

Beck's Risk Society and Giddens' Search for Ontological Security: A Comparative Analysis Between the Anthroposophical Society and the Assemblies of God

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There is a contention by social theorists such as Beck, Giddens, Bauman and Lash that contemporary Western society is in a transitional period in which risks have proliferated as an outcome of modernisation. In accordance with these changes individuals' sense of selfhood have moved toward being more sensitive as to what they define as risks, such as threats to their health, as economic security or emotional wellbeing than they were in previous eras. Living in such a world can lead individuals to what Giddens would term ontological insecurity. Obsessive exaggeration of risks to personal existence, extreme introspection and moral vacuity are characteristics of the ontologically insecure individual. The opposite condition, ontological security, when achieved, leaves the individual with a sense of continuity and stability, which enables him or her to cope effectively with risk situations, personal tensions and anxiety. This emergent field of study in sociology has nevertheless poorly addressed religious issues; as if these social researchers have omitted parts of the religious aspects of contemporary society. This article attempts to fill this lacuna and explores the notion of risk society and ontological security with that of postmodern religion/spiritualities. Two case studies of the Anthroposophical society and Pentecostalism aid in this task.

Ulrich Beck (1992; 1994; 1995; 1996) and Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991; 1994; 1999) while differing in their approaches, share similar concerns, foci and epistemological underpinnings in their work. Together these theorists describe the most conspicuous features of contemporary society as institutionalised pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence (Lash, 1993). In this society westerners cannot be sure what is going to happen, and so neither know how to behave, nor can predict what the outcome of their actions will be. Instinctively or by learned habit, westerners

dislike and fear ambivalence, that enemy of security and self-assurance. Westerners are inclined to believe that they would feel much safer and more comfortable if situations were unambiguous – where it is clear what to do and certain what would happen if they did it.

Let us consider some of the health and environmental scares of the past few years: brain tumours caused by cellular phones, cancer caused by high-tension electrical wires, Alar in apples, complications arising from breast implants, the Gulf War and the new Balkan War Syndrome, the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle (or what is called the mad cow disease), and its possible connection with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). And let us not forget the risks from our homes, our water, and the very air we breathe. As Anthony Giddens (1991:123) states: “The threats of death, insanity and - somehow even more fearsome - cancer lurk in all we eat or touch”.

The approach of these theorists is not without critiques; however, it is beyond the scope of this article to address this debate (see for example Lash 1993, Mestrovic 1997; 1998 and Wynne 1996). What I want to draw attention to concerns the fact that these theorists mostly employ a secular approach. Featherstone (1991) notes the marginal and isolated position that sociology of religion has taken within the field of sociology. Whilst reminding us of the invaluable works of Durkheim and Weber, whose writings on culture treated religion as central to the understanding of the structure and development of social life, he argues, save for a few notable exceptions, there has generally been little interest in religious phenomena on the part of those engaged in theorising the contemporary cultural complex. This argument is also reflected by Peter Berger (1996/97; 1999), a one time proponent of the secularisation thesis.¹ Berger contends that religiosity in the modern world may turn out not to be lost in the everyday life paths of ordinary people, but to be lost from view in academic accounts of the modern world. This argument has led me to attempt to fill in this gap by examining religion in relation to the search for ontological security in what is termed the ‘risk society’.

The Influence of Risk Society

Beck (1994) argues that the central problem of western societies is not the production and distribution of goods such as wealth and employment in conditions of scarcity, but the prevention or minimisation of risks. Individuals are daily bombarded with debates and conflicts, which proliferate over these risks. Bauman (1998:65) illustrates this point well when he states:

...it [risk] is now dissolved in the minute, yet innumerable, traps and ambushes of daily life. One tends to hear it knocking now and again, daily, in fatty fast food, in listeria-infected eggs, in cholesterol rich temptations, in sex without condoms, in cigarette smoke, in asthma-inducing carpet mites, in the dirt you see and the germs you do not.

Accordingly individuals living in these societies have moved towards a greater awareness of risks, deal with them on an everyday basis, and are far more sensitive to what they define as 'risks', or threats to their health, economic security or emotional wellbeing than they were in previous eras (Lupton, 1999). As Beck (1994:45) states, "[e]veryone is caught up in defensive battles of various types, anticipating the hostile substances in one's manner of living and eating." Consequently this 'risk society', as Beck terms it, involves living with contingency. That is, living in a more complex and less controllable world than that of our past.

