EXPERIENCE AND BELIEF: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF HUMAN RESPONSE TO MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University
2014
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree in any tertiary education institution.

________________________

Emma Nattress
ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the findings of an investigation into contemporary experience of mystical and or psychospiritual phenomena. Thirty-six interviews were conducted with adults who consented to discuss personal experiences that they perceived to be of a supernatural nature. The research methodology involved a modified form of grounded theory that was used in conjunction with the study’s strongly phenomenological approach.

Analysis of the data revealed that, subsequent to the experience and mediated by each individual’s personal circumstances and ontology, the experience acted as a catalyst or change agent. This core category, which was noted in all narratives as a sense of forward movement and energy, was termed Catalysis. Catalysis was discernable in three merging phases:

(i) engagement and reaction (often affective), involving identification or non-identification of the phenomenon;

(ii) a period of inquiry (sometimes referred to as ‘a journey’) leading to change in the individual’s religious praxis and spirituality; and

(iii) the reverberation of the experience into society in the form of changes within religious institutions, direct actions based on altruism; and social action.

Accordingly, the thesis argues that apprehension of mystical and/or psychospiritual phenomena is a catalytic, progressive and empowering experience that has capacity to enable individuals in ways that bring about tangible outcomes not only for themselves, but also for the wider community. Furthermore, that the continuity of the Catalytic Process Model (CPM) offers a possible template for authentication of human response to the mystical as a spiritual and evolutionary process.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In acknowledging my gratitude for scholarships that I received from the Australian Postgraduate Award and Murdoch University, I would like to thank a number of people for their assistance and support in the completion of this thesis.

Firstly, and most importantly, I wish to thank Dr. Nancy Ault and Dr. Alex Main. I am indebted to them for their supervision, guidance and consistent encouragement throughout this investigative journey of human response to the mystical. I know that I will miss our regular symposiums.

A debt of gratitude is also owed to those generous individuals who participated in the interview process. This study could not have proceeded without your vital input. Thanks again, for your trust and continuing interest in the study’s outcome.

Thanks to Ian MacPherson for his support and the gift of a rare publication, to Kay Ogden for her encouragement, to Nell Morgan and Sussan Shave for editorial assistance and to my sister Pat for always being a tower of strength and a patient listener.

Finally, this thesis was inspired by the Reverend David Merriman and is respectfully dedicated to his memory.

Emma Nattress, November 2014
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Chapter One

SETTING THE SCENE

What we have to do is to present such a weight of objective evidence in the form of written records of these subjective spiritual feelings and of their effects on the lives of the people concerned, that the intellectual world must come to see that they are in fact as real and as influential as the forces of love.

(Alister Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man)

1.1: INTRODUCTION

The present study is a follow-up to an earlier study¹ that reported on the findings of two identical surveys. These surveys, which were administered in order to test for the scientific criterion of repeatability,² took the form of a medical diagnostic model.³ Using this model, a series of class characteristics or symptoms that had initially been presented to a group of 100 participants, primarily from the helping professions (social workers, psychologists, teachers and nurses) was presented to 135 postgraduate students from Murdoch University. The chosen characteristics or symptoms were those associated with six experiences generally recognised as being of a psychic nature: the out-of-body/near-death experience, clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience, the seeing of auras/photism.

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² Repeatability/replication: The principle that that any experiment if carried out correctly, should always generate the same result. In the West the inability of experiencers of transcendent experiences to repeat their experiences on demand has been a stumbling block to belief in the existence of mystical and psychospiritual experiences.

³ For the purpose of this study examples of diagnostic models included the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention: ‘Toolkit for Health Care Professionals Diagnosing CFS’, Available online: http://www.cdc.gov.cfs and Communicable Disease Directorate, Department of Health Government of Western Australia and the Meningitis Information Centre ‘Information Package’, 2006.
The object of the study was to discover how many individuals within the group evinced the above specific characteristics. This proactive approach, in seeking information from people irrespective of their experience of psychic phenomena, is comparable with that of Kenneth Ring. Ring’s systematic collection of accounts from adults who had come close to death (there was no stipulation that they had to have had any experiences) played an important role in validating Kübler-Ross and Moody’s near-death experience (NDE) research.

In the initial survey, 60% of the participants reported having experienced one or more of the listed characteristics. These findings were quantitatively and qualitatively compared with the findings of the second survey, in which 64% of the postgraduate participants reported that they had personally experienced one or more of the listed class characteristics. Intriguingly, in both survey findings, a number of participants perceived their experiences as having spiritual and/or religious connotations.

The commonality of these findings was further supported by comparison between the Australian surveys’ qualitative reports of contemporary psychic phenomena and detailed descriptions of psychic and/or mystical phenomena included in four British, religious studies and one American secular study. Examination of these studies

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addressed the scientific criterion of repeatability and supports the argument that because of the similarity of the descriptions there are grounds to believe in the actuality of the experiences.

**The Current Study**

During the process of comparing the previous study’s findings with the above British and American studies, and in particular with Alister Hardy’s very detailed study, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, it became apparent that the nature and frequency of transcendental experiences has been a subject for much investigation. However, the question: ‘What influence, if any, did these subjective experiences have upon the lives of those who experienced them and upon the society of which these individuals were a part?’ remained unanswered. Accordingly, and in keeping with Hardy’s desire to provide ‘objective evidence in the form of written records of these subjective feelings and of their effects on the lives of the people concerned’, the current study has as its purpose to explore the effects of mystical or psychospiritual experiences as reported by individuals who perceive that they have personally experienced such phenomena. Therefore, in this study, the primary focus is on the effects, in the sense of the consequences, outcomes and results concomitant to the perception of a mystical or psychospiritual phenomenon, rather than on the experience per se.

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9 Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 5.
**Mystical**

For the immediate purpose of the current research project, the term mysticism, from which the adjective mystical is derived, is defined as knowledge of the Absolute through personal experience (*unio mystica*). Although, there are differences between Christian mysticism and other forms of mysticism, such as Buddhist, Islamic or Hindu mysticism. Generally speaking, mystical experience is usually perceived to be initiated by a number of strategies that may include, prayer, meditation, music or chanting. A number of sources consider that verification for the genuineness of mystical experience is demonstrated by ‘its effect, viz, its fruit in such things as an increase in humility, charity, and love of suffering.’ ¹⁰

**Psychospiritual**

In his *Sociology of the Paranormal*, Greeley uses the term ‘paranormal’ to operationalize experiences including ‘psychic and mystic’ as described within his survey. ¹¹ In a similar manner, in the studies which preceded this study, the term *psukhikos*, a Greek term meaning of the soul or life, was made use of to operationalize a number of terms including the out-of-body/near-death experience, auditory and visionary experience. This operationalization was deemed necessary to differentiate between the above experiences and other, possibly commercial, practices ¹² that are sometimes described as psychic but have also been condemned as

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¹² For example: fortune telling, tarot card reading and working with crystals that are thought to have magical powers.
being narcissic\textsuperscript{13} and irrational.\textsuperscript{14} For greater clarity within the current study, the term \textit{psukhikos} is replaced by the word psychospiritual.

Psychospiritual phenomena, clearly considered by many as a minor or less important form of mystical experience, have been referred to as ‘accidental or marvellous mystical phenomena’\textsuperscript{15} and also as ‘secondary and charismatic mystical phenomena’\textsuperscript{16}. From time to time, identification of experiences that involve psychospiritual phenomena has been somewhat problematic. Problematic, in view of the fact that such experiences may be perceived by those who experience them, as being either mystical or psychospiritual and in some circumstances both mystical and psychospiritual. To address this difficulty, rather than referring to either ‘mystical experiences’ or ‘psychospiritual experiences’ the phrase ‘mystical and/or psychospiritual will be used wherever appropriate.

When considering effects generated by perceptions of a mystical or psychospiritual nature, it may be useful to have some understanding of the actual phenomena that are involved. What are they like? How widespread are they, When are they likely to occur? What is the relationship between the mystical and the psychospiritual? However, the main focus of the current study is not the experiences themselves but


on the effects of such experiences on the lives of the people concerned. Therefore, to avoid a diversion into these areas of taxonomy and frequency, further information about mystical and psychospiritual phenomena has been situated in Appendix H: *Mystical and Psychospiritual Phenomena: An Overview of their Nature and Incidence*.

Given that the current study is an inductive one, in which the literature review will be undertaken subsequent to analysis of the research findings, it is appropriate to undertake a preliminary overview of general literature relative to the research area. Accordingly, the study now moves to undertake a selective pre-view of studies, undertaken from the twentieth century and onwards, that have considered experiences variously classified as mystical, psychospiritual or transcendental.

### 1.2: CONSIDERATION OF MYSTICAL PHENOMENA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND ONWARDS

Because mystical and psychospiritual phenomena tend to be ethereal and unexpected and are difficult to repeat under scientific conditions, their study presents challenges. In fact, purposeful investigation of experiences perceived to be of a psychic or transcendental nature, does not appear to have begun until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The post-enlightenment period was one in which it has been suggested that the growth of scientism coupled with the Church’s increasingly deistic point of view had alienated human experience from the world presented by scientific evidence. Darwin’s theory of evolution, in particular, placed many intellectuals in the invidious position of being seen as either ‘godless scientists or
irrational believers.” A need to reconcile human spirituality with natural selection began to emerge through scientific studies of religious and mystical experience such as Edwin Starbuck’s *Psychology of Religion* (1899) and William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Although, James, in common with many writers of that time, was interested in Spiritualism and the investigation of psychic phenomena, he is generally regarded as a religious psychologist and it is primarily for his work in the field of religious experience that he is most well known.

**The Importance of William James and The Varieties of Religious Experience**

Originally presented as the 1901-02 *Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion*, the importance of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE) in influencing 20th century study of metaphysics and consciousness has been mapped by Eugene Taylor.

Consideration of Taylor’s schema (see Figure 1 on the following page) confirms the VRE as a source of inspiration for writers from many disciplines, including, Philosophy of Religion, Anthropology and Transpersonal Psychology to name a few, not only in the twentieth century but onwards into the twenty-first.

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Figure 1: The Influence of James Varieties.

James’ study contains, in addition to one personal example of spiritual crisis,\textsuperscript{20} numerous examples of historical, psychospiritual experiences and accounts of religious experiences as provided by ordinary (in the sense that they were extant) nineteenth century people. Some of the ways in which James treats religious experience involve:

- undertaking an empirical study of individual experiences;
- formulating a definition of mysticism;
- justifying a rejection of reductionist medical and psychiatric explanations; and
- promoting his pragmatic concept that religious experiences should be judged by their outcomes.

The study will now consider James’ treatment of the above aspects of religious experience, together with the writings of some later researchers who have, to a greater or lesser extent, addressed the same issues.

**Undertaking an Empirical Study of Individual Experiences**

James’ empirical study of religious experience — the VRE, which draws upon his professional expertise as a psychologist, together with his commitment to scientific enquiry and pragmatism, has attracted both criticism and admiration.

Critics of James’ scientific treatment of religious experience include David Knowles and Jacques Maritain. Knowles classes James amongst a group of writers, including Underhill and Hügel, who, because they have failed to undertake any theological analysis of mystical experiences, have produced studies that merely provide a collection and comparison of reports of mystical experience.21 Maritain, also holds reservations as to the nature and character of examples of religious experience cited by James and dismisses them as being merely rudimentary manifestations of natural, as opposed to supernatural (and in Maritain’s opinion superior) spirituality.22

On the other hand, James’ empirical approach is admired by Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis — three psychologists who commend James’ lack of bias in giving equal consideration to the potentially constructive and destructive aspects of religious experience.23 Similarly, Beauregard and O’Leary, in approaching the VRE from the position of cognitive neuroscience, regard James’ interest in the less flattering private, even ‘pathological’ aspects of religious experience, as being necessary for scientific research.24

After the publication of the VRE, it was over half a century before any comparable empiric studies of religious experiences were to be undertaken. Then, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, descriptive accounts of mystical and paranormal


phenomena began to be found in British and American studies and particularly in studies relating to religious experience. Studies, such as those conducted by Hardy, Hay, and Greeley that focus, in one form or another, on what has become known as the Alister Hardy Question:

Do you feel that you have ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?

The first of these studies, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, was undertaken by Hardy — a supporter of Darwinism. Hardy argued that Darwin’s doctrine of natural selection and the spiritual aspect of humanity are not mutually exclusive. He postulated that the linguistic communication of ideas or memes and traditions has played a major role in the greatly accelerated evolutionary process of humans, as compared to that of plants and animals. Citing his frustration at scientists not giving sufficient attention to the ‘mind-body relationship’ Hardy urged the need to undertake a scientific study of religious feelings in order to demonstrate ‘whether or not a belief in the spiritual side of man may be regarded as reasonable or not.’

Thus, according to Argyle, Hardy began using his training as a biologist, to collect and classify accounts of religious experiences ‘as if they were specimens of plants or

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25 Alister Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*.


27 Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal*.


animals.’ Through newspaper appeals, pamphlets and questionnaires Hardy obtained thousands of replies. Analysis of the first 3,000 replies enabled Hardy and his team to develop a record of religious experiences that has possibly never been equalled.

Hardy and his team developed a complex classification system of divisions and sub-divisions that ultimately resulted in 92 categories. For example, the 431 records of clairaudience, recorded in Appendix I of Hardy’s study, fall within a main division of ‘sensory or quasi sensory experience: auditory’ and are further divided into ‘voices calming’ and ‘voices guiding.’ Similarly, 179 Out-of-Body experiences (OBEs) are categorised within the division as ‘sensory or quasi sensory experiences: visual’. A division which they share with other phenomena including visionary experiences, photism and possibly examples of nature mysticism.

In Hardy’s opinion, the experiences reported in his study are more representative of a sense of ‘transcendent reality’ than numinous or mystical religious experience. However, Richard Woods sees some similarities between the classifications developed by Hardy and experiences that are listed in the Chronicles of the South German Dominican Convents as mystical experiences. Woods writes that Hester

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32 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 132.

Reed Gehring’s analysis of these chronicles\textsuperscript{34} provides evidence of the skill of the Dominican sisters in creating a lexicon that had the capacity to describe mystical experiences. Gehring’s division of the chronicled experiences, as detailed by Woods, is shown below.

Table 1: Mystical Experiences Recorded by 14\textsuperscript{th} Century Rhenish Nuns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Purgative: Extraordinary often severe forms of asceticism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>In the tradition of ecstatic asceticism of beguines and other medieval manifestations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>realised in the cultivation of virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Constancy, Zeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Self-denial, abstinence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Mortification (abtotung)</td>
</tr>
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<td>vi.</td>
<td>Long- suffering</td>
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<td>vii.</td>
<td>Courage in the face of death</td>
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</table>

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<thead>
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<th>Illuminative: Mystical experiences, more typical of contemplative life</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Vita activa and vita contemplativea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Visionary life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Sensory and Quasi-sensory Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Visions – Ocular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Revelations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Oral</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Voices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Music</td>
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<td>iii.</td>
<td>Inner, Intellectual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Experiences of Taste and Smell</td>
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3. Unitive: Ecstasy and Rapture


Nevertheless, differences also exist, for example, whilst Hardy regards smell as being a sensory experience, the Rhenish nuns consider both taste and smell, to be cognitive experiences. Furthermore, the experience of taste is not included in Hardy’s listing. It is not possible to know if this is because it was not submitted by the survey’s participants or because, as was almost the case regarding smell, its relevance was not recognised. Beardsworth, for example, in his study of ‘ecstatic and mystical episodes’ drawn from the first one thousand records provided by Hardy, writes that he omitted the phenomena of smell ‘... since only four cases were reported...’.

Neither Beardsworth nor Hardy might be considered as being completely impartial in their treatment of religious experiences, as considered within their respective studies. For example, central to Beardsworth’s study, A Sense of Presence, is the concept that awareness of a presence, other than one’s self, accompanied by an emotion brought about by the experience is a core element of religious experience. However, attention is drawn to Beardsworth’s treatment of ’three exceptions [that] stand out’, in that, they failed to provide evidence of an affective relationship between the phenomena and the experiencers, thereby, to some extent, casting doubt on their validity as a variety of spiritual experience. Beardsworth does not seem to have taken into account that it is not all that uncommon to fail to recognise a personal experience of a psychospiritual phenomenon.

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35 Beardsworth, A Sense of Presence, x.

36 Beardsworth, A Sense of Presence, 40-44.

Although Hardy expressed concern that his study lacked a quantitative element, this issue was addressed by major national opinion surveys conducted by Greeley in America through the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) and in Britain by Hay and Morisy through National Opinion Polls Ltd (NOP). In America, all reference to God was excluded from the key question, a decision taken by Greeley to ‘operationalize the concept [of religious experiences] as paranormal experiences’.38 David Hay, in Britain, followed suit so that a comparison between the two surveys could be made. A quantitative comparison of the experience of a sense of presence is shown below:

**Table 2: Comparison between British and American Surveys of the Experience of a Sense of Presence**

Q: ‘Have you ever felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself,’ (Results as shown in British and American findings).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
<th>United States</th>
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<tr>
<td>Once or Twice</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several Times</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>31%</strong></td>
<td><strong>35%</strong></td>
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Later Gallup polls conducted in Britain by Hay and Heald\textsuperscript{39} and continuing NORC polls in America appear to lend support to Greeley’s conclusion that mystical and paranormal experiences are not only normal but widespread.\textsuperscript{40}

Perhaps it might be thought that Knowles and Maritain’s criticism (see above) of researchers who, because they have neglected to undertake any theological study of mystical experiences, have produced studies that merely provide collections and comparisons of mystical experiences could possibly apply, not only to James, but also to Hardy, Hay and Greeley. However, it may also be possible that these criticisms are based on the theological presupposition that mystical experiences are a gift from God, together with an oversight to recognise James’ predilection for scientific methodology — a process that relies heavily on replication and by necessity involves collection and comparison.

Whilst the issue of replication may be somewhat problematic with regards to investigation of mystical phenomena, from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century onwards, consideration of studies relating to mystical phenomena, religion and mysticism clearly indicates increasing utilisation of scientific methodologies, for example by researchers, such as, Persinger,\textsuperscript{41} Tart\textsuperscript{42} and Monroe.\textsuperscript{43} Monroe, who has been classified as being a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} David Hay and G Heald, ‘Religion is good for you’ New Society, 17.03.1987.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Poloma, The Sociological Context of Religious Experience, 170. See also, Marshall Mystical Encounters with the Natural World, 36. Here Marshall notes that many of Greeley’s descriptors of paranormal experience are also to be found in reports of extrovertive mystical experience (EME).
\item \textsuperscript{41} Michael A. Persinger, ‘Vectorial Cerebral Hemispherity as Differential Sources for the Sensed Presence, Mystical Experiences and Religious Conversions’ Perceptual and Motor Skills, 1992, 76: 915-930.
\end{itemize}
‘secular mystic’ and whose experiences appear to resemble those of Emmanuel Swedenborg, remarks:

One of the most important challenges we face as human beings is to convert our religious beliefs into ‘knowns’ — so that our ideas and concepts can then be based on personal experience.\textsuperscript{45}

In other instances, science and theology have combined to produce scientific mystics such as de Chardin\textsuperscript{46} and Stein.\textsuperscript{47}

**Formulating a Definition of Mysticism**

In defining mystical experience, James clearly separates *unio mystica* from psychospiritual experiences.\textsuperscript{48} He writes:

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness.\textsuperscript{49}


\textsuperscript{45} Nevill Drury *The New Age, Searching For The Spiritual Self* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 200 (personal interview with Monroe).


\textsuperscript{49} James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans Green and Co. Ltd., 1928), 419.
For the purpose of his lectures, James delineates mystical states, such as the above, by four marks: (i) ineffability, (ii) noetic quality, (iii) transiency and (iv) passivity.

(i) **Ineffability**

By ineffability James means that mysticism can only be properly understood by those who have first-hand experience of the phenomenon. He provides an example of what he means by explaining that, just as one cannot truly to understand a lover’s state of mind without at one time having been in love oneself, so too, one must have a musical ear to appreciate a symphony. Whilst the absolute ineffability of mystical experienced is disputed by Moore\(^{50}\) and Katz\(^{51}\) on constructivist grounds, James’ point of view is also supported by Forman\(^{52}\) and Roberts\(^{53}\) who report first-hand experiences of mystical experience.

The importance of first-hand experience is emphasised by Paul Marshall. Marshall challenges Katz’s hypothesis: ‘That there are NO pure (i.e. unmediated experiences)’\(^{54}\) on the grounds that the evidence, which Katz says will demonstrate that mystical experiences are reflective of socially acquired ideas and opinions, depends on ‘comparative doctrine, second-order and third-order writing’ rather than

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\(^{54}\) Katz, Language Epistemology and Mysticism, 26.
the factuality of personal mystical experience.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, Marshall contends that because Katz cites doctrines ‘as evidence for the influence of doctrines’, Katz’s argument in effect tends towards circularity.\textsuperscript{56}

However, Katz’s study predates Marshall’s by over a quarter of a century and, as noted by Bauman,\textsuperscript{57} seeking first-hand experience in a variety of altered states of consciousness (ASC) is an increasingly important feature of contemporary society. Accordingly, the purpose of drawing attention to Marshall’s critique of Katz’s study is not to examine explanations of religious and mystical experiences but to highlight the value placed by contemporary society on personal access to mystical experience. The importance that Marshall places on first-hand experience is confirmed by the inclusion of a list of ‘Mystic Scholars’, who have included autobiographical accounts of mystical experience in their published works and the disclosure of two personal accounts of extrovertive mystical experience, within his study.\textsuperscript{58}

Millikan and Drury also note that the pursuit of mystical and or psychic experience has been of particular significance within the New Age Movement. A movement characterised by liberationist philosophy and desire for a belief system based not on speculation but on personal experience — preferably of a transcendental nature.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} Marshall, \textit{Mystical Encounters with the Natural World}, 189.

\textsuperscript{56} Marshall, \textit{Mystical Encounters with the Natural World}, 190.


\textsuperscript{58} Marshall, \textit{Mystical Encounters with the Natural World}, 16-18, Marshall’s Mystic Scholars include: W. R. Inge; William James; Evelyn Underhill; R.M. Buck; Edward Carpenter and R. C. Zaehner. Also, more recently: Jeffrey Kripal, William Barnard, and Arthur Deikman.

Once classified as an era in its own right, the New Age is now seen as a religious movement within what has been termed the postmodern era.60

(ii) *Noetic quality*

For James the second mark of mystical experience is that it has a noetic quality — meaning that it has the capacity to provide knowledge and access to insights and revelations not accessible to the reasoning intellect. Since most mystics are confident that their experiences convey some form of authorititative insight, the noetic quality of mystical experience is generally something that is accepted by religious scholars.61 Marshall, in his study of natural mystical experience, specifies in some detail that knowledge or the noetic element is a feature of extrovertive mystical experience (EME).62 Marshall distinguishes EME from experiences that are mystical but not extrovertive as shown in Table 3, below.

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62 Marshall, *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*, 27. Here Marshall describes the feature of Knowledge within EME as having some of the following variants: ‘Intuitive, all-encompassing knowledge, (‘knew everything’); specific questions answered instantaneously; insights into order, harmony, and perfection of the world, the meaning of suffering, evolutionary development, the rightness of things (‘all shall be well’); recognition that one has ‘come home’.
Table 3: Distinguishing Extrovertive Mystical Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extrovertive mystical</th>
<th>Mystical but not extrovertive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity with the world or its parts</td>
<td>Identity with undifferentiated Absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity of self and cosmos</td>
<td>Blissful isolation of soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union with God partly or fully immanent in the world</td>
<td>Union with God apart from the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luminous transfiguration of body and surroundings</td>
<td>Intense light and peace but no sense of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noetic and unitive encounter with spirits at work in nature</td>
<td>Luminous vision of esteemed religious personage, plus <em>incidental</em> nature contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of time stopping, with profound insights into the universal Process</td>
<td>Timeless and spaceless pure consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision of world supported by supreme consciousness</td>
<td>Pure consciousness plus <em>incidental</em> nature contents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even though, Marshall allows that the noetic is a feature of EME, as can be seen from the above, his definition of both EME and mysticism in general is much broader than that provided by James. Marshall illustrates this extension of the definition of mystical experience by writing that, within his study of EME, commitment to definitions which equate the ‘mystical’ with terms such as ‘unity or contact with God’ are restrictive and have potential to exclude certain categories of mystical experience.  

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63 Marshall, *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*, 32.
Not all religious experience occurs in the form of mystical phenomena; however, and it has been suggested that the desire for such experiences has led to the commodification of mysticism. Annette Wilke remarks that ‘Mysticism has a marketable value’ as demonstrated in the form of allusions to ‘states of rapture’ in direct and indirect advertising.\(^{64}\) Furthermore, it is likely that an ongoing potential exists for New Age magazines, through articles and advertorial strategies, to constantly broaden or redefine the dimensions of contemporary mysticism.\(^{65}\)

(iii) **Transiency**

James’ third mark is transiency. For James this means that mystical experience is usually brief — never lasting more than one or two hours at the most. Greeley, in support of James’ mark of transiency, records Laski reporting that ‘the ecstatic interlude was very brief indeed — a few minutes at most’ and afterwards was followed by a period of ‘coming back down to earth.’\(^{66}\) A closer examination of Laski’s study, however, reveals that she takes care to separate ecstasy from ‘religious ecstasy’ [Laski’s emphasis] the length of which may extend for many hours or even days and months.\(^{67}\) Furthermore, the existence of modern studies, such as, E. W. Truman Dicken’s *The Crucible of Love* (1963), which refer to mystical

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states that go beyond James’ transiency category, is noted by Egan.\textsuperscript{68} Strangely, although James compares Western mysticism with Eastern mysticism,\textsuperscript{69} he does not refer to the prolonged mystical states of Samadhi, as within Siddha yogic tradition, or Absolute Truth (Nirvana) within Mahayana Buddhism.

(iv) \textit{Passivity}

Finally, for James, true mystical experiences are defined by passivity — no matter what activities the individual may undertake to induce these experiences when or if they occur the mystic feels ‘as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.’\textsuperscript{70} James’ fourth mark of mysticism finds support in following extract from Teresa of Avila’s \textit{The Interior Castle}:

\begin{quote}
We can take no active part in this work. ... [The soul] does no more than does the wax when impressed by the signet. ...How good thou art. O God! All is done by thee that we may be plastic as wax in thy hands.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Notwithstanding the above extract, Hollenback’s examination of the writings of Western and Eastern mystics, finds descriptions of both passive mystical techniques — where the mind is stilled, and active mystical techniques — where the mind is tightly focused towards producing a particular state of consciousness.

In support of the usage of active techniques, Hollenback observes that the authors of \textit{The Little Flowers of St. Francis} write that Christ advised Francis of Assisi that ‘he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Egan, \textit{What Are They Saying About Mysticism}?
\item \textsuperscript{69} James, The Varieties, 419.
\item \textsuperscript{70} James, \textit{The Varieties}, 381.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Interior Castle}, 5th M., Ch. ii. cited in Albert Farges, \textit{Mystical Phenomena}, 94.
\end{itemize}
was to be utterly transformed into the direct likeness of Christ Crucified not by physical martyrdom but by an enkindling of the mind'.\textsuperscript{72} This ‘enkindling of the mind’ is seen by Hollenback as having been brought about by Francis’ engagement in the active meditative technique of recollection — a technique that involved audible reading, frequent repetition and visualization of the scriptures. Thus, reading became a form of meditation which greatly increased the affective impact of the texts and could engender vivication in the readers.\textsuperscript{73} In further support of the use of both active and passive techniques by Christian mystics, Hollenback argues that although, Teresa of Avila’s early writings show she placed emphasis on the active technique of recollection that led to mystical experience, towards the end of her life, in writings such as \textit{The Interior Castle}, she tended to place greater importance on God’s actions in bringing about this condition rather than her own mental efforts.\textsuperscript{74} Notwithstanding the above, many contemporary meditators believe that it is the actual meditative practice, rather than any confidence in its efficacy or any religious faith, that brings about results.\textsuperscript{75}


\textsuperscript{73} Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism}, 520-525. Here Hollenback describes how St Teresa of Avila’s practice of recollection advanced \textit{lectio divina} to the level where readers did not have to actually have the text before them but could proceed as though still reading.

\textsuperscript{74} Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism}. 504.

\textsuperscript{75} See for example, Barrett \textit{The New Believers}. 276-282 (here Barrett expands on Transcendental Meditation); Donald S. Lopez, ‘Introduction’ in Donald S. Lopez (ed.), \textit{A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings From East And West} (Boston, MASS. Beacon Press, 2002), xxxvii.
Justifying a Rejection of Reductionist Medical and Psychiatric Explanations

James argues that all human processes, religious or non-religious, are organically founded and therefore should be granted equal consideration. He rejects reductionist explanations that dismiss religious revelations because they are perceived as having been the outcome of either mind-altering substances or impaired health.

(i) Mind-altering Substances

For James, the ingestion of alcohol or inhalation of substances which chemically alter a person’s metabolism are regarded as not being unlikely facilitators of altered states of consciousness. He writes:

Nitrous oxide and ether, especially nitrous oxide, when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree. Depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to; and if any words remain over in which it seemed to clothe itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense. Nevertheless, the sense of a profound meaning having been there persists; and I know more than one person who is persuaded that in the nitrous oxide trance we have a genuine metaphysical revelation.76

Huxley also sees similarities between his own, mescaline induced, experiences and religious experiences; and in The Doors of Perception (1954) he suggests that these experiences are comparable to those found within theistic mysticism. However, the suggestion that ingestion of drugs can give rise to mystical experience is argued strongly against by R. C. Zahner who, based on his own experimentation with mescaline, wrote his comparative study Mysticism: Sacred and Profane (1957)

76 James, The Varieties, 387.
specifically as a rebuttal of Huxley’s claim that drug usage could provide a genuinely religious experience.

It has been claimed that in the 1960s a drug ‘fad’ based on experimentation with psychedelics such as LSD or acid began to emerge. During this period, numerous scholars and scientific researchers experimented with mind altering substances to test their effectiveness as facilitators of metaphysical revelation. Scientific studies, such as Pahnke’s experiments on a Good Friday at Marsh Chapel, were conducted to test the manner in which drug usage might facilitate religious experience. Findings from Pahnke’s and other experiments appear to suggest that, although drugs may facilitate religious experience, their facilitation may possibly be limited to those who are already involved in a search for meaning. However, since the introduction of legislation to control drug abuse, experimentation with regard to the issue of certain drugs as a facilitator of mystical phenomena is no longer legal. And, this form of practice, seemingly, has been replaced by meditative techniques.


80 Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis, Religion And The Individual, 131-133; Egan, Christian Mysticism.

(ii) Physical and Mental Circumstances

With regard to physiological or psychosomatic illnesses, the suggestion that St. Paul may have been an epileptic or St. Teresa of Avila an hysterical does not for James in any way lessen the validity of their spiritual experiences. And, whilst, support for James’ stance in this matter may be found in studies by Perry and Badham; generally speaking society does not validate experiences of mystical phenomena. The denial of psychospiritual phenomena is also recognized by Grof, who alleges that, ‘modern psychiatry does not differentiate between mystical or spiritual states and psychotic episodes’. The result of this failure to differentiate, being that people who report such experiences may be admitted into psychiatric care and prescribed ‘suppressive pharmacological treatment’.

Stanislav and Christina Grof assert that changes in consciousness brought about by techniques including: Yoga, meditation, chanting and hesychasm may lead to ‘holotropic states’. Moreover, that the content of these states may range from experiences such as ‘ecstatic rapture, heavenly bliss and “peace that passeth all understanding”’ to extreme forms of personal suffering. Grof hypothesises that sometimes holotropic states constitute ‘psychospiritual crises or spiritual emergencies’ — during which experiencers can sometimes doubt their own sanity.

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85 Grof, *The Cosmic Game*, 5. Here Grof writes that ‘This composite word [holotropic] literally means “orientated towards wholeness” or “moving in the direction of wholeness” (from the Greek Holos = whole, and trepein = moving toward or in the direction of wholeness).’

Christina Grof in discussing spiritual emergence, which may occur over a period of many of years, equates kundalini awakening with the emergence of a deeper spiritual power that she identifies as the Holy Spirit.\(^87\) Galbraith, agrees that ‘Spiritual experiences are not overwhelmingly positive experiences’ and observes her work with homeless people confirms that symptoms of kundalini arousal can present as neurosis (hysteria, anxiety, depression and obsessive behaviour) or more serious forms of mental disorders. She speculates that a number of saints, including St. Teresa of Avila, endured the sufferings of awakening kundalini experiences.\(^88\)

That mystics have been known to undergo a period of mystical purgation prior to full spiritual awakening, which may present itself sometimes as in the form of psychosomatic or mental illness, has long been recognised. Woods writes that the force of mystical experience can be so overwhelming that for the individual it may lead to a ‘recasting of their whole system of beliefs’ to the extent that ‘a schizophrenic episode is probably inevitable.’\(^89\) Wood’s position is not supported by Hollenbeck who argues that it is incorrect to consider the schizophrenic as ‘simply a failed mystic’ and the mystic as ‘just a successful schizophrenic.’\(^90\) Hollenback asserts that comparisons of case histories show there are differences between schizophrenic episodes and mystical experiences. For Hollenback, some of these

\(^{87}\) Christina Grof, Accessed on line 21.02.2007.

\(^{88}\) Jean Galbraith ‘Spiritual Emergence, A Reply To The Article By Steve Taylor’ *Network Review*, No. 102 Spring 2010, 31-32. See also, Roberts, *The Experience Of No-Self*.


\(^{90}\) Hollenback, *Mysticism*, 129.
differences are that the majority of mystical experiences originate from some form of recollective effort; are of relatively short duration and neither ‘cripple’ nor impede the mystic’s though processes. Schizophrenic experiences, as opposed to mystical experiences, he writes, do not emerge as a result of any deliberate meditative effort and for the period of their duration — which progressively increases, the ‘victim’s faculties of critical judgement’ are impaired. Egan, on the other hand, whilst not arguing against the actuality of mental illness, provides examples of contemplatives who were ‘written off as mental cases’ only to have this judgement revoked at a later date as having been too hasty. He concludes that ‘Mystical discernment in these matters is a very difficult art, and not a science.’

Thus, Egan, in commenting on William Johnston’s contention that there is a requirement for Christianity to give serious consideration to Buddhism and particularly Zen Buddhism, with regard to Zen meditative practice, writes:

> These periods of concentration usually bring about periods of hallucination, *makyo* the world of the devil. Preconsciousness, subconscious, unconscious and unintergrated elements of the psyche arise into consciousness to torture, tempt, seduce, harass or to lead the Zennist astray. Zennist must ignore this, reveal it to the Zen master, be still, and let these inner beasts die. As Johnston notes, the Zennist during this period must pass through the “great doubt” or some psychotic phase similar to the Christian dark night of the soul, to reach enlightenment.

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Similar thoughts are expressed by transpersonal philosopher Ken Wilber. Wilber observes that a consequence of meditation, which dislodges the self’s defences and arouses the subconscious (Jung’s Shadow) and the awaking higher consciousness, is that it confuses meditators and ‘many theorists’ as to whether meditation is the door to the Devil or God.  

(iii) **Mind Mapping**

More recently powerful new technologies, such as: positron emission tomography (PET), single photon emission computerised tomography (SPECT), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), make it possible to observe a subject’s brain activity as it actually happens (mind-mapping). This capacity to mind-map has led to much activity in the field of cognitive neuroscience (CN), to the degree that neuroscientists Newberg and Waldman report that differences can be observed between the brains of meditating subjects and subjects speaking in tongues. However, the fallibility of CN techniques is argued by a number of writers. Wulff, for example, in critiquing the brain imaging activities of several scientists, who hypothesize that certain brain states are related to the experience of *unio mystica* or Absolute Unitary Being, observes that James, if he were living today, would be

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tempted to coin a new phrase — ‘medical spiritualism’ in response to these scientific activities.99

The use of mind-mapping technologies has greatly enriched the debate between those who argue that it is the mind or self (often referred to as soul, spirit or consciousness) that directs the brain,100 and those who totally deny the existence of consciousness.101 In between these two polarities there are also moderates, including Green, who opines that ‘the mental has the same causal status as the physical’;102 McGinn, who argues that our brains simply have not sufficiently evolved to deal with the mind-brain problem;103 and thoughtful researchers, such as, Tart who employs CN technology to observe possible OBE incidents but also argues against the polarisation of the CN and religious experience debate.104

The mind-body problem is undoubtedly far too extensive and complex to pursue further within the present study, which focuses not on the possible causes of mystical experience but seeks to discover outcomes brought about by such experiences. The purpose of drawing attention to CN research is to acknowledge that the resultant and


well publicised concept, that all human talents, emotions, ambitions and therefore outcomes are products of the brain brought about by natural selection, may be one of a number of factors which influence the manner in which contemporary society reacts to the concept of mystical phenomena. Having drawn attention to this possibility CN will not be referred to again.

Promoting his Pragmatic Concept that Religious Experiences should be Judged by their Outcomes

(i) The Prominence of Affect

In the VRE, James considers religious experiences from the philosophical position of pragmatism. His criterion is, ‘By their fruits ye shall know them not by their roots.’  

Using this pragmatic approach, James, provides examples of change brought about in individuals as a result of a particular religious experience but, rather than moving on to provide examples of effect or tangible outcomes that might have resulted from the experiences, he lays stress, on their emotional and subjective nature.

Although, as recognized by Poloma, James does acknowledge the possible on-flow of social outcomes resultant from saintliness, generally speaking, for James, the fruits of religious experience are primarily seen as being affective. Hence, he dwells on the subjective mystical experiences of, say for example, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, without referring to their considerable literary output and reorganization of the Carmelites. Similarly, he focuses on the unworldliness of St.

105 James, The Varieties, 20.

106 Poloma, The Sociological Context of Religious Experience, 175. Here Poloma notes that James writes that saintliness increases ‘tenderness in fellow creatures.’
Francis of Assisi and neglects to provide any reference to the mystical experience that led Francis address the corrupt condition of the Church of the day.  

In urging psychologists of religion to progress the study of affective theory and religious experience, Peter Hill argues that [in the VRE] James insists on the affective or emotional nature of religious experience. In support of this argument Hill signposts the following extract from the VRE:

At first, I began to feel my heart beat very quick all of a sudden, which made me at first think that, perhaps, something is going to ail me, though I was not alarmed, for I felt no pain. My heart increased its beating, which soon convinced me that it was the Holy Spirit from the effect it had on me. I began to feel exceedingly happy and humble, and such a sense of unworthiness as I never felt before...It took complete possession of my soul, for I am certain that I desired the Lord, while in the midst of it, not to give me any more happiness, for it seemed I could not contain what I had got. My heart seemed as if it would burst, but it did not stop until I felt as if I was unutterably full of the love and grace of God. (1902:188)  

Hill regards the above extract, derived from an 1830 religious pamphlet and drawing attention to a possible experience of Holy Spirit, as being representative of James’ conviction that religious experience is individualistic, private, and emotional. He further supports his concept that James’ treatment of religious experience deals with its affective qualities by citing the following from the VRE’s conclusion:

107 Sandro Chierichetti, Assisi (Milan: Industrie Grafiche Nicola Moneta, 1995,) cited in Peter Tufts Richardson, Four Spiritualities: Expressions of Self, Expressions of Spirit — A Psychology of Personal Choice (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black, 1991), 75. Here Chierichetti recounts that in 1206 Francis wandered into a ruined church and, whilst sitting in prayer before the crucifix, it seemed that the crucifix spoke to him “Vade Francisce et repara domum meam!” (Go Francis and repair my house!). At first Francis went around repairing churches but later realised that his task was to repair the Catholic Church, which was in a decrepit and corrupt condition.


‘You see now... why I have seemed so bent on rehabilitating the element of feeling in religion and subordinating the intellectual part. (James 1902:492)’

Whilst, Hill may be accurate in arguing that James is one of the few religious psychologists to drawn attention to the affective or emotional nature of religious experience, that is not to say, other religious scholars have entirely neglected this area.

That the affective nature of transcendental experience is of importance to Hardy, is demonstrated by his emphasis on the cognitive and affective aspects of transcendental experiences. For Hardy the effects, (what is produced) by these experiences consists of ‘feelings of joy, peace, security, awe, reverence and wonder, as also of exaltation and ecstasy, of hope and fulfilment.’ Doubtless these reactions may have a potential to produce an on-flow of altruistic works but that is not a part of Hardy’s study. Nor is it germane to Beardsworth’s study — *A Sense of Presence*, which stresses the affective after-effects of the reported experiences and emphasises their affective personal (“I—You”) nature.

Examination of data derived from Hay’s NOP survey and Greeley’s NORC study supports the frequency of a diverse range of altered states of consciousness but these findings are primarily focused on the subjective nature of the experiences rather than

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the possible on-flow of any social consequences. Similarly, Marshall, in his detailed study of a specific variety of mystical phenomenon — the extrovertive mystical experience (EME), displays little if any interest in the fruits of the experience. The imperative within Marshall’s study is to consider possible explanations for EME. Nevertheless, his feature list of extrovertive mystical experience, as shown in Table 4, (see below) draws attention to the many affective elements, such as, experiences that involve feelings of love, joy, bliss and awe that are a feature of EME
Table 4: Feature List of Extrovertive Mystical Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Some variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Feeling part of the whole; the world contained within; Everything intimately connected; community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Relaxation of individual identity; identification with Persons, animals, plants, objects, even the entire cosmos; Discovery of a deeper self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Intuitive, all encompassing knowledge (‘knew everything’); Specific questions answered instantaneously; insight into Order, harmony, and perfection of the world, the meanings Of suffering, evolutionary development, the rightness of things (‘all shall be well’); recognition that one has ‘come home’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>All embracing love; sense of being deeply loved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Extraordinary beauty; everything equally beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Bliss, joy, elation, uplift, peace, relief, gratitude, wonder Power, fearlessness, humour, surprise, insignificance, Humility, unworthiness, awe, terror, discomfort with Sheer intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Time ‘stops’; past, present, future coexist, harmonious flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Sense of contact with normally hidden depths of reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realness</td>
<td>‘Very real’ — ordinary experience seems less real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Everything animated with ‘life’, ‘consciousness’, ‘energy’; Things once thought living are lifeless in comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
<td>A ‘presence’ or ‘power’ in nature or in the immediate vicinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Heightened awareness; focused attention clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Special light suffuses or obliterates surroundings; vivid Colours; transparency; vision of cosmic scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Silence; ‘music’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Sensations through the body or at places along the spine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion</td>
<td>Light, love, bliss, knowledge fused together; synaesthetic fusion of sensory contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranormal</td>
<td>Extrasensory perceptions; out-of-the body experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marshall, Mystical Encounters With The Natural World, 27.
Many of Marshall’s examples of what he classifies as being EME are based on responses to the Alister Hardy Question, as are responses within the studies carried out by Hardy, Beardsworth, Hay and Greeley; although in the last two studies reference to God has been removed. Reflection upon the structure of this question, which starts with the phrase ‘Have you ever felt as though...?’, gives rise to the thought that such a enquiry might unintentionally elicit an affective response.

