the way of the concept into and its development in psychology as well as in the general usage. Here I traced the trajectory of the concept from the battle-cry of American hippies of the golden sixties, inspired by some of the humanistic psychologists, “I am not religious but I am spiritual,” up to the contemporary youth of the Czech Republic saying: “Spirituality yes, religion no!” My solution of the problem “spirituality versus religion” was very close to that of Ken Pargament (e. g., 1999). According to him, spirituality may best be defined as the experiential core of religion. I have been puzzled by the fact that so many highly competent students of religion refuse to accept this simple, ingenious solution retaining the traditional meaning of the term “religion”. At present, I am trying to show that the concept of spirituality and the double word “spirituality and religion”, which has become strangely frequent, is a social construction with a specific function that needs to be assessed critically.

Individual differences and their measurement as my dominant theme

As a psychologist who had spent most of his professional life working in the theory, measurement and practical assessment of individual differences I soon recognized my challenge in the field of the psychology of religion: measurement of spirituality. If the approach via individual differences proved useful with respect to human abilities as well as to dimensions of personality, it should be given its chance also with respect to spirituality. In the first place, it leads from mere theorizing to operationalization of concepts.

Our special interest has been, as suggested above, the questionable concept of the non-religious spirituality. We decided to define general spirituality, which means spirituality that can appear or exist independent from the particular religious confession the subject declares or even from the condition whether the subject confesses *any religion* or s/he is an agnostic or atheist. More specifically, the atheist should have a chance to obtain the maximum score on a test of this general spirituality.

Critical examination of existing instruments having the word “spirituality” in its title led us to the Spiritual Transcendence Scale of Ralph Piedmont. Piedmont – formerly one of the great ones around the Big Five – did an excellent job when he constructed a questionnaire of spirituality, to which even subjects professing no religion could answer meaningfully. (In its final version, interestingly, he included an item enquiring about faith in God – perhaps under the influence of his affiliation to the Loyola College?) With a young colleague, we translated Piedmont and verified the factorial structure of his questionnaire on the Czech students.

Before Piedmont, David Elkins published an outline of a questionnaire of general spirituality. His biography slightly reminds my own. He studied theology and then he started to work as a minister. However, his fundamentalist congregation fired him from this position and even excluded him as a member. In a personal crisis, he found a Jungian therapist and became therapist himself. His outline contains all essential Christian humanistic values, with love as the most important one!

We constructed, on similar lines as Piedmont (Elkins never published his questionnaire), the Prague Spirituality Questionnaire, PSQ (Rican, Janosova, 2005), more adequate to our culture. It was factor analyzed and validated and we appreciated very much that a study based upon it was published as an article opening the 2010 volume of the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*.

The reviewers were rather skeptical to us newcomers and their comments actually suggested that the whole job should be done again. Nevertheless, Ray Paloutzian as the editor-in-chief was more understanding and accepted a revised version. He even started asking us for reviews of new manuscripts, so now we feel really “in”!

A detail from our work on the PSQ may be of interest as symptomatic from the standpoint of my autobiography. It concerns morality as an aspect of spirituality. Our initial item-pool was rather extensive and we relied on exploratory factor analysis to establish sub-dimensions of spirituality. With me as a co-author of the items, it is not surprising that one of the factors invited interpretation as *Moral Involvement* (a sample item: *Sometimes I dread it, how badly I could mess up my life*). To our disappointment, we found that this factor correlated with neuroticism! So we searched carefully individual correlations within the item-pool and we were able rationally to construct another moral scale with an acceptable alpha, interpretable as *ethical enthusiasm* (a sample item: *Sometimes I feel craving to devote my entire life to the fight of good against evil*). And we modified the interpretation of the other factor to *conscientious solicitude*.

As an illustrative example of another psychometric project—still unfinished but already published in a preliminary form—the test called “Test of Spiritual Sensitiveness” may be mentioned. The items of this test are pictures projected on the screen while the subjects are asked to choose those emotions from a given list that each particular picture aroused in them. Exploratory factor analysis yielded 3 factors tentatively interpretable as (1) *Dionysian enthusiasm* (markers: enthusiasm, wonder, sadness/reversed), (2) *Christian hopefulness* (makers: hope, love, longing), (3) *Sense of holiness* (markers: awe, strength/reversed, humility). A typical picture of this test is given as Fig. 1. According to the data obtained from the Czech students, it evokes especially the feeling of gratefulness.

Please, Fig. 1 about here!

I cannot claim that I founded a Czech school of the psychology of religion! Yet, my work is being cited quite frequently and the interest in the questionnaire also is not negligible. Future years will show...

A hindsight

We live in a world that does not understand itself. The great ideas of Galileo Galilei, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and their followers remain challenges unmet by religious or other thinkers trying to provide contemporary man with a system of thought giving him a sense of meaning and a workable guide to social action. Much of the teachings of churches seem to be answers to questions we neither understand nor even know any more. The old images, symbols and stories grow pale and lose their relevance. Something substantial is lost, and we painfully miss it. Such has been my experience since childhood, even if only gradually I learned to articulate it, with the help of the thinkers whose books I have read, personal friends I have met and – last but not least – the patients who entrusted me with their psychospiritual troubles.

I believe that throughout my whole life, in all its developmental stages and breaks, in twists and turns, the proverbial red thread may be tracked: in the middle or under all that ordinariness and everydayness, under the strivings for success and happiness, the basic worry and care determined my course: to understand the great loss and to do something about it. It is probably the burden of every modern man but I was “privileged” to carry more of it than most people.

Already in the boredom of the minister’s child overfed with the routine of religious instruction dare I see a form of the refusal of the inauthentic surrogate of the dreamed of Truth and a vital faith, on which one could base his/her trust and basic orientation in the world. My adolescent quiet resistance to the obligatory religious instruction, the clash with the experience of an absolute personal Command and the years needed to overcome it, the choice of psychology as a field of study and profession, all that I now understand as groping quest for something to replace what religion had promised but failed to provide.

In psychology, I started as far from spirituality as possible (for reasons I tried to identify above) but step by step I proceeded from the periphery to what I gradually recognized as the center of the field: Here the topics like the highest value or striving, true self, conscience, peak experience, existential encounter, meaning of life, etc. mutually intermingle and actually call for integration in the topic completing them while transcending them – spirituality. So when I finally entered the psychology of religion proper I only had to make explicit what had been implicitly prepared during my whole personal and professional life.

Above I mentioned the Jungian idea of revival or even rebirth of religion in some new, unheard-of form. This is only one version of the idea of the big waiting for or quest of something that the world or at least our sick Europe needs more than anything else. As a child and as a young man, I lived my doubts and groping as a search for personal orientation, which I felt I must ground entirely individualistically. Gradually, I came to understand my individual quest as a part, as an atom of a great movement of millions of people in an outside of organized religions. I believe that even the core of the psychology of religion, and especially of the psychology of spirituality, may be understood as a part of this great quest. It is a science not only of that, which exists but of that, which is coming. I know that this is a heresy from the standpoint of religion as well as from the standpoint of science but I nevertheless gladly subscribe to it.