”Religious perspectives on Existential questions”
– A Psychological Examination of the Centrality of Religion in relation to Meaning-systems.
Abstract

Keywords: Meaning-system, centrality of religion, existential questions, global meaning, general attribution theory, young adults

This thesis aims to investigate to what extent the centrality of religion influences the existential aspects of an individual’s meaning-system. To do this I used a meaning-system framework and a qualitative approach in which I gathered information through a questionnaire based on the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale and by conducting 8 semi-structured interviews with young adults in Uppsala, Sweden. The analysis of these interviews was implemented through an abductive method. The theoretical perspective is based on the concept Global meaning and the General attribution theory. My conclusion is that those participating in the study describe their meanings differently depending on their religious meaning-system. The thesis also shows that the religious interpretations to a large degree were actualized by situational and dispositional factors. This suggests that the religious attributions were made to meet the participants need for meaning, control, and self-esteem. Finally, the thesis indicates that the centrality of one’s religion appears to inform the religious meaning-system, as well as, functions as a dispositional factor. Thus, this thesis suggests that the centrality of one’s religion can be an influential factor in how religious meaning is constructed regarding existential questions.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Background

How do people create meaning in their lives and how might religious beliefs influence this meaning-making process? These are important and relevant questions worth investigation as it may increase our understanding of religious behavior and experiences. As Silberman (2005) points out, religion has historically been an important feature of human life and is still in the contemporary world a vital and influential factor in people’s lives. Religion today constantly captures our attention through the daily news and reports of conflicts among religions or between secular and religious traditions. Religion is also an influential factor shaping different aspects of people’s lives by acting as a powerful social and political voice in debates regarding everything from education, abortions and contraception use, to decisions to wage wars. The relevance and centrality that religion has for individuals in their creation of meaning can therefore be of great importance if we are to understand how religion can be both constructive and destructive in society. For example, religion can help people overcome traumatic events or improve people's psychological health, but it can also be a source of inspiration for violence. These questions are especially important as we are living in an increasingly globalized world that is characterized by a growing cultural diversity and interdependence. Furthermore, the study of religion from a meaning-making perspective has several benefits. First of all, the meaning-making process can be seen as a basic condition of human life, and it therefore works as a starting point for the psychology of religion. Silberman writes:

in their everyday lives, individuals operate on the basis of personal beliefs or theories that they have about themselves, about others, about the world of situations they encounter, and their relations to it. These beliefs or theories form idiosyncratic meaning-systems that allow individuals to give meaning to the world around them and to their experiences, as well as to set goals, plan activities, and order their behaviour (Silberman, 2005, p. 644).

The meaning-making process and the meaning-system that emerges from this process can be seen as an inherent and necessary cognitive mechanism to make conscious and unconscious sense of the world, and to feel significance and purpose with one’s life. Secondly, religions can be seen as more or less coherent meaning-systems that are culturally elaborated and acquired through institutions and social relationships. Religions in different cultures are often visible and distinctive. They also seem to have an ability to address human issues such as existential questions, the demand of purpose and goals, and the reduction of uncertainty, which is cross-culturally recurring. Because of this, religion has a central role in the meaning-systems that are consciously articulated among numerous people in basically every culture (Paloutzian & Park, 2013). Religion as a meaning-system also has an ability to serve as a powerful source of significance in
people’s lives, and to influence the attributions and appraisals that we do of specific situations and experiences (Silberman, 2005). Additionally, the meaning-system approach contains the whole range of research topics and themes within the psychology of religion, which has been highlighted by Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009), who propose that the human need for meaning should be used as the overarching framework in understanding the psychological functions of religion.

Religion and meaning-making have previously been explored in several different studies for example, in how religion can provide particular purpose and meaning in life (Emmons, 2005), or how the religious and spiritual effects on psychological and physical health is mediated by a personal meaning-system (Park, 2007). Others have investigated how religion as a meaning-system can both reduce or intensify prejudice (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), or how the religious meaning-making influence the discursive construction of identity (Schwab, 2013). However, little empirical research has investigated the degree of influence that the centrality of religion might have on different aspects of one’s meaning-system. Even less research has investigated this question in relation to an existential aspect of one’s meaning-system, especially concerning young adults in a Swedish context. This is surprising as the meaning-system perspective and the centrality that religion has for individuals appears significant if we are to understand how religion can be both constructive and destructive. The goal with this thesis is to explore this question and population and hopefully address the lack of knowledge concerning this issue. This will be done by applying a relatively underutilized theory within the psychology of religion; the general attribution theory and by using a measuring instrument; the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale, which to my knowledge has never before been applied in a Swedish context.

1.2. Purpose and goal
This thesis aims to investigate to what extent the centrality of religion influences the existential aspects of an individual’s meaning-system. For this thesis, the centrality of religion should be understood as how relevant one’s own religious faith is for the individual. DeMarinis (2003) notes furthermore that humans have a basic need of trust and security that is internally challenged by the postmodern context,”The possibility of and probability of the threats of meaninglessness and by extension identity confusion or identity loss are to be expected realities” (DeMarinis, 2003, p. 42). It is therefore interesting to investigate how the centrality of one’s religion influences aspects of the meaning-system in this kind of context. The cultural context in which this thesis will take place is Sweden, which can be described as a postmodern country (DeMarinis, 2003). Furthermore, the thesis will be directed towards existential questions among young adults between 19 and 29 years old who describe themselves as Christians. As Klingenberg (2012) notes, Swedish youth surveys have not really paid attention to existential questions but instead concentrated on social relations and value changes in the contemporary society. The point of departure has often been the social and religious institutions rather than studying youths and religion individually. By focusing on young adults
my thesis can hopefully contribute toward the field of the psychology of religion. Young adults are also a good group to investigate in relation to a postmodern context like Sweden. They have grown up and live in a society that is seen as more complex and undefined. It is a context characterized by uncertainty where previous traditions and ways to act have lost relevance. To get closer to the participants’ own words and experiences, I will also give the interviewees the possibility and space to describe their own existential meaning by asking about important events in their lives and the reflections they make about them.

1.3. Research question
In relation to previous research and the aim of the thesis my main question is:

• How do self-identified Christian young adults in Sweden describe their meaning regarding important events and existential questions?

The thesis then has the following subquestions:

• Based on the general attribution theory, how is the religious interpretation actualized in these descriptions of meaning?

• Based on the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale, to what extent does the centrality of one’s religion seem to influence these descriptions of meaning?

1.4. Demarcation
The participants in this thesis will be limited to young adults who describe themselves as Christian in some sense, and who live in Uppsala, a major city in Sweden. I would like to emphasize that it is the participants that describe themselves as having a Christian confession in some sense. I have not limited the participants on the basis of a pre-created category. It only concerns the participants’ own self-understanding, in other words, if they actually describe themselves as Christians (regardless of creed) in any way.

1.5. Context description.
Before we proceed, it is important to account for the cultural context, as each theory is a cultural and historical product requiring translation into the relevant context of each investigation. The cultural context shapes one’s research approach and affects one’s own findings and interpretations. In this section, I will therefore briefly describe the cultural context of today’s Sweden and the city of Uppsala.
DeMarinis (2008) writes that Sweden is one of the most secularized countries in the world. She also points out that Sweden is recognized for its encompassing social welfare systems, high standards of living and overall health-related wellbeing. Sweden also has an open policy towards refugees and other asylum seekers and values both religious expression and religious freedom. Ingelhart and Baker (referenced in DeMarinis, 2008) have shown that the Swedish culture has a very strong emphasis on a secular-rational value dimension, which places less weight on religion, authority, and traditional family values while also emphasizing strongly on a self-expression value dimension, which places a greater importance on tolerance and trust. In the cultural mapping of these value dimensions, Sweden represents the extreme of the combination of these two value dimensions. In the Swedish context, God as a traditional representation has a minor importance in peoples’ lives while the majority of the population interprets the Swedish society in a positive manner, where there exists a high trust to others. DeMarinis (2008) concludes that Sweden is a non-traditional culture where religion is not seen as something vital or important but where there is a high degree of self-expression, a high degree of trust, a high subjective sense of wellbeing, as well as, an increased and growing interest in spirituality. DeMarinis points out that this picture of the Swedish culture must be seen in the light of Sweden’s modern political history and its welfare state, as well as, its Protestant-Lutheran heritage. Even though the Church of Sweden lost its position as the state church in 2000, it is still a major source of cultural and religious meaning and offers rituals such as baptism and marriage that are commonly used as cultural markers in the Swedish culture today (DeMarinis, 2008).

Besides describing the Swedish context it is also necessary to draw a small picture of the city of Uppsala. Uppsala is Sweden's fourth largest city and located in the province of Uppland 70 kilometers north of Stockholm, and the resident population today is over 200,000. Uppsala also has large companies that are world leading in areas such as life science and ICT, and is known for its 15th century university (Uppsala Kommun, 2014). The largest employers are the University Hospital, the University, several state agencies, and the big companies in the pharmaceutical, food and computer industries. The city is the county seat and the archdiocese for the Church of Sweden. This becomes striking as the immense cathedral in Uppsala is one of the most prominent buildings in the cityscape. The cathedral and the university also form the node around which the city is built on. Uppsala is also a rapidly growing city and during the 1960s - and 1970s the old buildings in the inner city were replaced by a new center. During the twentieth century, Uppsala constituted an important commercial, industrial and communications center in Sweden (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d.).

1.6. Definition of terms

Before we can proceed some key terms for the thesis need to be defined. In this thesis religion will be operationally defined as a religious meaning-system fo-
cused on the “search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament, 1997, p. 32). Like Paloutzian and Park (2013), I consider the term religious meaning-system as a conceptually dynamic subset of meaning-systems that can be operationalized in different ways depending on the nature of the research. I also agree that religion should not be seen as a unique psychological process. What characterizes the unique and distinctive features of religion are most likely a cluster of attributes that in themselves are not distinctively religious. Like Oman (2013), I think it is more fruitful to consider the concept of religion in terms of family resemblance. There is no single feature that is relevant in all contexts but combinations of these (like the sacred, transcendence etc.) are, perceived as religious. According to Pargament, the most prototypical for the sacred is objects such as a transcendent reality, God or divine beings (Oman, 2013). The sacred can also refer to other objects, which are considered separate or delimited from the ordinary. The sacred is therefore perceived with respect and veneration, which provides it with the ability to function as a particular source of significance in people’s lives (Silberman, 2005). Park (2005) also points out that this search is often central to the meaning-systems of religious persons but that its centrality can vary greatly from person to person. Oman (2013) also points out that this definition has an important strength as the term sacred is easily understood by followers of different Western traditions, for instance Christianity. Furthermore, the definition of religion as a search process has an important strength as it includes both a substantive and functional approach. It also has the ability to differentiate between various degrees of internalization of quests for the sacred and it prevents a polarization of religion as intrinsic versus extrinsic (Oman, 2013). Once again, however, this definition should only be seen as an operational definition that specifies certain elements that are not necessarily present in all instances of religiousness or excluded from areas that are non-religious.

The term culture is also central in this thesis and needs to be clarified. This term will build on cultural psychologist Marsella and Yamada’s operational definition, which states that culture is:

Shared learned meanings and behaviors that are transmitted from within a social activity context for purposes of promoting individual/societal adjustment, growth, and development. Culture has both external (i.e., artifacts, roles, activity contexts, institutions) and internal (i.e., values, beliefs, attitudes, activity contexts, patterns of consciousness, personality styles, epistemology) representations. The shared meanings and behaviours are subject to continuous change and modification in response to changing internal and external circumstances. (Marsella & Yamada, 2000, p. 4)

The advantage with this definition is that it highlights how culture is complex, contextual, and constructed. The definition can be related to the meaning-system framework used in this study, as well as, with other central concepts mentioned in this section, such as religion, and postmodernism, as these also have a constructive and contextual mark.
Young adults is also a concept that we need to define. Davie (2013) points out that adolescence has changed in the West from a relatively brief transition period between childhood and adulthood to an extended period where individuals have a prolonged period of education and delay marriage and childbearing to later stages in life (Davie, 2013). This is also supported by Lövheim (2005) who notes that the most obvious difference between the modern and Western society's attitude to young people and past societies is that the concept of youth has become increasingly disconnected from particular categories of people, both in terms of social position and age. Adolescence is no longer a phase where young people learn and gradually adopt values and roles from older generations. Adolescence has instead been extended both as youths enter puberty earlier than 100 years ago, while also having a later entry into the labour market (Lövheim, 2005). According to Gustavsson (2013) the young adults in Sweden also live in a society that historically is seen as more undefined and complex. They belong to a generation that has grown up and live in a time that is described in terms of uncertainty and compared with previous generations they can not lean on traditions and approved ways to act (Gustavsson, ibid). Gustavsson emphasizes that due to this complexity it is both interesting and important to examine how these young adults understand their lives (Gustavsson, ibid). For this specific thesis this group is of special interest as I aim to examine existential aspects in one’s meaning-system. The exact period in which one is a young adult is arbitrary, I will for practical reasons follow Gustavsson’s (2013) designation of young adults as people between 19 and 29 years old. This is also consistent with Lövheim (2005) who defines young adults as people between 20 and 29 (Lövheim, 2005, p. 13).

Another concept that we need to clarify is the term postmodernism. In this specific thesis the operational definition of postmodernism will follow psychology of religion theorist, David Wulff, who suggests that:

> Those living in the modern age share a confidence that, in spite of the obvious diversity of conflicting beliefs, reality can become progressively known - if not through some religious revelation, then with the aid of human reason and scientific methods. Postmodernism, in contrast, denies the very possibility of knowing reality. All beliefs, religious and scientific alike, are SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS, linguistic products of negotiation among persons living at a particular time and place. There are no privileged points of view, no universally accepted methods by which to test one proposition against another, no settled criteria for choosing among options (Wulff, 1997, p. 9).

This definition is adequate for this thesis as it emphasizes the postmodern challenge of both trust and ontological security which can become a threat to both meaning and by extension one’s identity (DeMarinis, 2003).

The last key concept that we need to clarify is the term existential questions. In this specific thesis, I will follow van Deurzen’s (2005) understanding of existential questions as issues that relate to the basic existential situations in an individual’s life. They are questions that concern what it means to be alive, such as who am I? What is the purpose of my existence? (See 3.1.3 and appendix B for more information and the actual questions used in the interviews).
2.1. Research review

Studies on the centrality of religion in individuals’ meaning-systems are surprisingly scarce. Park (2013) points out that not many studies within the psychology of religion have generally taken a meaning-system perspective and even less research has been done concerning how the centrality of religion influences one’s meaning-system. This is something that is also supported by my own research review of past studies in which none of the articles I found explicitly investigated how the centrality of religion influences meaning-systems.

A computer search (2014-02-21) using the combination "relevance of religion" OR "centrality of religion" AND "meaning-system" OR "meaning-making" highlighted the limited degree to which studies have taken a meaning-system approach in the study of religion. Google Scholar provides a broad search for literature that covers many sources and disciplines while PsychInfo has a database index of over 2,000 books, journal titles, and dissertations within the field of psychology but also related disciplines such as medicine, sociology, and anthropology. Uppsala University’s library (www.ub.uu.se) uses the search engine summon, which spans over 97 million journal articles, 3.5 million dissertations/theses, 4 million books/e-books and 6.5 million conference reports. At most, my search yielded 199 hits on Google Scholar while 100 hits in Uppsala University’s database with the limitation of peer-previewed articles and the subjects religion and psychology. On PsychInfo my search gave 25 hits with the combination "meaning AND centrality AND religion" with no limitation while the combination "meaning-system OR meaning-making" gave a result of 195 hits with the limitation of the publication year 2000-2014, peer-preview articles and the subject meaning. To broaden my search I made an additional search 2014-04-05 on ub.uu.se with the combination "religion AND meaning" which gave 52,425 hits and the combination "* of religion" AND meaning which resulted in 22,343 hits. I also searched on the combination "meaning-making" OR "meaning-system" AND "* of religion" which yielded 3,996 hits. (The asterisk (*) means that the search will match any word that is in relation to the sentence "of religion"). All the scans were limited to peer-review material and the disciplines psychology and religion. The searches were also limited to a publication date ranging from 12/29/1999 to 12/28/2014. All the searches (2014-02-21 and 2014-04-05) were sorted by relevance. When skimming through the search results my inclusion criteria for selecting different studies was for words relating to subjects concerning meaning and/or the centrality of religion, such as significance, importance, intensity, relevance, centrality, meaning-making, meaning-system, meaning process etc. My exclusion criterion was any study that explicitly did not investigate the relation between religion and the meaning that individuals make in their lives. I also excluded any study that cannot be placed within the subject areas of psychology or religion. For practical reasons
I also excluded any study that is not written in Swedish or English as these are the only languages I can read fluently.

After having skimmed through the results, I found that the relevant literature could be structured around two main themes. These are religious meaning and coping and religious meaning and well-being. In each theme, I will make a brief presentation of the studies that I found during my search. I will then more thoroughly present the studies that I consider closest to my own research.