(ii) Consideration of Social Consequences and Tangible Outcomes

Although empirical studies have, in the main, emphasised the subjective nature of mystical experience, a number of theoretical studies draw attention to the social consequences of such experiences.\(^{113}\) John Hick, for example, remarks:

> When the developing human race produces a spirit who is able to respond to the Transcendent in a new and fuller way, his (or her) experience of the Transcendent overflows or breaks the system of religious concepts inherited from his culture, and he proclaims a new truth about God or about the meaning of the process of existence, bringing with it new demands for the living of human life.\(^{114}\)

Similarly, Woods draws attention to the influence of mystics, such as, Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, Ghandi and the Baal Shem Tov, whose personal experiences are seen as having raised ‘to the collective consciousness the most important if often forgotten values and beliefs of a people.’\(^{115}\) With regards to the matter of more tangible outcomes, Wapnick observes that Teresa of Avila founded

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18 convents\textsuperscript{116} and Richardson refers to St. Francis’ physically repairing church buildings and also reforming the corrupt church of the day.\textsuperscript{117}

The societal role of institutionalised religion, inspired or otherwise by the experiences of saints and mystics, has long been acknowledged.\textsuperscript{118} However, as noted by Woods, the probability that ordinary people’s perceptions of mystical phenomena might give rise to both private and public consequences is something that, generally has not been looked for or even, in some cases, welcomed during their lifetime.\textsuperscript{119} \textsuperscript{120}

Furthermore, as observed by Marshall, usage of definitions that confine the ‘mystical’ to terms such as ‘unity or contact with God’, are restrictive and have potential to exclude certain categories of mystical experience.\textsuperscript{121} Argyle, for example, concedes that religious experience provides evidence of ‘fruits of the spirit’ but that psychic experiences do not. \textsuperscript{122} Psychic experiences for Argyle include the out-of-body experience, the near-death-experience, contact with the dead,

\textsuperscript{116} Kenneth Wapnick, 328.

\textsuperscript{117} Peter Richardson, \textit{Four Spiritualities}, 75.


\textsuperscript{119} Woods, \textit{Understanding Mysticism}, 5. See also, Cross & Livingstone, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church}, 740. Here, a reference to Joan of Arc notes that her influence on her followers may be measured by the ‘determination of her captors to encompass her death’.

\textsuperscript{120} Woods, \textit{Understanding Mysticism}, 7. Here, Woods’ includes Fox in a list of mystics whose teachings were considered as being dangerous during their lifetimes.

\textsuperscript{121} Marshall, \textit{Mystical Encounters}, 32.

\textsuperscript{122} Argyle, \textit{The Psychological Perspective Of Religious Experience}, 23. See also, Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 44. Here Hardy explains that experiences, which did not appear to have given rise to ‘religious feeling’, were excluded from his survey.
synchronicity and miracles. He argues that Hardy’s study [The Spiritual Nature of Man] contains numerous examples of psychic phenomena which ‘are of a lower order and should perhaps not be included as a variety of Religious Experience.’

On the other hand, Poloma, argues that since mysticism and religious experience are the same phenomenon, differing only in degree, the two terms may be used interchangeably. Moreover, she alleges that sociology’s role is to study, not only the interface of the objective social context and its bearing upon religious experience, but also the manner in which subjective interpretations of religious experience influence society. The dialectical relationship between mystical experience and institutionalized religion and society is also hypothesised by Almond and Berger. Cognisant, of the unavailability of ‘factual evidence’ required to assess the role of religious experience in society, Berger is adamant, ‘there is no alternative to a nuanced case by case approach.’ He writes:

Those who neglect religion in their analysis of contemporary affairs do so at great peril.

123 Argyle, The Psychological Perspective Of Religious Experience, 6-7.


129 Ibid.
Summary of Section 1.2

This brief pre-view provides a historical framework to the research by touching on a selection of studies undertaken during an era of social and scientific change in the Western world. In a time when consideration of mystical phenomena has not been confined to the discipline of theology, but has now become a subject for academic debate and practical investigation. It draws attention to the investigations of psychologists and neurologists who seek to discover the essential or practical details of specific phenomena; to the desire by individuals, in an age of individuality, to freely access mystical phenomena by whatever means available and finally to the deliberations of those who speculate on the fruits of mystical experience.

Studies examined, in this journey of exploration for an understanding of mystical experience in the modern era, confirm that mysticism and its phenomena have been subjected to speculation and intense scrutiny by many of disciplines — disciplines, such as, theology, psychology, biology and, most recently, cognitive neuroscience. Consideration of these studies, suggests that the phenomenological nature of mystical experience, as related to the Christian tradition, has remained remarkably constant over the centuries. The correspondence between these experiences appears to stand in contrast to the historically changing nature of institutionalized religion and mystical praxis in the West. Some writers suggest that the changing nature of religion in the West owes much to mystics, in that, their experiences have served to renew and revitalize both dogma and praxis. The view held by those who regard change as part of a larger, more evolutionary scheme that provides evidence of a
dialectical process of interaction between God, as the Holy Spirit, Logos or Christ and the world, is also of significance.

1.3: RATIONALE FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

In *Mysticism, Experience, Response and Empowerment*, Hollenback posits that the spiritual experiences of both Teresa of Avila and Black Elk ultimately effected change in their respective societies. Similarly, a general connection between mystical experience and religious, cultural and social outcomes has been noted in studies by Scholem, Hocking and Woods. However, these studies have been at the macro level, focusing on national outcomes and the activities of historical and public figures, such as, Eckhart, the Baal Shem Tov; Ghandi; and, as noted above, Black Elk and Teresa of Avila.

Sociologists Berger and Poloma have also touched upon the role of religion and religious experience in society, but the brush strokes are broad and both see a need for further investigation. None of these studies are based on the individual, less famous and private experiences of everyday people that may have worked, or at least assisted, to bring about historical change. Clearly, a study which seeks to examine private experiences of the mystical and the psychospiritual at the micro level of everyday life would seem to be warranted.

Shaping the Research Question

From early part of the twentieth century and onwards, the nature and frequency of religious experiences has been a subject of much interest. Nevertheless, some of these studies might be considered as being flawed because of discriminatory
attitudes about what constitutes a religious or mystical experience. Major surveys involving thousands of people have been undertaken in Britain and in America but in general and as noted in this introductory chapter, the qualitative findings of these studies have, inadvertently or otherwise, focused on the affective nature of the fruits of the experiences rather than on the tangible outcomes.

Consideration of the prominence of affect in earlier studies, directed attention to the significance of Hardy’s interest in the effects of transcendental experiences. Accordingly, it was determined that, although affect would not be excluded, this study, in seeking to explore the effects of mystical or psychospiritual experiences as reported by individuals who perceive that they have personally experienced such phenomena, would primarily focus on tangible outcomes brought about by these personal and, as noted above, sometimes misunderstood experiences.

Thus ‘effect’ for the purposes of this study,\(^{130}\) is typically used as a noun, to signify a tangible outcome or result. From time to time it may also be used as a verb meaning to ‘bring about’, as in the sense of effecting a change. The term ‘affect’ is used within this study to define personal feelings or emotions brought about by particular experiences as in the following examples:

\[
\text{I was very much afraid at first, and could do nothing but weep, though, as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear.}^{131}\]

\(^{130}\) Cf: This Chapter, Section 1.1: Introduction - The Current Study.

The Holy appearance lasted two minutes or so! Despite the fan blowing I was wet and wept deliriously, sort of [trance] I suppose. Switched off the fan and stayed put in my bed to rewind in my mind what I saw...fell asleep!\textsuperscript{132}

Although, as shown above, affects are usually subjective and emotive that is not to say that an affective experience may not bring about an effect.

**Justification**

Scientism and societal attitudes leading to the denial of the non-material have prevented serious consideration of the role played by mystical and/or psychospiritual experience and its sociological context.\textsuperscript{133} And, as argued by Jones, without rational or empirical support, beliefs, about the supernatural are indistinguishable from imagination.\textsuperscript{134} This study is primarily empirical. An empirical and generic study of personal reports that focuses on outcomes brought about by contemporary experiences of mystical and psychospiritual phenomena has not previously been undertaken in Australia or elsewhere. It will therefore fill a ‘Knowledge Gap’.

**1.4: THESIS STRUCTURE**

The following chapter (Chapter Two) details the philosophical approach adopted towards this research project, the research design and the methodology developed as


a consequence of this approach to the stated tasks. Chapter Three presents the findings of the empirical study, as derived from a detailed examination of the participant’s narratives, and includes the conceptualization of a socio-religious process. Chapter Four maps this process as a schema of human response to the mystical, and considers the emergent hypothesis in the light of other models of human response to mystical phenomena. Chapter Five, presents the study’s final conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research.
Chapter Two
RESEARCH PROCEDURES

2.1: INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter’s pre-view of mystical experience and/or psychospiritual phenomena, as considered by modern scholars; together with an examination of the diversity of mystical phenomena (see Appendix H) provided a useful starting point and data for use in the final analytical process. It also demonstrated that this research project, in seeking to explore the effects¹ of human response to the mystical sought to address an area previously overlooked by academic research. The current chapter (Chapter Two) presents the second stage of the research design, outlines the research methodology and details the processes used to address this lacuna.

2.2: METHODOLOGY

According to Groenewald² and Creswell,³ the decision about how social phenomena will be studied is dependent upon the researcher’s epistemology. Therefore, the study’s purpose — to explore the effects of mystical phenomena on the lives of

¹ Effect v Affect: As noted in Chapter I, effect for the purposes of this study is typically used as a noun, meaning a tangible outcome or result. Of course, it may also be used as a verb meaning to bring about, for example, as in the sense of effecting a change.


individuals who perceive that they have personally experienced such phenomena, provided an epistemological position for the study. The epistemological position underlying this study consists of the beliefs that:

(i) mystical experiences exist;
(ii) people experience these states; and
(iii) people are able to articulate their experiences.

In short, the above epistemological position presupposes a phenomenological approach.

By inviting people to share these private and subjective experiences, it was recognised that a number of possible implications were inherent to the study. These included acceptance that the data to be studied, although it would be obtained by face-to-face interviews, would not be the actual experience. Rather, as in the case of textual reporting, it would consist of the individual accounts of perceived experiences, influenced by social context and personal ontology.\textsuperscript{4} Also, that in the process of conducting the interview, the interviewer’s attitude would have potential to influence the narrator’s account; therefore, the approach towards each participant should be one which conveyed sensitivity and respectful interest. Furthermore, that the interviewer’s own life could, in some way, be influenced by the narrator’s account. Thus, narrator and interviewer would become part of each other’s life story.\textsuperscript{5} The above implications signified the need for an explorative research design

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\textsuperscript{4} Peter L. Berger, \textit{A Rumor Of Angels}; Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism}; Jantzen, For An Engaged Reading.

\textsuperscript{5} Norman K. Denzin, \textit{Interpretative Biography, Qualitative Research Methods} (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1989); Bill Gillham, \textit{The Research Interview} (London: Continuum, 2000).
that would, in so far as possible, curb any bias which the researcher might inadvertently or otherwise harbour.

**Phenomenological**

Consideration of the participants’ life stories together with the survey’s introductory question: ‘First of all, how would you describe your experience?’ indicated the appropriateness of phenomenological methods. Phenomenological methodology is related to Husserl’s concept of the lifeworld or *lebensweld* and to the philosophy of phenomenology. Phenomenology is described by David Ford as:

> [a] Philosophical movement aiming to ground philosophy in a descriptive and scientific method which understands religious and other phenomena in nonreductionist terms as they reveal themselves to consciousness, and seeks the distinctive laws of human consciousness, especially emphasizing its intentional character.6

Phenomenological methodology, then, is an approach to research that focuses on the qualitative meaning of experiential phenomena and is interested in the lived experience of ordinary people who are concerned with a particular researched issue.7

A phenomenological methodology seeks to elicit information about lifeworld

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6 David Ford, *The Modern Theologians, Vol. II, An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), 313. See also, Collins where phenomenology is defined as: the movement founded by Husserl that concentrates on detailed descriptions of conscious experiences without recourse to explanations, metaphysical assumptions, and traditional philosophical questions.

experiences by asking questions that will produce tangible responses. A phenomenological methodology was deemed appropriate to the research.

Phenomenological methods used within this study also involved expansion of interviews by the inclusion of lifeworld descriptions, accessed via printed and electronic media, and a certain amount of anthropological immersion in the form of visits to workshops, meetings and other venues that were of relevance to the particular participants.

However, a possible weakness within phenomenological methodology is that guidelines are not readily available. The reason being that those who employ a phenomenological methodology are often unwilling to stipulate procedures because they believe that methodology cannot be imposed on a phenomenon — ‘since that would do great injustice to the integrity of the phenomenon.’ Furthermore, phenomenological methods, which are characterised by the use of narrative and rich description, may by default present research on subjects’ views and not ‘research based on the descriptions of their lifeworlds.’ It is for these reasons that a modified form of grounded theory, which provides a practical process for accessing phenomenological understanding, was used in conjunction with the study’s strongly


11 Woods and Woods, *Key Words in Qualitative Methods*, 130.
phenomenological approach. Justification for this eclectic approach is provided by Strauss and Corbin, who advise that human and social science researchers are often, by necessity, pragmatists who may draw upon any number of techniques, theories and disciplines in order to further research.\textsuperscript{12}

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is an approach in which the phenomena to be investigated relate to experiences and understandings that are shared or experienced by a individuals or groups of people, for example, as originally presented in Glaser and Strauss’s study of dying patients\textsuperscript{13} and also in Corbin’s study of Vietnam Veterans.\textsuperscript{14} It is an approach to data analysis in which certain techniques are employed to elicit ‘theoretical insights from qualitative data’.\textsuperscript{15} As observed by Neuman, ‘A grounded theory approach pursues generalizations by making comparisons across social situations.’\textsuperscript{16} It is an approach in which a preliminary theory is not conceived but allowed to emerge and, as such, can also been compared to a medical diagnostic process in which differing symptoms are considered to enable the medical practitioner to arrive at a logical conclusion.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{15} Woods and Woods, *Key Words in Qualitative Methods*, 96.

\textsuperscript{16} Lawrence W. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative And Quantitative Approaches* (Boston: Personal Education Inc. 2006), 60.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Grounded theory, like phenomenological methodology, may involve accessing data from a diversity of sources — such as, consultation with people, examination of printed and electronic media and also observation of social settings. Within grounded theory, as the data are gathered, they are compared with other data on a continuous basis to uncover themes or categories. As categories are uncovered the researcher extends the data by theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling typically involves searching for cases that are of interest in confirming or contrasting emerging theory. Dick, who describes Glaser’s approach as being more clearly emergent than that of Strauss and Corbin, provides the diagram shown in Figure 2 to illustrate the overlapping phases of grounded theory.  

**Figure 2: The Overlapping Phases of Grounded Theory**

```
Data-collection

Note-taking

Coding

Memoing

Sorting

Writing
```

Source: Dick, Grounded Theory, 3.

As explained by Dick and illustrated by the above diagram, the first four activities — data-collection, note-taking, coding and memoing, occur almost simultaneously. It is during these activities that, through high frequency of mention, a central or core

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category begins to emerge. This category may consist of a particular term frequently mentioned or a concept which incorporates a number of frequently mentioned terms.

Strauss provides the following useful criteria for choosing a central category:

**CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A CENTRAL CATEGORY**

1. It must be central; that is, all other major categories can be related to it.
2. It must appear frequently in the data. This means that within all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept.
3. The explanation that evolves by relating the categories is logical and consistent. There is no forcing of data.
4. The name or phrase used to describe the central category should be sufficiently abstract that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas, leading to the development of a more general theory.
5. As the concept is refined analytically through integration with other concepts, the theory grows in depth and explanatory power.
6. The concept is able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is, when conditions vary, the explanation still holds, although the way in which the phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different. One should be able to explain contradictory or alternative cases in terms of that central idea.19

The ongoing process of coding continues until theoretical saturation has been achieved. Theoretical saturation is said to have occurred when the interview process ceases to add anything to the researcher’s emerging concept or concepts. Once a significant theory, sometimes referred to as a basic social process, has emerged, the process of writing up the study’s conclusions begins. 20


Employing a grounded theory methodology is not without risks. Firstly, after data has been collected and analysed, the researcher may not actually uncover a core category. Secondly, if the literature review is undertaken before a core category or social process emerges, the possibility exists that the literature review may not be relevant to the study’s findings. Whilst the first risk is unavoidable, it is usual, though not mandatory, for researchers who employ a grounded theory or a mixed methodology that involves grounded theory, to adhere to Glaser and Strauss’ original approach and defer the literature review until after conceptual analysis of the data.21 Presenting the literature at the end of the study is also recommended by Creswell who notes that this positioning allows the emergent theory to be compared and contrasted with the literature reviewed.22 Within the current study a decision was made to defer the literature review until after data analysis and emergence of a significant theory.

The manner in which Dick’s overlapping phases of grounded theory were applied within this study is outlined in Section 2.6 (How the Data were Treated) of the present Chapter and in Chapter Three, which details the study’s findings. However, before progressing the matter of data collection, it was necessary to address a number of mandatory ethical and confidentiality issues.


22 Creswell, *Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 31-32.
2.3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for the current study as reported within this section was completed in compliance with the mandatory requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Murdoch University, Western Australia. Outright Approval to commence the study, Permit Number 2008/045, was granted on 25 August 2008.

The Interview Proforma

The planned consultative process involved a semi-structured interview procedure that presented three qualitative questions and three quantitative questions. The three qualitative questions, which were not consecutive, asked participants:

(i) How they would describe their experience or experiences;

(ii) whether the experience affected the way in which they thought about religion, spirituality or the paranormal; and

(iii) what the main outcome of the experience/s had been for them.

The three quantitative questions related to belief, religious practice and, finally, personal details such as age — expressed as: Under 25 (young adult); 25-59 (mature adult) and 60+ (senior); gender and occupation.

The final section of the survey format provided participants with the option of receiving feedback on the study’s progress by writing their name and address on a pre-paid envelope, enclosing it in another envelope (also pre-paid) and forwarding it
to the researcher care of Murdoch University. A draft summary of the study’s findings was forwarded to the twenty-five participants who had taken up the option of receiving feedback on the study’s progress. A number of these participants (5) contacted the researcher to confirm that the text accurately reflected their lifestory.

The interview questions were piloted by volunteers who had participated in an earlier survey\textsuperscript{23} and, consequently, were known to have had some experience of psychospiritual phenomena. It was the opinion of this group that no changes were required. No member of the pilot group was included in the current study.

**Letter of Information and Consent Form**

It is a requirement of HERC that individuals participating in human research be provided with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed consent or otherwise with regard to participation in a research project. Furthermore, it is also a given that participants be advised of the availability of feedback with regard to the study’s findings

Accordingly, a *Letter of Information* and *Consent Form* were developed in order to obtain the informed consent from participants regarding:

- their participation in the research project
- the nature and purpose of the study
- what the study would involve
- the possibility that the study would provide no direct benefit to them

\textsuperscript{23} Cf: Chapter I, Section I.I: Introduction.
➢ the voluntary nature of participation in the research
➢ the participant’s right to withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice
➢ the procedures in place to protect confidentiality

The *Letter of Information* advised that the project welcomed people who considered that they had, in their experience, encountered something of a mystical and or psychic/supernatural nature, but on the proviso that they had not experienced any personal trauma during the last 18 months. This proviso was included because it was considered that possibly someone, who had experienced an OBE, might suffer stress through recounting the experience. In the event of anyone becoming distressed, a professionally qualified counsellor was available to provide assistance.²⁴

The *Letter of Information* also provided participants with the option of having their interview recorded or being hand written by the interviewer. In either case, to preserve anonymity, the participant’s consent would be verbal and anonymous. The option of having an interview hand written by the interviewer was not taken up by any participant.

To ensure informed consent and because of the sensitive nature of the study, possible participants and individuals who indicated that they were happy to participate in the study were given a copy of the semi-structured interview proforma, together with a *Letter of Information* and a *Consent Form* for consideration, some time before the

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²⁴ As it happened, no one who took part in the study signified that they had experienced trauma within the last 18 months and although one participant became quite emotional, it was in a joyful manner that did not require counselling or comforting.
interview was to be carried out. The purpose of this procedure was so that they could familiarize themselves with the study’s requirements and thus be enabled to make a truly informed decision with regards to participation or otherwise.

Copies of the survey proforma, *Letter of Information* and *Consent Form* can be found in Appendices A, B, and C respectively.

### 2.4: LOCATING THE SAMPLE

To study outcomes brought about by any particular experience it is first necessary to meet with people who have actually had such experiences. However, social attitudes towards people, who divulge details about personal experiences that involve some form of mystical or psychic phenomena, are often derogatory and discriminating.\(^{25}\) The result of this is that people do not speak casually about such intimate and personal experiences; and are often reluctant to make them common knowledge lest they be laughed at or, possibly, discover that their careers are jeopardised by the revelation of such experiences. Hypothetically, it is unlikely that many people would feel completely happy travelling on an aeroplane piloted by someone who makes no secret of their propensity to hear voices. Accordingly, people who hear voices, see visions and experience other forms of mystical phenomena may be considered as members of an often difficult to reach and specialized population and may or may not form social networks.

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In such situations a purposive sampling technique can be effective. Neuman defines purposive sampling as:

A non-random sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population. 26

To illustrate the above definition Neuman draws attention to a study in which 31 female artists in St Louis were identified by the researcher asking an artist about other artists and by joining an arts organisation. 27

Purposive or purposeful sampling is associated with qualitative studies and particularly with those that employ a phenomenological methodology. 28 Phenomenological studies, which commonly employ purposive sampling, are also known to include other sampling techniques. 29 A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used in the current research project.

Snowball sampling is a method in which the researcher, in seeking to locate a number of individuals exhibiting similar characteristics, relies on information

26 Neuman, Social Research Methods, 222.
27 Ibid.
29 Woods and Woods, Key Words in Qualitative Methods; Possami, In Search of New Age Spiritualities.
provided by one subject providing access to a second subject, who then provides access to another subject. This process continues until a suitable number of subjects has been accessed. 30

In a similar manner, the current study involved contacting people, living or working in or around the city of Perth (Western Australia), who were known to have publicly divulged personal experience of the mystical or psychic. Initial contact was made with a member of the clergy who was happy to discuss a personal spiritual experience. This interview led to interviews with other ordained ministers of differing denominations. As noted by Greeley, there seemed ‘to be a modest but significant correlation between religious experience and the priesthood.’ 31 When this source soon became exhausted, letters were written to people who had through newspaper articles discussed ‘spiritual experiences’ which, in their opinion, had been formative in their life. Some of these letters were responded to and some were ignored.

Initially it was hoped to interview up to 50 people; however, difficulties were encountered when attempting to source this number of volunteers within the study’s allocated time-frame. One cause of these difficulties may be attributed to the general inability of postmodern culture to validate contemporary altered states of

30 Bruce, L. Berg, Qualitative Research Methods For The Social Sciences (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004); Lofland et al, Analysing Social Settings.

31 Greeley, The Sociology of the Paranormal, 6.
consciousness that involve mystical phenomena. This problem is illustrated by two responses to the study’s Letter of Information as shown below.

Response No. 1 Committee of Christian Student Group:

We’re reluctant to inadvertently suggest that that’s how the Spirit operates in the normal Christian life because we don’t believe that it is. Rather we believe that the Spirit usually works in conjunction with God’s word to change the heart of the believer. There are certainly occasions where believers are aware of this work but they do not involve the kind of phenomena you have described in the paragraph above. That is not to say that none of the above can happen but there are people who teach that the above are normal and we want to distance ourselves from that idea.

Response No. 2 Women’s Service Organisation:

The committee seemed to think that our members would be rather upset when talking about these subjects, indeed putting it in the same category as the book written by Dan Brown – “Da Vinci Code.”

As can be seen from the above extracts, religious beliefs and concerns regarding the emotive impact of these experiences, contributed to refusals to take part in the study.

Furthermore, as the following extract from a participant’s response (received four weeks after the initial approach) indicates, people who have actually experienced mystical phenomena, do not necessarily share deeply moving religious experiences with other than one or two trusted friends and, beyond a very close circle of intimates, may not have links with people who might be aware of similar or have had similar experiences:

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32 Perry, The Far Side Of Madness; Susan Blackmore, Dying To Live; Science and the Near death Experience (London: Grafton, 1993); Grof, The Cosmic Game.
I have been unsure whether or not I should take part in your research project. However, I have made a decision and will post the consent form off to you today or tomorrow.

The above participant later confided, ‘I have become more discerning...I knew whom to share my experience with and whom not to. I usually share with believers or people who I feel it will help.’

Interest groups or organisations where such people might congregate were also sought out, meetings attended and activities observed. By invitation the researcher:

- Visited the Chaplaincy section of a major hospital;

- attended two meetings at a branch of the Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA). HVNA is the Australian branch of an international support group for people who experience altered states of consciousness that may entail perceiving sensory experiences such as clairaudience, clairvoyance, touch and smell;

- visited three Spiritualist churches — each with a differing constitution and beliefs. (The invitations to attend these Spiritualist churches led to meetings with Reiki practitioners and members of a spiritual development group); and

- on two occasions visited a chapel (*The Holy Family House of Prayer*) associated with the phenomenon of a statue which was reported to have wept.
Although all of the above contacts provided access to people who eventually participated in the research project, some of these participants were people known to members of these organisations rather than members themselves; others held dual membership. The total number of people who consented to participate in the study and where initial contact was made is shown below in Table 5.

Table 5: Source of Initial Contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants known to the researcher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association for ex-naval personnel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Chi Group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation Group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Service Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Order of St Luke</em> (Anglican Healing Group)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others — not members of <em>The Order of St Luke</em> but known to members of that organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hearing Voices Network Australia</em> (HVNA)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritualist Churches</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Holy Family House Of Prayer</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed via magazine article</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Participants</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.5: DATA COLLECTION

The primary method of data collection was the undertaking of one-to-one interviews between the researcher and each participant. This method of data collection was facilitated by the following material:

- the interview proforma and participant consent form (with duplicates for the participants)
- a battery-operated digital recorder equipped with voice editing software (Panasonic Voice Editing Ver. 2. Premium edition), capable of interfacing with Windows XP so that the interviews could be downloaded to a PC
- a PC equipped with Windows XP and software (Roxio Creator 9.0) so that each downloaded interview could be copied onto individual read-only CD/s
- a portable CD player

The value of transferring interviews to CDs was that repeated listening to the interviews aided (the researcher’s) appreciation of each participant’s unique experience.

The Interviews

The first interview was conducted on 16th October 2008 and the last on 8th January 2010. Thirty-six personal and in-depth interviews were held in quiet surroundings
appropriate to the needs of each participant. One telephone interview was conducted because the participant lived in a country town more than 400k from Perth.\footnote{This participant forwarded a signed copy of the interview proforma as signification of her consent.}

Each interview was usually commenced by the researcher offering the participant some form of light refreshment, such as tea or coffee, and inquiring if the participant had any questions about the study or about the questionnaire and Letter of Consent. This strategy was undertaken to put participants at ease.

The use of a snowballing technique to contact participants also assisted in generating rapport between the researcher and some participants, in that, a chain of relationships had already been built-up. These links existed because the person being interviewed was, to some extent, familiar with the researcher through the person who had acted as a referral and was sometimes acquainted with other participants. Once rapport had been established every interview was initiated by the researcher establishing confirmed consent. This was achieved by formally reading the following extract from the semi-structured interview proforma:

\textit{Signification of Consent:}

Participant No: \text{having read and understood the Information Letter and Consent Form, do you agree to participate in this research project?}

After informed consent had been obtained the interview process began.

Many of the interviews were fairly lengthy, often lasting well over an hour. A number of participants had prepared for the interview by making notes which they
used as an adjunct to the interview. Others contacted the researcher after their initial interview to provide additional details, which they felt to be important but had overlooked at the time. The researcher was presented with published articles, an autobiography, a second book — in the form of a CD and a DVD, which provided the history of a spiritual journey. Participants drew the researcher’s attention to a number of website addresses: (see Appendix D). Content from all of these sources added to understanding of the participants’ experiences.

The interviews were digitally recorded and then transferred to CDs. Each participant’s words were then faithfully transcribed by hand before being converted into a word-processed document. No attempt was made to improve coherence or syntax. As noted by Laski,34 and Riley,35 there may be great differences between the oral and literal. Many of the narratives contained much that could not be described as grammatically correct but pertained to particular speech habits or accents. Participants sometimes digressed, did not respond to questions sequentially and often repeated themselves.

Generally speaking, notes were not taken during the interview. However, upon completion of the interview and after the audio recorder had been switched off, it was not unusual for participants to call to mind something of importance. When this occurred permission was sought to take notes. Additional notes were made as soon as possible after the interview.

34 Laski, Ecstasy, 10.

Gillham estimates that, not including time required to write up an interview, a one hour interview consisting of approximately 5,000-6,000 words (18 pages), requires ten hours to transcribe; then about nine or ten hours to analyse. The majority of interviews were in the region of 1 hour with one lasting as long as 1½ hours (7,461 words). Gillham’s calculations do not include travel time and introductory and concluding stages of each interview which could add another three hours to the total time allocated to each person. Time taken to carry out each interview, together with time required for transcription and analysis, and the time required to review the wealth of additional information provided via books articles and multimedia sources, was a determining factor in the number of participants who could be involved in the study. Nevertheless, it was decided that additional contributions provided by participants could not be overlooked since failure to recognise this material could possibly be considered as compromising the study. Whereas, on the other hand, review of material other than the spoken interview, especially when a number of participants had indicated that they were more comfortable writing rather than speaking, had potential to enhance the richness of the narrative.

### 2.6: HOW THE DATA WERE TREATED

After collection, analysis of the data, whilst governed by its essential phenomenological approach, proceeded in accordance with the principles of grounded theory. This was not a straight forward linear process but one that involved much checking and cross-checking as interviews were transcribed, compared, coded and sorted.

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Copying the interviews onto CDs enabled the researcher to listen to them repeatedly, not just whilst transcribing but also on other occasions such as around the house or whilst driving. Repeated listening to the audio recordings allowed the researcher to become familiar with the participants’ words and gain a deeper sense of meaning through the manner of expression and tone of voice. This manner of immersion with interview content is common to both phenomenological methodology and grounded theory, as is the scrutiny of transcriptions to delineate units of meaning.  

**Coding, Memoing and Sorting**

The initial step in analysis, referred to as first level or ‘open coding’, involved examining each sentence and, using a range of coloured pencils, underlining categories (concepts) suggested by the sentence or a particular term within that sentence, say for example, with regards to religion. As categories emerged they were interpreted in the light of the participant’s attitude towards each category, thus, for example: Was the term religion used in a negative or positive sense? In this manner a number of categories were underlined with more than one colour. At this stage three interviews were outsourced to two colleagues, who were totally independent of the research project. In due course a meeting was held with these auditors and coding, developed independently by each auditor and the researcher, was compared, adjusted and agreed upon. From this point onwards, all further coding and analytical procedures were conducted solely by the researcher.

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Memos regarding clusters of words and concepts were annotated on an extra wide margin on the right hand side of each page. Careful analysis of each interview was required to ensure that the research project’s aims (namely, the answering of particular questions) were achieved without compromising the validity of the survey.

Multi copies of the transcripts were made so that individual copies could be sorted and filed in large envelopes — provisionally marked with the name of an emerging theme. These envelopes were themselves eventually re-sorted and used to form the building blocks of the emerging theory.

The next analytical steps involved axial coding and conceptualization, as earlier identified categories were subsumed to become sub-categories within major categories and appropriate names developed for each category. At this stage of the analysis, the researcher entered these ‘names’ into an Excel data base in order to assist with the management of the data.

A parallel data base, also using Excel, was set up to record participant’s age, sex, occupation, nature of the phenomenon experienced, religion and religious praxis.

Although, as noted by Lofland et all:

...computer data basing and qualitative software programs are not short cuts or magical keys to developing compelling and important analyses. At best they expedite and expand data organization, storage and retrieval possibilities, but they cannot do the hard work of data analysis which requires certain intellectual and creative skills that, to date, only the analyst can bring to the enterprise.39

Within the present study, data entry was helpful in confirming theoretical saturation and recognition of the central category. Data entry also assisted the preparation of a brief biographical profile of each participant’s lifeworld.

**Data Storage**

All data related to personal details were entered into an Excel database while the narrative was retained for more detailed analysis and the development of codes in keeping with grounded theory practices.

A portable file case with a number of divisions was obtained for storage of hard data relating to each interview. A unique number was allocated to each participant and this number with the date of the interview was marked on the outside of a large envelope. Other items placed in the envelope, for ease of access included:

- a master copy of the original interview
- CD/s of the interview
- additional material provided by the participants (written notes, CDs, printed material, newspaper cuttings)
- a synopsis of the interview
- additional notes made during or shortly after the interview
- working copies of the interview as used for coding (see Chapter Four)

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40 Dick, Grounded Theory, 7. Here, Dick writes that within grounded theory, theoretical saturation occurs when ‘Eventually your interviews add nothing to what you already know about a category, its properties, and its relationship to the core category.’ See also Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, 61.
The envelopes, together with larger publications were then stored in the portable file and placed in a locked filing cabinet.

All computer generated material relating to the research project was stored on multiple hard drives, with one external hard drive being stored in a safe at an off-site venue. Upon completion of the research project, all materials associated with Human Research would be retained in a Murdoch repository for a 5 year period.

2.7: CONCLUSION

This Chapter has presented the study’s empirical framework and detailed the research procedures involved in the current study. The next chapter, Chapter Three: Research Findings, introduces the participants and presents an in-depth discussion of the research findings.
3.1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the study’s inductive findings as obtained by a series of one-to-one interviews. These interviews were conducted between the researcher and 36 adults who consented to discuss personal experiences that they believed to be of a supernatural nature. As outlined in Chapter Two, the data which emerged from these interviews were treated by a process that involved aspects of: (a) grounded theory, which employs detailed analysis through the operation of a coding system that identifies underlying concepts;\(^1\) and (b) phenomenological methods, which explicate rather than analyse data so that the analysis, or breaking into parts, does not lead to a loss of the whole phenomenon.\(^2\) This treatment of the data, developed because it is generally recognised that neither religiousness nor spirituality can be easily quantified,\(^3\) permitted the emergence of a coherent narrative that examines the study’s definitive question. The results detailed in this chapter relate to experiences rated by the participants as being either of a mystical or psychic nature.

In some studies researchers have evaluated certain altered states of consciousness as being of greater value than others; they refer to primary mystical experiences, as

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\(^3\) Berger, *The Desecularization Of The World*; Wulff, *Listening to James a Century Later*. 

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opposed to secondary, or accidental; or unusual mystical experiences.\textsuperscript{4} In this way differentiation is made between experiences that are considered to be of particularly religious significance — usually classified as being ‘mystical’; and other experiences, such as, charismatic or psychospiritual experiences that are deemed to be of a lesser significance (see Appendix H). However, because the current study focuses its research on outcomes consequential to perceived experiences of mystical phenomena — as reported by the participants, this form of differentiation, which is arguable,\textsuperscript{5} was not applied in the present analyses. Instead the analytical process adopted here has much in common with what Possami describes as a \textit{Phenomenological Noumenalist} approach. A \textit{Phenomenological Noumenalist} approach, according to Possami, is one that, whilst acknowledging individual perceptions as independent variables within the analysis, ‘focuses its research on the consequences of belief and behaviour generated by [such] religious experience.’\textsuperscript{6}

\section*{3.2: ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS}

Thirty-six individuals (27 women and 9 men) consented to participate in the study. Thirty-five participants were living in and around the city of Perth in Western Australia, and one participant was domiciled in a country town some 400 kilometres east of Perth. All participants, in common with the majority of Australians, are either descended from Anglo-Celtic and European stock or are first generation migrants


\textsuperscript{5} See for example: Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism}; also Farges, \textit{Mystical Phenomena}.

\textsuperscript{6} Possami, \textit{In Search of New Age Spiritualities}, 7.
from that gene pool. During the interview process these origins were clearly discernable in the participants’ awareness of Western religious terminologies and traditions.

The following table (Table 6), the content of which is sourced from the participants’ interviews, offers a brief biographical profile of the participants and some of their experiences.7

Table 6: A Biographical Overview of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Biographical Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Megan: Senior, retired school teacher, Christian (wife of retired Baptist minister, maintains strong Baptist ties). Megan is active within the Uniting Church as an elder and lay preacher. Her experiences include awareness of the Holy Spirit and two examples of clairaudience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Gail: Senior, registered midwife and nurse, Catholic also interested in Buddhism. Her experiences include clairvoyance, a sense of presence and 2 mystical/ineffable experiences that occurred during church services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Francesca: Mature adult, teacher, former Anglican now a Baha’i and Sahaja Yoga practitioner. An active hands-on environmentalist, she has given presentations at three international sea grass conferences. Francesca’s experiences include kundalini arousal with a feeling that she had come home and a deep physical connection with the land, (upon arrival to Australia from England), 2 OBEs, and the sighting of an aura around a terminally ill young friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Teresa: Senior, retired nursing assistant, Church of England — non-practising. Whilst visiting a church at Port Arthur Teresa experienced a sense of someone standing behind her to such a degree that her husband observed her moving aside as though to permit someone to pass. Teresa is interested in the present study because she is sometimes aware of the smell of cigars (which her deceased husband smoked) in the new home where she and her present husband, both non-smokers, live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Nelly: Mature adult, housewife, Church of England ‘christened and confirmed’ — non-practicing. Shortly after the death of her husband Nelly had a hypnagogic experience, which involved entering a whirlpool or tunnel and hearing a beautiful voice, that brought her reassurance and comfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Bell: Mature adult, former nursing assistant, after ‘20 years as a Protestant and 20 years as a Catholic’, Bell says that she now has no religion but still believes in God. Her experiences involve an OBE during childbirth and awareness of scent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Lorna: Mature adult, no religious affiliation but belief ‘in a Universal Presence’. After the death of her husband Lorna began to experience a number of experiences which</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 All participants’ names have been changed in order to protect their privacy.
have caused her to believe in life after death. She attends a meditation group and works with cancer patients.

8. Karen: Mature adult, housewife, no religion but belief in God. Karen is actively seeking to find out more about a range of psychospiritual phenomena that she has personally experienced. She has attended a development group and is learning Reiki.

9. Elaine: Mature adult, nursery school teacher, Anglican — non-practicing. Elaine’s experiences include a two week episode of kinetic or poltergeist activity, which has stimulated an interest in the paranormal, and a period when she experienced ‘the power of God’ through prayer.

10. Isobel: Senior, housewife, Roman Catholic. After a lapse for a number of years, Isobel has now returned to regular church attendance. Her experience involved sensing the presence of her deceased father.

11. Marta: Senior, retired teacher and has degree in counselling, describes herself as an Ecumenical Christian. Marta’s experiences include awareness of a sense of Presence, which she describes as God/Christ, scent and touch. She is a church elder, voluntary counsellor and active in youth programmes.

12. John: Senior, semi-retired Uniting Church Minister. John is actively interested in mysticism and its theology. He has experienced the Holy Spirit in many ways and continues to actively pursue his interest in the healing mission.

13. Steven: Mature adult, Anglican priest and Chaplain at major hospital. Steven’s experience, which confirmed the direction of his calling, involved seeing a mystical cross and hearing a voice. He is confident in the validity of this experience.

14. Mary: Senior, Spiritualist. Mary’s experiences involve clairvoyance and clairaudience. Unexpectedly seeing her deceased father-in-law changed her life profoundly.

15. Bevan: Senior, (Mary’s partner) tai chi instructor, Church of England — non-practising. Describes his experience as having a sense of awareness of ‘something other.’ Studied for 7-8 years under a Master ‘About wisdom, deep silence — just through sitting. It’s the ‘Peace of God that passes understanding.’

16. Alex: Senior, retired senior member of Anglican clergy. His experiences include: a sense of calling; unio mystica, during monastic training; and a sense of being guided by the Holy Spirit. Alex remains active in many spheres of church activity.

17. Fiona: Senior, Alex’s spouse and help-mate — also an Anglican. For Fiona, the charismatic experience of speaking in tongues was ‘a life changing experience because instead of God being out there, He was within us!’ Fiona is active in the healing ministry and deliverance.

18. Maureen: Mature adult, business woman, Church of England — non-practising. As a young girl Maureen had a life saving experience in which she felt that she had been guided by God. This left her with the feeling that God had something important for her to do. She is not sure if she has achieved this but has initiated a new branch of an altruistic organisation.

years later whilst ‘agonizing in prayer’ about a relative, Calum began to speak in tongues. He has studied at Bible College and has a deferred admission (on health grounds) to a theological college.

20. Harry: Senior, Anglican — retired member of the clergy. He is now Chaplain to a number of organisations, has a talk-back spot on radio and is active in pastoral areas. An unexpected charismatic experience of speaking in tongues whilst praying resulted in change in belief.

21. James: Senior, semi-retired, skilled artisan, leading Minister in a group of eleven Christian Spiritualist Churches. He studied to become a Baptist Minister but this direction was changed by a life-altering dream experience when he was 26. James sees a personal invitation to represent his Church at the 2009 World Parliament of Religions as the culmination of a lifetime’s work.

22. Merlyn: Senior, retired farmer, currently attends Church of Christ where charismatic experiences are supported. A key experience referred to as a ‘Samuel experience’ and other clairaudient and visionary experiences have resulted in Merlyn engaging in a very religious life style which includes making careful notes of spiritual insights that occur during her morning devotions.

23. Nadia: Mature adult, Life Coach and Spiritualist medium. Nadia has experienced visions and voices since youth. Initially, she didn’t know what to make of the experiences but after some study decided to build a career around them.

24. Denyse: Mature adult, artist, attended university until her health broke down. Denyse describes her religion as New Age. She has seen visions and heard voices since childhood. She acts as convenor to a branch of HVNA (a support organisation for people who hear voices).

25. Graeme: Senior, former maintenance engineer and Anglican. Student of Eastern religious traditions and active member of the Spiritualist Church, Graeme provides philosophy (sermons) 3-4 times per week at differing venues. His experiences include clairvoyance and clairaudience and a unitive experience that changed his life.

26. Meryl: Senior, a former nurse and sometime member of the Salvation Army, she now attends a Spiritualist Church. Throughout her life Meryl has had a capacity for precognition which she uses to help people. Now assists in a reading program for children.

27. Arnold: Mature adult, engineer, ex Royal Australian Navy, defines himself as: ‘Atheist slightly Buddhist’. He has experienced an OBE and kinetic experiences and is actively seeking to experience ASC. Arnold was part of a Baptist group for some years but is disappointed that he did not experience ‘voices, the light or anything.’

28. Marion: Senior, Retired, former headmistress of Catholic Girls School. Marion feels that her whole life has been a spiritual experience. Her experiences of the Holy Spirit have caused her to be more totally involved in church life and this ‘overflows into family.’

29. Laurel: Senior, retired business woman, former Anglican now convener of an Independent Spiritualist Church. Experiences include awareness of unseen presences and, on one occasion, saw her grand-daughter’s astral double.
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Kathy: Mature adult, lifelong Spiritualist, former public servant (involved in adult literacy programs) now occasional celebrant and writer. Many experiences of clairvoyance and clairaudience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Zena: Mature adult, medical secretary, Christian. At one time when overseas experienced an ‘intense sense of evil’ which caused her to study Christianity and become a skilled exegete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Deirdre: Mature adult, Catholic, member of a religious community. Deirdre experiences locutions which she posts on the community’s web site. She studies theology and has travelled overseas with Roslyn (see 34 below) on a number of speaking engagements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Donna: Senior, former nurse, comes from a family of British spiritualists and since childhood has been involved in spiritualism. She has studied intensely and holds official representation status for the Spiritualist National Union in WA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Roslyn: Deirdre’s twin, Mature adult, previously a business woman now a worker in a religious community, Catholic. She was inspired by a mystical experience, involving the Virgin Mary, to establish a helping religious group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Terri: Senior, former nursing assistant, once a Methodist, now Anglican. The result of two psychospiritual experiences — an OBE and a vision during which her deceased mother spoke to her, has been that she does not fear death. Terri has started attending Bible Study to ‘find out more about these things’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Wilma: Senior, retiree, member of Uniting Church, originally a nominal Christian from a Church of England/Methodist/Anglican background until a healing experience of the Holy Spirit changed her life. Only shares details of her experience with believers or people she feels it will help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note, as indicated by the above table, that some participants preferred to denote their religion as being ‘Christian’ rather than cite any specific church membership. Furthermore, the religious identity of many non-catholic participants appears to be both ecumenical and mobile as participants move freely between various denominations or faiths. This is in contrast to the study’s four Catholic participants whose commitment to Catholicism, despite a lapse of some years in one case, remains constant. Nevertheless, interviews with these four participants also indicated that they too are strongly ecumenical in their outlook.
Twenty-five participants (69%) reported regular involvement in private praxis such as prayer and meditation and also public praxis, involving church or similar attendance. The remaining 11 (31%) participants, who currently were not involved with any form of institutionalized religion, clearly separated public worship from awareness of the ‘Real’. For example, Maureen a non practising member of the Church of England stated:

Because I read the Bible. I mean I know in the Bible it says you’re supposed to be with other Christians. But every time I go to a church, I might be comfortable for a while but in the end I feel more disillusioned. I do not like religion. I find that the people that hurt me the most in life are Christians. I think that’s probably because I expect more from them. There is a bumper sticker that I quite like that says ‘Christians aren’t perfect, we’re just forgiven.’ I understand all that but I also get very upset that people who profess to be Christians don’t seem to try harder. I think as a Christian you have a responsibility to try harder. I’m not saying that any of us can be perfect. I’m certainly not perfect. And a lot of Christians might say I’m probably not a proper Christian either because I don’t go to church. But I don’t care what other people say. My relationship with God is between Him and me. And that’s basically it.