This leads us to question if contemporary western society is any different from that of earlier times? Or are the hopes, anxieties, risks and uncertainties of each period merely a carbon copy of previous eras? Giddens (1999) contends the meaning of risk has changed with the emergence of modernity, beginning in the 17th century and gathering force in the 18th century. The underlying ethos of modernity is the notion that the key to human progress and social order is objective knowledge of the world through scientific exploration and rational thinking. It assumes that the social and natural worlds follow laws that may be measured, calculated and therefore predicted (Swingewood, 2000). It seems that since humans have secularly taken control of nature (through the example of industrialisation) and themselves (by the example of the French Revolution) so that risk, which at one time was the responsibility of an omnipotent God, would now be the responsibility of human kind.

Furthermore, the dangers and hazards of contemporary societies, principally environmental problems, differ significantly from previous eras. These threats, argues Beck (1995), cannot be delimited spatially, temporally or socially. The magnitude and global nature of risks is such that risks are becoming more and more difficult to quantify, prevent, and avoid. Contemporary events are often open-ended, rather than events that have a foreseeable end. Accordingly the risks of late modern society are not easily calculable. Beck (1996:31) encapsulates this powerfully when he states '[...] the injured of Chernobyl are today, years after the catastrophe, not even born yet'.

Scenarios where damage is long lasting, irreparable and incalculable lead to difficulty in identifying a single cause upon which blame can be cast, or in awarding financial compensation for the damage done (Beck, 1996:31). Accordingly, the early modernist rules of attribution and causality break down, as do the safety systems that once dealt with risk. As Beck (1995:76-77) states, contemporary hazards can only be dealt with by technological means - they can never be removed entirely. Risks that may always have been part of human history have an intrinsic difference within late modernity. The difference is that many of them arise from, rather than being assuaged by, the growth in human knowledge. This is reflected in the following statement from Ulrich Beck (1994:14):

The naïve certainties of the Enlightenment - the optimism in human progress wrought through science and rationalised action - have disintegrated, resulting in individuals' need to seek and invent new certainties for themselves.

The Interplay of Risk Society and Ontological Security

Living in a world of contingency can lead to what Giddens (1991) terms 'ontological insecurity'. The ontologically insecure individual has little if any sense of continuous narrative or biography. Obsessive exaggeration of risks to personal existence, extreme introspection and moral vacuity are characteristics of this individual (Giddens, 1991:53). Giddens is arguing that the ontological insecure individual may fail to achieve an enduring conception of his or her aliveness. The opposite condition, ontological security, when achieved, leaves the individual not troubled by, or even oblivious to, existential questions. Practical consciousness has excluded or bracketed them out, resulting in the taken for granted attitude that Giddens conceives as necessary for action (Jacobs, 1999).² Giddens clearly defines ontological security as an emotional phenomenon, incorporating 'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self identity and in the constancy of their surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens, 1990:92). Ontological security has to do with: "...being or, in the terms of phenomenology, 'being in the world'. But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive phenomenon, and it is rooted in the unconscious" (Giddens, 1990:92).

Of course what has just been presented, in the case of ontological security and insecurity, represents extremes. What should be clear is that ontological security is understood as a latent concept, which remains in the individual's unconscious unless it is threatened. It is the argument of this essay that living in what Beck would term a 'risk society' does indeed threaten one's 'ontological security'.

As alluded to earlier, the difficulties of living in a risk culture does not mean that there is greater insecurity on the level of day-to-day life than in previous eras. However, the crisis prone nature of our contemporary era has unsettling consequences in a different respect. Giddens (1991:184) contends that the 'risk society' fuels a general climate of uncertainty which an individual finds disturbing no matter how far he or she seeks to put it to the back of his or her mind; and it inevitably exposes everyone to a diversity of crisis situations of greater or lesser importance, crisis situations which may sometimes threaten the very core of self-identity, a characteristic of the ontologically insecure individual.

Giddens elaborates a typology of the individual's adaptive reactions to this sense of insecurity; however, this typology does not take into consideration any religious element and accordingly needs to be refined. Nevertheless, for the sake of this article this feeling of insecurity is generalised to a large majority of westerners, and noted as experienced by all respondents within the exploratory fieldwork. These adaptive reactions and the responses supplied by the research (see below) will be explored shortly.