2.1.1. Religious meaning and coping

The studies in this theme relate to how religion can contribute to a sense of meaning and help people in coping with illness or traumatic events. A number of studies focused on patients suffering from medical problems such as HIV and cancer. One study (Sorajjakool & Seyle, 2005) made a qualitative investigation in how breast cancer affected the ability to create meaning for 10 female breast cancer patients in Southern California (no age or specific religious affiliation of the participants were mentioned in the article). In the study, the authors argue that the need for meaning is an essential part of our ontological structure, which becomes more obvious when we are confronted by different crises such as illness. When illness becomes life-threatening the explanation of the illness often turns theological according to the authors. However, research has not generally encompassed the theological dimension of the human need to construct meaning while coping with painful experiences. The purpose of the study was to illustrate how these women experienced breast cancer by exploring the influence of theological strategies in how they construct meaning and cope with their illness. The researchers gathered the data through interviews, which they transcribed and coded. The collected material was then reviewed for common themes. The theological strategy was defined as the method employed by each patient to construct meaning in the experience of cancer based on her theological beliefs. The results showed that all of the participants employed a personal theology as a means of constructing meaning for their illness. Three theological strategies emerged from the interviews, God causes cancer for a purpose, God does not cause cancer, but there can still be meaning in illness, and cancer is just part of life and has no inherent meaning, though meaning can be constructed through the experience. By using the strategies, the participants were able to cope with their illness.

In another qualitative study by Koffman, Morgan, Edmonds, Speck, and Higginson (2008), the experience of advanced cancer and the influence of religion and spirituality was examined among 26 Black Caribbean patients between 35-82 years old (median age 68 years) and 19 White British patients between 34-88 years old (median age 77 years), living in South London. According to the authors, most studies that have explored the interface between culture, meaning of religion, spirituality, faith, and ethnicity among cancer patients are often from USA. The authors also point out that there have been few equivalent studies made in Europe, especially concerning the ways in which religion and/or spirituality...
affect the experience of cancer in the Black Caribbean population in the UK. By conducting semi-structured interviews, the authors investigated how religion and spirituality influenced the patients self-reported cancer experiences. The analysis of the interviews was performed in an inductive manner, i.e., the authors identified different emerging themes by rereading, organizing, and coding the interview transcripts. In the study four main groups of meaning appeared in terms of the participants’ attitudes to their belief in God and religious faith: 1) Where God and the religious faith is central in defining the participants’ attitudes to life and relationships with others. 2) Where religious faith and belief in God is guarded or ambivalent. 3) Where there are negative views toward beliefs in God and religious faith. 4) Where views about God and religion were not discussed. Among the participants, 25 Black Caribbean and 13 of the White British patients discussed their religious faith and belief in God. Among this subset, all the participants referred to Christianity. The results in the study suggest that religious faith and the belief in God can contribute in understanding and give meaning to the experience of having cancer. It also suggests that a central religious faith and belief in God can offer a structure in helping to locate a positive place and meaning for cancer in their lives. Participants with a stronger, rather than negative or ambivalent, views towards religion also felt less isolated in the absence of family or close friends. Furthermore, the experience of cancer was not viewed as a burden, but rather was greeted with enthusiasm. Instead, the experience increased interest in religion and helped in strengthening the participants’ religiosity. In short, religion and the belief in God gave meaning in three different ways; in comprehending the illness, in living with the impact and progression that cancer had on their physical and psychological states, and in reinforcing the religious faith and the connection with God.

The meaning-making function of religion has been shown in a qualitative study by Plattner and Meiring (2006). The study was conducted in Namibia to examine how HIV-positive individuals psychologically constructed meaning to cope with their infection. According to the authors, there has been a tremendous growth in literature over the last decade focusing on the economic, social, and developmental impact of HIV/AIDS. However, they point out that it is still possible to underestimate the psychological impact of HIV/AIDS despite all the available information. Despite the stressful experience of having HIV and the many negative emotions caused by it, many still manage to maintain a psychological balance. The purpose of the study was therefore to investigate coping mechanisms people with HIV/AIDS utilized in order to move on in their lives. The study utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were focused on the participants’ own perceptions about their HIV-infection. The researchers tape-recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim and then analyzed these by means of the Circular Deconstruction Method. Overall, two men and eight women between 20 and 48 years old participated in the study (no mean age or religious affiliation was mentioned in the article). The informants had known about their HIV-status for 6 months to 8 years and none were receiving antiretroviral therapy. The results show that religious belief made the HIV-status more meaningful and brought purpose and hope
for the participants. Out of the 10 participants, 8 stated that their HIV-infection had brought them closer to God. The study revealed that the participants HIV-status became more meaningful when they attributed their HIV-infection to God, and it especially brought them purpose to their infection as well as hope. The authors also point out that a combination of self-blame and the belief that God tested or punished the participants actually helped the informants to accept and reconcile with the HIV-virus. This acceptance turned out to be a crucial factor in the meaning-making process that helped the participants in maintaining psychological well-being. By accepting the infection, the person was able to take charge of his or her own situation and thereby create a resolution.

A somewhat similar result was shown in another qualitative study by Jacobson, Luckhaupt, DeLaney and Tsevat (2006) suggesting that religion functions as a meaning-making framework in coping with HIV. The author’s point out that recent studies have shown high levels of life satisfaction among patients with HIV/AIDS and that spiritual and religious factors may contribute to these positive outcomes. However, little research has referred to the developmental dimension of meaning-making concerning these issues. The authors examined the patterns of religious meaning-making for those coping with HIV through brief life history interviews. The study consisted of 19 patients, aged between 34 to 63 (median age 43) years old who were suffering through various stages of HIV/AIDS. The participants were drawn from a larger study of patients from four sites in three cities: Cincinnati, Pittsburg and Washington D.C in the USA. In the larger study, they had completed a battery of related interview instruments. Among the participants, fifteen were Christians, three selected “undesignated” or “other specific” and one had a missing response to the religious affiliation question. By using in-depth interviews, the authors explored the participants’ religious-spiritual background and current orientations, and how these gave meaning to their experience of living with HIV/AIDS. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was then analyzed in two stages, first by being open coded where general themes, categories and issues were noticed. In the second stage, the data was reread, analyzed and discussed. The authors then found that Park and Folkman’s meaning-centered coping framework best captured the process of religious/spiritual coping among the respondents in the study. The results illustrate a variety of patterns in the religious meaning-making for those coping with HIV. People who had developed a strong religious/spiritual identity could maintain, through their faith, a sense of coherence or meaning while individuals who had drifted away from their religious upbringings neither used nor benefited greatly from their religious or spiritual orientations.

Other studies have investigated how religion as a meaning-system influences the coping process after traumatic events such as the loss of family or friends. Park (2005) shows in a longitudinal study of bereaved college students that religion can function as a framework in which individuals can reframe their loss and find benign interpretations. Park points out that previous research has shown that different aspects of religion are strongly related to both the physical and psychological
well-being in people’s everyday life and particularly in the context of coping with stressful events. To illustrate the influence of religion and meaning-making, Park examined the relations between meaning-making coping, religion, and adjustment. The study focused explicitly on the perceived discrepancy between global beliefs and goals, as well as, the possibility of meaning-making coping to mediate the influence of religion on adjustment. The study consisted of 169 college students at a medium-sized Midwestern public university in the USA who completed packets of questionnaires in a small group setting. The participants consisted of 44 men, 121 women and 4 students who did not identify their gender. The students were between 17-25 years old, and with a mean age of 19.2 years. Among the participants, 70 reported that they were Catholic, 46 Protestant, 21 were nondenominational Christian, 8 reported that they were Jewish, and 12 reported other affiliations such as Muslim or Mormon. The selected participants were those who had experienced the death of a significant other within the past year. Most participants reported that they were at least somewhat religious and that religion was related to their understanding of the loss. The meaning-making coping was measured with the positive reinterpretation and growth scale of the COPE (Carver et al, referenced in Park, 2005). The results demonstrated that religion was related to a positive reappraisal of the death and to adjustments in relation to subjective well-being and stress-related growth. Furthermore, religion was not significantly related to avoidance, intrusion, or depressed mood. This suggests that religion is related to meaning-making coping.

A similar result has been shown in a literature review by Wortmann and Park (2008). The authors point out that little research has investigated the general assumption that religion and spirituality are helpful in adjusting to bereavement. Workman and Park therefore made a systematic literature search of 73 empirical articles that quantitatively investigated religion/spirituality in relation to bereavement (The authors does not mention where these studies were conducted). The review focused on studies that addressed the general effectiveness of religion/spirituality in situations of bereavement by relying on quantitative results and hypothesis testing. In their review they found that religion and spirituality in general have a positive relationship with adjustment to the loss of significant others. The results further suggest that meaning-making can be an important pathway religion and spirituality can influence the adjustment, which is further supported in another systematic review by Wortmann and Park (2009). The authors point out that previous research has shown that meaning appears to be an important pathway religion and spirituality influence adjustment following bereavement. However, few studies have provided a detailed account of the different ways meaning changes as part of the meaning making process. Wortmann and Park examined 39 qualitative studies that investigate adjustment and religion/spirituality in the context of bereavement (the authors do not mention where these studies were conducted). In their review, they included qualitative and phenomenological studies of adolescents and adults in which respondents described the involvement of religious/spiritual meaning systems in their processes of adjusting to the death of a significant other. Their review suggests that religion/spirituality as a meaning-sys-
tem has an important function in the meaning-making process after bereavement by directing appraisals and reappraisals and by accommodating changes in beliefs and goals that follow loss. However, religion can also be a source of strain when the individual is forced by circumstances to question aspects of his or her global meaning.

Finally, religion as a meaning-system has also been shown to influence coping in relation to different forms of adversity. In a qualitative study by Mattis (2002), twenty-three African American women from Michigan and New York were interviewed about their encounters with adversity in the past year. The author points out that there is little research done on the spiritual lives of women in both the psychology of religion and the psychology of women. The aim of the study was to broaden the discourse about the lives of women by investigating the link between religion, spirituality, coping, and meaning-making in the lives of the participants. The mean age of the respondents was 30.9 years. (Denominational affiliation is not mentioned in the article). The semi-structured interviews were focused on how religion/spirituality had helped the women in times of stress or trouble. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed verbatim, and then open-coded. The data was then used as a source for content analyses. In the study a range of adverse circumstances such as racism, family conflict, partner violence, loneliness, and stress were discussed with the participants. The results show that religion/spirituality helped the participants to cope in a variety of ways. It helped them for example to interrogate and accept the reality of their situation, identify, confront, and overcome limitations, identify and wrestle with existential questions, achieve personal growth, and act in principled ways that were consistent with their values in life.

2.1.2. Religious meaning and well-being

The relation between religion and well-being has been demonstrated by Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, and Prashar (2013). The authors point out that previous research has shown that religion and spirituality have a positive correlation to psychological well-being. However, there has been confusion over their operational definitions. Their study investigated whether differences in well-being would be found between groups with various levels of spiritual and religious involvement. The study consisted of 205 participants from a wide selection of faith groups and religious affiliations that were recruited from different spiritual meetings and religious institutions in London. Measures of religious involvement and spirituality were then used to assign the participants to four different groups; high religious involvement and high spirituality, low religious involvement and high spirituality, high religious involvement and low spirituality, low religious involvement and low spirituality. By using three measures of psychological well-being: meaning in life, self-actualization, and personal growth, the study showed that individuals in the first two groups obtained higher scores on all three measures. High levels of personal growth were only found in the second group while higher levels of meaning and self-actualization were found in both the first and second group. These findings are consistent with other quantitative studies like Ciarrocchi and...
Brelsford (2009), which aimed to examine whether religion and spirituality offer happiness and positive psychological functioning in themselves, and whether they predict outcomes independently of substance coping. The study consisted of 439 to 602 (differences caused by incomplete questionnaires) participants in the USA between 18 and 86 years of age (average age was 43.71 years) who were recruited through a convenience sampling approach via the distribution of questionnaires. In terms of religious affiliation, 35% of the participants described themselves as Protestant, 30% as Catholic, 2% as Jewish, 2% as Buddhist, 2% as Taoist, 1% as Muslim, 18% as other religious affiliation, and finally 10% as agnostic or atheist. The study used a number of different instruments to measure spirituality/religiosity, personality, coping, moods, purpose in life, satisfaction in life, and spiritual commitment. The study found that religion and spirituality were potential motivators for emotional and psychological well-being for the participants. The authors also propose that the religion and spirituality might have its greatest advantage in promoting well-being rather than diminishing pain and suffering.

Emmons (2005) has illustrated that religion and spirituality have an important role for people’s well-being. In his article, he argues that religious and spiritual strivings have the ability to establish goals relating to all aspects of a person’s life, and that these goals can contribute to psychological well-being. To illustrate this Emmons describes data from his own research program in which over 200 individuals with neuromuscular disease participated in a survey focused on personal goals and quality of life. The survey consisted of the Personal Strivings Assessment Packet (Emmons, 1999 referenced in Emmons, 2005), which measures the health status, subjective well-being, functional ability, and a range of other variables relevant to quality of life. The respondents were obtained through the University of California and the Medical Center Neuromuscular Disease Clinic in Sacramento. The data suggests people with neuromuscular disease felt more satisfied with their lives as goals increased in meaningfulness. The goals that brought individuals closer to God were also positively associated with life satisfaction for the participants. Emmons concludes that the striving for religious and spiritual goals provides people with significant purpose and meaning even in the face of a disabling and deteriorating psychical condition. Thus, religion might serve as a unifying framework that mediates harmony among people’s various strivings.

2.1.3. Adjacent research

None of the studies found in my research review have explicitly investigated how the centrality of religion in a meaning-system influence the attributions made by religious individuals. The only study more closely related to my own topic is an article about the role of religion for chronic pain patients written by Dezutter, Robertson, Luyckx, and Hutsebaut (2010). In the study, the authors investigate how the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system influences the life satisfaction of 207 chronic pain patients, and if the centrality can moderate the pain severity. The study consisted of members of a Flemish patients’ association who received questionnaires distributed by mail. The age ranged from 22 to 93 with a
mean age of 52 years including 69 percent women and 31 percent men. The average duration of the pain was 16 years (range 2–60 years). The results suggest that the centrality of the religious meaning-system is an important factor in furthering the life satisfaction for the CP patients and that the degree of centrality influenced how the pain affected the patients’ lives. When the centrality of the religious meaning-system was reported to be low, the pain severity compromised the ratings of life satisfaction while the patients with a very central religious meaning-system did not seem to be negatively influenced by higher levels of pain. In short, the study suggests that a central religious meaning-system promotes an adjustment to the pain and facilitates the maintenance of life satisfaction. The similarities between this and my study are that both focus on the centrality of a religious meaning-system but whereas this study investigated how the centrality influences the well-being and coping of chronic pain patients my thesis will focus on how the centrality of religion influence the attributions made within the meaning-system (see chapter 6 for a further discussion).

2.2. Presentation of theory
In this section I will elaborate on Crystal L. Park’s (2013, 2010) term global meaning as it will serve as a basic concept in getting a picture of the respondents meaning-systems. Next, I will present the general attribution theory developed by Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985), that will serve as the theoretical tool used in my analysis. Finally, I will address the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale that will function as the instrument in measuring the centrality of one’s religion in this thesis.

2.2.1. Global Meaning
Park (2013) makes a distinction between global meaning and situational meaning. The global meaning refers to the meaning created in general life while situational meaning refers to meaning in specific encounters in particular contexts. In this thesis I will focus on the global meaning which according to Park (ibid) is important for everyday life.

Park (2007) writes that the global meaning can been seen as a general orientation that forms one’s meaning-system. The global meaning consist of three aspects; beliefs, goals, and feelings which relates to the cognitive, motivational, and affective components in a meaning-system. Global beliefs (Park, 2013, 2010) comprises broad assumptions regarding an individuals views of themselves, other people, as well as, their understanding of the world. Global goals refer to the different motivations and purposes that people have in their life. They are internal representations of desired outcomes, events, or processes. These goals can be states or objects that people already possess and seeks to maintain, or something people work to achieve. The global goals often constitute the basis for one’s self-esteem and are organized hierarchically with the higher goals determining lower level goals. A number of commonly reported global goals are relationships, knowledge, work,
or religion. The emotional aspect, the global feelings (Park, 2013, 2010) relate to a subjective sense of meaning in life, it is a sense that one has direction or purpose, or that one is connected to something greater than oneself. This sense is thought to be derived from the perception that one’s actions are oriented toward desired goals or future states. According to Park the global meaning is assumed to be constructed early in a person’s life and modified throughout life based on one’s personal experience. It is also important in everyday life as it influences individual’s interpretations of both stressful events and ordinary encounters, as well as, peoples thoughts, emotional responses, and actions (Park, 2010, 2013).