Bell, who also reported that she was not involved in any form of religious practice, advised:

I was a Protestant for 20 years and a Catholic for over 20 years. I had a bad experience with a priest. ... I did go to mass a long time after that but mostly I just sat in mass and cried. A terrible place in my life and I had 5 kids — a terrible place in my life. I used to sit and cry on a Sunday thinking ‘God, please help me. Help me to move on and get out of this.’ And anyway I did. I did...eventually. I believe, I’m a big believer. I know where the church is if I need it [When you say you believe, you mean you believe in God?] Oh, yes, there is a God, yeah, there is of course.

8 Note: ‘the Real’ is a term coined by John Hick as a means to express the many names by which differing religions and believers refer to their concept of the Transcendent, for example: God, Christ, The Holy Spirit, Allah, Brahman, Vishnu, etc. For the same reason, from this point onwards, this terminology is applied, from time to time, within the current study. See Hick, An Interpretation of Religion, 9-11.

9 Comments or queries made by the researcher are signified as follows: [comment/query].
Amongst all the participants, Arnold, who designated himself as an ‘Atheist, slightly Buddhist’ was the only person not to express belief in an Ultimate Reality.

**Interest in Religion**

During analysis of the participants’ narratives, it became apparent that all participants were, to a greater or lesser extent, interested in religion. For analytical purposes, ‘Interest in Religion’ was coded under the following headings:

- **Religion** — positive or neutral terms were signified by terms such as religion, mention of religious denominations, prayer, mass, holy, faith, belief, and biblical quotations.

- **Negative Religion** — was signified by concepts and phrases such as Maureen’s ‘I do not like religion’ or Bell’s ‘bad experience’.

- **The Real** — was signified by terms such as God, He, The Lord, Jesus Christ, Christ, Holy Spirit, Universal Presence.

- **Church** — was entered in situations where the word church referred to the established Church or to an actual building.

- **Spiritual/spirituality** — was entered whenever these actual terms were mentioned.
- **Eastern Philosophies/Religion** — was signified by terms relating to Eastern traditions, such as: Buddha, Buddhism Baha’i, karma, kundalini, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba.

The following table (Table 7) illustrates the percentage of participants who referred to the above codes and the total number of mentions by category.

### Table 7: Awareness of Religious Terminologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Referred to by 100% of the sample. TNM = 417.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Real</td>
<td>Referred to by 92% of the sample. TNM = 362.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Referred to by 67% of the sample. TNM = 154.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual/</td>
<td>Referred to by 36% of the sample. TNM = 52.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Traditions</td>
<td>Referred to by 33% of the sample. TNM = 56.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of</td>
<td>Referred to by 25% of the sample. TNM = 29.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* TNM = Total Number of Mentions

Despite the significance of religion as an important theme within the data, as the analysis moved from description to conceptualization, it became apparent that religion could not be identified as the research project’s core category.
Identification of the Core Category

As detailed in Section 2.2 of Chapter Two, Strauss stresses the importance of a core or central category, which represents the most important theme of the research project. Within the present study, the core category, which emerged from the sub-core categories and was noted within all narratives as a sense of forward movement, energy and change, was given the name of Catalysis.¹⁰ This core category of Catalysis satisfied Strauss’s Criteria for Choosing a Central Category¹¹ in that:

1. All other major categories could be related to it.
2. Within all cases, to a greater or lesser degree, there were indicators relating to this concept.
3. There was no forcing of data.
4. The phrase used to describe the category is sufficiently abstract to be used in further research and could possibly lead to the development of a greater general theory.
5. As the concept was analytically refined it grew in depth and explanatory power.
6. It has capacity to explain variation and possibly contradictory cases.

The central category of Catalysis could be discerned in three distinct phases:

¹⁰ The term Catalysis is used to convey the process though which one substance (the catalyst or experience) in coming into contact a second substance (the experiencer) influences or changes the second substance without being changed in itself.

¹¹ Strauss, Qualitative Analysis For Social Scientists. For a facsimile of Strauss’ ‘Criteria For Choosing A Central Category’ see Chapter 2, Section 2.2: Research Methodology.
Phase I — The Experience and First Reactions

Phase II — The Experience as a Potential Catalyst for the Individual

Phase III — The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society

Having introduced the participants and identified the Core Category, which emerged as a consequence of grounded theory methodology (as described in the previous chapter), the thesis will now discuss findings relating to the above three phases.

3.3: PHASE I — THE EXPERIENCE AND FIRST REACTIONS
The Experiences

The experiences were many and varied. They included experience of the Holy Spirit, unity, speaking in tongues, awareness of unseen presences (both spiritual and of deceased persons) visionary experiences, auditory experiences, light/s, touch smell significant dreams and incidents of divine patterning or synchronicity. Many individuals reported more than one variety of experience, or several occurrences of the same type, whereas other individuals preferred to disclose a single experience. In situations where a series of experiences were disclosed, the study focuses upon the particular experience or experiences that were voluntarily selected, by the participant, as having been most significant. From this point onwards, for terminological ease, these significant experiences will occasionally be referred to as ‘key’ or ‘pivotal’ experiences.
The variety of altered states of consciousness reported by all participants is presented in Table 8. The table notes the number and percentage of respondents who reported each experience rather than the number of times any particular experience occurred.

**Table 8: Phenomena Experienced as Reported by the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomena</th>
<th>Number of Participants Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of an Unseen Presence</td>
<td>27 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A Sense of Presence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>14 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>13 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBE/NDE</td>
<td>9 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scent</td>
<td>7 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Glossolalia</em> (Speaking in Tongues)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronicity/Divine Patterning</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinetic Activity</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precognition</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aura</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A key point with regard to the experiences reported was that the greater number of experiences were perceived as spontaneous and occurred irrespective of the experiencer's volition:

*Teresa:* I suppose, it was I felt like — there was somebody behind me. I got the impression of somebody in dark clothes, not necessarily a suit but dark clothes, so I stepped aside into the aisle so that the person could pass.
Nelly: Well I was just going to sleep... and I... sort of went into this whirlpool tunnel. I can still see it as plain as anything. And it’s just sort of two shades — dark and light going into this whirlpool. And then this most beautiful voice — I’ve never ever heard it again. Like velvet; beautiful deep male voice and it says ‘don’t worry, you’ll be all right.’ [Were you sick at the time?] No, I had just lost my husband, it was about two days.

Even where prayer, meditation or other forms of empowerment were employed, participants reported the experiences manifested from a source other than themselves:

John: As I came through the prayer of that stage of relinquishment, the traumatic situation which was responsible for the obsessive compulsion disorder, flooded immediately into the forefront of my consciousness, as though a key was turned in a door and the door was locked, and I knew that I was cured instantly.

As with a number of previous studies, awareness of an unseen presence — also referred to as a sense of presence, was the most commonly reported phenomenon. The manner in which the unseen presence was diversely identified by the 27 participants, who reported this experience, is shown in Table 9 on the following page.

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12 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, Hay, Exploring Inner Space.
Table 9: Awareness of an Unseen Presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unseen Presence Identified as</th>
<th>No. Reporting this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Unio mystica</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God/Holy Spirit/Christ</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A deceased person</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ineffable experience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An evil presence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Lourdes</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

First Reactions

Within the first phase, the first reaction to the experience itself was seen as a catalytic process that had the three following qualities:

- It elicited a range of affective reactions such as surprise, wonder, often excitement and occasionally fear;
- brought about change in the person’s outlook and condition; and
- impressed itself strongly on the experiencer’s memory.

Because of the transformative nature of the catalytic process it was impossible to define the above features as occurring in linear form. Nevertheless, although the intensity of the process was mediated by each individual’s personal circumstances
and ontology; and also by the variety of phenomena experienced, with the exception of a few particular cases (to be discussed later) the above features remained constant throughout Phase I.

**Positive Affective Responses**

Most participants indicated that their initial response to the phenomena listed in Table 8 had been both affective and positive. The study’s first question: ‘How would you describe your experience?’ elicited responses such as:

*Elaine:* I found my experience strangely exciting and reassuring. (kinetic experience)

*James:* How would I rate it? Well, it was absolutely fantastic! (out-of-the-body experience)

Other participants used terms such as: ‘Wow!’ ‘Amazing!’ and ‘Awesome!’ to express their experiences. This is of interest because among early Christians the Greek term *mystikos* (mystical) was used as an expression of surprise in much the same way as ‘Amazing, Awesome, and ‘Wow’ are used today.\(^\text{13}\) See for example:

*Deirdre:* I think from my experience...it makes me understand that God is an awesome God. (Synchronicity/Divine Patterning)

*Calum:* It was an amazing experience! It was an amazing experience it really was. (Glossolalia)

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Steven: I didn’t take a lot of notice in the first instance. I thought Wow! What was that? (Visionary experience)

Less Positive Responses

For some participants the initial affective response was one of fright. In the first example, as shown below, Laurel’s experience of a sense of presence may possibly be representative of Otto’s concept of the numinous and the tremendum.14

Laurel: I have had several experiences and the one, I have to admit now, that scared me when I first experienced it was when Spirit came in really close to me. And it’s like every hair on your body stands on end. It’s like you’ve been plugged into the electric socket and all things like that — now I...I love it! ... the love is so strong I just burst into tears. It’s just... and I feel wonderful. Because they’re tears of joy not sadness, you know. But the love is just so overwhelming, I just float around. I just feel that I’m walking on air.

Whilst Laurel’s fear was relieved by feelings of love, two other narratives presented as seemingly negative experiences. The first story, as shown below, describes a sense of oppression by an evil spirit.

Zena: This goes quite a way back, like 1975, when I had this prompting to look into things a bit more: a meaning of life; asking questions like. One time we back-packed to India and through to Europe and through Indonesia and Afghanistan, through all those countries....We went to Varanasi or Benares which is in India it’s like the spiritual — where they go, Now at this time I still wasn’t intending to become a Christian. I walked through that city {lengthy pause} I felt a great heaviness and oppression that I had never felt before. And that is something and I remember that quite distinctly when we were going and, afterwards, I thought ‘What is this? I could feel it, it was really quite palpable, it was quite odd, an awful feeling, not a nice feeling.

And afterwards I thought, looking back, in hindsight, they are always trying to work their own salvation through the Hindu faith. You work, you work, your way into the next Karma and come back into the next life — things like that. But it’s where — it’s where all the pyres are lit and the people are burnt.

It wasn’t a joyful feeling. It was just awful. It was an oppressive feeling. That was very distinctive. I suppose you’d call that, I don’t know what you’d call that, psychic or mystic or something but that was quite strong. I thought, ‘I don’t want to come back here ever again’. It was very, very, very vivid [It’s stayed with you still?] Yes, and I can feel it.

I got to thinking about all these other religions and I thought, ‘All these other religions, you have to work for your salvation.’ Christianity is the only faith where it’s your faith, your believing saves you, that you have your salvation. Every other faith you’ve got to work, you’ve got to do this, you’ve got to do that. And that’s why I realized I thought it might have been part of that oppressive feeling. And I thought, people talk about in the spirit world and I thought it must be like that. I don’t know what you believe — like Satan or spirits. But places can have a sense of spirit or spirituality — there’s good and evil. And I thought Varanasi was a place like that, where there was evil. It was like an evil spirit.

Zena’s experience, categorized as a sense of presence, was unique within the current study.  

The second experience may possibly be representative of an out-of-the body experience occurring during a hypnopompic state.

Karen: It all happened in a couple of seconds. [What sort of thing?] I’ve since been told it was probably me — it was me. So, anyway, as I’m lying in the bed, I’m lying well — this body was about there {gestures} and as I looked down, I could see feet! Sounds as though it lasted for ages but it was only a couple of seconds.

Anyway, you know when you see hair, like in water, in water and its floating around? Well that’s what I saw. I didn’t see a face. I just got such a shock I screamed. I screamed and this thin thing Whoosh! It jumped back — well, into me {husband} run in from the bathroom and I was as white as a sheet.

15 However, the experience of ‘an evil presence’ can be found in other studies, see for example: D. Hay and G. Heald, ‘Religion is Good for You,’ cited in Michael Argyle, The Psychological Perspective on Religious Experience (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Centre, 1997), 7. Here, Argyle refers to a British Gallop Poll which recorded that 12% of participants had experienced the phenomena of a sense of presence as ‘an evil presence’. See also, Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 78, and 28. Here Hardy draws attention to the category of a ‘Sense of external evil force having initiative’ and records 134 accounts of this phenomenon in his first 3,000 responses.
and shaking. I was like that for about half an hour. I was in a terrible state. And at the time, I thought that it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me in my life because I got such a shock. So, anyway, this thing jumped into me and I think probably for about a week I was really traumatised. I suppose that’s the only way I can explain it. I was shocked! As I say it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me in my life, at that stage.

Karen’s affective reaction differs from Zena’s, in that, when it occurred it was completely beyond her comprehension. Zena, on the other hand, was able to formulate some sort of theory as to the cause of her experience.

**Exceptions to the Affective Response**

Exceptions to the affective response were found in two narratives that were devoid of any sentiment or passion. These narratives related the experiences of two participants — Kathy and Donna, who had grown up with an awareness of presences or ‘special friends’ that only they could see and communicate with. Kathy and Donna’s responses to the study’s opening query: ‘How would you describe your experience?’ are shown below.

**Kathy:** {long pause} Well, I’ve just had so many experiences. I wouldn’t know what.... What do you want? [Did you start at an early age?] Always. I’ve always had them as long as I can remember...

**Donna:** As a child I actually saw spirit, talked to spirit. Of course as you grow you actually lose that ability. I grew up with a father that was a medium, a trance medium, and a trance healer. So I’ve been involved more or less all my life with Spiritualism in one way or another.
The spirituality of young children and their ability to express experiences in non-biblical terms is commented on by David Hay and Rebecca Nye, and is possibly further demonstrated by another participant’s childhood experiences:

_Nadia:_ I thought that seeing people and seeing angels and having playmates with you was the norm. I didn’t think that there was anyone who didn’t have a playmate.

Although all three of the above participants went on to experience Phase II, only Nadia related a number of specific and life changing adult experiences that elicited affective responses.

**Change in Condition and Attitude**

A number of participants reported that their experience had resulted in an immediate change in attitude and condition:

_Steven:_ I saw an illuminated cross in the sky. It wasn’t just a cross. It was flashing and all the colours of the rainbow and I didn’t take a lot of notice in the first instance. I thought Wow! What was that? Sort of thing. And then It came back again but when it came back a second time it spoke. And there was a voice which said ‘Steven, I’ll look after you.’ So all these doubts I had diminished at that point...It [the experience] really affirmed my faith in God.

The above extract provides not only an example of Steven’s surprise and wonder at his visionary experience but also demonstrates the manner in which the experience immediately caused a change in his attitude that resulted in action. Steven’s doubts had arisen because, on that particular day, he had left a secure position in order to train for ordination and during the three or four years of study ‘would have no

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Income’ and ‘a family to feed’. A full text of Steven’s narrative is provided in Appendix E.

Marta’s emotional narrative, shown below, also provides an example of immediate change brought about by the phenomenon of a sense of presence.

*Marta:* And I got to the point, one day, where I got down on my hands and knees and prayed “IF there is a God, *{in an exasperated tone}* I have been taught that You sent your son to die on the cross for our sins and I’m confused and I don’t know what to believe. IF there is a God — you make yourself true for me.”

And it was like being wrapped up *{hugged herself}* There was a very conscious confirmation and there was love — just surrounded by love. He didn’t say anything. It was just a confirmation that what I had been taught was true. And Christ was present.

As can be seen from Steven’s and Marta’s accounts, they were both immediately confident as to the cause of the phenomena that they experienced. Wilma, on the other hand, despite the affective nature of her healing experience, initially, was totally confused by the nature of the phenomenon.

*Wilma:* [...] hands were laid on me and I was prayed over. I melted like butter, oblivious, almost blacked out — felt this amazing power. I felt heat like I was a radiator. I felt cradled, picked up in love — never wanted it to stop. Then the power drained out. Felt something phenomenal, felt amazing, something supernatural. When it was over I felt embarrassed, said ‘Thank you’ and left. On reflection, this was rather rude. Was in shock drove to the beach with my husband and we just sat in the car and tried to work out what had happened.

I drove home and I hadn’t driven anywhere in ages— I kept thumping my fat tum saying ‘no pain’.

Wilma’s narrative illustrates not only the physical and emotional changes that she perceived to be occurring during the course of her experience, but also an immediate
change (the absence of pain) brought about by the experience. A specialist later confirmed that she had been completely cured and no longer required surgery. In retrospect she says, ‘God’s Holy Spirit came upon me in a dramatic way... and I was born anew.’ Wilma’s sense of being ‘born anew’ is indicative of the complete change which she felt she had experienced.

Immediate change in outlook and condition was also seen in charismatic experiences when participants spontaneously found themselves speaking in tongues.

**Fiona:** my husband and I were both filled with the Spirit. I spoke in tongues straight away — he didn’t. And it was a life changing experience because instead of God being out there. He was with us. He was within. He was there and even when you felt...ahh... it’s not about feeling, but you have these times when you are flat and things are difficult and you feel remote. You know, when you speak in tongues, that God’s there with you. It’s your confirmation that he hasn’t left you. You might have moved off but he’s there and he’s with you and it’s a personal relationship. And the whole relationship has changed, my life has changed. And the Bible instead of being a drag and difficult to read meant something. And, the truth was there, God spoke into my life. And it was a whole different ball game to me. I used to think, I can’t go on with this Christian thing because it seemed to be such hard work but suddenly it wasn’t hard work because the Lord was with me. So, you know, that was a life changing experience.

**Harry:** The parish I went to, {name of parish} was a very charismatic parish and I was not used to the charismatic way. Anglo-Catholic was my experience. I said ‘Oh no, I don’t need to speak in tongues. I can speak in English reasonably well.’ You see, that was my response. But as I got involved, I had an experience, whilst I was there. I began to speak in tongues when I was sitting on a balcony overlooking 6 lanes of streaming traffic below. And these words came to me. And I began to repeat them. Knowing my attitude to tongue-speakers. I was amazed to say the least.

**Memory of the Experience**

Perceptions of key phenomena experienced appeared to be strongly impressed upon each participant’s memory. The following phenomenon was experienced by Alex,
over fifty years ago, and is one of a number of narratives that provide an example of the detailed manner in which reported phenomena were impressed upon the experiencer’s memory.

Alex: I remember quite vividly an experience in the chapel one day, of just, I don’t know how you would describe it but just that awareness of the presence of God completely and being caught up so that, in a sense, time didn’t mean anything. It happened during a quiet time, a meditation prayer, yes. The routine was — if you’re interested? [Nod] We used to get there at twenty to seven, I think it was. Yeah, twenty to seven. The monks would have a little private service, the students would come in at twenty to seven. We’d have what we call matins, which is morning prayer in the Anglican tradition and then we’d have 20 minutes meditation, then we’d have Holy Communion service and then we’d get out at 8 o’clock and that was every day. So it was in one of these periods of meditation, I think, when normally you went to sleep but on this particular occasion that wasn’t the case. And I got a bit interested in those days with The Cloud of Unknowing and all those sorts of things and medieval times and so on. But I recognise, I think, {laughs} today that it’s really just, it’s much simpler than that. It’s really just the Holy Spirit being there and around...And that was a very profound experience because the experience is still there and continues to be, motivating ministry and motivating one’s life.

Although Alex has shifted from identifying his experience as unio mystica to considering that it was an experience of the Holy Spirit, he still sees it as something that has been influential in shaping his life. Megan also, appears to have clear recollection of an experience that was both affective and seminal:

Megan: OK. So I was saying I was in standard I. [10 years old]. Always on a Friday afternoon the teacher told us stories. This Friday afternoon she told the story about the crucifixion of Jesus. Having come from a background where I attended Sunday school, I thought to myself ‘I’ve heard this story

before’ — and then she read it. And something I don’t know what it is. Probably, I think God, saying to me ‘start thinking’... So she finished the story and to my embarrassment I was crying. So this said something to me — All right, this is important, something that is going to be my life. Because I knew I was going to be a teacher. I have never forgotten it.

I think when you think back on the experience because as a ten year old I didn’t have the experience to know what that experience was doing to me. Except it was a little nudge and I could have gone that way or another way.

Some participants referred to notes or journals in which they had previously recorded their experiences, for example:

Karen: Where am I going from there? Got that much {checks notes}. Ok. Right, in 2005, I think it's 2005 {husband} had gone out to play darts and came back in about 10 o'clockish.

Calum: It was an amazing experience! It was an amazing experience it really was. I’ll never forget it. And that happened 3rd April 2005. I wrote it down...recorded the date. It was around 10pm at night and ever since then I’ve prayed in tongues nearly every day in my private prayer times.

The eminence of memory or recollection was noted in the narratives of all 36 participants.

3.4: PHASE II — THE EXPERIENCE AS A CATALYST FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

The catalytic effects of Phase I triggered a period of change and action as participants endeavoured to assimilate their experience. For the majority of participants, that is to say, 34, (94%), this period of change and action, from now onwards referred to as Phase II, involved action in the form of inquiry or search into
the nature and purpose of the experience. Some participants referred to this as a 'journey' or 'faith journey'.

Although several participants reported the continuation of mystical and psychospiritual phenomena, unlike the first phase in which the nature of the experiences made it impossible to separate the catalytic process, within Phase II it was possible to discern a pattern or theme that was partially linear — comparable to a chain-reaction process, as change led to action and action to change. Further explication of the data suggested that Phase II could be divided into three merging courses of action and change as shown on the following page (Figure 3: The Journey).
**Figure 3: The Journey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>An Initial Period of Action</strong></th>
<th>A busy period of exploration and experimentation triggered by a key experience.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>↓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merging into a second period of action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but retaining elements of the initial process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A Second Period of Action</strong></td>
<td>A complex period of study and various forms of inquiry sometimes leading to:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acceptance of other beliefs or philosophies, changes in praxis and the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>formation of focused spiritualities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merging into a third period of action building upon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the actions of the second period of action and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>retaining some elements of the first period of action.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A Third Period of Action and Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Occurring after a period of time, often many years, had elapsed between the key experience and the present research project. During this period, the search had become a study — something gentle and un rushed. Participants appeared to have gained an insight and perspective about their experience/s which was indicative both of self-actualization and self-realization.</td>
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The Journey

As indicated by Figure 3, on the previous page, the above journey was a complex period and one which clearly followed a spiritual line as the catalytic experience appeared to ignite a spark that sooner or later enflamed the individual’s spirituality.  

Explication of the data indicated that usually, but not always immediately subsequent to the catalytic process of Phase I, the experience prompted a need to search and find out more about that experience. Hence, for many participants the Initial Period of Action was one of exploration and experimentation.

The Second Period of Action was quite lengthy and often complex. The journey/search could be influenced by any number of variables such as: age, gender, family responsibilities, occupation, and health. It was during this period that the formation of individual or personal focused spiritualities became discernible.

In the Third Period of Action, for some, the journey appeared to have become a way of life during which, from participants’ perspectives, insights had emerged in stages. It was impossible to say if the search, or journey, was ever completed but along the way it appeared to have potential to engender a sense of personal growth indicative of self-actualization and self-realization.

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19 These cannot be closely detailed within in the present study but would be of interest for future research. See also, Chapter Four, 4.2: Catalysis and The Catalytic Process.

20 Self-actualization is explained by Maslow as follows: ‘All trees need sunlight and all human beings need love, and yet, once satiated with these elementary necessities, each tree and human being proceeds to develop his own style, uniquely, using these universal necessities to his own private
Although not every participant could be said to have progressed through all three stages, examination of the narratives made it clear that whilst there might be detours, short-cuts and rests along the way there was no return to any individual’s starting point, that is to say, prior to the key experience.

The Exceptions

The pattern of search and change was discernible in all but two narratives. These two exceptions were: Bell, who experienced an out-of-the-body experience during the birth of her fifth child and later the phenomenon of scent; and Nelly, who also experienced a variety of out-of-the-body experience during a time of personal stress (widowhood and the prospect of financial problems).

Bell: Well... the OBE I had... I was giving birth to my fifth child. It was very quick. I had no time for anaesthetic, gas, or anything so basically it was into labour, into the hospital and giving birth. And I gave birth and I saw myself. Looking down on myself. Scared myself out of my wits. Said ‘I can’t go

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21 A sense of unity or non-dualism. For Christian definitions see: Knowles, What is Mysticism? 16. Here Knowles provides the following abridged version: ‘That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us...that they may be one, as we also are one; I in them and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one.’ (John 17:22-23) and Richard Rohr, The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See (Mulgrave, VIC: John Garrett Publishing, 2009),173. Here Rohr, in describing nondualism, writes ‘Subject and object are one. God in you and through you, sees and loves God.’

For a Yogic definition see: Parmahansa Yogananda, The Divine Romance, (Los Angeles, CA: Self-Realization Fellowship 1986), 464. Here self-realization is defined by Yogananda as ‘... knowing — in body, mind, and soul — that we are one with the omnipresence of God.’

anywhere. I’ve just had another baby. I’ve got five kids to take care of and I need to go back.’ {spoken very urgently}. And back in ...yeah.

Nelly: I was about 33 (29 years ago). Never forgotten it. Well... it’s just amazing because I had two young children. My daughter was 12 going on 13 or 13 going on 14. My son was 10 going on 11. And I just thought what am I going to do. Because my husband was a fireman and the fire brigade looked after me pretty well at the time. But it’s just this voice. You never forget it. ‘You’ll be all right.’ And that was it. But it was the tunnel — Oh my God what’s happening now? Thought I’m going off the planet or something?

Nelly and Bell were the only two participants whose narratives did not indicate a further stage of inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon that they had experienced. Accordingly, from this point onwards, further explication of Bell and Nelly’s narratives is excluded from Phase II.

The Initial Period of Action

The narratives of many participants implied that the earlier stage of the journey, that is to say, closest to the experience, was a time of high activity, involving exploration, experimentation and a certain amount of study. All of these activities were evident in the narrative of Karen, who during the interview described a series of very recent experiences.

Karen: How would I describe it? I would say it was mostly of a spiritual nature and I suppose you would also call them mystical. ...Right. I’ll start from here {speaks but sometimes refers to notes} and this is just some of the main things. To be honest there are lot of things that are still going on all the time. ...Right, Now, {consults notes} Here we go. This is where I get to the most profound experience, if you like, and if I start crying...we’re at the {development teacher’s group} I used to like meditation at her place. She used to walk us through things. With {2 other names} it’s more, it’s assumed that you know and I don’t tend to get as much out of my meditation. So I’m in this meditation and for the first time I actually felt I was out in the field

That is if one does not consider involvement in the current research project as being indicative of some form of interest or inquiry into the nature of psychospiritual phenomena.

22
with all the wind and everything going on. But anyway, I think it’s about 3 or 4 lessons in and I’m in this meditation and it’s lovely and where I am and the next thing I saw Jesus Christ in front of me. And he’s stood there and just...aah...{breaks down/cries} and then he walks towards me {still emotional} [put arm around] It’s ok, it’s ok. I mean he just walked towards me like that... and then I just ...{emotional short break} [That’s beautiful. Aren’t you lucky?] Yes {sobs} And I’ve never had such a profound experience in all my life.

And I actually sat there in the class and I thought ‘Do I tell anybody this? Do I tell people?’ I mean there must have been about 9 or 10 people in this group. And it was just lovely.

Well, anyway, so I saw Lord Jesus. I think then the next week that I don’t see very much and the next week, I actually see Buddha. You know the Buddha that you see with...like all...those like, you know that, that, curvy...like the one you see in Asia, not the Chinese one, I saw that Buddha, which I know nothing about. I know nothing really about Buddhism or anything.

Karen’s continuing narrative suggested that she was expending tremendous emotional and physical energy in attempting to discover more about her experiences particularly after her terrifying out-of-body experience, as reported in Section 3.3, (Part I — The Experiences and First Reactions) of the current chapter.

As part of her exploratory process she joined a development group, a meditation group and had begun studying Reiki.23 At the time of her interview Karen was clearly still engaged in the first part of her journey. A précis of Karen’s narrative is provided in Appendix F.

For some participants it appeared that prevailing societal attitudes towards mystical and or psychospiritual phenomena could temporarily stall the busy initial period.

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23 Reiki involves a form of healing by laying on hands. To learn Reiki the practitioner must become attuned or spiritually empowered. Attunement is achieved through a series of initiations that are undertaken with the eyes closed. ‘this is because as a sacred and spiritual ceremony, the procedures are intended to be kept secret until such time as any individual student trains to be a Reiki Master.’ Penelope Quest and Kathy Roberts, *The Reiki Manual, A Training Guide for Reiki Students, Practitioners and Masters* (London: Piatkus, 2011), 25-27.
Roslyn: [...] and my parish priest who had actually witnessed the perfume on the roses on the feet in the October previous, he was away, because he was ill, and so a young assistant was there and he was very — you know, “Oh, it’s a private revelation — like ‘Take it home.’ ... No, I didn’t actually take it up to the church I actually just told, told him and he said “It will go away.”

Denyse: The first vision I had was as a small child. I seemed to see this vision of my mother being mmm... tried as a witch in medieval England. And I didn’t know much about it until I grew up. But that would have been the first vision then, of course, she died and it was traumatic for me. ....I seemed to have some inner awareness that perhaps there had been another life time. And then asked the priest about it and he said my mother was a bad woman. And, of course, I got very upset about that. And then as I grew older it all blended into one and it seemed to be an unrealistic experience and I put it aside.

Whilst Roslyn and Denyse sought advice from authority figures, Elaine, because of prevailing attitudes of disbelief towards mystical phenomena, questioned the actuality of her own experience and did not feel comfortable about discussing it.

Elaine: [...] and I was blown away. I said ‘I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it!’ And, again, I don’t speak to people about it because they might think — crazy. You see I come from a background where my family would say ‘What experience of God!!??’ {in a disbelieving sense}

Elaine’s disbelief was generated by her personal ontology which after the above experience changed to accommodate reassurance of the presence of God. About this experience she later remarked:

Elaine: Now I haven’t taken it to that extent saying, ‘Now I must become religious.’ I just feel reassured that he’s there.

The course of action or direction of the search taken appeared to differ between participants who interpreted their experiences from a position of religious conviction and participants who held less specific beliefs — at the time when their experiences
took place. The ontological positions from which participants identified their key experience are shown below.

- Twenty-six (71%) participants immediately interpreted their experience in a completely religious manner, one of these participants regarded a particular experience as being of a religious nature but referred to another experience as being paranormal’.

- Five (15%) participants described their experiences as being ‘spiritual’.

- Four (12%) participants were unable to classify their experiences.

- One (3%) participant classified his experiences as being of a psychic nature.

Some indications of the diversity of above interpretations can be seen from the following examples.

**Interpreted in a Religious Manner**

*Calum:* [a sense of presence] Very Powerful. Very real. It wasn’t an OBE. I felt the presence of God in a very special way when I was first converted. And it was in *hospital* in January 2000. I had peritonitis — seriously ill might have died — could have died, if not treated quickly. And I’d grown up in a Christian home and had thought about asking Christ into my life but hadn’t at that stage. And I was in hospital very ill and had come to the end of my own resources. I felt God’s presence. Call it a crisis conversion — some people would *smiles wryly*. I felt God calling me and that’s when I accepted Christ as my Lord and Saviour at that time. And when I did there was a very powerful sense of peace. The worry that was going through at the time with my illness. Would I live? What would the future be like? At the moment I accepted Christ, I just cried my eyes out but I was really peaceful [Was this something you did by yourself?] I was by myself.
Whilst Calum interpreted his key experience in a completely religious way, Elaine clearly made distinction between a religious experience and a paranormal one.

*Elaine:* [description of paranormal experience followed by a religious experience] Briefly my mother was quite ill and we had to rush to her bedside at the hospital... . And, anyway, when she did become ill, lots of events sort of taking place in our house. In the forms of constant bangings on the walls, knocking on the dressing table in my room that night, plates and things clanging in the kitchen and stuff like that which had never ever taken place in our house before so there would be unusual signs like the VCR switching itself on and off and the computer, fax machinery and printer switching on and off and flickering lights. It was a constant thing like that going on for about two weeks. Someone was trying to get my attention.

When my mother was dying I experienced the power of God and it came through prayer.... And, I say, I actually experienced the power of God for the first time. And yet through all my praying, you know, I thought ‘Oh well, he never really answered that!’

It really felt like something was coming through — everything was answered. And the fact that I knew he was there because I kept saying ‘I need the strength. I need the power’ and it was there. I was calm and he was there. I kept saying “I can’t believe this is me.” I felt the power of his strength for the first time ever.

[Did this change your beliefs?] Yes. I do definitely believe in the afterlife more strongly but religion still has its purpose and place in society. I do think I have become more attuned to paranormal existence.

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*Described as Being ‘Spiritual’*

Isobel and Marion both described their experiences as being spiritual. However, whilst, Marion’s concept of ‘spiritual’ had (for Marion) religious connotations, Isobel did not see her ‘spiritual’ experience as having a religious significance.

*Marion:* [a sense of presence] Well, I feel that I don’t just have one experience. I feel that my whole life is a spiritual experience because of my beliefs. [Do you want to go any further?] Do you want me to be more
specific? [Yes, if you could please.] For instance, when I was in hospital so long, I was in hospital for 16 weeks, and I had all sorts of ministers of religion calling in to see me. And I felt very comfortable with that — didn’t matter what religion they were, just felt very comfortable. And in my own prayer life, I felt that I was really being helped by a superior being — by God. And I was comfortable in the thought that if God would take me, he would and if he decided that I needed to get better then that would happen too. I was confident.

*Isobel:* [a sense of presence: deceased near relative] Well I was lying in bed and was fairly late at night. And I must have been thinking about Pop because I got this sort of very strong feeling just a feeling [Was this your father?] Yes, he was an older fellow. Sixteen years older than my Mother. I got this feeling like there was someone in the room. When I sort of half sat up...I sat up and I saw a figure at the door and I thought “Oh Pop” *tenderly* but as soon as I thought ‘Pop’ to myself it sort of disappeared. It like, sort of like, ‘Yeah ...Pop’...I feel like that I had a bit of a spiritual connection with my Dad. Because my Mum was *name of illness* in that Dad and I managed her.... So we shared responsibility for her, so I think we somehow had, like you know, a little bit of a spiritual thing.

[Did you think the experience with your Father was religious or spiritual?] Not religious...a connection that we had. We had a good connection.

*Inability to Classify the Experience*

Teresa and Lorna who, until comparatively recently, had not recognized any personal psychospiritual phenomena and were unable to classify their experiences.

*Teresa:* [describing awareness of an unseen person] Just the one...it was in...can’t remember the name of the place ... in Tasmania...Port Arthur. And we went to the church area and I wanted to go take some photographs of the tiers, because you know where the convicts sat. And so *name of husband* was on the top and so I decided to go down by the nave and take photographs of the top from the ground up.

Well I did. I took the photographs and come back up the steps and as I got near the top, I suppose, it was I felt like there was somebody behind me. I got the impression of somebody in dark clothes, not necessarily a suit but dark clothes, so I stepped aside into the aisle so that the person could pass. And... I... *name of husband* said what did you move over for? And I said to let
another person...[pass]. And I turned round and there was nobody there. And I thought it was silly really because I’d already been down and hadn’t seen anybody but you’re not really thinking of that at the time....I don’t really know if I liked it {made a shivery gesture hugging body}.

Lorna reported that she had been experiencing a variety of psychospiritual phenomena and synchronistic experiences since the death of her husband (after a long illness) a few years ago. A number of these experiences involve the sighting of butterflies.24

Lorna: [describing experiences of synchronicity] I was driving back home and I was probably about {name of suburb}, doing about 100 k an hour, and a Monarch butterfly flew over the car and it was huge it had a wing span — like that {gestures} and it went under the car and I thought, ‘Ooh! I hate killing anything as beautiful as that.’ So drove the rest of the way home and pulled into the carport and the butterfly flew up from under the car and it sat on the carport wall. And I thought, ‘I just can’t believe it’ And I had a little net that I use in the fish pond so I went and got it and I released it on a tree out the front. Anyway, I went inside and I thought I would ring my cousin and let her know I’d got home safely and that. And I had the front door open and I was sitting at the phone and the butterfly flew back into the — and settled on the door mat so I thought, ‘That’s odd,’ and didn’t think much more on it. I just went and got the net again and thought, ‘If you don’t like it out the front, I’ll put you out the back.’ So the next thing — morning, I went out it was still in the same place where I left it. Its wings weren’t tatty or anything. And before my husband died, he had picked out a tree, a bush, that he wanted buried, that was going to be his memory shrub. So I kept checking on the butterfly. The next time I checked it was on that particular bush. I thought, ‘ok.’ So I had an appointment to go out to the cemetery to meet the stonemason to arrange for the headstone to be made. So I left and that was about 5 o’clock that evening — the butterfly was still on the Memory Bush, as we call it. And I went out to the cemetery and met the stone mason and we walked around and he priced it all up and everything and said ‘How does that suit you?’ And I said ‘That’ll be fine’, and we shook hands to make the deal. And just as we shook hands 2 Monarch butterflies flew over the top, just like that {gestures}. I don’t know where they came from or where they went to. But it was just at the time when I shook this guy’s hand. So anyway, I thought ‘I’m taking that as a sign that you’re happy with what we’ve just ordered.’ So anyway, he left and I followed him, as I drove out of the cemetery gate one Monarch came along and just danced along the side of the car — like that {gesture}.

24 Historically, the butterfly has been used to symbolize the Resurrection, see for example, Jill Liddell, The Patchwork Pilgrimage (New York, NY: Viking Studio Books, an Imprint of Penguin USA, 1993).
Well, that was alright, and when I got home the Monarch that was in the
garden was on the rosemary bush, which was for remembrance. And I
thought, ‘This is really weird \{slightly emotional\}, really weird. Quite, quite,
weird.’ But I must admit when I go somewhere, if it’s a slightly longer trip —
not just around \{name of suburb\}, I will always get a Monarch will come
and just dance in front of the car just for a minute.

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**Classified as Being a Psychic Experience**

Arnold did not appear to see any of his experiences as being other than ‘psychic’.

*Arnold: [kinetic experience] I’ve had a number of psychic experiences. My
most recent one would have been, ahh...the wall knocker, I call it, probably
about three weeks ago around 4...3 or 4 in the morning I would hear knock-
knock \{knocks table\}. But at one stage it was so loud that it woke me out of a
deep sleep. It rattled the lamp on the bed-side table. So it must have knocked
on the table and not on the wall as usual. I didn’t know what it was about but
it’s not there anymore.*

Arnold stated that he was an ‘atheist’ and did ‘not belong to any religion.’ At this
stage of his journey — like Karen, he was very much involved in exploration and
experimentation. He had ‘done Ouija Board’, and was interested in UFOs.

*Arnold: I haven’t found the experiences scary — slightly apprehensive
leading to curiosity. They have whetted my appetite to learn more. They have
opened my mind. As they say ‘There’s more between heaven and earth...
can’t be explained scientifically.’ I’ve learnt not to share my experiences with
people I feel are not open to them. I haven’t really considered them
analytically.*

Unlike Arnold, Nadia found some of her experiences very troubling and, after a
particularly stressful precognitive experience, engaged in a period of investigation.
Nadia: ...then I thought, ‘I’ll start searching I don’t know what I’m going to do but I’ll start searching.’ and I remember going to a library down here, in {name of suburb}, actually and as I walked in the door I thought ‘What’ll I look for where will I go.’ And I went to the religious section and I looked right through the religious section and I thought, ‘Well can’t see anything here.’ and right beside the religious section there was a great big sign and It said Occult. And I went {pulls aghast face} and I remember looking around thinking, ‘What’s in it? There’s not many people in the library. I’ll just sneak a look.’ And as I started to look I was like this {mimics furtiveness} and I’m seeing things on hearing voices things on clairvoyance different things on OBEs and I’m thinking maybe this is it and I ended up with about 5 non-fiction books from this one section. And I took them all upside down to the counter. It felt like pornography. And bang, bang, {mimics librarian stamping books} ‘Bring them back in 3 weeks.’ {laughter} And I thought, ‘Oh my God!’

And I took the books and I started reading. And I thought, ‘Odd! Oh! That’s sort of what’s happened to me. I’ve been doing a bit of prophesy.’

Nadia’s research expanded (changed) her field of knowledge and led to further action.

Nadia: I went searching for someone to teach me and I fell in with these four meditation circles In {name of suburb} and they used to say ‘That’s lovely.’ {mimics} And I thought, ‘Lovely! What am I supposed to do with it?

Change brought about by disappointment with her initial meditative experiences resulted in further action as Nadia continued her search.

Zena’s (see above in Phase I) search, in response to experiencing ‘a sense of an evil presence’, was also experimental but strongly influenced by religious belief.

Zena: And later on that year, I did actually become a Christian in very interesting circumstances {laughs}. Well it was actually a cult. [Are you interested in cults?] Oh, yes I’ve looked at a lot of them since I’ve come out. Well it was, actually, The Children of God. As I say, I was with them for about 18 months when I came back to Perth in 1978 [from back-packing]. My parents were going off their face ‘It’s a cult! It’s a cult!’ And they took
me to different people to speak to, because they weren’t Christians. And I started to read the Bible a lot more.

And I was really praying for God to show me what was right and during that there was definitely that Holy Spirit prompting, ‘This is the word of God. There is nothing else, only this. And these other things that’s wrong.’ And as soon as I realized that I thought ‘This is wrong — I’m out.’ And I definitely felt the Holy Spirit had led me to those particular bits — Paul’s writings, bits of revelation and the — these other bits — probably in the Epistles. And I really had that definite ‘This is it.’ And it was very, very difficult personally for me too. Because I thought, ‘I have made a big boo-boo in my life.’ And also at that time I had a boyfriend, who was also in that cult, and I had to say, ‘Well look this is wrong.’ and he realized the ramifications of that.

The above narrative provides an example of the search as a response to an experience followed by a later experience, that of ‘prompting,’ which led to change and further action.

**The Second Period of Action**

During the Second Period of Action the busyness and experimentations of the initial period were gradually replaced by a less subjective period of focused intent as individual spiritualities were pursued and expressed. Participants now began to engage in a range of activities that had potential to bring about personal and public outcomes.

**Engagement in Study**

In all, eighty-five per cent (29) of participants engaged in study. This number comprised 4 (12%) participants, who interpreted their experiences as a sense of calling and directly focused on study with a view to becoming ordained, and 25 (74%) other participants, including Zena, Calum and Gail, who also, to a greater or lesser extent, were drawn towards periods of study.
Zena: Well, that was that experience. Now what else have I got in here [Looks at notes.] And then after that it’s important not to get trapped into anything like that again. It’s really important for Christians to know what the Bible says — to know the Bible in its entirety. So I went to Bible College for 2 years {laughs}. To Perth Bible College and during that time I got more and more interested in this understanding of the Scriptures and I had a real yearning for people to have the Bible in their own language. Because to read the Bible in another language not your first language is not the same.