Religion within our contemporary era

Modernity, we are constantly and authoritatively assured is inhospitable to faith, religion and the sacred (Lyon, 2000:122). This comment is supported by the claims

of Anthony Giddens (1990:109) when he explains some of the consequences of modernity:

[...] secularization is no doubt a complex matter and does not seem to result in the complete disappearance of religious thought and activity- probably because of the purchase of religion on some existential questions... Yet most of the situations of modern social life are manifestly incompatible with religion as a pervasive influence on day to day life.

Giddens continues by stating that this is because “reflexively organized knowledge supplants religious cosmology and that this undermines tradition even more than it does religion” (cited within Lyon, 2000:22).

Giddens’ approach to the question of secularization does not seem to fully cover its complexity (Lyon, 2000). His suggestion that religious activity is in decline is correct to a certain degree, however, his failing is in lumping together religious activity with religious “thought”.³ Beyond this, one must keep in mind that secularization does not occur within an historical, political, and social vacuum (Martin, 1969). Secularization is indeed a process in motion, yet we must allow that it is not unidirectional and that it is culturally and historically specific. This allows one to comprehend the differences in religious involvement in areas such as America, where church going rates are still relatively buoyant, and on the other hand northern Europe, where it seems to be mainly secular (Bruce, 1996). As Mestrovic (1997) points out, and a crucial point in relation to this article, religion can easily be misunderstood as merely customary behaviour (like church going) or as cognitive activity (logical beliefs), where in fact it also has to do with faith, identity, and non-cognitive aspects of life such as emotion. From this, one can gather that secularization is not as systematic or unidirectional as Giddens portrays. Furthermore, beyond the criticisms of Lyon (2000) and Mestrovic (1997) outlined above, it should be taken into account that Giddens’ mainly secular approach to Western society also dismisses the impact of New Religious Movements (NRMs) and various other forms of religion on the individual’s day to day life. This shall be demonstrated shortly.

Another way of examining this debate is through the work of Zygmunt Bauman, a critical theorist who analyses the consumer aspects of contemporary conditions. Bauman applies the term “postmodernity” as the best way of describing contemporary conditions. Up to this point we have been focusing on theorists who align their work with the term “modernity”, specifically Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. However, Giddens and Beck use a number of terms such as “high” or “reflexive” modernity, stopping short of “postmodernity”. It can be argued both theorists are discussing phenomena that can equally be thought of as “postmodern”.⁴

Bauman’s (1998) investigation of the nature of religion within western society is quite extensive, however, for the sake of this article we shall concentrate on his claim that there does exist two forms of religion within ‘postmodernity’: consumer religion and fundamentalism. Bauman’s emphasis on ‘consumption’ goes beyond

commodities. Products for gaining sensation gathering and sensation enhancement are not restricted to commodities and services, but can be, following the work of Bauman (1998), Featherstone (1991), Lyon (1994) and Bibby (1987) extended to the consumption of signs and texts. Bibby (1987) argues that religion has become a neatly packaged consumer item - taking its place among other commodities that can be bought or bypassed according to one's consumption whims.

I am defining the Anthroposophical society as a 'consumer' religion, and The Assemblies of God as representing a 'fundamentalist' religion. Briefly stated, the Anthroposophical society⁵, can be identified as a world affirming New Religious Movement⁶ (Chrissydes, 1999), whose characteristics of individuation, syncretistic and organisational openness⁷ point to the choice characteristic of what Bauman (1998) would term a 'consumer religion'.

In the case of Pentecostalism, specifically the Assemblies of God, they are seen to describe themselves as 'Bible loving evangelical Christians who emphasise afresh the teachings of Scripture' (Hughes, 2000). They continue by describing their beliefs as 'fundamental and evangelica l- our sole textbook being the Bible, which is the only infallible and authoritative Word of God' (Hughes, 2000). Through this self-definition and the use of Lawrences' (1998) definition of Christian literalist fundamentalisms - that is a theological position that believes that the Bible contains the actual words of God and directly applies it to contemporary life - we could argue that this form of religion could fit into what Bauman would term 'fundamentalism'.