In conclusion we can say that a meaning-system is a lens through which individuals interpret, evaluate, and respond to events and experiences. These systems are formed by one’s global meaning, or in other words, the global beliefs, goals, and sense of meaning. A religious meaning-system in this thesis is thus understood as a lens formed by one’s global meaning that is focused on the search for significance in ways related to the sacred.

2.2.2. The General Attribution Theory

The meaning-system approach that I use in this thesis emphasizes the view that the human being is a creature that searches for meaning. This need for an overall meaning is the result of the human being’s cognitive functions, i.e., her developed capacity for self-reflection. The psychological function of religion can be seen as a way to meet this need. An important theory in relation to this functional role of religion is the attribution theory (Wikström, 1999). The general attribution theory used in the psychology of religion was developed by Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) as a possible theory in the empirical study of the broad and elusive concepts of ”meaning” and ”purpose”. The general attribution theory draws from social psychology, and can be used to examine how attribution processes are at work in how people use religion to find meaning in life (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). The theory is called ”general attribution theory” because the approach is used to understand attributions in general, i.e., a theory made for interpreting the whole spectrum of life events and experiences (Spilka, Shaver & Kirkpatrick, 1985). The theory is primarily concerned with casual explanations about events, things, and people, and can be seen as a theory of meaning-making (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

According to the theory there exist three basic and interrelated needs that initiate the attribution process. These are the need for meaning, the need for control, and the need for self-esteem. The making of attributions can be seen as attempting to understand and interpret experiences in terms of broad meaning-systems, to maintain control over events in order to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes, and to prevent negative outcomes. As self-esteem and the self-concept is central to most of human behavior, the attribution process also strives to enhance the self, as well as, to maintain a positive self-concept and personal security (Spilka, Shaver & Kirkpatrick, 1985). These three basic motivators underpin much of our reli-
igious behavior and thinking (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). Based on these three needs the cause of an event can be attributed to a broad variety of referents, such as others, oneself, faith, or God. According to Hood, Hill, and Spilka these referents can be classified into two broad themes, religious themes and naturalistic themes. In most circumstances people employ naturalistic attributions, but depending on situational and dispositional factors the explanations can shift to religious attributions when the naturalistic ones do not meet the need for meaning, control, and self-esteem (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). According to Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) religion can meet these needs, as religious concepts offer a variety of meaning-enhancing explanations, as well as, procedures and notions for enhancing self-esteem and the sense of control.

According to Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) all thinking and behavior unfolds in a sociocultural and interpersonal context. The authors point out two factors that contribute to the making of religious attributions: situational factors and dispositional factors. Both of these factors contain components of meaning, control, and self-esteem, and it is the interaction between these that determines if a religious attribution will be made in any specific set of circumstances.

**Situational factors:**
The situational factors concern the setting an individual lives and can be divided into two subgroups: contextual factors and event character factors. The attributor's context is important for the attributions process as it stimulates and limits various cognitive processes, including the access of religious and non-religious explanations (Spilka, Shaver & Kirkpatrick, 1985). The first group relates to the actual situation and whether it is religiously structured or not. If religion is very salient (i.e., if it is more noticeable, important, or conspicuous) in the situation in which the attribution takes place the probability for a religious attribution is enhanced. The situation can be more religiously structured depending on the surroundings (e.g., if it is a church or not), the presence of others who indirectly or directly encourage or discourage religious attributions (e.g., priests), or the participation in religious activities (e.g., prayers or meditation). If the activity or evaluation takes place in a situation in which all these contextual elements are present the likelihood of making religious associations or awakening religious ideas increases (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

The event character factors concerns the nature of the event that is examined. The nature of the event can be affected by four different influences: the importance of the event, the quality of the event, the domain of the event, and the personal relevance of the event. The importance of the event relates to whether the event is assessed as significant or not. Some examples of experiences and events that could be important are the unexpected loss of loved ones, natural disasters, the suffering from a severe illness, or the birth of one's child. Such events are often attributed in relation to religious aspects such as God, who becomes a part of the "big picture" when these significant experiences occur (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).
The quality of an event refers to the valence (positive or negative) of the event or experience that is attributed. Sometimes the experience can be viewed in a positive manner even if the event is the cause of an illness or disability, for example, as a benevolent divine purpose. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) point out that religious attributions are often made to God, and these attributions are overwhelmingly positive. Negative attributions to God also occur, for example when people feel punished for their sins; however, these are relatively rare (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

The domain of the event refers to the area in which the experience or event belongs to. Some areas, such as social or economic domains, seem to invoke naturalistic explanations while others such as medical situations tend to elicit more religious attributions. According to Hood et al, the reason for this could be cultural and historical circumstances. They also point out that regardless of the domain, we tend to seek a divine help when we lack control over a certain situation and when we have troubles in finding meaning. Attributions made in, for example, a medical domain tend to be more religious as this domain has more distressful situations (e.g., severe diseases), which often are both more uncertain and threatening regarding meaning and control (Hood, Hills & Spilka, 2009). The personal relevance of the event relates to events or experiences that affect the individual directly. Hood et al points out that events that occur to ourselves are more important than when they happen to others. Such events are often embedded with a greater significance and are more likely to elicit religious attributions (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

Dispositional factors:
The dispositional factors concern the preconditions of the individual making the attributions and contains three subgroups: background factors, cognitive/linguistic factors and personal/attitudinal factors. The background factors concerns whether the individual has had any religious socialization. According to Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) the person is more likely to make religious attributions if the person has had a strong religious background, for example, early exposure to religious teachings at home or in school, and community (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). The cognitive/linguistic factors refer to our linguistic use as language influences our attributions. Our language forms our ways of thinking and creates the conditions for the meanings that we articulate. The access and familiarity to a religious language enables thought along religious lines and increases the actualization of such attributions (Hood, Hill & Spilka, ibid). The personal/attitudinal factors include a variety of dispositional factors in which Hood et al distinguish between two important variables: self-esteem and control. Attributions are often used to validate and strengthen one’s own self-esteem, i.e. they provide a self-protective function. A persons self-esteem can heavily rely on religious beliefs such as feeling loved by a higher power. Attributions are also made to provide a sense of control in life. The probability of religious attributions increase when non-religious efforts are perceived as ineffective in controlling outcomes (Spilka, Shaver & Kirkpatrick, 1985).
In conclusion, the general attribution theory postulates that attributions are conditioned by three basic needs: meaning, control, and self-esteem. These needs initiate the attributions process, which then is influenced by two broad factors: situational and dispositional factors. The situational factors consist of two subgroups: context factors and event character factors. The dispositional factor consists of three subgroups: background factors, cognitive/linguistic factors, and personal/attitudinal factors. The interaction between all these factors then affects the making of a religious attribution and results in the meaning that an individual makes of a certain event or experience.

2.2.3. The Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale

Dezutter et al (2010) points out that institutionalized religion has gradually diminished in secularized and postmodern countries in West Europe. However, a large part of the population still finds spirituality and religion important and many adhere to a religious meaning-system. Studies that examine and measure religion in these countries need to have suitable approaches in their investigations (Dezutter et al, ibid). One such approach is the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) developed by Stefan Huber. The scale measures the centrality or importance of religious meanings for an individual. The scale is widely used and has been applied in several studies and countries (Huber & Huber, 2012, p. 711).

The CRS is based on the multidimensional model of religion by Stark and Glock from 1968, which contains five core dimensions of religion: the intellectual, the ideological, the public practice, the private practice, and the experiential, which together constitutes a general frame of reference for empirical research. Glock’s model, however, does not address the general importance of religion for the individual. The CRS developed by Huber incorporates concepts from the psychologists Gordon W. Allport, J. Michael Ross, and George A. Kelly, suggesting the concept of the personal religious construct-system as the cohesive psychological entity in which these core dimensions fuse together. Huber and Huber define this system as a:

superstructure in personality which consists of all personal constructs which are related to the individually defined realm of religion and religiosity. A personal religious construct is activated when the individual anticipates something with a religious meaning. In relation to this approach, the five core-dimensions can be seen as channels or modes in which personal religious constructs are activated (Huber & Huber, 2012, p. 713)

This idea is similar to the concept of meaning-systems in which a religious meaning-system works as a lens where experience is interpreted and assessed. In short, Huber considers religious content to be embedded within one’s personal construct system. Huber further suggests that we must distinguish between the content of the religious meaning-system (content learned through religious socialization) and the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system, which indicates how important it is for a person’s emotional and cognitive system. According to Huber (2004) the
religious construct system will significantly influence one’s behavior and experiences if it holds a central position within one’s personality, and if it holds a minor position the influence will be weaker (referred to in Dezutter et al 2010, p. 509). This distinction between content and centrality may be especially important in postmodern and secularized countries since individuals in these areas might have turned away from religious content that are culturally prescribed but still value their personal construct of faith and beliefs (Dezutter et al, ibid). However, Dezutter et al points out that the CRS still seems to confuse the religious centrality and religious content by referring to religious behavior and using a terminology associated with the Christian tradition. Several items have also been found difficult to answer by several participants in previous studies. Dezutter et al therefore constructed the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale (from now on referred as the CORMS-scale in this thesis) that specifically measures the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system (Dezutter et al, 2010).

2.3. Working-model

In my report of the results (see chapter 4), I will draw from the central theoretical concepts presented in the theory chapter (see 2.2.). The global meaning, the general attribution theory, and the CORMS-scale are based on a meaning-system framework and can be adequately combined. Antoon Geels (2012) points out that there is a need for a multidimensional study of religious experiences as the human being is a complex creature with a multitude of factors and stimuli that influence her. My hope is that this need can be met by the general attribution theory as it takes into account the interaction between situational and dispositional factors. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) points out that the attributions made by people both reflect and influence the meaning-system. My hope is that the theory can be used together with the CORMS-scale to illustrate how the centrality of religion influences different aspects of one’s meaning-system. In this thesis I will focus on the existential aspects within one’s meaning-system which relate to the global meaning and its importance to everyday life (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

The factors presented in the general attribution theory can be used as an analytical model of religious experience, especially concerning the circumstances that affect the choice of a religious attribution (Geels, 2012). The theory is primarily concerned with the casual explanations about events or behaviors and the attributions made in regard to these experiences. At first sight, it could seem difficult to use this theory in relation to existential questions. However, I would like to argue that the existential experiences are recurring events throughout one’s life and something that most, if not all people, in some extent have to confront at some point in their lives. These confrontations can then be analyzed by using the conceptual tools from the general attribution theory. This idea is also supported by Park (2013) if we look at how existential questions relate to the concept global meaning.
Global meaning consists of global beliefs, goals, and feelings. The global beliefs can be seen as containing existential thoughts as these refer to broad assumptions about the world and one’s life. The global goals can also be seen as containing existential aspects as views concerning death and life comprise high level goals that motivates people in their life. Finally, the global feelings also concerns existential questions as these often direct one’s life and relates to a subjective sense of meaning.

Furthermore, the global meaning is important in our everyday life as it concerns people’s thoughts, actions, and influences the interpretation of both mundane and stressful events. Existential questions and experiences can be seen as present in everyday life as they relate to all three aspects of global meaning. These aspects of global meaning are also compatible with the general attribution theory. Global beliefs can be seen as means of control since they comprise broad assumptions about the world as well as the individuals view of themselves and other people. It is reasonable to assume that this provides some means of control in life. The means of control can also be applied to global goals since they refer to the different motivations and purposes that people have in their life. As Park (2013) also point out, the global goals often constitute the basis for one’s self-esteem. The global goals can be related to the basic need for self-esteem in the general attribution theory. Finally, the global feelings can be viewed as a sense of purpose since they relate to a subjective sense of meaning and direction in life.

The three aspects of global meaning can be seen as reflecting the three basic needs in the general attribution theory. Existential aspects in one’s meaning-system can be seen as relating to everyday life, embedding in our basic need that initiates the attribution processes. The existential dilemmas concern experiences that people must relate to in one way or another. These questions are particularly interesting to the psychology of religion as religion often deals with existential questions such as the meaning of life or the ultimate purpose of human existence (Schnitker & Emmons, 2013). Existential questions can be viewed as experiences that emerge throughout one’s life, especially within religious orientations. These experiences can be seen as events where people make attributions in order to meet the three basic needs of control, meaning, and self-esteem. The conceptual tools provided by the general attribution theory can be used not only in analyzing the attributions made to casual explanations about events or behaviors, but also in examining the meanings created in relation to existential questions. Furthermore, my approach could be seen as an attempt to test the “generalizability” of the theory as it is considered to be able to interpret the whole spectrum of life events and experiences. My own hypothesis is that existential questions will elicit more religious attributions among the participants interviewed as these are often characterized as unclear and challenging for both control and meaning.
To answer my first subquestion, I will use the general attribution theory to explain the attribution process. Based on the theory I will use the following main theoretical concepts: situational factors and dispositional factors. The situational factors consist of contextual factors and event character factors. Since the contextual factors refer to the context in which the attribution is made the contextual factor in this case will be the interview situation. Using the theoretical concept in this way is a strength as people’s meanings are always created in a social interaction (see 3.1.1. for more information). The event character factor consists of four subgroups: importance, quality, domain, and personal relevance. The importance of the event relates to whether the event is assessed as significant or not. This is an important factor to take into account during the interview since I assume that existential questions are interesting and significant for the participants. The quality of an event refers to whether the event or experience has a positive or negative quality for the respondents. The domain of an event refers to which area the experience or event belongs to. The personal relevance of the event relates to events or experiences that affect the individual personally.

The dispositional factor consists of three subgroups: background factors, cognitive/linguistic factors, and personal/attitudinal factors. The background factors concern whether the individual has had any religious socialization. I will therefore ask the participants about their religious background and significant others in their lives. The cognitive/linguistic factors refer to our linguistic use as the language influence our attributions. The familiarity to a religious language is something that will emerge during the interviews as the participants articulate their thoughts and experiences. The personal/attitudinal factors will consist of the variables self-esteem and control. These factors concern one’s relation to the divine and whether it is viewed in a positive or negative manner. They also concern descriptions of how one’s faith appears to provide means for controlling uncertain outcomes. Furthermore, by implementing the CORMS-scale the category personal/attitudinal factors can address all of the three basic needs (self-esteem, control and meaning) presented by Hood et al. Below is a simple illustration in how I will use the theory.
The CORMS-scale and the concept of Global meaning will be used to answer the second subquestion in this thesis. Based on the general attribution theory I will also compare attribution processes between the participants in order to provide some picture of whether the centrality of religion made any noticeable difference in how the meaning was created. The CORMS-scale is still in preparation and has to my knowledge not been used in a Swedish context. However, the scale has previously been successfully used in the Netherlands by Dezutter et al (2010). Since the Netherlands and Sweden have a relatively similar cultural context based on secular-rational values and self-expression values (Ingelhart & Welzel, n.d.) my hope is that it can be used in my own thesis.

The working-model for this thesis is illustrated below. First I will apply the CORMS-scale by sending out a questionnaire to the participants (see appendix A for this questionnaire). I will then analyze the answers according to the steps described in section 3.1.3.2. and place the participants into the categories non-central, central, and highly central depending on the answers. I will then interview the participants and ask about important events and existential questions. Their views will then be interpreted through the concept Global meaning in order to provide a brief picture of the participants meaning-systems. This will hopefully also give an indication on whether the centrality of religion can function as personal/attitudinal factor. The religious attributions that the participants make in relation to the important events and existential questions will then be analyzed by

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Figure 2.1
using the general attribution theory. I will then be able to answer my research questions by seeing if there was any difference between the categories in how the attributions were made and whether there is some noticeable difference between the participants based on their global meaning.
Chapter 3 Method and Material

3.1. Method

According to John W. Creswell (2014), there are three important components that researchers need to consider in the planning of their study. These three components are the worldview assumption of the researcher, the research design related to the worldview and the specific research methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014, p. 5). By presenting these three components for my thesis, I hope to provide both a framework for my research method and an explanation to why I have chosen a qualitative approach for my research. Furthermore, I hope that by presenting my worldview assumptions I will display increased transparency and enhance the quality of my thesis.

3.1.1. Worldview

Creswell points out that the researcher's own philosophic assumptions often remain hidden in the research even though they influence the study. These assumptions must be identified and accounted for (Creswell, 2014). In the presentation of my own worldview, I will use Creswell's own understanding of the concept as:

a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study. Worldviews arise based on discipline orientations, students’ advisors/mentors inclinations, and past research experiences (Creswell, 2014, p. 6).