Zena’s involvement in study was typical of the approach used by participants to understand or find out more about their experiences. Her desire to ‘know the Bible’ may be compared with Calum’s activity after his conversion experience.

Calum: I became very interested in the Christian faith. I studied it. I became very, you could say, obsessed with the Bible. I’ve read it cover to cover four times and there are other times I’ve read it in between. Every second year I read through the Bible completely. I love theology [It’s fascinating.] Yes, it is. I love theology but I only did the certificate for Christian Ministry through the Uniting Church Bible College at Gilman College in Adelaide.

And I applied to do a Bachelor of Theology up at Trinity Theological College and was accepted. The trouble was I became very ill. It just didn’t work and I had to write to the principal and say ‘not now’. But I still have intentions of going on doing a Bachelor of Theology.

Calum’s actions as revealed by the above narrative appeared to indicate that he, like Zena, had moved to the Second Period of Action. However, his narrative also showed that, at the time of the research project he had not been able to locate a church in which he felt at ease.

Calum: My connection with the Church at the moment is very tenuous, it really is. I’m still searching. You’d think that I would have settled by now. I’ve been a Christian for 9 years.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{25}\) At 26 years of age, Calum is one of the youngest participants involved in the present research project.
The continuation of Calum’s search could be considered as an example of merging between the initial and second periods of action whilst at the same time retaining certain elements of the initial process.

Although Calum’s and Zena’s actions were guided by their growing religious convictions, not all participants with religious beliefs engaged in directly religious studies. Some participants were attracted to a variety of studies that ultimately encouraged acceptance of other philosophies. Over a period of time, the outcome of involvement in study, experimentation and the experiential led to a perception of self-realization within some participants (See The Third Period of Action and Reflection).

**Interest in Other Philosophies**

Midwife Gail (as one of a number of different experiences) saw a fleeting image of an enrolled nurse, who had been killed near the hospital (where Gail worked) walk over to the fridge to get an ampoule of medicine ‘...like the blink of an eye. Similar to knowing people are passing one in a busy street, tho [sic] not recognising anyone.’

*Gail:* Briefly as a result of this, my research began into buddhist theories on umbilical cords and our various stages of movements on the ‘the other side’ during acute/ sudden + traumatic deaths. I came to terms with my sighting by reading that buddhists say we can be compared to a needle in a gramophone record by being the needle or gramophone record (can’t remember which) moving through this life either slowly or faster depending on the ‘record’ speed.\footnote{26 Gail’s actual text presented at time of the interview.}

The above psychospiritual experience and subsequent line of enquiry brought about change, in that, Gail expanded her Catholic belief system.
\textit{Gail:}  I have a deeper knowledge of the spiritual. I spend time with Tai Chi, meditative reading, correspondence with like minded people and my eyes are opened to more ‘tolerance if you like’.\footnote{Ibid.}

Bevan designated his religion as ‘Church of England’ and, although he does not attend any particular church, his lengthy period of study, as shown below, appeared to have resulted in a somewhat syncretic form of practice that involved Eastern philosophies (Buddhism, and Taoism), Christianity and New Age teachings.

\textit{Bevan:}  I had a pie shop in Dunsborough, one day this person came in and started talking to me. He said, ‘If you want me to, I’ll teach you. I’ll be your Master.’ And he taught me for about 7 or 8 years. About wisdom, deep silence — just through sitting. It’s the ‘Peace of God that passes understanding’.

Acceptance of other beliefs or philosophies that sometimes brought about changes in belief and praxis was noted in a number of other narratives.

\textbf{Changes in Belief and Praxis}

Five (15\%) participants, who reported personal experiences of charismatic phenomena, moved towards more charismatic forms of worship.

\textit{Harry:}  My new Ministry of the Spirit was ostensibly a ministry of healing and reconciliation. We had special evening services at a sister church, where services involved not only praise, worship and scripture reading but laying on of hands and prayers for healing.

\textit{Merlyn:}  That was my turning point. But then God took me from that church to \{name of non-charismatic church\} it was. And for 2 years we had a Pentecostal Minister, who became very good friends with our Minister. And he came down and gave us Bible Study for 2 years on a Thursday night and
taught us all about the working of the Holy Spirit. Worship, Praise and everything like that, which was wonderful. \{details of opposition to charismatic practices within the above church\} So the church all split up and all went off to Pentecostal churches.

Other participants, who had experienced a range of psychospiritual phenomena also recorded change in praxis and belief.

*James:* I’d known that, well from the age of 15, I thought, I was going to be a Baptist minister. I knew I was going to preach at some stage of my life. Incidentally the experience that I had was about when I was 26 \{identified by James a NDE\} Yes, so I had a thorough religious knowledge before I’d left the Baptist Church. I’d done courses on Baptist lay-preaching.

*Graeme:* ...[with reference to a transpersonal experience] that feeling of oneness that feeling of unity lasted for almost...ooh...months. It, it made me begin to realise just how interconnected everything is and it started me questioning my beliefs. I belonged at that time to the Anglican Church. What were they teaching? How far it went? And how it resonated with me? \[Query re variety of meditation\] At that time it was Siddha Yoga. It’s a beautiful meditation Siddha Yoga. \{name\}, the priest of the church, had been over to Baba Muktananda’s ashram \[He was an Anglican priest?\] Yes — had been over to Baba Muktananda’s Ashram in India and he came back and he started teaching at the church...that was pivotal because it made me come to understand that what I had believed...so...thought, a lot of my life, really was not what I was looking for. Might sound a bit ‘big-headed,’— I’d gone beyond it.

And, even though, I stayed in the Anglican Church quite a few years more it was always a case of going and questioning all the time. It was always every time a question of “But? What if? How can?”

[What is your religion now, Graeme?] The only word I can use is Spiritualist...a Spiritualist is a person seeking their spiritual self. The spirit within them, if you like.

Graeme’s belief that he had ‘gone beyond’, that is to say, found something greater than his former praxis, was similarly shared by other participants, including Francesca.
Francesca: Of course when you become a Baha’i, it’s service to mankind — it’s a big commitment... for me it’s the environment. I’m very comfortable with that. I’m not a Christian any more I’ve gone beyond that. I also practice Sahaja Yoga, you see that’s the Holy Spirit. Sahaja Yoga — It works for humanity because it’s releasing your kundalini.

Specific terms and phrases within the above participants’ narratives indicated that an awareness of change and a sense of confidence that was suggestive of movement towards the third period of action:

- ‘my new Ministry’ (Harry)
- ‘turning point’ ‘went off’ (Merlyn)
- ‘left the Baptist Church’ (James)
- ‘pivotal’ (Graeme)
- ‘gone beyond’ (Graeme and Francesca)

Denyse’s account of change in praxis, brought about by visionary experience, differed from that of the above participants, in that, it appeared to suggest continuing inquiry and experimentation rather than confidence in a particular outcome.

Denyse: Change? Oh, yeah, well...It’s put me off sides ... am aah, conventional religion because you see, I used to tell fortunes because I had this clairvoyant ability. I did astrology charts and read cards. And it put me off side religion because in the Bible, it says God despises people who tell fortunes — or something like that.

Consideration of the above examples of change of praxis and belief provides some indication of the diversity of beliefs and practices documented within the participants narratives.28

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28 Cf: Chapter Two, Bouma, Australian Soul, 211. Here Bouma notes the prevalence of ‘bricolage’ or the mixing of elements of different religions, within postmodern Australian society. See also Hick, ‘Religious Pluralism’ in his An Interpretation of Religion, 235-295.
Emergence of Focused Spirituality

During the Second Period of Action and merging into the next stage of the journey the stories of some participants drew attention to spiritual formation and the emergence of diverse forms of focused spirituality. The intent of actions or various activities associated with these focused spiritualities now differed from earlier actions. The difference being that participants’ actions now, for the most part, began to be outwardly directed rather than being largely subjective or inward looking as they had been during the periods of search and inquiry that occurred during the Initial Period of Action and in the earlier part of the Second Period of Action.

A non-exhaustive list of participants’ comments, construed through consideration of the data as being representative of focused spirituality expressed as action, is shown below.

Alex: [on Christian commitment] And the Lord seemed to be saying to me in the service ‘Get em, get em to stand for Jesus!’ You know to renew their commitment to Jesus. I said ‘Ahh...no, not with this lot! Not with this lot! So what I did was to invite them up, after communion I suppose it was, and said ‘If you want to come up and just seek prayer then please do.’ Quite a number of people started coming up. And the first person said, ‘I want to commit my life to the Lord.’ And I said, ‘Go on, right, ok.’ The second person said, ‘I want to commit myself to the Lord.’ I said. ‘Sorry Lord I made a huge mistake’ — ‘All those who want to commit their lives to the Lord...’ You see? [yes] So that’s a double twist, as it were, isn’t it [yeah] being obedient and taking that faith step and do it. To either be a fool which is what you are in Christ [yes] Yes, so yes...I think that’s the sort of stuff. I don’t think I’ve got much more to say {laughs}.

29 Here the term ‘focused spirituality’ is synonymously used to describe Wilber’s concept of ‘that line of development in which the subject holds its ultimate concern.’ Wilber, The Eye Of Spirit, 221.

30 Alex’s description of the above experience, during which he was not fully confident with regards to a charismatic form of worship, is interesting because in it he hints at his awareness of the developmental stages of his personal spirituality.
Wilma: [on Christian commitment] Sharing Christ’s love with others on my journey with him is very important to me. Sometimes I try and initiate conversations with non-Christians about what they believe in... Other times it may be simply taking a meal with someone who is sick, sharing a cuppa and making time to listen, even a brief phone call to say hello.

Graeme: [on teaching] I support Nadia [Chairperson of a Spiritualist Church] by giving the philosophy. People have told me that they appreciate my philosophy because I explain it simply. [How would you explain philosophy in this sense?] Teaching and sharing wisdom, some Buddhist, some from other religions.

Donna: [on teaching] I lived in South Africa and taught 2 churches there for 5 years. So I’ve always been involved, even in South Africa for 5 years. I worked hard in South Africa. I still taught my 2 groups — teaching groups and of course there, it’s dangerous for a woman working at night. And I worked at Krugersdof and in Pretoria, in Durban and in Cape Town.

Deirdre: [on caring for others] Many people have got someone who’s dying of cancer or a major problem in their life and they are just wanting somewhere they can go, where people will just listen to them and hear them. And we pray with them before they leave. If they are here at lunch time, we give them lunch.

We also have a soup run for the needy in {name of suburb} and we’ve also just recently — some people bought a house and allowed us to use it and it’s for pregnant girls. For girls who have got nowhere to go. Our ministry is busy.

Meryl: [on caring for others] I like to go round and make people happy. Give people a smile. Hold their hand. Give them a hug. Walk round the shopping centre with a big grin on my face. You know things and you find that people that are lonely and maybe a couple that are coming along and they look at you and you smile and they just smile back. Eventually after 2 or 3 times they come over and say ‘Do we know you?’ And I say ‘No, I just give you a smile.’ And from there friendships grow.

Marta: [on support for youth] I like to participate in ecumenical events, that’s why I said Ecumenical [Christian]. And I think in our locality the Youth Care is the most ecumenical thing I can find. And I’ve been Secretary of that for 5 years, just relinquishing it now [a big job!] very, very, big job. We’ve grown from two Chaplains, I think, when I first started. We now have seven. Which is quite a lot of growth. Partly because of the Federal funding for the three years. But the chaplains have come forward.
Merlyn: [on support for youth] I’ve done voluntary work but I’m probably a Prayer Warrior for the church. [That’s important?] Yes, it is. It’s more important than anything else I think this day because the youth of the area are sadly not being encouraged more.

John: [on healing] I’ve made several overseas trip with the particular view of seeing how the Healing Ministry is conducted. I’ve been around lots of places in the U.K. I once went specially to Geel, in Belgium.31

Fiona: [on healing] We’ve been involved with the Golden Grove healing ministry in Sydney. It’s under the Anglican Church but an independent thing. It’s the Healing Ministry Centre and they have a service at the cathedral once a week on a Wednesday night in which people from outside come and the people, who are equipped to pray, pray with people who are sick — all sorts of, all sorts of sicknesses. I mean psychological, physical and cancers and whatever. They’ve had some amazing results where God’s just intervened. [Are you still involved in that?] Yes, we’ve been over. Yes, we are, been over 3 or 4 times and done a few — a couple of months to help out.

Laurel: [on healing] Well, occasionally it’s {the experience of Spirit} happened at home because I send out absent healing every day, you know. So I’ve got a little healing room in the house. I do Reiki healing.

From the above comments it is possible to sense not only an emergence of focused spirituality but, in some cases, the materialization of Catalysis resultant from interaction between the participant and society.

Changes in Occupation

Changes in occupation or life style choices, possibly influenced by the emergence of focused spirituality, were noted in a number of narratives. As with the above expressions of spirituality, some of these changes had potential to impact upon people other than the participant. Zena, for example, addressed her ‘real yearning for people to have a Bible in their own Language’ by changing her occupation.

31 Geel, also known as Gheel, is a commune in the Flanders region of Northern Belgium where, for many hundreds of years, mentally ill people have been boarded in the houses of the people who live there: http://facultysanford.edu/~jigoldst (Accessed 12 December 2011).
Zena: I actually joined Wycliffe Bible Translators. I was a member of Wycliffe. And I worked up in \{names a number of Aboriginal communities in northern part of Western Australia\} for about 11 years.

Harry moved from ministering to a moderately sized metropolitan congregation to a becoming chaplain to the members (and members’ dependents) of a key government organisation. This was high-profile position and one that placed him very much in the public eye (see Section 3.5: Phase III — The Individual As A Potential Catalyst For Society).

Harry: I had a tremendous task ahead of me. ...My parish was Western Australia and my parishioners were spread over this vast third of the Australian continent.

Whilst some participants, in common with Harry and Zena, were able to practise their spirituality via paid occupations, others surrendered business opportunities in order to live out their spiritualities.

Roslyn: In 2004, I felt a strong call to actually just rely completely on God’s providence. I felt that calling in the July but I couldn’t just leave work until the end of the year because I worked at a school and it wouldn’t have been fair on the school. So I had to make sure that it wasn’t just my will that was working this, you know.... that was, was God’s will. And so my sister [Deirdre] and I finished work within 2 weeks of one another. And so then, we completely devoted our time to God’s work.

James: I was about 58 and I was driving home, and I was already started with the churches, and I kept thinking if I could find a way to retire, or retire earlier, I could give more time to the church. And I kept this thought and I kept praying along these lines. And, one night, I was coming home from work and I was driving a car that was two and a half — three years old \{description of an accident that resulted in personal injury\}.

But anyhow the ambulance came and took me away. And afterwards I thought ‘Well, that was silly, because in one sense that’s what I was asking
for.’ Because it wasn’t long after that, I decided I wasn’t...I...I couldn’t continue work as I wasn’t really able to maintain a...a viability... And I thought ‘I’ve run a successful business all my life. I’m not going to go out of business now’ you know, so I retired when I was 63 while I was ahead.

It is significant that James saw the above accident, which resulted in him having to give up his occupation and thereby enabled him to focus more on his church work, as one of a number of examples of synchronicity or divine patterning that had guided his life.

Shortly after establishing {name of helping organization} Deirdre and Roslyn were challenged by an adverse media campaign that targeted the actuality of Roslyn’s key experience. Nevertheless, Roslyn, like James, also regarded that trying time as an example of ‘how the Holy Spirit works.’

Roslyn: But that’s ok because, you know, for us it was sad but it’s also a testing time for everybody because, you know, people came when the phenomenon was happening and it was a testing to see whether how... whether your faith was planted in rich soil or whether it was just scattered on the pavement.

Roslyn and James’ acceptance of what might have initially been considered as setbacks is suggestive of movement from the Second Period of Action towards the Third Period of Action and Reflection.

The Third Period of Action and Reflection

The third period, as reflected by the participants’ narratives, was one of continuing action but from a position of inner strength and certainty. Occurring after a period of

32 Roslyn’s comment.
time, often many years having elapsed between the key experience and the present research project. During this period, for some, the search had become a study — something gentle and unrushed. Participants appeared to have gained an insight and perspective about their experience/s, which was indicative of both self-actualization and self-realization.

Participants, who had moved to The Third Period of Action and Reflection, were without exception involved in altruistic and not-for-profit activities. Their remarks clearly reflected a sense that their actions in no way stemmed from a need to address any internal or external deficiency. On the contrary, their statements indicated assurance of self-worth.

Assurance of Self-worth

Nadia: I have been now a member of the Spiritualist Church for nearing 25-28 years. ... I do services throughout the Spiritualist churches. I run a Spiritualist church in {name of suburb}. I’m what is classed as a CEO, I’m the chairperson. I just run the centre down here but it’s a part of the SNU33 {Spiritualist National Union} which is an organisation [I’ve looked them up on the net.] Yes we’re affiliated to England because there are affiliations all over the world. We are affiliated back to England but we are our own organization here in Australia.

I work as a medium [Do you do healing?] I do healing. I don’t do healing in the service because that comes separate to the service. We do have a healing circle. So I will take people at home or go to their home. I go to a man at {name of suburb} at the moment to give healing.

Francesca: [after 40 years of voluntary environmental action] On the beach were flat back turtles, A group came up with Birds Australia doing banding. And I feel very needed by the environment. To me my role in life is to spread the word about sea grass, about turtles, about birds, about the things that really matter. Because it doesn’t matter how much money you’ve got, you’re

no use without the environment. If the environment’s not working for you, you’re done for.

The above examples of self-worth, expressed as satisfaction arising from participation in voluntary and altruistic activities, would seem to agree with Maslow’s concept of self-actualization.\textsuperscript{34}

At this stage of the journey, as shown below, participants freely expressed their confidence in the omnipresence of the Real in ways that appeared to equate with perceptions of self-realization: \textsuperscript{35}

**Confidence in the Omnipresence of the Real**

_Nadia:_ To me life will always go on whatever form or whatever way, you know. If, if, there are disasters or a disaster like the way the world is going to finish, I will be there.

_Francesca:_ And when you become a Baha’i they do say he has to find you not the other way round. Baha’is accept all religions. They accept Jesus Christ, Muhammad and it’s bringing religion into the modern day world and it’s modernising it to suit the people of today I mean it’s unity. [...] I also practice Sahaja Yoga you see that’s the Holy Spirit. Sahaja Yoga — It works for humanity because it’s releasing your kundalini.

Signs of self-actualization and self-realization were evident, to a greater or lesser degree, in the narratives of participants quoted in the remainder of this section and also in *Case Studies* cited in the following section (Section 3.5: Phase III — The Individual As A Potential Catalyst For Society).


For many the nature of search appeared to have changed from its earlier urgency into something that was gentle and unrushed. Study seemed to have become almost a way of life.

*John:* The principal outcome, I think, is I’m still devoting my life to study with the bottom line still being healing to our mentally ill brothers and sisters.

*Deirdre:* Have you read Teresa of Avila’s book, *The Interior Castle?* [No, but I’ve read *The Life*] *The Life?* Oh! Because recently I was called to read *The Interior Castle* [How are you getting on?] Very heavy...yes, but I have learnt from it.

*Marion:* I was saying that when I was studying for a degree, I had to choose 3 other religions to study. And as a Catholic I wasn’t allowed to choose the Catholic religion. I had to choose three others whatever. And after a lot of study and a lot of...I discovered that fundamentally they were all the same. [Can you remember what those religions were?] There was Buddhism, Hinduism and I think it might have been Moslem. Because they were the 3 that interested me at the time. Because, you know, we had all these people coming to Australia and they’re setting up, you know, building temples, having meetings. They’re putting their mats down to pray facing Mecca. They’re doing all these things. I wanted to find out why. And I found out that their ideas — the basis of what they were doing is exactly the same as I do.

Whilst Marion’s religiosity, as shown above, was directly expanded through study, other participants including Harry, Graeme and Gail reported similar inclusivity of outlook, as their belief systems were expanded through personal insights.

*Harry:* Having ministered to the [name of a government agency] and not having had a congregation — they were my people, all 6,000 of them. I realized that spirituality is far, far greater than religiosity. It [the above ministry] broadened my understanding of spirituality rather than religiosity because people get stuck in religious corners.
**Graeme:** Life is eternal. Therefore I have confidence in the future. The body dies... eternal being continues. Life is experiences. Good and bad to provide contrast. How would we understand what good is if we did not experience bad?

**Gail:** I believe that in 200 years religious differences won’t exist.

The above participants’ comments, and the remarks of others as shown below, suggested that at this stage of the journey participants had a sense of perspective that enabled them to objectively assess their interiority.

**Marta:** I have continued in my journey with the Church. And I have continued to acknowledge the presence of Christ in my life. And I have periods when I don’t pray as much as other times. I still feel like I’m growing — a lot of growth to go.

**Megan:** Coming to Australia [as wife of a Baptist minister] there was a sense again of calling of this was how it was going to be. In a very real way these experiences and others reinforced my faith. So ok there are things in this world that we do not understand. I did not understand many of the things as they were happening but in hindsight you can see it. He has brought us.

**Deirdre:** Well the fruit is for me my journey. My spiritual journey has grown deeper and it still — you know... we grow until we die. To me, I definitely have changed the way I think and, even though, I had a strong faith when I was in business. I wish I had this depth of faith that I have now because I think I probably would have asked more for God’s help.

The narratives of participants, who had arrived at the Third Period of Action and Reflection, together with their attitudes as interpreted by the researcher during the interview process, as previously noted, appeared to suggest levels of awareness and personal fulfilment that were indicative of self-realization and self-actualization. However, as shown in the following section, it would be inappropriate to suggest
that the catalytic process ceased to have effect once this stage of the journey had been reached.

3.5: PHASE III — THE INDIVIDUAL AS A POTENTIAL CATALYST FOR SOCIETY

The findings described in the previous two sections of the current chapter (Chapter Three) relate primarily to the manner in which individual participants responded to a range of key altered states of consciousness that had a capacity to stimulate a catalytic process within the experiencer. The current section, Section 3.5: Phase III — The Individual As A Potential Catalyst For Society, now moves to consider findings relating to a continuation of the catalytic process, via the reverberation of key or pivotal experiences, through the participants and into society.

All participants, by virtue of their existence as a part of society, necessarily had potential to influence the nature of that society in keeping with the nature of their spirituality and lifestyle opportunities.36 Explication of the data clearly indicated that certain participants, as stimulated by their pivotal experiences, had a capacity to bring about outcomes that could lead to both micro and macro social outcomes.37

36 Consideration of causes leading to variation in human potentiality cannot be examined closely here but will form part of the discussion in the following chapter, Chapter 4, Section 4.2: Catalysis and the Catalytic Process.

37 In this sense social outcomes are taken to include outcomes consequent of altered states of consciousness that involve mystical and/or psychosocial phenomena. The relationship between religion and society is noted by Berger, ‘Some people have religious experiences and these experiences may challenge and change social structure.’ Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative, 89. See also Durkheim, The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life (trans.), Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995) and Max Weber, The Sociology Of Religion (trans.), Talcott Parsons (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
The Exceptions

Two participants, whose narratives principally cited examples of personal change, were deliberately excluded. These participants were Nelly and Bell whose narratives solely reported personal change in the form of empowerment (cf. Phase II — The Exceptions).

Nelly: Gave strength to go on. You were told you were going to be alright. And I have been, I suppose, just that... it was sort of a comforting thing. Like, you know, ‘Stop worrying.’ Now I’m married a second time — 25 years coming up.

Bell: My experiences have made me a stronger person. Oh, a lot stronger. When I came out of it. When I came out of it there was no holding me back. No, it just made me feel a stronger person. I can face up to anything that hits me now. I’ll face it head-on. I’ll face it head-on. {said this twice}. [You mean you feel secure because of your personal experiences?] Yes.

Doubtless it could be speculated that the sense of empowerment reported by Nelly and Bell enabled them to care for their children, thus bringing about personal and possibly social outcomes. However, in the absence of any mention of such outcomes during the interview process, this hypothesis might be construed as a ‘forcing of data’ and for that reason was excluded from further consideration.

Early Signs of Social Catalysis

Possible indications of the reverberation of the experience through the person and into society had already begun to emerge during the first and second phases of the Journey as participants began to interact with other people in a compassionate and helping way. Karen, for example, because of her experiences pursued her desire to

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38 Strauss, Qualitative Analysis For Social Scientists.
‘become a better person’ by learning Reiki so that she could join Lorna in working with cancer patients:

Karen: I’ve been to a Reiki course and I do healing, I don’t do it on a regular basis but I have been involved with a lady who does Reiki for cancer patients.

Denyse also had begun to use her own experiences to help other people.

Denyse: I come every week and co-ordinate this {helping group for people who hear voices} yeah. I’ve actually been attending the group for about 2 years. [...] But there was also a conference last year for recovery of psychosis and I think that all the Hearing Voices Groups and things like that came because of this international conference.

Several participants sought to positively influence the lives of others by prayer.

Merlyn: I’m probably a Prayer Warrior for the church. [That’s important.] Yes, it is. It’s more important than anything else I think this day because the youth of the area are sadly not being encouraged more.

Kathy: I do say my prayers every day and send out blessings to those I love. [So you do pray regularly, too!] {laughter} Yeah, I do, every day. But how do you define prayer? You know, you don’t get down on your knees and go ‘Our Father’ and all that rubbish. You’re sending out! Thoughts are living things if you send out thoughts. And hopefully they land where they’re most needed.

Further Indications of Participants as Change Agents in Society

Other indications of participants’ catalytic role in society were sourced from narratives describing actions that were considered (by the researcher) to have occurred within the Journey’s second and third periods of action. Some of these activities are described in the previous section (Section, 3.4: Phase II — The
Experience As A Catalyst For The Individual) under the headings of *Emergence of Focused Spirituality* and *Changes in Occupation*.

Most, but not all, of the participants listed under the above headings continued their journey into the Third Period of Action and Reflection. Generally speaking, it was these participants and also others, whose interviews expressed a sense of altruism and personal growth, who appeared to have the greatest capacity to stimulate changes that had continuing consequences.

An ability to facilitate changes in conviction with regard to various issues was recognizable within many of these participants. Potentiality to influence hearts and minds was especially to be found among the significant number of participants (17, 47%) who are or were engaged in some form of teaching or preaching. This potential can be illustrated in specific case studies:

**Case Study I: Steven**

Steven is among those who, as a part of their faith commitment, regularly testify to the validity of their experience.

*Steven:* I mean a lot of what I do is in faith but I’ve had this experience which confirmed and affirmed what I’m doing. I think for me, I know what I’m doing is authentic. It’s not just pie in the sky stuff.

Steven’s key experience, which led him to study for ordination, involved a vision of a shining cross. He willingly shares this experience with others. He says ‘for me it’s real. I know I wasn’t dreaming.’ Steven’s claim is a knowledge-claim — based on personal experience and is creditable because of who he is and what he does (see
below). It is therefore likely, if not to effect a complete change of belief in his listeners, to engender a change in attitude that may encourage some of them to give consideration to the existence of mystical phenomena and the possible relationship between such phenomena and the Real.  

Steven is now a Chaplain at a major hospital but was formerly a defence force Chaplain. He maintains responsibilities in both of these areas and also towards a number of ex-defence organisations. Steven meets many people in his social work role, ministering to the ill and dying and while participating in public and private defence force ceremonial occasions. His professional and voluntary activities are aimed at helping individuals and bringing about positive social outcomes. These activities, together with his sharing of his key experience, are all indicative of his ability to bring about religious and social outcomes. A copy of Steven’s brief narrative appears in full in Appendix E.

Case Study 2: James

James, as part of his faith, also shares his key experience with the general public.

*James:* And...I said, I wanted to go up there. And at first the answer was no. And I pleaded to go up there. And I said, ‘Whatever I find I will be prepared to teach. I will be prepared to speak about.’ And eventually the rope pulled to one side and I was allowed to go up.

I left there. I went down the flight of stairs and I was told I would never be allowed to go that far again but I was told that I had to teach.

James is the senior minister, in Western Australia (WA), of a group of Christian Spiritualist Churches spread throughout Australia. His passion or spirituality for many years has been successfully directed towards the furtherance of Christian Spiritualist Churches in WA.

*James:* Well, for a number of years now there’s been a group of churches and it's called *The World Parliament Of Religions* [All denominations and churches?] Yes, all denominations and churches and this year it’s going to be held in Melbourne and that will be the 13th of November. I’m invited to go and our Spiritualist group is specifically been invited to go and asked to...make...a presentation. [...] the association that I’m with now, I’ve changed over a lot of our allegiances to what is the *Association of Christian Spiritual Churches Of Australia.*

[How many churches is that James?] Well, with the associated churches that took their own name, we have 10 churches now in WA.

James’ claim is based on personal experience and, for the same reasons as Steven’s (see above), is likely to be believed, particularly by those whom he ordains as Christian Spiritualist ministers. His role in the establishment of 10 Christian Spiritual Churches in WA demonstrates continuation of tangible and intangible outcomes generated by his key experience. The full text of James’ narrative can be found in Appendix G.

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41 These churches are listed on the above website.
Case Study 3: Wilma

Evidently, it was not only ordained participants whose catalytic potential might bring about belief changes. For example, Wilma’s account of her miraculous healing as published in a magazine (circulation approximately 7,000), 42 is also a ‘knowledge-claim’ that may cause the magazine’s readers to reflect upon the possibility of modern-day miracles.

Wilma’s practical commitment to aid and befriend distressed people, in the small country town where she lives, supported or otherwise by her knowledge-claim, also provides an example of a tangible outcome initiated by a key experience.

Although the above examples of catalytic ability relate to participants whose spiritualities are directly focused on their commitment to Christianity, this is not to say that other participants, including Bevan and Donna, who view the Real from a different perspective, are without the capacity to disseminate opinion changing information.

Case Study 4: Donna

Donna has been teaching ‘awareness classes’ and ‘mediumship’ for ‘possibly about 15 years’ as the Education Officer for SNU [Spiritualist National Union] in WA. 43

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43 Donna explained that the difference between the SNU members and Christian Spiritualists is that Spiritualists ‘believe in personal responsibility’ and do not ‘accept the creed of atonement’. See also, Spiritualist National Union (SNU). Available online: http://www.snu.org/home (Accessed 2 February 2009).
Donna: For example, in October, I had 9 services, plus 2 groups. I teach at {name of suburb} and I teach at {name} Church. I teach development there. I could show you my certificates if you like. I’m the only person in Australia with these particular qualifications. I have a new class at {name of suburb} and we have 16. And last week we did auras and played aura games. Next week it’s pendulums you have to use tools in a psychic class before they have confidence to connect with spirit.

I believe in God. I believe in a Creator. I don’t know if you know the difference between a Spiritualist and a Christian Spiritualist? [No I don’t really.] There’s a difference. The difference is not so much here in Australia but in the UK and the greater world. One of the principles of Christian Spiritualists is of course a belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Christ, and of course they accept the creed of atonement which absolves you of any sins, wrong doings, which you commit on the earth plane. Well, Spiritualists don’t believe that, we believe in personal responsibility. We can’t expect any spirit to forgive us for what we’ve done, we have to take that responsibility. And that’s the difference between Christian Spiritualism and Spiritualism.

Interestingly, Donna is a frequently invited speaker at Christian Spiritualist churches.

Case Study 5: Bevan

For over a decade Bevan has taught weekly tai chi classes and presented displays at public functions. During each session, he intersperses his instruction with a number of aphorisms or a short homily based on a wide range of philosophies and beliefs. His teachings are eclectic and combine a blend of traditional Christianity and Eastern philosophies with the writings of modern authors such as Deepak Chopra and Eckhart Tolle. From time to time, he provides tuition in meditation and trains pupils, who show aptitude, to become teachers of his particular style of tai chi. Bevan does not openly base his teaching on a truth or knowledge-claim, but it is very probable
that his focused spirituality, which is directed towards moving meditation (tai chi) and pluralistic philosophies, may enlarge his pupils’ consciousness.\textsuperscript{44}

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As noted in the previous section, all members of the clergy who experienced charisms introduced charismatic forms of worship to their congregations.

**Case Study 6: Alex**

*Alex:* And that changed my whole approach...whole is too strong a word, to the way I would minister to people and my role then was to move around various congregations as one of constant travel so you’re in a different situation every time. [That’s a good outcome — a clear outcome.] It was in this case. Because it meant as a leader, which I was, I had a profound influence. I don’t mean personally but in the role.

Alex’s experience of the Holy Spirit led to the introduction of changes of practice in church ritual in a number of congregations. A change that resulted in many members of those congregations also having charismatic experiences. He believes that for a number of people and particularly those living in remote and deprived communities, these experiences led to behavioural change and positive social outcomes.

*Alex:* Now some years later, after I’d left, he was ordained as a Deacon in his community and as a leader. So I see that as a God incident and very much so.

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\textsuperscript{44} Bouma remarks that the mixing of religious traditions, referred to as ‘interspirituality or bricolage’, can be expected within postmodern society. Bouma, *Australian Soul*, 211 ff. See also Adam Possami, *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-real Testament* (Brussels: P.I. E. Peter Lang, 2005).
Case study 7: Harry

Harry, after his own experience of speaking in tongues, also introduced charismatic practices to his congregation.

*Harry:* ...the Bishop of the diocese said he wanted the whole diocese to become charismatic.

As with Alex’s experience, the introduction of charismatic forms of worship, by Harry to differing congregations brought about change, in that, many members of his congregations experienced charisms.

Sometime after embracing charismatic practices including healing, slaying in the spirit and deliverance ministry, Harry was appointed as Chaplain to a major government force. This appointment led not only to the ministering of his ‘congregation’ but becoming a sought after public speaker. In this role, his public persona and high profile continued to influence other people’s beliefs and practices.

Now, in semi-retirement, his services having received formal recognition; he continues to influence socio-religious outcomes by providing chaplaincy support to ex-service and migrant organisations, as a writer of published works, through regular participation in a talk-back radio show, occasional television appearances and, from time to time, mentions in newspaper columns.

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45 For example, an autobiography, 2 children’s books and, most recently, a book dealing with the spirit world and the material world.

46 Curtain Radio FM 100.1.

47 For example ABC TV: Compass 9 July 2006.

Harry: Experience of the paranormal has changed my opinion of the paranormal and has enhanced my ministry — absolutely enhanced it, rather than the other way around. It also broadened spirituality.

Harry’s original knowledge-claim has been reinforced by social-influence in the form of steadily increasing publicity. Consequently, he, in himself, has become a social influence. 49

Case Study 8: Roslyn and Deirdre

The importance of social influence in reinforcing religious and other outcomes can also be seen in Roslyn’s narrative and the attendant publicity, some of it originally controversial,50 that her experience of Our Lady of Lourdes received. Visits from overseas reporters (United Kingdom, Germany, France and Poland) and media articles in South Africa and Spain confirmed worldwide interest in the phenomenon. An estimated 500 people, each day, attended the church where the statue was on display for a period of 10 weeks. 51

The above publicity eventually resulted in the establishment of a ‘Commission under Church auspices — the first of its kind in Australia, to investigate the statue’. 52 The Commission’s results were non-conclusive; however, the Archbishop of Perth and

49 On social identification, see for example: Batson Schoenrade Ventis, Religion And the Individual, A Social-Psychological Perspective, 55 also Robert Audi, ‘Rationality and Religious Commitment’ in Marcus Hester (ed.), Faith, Reason and Skepticism (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1997).

50 In 2006, The Sunday Times printed a number of articles relating to the phenomenon of the weeping statue. These articles were somewhat derogatory.


52 Ibid.
the Catholic Church remain supportive of the effects of the phenomenon. The phenomenon’s religious and social influence was further supported by a television documentary.53

Although Roslyn was unknown before her experience, visits to the site of the experience, website activity and overseas speaking tours in America and Ireland continue to stimulate interest in the phenomenon. Public interest has made Roslyn a person of note and, together with her subsequent actions, lends support to her truth-claim. Hence, demonstrating the catalytic effect upon society of Roslyn’s actions as seeded by her key experience.

*Roslyn:* Yes, yes, in April we were called to go to America. We’ve been called to set up prayer groups around the world. And they’re called *Servants of The Little Way*. Their patron is St Teresa of Lisieux. And the thing is with Teresa of Lisieux, she lived in a convent and she died at the age of 24, yet her mission has been so powerful. She said that she would work for God after she died and to the end of time. And she’s such a powerful example, you know of staying in the background and doing things in a humble little way.

In 2008, Roslyn and her sister Deirdre founded an organisation — *SOUL* (Servants of United Love Inc) to care for those in need. Twice weekly, at six locations, *SOUL Soup Patrol* — with the assistance of food donations from local organisations and vegetables from its own gardens, provides a meal to needy people.

*SOUL Care* also provides support for pregnant women. The following extract from a newspaper interview, with Deirdre, provides some indication of this side of the organisation’s activities.

53 Channel 7: *This Day Tonight*, 5 April, 2007. This episode spotlighted the Weeping Madonna and presented interviews with Perth’s Catholic Archbishop and scientists involved in the investigation.
Extract:

The pair first helped an expectant mum six years ago, an overseas student who had fallen pregnant but had no support from family or friends.

“Sometimes these pregnant women don’t fit into Centrelink’s requirements, can’t receive benefits in Australia or are culturally isolated,” she said.

“We have stayed in contact with each woman even after their babies have been born. It’s a time of need it’s normal to forge strong bonds with people.”

The above newspaper article and others, such as one asking for volunteers (the organisation now reports as having 30 volunteers) to help with SOUL’s activities, demonstrate the osmotic process whereby Deirdre and Roslyn’s focused spirituality serves to bring about societal change.

Case Study 9: Francesca

Francesca is a teacher and environmental scientist. She reported having experienced a number of psychospiritual phenomena including:

- Kundalini arousal on first arriving in Australia;
- a OBE while being hospitalized for gallstone surgery; and
- another OBE as the result of an ischaemic stroke.

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54 ‘SOUL care for solo pregnancy’ The Weekend Courier, Friday, October 14, 2011.

55 See also Michelle Nugent, ‘Soul mates needed’ The Weekend Courier, Friday September 16, 2011, Front Page article.
Francesca clinically observed her OBE’s and found them interesting rather than emotive.\textsuperscript{56} Francesca’s recovery from the stroke was extremely successful and, at the request of the \textit{Australian Brain Foundation}, she presented a series of seminars and interviews on successful stroke recovery. She has written a book (also available as a DVD),\textsuperscript{57} to assist other stroke victims, in which her first OBE is briefly described. Generally speaking, Francesca does not promote her psychospiritual experiences lest they damage her creditability as a scientist. Nevertheless, the description of her OBE, in a medically sanctioned book of factual incidents, may bring about a change in attitude with respect to the way the book’s readers consider OBEs.

The following extract from Francesca’s narrative provides a description of her key and formative experience.

\textit{Francesca:} We landed at Fremantle. We came off the boat, \{\textit{shows a picture}\}... And as I stepped on to the land or onto the what do you call it? The jetty! I felt this whoosh thing right up through my body right to the top of my head! And I knew, it was like one of those insightful flashes, that I knew that I was home. And that has never ever left me and there’s no reason for me to say that because we only just migrated. We had no family here no connection with Australia whatsoever. I had this absolute — even now I have this connection with the land, and when we go up on the properties the connection with the physical land it’s almost like, an Aboriginal would be, you know, with the stones and everything. I didn’t know about kundalini until later. [It wasn’t scary for you?] No, it was wonderful, just right.

\textsuperscript{56} Francesca’s description of the first OBE was completely in line with the classic descriptions of the OBE as described by M. Sabom, \textit{Recollections of Death} (London: Corgi Books, 1982) and by Twemlow, Gabbard and Jones, \textit{The Out-of Body Experience: Phenomenology}. She describes her initial OBE as being a fascinating experience in which she was fully aware that she must return to her body which she could clearly observe lying on the bed below her. The second OBE she describes as going to the light – ‘a nice feeling, it was a positive feeling, good feeling. It wasn’t anything profound. It was very bright.’

\textsuperscript{57} Foreword by the, then, Consultant Neurologist and Head of Stroke Unit at a major Perth Hospital.
Francesca lectures to university and TAFE students on a variety of environmental issues, including water catchment control and air quality. Her field work has included studying the Green and Golden Bell Frog at the site of the Sydney Olympic stadium and participating in numerous counts for *Birds Australia*. However, her foremost concern is conservation of sea grass. As a team member of a Sea Grass Monitoring group, she regularly dives to physically observe and report on the denudation or otherwise of sea grass in a West Australian Marine Park.

*Francesca:* I feel extremely happy in life. I have many environmental interests. My sea grass is my passion, there’s no doubt about that. I feel really fulfilled. I very much feel that things have presented themselves to me at the time when I’ve needed them.

Francesca has presented papers at the following International Sea Grass Conferences:

- Townsville, Australia (2004)
- Vancouver Island, Canada (2008)
- Thailand (2010)

Plainly, Francesca’s hands-on environmental activities, lectures and presentation of reports at international venues all lead to a greater awareness of environmental issues and corroborate her role as a potential catalyst for society.
3.6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study has provided ‘written records’ of the effects of subjective spiritual feelings as reported by the people concerned, that is to say, ordinary, extant, members of Australian society. These records were sourced from interviews given by 36 adults who had experienced altered states of consciousness that they perceived to be of a mystical and/or psychospiritual nature.

A significant and almost immediate finding was that all participants, irrespective of their personal beliefs or non-belief, displayed a high level of familiarity with religious terms, see: Table 7: Awareness of Religious Terminologies. Some participants identified their altered state of consciousness as having been a religious experience.

Although not everyone used the phrase ‘religious experience’ to describe what they had perceived, everyone who was interviewed was confident that they had experienced some form of mystical and/or psychospiritual phenomena, that is to say, they considered these experiences to be of a transcendent nature. This perception fits well with Lee’s argument that ‘religious experience’ consists of ‘the engagement of the self with the transcendent in any form in which the transcendent might manifest itself’, and that such an experience does not necessarily equate with any particular theology or is restricted only to persons who hold particular beliefs. Thus, it might

58 See Chapter One re: Hardy *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 4.

be said that for all participants their altered state of consciousness resulted in some form of religious engagement.

However religion, although shown to be a major theme within the study, could not be validated as the current research project’s core category. Instead, the unexpected finding that emerged consequent to in-depth analyses of the data was a distinctive pattern of change and forward movement. This phenomenon, which was triggered by a key transcendental experience and set in motion a chain of actions or phases, was given the name of *Catalysis*. The metaphor of *Catalysis* was generated by consideration of the scientific process through one substance, the catalyst or, in this case, the experience, in coming into contact with a second substance — the experiencer, influences or changes this second substance without being changed in itself.

The following three merging phases were clearly apparent within the *Catalytic Process*:

(i) Engagement and reaction — often affective, involving identification or non-identification of the phenomenon;

(ii) a period of inquiry, sometimes referred to by participants as ‘a journey, leading to change in the individual’s religious *praxis* and spirituality; and
(iii) the reverberation of the experience into society in the form of changes within religious institutions, direct actions based on altruism; and social action.

The following chapter — Chapter Four: Recapitulation and Discussion, which comprises the study’s literature review, will consider other existing models of human response to mystical experience in the light of the above findings. This review is targeted to exploring the findings of this study and also towards the conclusions than can be drawn from these findings.
Chapter Four

RECAPITULATION AND DISCUSSION

Yes, it is surely this transcendental element that is fundamental: the feeling that there is a spiritual reality that appears to be beyond the conscious self with which the individual can have communication in one way or another — and whether spoken of as God or not—is indeed the most characteristic feature of the vast number of records we have received

(Alister Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man)

4.1: INTRODUCTION

The current research project presented an opportunity for individuals to confide personal experiences that they perceived to have been of a mystical and or psychic nature. The text of these conversations was analysed and the subsequent findings detailed in Chapter Three. In this chapter, which forms the current study’s literature review,¹ these findings will be considered in the light of other models of human response to the mystical.