Introducing the fieldwork

During the year 2000, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews⁸ with individuals who described themselves as belonging to the Anthroposophical Society, the Assemblies of God, or described themselves as having no religious affiliation whatsoever, the latter being used as a control group. Each group, or cell, was represented by five respondents, the minimum sample of participants for a qualitative analysis (Bouma, 1984:38). Of course a larger sample would be preferable, however, this research should be viewed as being in its initial stages and thus can be viewed as a pilot study. Respondents of the research, with the exception of the 'secular group', were initially approached via a formal invitation sent to their respective organisation. After initial contact was made participants were chosen through referral or the snowball technique. In regards to participants deriving from the 'secular group', initial contact was made through an acquaintance and again the referral and the snowball technique were employed. A consequent limitation to this particular methodological approach stems from this form of participant selection. It tends to produce a sample of individuals with similar economic, and education backgrounds: basically, individuals with very similar belief and value systems. However, although the sample is small, it is deemed representative in terms of gender, age and socio-economic background.

The Role of Risk

The conscious awareness of what Beck and Giddens term 'risk society' is evident within all of the religious and secular interviewees, however the reactions of this awareness differ in each group. To understand this differentiation Giddens' (1990:135) typology of ideal-type adaptive reactions will be utilised. These types are supposedly inclusive of all individuals living in a 'risk society'. I will argue that in addition to these four types of reactions, respondents from the Pentecostal church seem to portray a very different type of reaction, something that I would call a 'world-rejecting adaptive reaction'.

Giddens' adaptive reactions to risk:

- **Pragmatic acceptance-** the individual acknowledges the dangers of this risk society and concentrates on 'surviving' the everyday life rather than withdrawing from it. In this type of adaptive reaction there is a strong emphasis on pragmatic participation which maintains a focus on day-to-day living.
- **Sustained optimism-** Whatever dangers threaten the individual, he or she will demonstrate a continued faith in the providential reason of the Enlightenment period, a reason which always finds a scientific answer to any risk.
- **Cynical pessimism-** Individuals from this type are pessimistic, yet, rather than taking on a fatalistic approach to risk, their cynicism about society in general (e.g. politicians, scientists) allows them to take an adaptive approach to everyday life. This type presumes a direct involvement with the anxieties provoked by high consequence dangers, but the cynicism expressed by individuals from this type - because of its emotionally neutralising nature and because of its potential for humour (Giddens, 1990:136) allows them to cope with the reality of these risks.
- **Radical engagement -** This type reflects an optimistic outlook on the risk society. Yet, unlike the sustained optimism type that demonstrates a faith in the Enlightenment project, it is bound up with contestatory action, such as the action supported by social movements (e.g. Greenpeace).

We can see from the fieldwork that participants who claim to have no religious affiliation whatsoever, generally⁹ fall into the cynical pessimism reaction. One of the respondents within this research, Alexandra, struggles to encapsulate her thoughts and feelings about this subject. Her apparent pessimism resides in the fact that she feels she can do nothing to make the world a better place:

I get this terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach whenever I hear...there is a part of me...there is a cartoon where there are loads and loads of people and each one has a thinking bubble and each one is saying but what can one person do. And I sometimes get absolutely overwhelmed how I can do absolutely nothing to make the world a better place, especially since I have become a mother.

Individuals from the Anthroposophical Society react with a mixture of radical engagement and sustained optimism. Sara, who has only been with the society for

the last two years, expresses the combination of sustained optimism, through her expressed hope in the future, and radical engagement, through her increasing involvement and feelings of responsibility towards her environment, in the following way:

Through my involvement with the society I am definitely more aware of these topics that are affecting the world today. I feel that I should be more concerned as this is my world. I feel more responsible and really attempt to make a difference through my actions and through my attitude. But I definitely feel like there is hope in the future.

The 5 participants from the Pentecostal Church did not reflect, in their perception of the 'risk society', any of the 'adaptive reactions' ideal-types which Giddens depicts. These particular respondents expressed awareness of what Beck and Giddens terms the 'risk society', however their reaction had a world rejecting sense to it. The emphasis placed on the afterlife rather than on the present life was demonstrated by all respondents. Lauren succinctly expresses it in the following way:

These issues of course affect my life because I live on this planet which is affected by those things. [...] The time we spend on this earth is so little compared to where we will be for eternity. If you hold up a piece of paper and look how thin it actually is, that is what our time on earth is. But if you hold your arms out horizontally and envision that they extend forever, that is what eternity is like. So that is what I am concerned about.

