J.A. Belzen

Towards Cultural Psychology of Religion

Principles, Approaches, Applications

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Chapter 2

The historicocultural approach in the psychology of religion: Perspectives for interdisciplinary research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1997, *36*, 358–371. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.)

Chapter 3

Cultural psychology of religion: Profile of an interdisciplinary approach. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 2009, *20*, 103–129. (Leiden: Brill.)

Chapter 4

The cultural-psychological approach to religion: Contemporary debates on the object of the discipline. *Theory and Psychology*, 1999, *9*, 229–256. (London: Sage.)

Chapter 5

Methodological issues in the psychology of religion: Towards another paradigm? *Journal of Psychology*, 2006, *140*, 5–28. (Washington: Heldref.)

Chapter 6

Studying the specificity of spirituality: Lessons from the psychology of religion. *Mental Health*, *Religion and Culture*, 2009, *12*, 205–222. (London: Routledge.)

Chapter 7

Methodological concerns in the psychology of religion: Continuities, losses and transforming perspectives. *Religion*, 2005, *35*, 137–165. (Oxford: Elsevier.)

Chapter 8

Culture and the 'dialogical self': Toward a secular cultural psychology of religion. In: Straub, J., Weidemann, D., Kölbl, C., & Zielke, B. (Eds.) (2006), *Pursuit of Meaning: Advances in Cultural and Cross-Cultural Psychology* (pp. 129–152). (Bielefeld: Transcript.)

Chapter 9

Religion as embodiment: Cultural-psychological concepts and methods in the study of conversion among "Bevindelijken". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1999, *38*, 236–253. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.)

Chapter 10

Religion, culture and psychopathology. Cultural-psychological reflections on religion in a case of manslaughter in The Netherlands. *Pastoral Psychology*, 2000, *48*, 415–435. (New York: Springer.)

Chapter 11

Psychic functioning and mental health: The role of religion in personal life. In: Belzen, J.A., & Geels, A. (Eds.) (2008), *Autobiography and the Psychological Study of Religious lives* (pp. 117–157). Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi (International Series in the Psychology of Religion, Volume 15.)

Chapter 12

Religion and social order – psychological factors in Dutch pillarization, especially among the Calvinists. In: Belzen, J.A. (Ed.) (2001), *Psychohistory in Psychology of Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies* (pp. 205–238). Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi. (International Series in the Psychology of Religion, Volume 12.)

Preface

The aims pursued in this book are quite modest. The text is not an introduction in the traditional sense to any psychological subdiscipline or field of application, nor does it present anything essentially new. Rather, it shows 'work in progress', as it attempts to contribute to an integration of two differently structured, but already existing fields within psychology. In order to explain this, it is probably best to say a few words about how the book came into being and about what it hopes to achieve.

As a project, the volume owes very much to others. While lecturing in places ranging from South Africa to Canada and from California through European countries to Korea, colleagues have often urged me to come up with a volume on 'cultural psychology of religion'. For reasons that should become clear in the text, I feel uncomfortable with such a demand. To my understanding, there exists no single cultural psychology of religion. Rather, there are ever expanding numbers of divergent types of psychologies, some of which are applied to understanding religious aspects of human lives or to researching specific religious phenomena, while others are not. Within this heterogeneous field that is, correctly or not, still designated as 'psychology', there are also many approaches that are sometimes referred to as 'cultural psychology' or as 'culturally sensitive psychologies'. It would be worthwhile applying many of these to research on religious phenomena, but at present not too many are in fact so applied.

As I resisted the idea of writing an 'introduction', a 'handbook' or a 'companion' to cultural psychologies of religion, Joao Edenio Reis Valle and Marcio Fabri, both from Sao Paulo, suggested I should at least bring together a number of previously published papers in which I advocate cultural psychological approaches to the study of religion and that offer a specimen of the kind of interdisciplinary work I envision. Indeed, this is what this collection attempts: it tries, through a number of essays that may each be read separately, to serve as an 'appetizer' to possible ways of doing cultural psychology of religion. It hopes to make the reader aware of the possibility of applying cultural psychological approaches within the psychology of religion, and it hopes to stimulate others to indulge in this type of research. The volume owes much to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript and to the editors of journals and other media in which the various chapters were initially published, as well as to comments made at the final stage by Ray Paloutzian, Ulrike Popp-Baier,

Hessel Zondag and others. Supporters of the project from the field of cultural psychology include Carl Ratner, Jürgen Straub and Jaan Valsiner, all of whom I gratefully acknowledge.