4.2: CATALYSIS AND THE CATALYTIC PROCESS

What the narratives revealed was that all of the participants, who had reported having experienced some form of mystical phenomenon, were to a greater or lesser degree changed by their experience and that certain individuals were motivated by the phenomena experienced to act as change agents in society. However, underpinning these findings, the most important theme that emerged through

¹ As noted in Chapter Two, Section: 2.2 Research Methodology, the presentation of the literature review at the end of a study that employs a grounded theory approach is recommended by Creswell, Research Design; Glaser and Strauss; The Discovery of Grounded Theory and Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory.
analysis of the participants’ narratives was a distinctive pattern or process of forward movement, energy and change. This core category, which could be discerned in three distinctive yet merging phases, was given the name of Catalysis. The catalytic process may be summarized as shown below.

- **Phase I — The Experience and First Reactions**

  **Key Experience**

  Participants reported a wide variety of experiences including: experience of the Holy Spirit, unity, speaking in tongues, healing, awareness of unseen presences (both spiritual and of deceased near relatives), visionary experience, auditory experience, light, touch, smell, significant dreams and incidents of synchronicity or divine patterning.

  A key point, with regard to the experiences reported, was that the greater number of experiences were perceived as spontaneous and occurred irrespective of the experiencer’s volition. Even where prayer, meditation or other forms of empowerment were employed, participants reported that the experiences manifested from a source other than themselves.

  For many people their initial reaction, dependent upon their personal circumstances and ontology, resulted in immediate recognition of the phenomenon (in some cases bringing about consolation, conversion, healing or strengthening) and if not recognition of the phenomenon, then, recognition of what it was not. Participants who perceived their experience as being a manifestation of the Holy Spirit expressed a mixture of joyful emotion and awe.
Marta: There was a very conscious confirmation and there was love — just surrounded by love. He didn’t say anything. It was just a confirmation that what I had been taught was true. And Christ was present.

Deirdre: I think from my experience...it makes me understand that God is an awesome God.

Other participants who had no context within which to locate their experience expressed degrees of disbelief, confusion and fear. This pre-credal response to mystical phenomena is noted by Dennis Edwards.2 Kaufman also observes that it is not the phenomenon itself or its content that causes the experiencer to recognise the experience as being of a mystical nature but the interpretation and value which the experiencer places on it.3

Nelly: But it was the tunnel — Oh my God what’s happening now? Thought I’m going off the planet or something.

Karen: I was really traumatised. I suppose that’s the only way I can explain it. I was shocked! As I say it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me in my life, at that stage.

There is much in Karen’s narrative that lends support to Grof’s concept of holotropic states of consciousness.4 Holotropic states, although they give rise to spiritual and philosophical insights, may also contain all manner of mystical phenomena, including visionary experience and out-of-body experiences. Grof suggests that for

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3 Walter Kaufman, Critique of Religion and Philosophy (London Faber and Faber Ltd., 1958), 231. See also Hollenback, Mysticism, Experience, Response and Empowerment, 130-132.

4 Grof, The Cosmic Game, 5. Here Grof writes that ‘This composite word [holotropic] literally means “orientated towards wholeness” or “moving in the direction of wholeness” (from the Greek Holos = whole, and trepein = moving toward or in the direction of wholeness).’
individuals who are unprepared for such experiences and lack appropriate support, ‘many of these states are actually psychospiritual crises or spiritual emergencies’.\textsuperscript{5} It is of interest to contrast Karen’s narrative, in which she describes confusing and sometimes frightening experiences, with the narratives of either Stephen or James — both of whom, as shown below, approached their differing experiences from a faith perspective.\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Steven:} I had felt a calling to train for the ordained ministry for many years but I kept putting it off. ...

I know the scriptures teach us that we do our work by faith but I was given that experience which confirmed really what I was doing was the right thing to do. I don’t think everybody has that experience but in my case because I needed it. It was provided for me.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{James:} Well, having been a Baptist in my early days, I looked...it looked immediately as a religious experience...
\end{quote}

\textbullet\textbf{ Phase II — The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual }

\textit{The Journey}

Whilst, for some participants, the first phase was sufficient in itself, for others it ushered in a phase of action in the form of inquiry or search into the nature and reason for the experience. Plainly, many participants identified this stage as a period of spiritual seeking. Some participants made reference to a journey or faith journey.

Bouma writes that as used in Australia, where the term spirituality is frequently not associated with formal religion, ‘the spiritual refers to an experiential journey of

\textsuperscript{5} Grof, \textit{The Cosmic Game}, 9. See also, Jean Galbraith, \textit{Spiritual Emergence}.

\textsuperscript{6} For complete texts of Karen, Stephen, and James’ narratives see Appendices F, E and G respectively.
encounter and relationship with otherness, with powers, forces and beings beyond the scope of everyday life’. A journey which has as its nucleus ‘an encounter with the other, some other, be it God, nature, the tree, the sea, some other person or the core of our own being’. With inquiring minds, Australians search and hunger for spirituality; many young people, in particular, look in places formerly not seen to be either spiritual or religious. So, in a pluralistic age spirituality often means a mixture of elements formerly associated with other religions, such as yoga, meditation and ‘candles in churches that had shied away from them’. In so far as the current study is concerned, all participants’ narratives demonstrated a high level of interest in religion, together with a general knowledge and acceptance (if not actual participation in) of Australian spirituality as described by Bouma.

Wilber argues that it has become common to differentiate between religion, as seen in its authoritarian and institutional forms, and spirituality which is seen as ‘personal beliefs and experiences’; but that such differentiation, is not entirely helpful, because spirituality is closely aligned with religion. Difficulties associated in attempting to separate the term spirituality — as described and articulated within our pluralistic society, from the term religion, and the belief that such a separation could lead to a diminution in the meaning of the terms has also been articulated by a number of

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sociologists. Given the interconnectedness between spirituality and religion as noted above, and within the participant’s narratives, *The Journey* was seen as having both spiritual and religious connotations.

The search or journey, which had tripartite characteristics, could be influenced by a number of variables such as: family responsibilities, occupation, health, and gender. Furthermore, since, as is generally understood, ‘all things evoke a question for people within the limited scope of their understanding’, progress through all three stages of *The Journey* may also have been influenced by levels of personal development.

Societal attitudes, which sometimes equate particular experiences with mental instability, also affected outcomes. A number of people reported that they initially questioned the actuality of their experience, were cautious about openly discussing their experiences and did not know whom to turn to for advice. This finding will be returned to later in Chapter Five.

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12 Cf: Chapter 3, Section 3.4, Figure 3: The Journey.


14 See Chapter Three, Section: 3.4, Figure 3: The Journey for a detailed diagram of these stages.

15 Stein, *Finite And Eternal Being*, 436-437. Here Stein writes that the level to which experiences impress or affect individuals depends upon the level to which the individual’s intellect has ‘unfolded’. See also the concept of *Adaequatio* in E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), Chapters Four and Five.
For participants, who had recently experienced mystical or psychospiritual phenomena, the search was exploratory and often experimental. This sometimes led to acceptance of other beliefs or philosophies and a change in religious praxis — a finding that tends to support studies which draw attention to twenty-first century interest in the diverse aspects of religion.16

For some participants, where a period of time, often many years, had elapsed between the experience and the present research project, the search had become a study — something gentle and unrushed. They appeared to have gained an insight and perspective about their experience/s which was indicative of both self-realization and self-actualization.

Phase III — The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society

Focused Spirituality

The third phase, which in certain situations had already begun to show its potential during the first and second phases, was the reverberation of the experience through the person and into society via the gradual assimilation and adoption of new ideas. In some instances these osmotic reverberations took the form of changes within religious institutions and direct actions based on altruism and social responsibility.

Some participants, who had quite recently experienced mystical or psychospiritual phenomena, were already involved in or had begun to take an interest in altruistic

16 Bouma, Australian Soul; Barrett, The New Believers. See also, David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Sydney, NSW: HarperCollins, 2003), 68 and 206-210. Here, Tacey draws attention to the early seeking/experimentation stages of the spiritual quest as individuals pursue New Age pursuits and suburban development groups.
activities. Others, who had had a longer period to work through their experiences, were involved in activities or followed professions in which their actions were strongly influenced by beliefs and convictions. This was most clearly seen in participants who appeared to have internalized their key experience (and possibly other prior or subsequent experiences) and, as noted in Phase II, reached a level of self realization and self-actualization.

The Study’s findings clearly demonstrated:

1. That certain participants, motivated by experiences deemed by them to be of a mystical nature, acted as change agents in society; and

2. identified a distinctive pattern of process within participants’ accounts of their experiences.

The research project now puts forward a schema (see Figure 4: *The Catalytic Process Model*) that illustrates the findings summarized above and detailed in Chapter Three.
### THE CATALYTIC PROCESS MODEL

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<tr>
<th>KEY EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>THE JOURNEY</th>
<th>FOCUSED SPIRITUALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I</strong> The Experience and First Reactions</td>
<td><strong>Phase II</strong> The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual</td>
<td><strong>Phase III</strong> The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society</td>
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<th>Altered States of Consciousness:</th>
<th>Unio mystica</th>
<th>psychospiritual Charismatic</th>
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<tr>
<td>CATALYST</td>
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<td>SIS</td>
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**Mainly affective reaction:**
- unio mystica: surprise, amazement, conversion, healing, fear, reassurance, curiosity, empathy, empowerment
- psychospiritual: conversion, healing, reassurance, curiosity, empathy, empowerment
- charismatic: unio mystica, psychospiritual, CATALYST, SIS

**Time Line**

1. A busy period of exploration and experimentation.
2. A complex period of study and inquiry sometimes leading to: change in praxis, change in belief, change in occupation, the formation of focused spirituality.
3. The breaking of form, reconstruction of the person manifesting as: self-actualization; self-realization, involvement in altruistic activities leading to social and religious outcomes.

The osmotic effect of the original key experience penetrating society via:
- Persistence of the catalytic process as activities resultant from focused spiritualities directly, or indirectly through their potential to influence others, continue to bring about societal change.

The above schema provides a ‘freeze-frame’ of The Catalytic Process. As noted in Chapter 4, the transition from one stage to another may occur suddenly or by a gradual process. Importantly, the process is a forward movement with no regression. Therefore, the stages within Phase II, although represented vertically within the above illustration, also occur as forward movements via understandings that bring about change.
This new model, as shown above, contains features that are similar to three other well-known models of human response to the mystical; but, it also adds new insights.

The study will now move to consider the three models of human response to the mystical that relate to the *Catalytic Process Model* (CPM). The works from which the hypotheses governing these models emerge vary in length and complexity; therefore, given the constraints of time and length placed upon the current research project, it will be necessary to present an overview of salient points rather than a complete appreciation of each study.

The following models for discussion are presented historically rather than in any order of presumed merit or preference.

- Gershom Scholem’s Stage Theory of Religion
- David Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality
- William Miller and Janet C’de Baca’s Theory of Quantum Change

### 4.3: SCHELEM’S STAGE THEORY OF RELIGION

In 1938 Jewish philosopher Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) was invited to present the Strook Lectures at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. After considerable expansion of content, this series of nine lectures was published in 1946 as *Major Trends In Jewish Mysticism*.¹ *Major Trends In Jewish Mysticism* is an

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extremely complex and detailed work in which Scholem provides an historical overview of his topic and a useful model of his appreciation of mysticism.

The influence of Scholem’s uniquely Jewish exposition on mysticism can be seen in many subsequent studies of religious and mystical experience. Scholem was appointed as the first Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and he is generally regarded as the father of modern academic study of Kabbalism.

Prior to Scholem’s publication of his lectures, interest in his chosen topic of mysticism had become somewhat of an embarrassment to Jewish Scholars. Robinson, for example, reports that Sholem recounted a story about how, during his early research days, he had occasion to visit a teacher who was an expert on the Kabbalah. Seeing the Rabbi’s collection of books dealing with mysticism, Scholem asked about them only to be told ‘This trash! Why would I waste my time reading nonsense like this?’ Confirmation of derisive attitudes towards reports of experience of the supernatural is to be found in the narratives of the present study’s participants.

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3 See for example: Katz, Language, Epistemology and Mysticism; Armstrong The Case for God, also Marshall, Mystical Encounters with the Natural World.


and is also noted in other empiric studies of human response to mystical phenomena.\(^5\)

**Jewish Mystical Experience**

In his first lecture — ‘General Characteristics Of Jewish Mysticism’ (published in *Major Trends*) Scholem asks ‘what is Jewish mysticism?’ and ‘what distinguishes it from other kinds of mystical experience? Scholem’s response to his own question is that historically mystical experience is conceived as ‘knowledge of God through experience’ commonly known as ‘*unio mystica*’ or ‘mystical union’. However, he does not consider the above terms to be particularly important because many mystics ‘Jewish as well as non-Jews’ have not ‘represented the essence of their ecstatic experience, the tremendous up rush and soaring of the soul to its highest plane, as union with God.’\(^6\)

Rather than union with God, Jewish mystics strive to achieve *devekuth*, that is to say, attachment or adhesion to God. The Jewish mystic may also experience a range of psychospiritual phenomena including light, visionary experiences and even the experience of seeing his own self standing before him.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Scholem notes that ‘Kabbalism as distinct from non-Jewish forms of mysticism...is a masculine doctrine made for men and by men. The long history of Jewish mysticism shows no trace of feminine influence.’ *Major Trends*, 37.
Importantly, in defining mysticism (not mystical experience) as applicable to Jewish mysticism, Scholem separates experience of mystical phenomena from religion and also from the practices of mysticism. Mysticism is defined by Scholem as a particular stage ‘in the historical development of religion.’ Briefly, Scholem’s proposed model of staged religion may be expressed as shown below.

**Stage 1: The Monistic Universe**

Scholem’s first stage consists of a monistic universe in which man and gods existed simultaneously and communicated freely and directly with each other without recourse to meditative practices.

**Stage 2: The Institutionalization of Religion**

The second Stage is a creative period in which the development of religion occurs together with awareness of duality and consciousness of the vast and absolute abyss ‘between God, the infinite and transcendental Being, and Man, the finite creature.’ Thus Nature, as the former focus of religion, is replaced by the convictions and ethical actions of man.

**Stage 3: The Emergence of Mysticism**

Mysticism is, then, a third stage process that occurs in the later ‘romantic’ stages of religion and also, like religion, is a human construct. Mysticism, through the

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employment of specific spiritual techniques, is the means whereby man searches for the ‘secret’ that will cross the abyss.\(^{10}\)

Marshall, in his discussion of Scholem’s three stages of religion, writes that for Scholem the purpose of mysticism is ‘to bridge the gap between the believer and the divine’.\(^{11}\) This, of course, is correct; however, a further reading of Scholem reveals a deeper implication. Specifically in the mysticism of Luria and other Kabbalists, as disclosed by Scholem, the task of the mystic, by engaging in mystical prayer and right actions, is to cross the abyss in order to restore the original divine state or Gestalt and thereby ‘The redemption of Israel [which] concludes the redemption of all things.’\(^{12}\)

Scholem asserts that the Jewish mystic, whilst in no way refuting the revelational experiences of Moses and the prophets as specific historical occurrences, considers the source of his personal spiritual insights and experience as being ‘of equal importance for the conception of religious truth.’\(^{13}\) His study considers extraordinary figures including Israel Baal Shem ‘whose [mystical] experience was obviously first hand.’\(^{14}\) and draws attention to the social function of mystical ideas. Scholem’s study presents the concept that mysticism has a capacity to effect historical, social and cultural change — dynamic change that is driven by ideas rather than events. This

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Marshall, Mystical Encounters, 183.

\(^{12}\) Scholem, Major Trends, 274-276.

\(^{13}\) Scholem, Major Trends, 9.

\(^{14}\) Scholem, Major Trends, 338.
position has some similarities with Hegel’s dialectical hypothesis and as such has received a certain amount of criticism from other Jewish scholars.\textsuperscript{15}

Ultimately, for Scholem the practice of mysticism, within the context of Judaism and as an outcome of religion, leads to newer and deeper interpretations of religious value through ‘direct contact between the individual and God’ and also to social outcomes through the establishment of ‘new social groupings and communities.’\textsuperscript{16}

**Scholem’s Theory of Staged Religion and The Catalytic Process Model**

Scholem’s examination of Jewish mysticism is both historical and, given its vast time span, undertaken at a macro level. It is a theoretical study that paints broad brush strokes and focuses on a particular contextual understanding of mystical experience. For Scholem, within the ontology of his monotheistic religion, there is no room for pluralism — ‘The Lord our God is one.’ For Jewish mystics, experience of mystical phenomena can only be interpreted within the tenets of Jewish faith. He writes:

> There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on.\textsuperscript{17}

By choice, Scholem’s historical study, although, from time to time, it makes mention of Western mystics and Western mysticism, deliberately focuses on Jewish mysticism and it is from this mono group that his model of staged religion is developed. By contrast, the CPM emerges from an empirical study that draws its

\textsuperscript{15} Majid, Gershom Scholem.


\textsuperscript{17} Scholem, *Major Trends*, 6.
findings from the narratives of living men and women. Twenty-first century Australians live in a multicultural society and are often content to blend elements drawn from various religious sources; their national identity is not closely identified with a specific religion or creed. Yet, despite these obvious contrasts, the concept of staged development and also socio-religious outcomes as posited in both studies is of interest.

As shown in Figure 4, the first stage of the catalytic process (Phase I) involves a key mystical experience that acts as a trigger and stimulates a forward movement, that is to say, into the future. This forward movement of energy is a feature within all stages and lies at the heart of the study’s findings. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter Three, after the mystical experience there is no turning back to the original prior state of consciousness. On the other hand, Scholem’s model may be considered as representing both a forward movement and a backward movement. Paradoxically, the ‘backward movement’ of Scholem is actually a forward movement to an ideal which is conceived to have been the original state. However, it is the actual praxis of esoteric mystical techniques and subsequent mystical experiences that Scholem sees as ultimately bringing about social and historical outcomes. Hence, Scholem refers to ‘the social function of mystical ideas’.18

Because the current study focuses closely on the individual and his or her experiences, the CPM has capacity to present a detailed schema of individuals having been changed by their experiences and subsequently acting in altruistic ways that lead to social and religious outcomes. Scholem’s study lacks this capacity for

18 Scholem, Major Trends, 327.
minutiae because he has had to rely on second-order and third-order writings; and as he notes throughout Major Trends, Kabbalists are notoriously secretive about personal details. Consequently, Scholem’s belief that the experiences and actions of Jewish mystics have been effective in shaping social and historical outcomes is based on past accounts that relate to spiritual giants and national outcomes, rather than the actions of ordinary people.

Scholem’s study and the current research project both present models depicting stages of religious development. However, it is the postulation within both studies that certain individuals, who have personal experience of a mystical nature, may have a capacity to effect tangible social and religious outcomes that forms the strongest link between Scholem’s study and the current one. Possibilities with regard to this association of ideas will be referred to later in the present chapter.

4.4: RANSON’S CYCLE OF SPIRITUALITY

David Ranson is a Catholic Priest of the diocese of Broken Bay who also teaches spirituality and pastoral theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. He comes from a Cistercian background and is a prolific writer on a diverse range of topics relating to his faith. In 2002, he wrote Across The Great Divide, Bridging Spirituality And Religion Today.\textsuperscript{19} Although this publication has been described (by himself) as a

\textsuperscript{19}David Ranson, Across The Great Divide, Bridging Spirituality And Religion Today (Strathfield, NSW: St. Paul’s Publications – Society of St Paul, 2007).
pamphlet, it is actually a small, rather influential book that has been praised by many as a guide to contemporary spirituality.  

Ranson’s concern, as expressed in his book’s introduction, relates to the undeniable split between religion and spirituality. A split, that according to Ranson, began as early as the 12th century when theology came to be seen as an intellectual and scientific discipline that did not require affective involvement. Consequently, religion, for some people, has come to be thought of as an aspect of the corporatized church and spirituality is associated with interiority — the experiential and affective.

Ranson sees the consequences of this divide between intellect and heart as being responsible for contemporary interest in spirituality and a longing for romanticism at the expense of religious involvement. His comment that there are those who see that spirituality can be conceived as being a religion in its own right is supported by fellow Australian Gary Bouma, who comments on the increasing number of Australians declaring their religion, on national census forms, as being spiritual. Outside of Australia, interest in romanticism, diverse forms of spirituality and New Age activities is seen as an increasingly influential factor within Western society.

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21 Bouma, Australian Soul.

In acknowledging that spirituality is not an easy matter to define, Ranson argues that one reason there is a great deal of ambiguity when it comes to articulating the nature of spirituality relates to the way in which the two most formative cultures in the West (Hebrew and Greek) have dealt with that topic. He suggests that, generally speaking, if our preference is for Greek then spirituality is conceived as being ‘immaterial, beyond matter, supersensory, ethereal — connection with the spiritual world.’  

By contrast, Hebrew spirituality is concerned with ‘force and energy, a vitality in life, “a coming awake”. It is this latter, enlivening, more awake approach which Ranson, who sees religion and spirituality as being complementary, prefers.  

Ranson is confident that spirituality is linked to consciousness and that theories of consciousness provide the key as to how spirituality might be further defined. He asserts that because consciousness is cyclic ‘spirituality requires a cyclic definition’ and, to this end, has devised a schema — The Cycle Of Spirituality (see Figure 5, on the following page) which presents his envisagement of the manner in which spirituality might unfold.

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23 Ranson, The Great Divide, 16. See also note 8, page 80. Here Ranson makes a qualification, thanking David Tacey for pointing out that whilst the above might be true of Platonism, the Dionysian influence in Hellenist mythology provides examples of sensuous and embodied spirituality.

24 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 16-17.
The Cycle of Spirituality

The spiritual moment (awakening, awareness)  The religious movement (interpretation, evaluation)

(1) attending (recognising that something is beckoning us)

(2) inquiring (exploring deeper aspects of this beckoning)

(3) interpreting (reflecting on the deeper meaning of this beckoning)

(4) acting (unifying the world in response to this beckoning)

The personal sphere (pre-creedal; expressed in art)  The social sphere (creedal; expressed in worship)

The cyclic nature of spirituality involves the four core activities of (1) attending, (2) inquiring, (3) interpreting, and (4) acting. These activities occur in a sequence of inter-related phases which may be spread over a short or long period.

The cycle may be split in half by stalling in phases (1) and (2) or in phases (3) and (4), so separating ‘spirituality’ from ‘religion’. Hence, one may settle for ill-defined awareness and expression of what beckons us; alternatively, one may remain uncritically loyal to a code of religious conduct.

Again, the cycle may split but into ‘triangles’, if one omits to attend (phase 1), thus leading one into a spirituality lacking interiority; to inquire (2) – leading one into an uncritical, devotional spirituality; to interpret (3) – leading one into a spirituality characterised by prejudice; or to act (4) – leading one into a cerebral pseudo-spirituality.

Source: Ranson, 2002, 19.
As shown above, for Ranson spiritual development involves four key activities or stages: (1) *attending*, (2) *inquiring*, (3) *interpreting* and (4) *acting*. He writes that the deliberate configuration of these four stages acts as an aid to avoid confusion and over expectation of later stages within the cycle. It also assists in identifying problems ‘where we can get stuck’ and provides a complete picture so that one part is not confused with the whole.\(^{25}\) Furthermore, it is important to understand that the stages are mapped logically rather than chronologically so that for certain people it may be possible to experience all the stages as one illuminating moment, in which case the delineation of the stages is not so apparent. For others, each period might be apprehended over a greater period of time.

**The Spiritual Moment and the Personal Sphere**

**Stage 1: Attending**

The Cycle of Spirituality begins with a spiritual moment that, although it occurs independently of the experiencer, engenders a recognition that something is beckoning. The phenomena cited by Ranson that give rise to this experience are numerous, ranging from moments of great joy and wonder; to moments of crisis that take the individual beyond the limits of ordinary experience and to others that signal transcendence. \(^{26}\)

**Stage 2: Inquiring**

The second phase of the spiritual moment is a time of personal exploration and inquiry. The individual begins a journey or quest that finds expression in art and

\(^{25}\) Ranson, Ibid.

\(^{26}\) See also Timothy Beardsworth, *A Sense Of Presence*, Chapter 6. Here Beardsworth considers awareness of something other than oneself and that is not material, accompanies or is a precursor to a variety of mystical experiences.
other activities that are not aligned to any particular religious tradition. Ranson defines this pre-creedal period as the ‘genesis of the “spiritual” journey’ but warns that if we limit ourselves to the activities of attending and inquiring without moving on to the religious movement and the social sphere ‘we have only half the story.’

The Religious Movement and the Social Sphere

*Stage 3: Interpreting*

This third stage is seen by Ranson as the beginning of movement towards the social sphere and the religious moment. It is a period that involves reflection on and interpretation of the initial experience. For Ranson, evaluation of the experience involves ‘faith’ which, although normally used as a religious term, could be pictured as a certain interpretation of the spiritual moment. He writes:

> Faith is the conviction that life does have an inherent meaning and direction, that there is an inner logic to the apparent randomness of life, and that, ultimately, life is gracious and trustworthy. This fundamental disposition is constructed by a range of beliefs to which one has subscribed since they resonate deep within one’s own experience.

The above extract and in particular the final sentence, appears to provide support for Ault’s reflection [with regards to Ranson’s *Cycle of Spirituality*] that since ‘there are epistemological and cultural relativities in the earliest developments of spirituality, including the initial perception’, it may possibly be more appropriate to consider interpretation as having commenced prior to the third stage.

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Nevertheless, Ranson sees the third stage of interpretation as generating deeper levels of faith that lead to engagement in the social sphere of shared beliefs, through participation in prayer and worship, which then lead to the fourth stage of acting, so that spirituality becomes more than an imaginative concept.

**Stage 4: Acting:**

This final stage of movement, from the spiritual moment to participation in a specific religious tradition, leads to ‘informed acting’ within the doctrines of a particular faith. Something that Ranson sees as leading to a more profound perception of further spiritual moments, which may be experienced as being ‘mystical’ and also to the possibility of engaging in politics and social action. Ranson concludes that ‘informed acting’ leads to other spiritual moments, which, then, come to be understood from within the context influenced by earlier experiences so that the cycle continues at a constantly ‘deepening level’.

**Alternate Paths: Splitting and the Formation of Triangles**

Ranson presents a number of alternate scenarios or options within his schema. Firstly, he describes how the cycle may be bisected by stalling either in the first and second stages or in the third and fourth stages so that spirituality would be separated
from religion. He envisages that the consequence of stalling in the first instance (attending/inquiring) would result in a spirituality without the interiority to inquire. This vertical division between the personal and social spheres results in ‘ontic spirituality’ (in that it relates to ontology, the study of being) — a form of pre-credal spirituality which, despite being poorly regarded by theologians, is not without ‘theological import’.33 However, despite his acknowledgement that ontic spirituality also has the potential to develop into a sort of civil religion that in an exaggerated form can be dangerous,34 Ranson is convinced that the personal sphere is the wellspring of the spiritual life. He writes:

It is the sphere that gives spirituality — and religion — its energy and caliber — in a sense, its very spirit! 35

As indicated above, Ranson conceives religion without spirituality as being incomplete.

Ranson’s second scenario describes what happens if the social sphere (acting/interpreting) is separated from the personal sphere. He visualizes that when this happens ‘memory and communal interpretation’ become more important than ‘personal investigation’ and ‘experience’.36 In support of this point of view Ranson draws attention to Fowlers ‘tacit’ stage of faith development — a stage in which a

33 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 29.
34 For example, in Nazi Germany.
35 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 30.
36 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 30-31.
person has loyalty towards certain values without appropriate reflection. As Fowler observes:

A person [at this stage] is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system as a system, the object of reflection.

Finally, Ranson’s schema provides examples of other scenarios which might occur should one of the stages fail to materialize and triangulation occur; thus:

- Failure to act might bring about a ‘pseudo-spirituality’ lacking in capacity to bring about change.
- Failure to interpret might result in a shallow form of spirituality subject to caprices or fads.
- Failure to inquire might result in a non rational form of over-pious spirituality.
- Failure to attend might result in a form of cerebral spirituality lacking interiority.

**Some Thoughts on the Spiritual Moment**

Firstly, although Ranson envisages spirituality as originating from attending to a spiritual moment, Richardson speaks of another kind of spirituality — *Wintery Spirituality*. *Wintery Spirituality* is seen by Richardson as a type of spirituality in which individuals, even those who long for it, are unable to feel an experiential

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38 Ibid.
connection with the Real. Richardson provides the following description by a ‘theologian who considers himself to be wintery.’

The wintery sort of spirituality, let it be remembered, stakes out its place on the landscape next to persons who have seen God excluded from their horizon. That exclusion is the signal of their winterness. They have not given up on the search for God. They remain committed to the Christian meanings, and they find many occasions to worship and affirm. That is the sign of their spirituality...They cannot satisfy their hunger by reading the description of summery piety. They have to find their Yes in the colder, more barren landscape.

In the above paragraph, Richardson seeks to draw attention to the value of this rational form of spirituality that is based on faith alone. Wintery Spirituality, although it might be designated as being cerebral, is not an incomplete form of religion in Ranson’s sense (see above) but another form of spirituality. So too, Ruth Burrows draws attention to people who, although they are unable to describe or even recognize a spiritual moment, believe deeply in God.

Secondly, it may be possible that, in some instances, what Ranson envisages as the initial spiritual moment may have been preceded by a period of philosophical inquiry, so that the first stage of attending may be preceded by inquiring rather than the reverse. Wilber, for example, refers to the practice of Jnana yoga which, using the mind to transcend the mind, gives rise to contemplative awareness. He postulates that, in the West, intellectual awareness in the form of philosophical inquiry may

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also give rise to the experiential, and identifies Augustine, Descartes, Hegel, Husserl and Sartre as having been among the practitioners of this ‘“Western Vedanta”’.  

Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality and the Catalytic Process Model  

A major difference between the Cycle and the CPM is that Ranson’s mapping, like Scholem’s study, focuses on one particular form of religion. However, whilst Ranson’s Cycle is an envisaged guide for Catholic spirituality, the CPM presents the findings of an empiric study that involved Christian and non-Christian participants.  

Intriguingly, similarities in process are to be found within the Cycle and the CPM. The Cycle of Spirituality presents a journey that begins with an initial moment of attending and then moves through into three consecutive stages: (2) inquiring, (3) interpreting, (4) acting. The catalytic process is also initiated by response but always response to a key mystical experience — Phase I: The Experience and First Reactions.  

The CPM’s second stage — Phase II: The Experience as Catalyst for the Individual, appears to contain Ranson’s stages of inquiring, interpreting and acting, with informed acting being represented by ‘focused spirituality’ which comes into being from the second part of Phase II onwards. Figure 6 (see below) illustrates how these similarities might be mapped.  

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43 See Chapter Three, Section 3.2, Table 6 for details of the participants’ religious affiliations.
As can be seen from the above comparison, the CPM and Ranson’s Cycle are both continuums. However, the content of the CPM diagram is sourced from interviews with living people who have related personal experience of a mystical experience; whereas, Ranson’s Cycle is a theoretical construct.

The intent of the CPM is to illustrate, as it were, an anthology of biographical experiences and actions that have occurred during the course of an exploratory journey. A journey that, for some travellers, is sufficiently far enough advanced to be recognized as an account of their life story or *lebensweld*. 
Phase I and the sub-phases within Phase II of the CPM diagram illustrate milestones within the participants’ lives. Significantly, Phase III: The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society draws attention to the persistence of the catalytic process beyond the personal actions of the original experiencers.

The idea of the journey is also to be found throughout Ranson’s text. For example, in his first chapter, he draws attention to the following spatial analogy by Eire:

In many ways, the current state of scholarly research in spirituality resembles a sprawling shantytown on the outskirts of a city. Inside the town limits, that is inside the academy, it is possible to find a sense of community, history, order and balance. At the fringe and beyond, however, on a community without boundaries (i.e. spirituality) those same values become rare commodities and a sense of permanence the rarest of all. Hastily erected structures dot the landscape helter-skelter. Although there may be a sense of community it is constructed by liminality, tainted by a measure of suspicion.44

Later, in his Conclusion he writes:

The terrain upon which we find ourselves today is marked by unexpected fissures and escarpments. We too chart new oceans in the midst of shoals and reefs. ... As we negotiate the particular ravine characteristic of our time the spirit of ‘exploration’ and not simply ‘discovery’ will be one of our principal resources. In a postmodern celebration of heterogeneity we do not have the luxury of simply incorporating experiences into already-known classifications.45

Thus, as shown above, Ranson employs the metaphor of an explorative journey to draw attention to the nature of contemporary spirituality in a pluralistic society.


45 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 75-77.
4.5: THE PASTORAL CYCLE

Reflection upon the many references, within Ranson’s text that draw upon the confronting uniqueness of the Australian landscape, might give rise to the assumption that the Cycle portrays an actual journey. However, when it is understood, and as explained by Ranson that his four stages are represented as ‘these might be imagined to be aligned’, it becomes apparent that the purpose of his diagram is to illustrate, by way of a notional journey, a primer for spiritual exploration and discernment.

When Ranson’s proposed Cycle, which maps an unfolding journey — albeit an envisaged rather than actual journey — that continues at a constantly deepening level informed by preceding cycles, is seen as an instructional tool, it becomes reasonable to assume, although not acknowledged by Ranson himself, that his diagram is a variation of the pastoral cycle. Given that Ranson’s Cycle may be thought of as a type of pastoral cycle, then, the similarities and differences that exist between the Cycle and the CPM may also exist between the CPM and the pastoral cycle.

The term pastoral cycle is applicable to a number of methodologies for theological reflection. Figure 7, as shown below, provides one example of the pastoral cycle as presented by Anthony Maher.

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46 Ranson, *Across The Great Divide*, 18.

Figure 7: The Pastoral Cycle

The Pastoral Cycle\(^49\) is a theological tool; in this framework it represents a fourfold action plan:

(i) **Experience** — the starting point is the present concrete situation, the more or less routine existence of every-day life; within this context, a tension is discovered which demands a response. It is no longer possible to go on as before.

(ii) **Analysis/Exploration** — of the concrete reality — what is going on: the facts.

(iii) **Reflection** — information by itself does not give answers; it only indicates issues and responsibilities; there are matters that need to be taken into consideration: personal and communal, beliefs and values with regard to the challenge of the contemporary reality.

(iv) **Action/praxis** — Grows out of the whole process on the basis of informed decision and appropriate initiatives. On completion of stage iv the process begins again.


Although the above model of the Pastoral Cycle is presented as a chart, it and other models for theological reflection have also been represented by a variety of cyclic or spiral diagrams that illustrate four stages: (1) experience, (2) exploration, (3) reflection and (4) action.\(^50\) Laurie Green’s Pastoral Cycle\(^51\) which, demonstrates this spiral movement, is reproduced in Figure 8.

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\(^{49}\) Ibid. Here Maher notes ‘The Pastoral Cycle is a guide not a panacea; it serves as a stimulus to learn and discover, it encourages personal reflection and experiential methods of solving problems. It is a useful tool for fostering empowerment of the individual and the community.’


Figure: 8  Green’s Pastoral Cycle

THE PASTORAL CYCLE

We start by getting in touch with ourselves and with the place
EXPLORATION + DESCRIPTION

We plan a transformative RESPONSE

We engage in REFLECTION upon what we have identified

We dig deeper through ANALYSIS

and again

and again

and again

we embark upon the cycle again

Some concern has been expressed about the usefulness of the pastoral cycle, and similar tools for theological reflection, on the grounds that ‘it [the pastoral cycle] does not illustrate the outcome of the reflective process’ and is unable to ‘demonstrate what it achieves’. Clearly, Ranson’s Cycle, which maps an unfolding journey, at a constantly deepening level — informed by preceding cycles, reflects Green’s pastoral cycle spiral (see Figure 8 above). Therefore, Ranson’s Cycle may, in common with other versions of the pastoral cycle and tools for theological reflection, be susceptible to criticism on the grounds that it is hard to demonstrate its outcome. Nevertheless, despite the above possibility, Ranson boldly envisages a capacity within his fourth stage of acting to ‘change the world.’ By way of contrast, the research, from which the structure of the CPM is derived, as shown in the previous chapter (Chapter Three, Section 3.4), provides evidence that experience of mystical phenomena can lead to altruistic activities that bring about tangible outcomes.

4.6: QUANTUM CHANGE


53 Ranson, Across The Great Divide, 28.
the field of quantum mechanics and the sudden jump of an electron from one energy level to another. Hence, in their book and in later publications, the term quantum change, sometimes referred to as QC, is used as a metaphor to describe the above form of transformative change. In the same vein, people who are deemed to have experienced this type of change are designated as quantum changers.

*Quantum Change* was written almost a decade after the original study, and whilst it does contain narratives of the original participants, which are now discussed at length, a considerable section of *Quantum Change* is given over to the authors’ post-study reflections and possible hypotheses. This style of presentation is appreciated by Kurtz who applauds Miller and C’dé Baca’s return to the tradition of story-telling and story-listening — a tradition that ‘values synthesis over analysis and comprehension over precision.’ However, Kurtz’s praise is accompanied by the rider that some readers may find this book frustrating because it provides neither easy answers nor many clear and distinct findings. ¹⁴ In a like manner, Wood observes that because the book largely consists of ‘raw data' in the form of quantum changers’ stories, as presented from the view point of the researcher, it ‘tantalizes rather than illuminates.’ ¹⁵ *Quantum Change*’s fusion of conclusions, methodology and findings may initially confound some readers. Nevertheless, two additional papers — Miller’s ‘The Phenomenon of Quantum Change’ ¹⁶ and C’dé Baca and Paula Wilbourne’s

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Miller and C’dé Baca begin their book by discussing the frequency of quantum change, within literature. Firstly, attention is drawn to two well known fictional characters — Ebenezer Scrooge and George Bailey, both of whom, in Miller and C’dé Baca’s opinion, provide examples of quantum change. Secondly, Miller and C’dé Baca argue that many biographies and autobiographies present accounts of quantum change. Examples of quantum change in ‘real-life’, as provided by Miller and C’dé Baca, include spiritual leaders: St. Paul, St. Augustine, the Buddha, Simone Weil and Martin Luther; social reformers and activists: Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale and Malcolm X; also writers and thinkers, such as: Tolstoy, C. S. Lewis and Kierkegaard.

Moving on from the above examples, Miller and C’dé Baca note that in the Varieties James discusses two forms of change. The first, and most common of these forms, which consists of gradual and cumulative change, has been designated by Miller and C’dé Baca as Type I change. The second form of change, one that involves sudden and abrupt change, is sometimes exciting, sometimes frightening and provides outcomes that may be either positive or negative, is designated as Type 2 change. Miller and C’dé Baca posit that, although, James does not imply that one type of change is to be valued more than the other, as a psychologist, he was greatly


interested in ‘understanding how it is that people can change so totally and abruptly.’ Therefore, it is the discontinuous transformations of abrupt change associated with of Type 2 change that fascinated James, rather than the educational or incremental form of change associated with Type I change. As an example of James’ interest in Type 2 change, Miller and C’de Baca provide the following extract from the *Varieties*.

> I was effectually cured of all inclinations to that sin I was so strongly addicted to that I thought nothing but shooting me through the head could have cured me of it; and all desire and inclination to it was removed, as entirely as if I had been a suckling child; nor did the temptation return to this day. (James, *The Varieties Of Religious Experience*, 1902: 217)

The above extract relates to the manner in which an individual was instantaneously cured of an addiction to alcohol. Miller observes that, in his own clinical field of addictions, reports of Type 2 change, such as the above are common; however, there is no psychological term for the phenomenon. Furthermore, ‘Conversion’ the term previously chosen by James to describe transformational change is no longer appropriate. Consideration that modern psychology had failed to sufficiently examine the phenomenon of transformational change provides the rationale for Miller and C’de Baca to undertake a study ‘to determine whether there was a phenomenon to explain, and if so, to describe it.’

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60 Miller and C’de Baca, ibid.

61 Miller, *The Phenomenon of Quantum Change*, 455.

62 Ibid.
The First Study

In the tradition of other studies of transcendent experience, Miller and C’de Baca began their investigative study with the assistance of a newspaper article. The article, published in November 1991, outlined the parameters of quantum change by providing fictional examples of quantum change, including, amongst others, the story of Ebenezer Scrooge as depicted by Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*. People, who felt that they had experienced some form of transformational change, were invited to contact Miller and C’ de Baca. This initial contact resulted in 55 people (31 women and 24 men) volunteering to take part in the study.

Examination of the volunteers’ narratives enabled Miller and C’de Baca to conclude that descriptions provided by 41 participants matched Miller and C’de Baca’s model of quantum change. This finding was expanded upon by a range of primarily affective findings sourced from questionnaires administered to provide information about psychological well-being; religious behaviour; and the type of person who might have a propensity to experience quantum change.

C’de Baca and Wilbourne report that four measures were used during the interview process: the Quantum Experiences Retrospective Interview or QUERI — a set of questions, designed by Miller, that relate to certain characteristics of transcendent experience; a Values Card Sort (adapted from Rokeach, 1983); The Religious

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64 C’de Baca and Wilbourne. Quantum Change: Ten Years Later, 533. Here C’de Baca and Wilbourne note that inspiration for these characteristics was drawn from James’ *Varieties* and from K. D.
Background and Behaviour or RBB (Connors, Tonigan and Miller, 1996) and The Short Symptom Check List-52. Data obtained from the interviews and these psychological measures indicated that the most common changes reported by quantum changers were:

Relief from fear, depression, anger; release from destructive behaviour patterns, a deepening or healing of relationships, spirituality became vibrant and trusting and central to lives, self-actualization was accelerated, affirmation of a sense of self, and a trust in the future. For two individuals, however their lives changed for the worse. These individuals reported lost relationships and spiritual opportunities that negatively impacted their sense of self and their spiritual development.65

Despite the above reference to negative outcomes, Miller and C’de Baca assert that quantum change is ‘...a vivid, surprising, benevolent and enduring personal transformation.’66 The results of the Values Card Sort, undertaken to determine participants top twelve values (out of fifty listed choices) before and after quantum change, are shown below in Table 10.

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65 C’de Baca and Wilbourne, Quantum Change: Ten Years Later, 532.

66 Miller and C’de Baca, Quantum Change.4.
Table 10: Twelve Most Highly Valued Personal Characteristics (ranked among 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Before</th>
<th>Men After</th>
<th>Women Before</th>
<th>Women After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Personal peace</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>God’s will</td>
<td>Fitting in</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Be respected</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Personal peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Be loved</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Miller & C’d Baca, 131.

Based on the results of the above exercise, Miller and C’d Baca concluded that the Values of participants, who reported having experienced quantum change, were often completely changed. Miller writes:

They wanted fewer and closer friendships. Some experienced sudden healing of and release from enmeshment or abuse that they had experienced in childhood. Others found the courage to leave abusive relationships. For some, family and intimate relationships became more meaningful and peaceful.⁶⁷

Importantly, analysis of the study’s data also resulted in the recognition of two types of quantum change: Insight Type and Mystical Type. These newly discovered types of change, as mapped by Miller and C’d Baca within the larger schema of Type 2 change, are shown in Figure 9: The Landscape of Quantum Change.

⁶⁷ Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change, 458.
(i) **Insight Type**

The insightful type of quantum change is described by Miller as centring on insights; lying more within the conceptual world of psychotherapy; and apart from the noetic element of realization, lacking most of the classic components of mystical experience. The characteristics of insightful quantum changes are such that they are perceived as occurring with ‘great and sudden force’; are immediately recognized as ‘authentic truth’; and are accompanied by intense ‘emotion and a cathartic, even
ecstatic, sense of relief and release.” Two examples of insightful quantum change are shown below.

Insight (a) ...I couldn’t even run a quarter mile. At one point I had been up to marathon trim. I guess it was that, and some things that were coming out of the reading I had taken along to try and get a handle on how to help the employee. I decided “I have a problem with alcohol, and the only way to deal with it is to simply put it aside.” And all of a sudden, it just dropped away. At that moment I turned into somebody who didn’t use alcohol. I haven’t had a drink since that day two years ago.

Afterwards: ...I don’t know the mechanisms. I’m not sure what it was about, but I ascribe it to a power outside of myself, a power higher than myself, a power beyond myself.