Alison reflects on the risk society in the following way:

The Bible has promised that all of these things are going to get worse...even interplanetary problems like the planets leaving their orbits. People who have a personal relationship with God, when you have it He promises, He protects you. So in the end these things don't even touch you. So I guess the decreasing state of the world, I feel protected from.

The term I have chosen to express the adaptive reaction employed by these particular participants is the 'world rejecting adaptive reaction'. Though the name of this type itself seems to be antithetic, it portrays the feelings expressed by each of the 5 participants. On the one hand the respondents acknowledge the declining state of the world in terms of environmental, social and political issues, and express sentiments such as "of course I care, so I make sure to recycle", yet on the other hand, because of their emphasis on their eternal life, they do not see these issues as affecting them. As Brian states "Those who have a personal relationship with God are protected from these issues, there are things that can't even touch us".

The fact that Giddens' typology of adaptive reaction to risk does not include the reactions of the individuals I interviewed, stemming from the Assemblies of God, demonstrates his dismissal of religion as an influence on the individuals day-to-day

life.

Operationalising ontological security

Previous research in the area of ontological security is concentrated within the field of urban (Saunders, 1984, 1989; Dupuis and Thorns, 1998) and leisure sociology. Though this research has inspired this paper, the concept of ontological security needs to be operationalised for a study on religion, for this reason, the interviews from the secular group have been omitted from this section. This will be achieved by analysing the following areas: (1) The religious site as a base for the establishment of routine; (2) A site which represents a secure base where identities can be constructed; (3) If reflexivity is partially defined as self monitoring through expert systems, what does the individual's specific religion offer them?

(1) Religion as a base for the establishment of routine

Giddens contends that the conditions that maintain ontological security include bodily autonomy and predictable routines, which are based in a 'sense of continuity and order in events' (1991 243). The ontologically secure individual is anchored in the discipline of predictable routine. Routine can be understood as the predictability of daily life and the patterns of living that are regularly followed. Prediction of daily life, through religion, was a salient characteristic among the respondents deriving from the Pentecostal denomination. Lauren a respondent who has been with the Pentecostal denomination for the last 8 years, speaks about her daily and weekly routine, at church and at home, in the following way:

Church is a huge part of my life and my family's life. Our belief is practiced at home everyday as well as in church on Sunday and Wednesday. I currently teach an adult Sunday school class every Sunday and we attend three services a week. My children are also involved in the children's programs and my husband is the leader of the men's fellowship group at the church. God is the central focus point of this family. God is talked about a lot and the kids see how important it is to both their mother and their father. The kids see both of us reading our Bibles and teaching it to them, and we have family prayer every night.

This pattern is found throughout the five interviews conducted with individuals from the Assemblies of God Church. It seems this particular form of religion pervades into every sphere of their life, in other words it is an "all encompassing one".¹⁰

There was, however, a demonstration - to a smaller extent than that of the Pentecostals - of routine within the daily lives of the Anthroposophists. Marget, who has been a member for 60 years, spoke about her daily meditation time and her weekly get together with fellow members. Within the study of Angela's home, a respondent who has been with the society for the last 6 years, are a series of drawings. In response to my admiration of these drawings, Angela comments:

Yeah I drew those around 2 years ago, they are based on Steiner's work on life cycles. I used to meditate to them daily, especially that one. Yeah I haven't done

it for quite a while now, I should get back into it.

This highly individualistic character and according flexible organisational framework of the society is explained by Randolph, who has been a member of the society since the 1960s:

There are a lot of people dissatisfied with normal religion, of course there are a lot of people who are not. But the mysteries¹¹ are the places you go to when you are dissatisfied and you want to go further [...] Those mysteries have not disappeared but they have transformed. Now the appropriate way to do it is in freedom. You still need a guide, but you don't have this tight bonding. So now, in Steiner's estimation, yes we still want to, this is a need this is why there are all of these movements but it is how to do it appropriately. He gives us background and he gives us all of this stuff you see, so that modern people can make this reconnection [...] And so you know it depends on you. If you only want to read a book and look at the world through that kind of lens that is fine. If you want to learn more, you can look at Steiner's spiritual philosophy and start to apply it yourself. It is up to the individual.