My own philosophical worldview is influenced by social constructionism. Somewhat simplified, the social constructionist approach often assumes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr, 2003). The social constructionist argues that people develop varied and multiple subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are negotiated socially and historically and formed through interactions with others, hence the name social constructionism. In research influenced by this approach it is important to listen to what the participants say and do in their specific setting and to ask general and broad questions so that the participants can construct their own meaning of a situation. The specific context of the participants in a study is of great importance for a research approach influenced by the social constructionism. It is also important as a researcher to be aware of one’s background and cultural and historical experiences as this influence the interpretation that the researcher makes regarding the meanings that others have about the world (Creswell, 2014). In accordance with social constructionism, I consider both culture and religion as social products created by persons living at a particular place and time. This does not however mean that there exist no religious truths or God. It only means that different religious beliefs and cultures are social constructions and they might or might not contain an ultimate truth. For me the purpose with the psychological study of religion is not to determine
whether religious truth claims are real or not, but rather to describe and explain religious behaviors, experiences, and phenomena. My approach to research can be labeled as a methodological agnosticism, i.e. I leave the ontological questions of religion open for discussion. Furthermore, in contrast to different forms of social constructionism I believe that there exists universal psychological processes and needs. However, since I think of culture and religion as social constructs I put a great emphasis on a contextual awareness. Each phenomena that is being studied must be explained within the actual context and each theory is a cultural and historical product that must be translated into the relevant context in each investigation. A key assumption in my philosophical worldview is that humans have a need for meaning in their lives. People need to consciously or unconsciously make sense of their experiences and to feel some purpose and significance with their life. How these needs are expressed are, however, a contextual matter and we must study the need for meaning based on the cultural and historical situation that people live in.

3.1.2. Research design

According to Creswell, the research designs can be seen as different types of investigations within qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches that provides directions in the research design (Creswell, 2014). As my research approach is influenced by social constructionism, I am interested in how people construct meanings as they engage in the world. I am therefore primarily leaning towards a strategy of inquiry based on a qualitative approach. Since social constructionism holds a basic assumption that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and act my research will be interested in the participant’s views of the world and by listening to how they construct their own meaning of different situations. A suitable strategy for my D-thesis centers on phenomenological research. This research design is adequate since the aim in this thesis is to examine how the participants make meaning concerning important events and existential questions, and to see to which extent the centrality of religion might influence this aspect of one’s meaning-system.

3.1.3. Research method

This component includes the specific methods that are used to gather data and the forms of analysis and interpretation that are used in the study (Creswell, 2014). In my case, I will gather the information through qualitative interviews and a CORMS-scale questionnaire (see appendix A). The qualitative research interview seeks to understand the world from the participant’s point of view and elicit meaning out of his or her experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The qualitative interview has several different aspects and in my case, I will focus on the phenomenological aspect that concerns meaning. This aspect seeks to describe and understand the meaning of the central themes in a person’s life. In these types of interviews the interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said and how it is said (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews will be semi-structured and
follow an interview guide. The semi-structured interview includes several specific themes and follow-up questions that the interviewer asks to each of the participants. However, the questions do not have to be asked in a consecutive order; instead, they can be brought up and discussed when the opportunity arises. The qualitative interview is flexible, open and is similar to ordinary conversation (Bryman, 2002). In my interviews, I will adopt a flexible approach where the interview guide will function more as a memory list than a detailed scheme (the interview guide and the questions that I will ask can be seen in appendix B). Follow-up questions will be improvised and depend on the answers given by the participants. My aim is to interview 8 young adults. This number is reasonable in relation to the time constraints that I have for my thesis. This number is consistent with the guidelines provided by Creswell who points out that phenomenological research typically range from 3 to 10 participants (Creswell, 2014). 8 people are also adequate in relation to the categories based on the CORMS-scale. In my case, I will try to find 3 participants that place themselves in the category non-central and 3 participants that place themselves in the category highly central and 2 participants in the category central. By doing this I have a greater opportunity to examine the differences between the two categories, which differ the most. The interviews will be conducted in person and face-to-face, as well as, one-on-one. The interviews will also last between 45-60 minutes and be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.1.3.1. Selection
In relation to the purpose of the thesis, I have chosen to interview young adults that describe themselves as Christians in some sense. The participants will be selected based on a convenience sample (Bryman, 2002, p. 114-115). This means that the participants consist of people who are available for me as a researcher. I will therefore talk about the thesis with friends and other acquaintances to find possible candidates in Uppsala or surrounding areas. None of the chosen participants will stand, however, in direct relation to me as it could compromise the reliability of the thesis. When I have found suitable candidates that want to participate, I will try to call each respondent personally to establish a first contact and additionally tell more about the thesis. After the phone call, I will email the questionnaire based on the CORMS-scale to the participant so that the person can complete it comfortably at home and send it back to me before the interview. Meanwhile I will email an info sheet so that the participant also has written information about the study. This info sheet can be seen in appendix C. Depending on the results after having compiled the responses from all the questionnaires, I will contact 8 participants for an interview. In the selection of these participants, I will follow Repstad’s (2007) advice that the respondents should be as different from each other as possible (e.g. CORSM-score, religious affiliation etc) so that the thesis can get a broad and general picture based on the interviews. To these interviews I will bring a form for informed consent that the individual can sign (see appendix D for this form).
3.1.3.2. Instrument and interviews

To measure the centrality of religion in one’s meaning-system I will use the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale developed by Dezutter et al (in preparation). The CORMS-scale consists of one open question followed by twelve closed questions in which the participants rate their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale. In the open question, the participants are asked to provide a concise description of their religion/spirituality/faith. They are then asked to keep this description in mind as they responded to the next twelve statements that assess the degree of centrality of their religious meaning-system (see appendix A for more information). In this thesis the scale will follow a probabilistic logic, i.e., a higher score on the scale indicates that an individual in general has a religion that is more central in her or his meaning-system. If one’s religion has a central position their experience and behavior is highly influenced by it, and if it has a minor position the influence is weak. The advantage of using the CORMS-scale questionnaire is that I can get an indication of how central religion is in one’s meaning-system before I conduct the interviews. I want to emphasize however that the use of the CORMS-scale should not be seen as a quantitative procedure. In this thesis the calculation of the scale will be executed in a similar manner as the CRS scale, i.e., the item sum score is divided through the number of scored scale items, which allows for a range of a CORMS score between 1.0 and 5.0 (Huber & Huber, 2012, p. 720). The first two response alternatives (one and two) will indicate that the religious meaning-system is not psychologically relevant. For individuals who have a mean between 1.0 and 2.0 it is plausible to think that religion is not central in their meaning-systems. This category will be called non-central. The intermediate response alternative (number three) represents the transitional range between a highly central and a non-central position of religion in one’s meaning-system. For individuals who have a mean around 2.1 and 3.9 it is plausible to think that religious constructs are present in the individual's life, but also that they are not very central or intense. This category will be called central. Finally, the response categories four and five express that religious constructs are clearly present in one’s meaning-system. Consequently, I will assume that individuals who have a mean around 4.0 to 5.0 have a religion that is highly psychologically relevant for that person's experience and behavior. This category will be called highly central. Since this instrument is new it had to be translated from Dutch to English and then from English to Swedish. To ensure the validity of the instrument a forward-translation and back-translation was applied. First, a person who speaks English fluently and whose mother tongue is Dutch, translated the instrument from Dutch to English. This version was then assessed and approved by Jessie Dezutter. This version was then translated from English to Swedish by a person who speaks English fluently and whose mother tongue is Swedish. This version was then back-translated from Swedish to English by an independent person who speaks Swedish fluently and whose mother tongue is English. The second version was then compared and approved as conceptually equivalent. The English and Swedish version of the instrument can be seen in appendix A.
An advantage of using interviews in my thesis is that they are used to elicit opinions and views from the participants (Creswell, 2014). This method is therefore suitable based on my worldview as I want to collect the participants’ meanings. It also suits well with my phenomenological research design. In the interviews, the participants will first be given the opportunity to describe their religious background. Next, I will ask about their existential meaning. This will be done by asking about important events in their lives and the reflections they have about these. After this, I will ask about the big existential themes: the meaning of life and death. When I ask my questions, I will take into account whether the interview situation is religiously structured or not since it can have stimulating effect on the cognitive processes. However, in those cases where the participants are asked about a specific important event I will consider the context in which the important event took place when analyzing the material. During the interview I will also ask the participants if they often think about existential questions and if they found them important. When the participants are asked to tell about their reflections concerning existential questions and important events I will note whether the experience is described in a positive or negative manner. I will also pay attention to how the participants describe their faith and whether it seems to provide means for controlling uncertain outcomes.

3.1.3.3. Analytic method

In the data coding process I will use the computer program MAXQDA11 as it will help me organize and sort the interview information. The data analysis will follow six steps of analysis presented by Creswell (2014). First, I will organize and prepare the raw data for analysis by transcribing the interviews. Next, I will read all the data to get a general sense of the information. I will then start coding all the data by using MAXQDA11. In the coding process, the transcribed material will be sorted based on predetermined categories from the general attribution theory and the CORMS-scale (see 2.3.) and new categories that may occur during the coding process. In this process, I will look at all the data and structure it into themes. These themes will then be organized by bracketing text segments and writing words representing a category, for example global meaning, personal/attitudinal factor, and relation to the divine. In step 4, I will use the coding process to generate a description of the participants as well as themes for analysis, for example religious background, existential questions, and context. I will then for step 5 convey my findings for the analysis in chapter 5. This will be done in chapter 4. The presentation of the result in chapter 4 will use a narrative passage in which I reconstruct the original interview for each participant in a more summarized form based on the descriptions generated in the coding process. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the advantage of using a narrative approach in presenting the findings is that it becomes easier to read. In the final step, I will interpret the findings presented in chapter 4. This analysis will be done by applying the theoretical concepts presented in my working model (2.3). This will be performed in chapter 5 where I will present my conclusions in relation to the research questions. This analysis will be done through an abductive approach, which can be described as a
kind of interaction between theory and empirical data. It is an interplay between the empiricism in the inductive approach and the theory in the deductive. This approach means that something particular is interpreted based on a hypothetical overall pattern that can explain the case that is being examined. This interpretation should then be sustained by new empirical data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). The advantage of using an abductive approach is that it entails an understanding that can gradually emerge and suits well with my own worldview.

3.1.4. Research approach

In this thesis, I have described how my worldview, research design, and research method contribute to a qualitative research approach. Creswell points out that the chief reason for using a qualitative approach should be that the study is exploratory, in other words, that not much has been written about the specific topic or population that is examined (Creswell, 2014). This applies to my own thesis as not many studies have been written about young adults and existential questions and even less about the centrality of religion in one’s meaning-system.

3.1.5. Validity and Reliability

In this qualitative approach, I will take several steps to check for the validity and reliability in my findings. In a qualitative approach, the validity means the accuracy of the findings while the reliability relates to the consistency of the research approach (Creswell, 2014). To check for validity I will follow six strategies proposed by Creswell (2014, p. 201-202). These are the following:

*Triangulation*: By using different data sources of information the validity can increase. In this thesis, it is done by using the CORMS-scale and interviews.

*Members checking*: This means that the respondents check the descriptions of the study. In this thesis, I will take back the result (chapter 4) to the participants.

*Rich, thick description*: This means that the researcher provides a detailed description of the context or different perspectives regarding a theme. In my case, I have already provided a detailed description of the cultural context (see 1.5) and in chapter 4 I will present a detailed summary of the interviews made with each of the participants.

*Clarify bias*: By being an honest, open, and self-reflective researcher, the validity of the study can increase. In my case, I will be forthcoming and as transparent as possible throughout the research process and thesis.

*Present negative or discrepant information*: By presenting discrepant or negative information that runs counter to the researcher’s assumptions and expectations, the validity can increase. In this specific thesis, I will discuss the information that
contradicts the themes and theories presented in this thesis. This will be done in chapter 6.

Peer debriefing: By involving a person (a peer debriefer) who assess and questions, the research validity can increase. To enhance the validity in my research I will involve persons outside the study who will review and ask questions about the procedures applied in the thesis. These persons will be friends and fellow students both within and outside the field of the psychology of religion. By involving an interpretation beyond me as researcher, the validity might increase.

To improve the reliability of the study I will follow two procedures suggested by Gibbs ((2007), referred in Creswell, 2014, p. 203). These are:

Checking transcripts: By double-checking transcripts, the reliability can increase. I will apply this to my own research to make sure that I have not made any obvious mistakes during the transcription.

Check codes: By checking the codes so that their meaning does not drift the reliability can increase. In my case, I will constantly compare data with my codes and write memos about codes and their definitions to make sure that there is no shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process.

In addition to these two procedures my supervisor has read the transcripts, as well as, the codes and agreed on how these have been applied.

3.2. Ethical issues in Research

Creswell (2014) emphasizes the need to anticipate ethical issues that might arise during one’s studies. Research involves gathering data from people and about people and the researcher needs to consider ethical issues throughout the whole research process. The researcher has to be able to protect the research participants and develop a trust with them. The researcher must promote their integrity and guard against any misconducts or impropriety that might reflect on their institutions or organization, as well as, to be able to cope with new and challenging problems (Creswell, ibid). In anticipating these ethical issues Creswell points out that it is helpful to address them in relation to each phase of the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 92-95). Each of these phases will be commented by relating them to this specific thesis.

Creswell points out that prior to the study the researcher should examine professional association standards. This can be done by consulting the code of ethics for the professional association in one’s area (Creswell, 2014). In my case I will strive to follow the ethical principles developed by The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). These principles can be formulated in four requirements: the information requirement, the requirement of consent, the confidentiality re-
quirement, and the utilization requirement. These requirements will be complied in the following way: in the phone call I will introduce myself and give a brief introduction to my research project. I will also explain to the person that his or her participation in the thesis is entirely voluntary and that he or she can withdraw from the study at any point. I will also tell them that I will audio-record the interview. If any of the participants refuse to be audio-recorded they will be excluded from the thesis. Furthermore, I will inform the participants that I will give them confidentiality and anonymity i.e., no one outside the research group (me and my supervisor) will have access to the collected information. This will be done by describing to the participants the measures taken to prevent the risk that sensitive personal information will be spread. In my case, I will do this by not using the participants’ real name or the names of other people mentioned, nor will I present any other information that can be used to pinpoint or identify the participants. All the participants will also get the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. I will store the audio recordings in a secure and looked place. After the interviews, the participants will also be given the opportunity to get more information about the research project and I will tell them that they can contact me at any point if they have any questions. They will also be informed about how I will work with the audio-recording (the transcription) and how the results will be published. Finally, in accordance with suggestions from Repstad (2007) I will tell the participants that the information collected about them will only be used for research purposes.

The second phase concerns the beginning of the study. In this phase, the researcher needs to identify how the research problem will benefit the participants in a study or others besides the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Even if these understandings do not have a direct benefit for the participant there is still an indirect benefit as these questions are important for the society in which they live.

The third phase relates to the collation of data. During this phase, it is important to respect the potential imbalance of power when interviewing the participant. The researcher needs to consider how the interview will improve the human situation for the participant and how the interview might be stressful for the participant. It is also important to consider whether participants can influence how their statements are interpreted and how critically one might question the participants during the interview. Finally, the researcher must also consider what the consequence of the interview might be for those interviewed (Creswell, 2014). In accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) I will address these issues by avoiding leading questions and disclosing sensitive information. The questions have been designed as open as possible, where the emphasis lies on how, when, and what so that the participants themselves can tell about their own experiences without being influenced or led by me as an interviewer. This also prevents the possibility that the participants only answer yes or no to the questions. The questions are also formulated as short and specific as possible as my goal is to have an easy conversation without any misunderstandings. The choosing of instruments and interview questions has also been carefully examined to avoid issues that might be harmful or
sensitive. I will also try to engage the participants in the research process by sending them the summaries of the interviews for correction so that they can examine whether the themes and descriptions that emerge seem reasonable.

Creswell also points out that the researcher needs to avoid exploitation of the participants. There must be some mutual exchange between the researcher and the participants, otherwise the researcher "uses" the participants for data collation. This reciprocity to the participants can be a small reward for participating or sharing the final research report (Creswell, 2014). In this specific thesis, I will provide a small reward in the form of a cinema tickets to each of the participants. This will be funded from my own pocket. In planning the interview questions I have also tried to implement an ethical aspect by thinking out possible formulations so that the informant can receive some benefit from the interview, for example through greater insight into their own faith and existential dilemmas.

The next phase concerns the analysis of the data. Creswell (2014) points out that in this phase the researcher must avoid disclosing only positive results. In a qualitative study the researcher needs the full range of the findings, including those that might be contrary to themes and theories (Malterud, 2014). In this thesis I will describe multiple perspectives, as well as, report both confirming and conflicting results and discuss this in chapter 6.