Prior to the above experience the quantum changer had been experiencing minor worries about his fitness levels and consumption of alcohol.

Insight (b) ...I was packing to check out when I looked in the mirror. I didn’t recognize what I saw. There was a real split, I guess, between my inner self and the self that the outside world could see. I didn’t like what I saw. I saw a fat person. I saw someone who looked like he was experiencing some physical deterioration due to alcohol. I didn’t see a healthy person. I didn’t see a happy person. I guess that really what it all boils down to. It woke me up.

Afterwards: I’m not a religious person. I understand a lot of people say they go through dramatic changes with religious connotations. That wasn’t really the case with me.

The above experience was related by a college student who had been having panic attacks after the death of his parents, was depressed and had started consuming alcohol to excess.

68 Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change, 457.

69 Miller and C’de Baca, Quantum Change, 36.

70 Ibid, 58.
(ii) Mystical (epiphany) Type

For Miller, experiences, classified as being of the mystical (epiphany) type of quantum change contain ‘most of the classic elements of mystical experience, described by James (ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity) and Pahnke (unity, transcendence, awe, positivity, distinctiveness). They are triggered by an ‘acute event’; and are of the ‘more dramatic type, the kind experienced by William Wilson, Malcolm X, Tolstoy, Joan of Arc, Theresa of Avila and many others.’ 71 Two examples of mystical quantum change are shown below.

Mystical Type (a): A voice came into my mind and said, “Everything will be all right; I am here to protect you, and I will be with you always.” I can’t begin to explain what I felt at that moment; I have never felt that way before. Those few simple words echoed in my head, and a blanket of warmth and love wrapped around me. As the voice was talking, I felt protected and loved. For a long time I couldn’t move and I wanted it never to end.72

The above quantum change occurred whilst the person, who had alcohol problems, was sitting at her desk, with her children playing in the same room. Miller relates that she was very tired and on the point of stopping for a beer immediately prior to the experience.

Mystical Type (b): I had a mystical experience in 1980.... All of a sudden, out of nowhere this wave of spiritual electricity washed over me. My body and the car and the landscape and everything started turning into smaller and smaller pieces, and everything started disappearing, including myself. I didn’t know if I was having a heart attack or what was happening. During those moments everything, including myself and the landscape, just turned into little dots of light. ...It was awesome and it was terrifying and it was peaceful....What I felt was the — of being one with God. I felt myself dissolve into it and it dissolve into me. There was no separation. There is a

71 Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change, 456-457.

72 Miller and C’de Baca, Quantum Change, 78-97.
Japanese character for this experience which translates roughly as “This and that — no difference,” or “I and Thou — the same.”\textsuperscript{73}

The above narrative is a retrospective account of quantum change, provided during the study’s interview procedures. The quantum changer was recording an audio letter during the actual experience and subsequently provided this tape to Miller.

Having made a distinction between Insight Type quantum change and Mystical Type quantum change, Miller and C’dé Baca acknowledge that some experiences are difficult to categorize. They write that ‘Cases seem to pile up at each end but there also some in the grey area in the middle’ and [our] research suggests that the two types rather than being completely separate represent ends of a continuum.\textsuperscript{74} Moreover, categorization is problematical, since the perception of being in the presence of some ‘holy Other’ was reported not only by most mystical type quantum changers, but also by 42\% of insightful quantum changers.\textsuperscript{75} In \textit{Reflections}, the final section of \textit{Quantum Change}, Miller and C’dé Baca deliberately choose not to focus on developing a taxonomic system for classifying participants’ experiences. Instead, attention is turned towards speculating about what quantum changers’ narratives might teach about human nature. However, this is a multi-faceted issue and in the light of such complexities, they conclude that no single explanation can be found.

Other points of discussion include: conjecture about the genesis of quantum change; the possibility that greater understanding of quantum change might contribute to clinical practice; and, taking into account that quantum change can sometimes be

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 99.

\textsuperscript{74} Miller and C’dé Baca, \textit{Quantum Change}, 22.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 173.
detrimental or disabling, the development of support systems to assist quantum changers assimilate their experiences.

**Quantum Change Ten Years Later**

Ten years after Miller and C’dé Baca’s original study, C’dé Baca and Paula Wilbourne interviewed 30 people who had contributed to the original study. Irrespective of 4 quantum changers not being able to remember their experience clearly and upgrades having increased the Valued Card Sort choices from 50 to 80, the second study provides comparable results to the original study. Nevertheless, C’dé Baca and Wilbourne are careful to note that their findings are based on the memory construction and evaluation of the participants; and that these reports were not validated with people who had known the quantum changers over the years that had elapsed since the previous study. Interestingly, attention is drawn to a ‘subgroup’ within the sample who described among other perceived experiences ‘clairvoyance, hearing voices, seeing visions’—the type of phenomena that C’dé Baca and Wilbourne mention as having been noted by James.76

**The Possibility that Quantum Change is not a New Concept**

Given that the majority of quantum changers believed that their experience involved some sense of a ‘holy Other’, similarities may be drawn between Miller and C’dé Baca’s study and major studies conducted in Britain and America during the 1960s and 1970s. In Britain, the question presented by Hardy and also by Hay and Morisy was: ‘Do you feel that you have ever been aware or influenced by a presence or

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76 C’dé Baca and Wilbourne, Quantum Change: Ten Years Later, 539.
power, whether you call it God or not, that is different from your everyday self?’ Hardy’s taxonomy of transcendental experiences includes, not only a sense of presence, sometimes identified as a holy presence, but also clairvoyance, hearing voices, visionary experiences and the experience of light. All of these experiences are to be found in the narratives of quantum changers.

In America, within surveys conducted by Greeley and McCready and by Glock and Stark, the question was operationalized so as to extend the survey to individuals who might hold other beliefs, and was presented as: ‘Have you ever felt as though you were very close to powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?’ As with the British studies, many of those who responded in the affirmative to the above question also reported concomitant experiences such as clairvoyance, hearing voices, seeing visions, out-of-body experiences and the experience of light. Greeley, who explains that when he uses the term paranormal, he means ‘psychic, mystic and contact with the dead experiences’, draws attention to the experience phenomenon of being enveloped in light. A phenomenon, he notes, that is recorded by Eliade as being typical in all the world’s religions. Miller and C’de Baca also draw particular attention to the experience of light as a ‘frequent


78 Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal*.


80 Hay, *Exploring Inner Space*.


82 Greeley, *The Sociology of the Paranormal*, 77. See also 87 Here, Greeley remarks ‘An amazing number of the mystics I have interviewed personally report the light phenomenon.’
element in mystical quantum change’. Comparison of Miller and C’dé Baca’s study with the above studies may possibly suggest that whilst, mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences have been extensively studied, Insight Type quantum change experiences that do not involve either transcendental or paranormal phenomena, may present opportunities for further investigation.

**Quantum Change as a Religious Experience**

Intriguingly, despite the prevalence of religious feeling reported by quantum changers, Miller and C’dé Baca do not see quantum change as necessarily being a religious experience. Instead, they observe that certain examples of Insight Type quantum change may parallel religious conversion. Mahoney and Pargament note that parallels exist between quantum change and the following two categories of religious conversion as defined by Lofland and Skonovd:

1. intellectual conversion, which involves the seeking of knowledge without significant social contact; and

2. mystical conversion, which is considered by some as the prototype conversion characterized by a sudden and dramatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences.

Despite noting parallels between quantum change and the above categories of religious conversion, Mahoney and Pargament do not consider quantum change to be a form of spiritual conversion. Instead, they regard spiritual conversion as a further

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83 Miller and C’dé Baca, *Quantum Change*, 89.
type of religious conversion — one that represents the interior world of religious conversion, and differs from other life-changing transformations. Mahoney and Pargament argue that spiritual conversion involves a change in the core destination of a person’s life, as identification of the self with the sacred becomes more important than anything else. Furthermore, whilst other concerns may still be of significance, they cease to be of paramount importance as the person alters his or her life-path to reach this destination. Ultimately, ‘spiritual conversion radically alters a person’s understanding of the sacred, the self, relationships, and one’s place in the universe.’\textsuperscript{85} However, whilst quantum change involves an alteration in what is perceived as being most significant in life and a change in the destination conceived to be of highest importance, Mahoney and Pargament assert that quantum change differs from spiritual change, because it involves neither ‘attributes of the sacred to be embedded in the change’\textsuperscript{86} nor an alteration in the quantum changer’s relationship with the sacred, ‘such that the sacred becomes the centre’.\textsuperscript{87} The term sacred, as defined by Pargament and Mahoney, applies to ‘concepts of God, the divine, the supernatural, the metaphysical, and the transcendental.’\textsuperscript{88}

Nevertheless, it may be presumptuous to rule out the possibility that quantum change might not result in spiritual conversion. On the contrary, it may not be about cause. It is possible that spiritual conversion is one type of quantum change. It is not so much that quantum changers (excepting those quantum changers [15%] who were


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 487.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 490.

\textsuperscript{88} Mahoney and Pargament, 482.
designated as atheist, agnostic or unsure about the existence of the Real) may not have experienced spiritual conversion, but that the structure of Miller and C’dé Baca’s survey and its ten year follow up (see above) precludes evidence of either spiritual conversion or its absence. Similarly, lack of evidence also impinges upon Miller’s contention that quantum change has shaped the lives of religious leaders, social reformers and philosophers.

The Landscape of Quantum Change and the Catalytic Process Model

Miller and C’dé Baca’s study of quantum change and the current study’s postulation of Catalysis have much in common. Both studies are empiric and both involve interviewing people who report having experienced certain phenomena. Both studies use a metaphor derived from scientific concepts to describe the phenomena discovered. The term quantum change is used by Miller and C’dé Baca to suggest immediate change, similar to the sudden jump of an electron from one level to another. In the current research project, the term Catalysis is used to convey the concept of a process though which one substance (the catalyst or experience) comes into contact with a second substance (the experiencer) to influence or change the second substance without being changed in itself. Similarities exist between some experiences classified by Miller and C’dé Baca as Mystical Type quantum change and experiences related by some participants in the current study; but, they are not the same sort of study and, in so far as their aims and methodologies differ, their results also differ.

The stated purpose of Miller and C’dé Baca’s study reads: ‘to determine whether there was a phenomenon [transformational change] to explain, and if so, to describe
As noted in the first chapter of the present study, this study has as its purpose to explore the effects of mystical or psychospiritual experiences as reported by individuals who perceive that they have personally experienced such phenomena. This study is an inductive study; that is to say, rather than seeking to confirm a particular theory, it explored an area of study and allowed what was germane to that area to emerge. Hence, the phenomenon of a Catalytic Process emanates from data gathered during the research process.

The question put to quantum changers by Miller and C’dé Baca was, ‘What was different after your experience?’ — a question that evoked mainly emotive responses and provided descriptions of quantum changers’ ways of perceiving and understanding themselves. Whereas, the question put to the current study’s participants was ‘Can you briefly sum up what the main outcome of the experience has been for you?’ This question evoked descriptions of what Alister Hardy refers to as the ‘effects’ of transcendental experiences, that is: the results; consequences; outcomes; upshots or end product produced by the experience. This primary difference between the two studies is made plain in Miller and C’dé Baca’s Landscape of Quantum Change (see Figure 9) which shows where quantum change is situated, but not where it goes. Whereas, the CPM schema (see Figure 4) maps a journey that begins with the individual’s perception of a mystical experience. A

89 Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change, 455. Here, Miller notes his frustration ‘that rarely has the topic of transformational change been addressed in modern psychology.’

90 Cf: Chapter 1, 1.1: Introduction – The Current Study.

91 See Strauss and Corbin, Basics of Qualitative Research; Creswell, Research Design.

92 Miller and C’dé Baca, Quantum Change, 127.

93 Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man, 4.
perception that generates a search that progresses in stages, stimulated by later catalytic experiences, towards religious, spiritual and social outcomes. In short, as illustrated by the CPM, because it maps a social process, the current study goes further.

There is however, a sense of relationship between the two studies. The finding that a majority of quantum changers reported that their quantum change experience included a sense of the Real and other experiences, such as, out-of-body experiences, hearing voices, and seeing visions, aligns Quantum Change not only with British and American studies that present differing versions of the Alister Hardy Question, but also with other more recent studies that have considered transcendental experiences. Although all of these studies have differing aims and present different outcomes, a relationship exists between them on account of their descriptions of mystical and psychospiritual phenomena. Plainly, and for the same reason, the current study is, as it were, part of the same family. Therefore, as shown below, a family resemblance might be seen to exist between some experiences, classified as Mystical Type quantum change by Miller and C’de Baca and certain experiences related by participants within the current study:

\[94\] Hardy, The Spiritual Nature of Man; Hay, Exploring Inner Space; Greeley, The Sociology of the Paranormal.


\[96\] See for example: Wood, Quantum Change, 257-258. Here, Wood makes comparison between the study of quantum change and the study of the near-death-experience.
First Example

Here, Miller and Cede Baca provide the following example of a defining moment in the life of a physician who was fighting to overcome a drug addiction:

*Mystical Type Quantum Changer:* I was lying there saying this prayer. With every breath I’d say with all sincerity in my heart. “God please help me to trust you.” I realized, I’m miserable. There is nothing I can turn to except turn to God. I can’t turn to my girlfriend because she’s not there. I can’t call counsellors or sponsors. None of that’s going to help. So with every breath for about four or five minutes I kept saying, “Dear God, please help me to trust you.” And then I had this new thought, which was not my own thought, to say this prayer: “Oh, God please bathe me in the light of your love.” Whew! All off a sudden, for about two or three seconds, I had this thing happen to me that was just out of this world. I mean it was like warm and wonderful and unmistakable, and like nothing that had ever happened to me in my life. I just got this warm, wonderful and beautiful feeling. I can’t even try in words to describe what it was like. When you take intravenous morphine, you get this sudden euphoric thing. That’s similar to what happened, but drugs pale in comparison to what this felt like. It was really unique. That was the first time I knew something was really going on. I didn’t want it to stop. I wanted it to keep happening.  

A quite similar experience is recounted by John

*John:* The principal one, I would say, would be my experience of healing. I contracted an obsessive-compulsive disorder at the age of 18. As a consequence of that I went though full blown psycho analysis twice a week with a Macquarie St. Sydney psychiatrist for several months which gave me greater self-understanding but no relief from the symptoms. The obsessive thought or system in the fore-front of my consciousness was all of my waking hours. If I have had two very dark periods in my life, that two and a half years and the period of two years between my wife’s diagnosis of cancer, and her death, and my grief afterwards — the obsessive-compulsive disorder suffering was worse.

And I eventually came to the stage where I read the book of Job in 4 days. It’s 42 chapters and that is fast reading for me. I’ve always been a slow reader. But reading it quickly, for me, I got more of a global over-view of it. And at the conclusion of it, in my prayers for the first time, I was able to offer a prayer not for healing but that if in God’s inscrutable purposes, those purposes could best be achieved through me not being healed I was prepared to live with it. As I came through the prayer of that stage of relinquishment, on my knees, in the place where I was boarding in Wollongong. There’s a

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photo of it in my oratory. As I came to that stage of relinquishment, the traumatic situation from my childhood, mercifully not a sexual one, which was responsible for the obsessive-compulsive disorder, but because of the traumatic nature of it had been repressed, flooded immediately into the forefront of my consciousness, as though a key was turned in a door and the door was locked, and I knew that I was cured instantly.

The above narratives are similar because they both describe anguished and powerless conditions having been relieved by prayer. However, only John’s story goes on to explain that, at the time of the above experience, he was a civil engineering student; but after qualifying, left engineering to become a Minister.

John: So that was my healing for which I thank God...and [it] really gave a focus to my ministry to bring the means of that healing to other sufferers.

Second Example

The following quantum changer’s auditory experience also shares similarities with an experience related by a participant within the present study:

*Mystical Type Quantum Changer* A voice came into my mind and said, “Everything will be all right; I am here to protect you, and I will be with you always.” I can’t begin to explain what I felt at that moment; I have never felt that way before. Those few simple words echoed in my head, and a blanket of warmth and love wrapped around me. As the voice was talking, I felt protected and loved. For a long time I couldn’t move and I wanted it never to end.58

*Nelly*: Well I was just going to sleep... and I... sort of went into this whirlpool tunnel. I can still see it as plain as anything. And it’s just sort of two shades — dark and light going into this whirlpool. And then this most beautiful voice — I’ve never ever heard it again. Like velvet; beautiful deep male voice and it says ‘don’t worry, you’ll be all right.’... Gave strength to go on. You were told you were going to be all right. And I have been, I suppose, just that... it was sort of a comforting thing. Like, you know, ‘Stop worrying.’

58 Miller and C’de Baca, *Quantum Change*, 78-79.
The above examples of auditory phenomena are similar, in that, they occurred when the experiencers were stressed and weary, one struggling against alcohol addiction and the other recently widowed. Again, *Quantum Change* does not provide any further information about the Mystical Type quantum changer’s auditory experience, the outcome of which can only be speculated upon. But, because Nelly was asked to sum up what the main outcome of her experience had been, she was identified as one, of only two participants within the current study, whose narratives solely report personal change — in the form of empowerment, rather than a pattern of search and change: 99

*Nelly:* Gave strength to go on. You were told you were going to be all right. And I have been, I suppose, just that... it was sort of a comforting thing. Like, you know, ‘Stop worrying.’ Now I’m married a second time — 25 years coming up.

Moreover, given that some participants report further mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences throughout *The Journey*, it may be possible that, stimulated by exploration and study, these experiences bear some resemblance to the cumulative educational type of change described by James and the ‘aha’ moments of Insight Type quantum change. However, the current study is not about classifying experiences it is about the consequences of ordinary people’s perceptions of mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences.

### 4.7: CATALYSIS, QUANTUM CHANGE AND CONVERSION

Consideration of the consequences of mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences, as described by participants within the current study, draws attention to Mahoney and

99 See Chapter 3, Section 3.4: Phase I I — The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual: The Exceptions.
Pargament’s refutation of quantum change as spiritual conversion (see above: Quantum Change as a Religious Experience). Mahoney and Pargament maintain that quantum change differs from spiritual conversion because quantum change, taken as a whole, does not demonstrate an alteration in the quantum changer’s relationship to the sacred, to the degree that the ‘the sacred becomes the center’. However, if Pargament’s definition — together with his extrapolation of this definition to explain that, within his context, the sacred applies to concepts of the Real, the divine, the supernatural, the metaphysical and the transcendent, is accepted; it becomes evident that, the search or journey, as described by the majority participants within the current study, parallels Mahoney and Pargament’s definition of spiritual conversion.

**Religious Conversion**

Mahoney and Pargament agree that although, quantum change is distinct from spiritual conversion, quantum change appears to be aligned with mystical conversion and intellectual conversion as defined within Lofland and Skonovd’s topography of religious conversion.\(^{101}\)

**Lofland and Skonovd’s Categories of Religious Conversion**

1. intellectual conversion, which involves the seeking of knowledge without significant social contact;

2. mystical conversion, which is considered by some as the prototype conversion characterized by a sudden and dramatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences;

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\(^{100}\) Mahoney and Pargament, Sacred Changes, 490.

\(^{101}\) See previous section – Section 4.6: Quantum Change, Quantum Change as a Religious Experience.
3. experimental conversion, which reflects a “show me” mentality by the religious seeker who actively tries out different groups and explores their theology, ritual, and organization for best fit;

4. affectional conversion, which emphasizes a personal experience of being loved, nurtured, and affirmed by a religious group or leader;

5. revivalism, which relies on crowd conformity to induce conversion behaviour; and

6. coercive conversion, which involves external pressure exerted on the person to convert to an alternative religion.  

Reflection on the above categories of religious conversion, then, leads to consideration that a comparison between these categories, as defined by Lofland and Skonovd, and the process of Catalysis may perhaps be worthwhile. To facilitate this comparison between Catalysis and Lofland and Sknovod’s Categories of Religious Conversion, a downsized version of the CPM is presented in the following figure, Figure 10: Comparative Diagram of the Catalytic Process Model.

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102 Lofland and Skonovd, cited in Mahoney and Pargament, Sacred Changes, 488.
Figure 10: Comparative Diagram of the Catalytic Process Model

THE CATALYTIC PROCESS MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>KEY EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>THE JOURNEY</th>
<th>FOCUSED SPIRITUALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>The Experience and First Reaction</td>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Altered States of Consciousness:**
  - Unio Mystica
  - Psychospiritual
  - Charismatic

- **Mainly affective reaction:**
  - Unio Mystica: CATAALYSIS
  - Psychospiritual: CATAALYSIS
  - Charismatic: CATAALYSIS

- **Initial Period of Action:**
  - A busy period of exploration and experimentation.
  - **Second Period of Action:**
    - A complex period of study and inquiry sometimes leading to: change in praxis, change in belief, change in occupation, the formation of focused spirituality.
  - **Third Period of Action:**
    - The breaking of form, reconstruction of the person manifesting as: self actualization, self-realization, involvement in altruistic activities leading to social and religious outcomes.

- **The osmotic effect of the original key experience penetrating society via:**
  - Persistence of the catalytic process as activities resultant from focused spiritualities directly or indirectly through their potential to influence others, continue to bring about societal change.

The above schema provides a ‘freeze-frame’ of The Catalytic Process. As noted earlier in the present chapter, the transition from one stage to another may occur suddenly or by a gradual process. Importantly, the process is a forward movement with no regression. Therefore, the stages within Phase II, although represented vertically within the above illustration, also occur as forward movements via understandings that bring about change.

**First Comparison**

Category (1) intellectual conversion, which involves the seeking of knowledge without significant social contact.

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103 Cf: Chapter Four, Recapitulation and Discussion, Section: 4.2 Catalysis and The Catalytic Process Model.
Intellectual conversion, involving as shown above, the seeking of knowledge without significant social contact but building up through a series of realizations, is apparent in Phase II, within the second stage of The Journey. The above diagram (Figure 10: Comparative Diagram of the Catalytic Process Model) maps how, as a consequence of a key experience, participants progress from the Initial Period of Action, a busy time of exploration and experimentation, to the Second Period of Action. The Second Period of Action is more focused that its predecessor and takes the form of a complex period of study and inquiry. A search that sometimes leads to acceptance of other beliefs or philosophies, changes in praxis and the formation of focused spiritualities. Examples of this second period include: Nadia who borrowed library books in order to understand her experiences and Graeme whose studies in Eastern religious traditions led to him adopting a pluralistic stance.

This is not to say that intellectual conversion ceases after the Second Period of Action. Indeed, it is likely that, with continuing insights and the development of focused spirituality, potential also exists for intellectual conversion during the Third Period of Action.

Second Comparison

Category (2) mystical conversion, which is considered by some as the prototype conversion characterized by a sudden and dramatic burst of insight, induced by visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences.

Plainly, as mapped within the above schema, Phase I: The Experience and First Reactions, in which participants reported perceptions of a mystical or psychospiritual nature, has similarities with Mystical Type quantum change and also
mirrors Lofland and Skovnød’s second category of mystical conversion. For example, Stephen’s visionary experience of a shining cross and James’ visionary, near-death experience.

**Third Comparison**

Category (3) experimental conversion, which reflects a “show me” mentality by the religious seeker who actively tries out different groups and explores their theology, ritual, and organization for best fit.

This third category, which involves the seeker exploring differing theologies and groups in order to find a preferred option, is not noted by Mahoney and Pargament as paralleling quantum change. However, it is clearly observable in the journey’s **Initial Period of Action**. Seen as a busy period of exploration and experimentation, during the **Initial Period of Action** participants reported investigations of different religious groups. For example: Zena joined a cult, Karen and Lorna joined spiritual development groups and Calum searched for a church in which to feel comfortable.

**Fourth Comparison**

Category (4) affectional conversion, which emphasizes a personal experience of being loved, nurtured, and affirmed by a religious group or leader.

Lofland and Skonovd’s fourth category of affectional conversion, is also not seen by Mahoney and Pargament as paralleling quantum change. However, given that affectional conversion places emphasis on the individual being loved and supported by a religious group or leader, perhaps Zena’s time as a member of a cult might possibly be conceived as an example of experimental conversion that led to affectional conversion. Thus, there may be a potential, during the **Initial Period of**
**Action**, for more than one type of religious conversion, as defined by Lofland and Sknonovd.

Conversion, which involves a movement from egocentricity towards a centring on the Real, is an ongoing process and it has been observed that a person may experience more than one type of conversion and at different stages of their life.\(^{104}\) Therefore, it may be possible to hypothesize that the periods within the CPM, designated as **Catalysis** (meaning to signify a happening that results in change) may perhaps also, in some cases, be seen to signify stages of conversion. For example, Zena in response to a sense of evil, the key experience, became interested in Christianity and joined a cult — the first period of action; then began a study of the Bible and as a consequence left the cult — the second period of action; attended Bible College, and began to work with remote communities — the third period of action.

The above discussion regarding religious and spiritual conversion and **Catalysis** highlights significant differences between the current study and Miller and C’de Baca’ investigation of quantum change. Firstly, the primary focus of the current study is on what happens after the perception of a mystical or psychospiritual phenomenon. Secondly, Social outcomes were sufficiently public to be validated. Thirdly, this study’s findings are mapped longitudinally. Longitudinal mapping was achievable throughout the present study because each participant’s narrative had a sense of progression, that is to say, from a past key experience and from the

consequences of that experience, to where they found themselves during the interview situation. Conversely, in Miller and C’de Baca’s investigation, the emphasis is firstly, the phenomenon itself; secondly, the feelings of those who experienced this phenomenon and thirdly — to a lesser degree, what happened afterwards.

Moreover, as noted by C’de Baca and Wilbourne, changes brought about by quantum change were not validated either by observation of quantum changers outside of an interview situation, or with people who had known the quantum changers for some years. Consequently, it is not possible to know, at this point in time, whether or not, the transformation brought about by a quantum change experience involved a shift in the quantum changer’s relationship to the sacred, to the extent that the sacred became the centre.

4.8: THE ADDED CONTRIBUTION THAT THE CPM MAKES TO EXISTING MODELS

The previous sections have considered the following three models of human response to the mystical in the light of the model derived from the current study’s findings:

- The first model — Scholem’s Stage Theory of religion, presents an historical overview of a distinct national and religious response to the mystical. It is an academic study of Jewish history that presents the concept that Jewish

105 C’de Baca and Wilbourne, 539.
mystics, through their experiences, have played, and continue to play, a vital role in effecting, political, social and cultural change.

- The second model — Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality, presents a guide for Christian spirituality that envisages spirituality and religion as being complementary. Within this model, the consequence of attending to the mystical is seen as the beginning of a cyclic journey that, through making the right choices, ultimately has a capacity to bring about personal, social and even worldwide change.106

- The third model — Miller and C’dé Baca’s Theory of Quantum Change, presents the findings from a psychological study of sudden change. Miller and C’dé Baca posit that the effects of quantum change can be seen in the lives of saints, spiritual leader, social reformers and philosophers. A landscape of quantum change is schematized and attention is drawn to two types of sudden change: Insight Type quantum change, and Mystical Type quantum change, which represent the ends of a continuum. With the exception of a few examples, the outcome of either type of change is seen as being positive to the degree that Miller, in considering quantum change from the viewpoint of humanistic psychology, suggests that quantum change by leading to a higher level of human development, parallels Maslow’s concept of peak experiences, accelerates the process of self-actualization and may possibly be conceived as an evolution in consciousness.107


107 Miller *The Phenomenon of Quantum Change*, 458-459; see also, Miller and C’dé Baca, *Quantum Change*, 139-140.
One major and insurmountable difference between first two models and the CPM, is that the CPM is based on findings derived from an empiric study. A second but none the less important difference is that the results of this study relate to twenty-first century, extant Australians of diverse faiths. Therefore, in some aspects, a closer relationship, in terms of method and approach, exists between the current study of human response to the mystical and the study of quantum change, than exists between the current study and the other two examined models. Firstly, as is the case with the current study, the findings from which the existence of quantum change is confirmed and its subsequent landscape mapped, originate from an empirical study which involved living people. Secondly, although Miller and C’de Baca’s participants reside in the United States of America, as is the case with the current investigation, their narratives reveal that their religious affiliations are various and, significantly, that the majority of participants also interpret their experience as a sacred encounter.

The current study involved conducting one-to-one interviews with individuals for whom experience of certain phenomena, whether kataphatic or apophatic, had given rise to religious feeling. It is unlikely that any of those interviewed would describe themselves as being a mystic or even as an ‘outstanding sensitive’.\(^{108}\) However, analysis of the narratives derived from these interviews and, in some instances, factual verification of findings via public media sources and visits to particular

\(^{108}\) The term ‘outstanding sensitives’ is used by Hick to describe those who experience a variety of mystical phenomena. Hick, *An Interpretation Of Religion*, 166-169.
venues, does appear to support the premise of human and social transformation through experience of the Real.109

Therefore, despite differences, an important connection between the CPM, the first two models and (to a less emphasised degree) the study of quantum change, is all four models propose that certain individuals, who have personal experience of a mystical nature, may well have a capacity to effect tangible social and religious outcomes. As noted earlier in the present study, this is not a new idea.110 Woods, for example, writes that a number of scholars, including, Underhill, Bergson and Hocking have drawn attention to ‘the process by which social, values, customs beliefs and behaviours are altered by the mystic’s particular self-transformation.’111

A general connection between mystical experience and religious, cultural and social outcomes has also been speculated upon by Berger112 and Poloma;113 but, again, as in the studies by Scholem; Ranson; and Miller and C’dé Baca,114 the brush strokes are broad. Evidently, there is a need for further study about the role of subjective

109 See for example, Meg Maxwell and Verna Tschudin (eds.), Seeing the Invisible: Modern Religious and Other Transcendent Experiences (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Centre, 1996); Almond, Mystical Experience and Religious Doctrine; Hick, Mystical Experience As Cognition.

110 Cf: Chapter One, Section 1.3: Rationale for the Current Study.

111 Woods, Understanding Mysticism, 5.

112 Berger, A Rumour of Angels.


114 Miller and C’dé Baca, Quantum Change; Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change; C’dé Baca and Wilbourne, Quantum Change Ten Years Later.
religious experiences in determining not only social outcomes but also the future of organized religion.\textsuperscript{115}

4.9: FURTHER COMMENTS

I: The Catalytic Process

During analysis of the participants’ narratives, in addition to the finding of a range of affective responses and tangible outcomes within the sub-core categories, the first inescapable and unanticipated discovery that came to light was that of transformative change. Within certain individuals the nature of the change, from inward-looking, subjective spirituality to more outward-looking spiritualities that manifested as self-actualization, self-realization and involvement in altruistic activities, was indicative of a rise in consciousness. This process of change was given the name of \textit{Catalysis} and mapped as the \textit{Catalytic Process Model} (CPM).

If the development of focused spirituality, ultimately manifesting as self-actualization or self-realization, is considered as process of personal growth and interpreted as rise in consciousness, then, the process of \textit{Catalysis} becomes reflective not only of a spiritual journey but also of a process that may perhaps lend support to Hardy’s argument that natural selection and the spiritual aspect of humanity are not mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{116} Hence, the CPM might possibly also be seen as providing support for other hypothesises of what Huxley refers to as ‘progressive psychosocial

\textsuperscript{115} Poloma, The Sociological Context of Religious Experience, 179. See also, Berger The Desecularization of the World.

\textsuperscript{116} Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 15.
‘evolution’. All the more so, since the persistence of Catalysis, unlike other proposed hypotheses, is arguably demonstrable as activities resultant from focused spiritualities directly or indirectly, through their potential to influence others, continue to bring about societal change.

II: Comparability of the CPM and the Pastoral Cycle

A second unanticipated finding that emerged, not from analysis of the survey findings, but during the discussion that compared the CPM with other theoretical models mapping human response to the mystical, was the existence of certain similarities between the CPM and the Pastoral Cycle. The congruency of the first and second phases of the CPM, the Pastoral Cycle and possibly other theoretical models for theological reflection and Christian formation was unforeseen.

III: Complementary Aspects of the Current Study and Quantum Change

(1) Consideration of quantum change as a religious experience, as part of a comparison between Miller and C’de Baca’s study of quantum change and the current study of human response to the mystical, drew attention to the research design challenges that precluded evidence either for or against quantum change as a form of spiritual conversion. However, in putting forward the hypothesis of Catalysis and in mapping it as a social process, the current study progresses the investigation of human response to experiences perceived to be of a mystical nature;


118 Cf: Hardy in Chapter 1, Section 1.2: Consideration of Mystical Phenomena in the Twentieth Century and Onwards, on the possible role of memes in human development. Also see above, Section 4.3: Scholem’s Stage Theory of Religion, on the societal role of mystical ideas; Miller, The Phenomenon of Quantum Change, 459, here Miller reflects ‘I sometimes wonder if what we observed as quantum change is an evolution in consciousness that all of are meant to undergo as the human race matures.’
and in doing so gives rise to suggestion for the design of another empirical study of quantum change. An empirical study that uses measures of quantum change which include spiritual change explicitly. Hence, in its proposal and mapping of a *Catalytic Process*, the current study may be said to complement the study of quantum change.

(2) Scrutiny of Mahoney and Pargament’s argument that, whilst quantum change might parallel some definitions of religious conversion it could not be seen to equate with Pargament’s definition of spiritual conversion, facilitated a comparison with other models of conversion and the CPM. These comparisons, then, gave rise to the possibility that sections designated within the CPM as *Catalysis* (to denote change) might also be considered as markers or milestones of conversions that transpire as the journey progresses. This unlooked for premise, adds a further dimension to the current study.

The significance of the above unanticipated findings will be returned to in the following chapter which presents the study’s conclusions and implications.
Chapter Five
CONCLUSION

Treating these [experiences] as purely subjective phenomena, without regard to the question of their “truth”, we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance to class them amongst the most important biological functions in mankind. (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*)

5.1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents the findings from an empirical study that confirms people experience mystic phenomena. It argues that the effect of these experiences is the generation of a transforming *Catalytic Process* that directly and indirectly has a potentiality to bring about socio-religious outcomes.

5.2: WHAT HAS BEEN SAID

Chapter One – Setting the Scene

The first chapter of the dissertation provided a rationale for the current study. It advised that the purpose of this study was to explore the effects of mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences, as reported by individuals who perceived that they had personally experienced such phenomena. Furthermore, that in undertaking this exploration, the study also aimed not only to progress earlier studies of such experiences but to offer, in some way, a response to Hardy’s call to provide ‘*objective* evidence in the form of *written* records of these subjective spiritual feelings and their effects on the lives of the people concerned.’¹

¹ Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 4.
Having established its purpose, the study, then, moved to undertake a preliminary reconnaissance or pre-view of studies that, from the twentieth century and onwards, have conducted purposeful examinations of mystical phenomena. The function of this preliminary exploration of earlier studies was to facilitate a backdrop against which the current study could be situated. This was a necessary undertaking since, as discussed previously, in accord with the practices of constructivist grounded theory, the literature review, does not guide or direct the emergent theory. It is conducted after conceptual analysis of data has been completed, at which point in time, it becomes a basis for comparison and contrast of the evolved theory with other theories found in the literature.

The above reconnaissance of earlier studies indicated that substantiative grounds have been put forward for a belief in the actuality of mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences. However, studies relating to the concomitant effects and consequences of these subjective experiences have been primarily theoretical or biographical and, have in the main, focused on the lives of saints or spiritual giants. These salient points validated the need for the current study and assisted in refining the survey question.

**Chapter 2 – Research Procedures**

Chapter Two proposed the appropriateness of adopting a phenomenological approach towards the study, that is to say, an approach in which the researcher

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2 Cf: *Chapter Two, Section: 2.2: Research Methodology.*

identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the participants.⁴ Research procedures were detailed and reasons given for combining a phenomenological methodology that sought to elicit information about the participants’ experiences by asking questions, which would produce tangible responses,³ with grounded theory — an inductive methodology that supports rigorous investigation of subject matter relatively unknown to the researcher.⁶

**Chapter 3 – Research Findings**

Chapter Three permitted each participant to narrate their biographical experiences as a way of taking the reader into their lifeworld. These narratives were allowed to speak for themselves, often requiring little explication,⁷ and treated in accordance with the principles of grounded theory.

Many of the phenomena described by the participants, such as, the out-of-body experience, the appearance of light, visions and auditions, were comparable with similar transcendental experiences described in earlier studies of spiritual and religious phenomena.⁸ These phenomena have been shown to exist across cultures and are generally interpreted within the context of the experiencer’s belief system

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⁵ Giorgi, *Phenomenology and Psychological Research*.


⁷ Hycner, Some Guidelines For The Phenomenological Analysis Of Interview Data, 17. Here Hycner clarifies that explication implies ‘investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole’ as opposed to ‘analysis’ which often means ‘a breaking into parts’ and can lead to a failure in perception of the complete phenomenon.

and culture.\footnote{See for example: Dean Sheils, ‘A Cross Cultural Survey of Beliefs in Out of Body Experiences’ \emph{Journal of the Society for Psychical Research}, Vol. 49, 609-741. See also, Hick, \emph{An Interpretation of Religion}, 166, here Hick writes ‘it is invariably a Catholic Christian who sees a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary and a Vaishnavite Hindu who sees a vision of Krishna.’} In the current study, generally, the major choice of interpretation was spiritual and reflected individual beliefs. Initiation of action as a consequence of the experiential was central to the study’s findings. The ongoing theme, which emerged from all narratives as a process of forward movement, energy and change, was given the name of \emph{Catalysis}. Discovery of this core category completed analysis of the data and opened the way for commencement of the literature review in the following chapter.

**Chapter 4 – Recapitulation and Discussion**

In Chapter Four — the literature review, this process of movement, energy and change was summarized and presented in diagrammatic form as the \emph{Catalytic Process Model} or CPM (Figure 4). As noted previously,\footnote{Cf: \emph{Chapter Three, Section 3.4: Phase II — The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual}} a number of participants when describing activities and thought processes, stimulated by their initial key experience in Phase I, perceived themselves to be undertaking a spiritual journey as delineated in Phase II and moving forward into Phase III.

A less detailed schema of the CPM, which maps the gradually merging stages of \emph{Catalysis}, is show on the following page in Figure 11: The Merging Stages of Catalysis.
Figure 11: The Merging Stages of *Catalysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Three Primary Stages</th>
<th>Time Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key Experience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Experience and first Reactions</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mainly an emotive period)</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase II</strong></td>
<td>The Journey*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Experience as a Catalyst for the Individual</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a complex period gradually leading to focused spirituality and altruism that produced tangible outcomes)</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III</strong></td>
<td>The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Individual as a Potential Catalyst for Society</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(reverberation of the experience through the person and into society with the potential to bring about societal change)</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence of the catalytic process via osmosis</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As discussed in Chapter 3 and detailed in Figure 4: The Journey, Phase II comprises three periods of personal development.

The CPM schema was, then, considered in the light of the following three models of human response to mystical phenomena:

- Gershom Scholem’s Stage Theory of Religion;
- David Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality; and
- William R. Miller and Janet C’de Baca’s Theory of Quantum Change.
Unlike the current study, neither Scholem nor Ranson’s studies are empirical. Nevertheless, a common ground between Scholem and Ranson’s hypotheses and the current study’s empirical findings is the concept that certain individuals, as a consequence of the transforming power of mystical experience, have a potential to become change agents within society.

A closer relationship, in terms of method and approach, was found to exist between the current study and Miller and C’de Baca’s empirical study of Quantum Change. A study, in which the majority of participants, irrespective of their quantum change experience having been classified as Insight Type quantum change or Mystical Type quantum change, reported a perception of being in the presence of some ‘holy Other’.\(^\text{11}\)

Miller and C’de Baca, as a part of their hypothesis, also propose that certain individuals who experience quantum change may, through an acceleration of the process of self-actualization, have a capacity to effect religious and social outcomes.\(^\text{12}\) It is this connection between the concept of transforming change and its possibly tangible effects that links Miller and C’de Baca’s study of cognitive and behavioural change not only to the current study, but also to Ranson and Scholem’s models of human response to the mystical. However, since Scholem and Ranson’s studies are theoretical and Miller and C’de Baca’s empirical study did not seek to confirm outcomes, only the current study has a capacity able to offer evidence in support of socio-religious outcomes.

\(^{11}\) Miller and C’de Baca, *Quantum Change* 173.

5.3: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The CPM schema maps a biographical process, the length of which varies from person to person — dependent upon a number of variables, not least of these being: the pressure of modern living that conspires to deter the possibility of engagement with the Real; individual formation; and access to suitable support. For example, some participants reported they had experienced visionary and auditory experiences since childhood without realising that these experiences were at all unusual. Other participants confided that, upon reflection and subsequent to their key experience, realization and understanding of earlier experiences emerged. The failure of individuals to recognize experience that involves psychospiritual phenomena is noted in other studies and notably by Teresa of Avila who explains that the rationale for her detailed cataloguing of sensory and non-sensory experiences is hopefully to prevent others:

‘...to whom the Lord gives these experiences from feeling surprised and thinking them impossible as I used to.’

Examination of the narratives also revealed that for some individuals, the journey from a key experience towards focused spirituality could be troublesome, confusing


and occasionally fearful. Participants retained vivid recollection, both positive and negative, of specific experiences. For example: Denyse retained feelings of distress regarding her childhood dream/vision of her mother dying; Zena reported that recollection of Varanasi summons up the actual sense of oppression that she experienced there and Karen (see Appendix F) recollected that as a consequence of her key experience, she remained traumatized for a week. Counselling was not always readily available and in some cases quite unhelpful. The pastoral role that was available to the participants appeared to be instructional rather than responsive so that participants were left to manage spiritual crises as best they could.

Although no one, who took part in the current study reported psychospiritual phenomena as fearful or disturbing as those described by Julian of Norwich or Maurice Rawlings, spiritual crises are not uncommon and sometimes have been misdiagnosed as mental illness. Consequently, many people are reluctant to share details of any experience that might be classified as being of a mystical or psychospiritual nature. This reticence on the subject of transcendental experiences is problematic since, as noted by Mahoney and Pargament, social communication

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16 Cf: Chapter 3, Section 3.3: Phase I — The Experience and First Reactions.


18 Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death’s Door* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979). In this work Rawlings, a specialist in cardiovascular diseases, reports on both negative and positive near-death experiences as related by his patients.


about spiritual conversion and about quantum change appears to be an important factor in the validation and facilitation of these experiences.²¹

According to Capra, research by humanistic and transpersonal psychologists has shown that spontaneous occurrence of nonordinary experiences, similar to those induced by meditation and well known to mystics, is much higher than suspected in conventional psychiatry.²² Significantly, it has been argued by psychologists and others that people who are able to successfully assimilate such experiences within their lebensweld are not generally regarded as being mentally ill.²³ Laing, for example, with regard to the ability of individuals to integrate nonordinary experiences, remarks:

Mystics and schizophrenics find themselves in the same ocean but the mystics swim, whereas the schizophrenics drown.²⁴

Clearly, harmonious integration of such experiences is a decisive factor in the mental well-being of their perceivers. Therefore, there appears to be a need for counsellors, psychologists, life coaches and all manner of spiritual advisors, in each of their own fields, to engage in responsive listening and to demonstrate a deeper understanding of spiritual growth and development when working with individuals whose


experiences fall outside of the generally accepted medical, materialistic, and religious paradigms.

LaPierre writes that pastoral supervisors are rarely ‘taught about the complex psychological and spiritual consequences than often result from trauma sufficient to cause PSTD [post-traumatic stress disorder].’25 Thus, visions which may accompany PSTD are often treated pharmaceutically and possible injury caused to self by such psychic distress is ignored.26 With these problems in mind, attention is drawn to the congruency between Phases I and II of the CPM and the four stages of spiritual unfolding, as envisaged by Ranson in his Cycle of Spirituality (see Chapter 4, Figure 5).