Ritual, or rather a self-imposed ritual, deriving from belief, did not occur on the same level within the Anthroposophical society. This can be seen as a reflection of one of the characteristics of world affirming NRMs, that is the openness of their organisation. As stated earlier emphasis is placed on the location of sacredness within the individual rather than effort being placed on attempts to address all aspects of followers' lives. It is this individualistic based approach that necessitates a flexible organisational framework which is demonstrated within the fieldwork.

(2) Religion as a representation of a secure base around which people can construct their identities

The confidence in one's self-identity is an element in Giddens' depiction of the ontologically secure individual. As Giddens (1991:52) states "a stable sense of self-identity presupposes the other elements of ontological security". The self is no longer seen as a homogeneous, stable core which resides within the individual but one which is suppressed by various social norms, rules and codes (Rose, 1989). Within Giddens' view of high-modernity, self-identity is now something constructed through the continual re-ordering of self-narratives (Giddens, 1991). Giddens contends self-identity presumes reflexive awareness (Lash, 1993). Self-identity, in other words, is something that must be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual (Giddens, 1991).

Each member of the Pentecostal Church expresses self-identity through their relationship with God. Lauren expresses it in the following way when she speaks fondly about her daughter:

Chrissy has seen so many victories in her life due to answered prayers. And she

has such a grateful heart about the abilities that God has given her. And she totally acknowledges that she has those gifts for reasons in which God will use her. So she has grown up with the focus on God and not *herself*.

Each respondent deriving from the Pentecostal Church claimed that their Christian self was represented in every sphere of their life. This emerging theme of the unified self¹² was not found to the same degree in the members of the Anthroposophical Society. Marget states:

I think of myself as a Hungarian born Jew who has become an Australian Anthroposophist. I have been with this society for sixty years, I became involved at the age of 17 when I was still in Hungary, but there are so many different parts to what makes me *me*. [...] some people who interact with me would never know I belonged to the society.

The demonstration of the 'unified self' especially by the Pentecostals, appears to contradict the arguments of both Bauman (1998) and Giddens (1991). For Bauman the modern world has moved toward the postmodern condition, it has become secular, individuals have lost belief in religious dogma, because their lives have become increasingly fragmented, to the degree that any unitary vision provided by a religion could never be satisfactory for all aspects of an individual's life.

(3) Religion viewed as an expert system

In circumstances of modernity, the balance between trust and risk, security and danger, becomes altered from traditional society. Day-to-day activities are no longer structured substantially through kinship relations, and the 'locality' no longer has the same significance as it once did. Reflexivity is now mediated through what Giddens terms expert systems (Giddens, 1990:113). Expert systems are defined as a system of expert knowledge, of any type, depending on rules of procedure transferable from individual to individual, for example, the psychology which is available to the lay public in the form of self-help or therapy manuals. The self has become a reflexive project, and in contemporary western societies, expert systems become centrally involved in the formation and continuity of the self. Giddens (1991:33) sees expert systems as a tool for warding off contingency, imposing order in the face of chaos, and used in the maintenance of individual identity in the face of ontological insecurity.

Modernity, as previously discussed, breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition. The individual, Giddens (1990; 1991; 1992; 1999) contends, feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the sense of security provided by more traditional settings. It is an argument of the present paper that contemporary religion, for its followers, is not an element of tradition but rather akin to an expert system in Giddens' sense, and as such can be a source of ontological security in late modernity.

Religion as an expert system emerged as a theme during the interviews conducted with respondents from the Pentecostal Church and the Anthroposophical Society.

The deployment of social knowledge (Giddens, 1991:18) through the individual's religion was expressed in the following way. Kalman, a member of the Anthroposophical Society states:

Right now I am holding some classes, through Steiner's philosophy, on aging and dying. I think it is hard for people to come to terms with these types of issues, but if we follow this philosophy it creates more certainty for each one of us. Aging and Dying should not be a scary thing.

Individuals from the Pentecostal church express similar sentiments. Lauren emotionally discusses what her belief provides her with:

God has provided me with inspirations and answers to problems that I would never have found anywhere else. I am nothing without God and it is only through him that I am what I am today. And it is only through him that I can live each and every day without making a mess out of everything. If it wasn't for God I would have had a nervous breakdown after giving birth to my surrogate baby. The agency couldn't help me, a counsellor couldn't help me, it was God who helped me. God is my source of life. I could not live my life without his presence even for a single day.