The last phase relates to the reporting, sharing, and storage of the data. In this specific thesis I will use the strategies presented in 3.1.5 to check for the accuracy and consistency. The thesis will also be published and publicly available on the DIVA portal, which is a database for research publications and student theses in Sweden. Finally it is important to keep the raw data and other materials such as instruments for a reasonable time (Creswell, 2014). In my case I will follow the guidelines provided by APA and keep the raw data safe for 5 years (APA, referred in Creswell, 2014, p. 100). After this period I will delete the audio-recordings.
Chapter 4 Results

4.1. Presentation of Qualitative Material

The primary material consists data from 8 people between the age 20 to 29, that describe themselves as Christians. All of the respondents have either grown up in Uppsala or lived here for an extended period of their lives. As mentioned earlier, the goal was to include individuals from each of the CORMS categories. Unfortunately this was not possible since I could not find any participants who could be placed in the non-central category. Instead the interviews were focused on the categories central and highly central by including 4 people from each respective category. The participants were selected based on a convenience sample (see 3.1.3.1. for more information). Based on this method, I managed to reach 24 people that met the requirements of the thesis. Of these 24 individuals 15 were interested in participating in the study. 14 of these 15 completed the CORSM-questionnaire that were sent to them by email. Based on their CORSM-score, 9 were placed in the category highly central while 5 were placed in the category central. Of these 14, 8 participants were selected for an interview based on their responses in the CORMS-scale questionnaire and the degree they differed between themselves. In the selection of these 8 participants I took into account differences such as religious affiliation and age while also looking for the biggest differences in the mean score between the categories (i.e. choosing the participants with the lowest mean score in the category central and the participants with the highest mean score in the category highly central). I also sought to achieve an even distribution between men and women.

The respondents in the presentation have either chosen their own pseudonyms or allowed me to create a fictitious name for them. For anonymity reasons I will not provide any reference for the citations in the text. The respondents will be presented one by one as this facilitates the reading and understanding of the participants background and existential thoughts. In the beginning of each category I will present the mean score for each question in the CORMS-scale questionnaire for the 9 respondents in the group highly central and the 5 participants in the group central. I will then present the religious background for each interview respondent followed by their own reflections concerning the two themes: important events and existential questions. The open question in the CORSM questionnaire will not be presented as this could jeopardize the anonymity of the participants. However, the open question of the 8 participants is to a large degree reflected in the description of their religious background. The presentation will begin with the 4 respondents belonging to the category highly central followed by the 4 participants belonging to the category central.
4.1.1. Highly central

Questions and mean score of the 9 respondents in the category Highly central.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My religion, spirituality, faith:</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes life worth living</td>
<td>4,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence how I act in daily life</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is important for the meaning that I give to my life</td>
<td>4,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is an important aspect of my life</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines to a large extent who I am</td>
<td>4,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is central in my life</td>
<td>4,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has influence on the choices that I make</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is important for my identity</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me deal with difficulties</td>
<td>4,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays an important role in my life</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me into the person that I am</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers me goals in my life</td>
<td>4,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The mean score of the category Highly central was 4,5. The CORMS questions allowed for a range of a score between 1 and 5. The response alternatives was arranged from 1 to 5 with 1 being “not true at all” and 5 being “very much true”.

4.1.1.1. Respondent 1: Maria

Religious background

Maria is a female, 20 years old (born 1994) and raised in a Protestant, ecumenical congregation in Uppsala. Following the request of Maria the interview took place in a secluded and quiet room in her congregational church. Maria describes her faith as an active and ongoing relationship with God. It is a relationship expressed in a shared life that influences all of the different areas of her life. The center of this relationship is Jesus which Maria views as her biggest role model and who she yearns to live with. Jesus is expressed as both the goal and origin of this relationship. She points out that she has always had this relationship with Jesus and how she even as a child used to pray and talk to God. She describes Jesus as the foundation of everything and how it has always been obvious to her that Jesus is alive and visible in life. In the questionnaire Maria answered very much true on all
the response alternatives resulting in a mean on 5.0. Based on the CORMS-scale she was chosen as representing a person within the *highly central* category.

Maria describes how the religious worship and activities within the congregation have been very central for her from an early age. She also tells about how she has participated in open conversations about the Christian faith in her congregation and how she has delved into biblical studies and philosophically tested her faith. Significant others for Maria are her family members and a youth leader during her teens. Maria has had a religious upbringing where both of her parents are Christians. She points out that this has been very important for her own faith and the perspective she has on various life issues as well as her self-image. According to Maria they have always affirmed God's intervention in life and been very important to talk to regardless if it concerned religious issues or life in general. When she was thirteen years old she also met a youth leader in her congregation that had a great impact on her faith. Maria describes the youth leader as very passionate for God as well as sharp and theologically well-read. She could challenge Maria's mindset and bore witness to an active God where the belief in God's intervention was seen as something very real and tangible.

**Important events**

Maria mentions that she used to have pain in both her shoulder and back. However, during a worship service earlier this year (2014) she experienced the healing of one of her legs that had been too short and therefore caused the pain in the back and shoulder. At the service the congregation prayed to God for Mary's leg to grow and according to Maria it did. She explains it in the following way:

> [...] it grew out, it is the craziest thing I've been through in my entire life! That I saw it, I felt it and when I got up the heel was in the wrong place, the leg was so different that it took one and a half week before I figured out a new gait that worked. But it solved the problem, I does not hurt anymore, in my back or my shoulder or anything.

Maria points out that the event did not raise any questions but rather a sense of gratitude and an acknowledgment of her faith. Nor did it raise a new understanding of her own life. Instead she highlights that God is the center of the event and that the important thing is the belief itself, that God both wants and can complete us.

**Existential questions**

Maria points out that she often thinks about issues such as death, the meaning of life and identity in her everyday life as these are closely linked to her own faith. She also perceives existential questions as important, or rather more the answers that these questions might produce. She highlights especially issues concerning identity as central as she has her own identity in God and believes that every human being is unconditionally loved by God. Maria points out that this forms the basis for how she sees herself and others. She describes the experience of being
deeply loved as existential and how she can get a sense of security in relation to issues such as death.

Maria expresses the meaning of life in the following way,

I consider it to be a living relationship with Jesus, to receive the love from him and respond to the love from him. I think that's the point. I think the human being in the deepest sense, is created for a relationship with God and a communion with God, and then the meaning becomes to affirm it as well.

This relationship is described as the most important thing in her life. She views the meaning of life as something highly positive since she is always searching for its meaning in relation to Jesus.

Maria views death as a consequence of evil and the entry of sin into creation when humankind turned away from God to make itself the authority and god. She also explains that she believes that every human has a longing for God and that death is a gateway into what God originally wanted with the creation. Maria expresses that life after death is as concrete as this life, and a place where we meet God face to face. When asked if there are any negative aspects or feelings associated with death she highlighted the uncertainty regarding who will enter the afterlife and how severe God will be in his judgement. For Maria there is no uncertainty about what death entails but rather a fear that people she loves will not be a part of the afterlife due to their active choice not to be a part of God. However, she points out that in the end, she relies on God's justice and mercy in the matter.

4.1.1.2. Respondent 2: Samuel

Religious background
Samuel is a 20 years old male (born 1994) and raised in a Syriac Orthodox home. The interview took place in the home of a mutual friend as this was the most convenient and comfortable for both him and myself. The interview was conducted when we both could sit secluded and undisturbed. Samuel describes his faith as a supporting safety net, he feels safe since he knows that there is always someone who looks after him. When he is scared or when there is some form of uncertainty, his faith makes it possible to gain control over the situation. His faith has also provided guidance and helped him shape his values and personality. A central concept in his faith is love. He describes it as the warm feeling that gives him comfort and the reliance that when he prays he will receive help. Another central concept, which is closely linked to his faith, is rules. He views rules as something very important and positive and explains that the world needs rules to function. In the questionnaire Samuel answered very much true on almost every response options which gave a mean of 4.8 and was chosen as person within the highly central category.
Samuel describes his home as an ordinary Christian home though a little stricter. He explains that the strictness is mostly related to his cultural tradition and that it is much stricter compared to his Swedish friends’. At the same time he finds it difficult to discern a difference between his cultural tradition and religion. Significant others for Samuel are his family members. He has had a Christian upbringing where his mother has had a great influence. Samuel describes his mother as very religious and explains that she took him to church every Sunday and prayed evening prayers with him when he was younger. His relatives have also made an impact, especially many of his aunts. Samuel also points out that the Arabic language that his family speaks has influenced him as it often refers to God.

**Important events**

When Samuel was younger he was terrified of using the elevator. However, in these situations he always gained strength from his faith. When he prayed he felt protected. He explains that ”you feel that.. you forget what happened, what you're afraid of and that someone is with you, that you are not alone”. Samuel describes the feeling as something warm and comforting. When asked if any questions have been raised in relation to the event he replied that he has not thought much about it, but that God is the important figure in relation to the event and that his faith has probably helped him overcome the fear of using elevators.

**Existential questions**

Samuel explains that he has thought about existential issues such as the existence of God and the afterlife, but not very often. It is nothing he thinks about in his everyday life and he does not perceive them as especially important. Samuel describes life as a test to reach God. According to him its meaning is to:

> Show yourself worthy to enter paradise. I think everything, all of life is a test [...] If you sin or not. If you manage not to sin, once it comes to that. If you are gullible, if one is caring, if you're nice, I think.

In general he found it hard to elaborate on his own thoughts surrounding the topic since he has not reflected much on the subject before. Nevertheless, Samuel explains that he has positive feelings such as love related to the meaning of life. Samuel also had a difficulty in expressing his reflections concerning death. When asked about how he feels about death he points out a feeling of unfairness, that some who do not deserve to die do die while some who deserve to die do not die. He specifically thinks about his cousin that died young and those who wage war in the Middle East. The death of his cousin did not, however, actualize questions concerning death. Samuel points out that for him it is obvious that his cousin went to a better place. Besides the feeling of unfairness he explains that he has both positive and negative feelings concerning the issue. He also points out that he has no fear of what comes after death.

### 4.1.1.3. Respondent 3: Mimmi
Religious background

Mimmi is a 28 years old female (born 1985) and raised in a religiously open home. The interview took place in a quiet room at the department of Theology. Mimmi describes her faith as a belief in a personal God who has created the entire universe. It is a God who wants to have a personal relationship with everyone and everything and who has an infinite love for everyone. Mimmi explains that for her, God is both close and far away, and does not intrude against someone's will, but comes when we are open for a relationship. She also points out that Jesus can be an inspiration for all of humanity, and that the goal for us is to become more like him. In the questionnaire Mimmi answered very much true on all the responses except two, resulting in a mean on 4.5. Based on the CORMS-scale she was thus chosen as representing an individual within the highly central category.

Mimmi describes that she comes from a religiously open and spiritual home. Her mother is a Christian but also open for ideas related to New Age, while her father is not religious at all. Mimmi also points out that she was a seeker early in her life. Mimmi further explains how she, without having been in an ecclesial context, has been interested in who Jesus was and who God is. After Gymnasium (high school) she joined a confirmation group belonging to the Church of Sweden, where she found her ”spiritual home” and her religious focus became directed towards the church. When it comes to significant others, Mimmi points out that some people have influenced and inspired her, such as former Archbishop KG Hammar and the Dalai Lama, but that the most important person is Jesus. She explains that he is a role model that is easy to embrace since he lived a life on earth like us and showed us how it is to live with God. She finds him very inspiring in her own approach to God.

Important events

When Mimmi still lived at home during her time in the Gymnasium (high school), she had a difficult confrontation with her mother, which made her feel that life was too hard to live, and for the first time she began to genuinely pray for help. She opened herself and surrendered to anyone that could hear her, regardless if it was God or anything else. After she had prayed nothing happened, but on the next day she got a call from the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (BUP in Sweden) that asked if she wanted to be in a therapy program. Mimmi emphasizes that the reason why BUP called was because her family had contacted them several months earlier, but for her the phone call was a clear answer to her prayers. She felt that there was someone out there who saw her and who made BUP call just her family. She describes the incident as very crucial for her own life. It gave her hope, and it did not matter what they said or did on the program, the important thing was that someone had seen and heard her. She describes the phone call in the following way,

[…] to me, at that moment it became very much like an answer to my prayers, that there is someone out there who sees me and pulls in the strings […] it became very crucial for my future, or rather it gave me hope and it did not really matter what they said or did in the
therapy, it was more that I felt that someone had seen me and that there was someone out there

According to Mimmi the event confirmed and strengthened her faith in God. When asked if any questions has been raised in relation to the event, Mimmi replied that it has been issues concerning her own identity, such as who she is, what she is responsible for and how she can manage her own emotions. She points out that this understanding has helped her in her life and strengthened her own self-esteem. According to Mimmi, the relationship to God also had a central place in relation to the event. The event did not make her more religiously active, but it made her feel loved as well as acknowledged, and God became more concrete as an active force in her life. When asked how she feels about her relationship to God, Mimmi answered that she feels a happiness and comfort in knowing that there is a God, but also a frustration in not being able to receive all that s/he wants to give. She explains, however, that her relationship to God helps her overcome this frustration. By being honest and open in her relationship to God and by affirming her feelings of being unloved she can manage the conflicting emotions. Mimmi explains that she feels strengthened by her relationship to God.

Existential questions

Mimmi explains that she has thought a lot on issues surrounding the meaning of life and why we are here during her teenage years, but that she now has found answers that she can live with. She points out that these questions were very important before but that she is unsure whether they are important today. According to Mimmi the meaning of life is,

[…] to live life and experience it, and to sooner or later during one’s lifetime take up the contact with God who have created our life and who wants to have a contact, and to eventually reach that connection and maintain it.

Mimmi points out that the goal in life is both to reach God and progress as a human being in life. She also describes the contact with God as the most important thing in her life. She believes that the purpose in life is to get closer to God and to live more like Jesus. She also emphasizes that she does not believe that one can be truly happy until one has begun to seek out God. However, she emphasizes the belief itself does not provide meaning in life, it is a part of what makes life worth living but its not the only thing that gives life its value.

When it comes to death Mimmi believes that we all have immortal souls and that we can choose if we want to spend the afterlife in a relationship to God. According to Mimmi there are mostly positive feelings related to death. In the same way that there is joy to be born there might be joy in dying since you are born into something new. When asked if there are any negative aspects or feelings associated with death, Mimmi responded that there is nothing negative, except perhaps the uncertainty about what will happen.
4.1.1.4. Respondent 4: Roland

Religious background
Roland is a 29 years old male (born 1985) and raised in a non-religious home. The interview took place in a quiet room at the department of Theology. Roland describes his faith as a personal relationship with Jesus. He views God as forgiving and his source to love. He points out that he is a Roman Catholic and that the Church's faith is his own faith. Through life, prayer, and the sacraments, his relationship to God is nourished and developed. In the questionnaire Roland answered very much true on the majority of the response options, which gave a mean on 4.6. Based on the CORMS-scale, Roland was therefore chosen as person within the highly central category.

Roland explains that he was raised in a completely non-religious home. Instead he more or less grew up in a black metal environment, and practiced Satanism and devil worship during his teenage years before he converted to Catholicism and was baptized at the age of 23. He points out that he probably has had the same God throughout life but that his understanding of this God has evolved until it became a disruption with his previous outlook on life. It was at that point that his "heart fully transformed," and he realized that he must be baptized. He describes the process as a personal reflection that lasted for more than ten years, from the time he was a young teenager until he was baptized. Roland tells how he early in life began to think about God and how he found that Satanism could provide answers to many of the questions he reflected upon. However, he eventually found the answers shortsighted and too hedonistic and ultimately inadequate. Instead his reflection got an answer in God and Jesus. He describes this reflective process as a "patchwork that ultimately had to be stitched together, and it was Jesus who did it".

According to Roland it was evident that he would become a Christian, and there were never really any options other than the Catholic Church. He explains that there was no one who introduced him to the Catholic faith, but since he has an interest in old books and ancient language he had read a lot of Latin and Old Swedish and was thus influenced by the ideas of that time. He especially mentions ascetic scriptures from different Desert Fathers and monks in the Vadstena Library as something that has influenced him, mainly because they were so quirky and outlandish that he could relate to them, but also because they pointed to something else beyond this world.

Significant others for Roland are his confessor, friends within the church and different saints. Roland points out that his confessor and spiritual counsellors at church have been extremely important. They met every other week for several years which helped him relate to his new life while also confirming his belief. Af-
ter he converted he also began to meet people who attended the Catholic seminar. Roland explains that some of these have been important for his own faith as they discussed many issues concerning life while some also became very good friends to him. Roland further mentions different saints such as Padre Pio, Hildegard of Bingen, and Bridget of Sweden as important persons since their lives can portray the life of Jesus in a new guise.

**Important events**
When asked about an important event in his life, Roland mentions his baptism as a crucial event.

> It ... it is a very crucial event. Then we end up on a religious plane, but it is the only thing I can attribute a sustainable value. There are many other things that are important on a secular plane [...] But it might not have any bearing on anyone else.

According to Roland the event embodies a new beginning and works as a marker for what as been. When asked if any questions had been raised in relation to the event, Roland found it hard to mention any specific question since the event involved a huge jumble of all sorts of thoughts. However, he points out that most were related to the conversion and and his new life.

**Existential questions**
Roland points out that he used to think a lot about existential issues such as life after death, but that his path towards the Catholic faith has stilled these questions. He views existential issues as very important, but the crucial part is how we manage the answers to these questions since this affects our lives. Roland regards the meaning of life as being happy.