The strength of Ranson’s Cycle of Spirituality and similar methodologies for theological reflection and Christian formation27 is that they suggest techniques for problem solving via a process of reflection.28 The strength of Miller and C’de Baca’s study of quantum change lies in its confirmation of transformational change, its


26 Wilson, The Broken Spirit. See, also, for example ‘Shell Shocked,’ presented on the Australian, SBS program Insight, 23 October 2012. In this episode Australian servicemen described experiences of PTSD that involved visionary experiences. One serving Officer vividly detailed how (after returning home) whilst driving his car, he looked into his rear-view mirror and saw a person whom he had shot at close range sitting in the back seat of the car. The program acknowledged the stigma of mental illness and noted that since the Afghanistan conflict PTSD is more prevalent than ever before.

27 As discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.5: The Pastoral Cycle.

28 Killen and De Beer, The Art Of Theological Reflection, viii-x, Here Killen and De Beer explain that reflection is: ‘the act of deliberately slowing down our habitual processes of interpreting our lives to take a closer look at the experience and at our frameworks of interpretation for enquiry into experiences.’
cognitive therapeutic approach, and the application of measures. The strength of the CPM lies in its ability to chart a spiritual journey and to offer empirical evidence of tangible outcomes. Thoughtful consideration of all of the above strengths, together with the likelihood that that the CPM may represent a normal progression of spiritual development, offers a starting point for the development of techniques that may facilitate greater understanding of spiritual journeying and have implications for Ministry, Christian formation and cognitive psychotherapy.

Furthermore, if it is assumed that the same Spirit is indwelling in everyone and spiritual experiences, whether they take the form of some variety of mystical phenomenon or some other experience that is meaningful to the individual concerned, all arise from the same ground; it becomes clear that use of such techniques need not be confined to the churched but may also be of assistance to anyone who finds themselves at a loss when experiencing the Spirit in whatever way that experience is manifested.

5.4: FUTURE RESEARCH

This investigation has provided insight into the spiritual life of ordinary people whose experiences may not reflect either the lives of medieval contemplatives or the ‘postmodern world of flux and reflexivity’ as created by intellectuals. Although

29 Keith Rowe, Living with the Neighbour who is Different, Christian faith in a multi religious world, extract from a paper presented at the Ninth Assembly of the Uniting Church, Adelaide, (Collingwood, Australia: Uniting Education, 2002), 44. Here Rowe writes: ‘The Spirit is the presence of God active in every area of life and in every person. No part of creation, no people, no person is without the presence of the Spirit. See also, Wilber, Integral Spirituality and Rahner, Experiencing the Spirit.

theoretical saturation was achieved within the current study,\textsuperscript{31} without further investigation it is not possible to say that these findings are applicable to anyone other than those who took part in the research project. Nevertheless, the current study provides a starting point for validation and further research into contemporary experience of mystical phenomena. Possible suggestions for further research are shown below.

- A preponderance of seniors and mature adults amongst participants provides opportunities for further investigation of the age issue and other unconsidered factors, such as gender, education or social status that might influence spiritual development.

- Given that the sample was entirely composed of Australians descended from Anglo-Celtic or European stock and first generation migrants from that gene pool, potential also exists for replication of the survey using other social and cultural groups.

- Comparisons between the above or similar surveys provides opportunity for the validation or otherwise of \textit{Catalysis} as a spiritual and evolutionary process.

- Consideration of the complementary aspects of the current empirical study and Miller and C’de Baca’s empirical study of quantum change provides opportunity for investigating whether or not the \textit{Catalytic Process Model} might usefully be

\textsuperscript{31} In accordance with the principles of grounded theory, theoretical saturation is said to have been achieved when the interview process ceases to add anything to the researcher’s emerging concept or concepts.
constructed for inclusion in a further study of quantum change or similar studies that make use of psychological measures.

- Potential also exists for inclusion of psychological measures in a replication of the current study.

- An investigation of levels of personal development that are linked to the stages of progression delineated within the Catalytic Process Model may be of practical benefit to spiritual directors and others in the helping professions.

5.5: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study has confirmed the enduring role of mystical phenomena in human experience, in that, descriptions of the various forms of mystical phenomena, as related by the participants, although possibly differing only in minutiae, are confirmed by the annals of fourteenth century Rhenish nuns\(^\text{32}\) and by numerous contemporary studies.\(^\text{33}\) Historically, the common reaction to these experiences has been to assume the ‘impact of the presence of the Real upon the mystic.’\(^\text{34}\)

Similarly, in the present study and as reflected by the participants’ narratives, the most common, albeit not always immediate, reaction has been to attribute these experiences to the influence of the Real. The effects of this assumption, mediated by


\(^{33}\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature Of Man*; Hay, *Religious Experience Amongst a Group of Postgraduate Students*.

\(^{34}\) Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 167.
the ontology and capabilities of the individual, were seen as a relationship with the Real; engagement in spiritual/religious praxis and a movement within the individual from subjective spirituality towards a focused spirituality that ultimately had the potential to bring about tangible outcomes. This progression, within the participants’ life stories, was given the name Catalysis. The continuity of the catalytic process, as mapped by the CPM, offers a possible template for authentication of human response to the mystical as a spiritual and transformational process. The postulation of Catalysis appears to challenge the argument that, in general, modern society is composed of secular, self-absorbed ‘tourists’ who contribute nothing of worth to society. It may also provide support for the contra argument that the world today is actually as religious as ever — if not more so.

Significantly, and as noted previously, studies relating to the role played by mystical experience; and its capacity to bring about personal and social change have to date been mainly theoretical and, in general, have not considered the experiences of ordinary people. Hence, the current empirical study, which demonstrates that ordinary people are changed by mystical experience in ways that have personal and societal consequences, has addressed a knowledge gap.


36 Berger, The Desecularization of the World; Houtman and Aupers, The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition.

37 Cf: Chapter One, Section 1.3: Rationale for the Current Study.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY

INVESTIGATION INTO THE ROLE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF MYSTICAL AND OR PSYCHIC PHENOMENA IN CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Signification of Consent:

Participant No: 1, having read and understood the Information Letter and Consent Form do you agree to participate in this research project?

Questions:

1. First of all, how would you describe your experience?

2. What is your faith or religion?

3. Which of the following describes your participation in any form of organized worship e.g. church attendance?

   Regularly  Sometimes  Not at all

4. How has your experience/s affected the way you think about religion, spirituality or the paranormal?

5. Can you briefly sum up what the main outcome of the experience has been for you?

6. Other details:

   Age: Under 25 (young adult)  26-59 (mature adult)  60+ (senior)

   Gender:  M  □  F  □

   Occupation:

Closure

Thank you very much; you’ve given me a lot of useful material. I’ll be preparing a summary of the report’s findings when all the data has been collected. If you’d like a copy, just send your name and address to Murdoch inside this pre-paid envelope. It may take some time but you will definitely receive a report. Thank you, it’s been really great talking to you.
APPENDIX B

Letter of Information

My name is Emma Nattress, I am a PhD candidate at Murdoch University, under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Ault. Dr Ault and I invite you to participate in a research study looking at the way in which personal experiences of mystical and or psychic phenomena may possibly bring about attitudinal and lifestyle change.

Nature and Purpose of the Study
It is commonly supposed that altered states of consciousness involving experiences of mystical and psychic phenomena are rare occurrences. However, research has shown that this is not so. Some of the phenomena reported by experiencers are: being aware of an unseen presence; the sensation of being touched by something or someone invisible; seeing a vision; hearing a voice; finding oneself outside of one’s body.

If you have had an experience which you consider to have been of a mystical and or psychic/supernormal nature and have not experienced any personal trauma during the last 18 months, we would really appreciate hearing about your experience.

What the Study will Involve
Assisting with this study means agreeing to be interviewed about your experience. A copy of the interview’s questions is attached for your information. As you can see it is quite brief and the interview session should take approximately 45 minutes. The interview can be either audio recorded or notes simply taken, in either case, consent is anonymous and verbal. Please read the Consent Form and Interview Questions.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. All information is treated as confidential and no names or other details that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be destroyed.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the procedure you will be asked to undergo. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

Benefits of the Study
It is possible that there may be no direct benefit to you from participation in this study. However, a summary of the report’s findings, which may be of some interest to you, will be available when all the data has been collated. If, after completing the interview, you would like to receive a copy of the report, you will be provided with 2 pre-paid–envelopes. To retain your anonymity, simply write your name and address on the blank envelope and enclose it in the second envelope which is addressed to Murdoch University.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Emma Nattress on mbl. [--] or my supervisor, Dr Nancy Ault on ph. 9360 2602.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au

You can expect to receive feedback in 10-12 months.

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 2008/045)
APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Experience and Belief: An investigation into the role of mystical and or psychic phenomena in contemporary spirituality and religious practice.

Participant

I have read the participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded/notes taken (please indicate) as part of this research. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw at any time without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Investigator

I have fully explained to ___________________________ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

__________________________________  ______________________
Signature                         Date

__________________________________  ______________________
Print Name                        Position
APPENDIX D

Website Addresses Provided by Participants

- The Healing Ministry St Andrews Cathedral & The Healing Ministry Centre
  Golden Grove: [www.healingministriesydney.org](http://www.healingministriesydney.org)

- Spiritualist National Union (SNU): [www.snu.org/home](http://www.snu.org/home)

- Western Australian Branch of Hearing Voices Network Australia (HVNA): [www.rfwa.org.au](http://www.rfwa.org.au)

- Weeping Madonna: [www.weepingmadonna.org](http://www.weepingmadonna.org)
APPENDIX E

STEVEN

When I...I had felt a calling to train for the ordained ministry for many years but I kept putting it off. Because I knew that during the three or four years I’d be studying I would have no income. And I had a family to feed — a wife and three children. I didn’t want their lives to be affected by what I was doing. But in the end I decided or someone decided this was something I had to do. So I made a decision to do it and resigned from my job which was a Ranger in the National Parks in Tasmania — a very, very, good job [interesting?] mmm.

The day I resigned I took my resignation into Head Office in Hobart. And I spent the day wandering around the office just telling people what I had done and saying goodbye to them. I only gave a weeks’ notice and everyone, without exception, told me what an idiot I was. So I was feeling pretty down and in my mind was questioning whether I had made the right decision. When I got home that afternoon as I drove into the National Park or the Historic site where I was working I closed the gate as I always do and every night I walk back, this was a routine, to close the gate and look back up onto the hill to where the house was to see if my 4 year old daughter was coming down the hill to meet me. She always did that and steered the car round back the hill.

This night as I looked up at the hill, to see where she was coming, I saw an illuminated cross in the sky. It wasn’t just a cross it was flashing and all the colours of the rainbow and I didn’t take a lot of notice in the first instance. I thought wow! What was that? Sort of thing. And then it came back again but when it came back a second time it spoke. And there was a voice which said ‘Steven’, I’ll look after you.’ So all these doubts I had diminished at that point. When I got home and told my wife about it and she said ‘Gosh, I wish I’d seen it.’ But she didn’t have to see it because she was ok about it all. But I was giving up a lot so I needed that reassurance. So that is basically my experience.

It really deepened it and well I suppose changed it too because now I knew what I’m called to do is what I have to do in life and that what I do is authentic because that sealed the deal, if you like, for me. I know the scriptures teach us that we do our work by faith but I was given that experience which confirmed really what I was doing was the right thing to do. I don’t think everybody has that experience but in my case because I needed it. It was provided for me.

Really has affirmed my faith in God and equipped me, better equipped me, for the work I do today. I mean a lot of what I do is in faith but I’ve had this experience which confirmed and affirmed what I’m doing. I think for me, I know what I’m doing is authentic. It’s not just pie in the sky stuff. Others may think that but for me it’s real. I know I wasn’t dreaming.
How would I describe it? I would say it was mostly of a spiritual nature. And I suppose you would also call them mystical. [I see you’ve brought some notes along. Does that describe some of your experiences?] Yes, it is. Yes, very vaguely. [Is there something you’d like to talk through with me?] Yes. The whole lot actually! I’ve had experiences since when I was, well quite young. [By young do you mean as a child?] Yes... Would you like me to tell you about what happened when I was a child? [Anything] I don’t really remember a lot from when I was a child. I was always aware there was somebody around, you know. I can remember I used to lie in bed and I must have been quite young at the time, and I can remember being able to make the wall come to me, as if it was right to my eyes. Looking back, or on reflecting back [At the wall paper this was?] Yeah. It was as if I was like moving towards the wall; and then the wall would end up right in front of my eyes. I was probably floating around. But obviously, as a kid, I know I used to sort of play with it a bit. But that’s as far as I can remember, ok? As, I say I was always aware that there was always somebody around...but that’s about it. That’s as far as I can tell you.

I used to go to Sunday school and church and what have you but my parents, but my parents that wasn’t something that they, what’s the word I’m looking for? Got it written down here {looks at notes} but my parents, they didn’t encourage it. In fact my father was completely against religion of all types. He didn’t believe in a god. He didn’t believe in anything, you know, anything. My Mum was quiet. She never, ever talked about anything to do with religion until I decided to get married. And then I wanted to get married in the Registrar’s, you know and a quite simple wedding. But my Mum said, ‘It’s got to be in the church.’ you know and all this kind of thing. So I ended up getting married in the church.

So, do you want me to carry on from there or do you want me to read my notes that I put down this morning? [Whatever you feel most comfortable with?] Ok. What I mean is do you want me to answer these questions first and then go on? [Can do.]

Well, yes, I definitely know now there is a God. I’ve always believed that there’s something. Note: ‘I have always believed in a Higher Being. Due to profound experiences over the last few years, I am now certain there is a God — I have seen Jesus! I was blown away. Due to these experiences and things I am learning — after going on the spiritual path — I believe ANYTHING is possible. I only talk of these things to’ like-minded people’.”

[The Outcome?] That’s 5. I’ll give you the answer to that and this what I wrote this morning down before I came: ‘I still tend to gossip. And I know that I shouldn’t as we are not here to judge. But I believe I am becoming a better person. I believe we are passing through this time as a learning experience to go on to bigger and better things. And I feel special!!!? I actually do feel special. I also now do Reiki to share my gift.’
I try not to be horrible. I actually do feel special since having these experiences more and more. And I’ve started to develop now. I’ve been to a Reiki course and I do healing. I don’t do it on a regular basis but I have been involved with a lady who does Reiki for cancer patients [And do you help with the healing?] Yes. I’ve been to, I think it’s up to 4 of them now, yeah. They get the patients coming and carers that look after children and people like that. People who are really needing sort of a bit of a boost.

[Occupation?] Retired: Much to my husband’s regret. He’d like me to get a job. But what can you do? Haven’t got the time! {laughs} [Right. Tell me about your experiences now.]

Right. I’ll start from here {speaks but sometimes refers to notes} and this is just some of the main things. To be honest there are a lot of things that are still going on all the time. Anyway, I’ve started to tell you about when I was a child I was able to make the bedroom wall come right up to my eyes. As I say, on reflection, I was actually going around the room.

When I was approximately 14, I thought I was younger than that but thinking about it I must have been about 14. I woke up one night and I was lying in bed. It was dark, there was no electric light or anything in the bedroom and as I woke up, I looked at the bottom of my bed and there was my Nan standing there. And she’d actually died 3 or 4 years before. And she was standing there as real as I could tell. And the room was icy cold. I don’t know why. But as well, as I can remember, it the room was icy cold and she was standing there in this light like sparkles. Do you know, like kid’s sparklets? [Yes] Like she had sparklets all around her. Well I just looked and I just wanted to play with them, you know put them over my head.

Now I don’t know if I discussed that with my Mum and Dad the next day. But it was sometime after that, after a time, I suppose, that I felt frightened. I don’t know why I felt frightened. But anyway, that was when I was roughly about 14 and...I don’t really think anything happened to me between then and when I got into my twenties. But not than I can remember anyway.

Then when I was about 23 I must have been about 22 or 23. We lived in {overseas country}. We lived in {name of city} for 7 years. And a friend of ours had this big old house. It was just by the what do you me call it? The cricket ground. Anyway I’m standing there in this room and there’s a gang of us, because we’re all in our early twenties. We’d all immigrated to {overseas country} and {female name}, whose house it was, was British and her {husband’s name} was {nationality}. And I’m standing there and outside the house they had a stoop, you know, like a veranda [Yes, Dutch word?] Yeah and I looked and there was this group of people standing there as if they were having — as if they were part of the BBQ. But they weren’t because they were outside. They were just outside. But they had these different clothes on, you know, like 100 years ago — like old fashioned clothes. And I looked away and as I looked back — they’d gone, just vanished. And I remember saying to {friend’s name} what I’d just seen and she said, ‘Whatever you’ve seen, don’t tell {name of person}, because he won’t come in this house. There’s all sorts of things
like that happening but whatever you do, don’t tell {name of person}.’ So I didn’t and that was quite a funny experience that I went through.

But all these things, you tend to forget about. It’s only when I trying to think about other things. Right, it was 22 February 2007, and I’m taking this out of context really

So that was one thing. Where am I going from there? Got that much {checks notes}. Ok. Right, in 2005, I think its 2005 {name of husband} had gone out to play darts and came back in about 10 o’clockish. And I’d been in bed some time, so he came back into the bedroom, so I’m propped up and he said I’m just going to watch a film or something on television. And I said “Oh, ok.” And I just left the lamp on, and probably I had a little bit of a read, then I put the pillows to one side and lay down. But the lamp was still on and I fell asleep. Anyway, the next thing, I woke up very abruptly. Now I don’t know whether it was because {name of husband} had come down the hall and gone to the toilet. Our bedroom door was there {gestures} and the toilet door was there and he’d gone in the bathroom. So I don’t know whether it was him that woke me up, but as I woke up I saw this thing above me about a foot above me. Right? And I could see it. It all happened in a couple of seconds. [What sort of thing?] I’ve since been told it was probably me — it was me. So, anyway, as I’m lying in the bed, I’m lying well — this body was about there {gestures} and as I looked down, I looked down, I could see feet! Sounds as though it lasted for ages but it was only a couple of seconds.

Anyway, you know when you see hair, like in water, in water and it’s floating around? Well that’s what I saw. I didn’t see a face. I just saw this hair. And thinking about it, it was the same colour as my hair. Well, I just got such a shock I screamed. I screamed and this thing Whoosh! It jumped back — well, into me {name of husband} run in from the bathroom and I was as white as a sheet and shaking. I was like that for about half an hour. I was in a terrible state. And at the time, I thought that it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me in my life because I got such a shock.

I’m more aware now. If it happened to me now I would sit and look. I mean I’ve seen ghosts, you know. And like when I saw my Nana, I sort of looked away; when I saw those people, I looked away; but if it happened to me again, and I wish I really wish it would. You see, things have happened in dreams where I’ve never, or since, I’ve been aware, I’ve never actually seen any ghosts. Do you know what I mean? [Yes] And I’m so looking forward to it {laughter}. I wanna! I’m gonna, confront it now!...Because they’re there for a reason, you know.

So, anyway, this thing jumped into me and I think probably for about a week I was really traumatised. I suppose that’s the only way I can explain it. I was shocked! As I say it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me in my life, at that stage. I spoke to somebody about it — Oh... several months later and they seemed to think that it was myself and I said well I didn’t see my face and the lady I went to, she said, ‘Perhaps you weren’t meant to.’ Because I don’t know, you know. Do you see yourself? I’ve had dreams where I’ve seen myself in my dreams.. yeah, yeah {thoughtfully}. 

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Oh, Oh. \{studies notes\} So, anyway, so that’s what happened to me. And I think it seemed like from then that was the start of my really being interested because it...something so profound that had happened \{very dramatic\}. It was, well I was that shocked and as I say I told my husband about it and everything and he was concerned because I was in such a state [How old were you then?] 2005...I was 55. As I say, \{name of husband\} was concerned and I said to him “If I had told you about it tomorrow, you wouldn’t have believed me, would you?” And he said “No, but” he said, “I actually saw.” Saw me, you know, actually shaking and what happened.

There are a lot of things that sort of happened, like, you know, I’ve always been aware of someone whether like looking after me or whatever. I don’t know. But I do get a very strong feeling that there’s somebody here. I feel in the house that we’re living in now. I think there’s something in that house. I’m not frightened of it. [Is that where you are now?] Yeah. Yeah. Where that happened to me as well. So it’s like as if I’m supposed to be there for some reason because all these things, all these profound things that have happened to me. But there’s just been a lot of things that have happened to me. I often see somebody. I can wake up and for a split second, the tiniest amount of time, I’ve seen people standing there.

One night my friend \{name of friend\}, you know, from tai chi? She’d come to our house and we were just doing a bit of practising for tai chi and what have you. To cut a long story short, the doorbell rang and I looked out the window and there’s this, and at the time I never realized, I just thought that it can’t and there was a person there very tall and with a woollen hat on and a long coat. Well anyway, when I got outside \{name of friend\} was standing there, and I mean and she’s not that tall, standing in exactly the same place as she was standing. And I said, “Oh who was that standing with you?” No — I didn’t say that to her at all. \{attempts to visualize what happened\} I’m getting a little confused here, I wasn’t really looking at what she was wearing so I said to her ‘I’m just going to run in the shower, I’ll be back in 5 minutes.’ Because she was supposed to be coming at 7.30 but \{name of friend\} being \{friend\} is always early. Went in shower, went in bathroom spoke to \{friend\} etc. \{name of husband\} went out and practised our Tai Chi. So, then, in the end she said ‘I’ll have to go, blah, blah, blah.’ So as she’s walking down the hall, I said to her ‘Well, where’s your hat and coat?’ And she said ‘I didn’t have a hat and a coat.’ And I said, ‘Oh — who was that standing outside with you? When you rang the door bell, wasn’t there someone, very tall standing there, with a hat and coat?’ And it wasn’t until then that I realized that whoever it was, was this very tall person, it wasn’t \{name of friend\}. So that was odd. That was an odd experience.

So, hold on, let me just \{consults notes\} right. I have a lot of dreams — not a lot of dreams. I have quite a few dreams and I tend to think that it’s something that I should take note of and I don’t know why I should be taking note of it. The dreams are in Technicolor [Yes]. If I have ordinary dreams, it’s in black and white [I’ve never had a black and white dream.] Haven’t you? Well, I think they’re in black and white. So when I know I’ve had a dream that’s in real good Technicolor, I know that’s something to take notice of. It goes on \{consults notes\}. Let me see, let me see
laughs. Hope this has all been of interest? [Oh, yes it is very interesting. I can’t believe people have been so helpful!]

Right where am I? Ok. So I have dreams and I’m writing them in here. I’ve got to bring this up to date. There’s stuff that I really need to write in there. Ok, now one night I was asleep. I’m lying in bed and I open my eyes — there’s no light on, and {name of husband} was asleep, and as I open my eyes — can you imagine? There was writing all over the ceiling. Now when I say writing, I was wide awake, completely wide awake. You know when people have like fluorescent lights they put that sort of like Perspex underneath it. So you’ve got the light there and then the Perspex. Anyway, there’s all this writing and I thought, ‘What the heck?’ It was all nice and neat and it was in the cornice, you know? It wasn’t down the walls. And when I looked up the writing stayed there. It wasn’t down the wall. So I thought ‘Something’s going on here.’ Thought I was going crackers. And I looked and ‘No, no — it’s still there.’ Well anyway, this writing was all in a funny language. Like Russian or something like that. Had no idea what it was but it must have been there for a reason.

Anyway, another night I woke up. This might be a couple of weeks later. Again, on the ceiling! The lights were out but there was this light coming through and I could see all these, you know — sign posts. [Yes] Signposts but they were all over the ceiling again, neatly in the cornice. And I looked down and they weren’t there. And I got all these, all these things on the ceiling. Anyway, I wasn’t asleep. I was wide awake but they were in a different language as well. So there was square ones and there was triangle ones and there was long ones, you know? As if someone had stuck all these sign posts on the ceiling. {checks notes}

Another night, just let me think. Oh yeah, we were due to go to the spiritual group that I’d been, you know, had my name down to join and everything. Anyway, woke up in the night and on the ceiling there was all this — the way I’d describe it is... there was the same thing again. There was like the lights, the Perspex but it was as if somebody had gone ‘Oh, I’ll have a bit of yellow there, a bit of blue there and a few pink blobs there and a lot of green there.’ And that’s what it looked like. And I’m thinking, ‘What is all that about — what is all that about?’ Didn’t have a clue.

Anyway, let me see. I might have her card in here. {rummages in bag} We ended up going to this spiritual group and the first week we were there. I don’t think I’ve got it here {card} — oh, yes I have. {shows} First week we’re there, I looked on the table. I mean I’d told {name of friend} and everyone about it — about this writing and everything. I said there was a bit of blue here and a bit of pink and everything. And I looked down on the table and there’s {person’s name} card. [Wow!] And that is the way it looked to me — a bit of blue here, a bit of pink there and that was what was on the ceiling. And I picked this up and I said to {name of friend} ‘That’s more or less what I saw on the ceiling.’ Not the writing. It was just the colour.

So anyway, [What made you go on the course? Did you see an advert or something?] No, what happened was after I’d had my experience, you know, with that thing and {father-in-law} had died. It was not long after {father-in-law} had died and {name of friend} said to me one day “Come round for some coffee and what have you.” And I was talking to her you know and my Dad wasn’t well. I was just, you
know. *[shrugs despondently]* These things had happened and I was just... so I said to *[name of friend]* you know, telling her all about it. And *[name of friend]* said, ‘Perhaps you need a healing.’ Now across the road from her there’s a lady called *[name]*. ‘Do you want me to ask *[name]* across the road.’ When *[name of friend’s spouse]* was alive he wouldn’t have anything to do with healing or anything. I don’t think he was very religious. I fact, I know he wasn’t religious at all. I know he wasn’t. But anyway, she said ‘Would you like a healing?’ Anyway she made an appointment for me and off I went to see *[healer]*.

Anyway, I walked in and *[name of healer]* sat me down and she said ‘Would you like a cup of coffee now or would you like one later?’ and I said ‘Oh, I’ll have one later.’ Didn’t know what to expect. Never had a healing, a Reiki healing. I never had — I mean, I wasn’t ill as such. I wasn’t suffering from a thing. I was just... just [Fed-up?]* Yes. Anyway, she said, ‘No. I think I’ll make you a cup of coffee now.’ She said ‘I’d just like to have a bit of a talk to you.’ So, anyway, we got talking and what have you.

Just before she’s about to take me into the room where she does the healing, she said to me “I haven’t done this before,” or “I haven’t done this for long time.” She said ‘I’d like to check your aura.’ So she sat me down on a chair and she looked at me. She said ‘Oh, you’ve got a really bright aura.’ Can you see auras? I used to be able to. I’d actually forgotten that I saw auras when I was a child. Well even when I was a teenager, I used to be able to see a sparkly outline on people; but I put that down to bad eyesight you know. I was very short sighted. But, anyway, so she sat me down and said ‘I’m just checking to see if there’s a break in your aura.’ And she said, ‘No, there’s no break. Because’ she said, ‘We would have had to fix that.’ or something ‘before,’ I mean I don’t know. I really don’t know. Anyway, she took me in. I was having this healing and everything and she said, ‘If I see anything good, do you want me to tell you what I see?’ And I said, ‘Yeah. Yes, of course, I do.’ I didn’t know what to expect or anything like that. She started doing what she was doing and she said to me, ‘Oh, there’s a young boy here. He’s ridden into the room on a bike, a bicycle.’ She said, ‘Do you know who he is?’ and I went, ‘No.’ She went, ‘Oh, right, oh well.’ A couple of minutes later — ‘Are you sure you don’t know who this boy is?’ And I went, ‘No.’ And she said, ‘Well he knows who you are, you know. He’s hanging around.’ Anyway, he must have stayed for about 10 minutes or so and then obviously, he must have vanished. Anyway, I didn’t think anymore of that and then, as I’m lying there, she never left the room and she didn’t do anything but what happened was: she was holding me here {indicates} I think. And she comes to the back of my head and tucked her hands under my head, and picked my head up, and as she did it, her hands went icy cold. Now, if it hadn’t happened to me I would have thought, ‘What a load of rubbish!’ I really would have done but her hands went icy cold, icy cold. Anyway she finished with the Reiki, the healing and everything. And we went into the other room and were talking to her and I said to her, ‘Your hands went very, very cold, when you were holding my head.’ And she said, ‘Well that’s the healing that you needed. It doesn’t have to be warm or hot. It can be cold as well.’

Anyway, so {person’s name} said to me ‘I’d like to invite you to our spiritual group.’ So she said, ‘We meet,’ I think it was once a month at the time or once a fortnight, because it’s all stopped at the moment because we’re on the course and the
lady whose house we used to go to. She’s had a lot of family problems so it’s all in abeyance. But we still get together now and again. And I went to that and that was really how I got involved with Reiki because we do meditations and they do this Reiki but I’d didn’t have a clue what I was doing — how to go about it. They just said ‘do this’ or ‘do that’ or what have you, ‘Ask for the energy to come through — the universal energy.’ So I decided to go on a Reiki course.

Where am I up to now? Now one time I saw some cartoon characters sitting on top of the door. Now I’m stone cold sober — middle of the night. {name of husband} next to me. Now, one was dressed up like an Indian and one was dressed like a... like a pig [like Looney tunes?] yeah. Sitting there on the door and I’m thinking ‘Oh, my God! What’s going on here?’ Well anyway. I did ask the meaning of this and I was told it was trying to tell me to lighten up not to be so serious.

Right. Now {consults notes} here we go. This is where I get to the most profound experience, if you like, and if I start crying...we’re at the {development teacher’s group} I used to like meditation at her place. She used to walk us through things. With {2 other names} it’s more, it’s assumed that you know and I don’t tend to get as much out of my meditation. So I’m in this meditation and for the first time I actually felt I was out in the field with all the wind and everything going on. But anyway, I think it’s about 3 or 4 lessons in and I’m in this meditation and it’s lovely and where I am and the next thing I saw Jesus Christ in front of me. And he’s stood there and just....ahh...{breaks down/cries} and then he walks towards me {still emotional} [put arm around] It’s ok, it’s ok. I mean he just walked towards me like that... and then I just ... {emotional short break} [That’s beautiful. Aren’t you lucky?] Yes {sobs} And I’ve never had such a profound experience in all my life.

And I actually sat there in the class and I thought ‘Do I tell anybody this? Do I tell people?’ I mean there must have been about 9 or 10 people in this group. And it was just lovely.

Well, anyway, so I saw Lord Jesus. I think then the next week that I don’t see very much and the next week, I actually see Buddha. You know the Buddha that you see with...like all...those like, you know that, that, curvy...like the one you see in Asia, not the Chinese one, I saw that Buddha, which I know nothing about. I know nothing really about Buddhism or anything! I then saw Jesus Christ again — or Jesus and I also saw another person. But I don’t know who that person was.

And after I told them about it, you know, after the meditation because after we have the meditation they ask, you know, what experience we have and things like that. Someone said that it may have— been — but I don’t know what the name was. But anyway going on further, one of the girls on the second course, the next lot of lessons, one of the girls who was on the course, she said to me, one day — Oh, I say I saw Jesus again but when I saw him I only saw like half his face — one of his eyes, but I wasn’t really... Anyway, so this girl came up to me and said to me ‘I’ve been doing a portrait of Jesus, but,’ she said to me, ‘What colour of eyes has he got? Because, obviously he was Middle Eastern, they’re probably brown.’ And I said ‘Do you know what? I haven’t really noticed the colour of his eyes.’ So next time I did meditation I asked and the next thing I saw this pair of blue, blue eyes. You know like this type of blue {points to blue article}. But when she brought her portrait in, it
wasn’t anything like I saw. The version I saw was the one you mostly see in pictures. So I thought that if the one I’ve seen is the one people mostly see then people are able to paint him or make statues or whatever.

* * *

[Eight days later Karen approached myself and another person to say that she had forgotten to tell me that when she saw Jesus Christ, her experience was not a vague one. She saw him as real as the person standing next to me. She suggested that I ask participants to make notes before the interview because it was so easy to leave out details.]
APPENDIX G

JAMES

How would I rate it? Well, it was absolutely fantastic. I had a health problem which, caused me, shall I say, to be delirious and I was in bed for about three days. During this time I have an experience which was what I would expect be something like a NDE rather than just an OBE experience but I don’t believe I was near death. At this time I felt that... or I saw a beautiful staircase... a marble staircase and it was going up out of — virtually... just going up out of the floor of the room I was in and it seemed to go up about 20 or 30 steps. Very easy to climb, very, very easy to travel up. And when I got to the top of this 30 to 40 steps, there was like a landing on both sides. I went off to one side and I saw... many, many people. It was just like walking off into another country. As if I were stepping off a plane into another country. And there were many people, of all different colours and races and creeds and, one thing that took my notice straight away was, they were dressed in so many different types of clothing. It wasn’t just the type of clothing from my era. It was the type of clothing from different eras and yet all these people were talking together. So, after I experienced this for a short while I walked out onto the landing again and crossed to the other side and found a similar sort of thing. After that level of experience, I walked back to the landing and I walked up a further 20 to 30 steps and I came to another landing. And, when I went out on both sides of the landing I found a similar experience. Many, many different people, of all different races, all talking together, all different ages... from all different ages. But each level I went to, it seemed to be a much brighter, colouring everything seemed to be much more harmonious.

And...there was very delicate music seemed to be playing in the background.

After going up through about four or five of these different levels, I came to one narrow staircase. It wasn’t marble, it seemed to be structured out of some sort of a timber, and there was a rope across it. And... I said, I wanted to go up there. And at first the answer was no. And I pleaded to go up there. And I said, ‘Whatever I find I will be prepared to teach. I will be prepared to speak about.’ And eventually the rope pulled to one side and I was allowed to go up. It wasn’t easy climbing that flight of stairs and when I got to the top there was a wooden door. And I opened the door and went in. And in the single room that I went into, which was quite a large room, there were all the heads and all the prophets from all the different religions. And when I looked around because most of these prophets had been called sons of God or gods in their own right, in some cases, but when I looked around I was quite astounded to see that they were all sat there, all together, all discussing...well, I suppose, the events of the day. So, I asked, well really my question was going to be ‘Well, who is God?’ And instead I said ‘Where is God?’ And the answer came, straight back, ‘We are not good enough to see God, we have not attained that right.’ Which astounded me...because I thought surely one of the religious prophets should have been pure enough in order to see God but the answer was not so. I left there. I went down the flight of stairs and I was told I would never be allowed to go that far again but I was told that I had to teach. And then I eventually then, came back to... Back to earth, if you like.
Well, having been a Baptist in my early days, I looked...it looked immediately as a religious experience...but having been able to see people, as other people can’t see, since I was three years old...I obviously look at as a spiritual experience [May I ask you a question, at this point?] Yes. [Sorry to interrupt but I’m interested in this very much. When you see people, do you see them as you would see on a TV screen or do you see them as a real person?] I see them as a real person. Consequently, I look at this as a spiritual experience. I don’t really — I’m not really interested in the paranormal viewpoint because I viewed it from the spiritual viewpoint.

Well, first of all, the first thing that happened to me I suddenly realized that none of the traumas that were taken in the normal day were of any consequence to me...nothing upset me. At one time, going back about six years, before that I used to lose my temper, I cannot remember the last time I lost my temper. I find nothing really surprises me. I’m able to accept things as I see them. I can tell people that I’m disappointed, I can tell people that I’m not pleased but at the moment I’m using the voice I use if I’m very much annoyed. {The participant’s facial expression was welcoming and altered to reflect various points. He spoke in a friendly and precise manner throughout the interview.} In other words, I can tell people what I think without getting upset about it because to me...things that would normally upset me are not part of my making so therefore they are not really my problem. They’re the problem of the person that’s done something that would upset others and I’m prepared to say so. If somebody wishes to criticize me...I don’t get upset by it, I take it on board and then say, ‘Is there anything I need to change?’ If not. ‘Well, I’m sorry but that’s the way you see it.’ I...I don’t usually argue, I’ll debate any subject but I won’t argue, because I refuse to get upset over any situation.

Lots of things have happened in my life. When I first came to open the first church...it was a situation where the man who was running the church had been asked by the visiting speaker, ‘Would you like to book for the following year?’ and he said, ‘There won’t be a following year, I’m closing the church at Christmas.’ [That church was where?] That was in {place name} that was the Reverend {name of person}. Having overheard this I said ‘Look, look you can’t do this. The church is not just you. It’s not the building and you have a congregation of people here that need help.’ His answer was that he hadn’t been able to find anybody who’d take over. And, of course, I found myself saying, ‘Well, I think that’s going to be me [How old were you then?] About 56. I’d been...I’d known that, well from the age of 15 I thought, I was going to be a Baptist minister. I knew I was going to preach at some stage of my life. Incidentally the experience that I had was about when I was 26 [Oh! That’s good, that’s very helpful. Thank you.] Yes, so I had a thorough religious knowledge before I’d left the Baptist Church. I’d done courses on Baptist lay-preaching. {silence}

[Do you mind telling me about the other things you spoke about on the Friday?] No, not at all. [If you get tired or want to stop, just say so.] No, no, I can talk forever on this subject. I couldn’t keep the church in the building it was in because it was private property and the property had to be sold. So we moved across to the local shire hall. ...The area was such that there was a lot of damage to cars and things so we moved to {place name}. After running for about a year in {place name}, I, as I
do quite often, travelled down to see my daughter in, {place name} who is a hairdresser. And she said, ‘I have a customer who thinks like you and introduced me. After having a chat to this lady, she said, ‘We’re trying to open a church in {place name}. Can you help me?’ And one of the funny things that happened, next time I was down there she said, ‘Will you take the service?’ So, I took the service.

I’m usually down there about every eight weeks. So the next time I was down it was, ‘Will you take a service?’ So, I said yes. So, the next time I was down it was, ‘Will you take a service? So, I said how often do you have your services?’ She said, ‘Every time you come down.’ So, I said, ‘Oh, come on, you’ve got to be serious about this.’ So I gave a group of people a good talk about setting up a church. So the church started in {place name}. A short while later she said to me ‘My son’s in {place name} and they would like a church in {place name} like this.’ So I went over to {place name} and I helped them set up a church in {place name}.

Because I’ve got to virtually supervise the running of the church until I’ve got a minister who’s had two years experience that meant I was away from my church in {place name} quite a bit. So I called for somebody to come in as minister in {place name}. I had two people put their hand up. So we put these two people through a ministerial course. And, of course, one of them needed their own church. So it finished up at {place name}. Shortly after that, I was doing my normal work, which although I’d retired by then, I only do one day a week. I still do because nobody else does my normal job. So while I was travelling to see people, I happened to be in {place name}, when the call came, ‘Would I help Reverend {name of person}. because there was a funeral and he couldn’t do it. He’d been in hospital. That was half past twelve when I got the call and I had to get back home, get changed into my ministerial clothes and get out to {place name}, by two o’clock. I did that all right but then it meant I was going to have to come home again and get changed before going out again on my normal work. So I decided I would go out dressed in my minister’s clothes.

I got as far as {place name} and a lady said, ‘Why are you dressed like that?’ Of course, after I’d explained what I’d been doing, the question was, ‘What religion?’ I said, ‘I’m a Spiritualist.’ She said. ‘Oh, I’m interested in that as well. I have quite a few friends are interested in that. Will you put on a night for us?’ I said, ‘No. I won’t entertain anybody. I’ll come and talk to you about the Spiritualist viewpoint.’ I said. ‘If necessary, I will give you a demonstration of clairvoyance but it will be all with a viewpoint of seeing if you’re ready to open up a church. And, of course, within a few weeks we had a church up and running in {place name}.

I ran the {place name} church for 12 months. [Travelling up there?] Yes [Hard work.] And after that 12 months I said, ‘You need a minister up here.’ And there was four people, four possibilities. And the answer basically was, ‘Why do we need a minister, we’ve got you.’ And I said, ‘Well I’m an hour and a quarter away from here and if anyone takes ill and wants to see me, I’m too far away. You need a minister.’ So by the end of the night one of the men said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Oh, I think that’s going to be me.’ The very next day I got a phone call from a lady, who I knew had been in spiritualism for about 20 years, and she said ‘I understand you need a minister for {place name}.’ I said no, ‘I’ve actually pinpointed the person who is going to be.’ So she said, ‘Oh, well, I was going to put my hand up.’ So, I said, ‘As it
happens we’ve been looking at a place in {place name} and not found one, so I’m looking in {place name}.’ She said, ‘I was brought up in {place name}, that would be like going home.’ We met at 3 o’clock in the afternoon to look at a hall...we decided, yes, that was a very nice hall — very comfortable place to be. We wanted to get the advert, in the *Universal Mind* magazine, which had to be in by the 15th. It was the 25th of the month and we were going to open by the first of the new month — 25th May. And we were going to open on the first week of June. However, I decided I would ring the publisher and just let them know what was going on so that she was prepared to put in an advert as soon as possible. Her husband had been in hospital and she was only just starting to do the adverts in the paper that had to be out within three or four days. So what was the impossible was done. We had an advert. But not only that. She said to me ‘Tell me your first five speakers for the first five weeks?’ And every single person I rang to see if they could come and take the service said, ‘Yes, I’m free that week.’ So within an hour the church was virtually up and running. When we first discussed, the lady who was going to run this said to me, ‘Well, if you try and get it done in just over a week,’ she said, ‘If God wishes it to happen, it will happen.’ And it happened.

The next one was...well, I helped two other people open churches in between times. There was a young lady, who opened a church in {place name}, who had been very experienced in Spiritualism. I’d known her since she was 28, and she’s now — what? 43, and that’s the Reverend {name of person}. And she said she’d been working in spiritualism all that time. She’d actually opened her own church but she didn’t have the qualifications — a reverend, and she would like to have it. [Question re various affiliations of Spiritualist churches?] Can I take that as a separate subject?..... Remind me about that. (See section on affiliation below)

So as seeing how I knew {name of person}. since she was 28 and, as I said, she’s now 43. I’ve seen her mature beautifully as a spiritualist...and a medium. So, yes, I helped her through her ministry course and I ordained her. Their church isn’t called the same name as ours but is an associate with us.

Then one of the people who’d been working in {place name} had needed an assistant minister so she’d got somebody working with her. This lady, I’d told five years ago that she would open a church in {place name} and she said, ‘Oh! No, no, no!’ At the end of September we opened a church in {place name} and we ordained her in her church in {place name}.

And then, of course, I was thinking about this church in {place name}. I had a person who I was convinced was going to be the minister and then she found she was being taken in the direction of working in palliative care. And she was most apologetic. And, of course my view is, ‘Don’t apologise because if this is the way Spirit is taking you, then this is the way you’ve got to go. So I rather thought that {place name} was going to be on the back-burner. And then I went to a social evening...well not a social evening, a show with my grandson and while I was there a lady challenged me because I had my Spiritualist badge on. And she said ‘Is that a Spiritualist church?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ And funny enough, she lived in the area of {place name} or {alternate place name}, so I thought — well, that struck my mind again, ‘yes, yes. There’s something there.’ And the {place name} closed down so I thought
well, possibly there's an opening at {place name} still. I went to take the service at {place name}, it was about October time. As I was meeting people in the foyer a lady said, ‘Oh! So you are Reverend {name}’ I said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘I’ve been told, if I want to go further, I’ve got to do courses with you.’ So I said, ‘Well, I’m running a course now if you want to join it.’ So I made things particularly difficult for her during the course to see how she would get on. And she survived every challenge I gave her. And at the end of the course I said, ‘There are two people here who are capable of being ministers.’ And she said, ‘I hope you’ve included me in that.’ She said. ‘Because that’s where I want to go.’ And strangely enough, she lives close enough to {place name}. So, she’s now the minister of {place name} church.

How many churches is that? Well, with the associated churches that took their own name, we have 10 churches now. [That’s a big effect!] “Yes.”

(Response to query about various affiliations of Spiritualist churches)
We have the Aquarian Church started by the Reverend {name of person} and that was the church that I took over. A lot of people said to me, ‘Oh, haven’t you done well with the Aquarian Church!’ but that was just a church that I took over. If it wasn’t for the Reverend {name of person} there wouldn’t be an Aquarian Church. With the Aquarian church, we now have Armadale, Port Kennedy, Ballajura, Bibra Lake, Kingsley and as of next week Safety Bay — because...they’re closing the church. We can’t use the name. Their constitution does not allow it, unfortunately. I would have liked to have kept the name but it will become the Aquarian Church. So these are the Aquarian Churches and the others are the associate ones. [Those are the ones in Narrogin?] Narrogin, Collie, Bridgetown, Mandurah.