In a recent issue of the *Bulletin* (April 11, 2000) the growth of Christianity, specifically that of Pentecostalism, is examined. Following is an extract which reveals the social knowledge which the expert system of this particular religion can offer:

In the new churches the power of the message is in its communication. 'We scratch where people are itching,' says a senior minister of an expanding NSW Church. His sermons are more likely to focus on financial management and work issues, relationships and raising children than on fine theological argument. But fundamentally, there is still only one message - salvation through Jesus Christ. (Bagnall, 2000:28)

The illustration of religion, specifically Anthroposophy and The Assemblies of God, as an expert system has emerged within the fieldwork. Expert systems, as Giddens contends, bracket time and space and the knowledge of individuals through the deployment of technical and social knowledge. Trust in modernity is in these expert systems that create islands of certainty. In a world characterised by chaos, risks and hazards, this might lead the individual into a sense of ontological security.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the perception and experience of risk and its subsequent effect on the individuals' sense of ontological security, specifically individuals involved in religion. The central focus of this research is the notion, not examined previously, that these specific religions, fundamentalism and consumer religion, could provide a sense of ontological security in a world that at times is experienced as threatening and uncontrollable.

Examining these two religious groups as a possible source of ontological security, provides, to a certain extent, a source of critique to the work of Giddens and Bauman. Both theorists allow that the conditions of 'late modernity' or 'postmodernity' creates a system in which areas of relative security interlace with radical doubt and with disquieting scenarios of risk, which can lead to new forms of religious sensibility and spiritual endeavour (Giddens, 1991:207). However, they both contend that the increasing fragmentation of individual's lives does not allow for the 'unitary vision' of religion to fulfil every aspect of an individual's life.

Giddens (1990:103-105) contends that in pre-modern orders, religion generates a sense of the reliability of social and natural events, and "thus contributes to the bracketing of time-space". He connects pre-modern religion to trust mechanisms in terms of the personages and forces it represents, in such a way that these are directly expressive of trust - or its absence - in parental figures. However, the role he imparts to religion in our contemporary era is one that is incompatible with, and could not possibly influence, our day to day lives.

Taking into account the findings from this pilot study, it would be tempting to argue that Giddens 'somewhat secular' approach has its flaws when dealing with today's religions as demonstrated in his construction of the 'adaptive reactions' to risk and his dismissal of the impacts of NRMs. Bruce (1996), Berger (1996/97; 99) and Lyon (1994;2000) argue the secularisation metanarrative is dead. That indeed, religious belief is highly influential in an individual's life; for this to be the case, "individuals with clear religious identities engage in a continuing process of adaptation and resistance in respect to contemporary conditions" (Lyon, 2000:138). It has been demonstrated within the fieldwork, that indeed the religions examined, do have influence on the individual's day to day life, and based on an examination of the questions discussed previously, contribute to the individual's sense of ontological security.

Though there was a marked difference in the extent that individuals, from both forms of religion, derive routinization, self-identity, and the application of the expert system to their daily lives, individuals stemming from both groups were supported by a sense of ontological security. It has been argued, within this paper, that both forms of religion provide the individual with a patterned collection of social practices that constitute a sense of continuity and stability. As Giddens (1990:1991) maintains, it is the individual with a sense of continuity and stability, the ontologically secure individual, who can use the self as an anchoring device that helps the individual make sense of a fragmented and ambivalent world.

This paper has provided some empirical evidence, that postmodern religion can provide a sense of 'ontological security' to the individual residing in a 'risk society'. However, it has just skimmed the surface in an area that will increase in significance in the coming years. As Tacey (2000:7) points out:

We are bringing about an experience that could be called a 'second enlightenment', a postsecular enlightenment, where religion and spirituality will

return to centre stage and where secular materialism will appear out of date and anachronistic.

Accordingly, research must be extended, beyond Bauman's two ideal types, into various forms of religion. For as Tacey (2000:10) contends: "We need much more discussion in this country [Australia] about spiritual issues, because the silence is enforced and uneasy".

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Endnotes

¹ Berger (1999) now states that the secularisation thesis, to which he himself contributed to during the 1960s and 1970s, was "essentially mistaken".