> [...] basically it is about to be united with God. It is the only happiness. The only lasting happiness. But it can be both happy and sad, in a life. But that is not that which is crucial.

He points out that he mostly has positive feelings to the meaning of life and describes it as something liberating and enriching. When asked about how he views death, Roland replies that he sees it as a new beginning. He explains that it is pretty obvious what happens after death, or rather that it seems fairly obvious what we can find answers to and what we cannot find answers to. He says that he on many levels does not have a clue about what happens when he dies, but that he has gained a confidence about what is happening, and that this lies in God's hands. He affirms that this provides a security and comfort in facing death and that he has no fears concerning the issue.
4.1.2. Central

Questions and mean score of the 5 respondents in the category Central.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My religion, spirituality, faith:</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes life worth living</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence how I act in daily life</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is important for the meaning that I give to my life</td>
<td>3,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is an important aspect of my life</td>
<td>3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines to a large extent who I am</td>
<td>2,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is central in my life</td>
<td>2,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has influence on the choices that I make</td>
<td>2,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is important for my identity</td>
<td>2,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me deal with difficulties</td>
<td>4,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays an important role in my life</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me into the person that I am</td>
<td>2,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers me goals in my life</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The mean score of the category Central was 3,1. The CORMS questions allowed for a range of a score between 1 and 5. The response alternatives was arranged from 1 to 5 with 1 being ”not true at all” and 5 being ”very much true”.

4.1.2.1. Respondent 5: Svea

Religious background
Svea is a 21 years old female (born 1993) who was raised in a non-religious home. Following the request of Svea, the interview took place in an ordinary cafe in Uppsala. When asked to describe her faith during the interview, Svea found it very difficult to put her faith into words. However, she mentioned that she spontaneously thinks about the love for life itself and the love for people. In the questionnaire Svea gave a variety of answers to the different response alternatives, which led to a mean on 3,3. Based on the CORMS-scale, Svea was therefore chosen as a person within the central category.

She explains that she was not raised in a religious home since none of her parents are active believers. Her father wished, however, that she would participate in a confirmation camp in the Church of Sweden when she was a teenager. Svea says
that she did not want to do this but began in the camp, which she then dropped after a month. She points out that the camp was fun and that she got to know new people, but that she was neither keen on talking about God at that time nor felt at home. After the camp, Svea did not have any connection with religion until she went to the USA as an exchange student during the Gymnasium (high school). She explains that religion was a part of the everyday life during her time in the USA. It was very natural to meet friends in relation to the church, which also organized trips during the year. Svea also points out that she went with her host family to church most Sundays and that the church became a natural meeting place. She explains that religion eventually became quite a large part of her exchange year and that she got into religious routines. She points out that once she had taken part in it, she realized that it was very important. When she came back to Sweden, she felt that she wanted to participate in the confirmation again. She therefore joined a confirmation group in the Gymnasium and views herself since then as a Christian.

According to Svea, Christianity can provide guidance when you feel the need for a compass in life. She specifically thinks about existential issues and how faith can create an understanding in meeting with other people, as well as, for the larger contexts in life. When asked about significant others that have influenced her faith, Svea could not recall anyone in particular. She points out that there is no prominent figure in relation to her faith, but that she has always been curious since she came home from the United States.

**Important events**

Svea mentions the exchange year as a very important event. She explains that as a teenager she was very insecure and that she did not want to challenge herself. Going away to a foreign country was a great challenge and something that made her evolve as a person. She points out that she had previously lived a sheltered life, isolated from the larger contexts of life and where her surroundings had made everything very easy for her. When she went to the United States, she came to a new environment which required both adaptation and effort from herself. She describes it as “an encounter with reality”.

Svea further points out that a lot of questions were raised when she came back home. There was a contrast between her life back home and the life she had in the United States, and she needed to piece together those two worlds. They needed to be bridged and it raised a lot of questions on how she should continue her life when she felt lost between two contexts. She describe it in the following way,

If you imagine a puzzle here back at home, and that I am a piece of the puzzle, and that the piece of that puzzle then disappears for a while and is formed into a different piece of the puzzle, and when I then came back, the other pieces of the puzzle was of course very happy that it was complete, now I was back, when Svea was back home, but they did not think about that the piece had a very different shape and did not quite fit in the little box where I had fit into before.
According to Svea, the Christian faith became an important support during this period, and something that partly could help her bridge the two worlds. She emphasizes that the piece of the puzzle does not fit today either, as it did before, since it is something it will never do again. She is, however, grateful for this. She explains that she is both happy and grateful for the journey she has made, and that she has realized that it is not always desirable to be a piece in a puzzle. When asked if someone has come to mean much in relation to the event, Svea replied that she cannot recall any specific person, but that she had support from many in her surroundings.

Existential questions
When it comes to existential questions, Svea points out that she thinks about issues such as why we are here and where we are heading, and that she considers these questions as very important. Svea regards the meaning of life in the following way,

[...] difficult to summarize the meaning of life in a sense. I can say it in one word, and then maybe it is love. [...] I feel love for life, God, my fellow human beings that I encounter. I do not know how to explain it otherwise.

She described that her faith as deeply rooted in the meaning of life, and she has in general a positive feeling to the issue. According to Svea death is the end to our earthly life and she hopes and believes that there is a heaven after death:

[...] I do not believe that life ends after our earthly life. It is not possible. But I have no scientific explanation for it. [...] I think that life does not end after death. It is the end of the earthly life, that is what we know for sure. [...] I hope and believe that heaven exists.

She mostly has a positive feeling in relation to the issue. However, she points out that questions surrounding death are rather hidden or concealed in our daily life and something that we should perhaps discuss or think about more.

4.1.2.2. Respondent 6: Mathias

Religious background
Mathias is a 21 years old male (born 1993) who is raised in a Christian home. The interview took place in a quiet room at the department of Theology. Mathias points out that he believes in God and in the inherent good in every person. He further explains that he is a Christian within the Church of Sweden and that he is active within several aid and youth organizations linked to the Church of Sweden. Mathias also points out that he cannot call himself a true Christian unless he is active in his faith. He believes he has an obligation to care for creation itself as well as his fellow human beings. He further explains that his faith has given him some support in his life. When faced with difficult or overwhelming situations he has been able to feel calm by praying. In the questionnaire Mathias gave a variety of answers to the different response alternatives, which resulted in a mean on
3.08. Based on the CORMS-scale, Mathias was thus chosen as person within the central category.

Mathias describes how he comes from a Christian home. His mother and his siblings are Christians but his father does not believe. Mathias explains that his faith was a natural part of his childhood and something he accepted without any further reflection. However, he explains that his faith developed during his confirmation in the Church of Sweden since he had a chance to test and discuss his faith with others. This development continued as he became a confirmation leader and started to participate in the Church of Sweden Youth (an organization for children and young people within the Church of Sweden). Mathias points out that his faith also became a more social thing as he previously had only related it to his family. His faith went from something very individual to something that you can experience together. He views his faith mostly as something positive but points out that he is not always completely convinced and that he sometimes doubts. He has, however, never related anything negative to his faith.

Significant others for Mathias are his mother and people related to the church. He explains that his mother is quite religious and that she brought him into the faith. Since a couple years ago he has also been influenced by people within the Church of Sweden Youth and a fasting group that he used to be in. Mathias points out that he could share and discuss different ideas with these people.

**Important events**

An important event for Mathias is when his family moved to Sweden from Germany when he was three years old. He explained that the event had a great impact on his life as his foreign background has somehow followed him through his life. He has never experienced any real problems related to his background, but he points out that it has created a sort of ambivalence. He describes it in the following way,

it's no problem really, I look like a Swedish person but somehow it have after all, it gives a little.. you are a bit torn between being Swedish and being an immigrant somehow. I feel that I have somehow experienced the Swedish society at some distance [...] You do not feel a hundred percent Swedish because we may not always have the same traditions [...] some implied stuff in Sweden are not the same things for my parents, now they can the code and so, but still.

He points out that the event has not been so important to his faith, but rather to his life in general. On the whole, he sees the event as something positive. According to Mathias the most important thing with the event is that he has somehow ended up a bit on the outside. He explains that by not having a given social network and cultural understanding you have to struggle a bit more. Through this, he has been able to relate more to other people who come to Sweden. When asked if any questions has been raised in relation to the event, Mathias replied that it has provided an understanding that you have a responsibility to take care of other people, but also that you have to struggle a bit yourself, that one should not give up so easily.
When asked if he had related any existential questions to the event, Mathias replied that he was unsure. He might be able to relate it to an existential aspect but there was no obvious connection that he made.

**Existential questions**

Mathias points out that he sometimes think about issues such as why we are here or what purpose there is in life. He also points out that he has found his role in influencing global justice issues and by trying to realize them in practical terms. When asked if he considers existential questions as important, Mathias replied that they are relatively important since he wants to be active in his faith. It sometimes also gives him a sense of meaning, however, he emphasizes that he does not usually ponder on existential questions. According to Mathias the meaning of life is,

[…] to care for others and not just the ones you have closest around you, that you have some kind of global responsibility. Well it is to love the human being. It is probably.. it is probably the closest thing I can think of anyway.

Mathias further explains that he mostly has positive feelings related to the issue but that he sometimes feels a certain existential distress when he is dissatisfied with himself and life feels like it is standing still. When asked if his faith has helped him in these moments, Mathias replied that it sometimes has given him a kind of strength and willpower to take the necessary leap to move life forward. When it comes to the issue of death, Mathias believes that there is something left after death, however, he does not know how this afterlife looks like.

**4.1.2.3. Respondent 7: Lea**

**Religious background**

Lea is a 23 years old female (born 1991) who is a raised in a non-religious home. The interview took place in a quiet room at the department of Theology. Lea explains that her faith is a belief in a greater power that has predetermined our lives. She does not know what this power is, only that it is something. Lea points out that it is difficult to put her faith into words, it simply exists for her. For Lea the Christian faith is about togetherness and friendship, that you do and share something together. It is about a feeling, a comfort, and a community rather than some texts in a book. In the questionnaire Lea gave a variety of answers to the different response alternatives, which led to a mean on 3,08. Based on the CORMS-scale, she was therefore chosen as person within the central category.

Lea explains that she was raised in a non-religious home. Her mother, however, took her to the Church of Sweden’s kindergarten since her parents thought it was a good place. After the kindergarten Lea did not visit the church until a friend dragged her to confirmation. Initially she would only accompany her friend, but instead she stayed and has since been a youth leader within the church for eight years. According to Lea she stayed because of all the friends she came to know.
She also stresses that the church felt like a safe place where she had the opportunity to grow personally. Lea further explains that friendship and a sense of fellowship means a lot to her. It has helped her self esteem and is a major reason why she remained within the church. Another reason is the sense of security. She feels safe in the church and considers it her second home. She explains that it feels good to know that she can turn to God in difficult situations. Lea points out that she might not believe in the God described in the Bible, but she believes that there is something out there that has made a plan for everyone, which provides a sense of security in her daily life. She states that there is something to fall back on when life feels empty and meaningless. However, she also stresses that her family and friends provide a more significant meaning in her life compared to her faith.

Significant others for Lea are different priests and deacons who she has worked with. However, she stresses that there has not been any important person, but rather a process where her faith has slowly emerged. When asked if she views her faith in terms of a personal relationship, Lea replied that one could call it a relationship since her faith is with her continuously during her daily life. Lea describes the relationship as comforting and something that has contributed to her growth as a person.

*Important events*

Lea mentions the beginning of the Gymnasium (high school) as an important event. For her it was a new beginning with a new school and new friends.

[...] In the secondary school, it was a lot, you get labeled as a certain person even though you might not be that person you perhaps become that person in school. Me and my friends were the nerds who sat silently and did nothing while the others were out and got drunk and then bragged about it in school. We had like nothing in common with them at all. And then you came to the Gymnasium and was able to study with those who had the same interest and wanted the same thing and exactly this felt so good, to actually break up with the old.

She points out that the new context became significant and the most important thing was that she could be herself. When asked how she views life in light of the important event, Lea replied that she now takes each day as it comes. She also pointed out that she has learned there are some people who will be your friend for the moment and there are some that will be your friend for life.

*Existential questions*

Lea occasionally thinks about issues such as why we exists, the meaning of life or what our purpose is on earth. She does not regard them as very important, but not completely useless either. She points out that they can be very rewarding once they are raised. When asked if her faith is strongly related to these questions, Lea replied that they are related to each other since life and God go together, however, God is more in the periphery in her case.

When asked what she considers the meaning of life, Lea replied that:
I do not know. I have thought quite a lot about it, for there ought to be some meaning. There are.. I feel that, there is a meaning, otherwise we would not be here. But what precisely my meaning is, that I still keep trying to figure out, it feels good though that I still think about it, because if it would already be clear, if I already would know what my meaning is in life, then maybe I finish that meaning right now, it is like; you will just do this, then it will be; what should I do then for the rest of 70 years? By still not knowing, someday I will know, maybe about 70 years or tomorrow, it is up to God, he will point me in the right direction, in my choice, but when I arrive at the goal, when I know what the meaning is, then he will let me know it, somehow.

Lea explains that it is only when you have reached the meaning that you know what it actually is. She points out that life would feel a little exhausted if you knew what it is now. Lea points out that she has a positive feeling when thinking about the meaning of life. When asked what she considers most important in life, Lea responded that it is her relationship with her friends. She points out that it feels good to know that someone cares about you and to care about others yourself. When it comes to death, Lea explains that:

[...] I do not feel that death is an end. It would just feel strange if... God now has predetermined how everything should be, that there is an end and then it is nothing more. It feels like, if we still have a chance then he could still continue. Therefore, it feels like.. I would like to somehow say that death is the beginning of something new. But you do not know what it is until you are there yourself. But I do not know if this is some kind of wishful dreaming, that ... it does not end there.

Lea further explains that she has no idea of what might come after death. She would like it to be something, but she does not think it is a paradise. Lea also describes an indifference to death; it is neither a good nor a bad thing. She points out that death will come when it comes and it is not something one needs to be afraid of.

4.1.2.4. Respondent 8: Pontus

Religious background
Pontus is a 23 years old male (born 1991) and is raised in a non-religious home. The interview took place in a quiet room at the department of Theology. Pontus describes himself as liberal in his Christian faith. Pontus points out that his faith is not always obvious and that he has been struggling with it. He also points out that his life gets a greater meaning through faith. In particular through love and fellowship, to be active in a church and meet people who also have faith and who may also be struggling with it. He also explains that he does not read much of the Bible and may not always live according to God's commandments. However, he sees his faith as a guiding star and help in life. He points out that the greatest significance with his belief is that he gets to be in a community. In the questionnaire Pontus answered with the alternative 3 on the majority of the response options, which gave a mean on 3.0. Based on the CORMS-scale, he was chosen as person within the central category.

Significant others for Pontus are his confirmation priest. Pontus describes him as a very significant person, and the one who got Pontus to remain within the church.
Important events
An important event in Pontus’s life is his confirmation. He points out that it was a crossroad that was defining for his own life. He describes it in the following way:

[...] one of the most important events is my confirmation. Because it just feels like it was such a big crossroad, and it was there perhaps that I kind of chose my future, where I now find myself. And I've been thinking back on it quite a few times, because it has become a major involvement in the church, and there is much that would not have happened, that I never would have experienced if I had taken the other path, and I had perhaps... I might have chosen a different track and done something else that had been good, you never know, but it feels very important that I made that decision really. So it's probably the most important thing... I can think of.

By learning about faith, he was also learning things about himself. Pontus points out that he views his confirmation as two parts, first it is about faith, Christianity and God, and secondly, it is about life, how to manage love, grief, and other human issues. According to Pontus, you can discover things about yourself and your faith through the confirmation. Pontus describes how he himself has learned that one should try to be a responsible, good, and helpful person, and that one should try to be happy for the things that you have. When asked if he feels that the event has an existential aspect, Pontus replied that he was not entirely sure, but that it leans towards such an aspect.

Existential questions
Pontus sometimes thinks about existential questions, for example what happens after death. He believes that these issues are quite important, but he stresses that some questions might be more significant than others might. Pontus regards the meaning of life in the following way:

[...] I think the purpose of life is to be, to simply feel good. That's what I think. And feeling good can be done in many different ways, I think it is completely individual. For some perhaps it is to rest and just take it easy, for someone else it is perhaps to hang out with friends, for another it is perhaps standing on a bridge and casting a spinning rod and so on. To feel good both physically and mentally I think. I think that is the meaning of life.