[What shall I put down for your occupation — minister?] Well I was a {name of occupation} [Wow! Are you retired or semi-retired?] They won’t allow me to retire. I am the only {name of occupation} maker in Western Australia so consequently no one wanted to take over. So I lost my business because nobody would buy it. [They didn’t have the skill?] Well, the people I taught, I said to them, ‘Do you want a business?’ ‘Oh, no! It’s too much like hard work. You retire, we retire.’ [shall I say and minister?] I am now. Yes.

Can I just tell you a little bit of an experience I had? [Affirmative response]
I was about 58 and I was driving home, and I was already started with the churches, and I kept thinking if I could find a way to retire, or retire earlier, I could give more time to the church. And I kept this thought and I kept praying along these lines. And, one night, I was coming home from work and I was driving a car that was two and a half — three years old. I don’t usually come up Stock Road. I usually come along the coast road [Yes because it’s nice] I was coming up Stock Road this night and I got towards Yangebup. It was a beautiful evening. It was just coming up to six o’clock, the news hadn’t started and as I was approaching Yangebup traffic lights. A thought went through my head and it was. ‘I wonder how much this car would be worth if it was written off? {laughter} I thought, ‘That’s silly thought.’ And I just dismissed it out of my head, you know? I came up to the lights and there’d been nothing travelling in my direction. I’d been the only one travelling towards Rockingham. Coming up to the traffic lights, the traffic lights were green for me but the traffic coming towards me was all stationary and I realised that there was an ambulance
coming out of the left hand side with its lights flashing and its sirens blaring. So, of course I stopped. And he didn’t go, so I flashed my headlights at him and he still didn’t go. And I thought ‘that’s strange’ and I looked up in my mirror and there’s a big black car boring down on me [Oh.] didn’t even bother to go around — it was straight into the back. If the ambulance had gone I would have been in the side of the ambulance. So, of course, I finished up in front of the ambulance. [Were you hurt?] Quite substantially...terrible whiplash and back troubles. I could hear the scraping metal on the ground. And I thought, ‘The lowest thing in this car, at the back, is the petrol tank, if the tank ruptured, the exhaust will be red-hot.’ You know, ‘I’m up in flames.’ And I couldn’t get the door open. The whole framework had twisted — couldn’t get the door open. The next thing, I was conscious of — a great big truckie, shouting ‘Open the window!’ So I opened the window and he just about wrenched the door open, you know, got his hand in ‘I’ll push you off the road.’ That was to get the ambulance away. And the ambulance couldn’t stop because he already had an emergency but, obviously, he’d radioed for another ambulance. And...then I’m sat in the car but at the moment I just...shock. Just, paralysed with shock, as it was, I heard this young lady’s voice shout ‘Why didn’t you go when the lights were green?’ you know. And, of course, she got the answer from the big truckie and of course it wasn’t respectable for a start. {laughs} And afterwards I felt sorry for her because he did get stuck into her. But anyhow the ambulance came and took me away. And afterwards I thought ‘Well, that was silly, because in one sense that’s what I was asking for.’ Because it wasn’t long after that, I decided I wasn’t...I couldn’t continue work as I wasn’t really able to maintain a...a viability.. And I thought ‘I’ve run a successful business all my life. I’m not going to go out of business now’ you know, so I retired when I was 63 while I was ahead [A lot of people retire at 55.] Well, I would have loved to but when you work for yourself you can’t build up enough.... Well, the idea was, when I sold my business I’d have enough.

[James then asked that the following be recorded]

Well, for a number of years now there’s been a group of churches and it’s called The World Parliament Of Religions [All denominations and churches?] Yes, all denominations and churches this year it’s going to be held in Melbourne. I’m invited to go and our Spiritualist group is specifically been invited to go and asked to...make...a presentation. I was hoping to be part of that but financially it’s not quite within the bounds. And also it happens to be my 70th birthday just around that time. And I know my family will want to do things, so I’ve said ‘No, I’ll spend time with my family.’ {pause}

[Shall I turn this off? (the recorder)] No. Please record. But the Association that I’m with now, I’ve changed over a lot of our allegiances to what is the Association of Christian Spiritual Churches Of Australia. Now, this is the only group that declares itself as a Christian Spiritualist Group. Because a lot of...well some of, the Spiritualist groups, will turn round and say ‘We are not a Christian religion.’ And this doesn’t fit with me at all. They talk about the White Christ Light and use the White Christ Light for protection and then turn round and say... And I say ‘How dare you, if you don’t profess to be a Christian religion.’ Some of our churches — we have two churches in WA of our group, that take a very, very, strict view on Christianity and hold communion. Others are a little bit more liberal and don’t hold communion. Now, for me, as senior minister of this group, I say to the ministers
‘You are in charge of your church and you run your church to the best of your ability, in the direction you feel it should go, so long as you remain within the Christian spiritualist concept.’ So then each one has a slight variation. And it’s very good.

But one of the things I would like to tell you, and this is wandering off again. In my church in {place name} I used to have a member who was,...was Muslim and I used to get quite a few visitors who were Buddhists; and I’ve had quite a few visitors who were Hindu [Like Interfaith?] Yes. And I have or I had, I’m not an {place name} person myself now but when I was, I had a lady there who was a Jewess. And she used to come in and she’d say ‘I always feel more at home in your church then I do anywhere else.’ I think that what it’s about. {pause}[Shall I turn off now?] {nods}
APPENDIX H

MYSTICAL AND PSYCHOSPIRITUAL PHENOMENA
AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR NATURE AND INCIDENCE

INTRODUCTION

In the West although concepts about mystical phenomena are inexorably linked to notions about religion and religious experience, in considering what these phenomena might be like, it may be appropriate to firstly think about the experience of mystical phenomena as a form of altered states of consciousness (ASC). Kokoszka notes that the Ludwig’s definition of altered states of consciousness, as shown below, is of historical importance because it led to the idea that consciousness could be a subject for investigation by psychologists.

any mental state(s) induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological manoeuvres or agents, which can be recognised subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness. This sufficient deviation may be represented by greater preoccupation than usual with internal sensations or mental processes, changes in the formal characteristics of thought and impairment of reality testing to various degrees.¹

The above definition has relevance for the current study because Kokoszka directly refers to mystical experiences, peak experiences and a range of psychospiritual experiences as being altered states of consciousness.

The object of this overview is to provide a sense, however limited, of the nature and frequency of such experiences. Consequently, Kokoszka’s observation, that an altered state of consciousness is ‘a state in which “extraordinary” content is experienced or in which the manner of experiencing is “unusual,” or if both of the situations take place at the same time’ appears to be eminently applicable to the experiences under consideration.

THE EXPERIENCES

Mystical Union

In his lectures on mysticism (Lectures XVI and XVII of the Gifford Lectures) James writes that the great mystical achievement in the majority of mystical traditions, is both to become one with the Absolute and to be aware of that oneness. Within classical Christian tradition this is known as unio mystica (mystical union). Union with God (unio mystica or theosis), that is to say, the experiential, felt presence of God, is recognised as the paramount form of mystical experience and one that is not commonly experienced. Therefore, apart from the many records of this experience in the lives of saints, it is difficult to estimate the frequency of unio mystica.

However, if Peter Moore’s opinion, that mystics in describing their experiences tend to concentrate on the ‘most advanced stages of experiences’ because they assume

2 Kokoszka, Occurrence of Altered States of Consciousness, 90.


that these must be the most informative,⁵ is taken into consideration together with Geoffrey Parrinder’s argument, that although “communion” with God is not identical to “union” with God, the two states are not dissimilar and in fact differ only in degree,⁶ it may be that the experience of union with God is more frequent than traditional theology suggests. Thus, the two following examples presented by David Hay as examples of the presence of God may possibly be reflective one of the less advanced stages of the phenomena of union with God.

Example (1)

I am surprised that I didn’t make a note of the date, but I believe it happened in spring or early summer of ... My husband was still away in the army “somewhere in England”, but in no particular danger, our son was bouncing about in his pram outside, the sun was shining and I was making the bed; there was nothing in my life to make the day different from any other. Suddenly, I was filled with an absolute certainty of the reality of God. No lights, no voices, no exotic feelings. Just quiet utterly convincing certainty “of course there is [a] God” ...it was cool and quiet and certain — and very surprising.⁷

Example (2)

The experience itself is very difficult to describe. It took me completely by surprise. I was about to start shaving at the time, of all things. I felt that my soul was literally physically shifted — for quite a number of seconds, perhaps 15 to 20 — from dark into the light. I saw my life, suddenly, as forming a pattern and felt that I had, suddenly, become acquainted with myself again after a long absence — that I was, whether I liked it or not, treading a kind of spiritual path, and this fact somehow demanded me to quit academics and enter social work ... I must stress here that prior to this experience I used never to use the words such as “soul” or “salvation” or any such religiously coloured words. But in order to make even the slightest sense of what had happened to me I find it imperative to use them. Looking back it does seem as if I say a kind of light, but I think that might have been a metaphor I coined immediately after the experience.⁸

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⁸ Ibid 8-9.
Hay writes that typically experiences of the presence of God [as presented above] appear spontaneously and sometimes in the most ordinary of circumstances. Awareness of the presence of God is noted in a number of major surveys.9

Unlike James, who is keen to point out the parallelism between the great mystical traditions of ‘Hinduism’, ‘Neo-Platonism’, ‘Sufism’ and Christian mysticism,10 Christian theologians are concerned to emphasise that whilst experiencing the presence of God, the Christian mystic does not, as in some Eastern forms of mysticism, become God or lose all sense of identity. For example, Farges, makes it clear in his treatise on mystical phenomena that unio mystica, which occurs through the divine gift of infused contemplation is union and not fusion with God.11

With regards to the nature of infused contemplation,12 Farges provides the following extract from conclusions approved by the 1923 Madrid Carmelite Congress:


10 James, The Varieties, 419-421.


12 Infused contemplation is the last of a number of prayer stages through which mystics ascend before experiencing the Absolute. The prayer techniques which mystics engage in during these stages are complex but since they are not the main interest of this study, which focuses on experiential phenomena that may or may not emerge during these stages, they will not be referred to further.
Theme V. Contemplation: Manner of becoming disposed to it according to the teachings of the Doctoral of Avila

1. Infused contemplation is the mystical operation par excellence.

2. This contemplation is the experimental knowledge of divine things (or realities) produced supernaturally by God in the soul; and it is the closest state of intercourse and union between God and the soul that may be attained in life.

3. Consequently it is in the order of means, the highest ideal, and as it were, the last stage of Christian life in this world, for those souls who are called to mystical union with God.

4. The contemplative state is characterised by the increasing predominance of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and by the superhuman manner in which, by their aid all our good actions are performed.

5. As the virtues find their final perfection in the gifts and the latter are perfected in contemplation it follows that contemplation is the ordinary “way” of sanctity and of habitually heroic virtue.\(^{13}\)

Examples of the nature of this mystical union may be particularly found in the writings of Spanish mystics, such as St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), and St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).\(^{14}\) It has been argued that the Spanish mystical tradition with its stress on private, psychological and subjective experience continues to overly influence present day expectations with regard to mystical experience.\(^{15}\) One aspect of this influence relates to the variety of experiences that frequently occur as an adjunct to mysticism. Experiences designated

\(^{13}\) Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, 649.


by Egan as ‘secondary and charismatic mystical phenomena’, by Farges as ‘accidental mystical phenomena’ and within the current study as psychospiritual.

Psychospiritual Phenomena

Psychospiritual phenomena are reported to occur during waking consciousness and also during the dream state. They sometimes present as being cross-cultural experiences and occasionally are reported as having occurred outside of any particular belief system. It is possible that these may be a few of the reasons why psychospiritual phenomena are as likely to be studied by scientists as theologians. Some varieties of psychospiritual phenomena are rare and often esoteric, for example: stigmata (St. Francis of Assisi, Therese Neumann); levitation (St. Joseph of Cupertino, St. Stephen of Hungry); empire over creatures (St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua); and the ability to exist without physical nourishment (St. Catherine of Siena, St. Peter of Alcantara). However, within this study, the experiences to be examined are those which are most commonly reported in major studies of religious and/or psychospiritual experience.


17 Farges, Mystical Phenomena, 317.

18 Cf: Chapter I, Section 1.1: Introduction – The Current Study.

(i)  The Out-Of-Body Experience and the Near-Death Experience

The out-of-body experience is one phenomenon that has been extensively researched by theologians and by scientists of almost every discipline. The term out-of-body experience (OBE) was originally introduced by American transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart in 1960 with the intent of providing a descriptor, which did not suggest causation, for a range of experiences variously described as: astral projection, astral travelling and ESP projection.\(^{20}\) Nevertheless, a consequence of Tart’s non-judgemental nomenclature is that the term OBE is often used indiscriminately. Sheils, for example, reports that 95% of world cultures believe in OBEs.\(^{21}\) Although the OBE experience is defined by Collins as ‘a vivid feeling of being detached from one’s body, usually involving observing it and its environment from nearby,’\(^{22}\) there is wide interpretation of the term and it has been used to describe a varied range of experiences, including mind travel, remote viewing, and astral projection. Some of these OBEs are reported to be drug induced, for example, as in Susan Blackmore’s ketamine and cannabis induced OBEs.\(^{23}\) Others, as in the case of shamanistic or yogic practices, are associated with mystical or religious praxis. However, in The Spiritual Nature of Man (1979), Alister Hardy in drawing attention to 179 reports of OBE, in the first 3,000 reports of experiences that gave rise to religious feeling, notes that the majority of these experiences were spontaneous occurrences. A


\(^{22}\) Collins English Dictionary, Australian Version.

\(^{23}\) Susan Blackmore, Dying to Live, Science And the Near Death Experience (London: Grafton, 1993), 70 — Here Blackmore explains that drug induced OBEs are not as vivid as naturally occurring ones. See also, Rick Lewis, ‘Susan Blackmore’ in Philosophy Now, Vol. 42, July/August 2003, 20 — in this interview with Lewis, Blackmore details an experience with cannabis which initiated her interest in parapsychology.
number of writers\textsuperscript{24} consider that evidence in support for the OBE as a mystical phenomenon can be found in St. Paul’s experience as described in 2 Corinthians 12: 1-15:

It may do no good but I must go on with my boasting; I come now to visions and revelations granted by the Lord. I know a Christian man who fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I don’t know – God knows) was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know that this same man, whether in the body or apart from the body I don’t know – God knows) was caught up into paradise, and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them. About such a man I am ready to boast. \textit{2 Corinthians 12: 1-5}

The above version of St. Paul’s experience is cited by Paul Badham who claims that there is little doubt Paul’s account was autobiographical and contains features of the near-death experience. Indeed, Badham goes further and suggests that St. John of the Cross’s comments on St. Paul’s experience together with certain extracts from St. John of the Cross’s poems, for example, where John writes of ‘living without inhabiting himself’ and ‘soaring to the heavens’\textsuperscript{26} also indicate that John of the Cross experienced a OBE.

Badham sees the OBE as having significance for modern religious belief because modern scientific investigation and medical technology have ‘democratized’ the OBE and made available to the many an experience that previously had been seen as ‘coming very rarely and to very few’.\textsuperscript{27} Tart, who has conducted laboratory research on the OBE, notes that frequently the near-death experience (NDE) begins with an


\textsuperscript{25} Badham, \textit{Religious Experience and the Near Death Experience}, 6.


\textsuperscript{27} Badham, \textit{Religion and the Near Death Experience}, 6-7; 15.
OBE. Furthermore, ‘psychologically’ the OBE, and by extrapolation, the NDE appear to confirm belief in survival after death. Hence, the experiences have import for the psychological study of religion.\textsuperscript{28}

The OBE is closely related to the near-death–experience (NDE) and has been reported to occur in life threatening situations. Sometimes in a life threatening situation, or when a person believes that they are in a life-threatening situation, the OBE appears to extend and become a NDE. NDEs have been reported as occurring during surgery while the patient is anesthetized or after cardiac arrest. The most well known description of the NDE is provided by Dr Raymond Moody. Moody’s description, based on 150 accounts provided by people who reported that they had experienced a NDE, is shown below.

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time finds himself moving rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a “body,” but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm bright spirit of a kind he has never encountered before — a being of light — appears before him. This being asks him a question, non-verbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point, he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limits between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds he

\textsuperscript{28} Charles T. Tart, ‘Perspectives On Scientism, and Philosophy Provided By Parapsychology’ \textit{Journal of Humanistic Psychology}, Vol. 32 No. 2, Spring, 1992, 70-100. See also Badham, \textit{Religion and the Near Death Experience}. 
must go back to the earth and that the time of his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.²⁹

As acknowledged by Moody, the above description varies slightly from experiencer to experiencer and despite remarkable similarities, no two accounts are identical. Nevertheless, research by hematologist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross,³⁰ psychologist Kenneth Ring³¹ and cardiologist Michael Sabom³² appears to validate Moody’s identification of the NDE.

Interestingly, D. Scott Rogo observes that some people have reported experiencing core elements of the NDE including, seeing deceased relatives, spiritual guides, travelling along the dark tunnel and seeing white light, without actually have been, or even believing that they were, in any danger of dying.³³ Furthermore, although the majority of experiencers report the NDE as having been a life changing event, not all NDEs are experienced in a positive manner. Badham, for example, refers to

³¹ Kenneth Ring, Life at Death: Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience (Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980).
terrifying NDEs and draws attention to a survey of 344 NDEs in which ‘almost 1% talked of hellish experience, 15% felt a sense of fear, and some 9% a sense of loss.’

Because the OBE and NDE have both been the subject of widespread investigation and scientific analysis there may be a sense that both of these experiences are quite frequent occurrences. However, this may be a false concept since it is based on studies which have specifically focused on these particular experiences. Generic studies of religious or psychospiritual experience indicate that experiences involving phenomena such as awareness of an unseen presence and clairaudience are more commonly reported than either the OBE or NDE phenomena.

(ii) Awareness of an Unseen Presence
Sensing the presence of an unseen person or presence may be considered as a variety of clairsentience that receives its stimulus from a source that is indiscernible to the physical senses. In major studies of religious and psychospiritual experience this phenomenon is sometimes seen as a religious experience. Within traditional Christian mysticism it is termed as being an intellectual vision. Intellectual, with reference to this variety of psychospiritual phenomena, is one of a number of specialist terms, including imaginative or imaginary vision and locution which were


developed when 16th century Christian scholars began to categorize and differentiate between various types of mystical phenomena.\textsuperscript{38} Many of these terms are not in common usage nor can they be found in standard dictionaries. Consequently, twentieth century researchers have either developed their own coding systems to explain psychospiritual phenomena or gone to some lengths to explain the original terms.\textsuperscript{39} An intellectual vision is defined by Farges as ‘an intuitive and supernatural knowledge of truths or of spiritual things or even corporal things but abstracted from all sensible form.’\textsuperscript{40} One such experience, described by St. Teresa of Avila, is shown below:

One day when I was at prayer — it was the feast day of the glorious St Peter — I saw Christ at my side — or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul. He seemed quite close to me, and I saw that it was He. As I thought, He was speaking to me. Being completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at first, and could do nothing but weep, though as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be at my side, but this was not an imaginary vision. I could not see it in that form. But I most clearly felt that He was all the time on my right, and was a witness of everything that I was doing. Each time I became a little recollected, or was not entirely distracted, I could not but be aware that He was beside me.\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{40} Farges, Mystical Phenomena, 339. See also, Dennis Edwards, \textit{Human Experience of God}.
\end{thebibliography}
It is considered by a number of writers, including Underhill\textsuperscript{42} and Forman\textsuperscript{43} that intellectual visions, similar to the above, are superior to other visionary experiences that are perceived as being of an external nature. However these opinions, which are for the most part based on the writings of mystics, such as, Henry Suso, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila are challenged by Hollenback. Hollenback finds evidence throughout St. Teresa’s writings and especially in Chapter 22 of St. Teresa’s Life, where she records that, in her opinion, contemplation on the ‘Sacred Humanity of Christ’ was more important than focusing on ‘His Formless Divinity’, that St. Teresa was ‘quite skeptical of the supposed superiority of intellectual visions to imaginary ones.’\textsuperscript{44} Farges acknowledges the importance of intellectual experience on the grounds that ‘because God alone is able to act directly’ this variety of experience is free from devilish deception; but is also of the opinion that, although the intellectual experience is distinct from other forms of psychospiritual experiences, intellectual experiences are not always free from natural or supernatural images.\textsuperscript{45}

Comparable experiences, although less detailed than those recorded by St. Teresa, can be found in Beardsworth’s study, A Sense Of Presence, which considers examples taken from the first 1,000 responses to Alister Hardy’s survey of religious experience. Beardsworth concludes that the key to these experiences, in which an

\textsuperscript{42} Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness (New York: Dutton, 1961).


\textsuperscript{44} Jess Byron Hollenback, Mysticism — Experience, Response and Empowerment (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 564.

\textsuperscript{45} Farges, Mystical Phenomena, 340.
unseen presence is experienced, is the meeting with something other than the self that is recognized as being both external and internal to the experiencer. Significantly, he equates the experience of sense of presence with the actual presence of God within the individual.\(^{46}\)

The following summarised extract from a 1987 British Gallop Poll, showing answers relating to a question about religious experience and illustrating the manner in which the unseen presence was variously identified by participants, provides a number of examples of the phenomena of a sense of presence (see Table 1 below).\(^{47}\)

**Table 1: Religious Experience in Britain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unseen Presence Identified as</th>
<th>% Reporting this</th>
<th>% Interpreting religiously</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The presence of God</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guiding presence not called God</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sacred presence in nature</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of someone who has died</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An evil presence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity (the experience that all things are one)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: David Hay and David G. Heald, Gallop Poll 1987.

However, this is not to say that all such experiences are religiously interpreted. For instance, Hay and Morisy, analyzing the findings of another British National

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Opinion Poll which presented ‘The Alister Hardy Question’\(^\text{48}\) to approximately 2,000 people, found that, although 34% of participants responded affirmatively, a substantial number of these participants were unable to identify the presence which they had experienced.\(^\text{49}\) Within the same survey, where the most commonly reported experience was the presence of God, Hay and Morisy did not find a definite association between church attendance (by survey participants) and recognition or non recognition of the presence as such. The inability, of many people to recognise particular personal experiences as being of a mystical or psychic nature, appears to lend support to the argument that a knowledge gap, in relation to psychospiritual experiences, exists within contemporary society.\(^\text{50}\) This is interesting in the light of a number of studies both religious and secular which rate awareness of an invisible presence as the most frequently reported form of mystical and/or psychospiritual experience.\(^\text{51}\)

(iii) **Visionary Experience**

Notwithstanding the intellectual vision or awareness of an invisible presence as already discussed, visionary experience may consist of seeing within the inner eye (the mind’s eye) or outwardly as the seeing of an actual external happening. Egan and Farges are in agreement that the first of these types of visionary experience

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\(^{48}\) Hard, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, 126. Here, The Alister Hardy Question is presented as ‘Do you feel that you have been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?’

\(^{49}\) David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space*.


should be categorized as an imaginative or imaginary vision but differ slightly on the categorization of the second. Egan, for example speaks of ‘sensible or corporal visions also called apparitions’ when describing situations where the mystic, using his bodily eyes, sees a real or apparent object, such as the vision of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes.\textsuperscript{52} Farges, on the other hand, prefers the term ‘external vision’ and argues that it is not necessary for the vision to be corporal that is to say with ‘flesh and bones.’ Thus, according to Farges, although the apparition of Christ seen by the Apostles (Luke 24:39) was not spirit but ‘flesh and bones’, it is not relevant, in the vision (that Bernadette had at Lourdes) whether the Virgin Mary had a material body or only the appearance of such a body; it is sufficient that both visions are seen as external by the contemplator and ‘occupy a definite space either to the right or left of him.’\textsuperscript{53}

With regards to imaginative visions, both Egan and Farges consider that these experiences present as being not only incredibly real but are almost larger than life. Thus, Farges draws attention to the following imaginary vision as described by St. Teresa.

There stood before me the most sacred Humanity, as painters represent him after the resurrection, in great beauty and majesty…. If I were to spend many years in devising how to picture to myself anything so beautiful. I should never be able, nor even know how, to do it; for it is beyond the reach of any possible imagination here below; the whiteness and brilliancy alone are inconceivable. It is not a brilliancy which dazzles, but a delicate whiteness and a brilliancy infused, furnishing the most excessive light to the eyes, never wearied thereby, nor by the visible brightness which enables us to see a beauty so divine.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Egan, \textit{Christian Mysticism}, 307-308.

\textsuperscript{53} Farges, \textit{Mystical Phenomena}, 328.

\textsuperscript{54} St Teresa, \textit{Life} Ch. xxxvii, cited in Farges, 334.
The brightness of visionary experience (albeit drug induced) is emphasised by Huxley\textsuperscript{55} and noted by Hollenback.\textsuperscript{56}

It is difficult to confirm the frequency of visionary experience since studies differ in their definitions of visionary experience. For instance, although Hardy classifies 544 reports as being representative of visionary experience and another 102 as involving the perception of apparitions, he classifies 239 occurrences, where the object of the vision was a deceased person, as ‘Supposed contact with the dead.’\textsuperscript{57}

The following abridged extract is the only example provided by Hardy as representing presumed contact with a deceased person:

\ldots After his passing, I both saw and spoke to my husband and held his hand. This hand was strong and not at all ghost-like, nor was his appearance. I was alone at the time, no medium there to act as a link. Probably this is not a detail to prove God’s existence, but to me it indeed did.\textsuperscript{58}

In studies other than Hardy’s it is possible that the above experience might be considered as being a variety of visionary experience.\textsuperscript{59} It also demonstrates the manner in which mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences may combine a number of distinct phenomena — in this instance, sensory and auditory phenomena.


\textsuperscript{56} Hollenback, \textit{Mysticism}.

\textsuperscript{57} Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 46.

\textsuperscript{58} Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature of Man}, 47.

\textsuperscript{59} For example, see above, Egan’s classification of ‘sensible or corporal visions also called apparitions’ and Farges on ‘external visions.’
Auditory Phenomena

Auditory phenomena are sometimes referred to as auditions or locutions and, as in the case of visionary experience, the hearing of supernatural words can be perceived as being heard externally — as an actual voice; imaginatively — when the voice is heard internally; and intellectually — when they are perceived purely intellectually without any image. Egan notes that St John of the Cross sub-divides intellectual locutions into three types: successive, formal and substantial. In the case of successive internal locutions, these are perceived to be a form of reasoning directed by God which the mystic experiences during deep concentration. Formal intellectual locutions differ in that they require no mental effort on the mystic’s part and are experienced as ideas, which the experiencer is unable to prevent but always understands, coming from another source. On the other hand, substantial locutions at all times bring about whatever has been heard. Substantial locutions have a performative quality — Egan writes ‘For example, if God says substantially to the mystic, “fear not! He concomitantly becomes fearless.’ External locutions may also bring about results, for example, in the case of Joan of Arc who, guided by external locutions, urged for the relief of Orleans. Because of her actions Joan is named by Woods as being one of a group of mystics whose personal experiences have reshaped the ‘social consciousness of an epoch’. Similarly, Richardson draws

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60 Dennis Edwards, *Human Experience Of God*.


attention to Francis of Assisi who, in response to hearing a voice, played a major role in reforming the corrupt and decrepit church of his day.\textsuperscript{63}

Auditory phenomena may include music and a variety of other sounds including voices — some of which are not always welcome. Whilst historically, ecclesial authorities developed protocols to discern whether the auditory phenomena experienced came from the imagination, God or the devil, contemporary society often appears to be less prepared to deal with auditions. Furthermore, because hearing voices may be equated with mental illness, many people are reluctant to discuss personal experience of such phenomena. Research indicates that although some people hear extremely upsetting voices, not all people are distressed by hearing voices and that there are those who regard them as beneficial. As noted by Hay\textsuperscript{64} and also by Harper,\textsuperscript{65} many people report hearing voices in a specific context, for example: in a life threatening situation or (quite commonly) after a bereavement.

Hardy records almost 1,000 reports of auditory experiences, 544 of which were incorporated in visionary experience, 221 within the subcategory of ‘Voices calming’ and 210 within the subcategory of ‘Voices guiding’.\textsuperscript{66} The following extract is provided by Hardy as an example of a calming voice:

\textsuperscript{63}Peter Tufts Richardson, \textit{Four Spiritualities: Expressions of Self, Expressions of Spirit — A Psychology of Spiritual Choice} (Palo Alto, CA: Davies Black), 96.

\textsuperscript{64} Hay, \textit{Religious Experience}.


\textsuperscript{66} Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature Of Man}, 39.
Gradually, I became aware of this power and really began to court it. It has come to me often — once in a dream — as a light, warmth, comfort and love past understanding. It has walked with me and sometimes I hear something or someone calling my name.\(^{67}\)

The above extract again provides an example of the prevalence of the sense of an invisible presence and also the manner in which a single incidence of psychospiritual experience may involve a number of phenomena.

**(v) Tastes, Touches and Smells**

Experience of touch, taste and smell, which are perceived to occur without physical stimulation, are phenomena that may be considered as a form of clairsentience. Again, within Christian mystical traditions, each of these three psychospiritual experiences may be perceived in an intellectual, imaginative or sensible manner. Examples of this variety of experience are to be found as far back as the 14\(^{th}\) century when Dominican nuns recorded the intellectual experiences of taste and smell as being a form of religious experience.\(^{68}\)

Egan sees the intellectual and imaginative forms of these three varieties of psychospiritual phenomena as being authentic when historically recorded in the writings of St. Augustine and as promoted in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola but otherwise has reservations about their role in religious experience.\(^{69}\) Yet,

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\(^{67}\) Hardy, Ibid.


\(^{69}\) Egan, *Christian Mysticism* 312-313. See also 34, Here Egan writes that in the Ignatian Exercise ‘Application of the Senses’ the exercitant is directed to ‘see, hear, touch, taste and smell’ in imagination certain aspects of a contemporary mystery.
despite these reservations, he provides a personal example of the phenomenon of taste. This example concerns a person, whom he spiritually advised, reporting to him that whenever she prayed, she experienced ‘an unusually delicious taste in her mouth’. Egan writes that, since this person did not seek out the experience nor become dependent on it and it served to deepen her prayer state, he assumed it to be ‘a good thing.’\(^\text{70}\) The experience of taste is not referred to by Hardy and appears to be a less common phenomenon than either touch or the experience of fragrance.

Although Osborne draws attention to Indian religious traditions, and the ability of living twentieth century saints to psychically manifest perfume,\(^\text{71}\) in the West, the experience of smell is usually historically associated with fragrance exuding from the bodies of living or deceased saints. Connection between deceased persons and experience of a fragrance which appears to have no material source is also a modern phenomena. Hardy, for example, while providing only 33 examples of the ‘Quasi-sensory experience of smell’ draws attention to another study which contains 58 examples of the phenomena.\(^\text{72}\)

Sometimes noted as being a component within visionary experience, the experience of being touched by someone or something invisible has also been perceived to occur in isolation and at unexpected times. Hardy, in subdividing the experience of touch into the categories of: ‘Healing’, ‘Comforting’, ‘Feelings of warmth’, ‘Being struck’ and ‘Guiding’, records 355 instances of people who felt that they were

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\(^{70}\) Egan, \textit{Christian Mysticism}, 100.

\(^{71}\) Arthur Osborne, \textit{The Incredible Sai Baba} (London: Rider, 1972).

\(^{72}\) Hardy, \textit{The Spiritual Nature Of Man}, 43.
physically touched in some inexplicable fashion. Pupynin and Brodbeck in their study *Religious Experience in London* provide the following example of touch without physical stimulation:

> After the death — of my father, I felt him holding my fingers for many days and talking to me.\(^7\)

The experience of touch without or prior to tactile stimulation has been the subject of scientific experiments that Libet\(^7\) and Roland\(^6\) conducted on the somatosensory cortex. These experiments, which found that in the experience of touch, cognition precedes tactile stimulation, suggest that awareness of touch is as much a process of consciousness as of external causation. A finding which is reflected in concept of the soul’s five spiritual senses: sight, touch, hearing, taste and scent. Of these five spiritual senses, Farges writes that touch is the ‘most obscure’.\(^7\)

**Charismatic Phenomena**

In the New Testament charismatic phenomena are reported in Acts 2:1-13 with the dramatic intercession of the Holy Spirit at the time of the Feast of Pentecost and the Apostles speaking in a variety of languages. This gift of capacity to speak in unknown tongues (*glossolalia*), together with other spiritual gifts, such as: the working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, interpretation of tongues and

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\(^73\) Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature Of Man*, 42-43.


\(^77\) Farges, *Mystical Phenomena*, 56.
healing, is again referred to by St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.\textsuperscript{78} The diversity of gifts of the Spirit is noted by Paul:

> Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy, \textit{let us prophesy} according to the proportion of our faith;
>
> Or ministry, \textit{let us wait} on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;
>
> Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, \textit{let him do} it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with simplicity; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8)

It is clear that for early Christians there was no enmity between authority and the practice of charisms. Rather there was an expectation that spiritual gifts as a sign of God’s presence in the world would be present, in various forms, in all Christians.\textsuperscript{79}

However, by the third century the charismatic movement had lost some of its vigour and gradually monasticism assumed responsibility for charisms. And, as noted by Rahner, the concept of union with God and the subjectivity of individual experience ‘pushed the prophetic and charismatic sense of a mission for the building up of the church into the background.’\textsuperscript{80} More recently (principally from the 1960s) a neopentecostal movement, not only within the newer independent churches but also within many traditional congregations, has led to renewed interest in the activities of

\textsuperscript{78} To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit. To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another \textit{divers} kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: (1 Corinthians 12:9-10).


\textsuperscript{80} Karl Rahner, Charism, 185.
the Holy Spirit and a greater awareness of charismatic phenomena. To observers the most publically noticeable of these phenomena are *glossolalia*, sometimes referred to ‘as speaking in tongues’ and ‘resting, or being slain in the spirit’.

(i) *Glossolalia*

As noted above, the phenomenon of *glossolalia* or speaking in tongues is referred as having occurred at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) when the Apostles spoke in foreign languages that they had not learned — an account, which according to David Edwards, has sometimes been interpreted as a reversal of the curse of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). However, St. Paul’s understanding of *glossolalia*, as revealed in his first letter to the Corinthians, appears to involve speaking in ecstasy and in languages that are unintelligible to the speaker and also to most of the listeners.

Although, St. Paul provides instruction for interpretation of tongues,

throughout this letter it is clear that his preference is for prophecy — prophecy that involves intelligible speaking in the Spirit. However, he also writes ‘I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:’ (1 Corinthians 14:18) and, where speaking in tongues is accompanied by interpretation, he seems to value it equally with prophecy on the grounds that interpreted *glossolalia* builds up the community. Contemporary charismatics occasionally speak in an understandable foreign language and

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83 ‘If any man speaks in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.’ (1 Corinthians 14:27).

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‘sometimes in “angelic,” or unintelligible glossolalia.’

Speaking in tongues has also been seen as a variety of prayer and a form of apophatic mysticism.

Studies conducted by the University of London have identified two distinctive forms of glossolalia. The first usually occurs publicly, for example, during church activities, and involves singing, verbal sounds and bodily ecstasy. The second form is more private, consisting of quiet glossolalic prayer that engenders feelings of tranquility and harmony within the speaker. This second form of glossolalia may take place when the person is alone and involved in routine chores.

Speaking in tongues has been the subject of investigation by cognitive neuroscientists. Newberg and Waldman report that a comparison between the brain scans of Pentecostal women, engaged in speaking in tongues, and the brain scans of meditating Franciscan nuns and Buddhists showed significant differences. The brain scans of those speaking in tongues showed decreased activity in the frontal lobes, whereas, within the scans involving prayer and meditation, there was an increase in frontal-lobe activity. Newberg and Waldman suggest that this increased frontal-lobe activity may arise through the meditators focusing on specific objects. For example, when the nuns contemplated religious texts, increased activity was seen in the language areas in the frontal-lobes. However, during speaking in tongues despite the language being ‘highly structured’ and ‘filled with clearly articulated phrases’ the

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84 Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 323. See also, David Barrett, *The New Believers*.


language areas of the frontal-lobes did not change. Newberg and Waldman suggest that this may indicate that the language of those speaking in tongues may be generated differently or from somewhere other than the normal speech processing centres.\(^{87}\)

A later study of the resting brain state of a Pentecostal subject and the resting brain states of frequent meditators (Franciscan nuns and Buddhist practitioners) showed similarities, in that, all scans indicated asymmetrical activity between the two sides of the subjects’ thalamus. Newberg and Waldman emphasise that this asymmetrical activity is unusual and may possibly indicate that either the subjects of this study have a unique capacity for spiritual revelations or that their spiritual practices ‘have permanently altered their neural functioning.’\(^{88}\) Therefore, according to Newberg and Waldman:

> For the Buddhist, unitive consciousness is real. For the nun, the presence of God is absolutely real. And for the Pentecostal practitioner who speaks in tongues, the Holy Spirit is not just a metaphor; it is as solid as the book that you are now holding in your hands — as far as the brain can tell.\(^{89}\)

Another study conducted by Newberg and Waldman showed that the asymmetry found in the brain scans of an atheistic subject, who participated regularly in healing meditation but had no religious belief, was similar to the asymmetry found in the brain scans of not only meditating nuns and Buddhists but also in the brain scans of subjects speaking in tongues. Because this is not typically seen in the general

\(^{87}\) Newberg and Waldman, _Why We Believe What We Believe_, 200-201.

\(^{88}\) Newberg and Waldman, _Why We Believe What We Believe_, 214.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.
population, Newberg and Waldman conclude that further studies are required to assess whether this asymmetry is caused by long-term meditative practice or is the result of some genetic predisposition.\(^\text{90}\)

(ii)  **Slaying in the Spirit**

The phenomenon of being slain in the spirit, which involves partial or total loss of consciousness in the recipient, usually occurs as a result of a member of the clergy laying hands upon a person who has requested to be prayed over or to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. Although slaying in the spirit is not a charism noted by St. Paul, Egan considers that Biblical examples of certain prophets and saints falling to the ground and losing partial or total consciousness whilst experiencing fear, awe and reverence may be representative of this phenomenon.\(^\text{91}\)

Precedence for the experience of being slain in the spirit may also be found in Corcoran’s study of spiritual guidance within the lives of early Christians where she draws attention to the ability of the Desert Fathers and Mothers to create a ‘felt experience of transmission of spiritual power’.\(^\text{92}\) Corcoran finds this experience comparable to the transmission of the prophet Elijah’s spirit to his disciple Elisha and to the Hindu experience of *shaktipat* which occurs when a spiritual teacher or guru lays hands upon a disciple.

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\(^{90}\) Newberg and Waldman, *Why We Believe What We Believe*, 228.

\(^{91}\) Egan, *Christian Mysticism*.

Although, as noted by Newberg and Waldman, exact figures regarding the number of people who personally experience charisms are imprecise and difficult to calculate.\textsuperscript{93} Poloma, certainly, regards Pentecostal or charismatic experiences as being a major contributing factor to the growth of the Assemblies of God and some Episcopal churches in America.\textsuperscript{94} Bouma also sees interest in Pentecostal and evangelical activities as being relevant to the growth of non-denominational Pentecostal churches and mega-churches at major centres throughout Australia.\textsuperscript{95} Consequently the growth and size of congregations attending centres that encourage charismatic experiences, may possibly provide some indication of the frequency of charisms that include speaking in tongues and being slain by the spirit.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNITARY PSYCHOSPiritual AND CHARISMATIC EXPERIENCES

The phenomena of \textit{unio mystica}, seen primarily as the preserve of those who engage in infused contemplation, is deemed to occur much less frequently than the varieties of charismatic or psychospiritual phenomena that have so far been discussed. However, although, it is generally accepted that psychospiritual phenomena may from time to time accompany contemplation and that the experience of union does not preclude former or subsequent experiences of a ‘secondary’ or ‘accidental’ nature, the relationship between psychospiritual phenomena and that of union has from time to time been an uneasy one. There has often been concern that the

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\textsuperscript{93} Newberg and Waldman, \textit{Why We Believe What We Believe}, 193.


\textsuperscript{95} Gary Bouma 2006, \textit{Australian Soul, Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century} (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
manifestation of ‘secondary’ or ‘accidental’ (charismatic ecstasies or psychospiritual phenomena) forms of mystical phenomena may be indicative of self-deception, psychological infirmity, diabolical intrusion or even downright fraud. This has been somewhat problematic; hence, George Mavrodes’ position that it is impossible to distinguish true mystical phenomena from false mystical phenomena is, to some extent, supported by Knowles and Farges. However, Knowles and Farges also consider that to deny the existence of supernatural phenomena merely provides an impasse. An impasse that Knowles, in a reflection of James’ pragmatism, resolves by arguing that in the final analysis judgment must be based on outcomes — he argues: ‘Grapes cannot be plucked from thistles; by their fruits we may know them.’

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98 Farges, Mystical Phenomena.

99 James, The Varieties, 20, Here James states his empirical criterion: ‘By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots.’

100 David Knowles, What is Mysticism? 56.
GLOSSARY

An Explanation of Key Terms as Used by the Researcher within the Present Study

Affect

The term affect is used as a noun to define subjective feelings or emotions brought about by personal experience of particular phenomena. This is not to say that affect cannot be used as a verb, meaning to ‘cause or bring about an effect.’

Effect

The term effect is used as a noun to signify a tangible outcome or result. From time to time it may also be used as a verb meaning to ‘bring about’ as in the sense of effecting a change.

Praxis

(i) The manner in which human beings express religiosity — either privately or socially.

(ii) The use of deliberate techniques, such as, meditation, prayer or music to facilitate religious experience or access altered states of consciousness.

Psychic & Psychospiritual

The term ‘psychic’ when used by the researcher, is not used to describe activities such as astrology, channelling, fortune telling or mediumship. Instead, it is used to denote those altered states of consciousness that are not best described as being ineffable.

The phenomena considered in this study fall broadly within the area considered as being psychospiritual. They include the out-of-body/near-death experience, auditory, visionary and textual experience, photism and awareness of unseen presences. To avoid repetition in this thesis, the term psychospiritual is used synonymously with the term psychic.

Experiences involving psychospiritual phenomena are somewhat problematic in that they may be perceived (by those who experience them) as being either mystical or psychic and in some circumstances both mystical and psychic. To address this difficulty, rather than referring to either ‘mystical experiences’ or ‘psychospiritual experiences’
the phrase ‘mystical and/or psychospiritual experiences’ will be used wherever appropriate.

**Mystical** (μουστικός/mystical)  
The terms mystical and mysticism have their beginnings in pre-Christian times with the Mystery religions. At that time the word μουστικός (mystikos/mystical) was used to refer to a secret that must be kept hidden from the uninitiated.

Mysticism is seen within many religions as knowledge of the Absolute through personal experience. Experience that, broadly speaking, can be initiated by religious strategy or praxis.  

**Focused Spirituality**  
Within the current research project and in keeping with the non-nebulous aims of the study, focused spirituality is defined as action brought about by deliberate human choice.

This definition arises from Wilber’s conception of spiritual development. He explains that ‘the spiritual line of development is the development line of ultimate concern, regardless of its content.’ For the purposes of this study, this broader concept of spirituality may include social and political outcomes.

**Supernatural**  
A term used to describe that which is envisaged to be beyond natural laws or beyond nature uninitiated by grace.

**The Real**  
‘The Real’ is a term coined by John Hick to express the many names by which differing religions and believers refer to their concept of the Transcendent, for example: God, Christ, The Holy Spirit, Allah, Brahman, Vishnu etc. For the same reason this terminology is applied, from time to time, within the current study.

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