A volume like this has limitations of several kinds. Many such limitations are due to the person of the author. Colleagues from especially the USA have often remarked how different the kind of work represented here is from what is being done in so-called mainstream psychology in the USA. The work is seen as European, and if it is true I am grateful for it and proud of it. Yet, whether I like it or not, it also has to be admitted that throughout the work it will remain visible that the author is Dutch, educated and trained primarily in the Netherlands, doing research mainly in that country. None of this, however, is a problem within the type of psychological knowledge and research represented here: as all knowledge is limited and situated, so is everything that is offered and proposed here. Cultural psychologists do not strive for universally valid knowledge: such is left to other branches of scholarship, working on such foundations of human psychic functioning as may be analyzed using natural science approaches. Cultural psychology does not deny or trivialize such foundations. But it does remind us of the limits that inevitably go with such approaches as well: for next to being impossible without genetic, neurological, chemical and many other foundations approachable by natural sciences, psychic phenomena are instigated and regulated by cultural conditions, determinations and limitations to human conduct, such as conventions, norms, beliefs, practices and many others more. Cultural psychologists urge their colleagues in other fields not to forget about these, but to come up with types of knowledge additional to those discovered by psychologists collaborating with neurologists or geneticists. By consequence, the type of knowledge cultural psychologists provided is valid first and foremost (and sometimes even only) at the place and at the moment it was developed. Therefore, what this book has to offer is not a paradigm of how to do cultural psychological research on whatever religion wherever on the planet. It does not offer a recipe at all, but rather an *appetizer*: it provides an invitation to take notice of and to get involved in this kind of research, by offering examples of how cultural psychological approaches can be applied to the study of specific forms of religion. That these examples deal largely with the so-called *gereformeerden* (Reformed, a subclass of Calvinism) in the Netherlands has mainly to do with my situatedness as a researcher and an author: the Reformed have been and continue to constitute an important, in itself not homogeneous, religious subculture in the Netherlands, to which I myself have never belonged (nor did my family), but which I happened to come across in some of my earliest research projects and that I have some in-depth knowledge about. (And lest anyone thinks I would be particularly fond of *gereformeerden*, I have included in chapter 10 also an analysis of an incident they have always been embarrassed about.)

Next to gratitude for moral support provided by colleagues from many countries, this volume owes a debt also to others who helped out with many practical things, esp. to Fraser Watts, the director of the Psychology and Religion Research Group at the University of Cambridge (UK), who invited me to be a visiting Fellow during the Fall of 2008 and to shelter at Queens' College away from the many distractions

from intellectual work that prevail at the University of Amsterdam. I am grateful for the opportunity to share ideas from this book with members of his Research Group and for the opportunity to see what a truly academic setting can look like.

Hopefully, this collection conveys some of the enthusiasm with which the studies have been pursued: contrary to the tendency to tailor empirical phenomena according to theoretical categories and to press them into the moulds provided by research methods, cultural psychology allows the researcher to remain close to the lived reality of subjects' lives, seeking by necessity collaboration with other approaches that try to interpret these lives and their vicissitudes. Although they are just like every other scientific and reflective approach apt to reducing complexity, cultural psychologies try to resist the tendency to reductionism found so often in research on religion and to help to deconstruct scientific prejudices and all too easy answers to all too simple questions. Paradoxically, the aims pursued by this volume will be achieved if readers put it aside as insufficient and not good enough, asking for more and for better, and are consequently inspired to try to come up with such themselves. *Bon appétit!*

Amsterdam, Cambridge

Jacob A. Belzen
New Year's Eve 2008

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