What this means for Pontus is to be with friends and engage in his hobbies. He explains that his Christian faith has helped him discover and articulate what he finds meaningful in life while also providing a certain meaning since he has made friends through the church. When asked about how he feels about the meaning of life, Pontus points out that he has positive feelings towards the issue. He describes that it feels good to have found his own perception about the meaning of life, to have something to strive for and to have something that helps him build both long term and short term goals. When it comes to death, Pontus explains that he is unsure about what happens. However, he also points out that it does not really bother him, he is not afraid of death. When asked if he has any negative feelings towards the subject, Pontus replied that he actually hates death. He thinks it is tragic when people die, especially prematurely, and he wishes that he and his friends could
live longer. However, he also points out that it can be positive to accept that you will eventually die.
Chapter 5 Analysis

5.1. Analysis
In this chapter I will analyze the results based on the theoretical framework in chapter 2. The analysis will follow the presentation in chapter 4.

First I will briefly examine if the centrality of religion is noticeable based on the categories global beliefs, global goals, and global feelings. This will contribute with an image, albeit superficially, of the respondents religious meaning-systems. I will thereafter use the general attribution theory to analyze how the attributions of the important events and existential questions are actualized. I will conclude the chapter by answering my research questions.

5.1.1. Analysis of the respondents within the category Highly Central

5.1.1.1. Global Meaning
According to The CORMS-scale, all of the participants have a highly central religious meaning-system. This is also visible during the interviews if we look at their global meaning, which consists of global beliefs, global goals, and global feelings.

5.1.1.1.1. Global beliefs
We can see that most of the participants in this groups have global beliefs related to God. As mentioned before, global beliefs comprise broad assumptions regarding individuals view of themselves and other people, as well as, their understanding of the world. Based on the interviews, we can see that most of the respondents understand both the meaning of life and death in relation to God. Most of the respondents in this group also understand God in terms of a personal relationship and with a special emphasis on the importance of Jesus. The only exception is Samuel, however, in accordance with other participants, the concept of love is expressed as central to his own faith. Another central concept which is closely linked to his faith centers on rules. All of the respondents also express how their faith has influenced their self-understanding and/or views of other people.

5.1.1.1.2. Global goals
The global goals of the participants also seems to be related to God. Global goals are the different motivations and purposes that people have in their life. These goals can be states or objects that people already possess and seek to maintain or something people work to achieve. In Maria’s case, we can see that her relationship to Jesus is both a state that she wants to maintain and something that she strives for. She expresses that Jesus is her foundation and that she yearns to live a life with him. The same can be said about Samuel who describes life as a test to reach God, and Mimmi that expresses that the purpose in life is to take up and...
maintain a contact with God. This also applies for Roland who points out that the meaning in life is "to be united with God."

5.1.1.3. Global feelings

We can see that the participants have global feelings associated with God. However, the pictures of their global feelings are a bit more diverse compared to the previous categories. The global feelings are a subjective sense of meaning in life and that one is connected to something greater than oneself. Since Maria points out that she has her identity in God and that her purpose in life is to embrace and answer to his love. Mimmi also expresses global feelings associated with the divine. She describes her contact with God as the most important thing in her life while expressing that the purpose in life is to get closer to God and to live more like Jesus. However, she emphasizes that there is no obvious parallel between what makes life worth living, and her faith. When it comes to Roland, we can see that he regards the unity with God as the purpose of life while also considering this relationship as something very important. However, this is not as distinct as in the case of Maria. In Samuel’s case, we can see that his global feelings are also related to God. However, this is expressed in a more indirect manner. He points out that his faith gives guidance in his life and how it provides a warm feeling of comfort and reliance. This suggest that his global feelings are connected to something greater than himself.

5.1.1.4. Conclusion regarding Global Meaning

To sum up we can generally see that the participants in this group seem to have a highly central religious meaning-system where their global meaning is clearly focused on the search for significance in ways related to the sacred. Based on the brief sketch made of their meaning-systems, the centrality of religion does seem to be noticeable based on the categories global beliefs, global goals, and global feelings. Furthermore, since Park (2013) points out that the global goals often constitute the basis for one’s self-esteem, it seems reasonable to propose that the variable of centrality is likely to influence the probability of making a religious attribution. In other word, it can function as a dispositional factor in this group.

5.1.1.2. Important events

5.1.1.2.1. Attribution process of the important events

In this group these events lack a prominent existential meaning, however, it is still useful to examine the attribution process behind these incidents.

Situational factors

As noted by Spilka, Shaver, and Kirkpatrick (1985) the attributor's context is important for the attribution process as it stimulates and limits various cognitive processes. If the situation in which the event takes place is more religiously structured the likelihood of making religious associations increases. When it comes to situational factors concerning the important events, only Maria and Roland describe incidents that are clearly religiously structured. However, all of the participants assess their events as very significant and the quality of the events are ex-
clusively described as something positive. Additionally, Maria and Mimmi describe events within a medical domain while Roland describes an event within a religious domain. In Samuel’s case, the domain is non-religious. Finally, the events are described as very relevant for each of the respondents. In total, we can see that all of the participants described several situational factors that most likely influenced them in creating religious meaning for their important events.

**Dispositional factors**

Based on the interviews, we can also see that the respondents have several dispositional factors that point to their religious attributions. All of the respondents except Roland have had religious primary socialization. However, in Roland’s case there has been a strong religious re-socialization. Furthermore, of all the respondents only Maria seems to have had a significant religious secondary socialization. When it comes to significant others, all of the respondents mentions someone that has made a considerable religious impact. Since most of the participants have a religious background it is also likely that that they possess a religious language. The cognitive/linguistic factor also became visible during most of the interviews. Maria made a theological exposition of death as a consequence of human sin. Samuel points out that the arabic language that his family speaks has influenced him as it often refers to God, and Roland describes how he has read a lot of Latin and Old Swedish. He especially mentions how he has become influenced by ascetic scriptures from different Desert Fathers and monks in the Vadstena Library. Everyone also expresses several positive concepts of the divine, and several of the respondents describe how their faith provides a sense of security and comfort. Finally, all of the respondents have a high centrality based on their global meanings and the CORMS-scale. It seems reasonable that the centrality of their religious meaning-system, to some extent, influenced their religious attribution of important events and existential questions.

5.1.1.3. Existential questions

**The meaning of life**

In the interviews all of the respondents relate God to the meaning of life. Maria describes it as a "living relationship with Jesus, to receive the love from him and respond to the love from him”. According to Samuel the meaning of life is a test to ”show yourself worthy to enter paradise”. Mimmi expresses that it is "to live life and experience it, and to sooner or later during one’s lifetime take up the contact with God” while also emphasizing that one cannot be truly happy until one has begun to seek out God. This is similar to Roland who points out that the meaning of life is ”to be united with God. It is the only happiness. The only lasting happiness”. 

**Perception of death**

Most of the respondents view of death is also related to the divine. Maria describes it as a consequence of evil when humankind turned away from God. She further explains that all people have a longing for eternity and that death is a
gateway to God. She points out that the afterlife is something perfectly good and a place where we will meet God face to face. Mimmi describes death as the physical end of our earthly life and that we can choose if we want to spend the afterlife in a relationship to God. Roland views it as a new beginning and points out that it is a matter that lies in God's hands. Samuel on other hand, had difficulty in expressing his reflections concerning death since he had never really thought about it before. He only described that he has both positive and negative feelings related to the question. In short we can see that almost all respondents made religious attributions of existential issues concerning the meaning of life and death.

5.1.1.3.1. Attribution process of the existential questions
Based on the attributional theory, the religious meaning that the participants made can be explained due to their situational and dispositional factors.

Situational factors
The meaning that the participants made concerning the existential issues were created in the social interaction during the interview. In this group it was only Maria that was interviewed in a religious structured context. There is also a diversity in how the participants assessed the existential questions as something significant. Maria, Mimmi, and Roland perceive existential questions as important while Samuel explained that he neither thinks about these issues very often nor perceives them as especially important. However, in general the respondents mainly have a positive valence concerning the issues. The domain of these questions is existential and most of the respondents seem to embed them with a greater significance. However, Samuel appears to not view these questions as significant even though they affected him personally.

Dispositional factors
As mentioned earlier the respondents have several dispositional factors that points to their religious attributions.

5.1.1.4. Conclusions on the category Highly Central
In sum we can see that all of the important events and nearly all of the existential questions were attributed with a religious meaning. This can be explained by the situational and dispositional factors that to a large degree appear to have influenced the making of religious meaning regarding these issues. Based on the general attribution theory this would suggest that the religious attributions were made to meet the participants need for meaning, control, and self-esteem. It is important to note that Samuel differed from the other participants. This will be discussed further in chapter 6.
5.1.2. Analysis of the respondents within the category Central

5.1.2.1. Global Meaning
According to The CORMS-scale, all of the participants have a central religious meaning-system. Like the previous group this is also visible if we look at their global meaning.

5.1.2.1.1. Global beliefs
We can see that most of the participants in this groups have global beliefs indirectly related to God or the divine. Based on the interviews, we can see that most of the respondents in this group understand God in a more vague and uncertain manner. Most of the respondents also associate their faith with their understanding of death and the meaning of life; however, this is made in an indirect way.

5.1.2.1.2. Global goals
Global goals are the different motivations and purposes that people have in their life, for example, states or objects that people seek to maintain or work to achieve. In general these goals appear to be indirectly related to God or faith for this group. Mathias, for example, expresses a primary goal in caring for his fellow human beings and to work for global justice in the world. It is important to note, however, that these goals do not seem to be constituted by his faith. Instead these goals appear to be indirectly related to his faith where his faith functions as a motivator in achieving these goals. This is also similar to Lea who explicitly expresses how friendship is a major reason why she remained within the church. Like Mathias, her faith seems to be related indirectly to this goal. However, in her case it does not seem to function as a motivator but rather as a mediator by providing a context for friendship.

5.1.2.1.3. Global feelings
Like the other categories the respondents also appear to have global feelings that are indirectly associated with their faith. Pontus, for example, points out, that his life gets a greater meaning through his faith. However, like Lea and Mathias, it is primarily by providing a meeting place and context for friendship that his faith appears to be related to the global feelings.

5.1.2.1.4. Conclusion regarding Global Meaning
To sum up we can generally see that the respondents in this group appears to have a central religious meaning-system where their global meaning is indirectly focused on the search for significance in ways related to the sacred. Based on the brief sketch made of their meaning-systems, the centrality of religion does seem to be noticeable based on the categories global beliefs, global goals, and global feelings. However, their global meaning seems to be informed in a different way compared to the group highly central. One clear difference between the groups is how they understand God. In the highly central group their faith is often described in terms of a relationship to a personal God. In the central group, God is understood in a vague and uncertain way. Another difference is that the respondents in the first group often relate God to their global beliefs, goals, and feelings in a di-
rect manner while the respondents in the second group relate their faith to their global meaning in a more indirect way. As mentioned earlier, Park (2013) points out that global goals often constitute the basis for one’s self-esteem. It appears reasonable to propose that the variable of centrality is likely to influence the probability of making a religious attribution. However, since this group mostly has an indirect relationship between their faith and global goals, it is likely that this variable has a minor influence as a dispositional factor for the central group.

5.1.2.2. Important events

5.1.2.2.1. Attribution process of the important events

Unlike the group highly central, all of the respondents in this group have important events with an existential meaning related to identity. However, in contrast, most of the respondents in the group central did not make any religious attributions. Even if these incidents lack a prominent religious meaning it is still useful to examine the attribution process behind these events so that we can compare it with the group highly central.

Situational factors

When it comes to situational factors regarding the important events, 3 of the 4 of respondents did not have a religious structured context while all assessed their events as significant and positive. When it comes to the domain of the event it could be argued that it is existential since all of the respondents describe incidents that relates to issues concerning their identity. We should, however, note that unlike the others in this group, Pontus also had a religious domain since his event relates to his confirmation.

Dispositional factors

When it comes to dispositional factors, only Mathias had a religious primary socialization. On the other hand, all of the respondents have a secondary religious socialization. Mathias and Pontus also have significant others that have made a religious impact. Since most of the participants do not have a religious background it is likely that they do not possess a religious language. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the participants are familiar with a religious language as a result of their secondary socialization. However, since this language did not explicitly emerge during the interviews it is reasonable to not count it as an influencing factor. Furthermore, all express several positive feelings in relation to their faith. However, this is often done in an indirect manner. This group also expresses less positive concepts of the divine. Several of the respondents further describe how their faith provides a sense of security and comfort. In contrast to the group highly central I do not propose that we should view the variable centrality as an influential personal factor for this group. Since this group mostly has an indirect relationship between their faith and global goals, it is likely that this variable has a minor influence as a dispositional factor for this group. In sum this group has a mixture of dispositional factors that appear to both discourage and encourage religious attributions.
5.1.2.3. Existential questions

The meaning of life

Based on the interviews, only Svea and Lea relate God to the meaning of life. While Pontus relates his faith to the issue in an indirect manner. For example, he points out that his faith provides a certain meaning since he has made friends through the church. According to Mathias the meaning of life is to “care for others and not just the ones closest around you, that you have some kind of global responsibility”. Since he also points out that he wants to be active in his faith regarding global justice issues, his faith appears to be indirectly related to his perception of the meaning in life.

Perception of death

Most respondents have vague notions about death. Mathias believes that there is something after death, but he has no conception of how this afterlife might look like. Lea points out that she associates the issue with God, but like Mathias she has no idea what might come after death. She would like it to be something, but she does not think it is a paradise. Pontus explains that he is unsure about what happens after death. Like Lea, he only hopes that there will be something. Svea on the other hand points out she both hopes and believes that there is a heaven after death. She is thus the only one in this group that made a clear religious attribution regarding the this issue.

5.1.2.3.1. Attribution process of the existential questions

In this group the existential questions appears to generally lack a prominent religious meaning. However, it is still useful to examine the attribution process so that we can compare it with the group highly central.

Situational factors

Since the contextual factors refer to the context in which the attribution is made the contextual factors in these cases are the interview situation itself. As none of the respondent were interviewed in a religious structured context this factor did not encourage a religious attribution. Furthermore, among the participants there is a diversity in how they assessed the existential question as something significant. Svea considered them as very important while Mathias perceives them as relatively important. Lea explains that she does not regard them as very important, but not completely useless either. She points out that they can be very rewarding once they are raised. Pontus points out that they are quite important while also stressing that some questions might be more significant than others.

All of the participants also express a positive valence concerning the meaning of life. However, there are some negative aspects regarding death. Pontus explains he actually hates death. He thinks it is tragic when people die, especially prematurely, and he wishes that he and his friends could live longer. However, he also points out that it can be positive to accept that you will eventually die. Lea expresses that she is indifferent to death, it is neither a good nor bad thing. Even
though this group mostly has a positive valence regarding existential questions, this does not seem to have contributed to a religious meaning except in Svea’s case. The domain of these questions is existential. However, this factor does not appear to be very influential in this group. Finally, all respondents appear to relate a personal relevance to the existential questions. They are probably embedded with greater significance. However, in this group this did not seem to elicit religious attributions.

Dispositional factors

As mentioned earlier this group has a mixture of dispositional factor that appear to both discourage and encourage religious attributions.

5.1.2.4. Conclusions on the category Central

The participants in this group appear to have a central religious meaning-system where their global meaning is indirectly focused on the search for significance in ways related to the sacred. Based on the brief sketch made of their meaning-systems, the centrality of religion does seem to be noticeable based on the categories global beliefs, global goals och global feelings. Compared to the participants in the category highly central, this group seems to understand God in a vague and uncertain manner. Another difference is how these respondents relate their faith to their global meaning in an indirect way. As mentioned earlier, Park (2013) points out that the global goals often constitute the basis for one’s self-esteem. It appears reasonable to propose that the variable of centrality is likely to influence the probability of making a religious attribution. However, for this group it appears to have a minor influence as a dispositional factor. Based on the interviews we can see that all of the respondent appear to relate an existential meaning to their important events. However, most of the respondents did not make any religious attributions to these events. The same applies to the existential questions who generally appear to lack a prominent religious meaning in this group. In this group there is a mixture of dispositional factors that appear to discourage and encourage religious attributions. However, in combination with the situational factors it is reasonable to suggest that we should have seen more religious attributions for the important events and existential questions. This discrepancy will be discussed further in chapter 6.

5.2. Conclusions

How do self-identified Christian young adults in Sweden describe their meaning regarding important events and existential questions?

This thesis has shown that the participants describe their meaning differently depending on their religious meaning-system. The respondents with a highly central religious meaning-system tend to describe important events and existential questions in relation to a personal relationship to God. All of the important events refer to God while the meaning of life is mostly expressed as having a contact with
God. All of the respondents also perceive death as some kind of afterlife where one is united with the divine. This differs from the participants with a central religious meaning-system who generally do not describe their meaning regarding these issues in reference to God or their faith. This suggests an inverse relationship between the groups in how these issues were attributed with a religious and existential meaning. In the first group none of the respondents clearly described an existential meaning in relation to their important events. However, all of the important events and nearly all of the existential questions were attributed with a religious meaning. In the second group all of the respondents appear to relate an existential meaning to their important events. However, in contrast, most of the respondents did not make any religious attributions to these events. The same applies to the existential questions, which generally appear to lack a prominent religious meaning in the second group.

Based on the general attribution theory, how is the religious interpretation actualized in these descriptions of meaning?