² Of course what has just been presented represents an extreme, psychologically speaking. This may be due to the fact that the term ontological security derives from the work of the psychologist R.D. Laing. Laing (1960:40) contrasted the ontologically secure person who could "encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity" with ontologically insecure people who experienced a split both within themselves and between themselves and others. Anxiety experienced by the ontologically insecure person includes fear of engulfment, or being taken over by another, fear of implosion, or obliteration of identity from within, and fear of petrification, or change into a dependent, passive thing. Defensive responses follow: activity for its own sake, isolation and depersonalisation of oneself and others.

³ Lyons (2000:23) points out that everyday modern life runs on principles that are in some ways inimical to religious cosmology, this however does not seem to stop people believing in God. He claims that in Canada more than 80% of the population claim to believe in God and over 30% connect this with some very conventional Christian commitments to Jesus as "personal savior".

⁴ The postmodern, whose contours became clearer in the 1980s, relates to the development and diffusion of communication and information technologies, and to the growth of consumerism: "These in turn both depend upon and stimulate global flows of information, cultural codes, wealth, and power. Other features of postmodernity include the reorganization of cities, the deregulation of financial markets and public utilities, the bypassing of nation-state power, leading to its partial obsolescence, global travel and tourism, experimentation with traditional life courses, and the sense of growing social and environmental risk". (Lyon 2000: 37)

⁵ Dr. Rudolph Steiner founded this philosophical, and spiritual society in 1913 and it arrived in Australia in 1925. The beliefs and practices of the organisation center around the notion that there is a philosophical, spiritual-scientific path on which individuals can seek their own relationship between themselves and the world without adhering to one single ideology (Hughes, 2000).

⁶ Some of these movements may be grouped by broad family resemblances, however radical differences are apparent among others. Some of the new religions 'affirm' the world while others 'reject' it. Accordingly these movements can be classified, by their similarity of goals, assumptions and perspectives, and placed within either of two categories, 'world affirming' or 'world rejecting'. These two categories can best be summarised as follows. World affirming movements are those which respond positively to the existing secular culture and which offer to their followers the prospect not only of spiritual blessing, but of material and psychic benefits by way of enhanced emotional security, therapy, heightened competence, and social an perhaps

economic success. In contrast, world rejecting movements, such as the Unification Church or the 'Moonies' as they are most commonly known, seek to withdraw their members from any involvement with the wider society and offer prospects of reward whether within the withdrawn community and/or afterlife(s) (Wilson, 1995, 32).

⁷ The characteristics described here derive from the six primary characteristics of NRMs drawn from the work of Dawson (1990), who derives her work from the articles of Campbell (1978), Westley (1978) and Stone (1978). These characteristics include: Religious individualism, the experiential dimension, the authority of the leader, the syncretistic characteristic, the monistic characteristic, and the organisation openness. For further clarification of these terms please see the above articles.

⁸ These in-depth interviews provided extended discussion of the individual's life trajectory, his or her perception of risk and of security and of the individuals' involvement and belief in his or her faith. These interviews were theoretically analysed afterwards.

⁹ The only respondent from this group who did not share exact similar feelings was Susan. Her approach to perceived risk was more a combination of the cynical pessimism adaptive reaction and the pragmatic acceptance reaction:

"I would say that these issues don't really bother me so much. Now I just don't even think about it. It's one day at a time for me, I don't think about the future. I really don't see things affecting me personally. It's only when they get closer to home that it can get to me, but I can't even think of a time when that has happened. And they all just seem so big and what can you really do about it."

This difference might stem from the concept of 'ideal types'. It is a methodological concept which facilitates the understanding and explanation of social phenomenon. The ideal type is not description of reality but a mental construction which incorporates the essential, not the average, properties of a particular phenomenon (Swingewood 2000).

¹⁰ This can be seen to relate to Bauman's view that fundamentalism seeks all that modernity has provided, such as authoritative guidance, without abandoning the individual to the continued quest for self-reliance.

¹¹ 'Mysteries' is a term derived from the works of Rudolph Steiner. The mysteries can be seen as 'altered states of consciousness'. It is argued that every culture and every society throughout history have these mystery centres or mystery regions.

¹² Although respondents claim they have a sense of a 'unified self' the researcher expects that there must be a degree of 'fragmentation'. Contemporary society has become differentiated, segmented, separated, not known to all, and variable, and must necessarily limit the individual from accomplishing the 'unified self'.