This thesis has shown that the religious interpretations to a large degree were actualized by situational and dispositional factors. This suggests that the religious attributions were made to meet the participants' needs for meaning, control, and self-esteem. The religious attributions can be seen as attempts to understand and interpret experiences in terms of their religious meaning-systems.

This also suggests that for the respondents in the highly central group, religion appears to offer a variety of meaning-enhancing explanations as well as ways for enhancing self-esteem and a sense of control. Their religious meaning-systems appear to meet the three basic needs by providing integrated and comprehensive concepts, as well as providing answers to existential dilemmas. Their meaning-system also seems to suspend the need for direct control through the trust and confidence in a divine benevolence. Finally, their religious meaning-systems also appear to be well suited in maintaining and enhancing the individual's self-esteem by offering global goals as well as unconditional love through their beliefs.

Based on the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale, to what extent does the centrality of one’s religion seem to influence these descriptions of meaning?

This study has shown that the centrality of one’s religion to some extent appears to inform the religious meaning-system as well as to some extent function as a dispositional factor. If we look at global meaning we can see a clear difference in how the religious meaning-systems appear to be informed in the two groups. In the first group the participants often describe their faith in terms of a relationship to a personal God while the respondents in the second group appear to have a vaguer and a more uncertain image of God. Another difference is that the respondents in the first group often relate God to their global beliefs, goals, and feelings in a direct manner while the respondents in the second group relate their faith to
their global meaning in an indirect way. Finally, the participants in the group *highly central* appear to relate their faith to their self-understanding to a greater extent than the respondents in the group *central*. Based on the brief sketches made of the participants’ meaning-systems this would suggest that the centrality of religion functions as an influential dispositional factor among the participants in the group *highly central* while it is less influential among the respondents in the group *central*.

When it comes to the attribution process behind these meanings we can also see some surprising details. Both of the groups have background and personal/attitudinal factors that point to religious attributions. They also share similar situational factors. Yet the first group made religious attributions to a much larger extent than compared to the second group. This could suggest that the centrality of one’s religion is a very influential factor in how religious meaning is constructed regarding existential questions. Since this was a comparison between a central and a highly central group this seems to imply that the quality of this factor becomes significantly more influential when religion has a highly central position in an individual’s meaning-system. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.
Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1. Empirical reflection

Based on my research review I found 2 main themes; religious meaning and coping and religious meaning and well-being.

Within the first theme several studies shows how religion can contribute to a sense of meaning and help people in coping with illness or traumatic events. (Sorajjakool & Seyle, 2005; Koffman, Morgan, Edmonds, Speck and Higginson, 2008; Plattner & Meiring, 2006; Jacobson, Luckhaupt, DeLANey and Tsevat, 2006; Wortmann and Park, 2008; Wortmann and Park, 2009; Mattis, 2002). Based on my own thesis it is reasonable to suggest that the coping process could be influenced by the centrality of religion since this appears to inform the sense of meaning. Additionally, we should note that if religion can facilitate a positive perception of stressful situations and encourage more benign re-attributions, it is plausible that the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system will influence these re-attributions. This thesis, supports the work done by Koffman, Morgan, Edmonds, Speck, and Higginson (2008) who found that a central religious faith and belief in God could offer a structure in helping to locate a positive meaning in cancer patients’ lives. Participants with a stronger rather than a negative or ambivalent view towards religion also felt less isolated in the absence of family or close friends. In the study, the authors understand a central religious meaning based on how relevant God was in the participant’s attitudes to life and relationships to others. However, they do not mention how this was measured or whether it seems to show how relevant religion is to an individual’s cognitive and emotional system. By implementing an approach based on the CORMS-scale, research could contribute to a more nuanced picture of how religious relevance influences the coping process. This is important since my thesis indicates that there exists a contrast between people with a central and highly central religious meaning-system in how their global meaning is informed. This is somewhat surprising since both groups actually have a central and relevant religious meaning-system. We can be more careful in how we create and measure categories concerning a central religious meaning.

The second theme addresses religion and wellbeing. This relationship has been demonstrated by Ivtszan, Chan, Gardner, and Prashar, (2013), Ciarrocchi and Brelsford (2009) and Emmons (2005). Since a strong belief in God appears to provide a significant meaning in life, it is reasonable to investigate this based on a CORSM-scale approach, which unlike previous research, can provide a more nuanced picture without relying on the specific content of a person’s meaning system. Through such approaches, we can also better understand the relationship between religion, meaning, and wellbeing.
Based on my research review, the only study more closely related to my own topic is the article written by Dezutter, Robertson, Luyckx, and Hutsebaut (2010). In the study the authors suggest that the centrality of the religious meaning-system is an important factor in furthering the life satisfaction for the chronic pain patients and that the degree of centrality influenced how the pain affected the patient’s lives. In short, the study suggests that a central religious meaning-system promotes an adjustment to the pain and facilitates the maintenance of life satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, the similarity between this and my own thesis is that both focus on the centrality of a religious meaning-system, but whereas this study investigated how the centrality influences the well-being and coping of chronic pain patients, my thesis investigated how the centrality of religion influences the attributions made within the meaning-system. My approach is more interested in the meaning process, and how the relevance of religion influences the meaning of existential questions. My thesis can hopefully contribute to the pool of research knowledge available surrounding religion and meaning-making. This is also supported by Emmons (2005) who points out that contemporary psychological research has shown that the explanations that individuals offer existential questions have profound implications for the person’s well-being.

6.1.1 Contribution

The major contributions of this investigation are threefold. First, I have addressed an issue that has very little previous empirical research. Not many studies within the psychology of religion have generally taken a meaning-system perspective and even less research has investigated the extent to which the relevance or centrality of religion might influence different aspects of one’s meaning-system. Even less research has investigated this question in relation to an existential aspect of one’s meaning-system and especially concerning young adults in a Swedish context. Based on my research review and empirical reflection this is surprising as the examination of the centrality of a person’s religious meaning-system appears to be able to contribute to different aspects of research concerning coping and well-being. Secondly, I have addressed the need pointed out by Park (2013) that we have to investigate further, how meaning-systems are informed. I have shown, based on the CORMS-scale that global meaning appears to be differently informed depending on the centrality of religion. Third, I have applied a relatively underutilized theory within the psychology of religion and used a measuring instrument, which to my knowledge has never before been applied in a Swedish context, which contributes to the application and development of these theoretical tools. This will be further discussed in the section below.

6.2. Theoretical reflection
On a meta-theoretical level I have used a meaning-systems approach. In this specific thesis this approach has been vital in providing a theoretical framework in which global meaning, the general attribution theory, and the CORMS-scale can be adequately combined to examine the existential questions among the participant. By drawing from these theoretical concepts I have also hopefully been able to somewhat contribute to the development of the general attribution theory. General attribution theory has been used to illustrate how the centrality of religion influences the existential aspect of one’s meaning-system. This is unusual as the theory is primarily concerned with the casual explanations about events or behaviors and the attributions made in regard to these experiences. My thesis has been an attempt to test the “generalizability” of the theory as it is considered to be able to interpret the whole spectrum of life events and experiences. In relation to the results of my thesis, we can see that the use of this theory has successfully been able to provide a picture in how the centrality of one’s meaning-system might influence the religious meaning process. Furthermore, it has not only been useful to the purpose of this thesis but also compatible with my own philosophical worldview. As Taves (2009) points out, the attribution theory takes into account both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective in relation to particular experiences. The choice of the theory can thus be viewed as adequate.

Since the first group made religious attributions to a much larger extent than the second group, the centrality of one’s religion might be an influential factor in how religious meaning is constructed regarding existential questions. This was done by implementing the centrality as a personal/attitudinal factor. Previously, the personal/attitudinal factors have only consisted of variables concerning self-esteem and control, and only met two of the three basic needs that the theory rely on. Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) have furthermore pointed out that there might exist motivational variables that increase the probability of making a religious attribution, and that these motivational factors must be distinguished from belief components. The use of the CORMS-scale, which does not rely on belief components is adequate in indicating variables that influence the probability of making a religious attribution. By implementing the CORMS-scale and by creating a picture of the religious meaning-system with the concept of global meaning I was able to address all three basic needs (self-esteem, control, and meaning) that form the basis of the general attribution theory. The mean scores of the respondents were also consistent with the results from the interviews. As shown from table 1 and 2 the respondents in both groups reported that their faith provided security in the face of difficulties. This were also reflected in the interviews. Furthermore, the low scores between identity and faith in the category Central also appeared in the analysis as most of the respondents in this group described important events related to their identity without making any religious attributions. The opposite can be seen in the category Highly central were the respondents had high mean scores between identity and faith. Something which also were shown during the interviews as they related their faith to their own self-understanding to a much greater extent compared to the respondents in the category Central.
However, I will address a more critical eye towards the results and the theoretical concepts. First, one can note that the general attribution theory is developed in the cultural context of the USA. If we look at the situational factors, the general attribution theory postulates that important and positive events, as well as, the personal relevance of these events, increases the chance of a religious attribution, since such events are often attributed in relation to religious aspects such as God, who becomes a part of the "big picture" when these significant experiences occur. However, this might not be true in a postmodern and secularized context such as Sweden. The Swedish culture has a very strong emphasize on a secular-rational value dimension, which place less weight on religion while also emphasizing strongly on a self-expression value dimension. In the Swedish context, God as a traditional representation has minor importance in peoples lives and religion is not seen as something vital or important (DeMarinis, 2008). These situational factors might, in other words, not have an adequate ability to increase the chance of a religious attribution in the context of this study. We should also note that the domain factor might not have been very influential. According to Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2009) we tend to seek divine help when we lack control over a certain situation and when we have trouble in finding meaning. A medical domain might in other words increase the chance of a religious attribution since these tend to be more stressful. However, in this thesis this only seems to apply to Mimmi and Samuel who both describe important events that were stressful and uncertain. If we look at the the existential questions these could be placed in an existential domain, which could be characterized as more uncertain and threatening regarding meaning and control. Since religion often deals with existential questions such as the meaning of life or the ultimate purpose of the human existence, it could be argued that this domain will increase the likelihood for religious attributions. My own hypothesis was that the existential questions would elicit more religious attributions among the participants interviewed as these are often characterized as unclear and challenging for both control and meaning. However, in this thesis, the existential questions lacked a prominent religious meaning in the second group while most of these respondents did not make any religious attributions of their important events, although all of these could be placed in an existential domain. This could indicate that this was not an influential factor in this study. This could be due to the fact that the existential aspect of the important events concerned identity issues that did not appear to clearly imply a lack of control. However, they could still be characterized as uncertain regarding meaning. Why then did the participants not make any religious attributions to meet the need for meaning? One possible explanation is that the need for meaning was indirectly met through the religious community or friends since most of the respondents in this group emphasis the social aspect in their lives.

In relation to this we can also note that both of the groups have background and personal/attitudinal factors that point to religious attributions. They also share similar situational factors. However, the first group made religious attributions to a much larger degree than compared to the second group. Based on the general attribution theory this could be explained by the fact that the first group had a
primary religious socialization. This could be the most dominant factor in considering whether or not a person makes any religious attributions. However, this difference could also be due to the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system. My own suggestion is that these two factors are interrelated since the primary socialization probably influences the centrality of one’s religious meaning-system. However, further research needs to be made concerning this issue.

Finally, we should address how the case of Samuel can be explained in relation to the result of the thesis. As mentioned before, Samuel distinguished himself from the other participants in the first group since he neither thinks about existential issues very often nor perceives them as especially important. Samuel also appeared to not view these questions as significant even though they affected him personally. Unlike the other participants he did not relate God to his perception of death and his global feelings appear to be related to God in a more indirect manner. He appears to have more in common with the participants in the second group rather than the first. One explanation to this could be that Samuel answered the questionnaire based on what is expected of him as Christian rather than his own views and feelings. Another explanation could be that his religious faith is strongly related to his own cultural background. As mentioned earlier Samuel expressed a difficulty to discern a difference between his cultural tradition and religion. This could indicate that the CORMS-scale was answered based on his cultural background rather than his religious faith. This could demonstrate a need to further develop the scale so that it can better differentiate between cultural and religious aspects.

6.3. Methodological reflection

In this thesis I have applied a qualitative approach. My research is interested in listening to how people construct their own meaning of different situations. A suitable research design is a phenomenological research design since it is used to examine the lived experience of certain phenomena as it is described by the participants. An adequate research method is the qualitative research interview as it seeks to understand the world from the participant’s point of view and elicit meaning out of their experiences. The use of a qualitative approach in this thesis is well founded in my own opinion. It can be argued that the research would have gained more by applying a mixed-method approach, as this would have provided both a breadth and depth to the thesis. The accuracy of the research would have increased since the phenomena are approached from different vantage points. However, even though my thesis does not adopt a mixed method, it still contributes to the research enterprise and can be seen as part of a group-based interpretation of mixed methods. This is also consistent with Moghaddam, Walker, and Harré (2003) who argue for a holistic view of mixed-methods in which the collective enterprise of research generates different results through a multitude of methods.
Nevertheless, since this is a qualitative study it has important limitations. The thesis is intended to elucidate only different points as very little empirical research has been made in relation to the research questions. The thesis does not endeavor toward generalizability. The non-generalizability of my findings is further underscored by the fact that the processes of making a religious meaning might vary in accordance with factors such as education and socio-economic class. In retrospect, I wish I had taken this more into account and created a wider distribution among the respondents with respect to these factors. By using a convenience sample, I suspect that most of my participants can be said to reflect the middle class in the Swedish society. This also had an impact on the material since I could not find any participants who could be placed in the non-central category. Instead the interviews were focused on the categories central and highly central by including 4 people from a respective category. With the category non-central the result might have been different. My own prediction is that the meaning-system would have been even less informed by one’s religion for participants in this category. Furthermore, since the result of this thesis imply that the quality of the centrality factor becomes significantly more influential when religion has a highly central position, we would probably see even less religious attributions concerning existential questions. Similar to the participants in the category central, respondents belonging to the non-central category might also have related an even stronger existential meaning to their important events. However, further research needs to be made concerning this issue.

We should also note that all of the respondents in the second group belong to the Church of Sweden. The results of the second group could in other words depend on their religious affiliation rather than the centrality of religious meaning-systems. For future research, it is necessary to expand the variation of the participants. Furthermore, since this is a study of young adults in Uppsala, the results cannot and should not be generalized to young adults in Sweden. We should further note that my results depend on a specific cultural context, age, and type of meaning. Future research might investigate the questions raised in this thesis in different cultural contexts, as well as, within different age groups and religious affiliations.

Finally, we should address the criteria regarding validity and reliability. Concerning the validity in this thesis I have followed six strategies proposed by Creswell (2014) to make sure that I truly measure/record what I intended to measure/record. In retrospect, I could perhaps have used different sources of information, for example applied a mixed-method approach. I could also have asked the participants to read the transcribed interviews. In this study, the respondents have only read the results presented in chapter 4. When it comes to the remaining strategies, I would dare to say that I have meet them in an adequate way. I have provided very rich descriptions, especially in chapter 4 that should contribute to the validity of the study. I have further been transparent throughout the whole thesis, as well as, provided a detailed account of my own worldview assumptions. I have also presented discrepant information that runs counter to my assumptions and expec-
tations. As mentioned before, I also have extended experience similar to the setting of the participants and I have involved persons both within and outside the field of psychology of religion who have reviewed and asked questions about the procedures applied in this thesis. In sum, this should be adequate to provide a proper validity to my thesis. To check the reliability of the study I followed two procedures: checking transcripts and checking codes. In retrospect, I could perhaps have included another person in my coding process to gain an interjudge reliability. However, this has not been possible in relation to the disposable time for this thesis.

6.4. Concluding reflections

Besides the recommendation already mentioned earlier concerning future research, I would also propose the use of longitudinal studies since the religious meaning-systems evolves through time (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013). To examine these complex dynamics my suggestion is that we apply longitudinal methods so that we can understand how religious meaning-systems become central as well as how this influences different aspects of one’s meaning-system over time. This is important if we are to get a picture of how religious meanings are constructed, as well as, how people relate to existential questions during different stages in life, especially since the explanations to existential questions have a profound impact on people’s well-being. To quote Nietzsche, "he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how" (Nietzsche, referenced in Frankl, 1984, p. 126).
Summary

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the individual differences in the extent to which the centrality of religion influences the existential aspect of one’s meaning-system. For this thesis the centrality of religion has been understood as shaping how relevant religious faith is for an individual. The central research question for this thesis were:

How do self-identified Christian young adults in Sweden describe their meaning regarding important events and existential questions?

The thesis then had the following subquestions:

Based on the general attribution theory, how is the religious interpretation actualized in these descriptions of meaning?

Based on the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale, to what extent does the centrality of one’s religion seems to influence these descriptions of meaning?

To answer my questions I used a meaning-system framework as well as a qualitative approach in which I gathered information through a questionnaire based on the Centrality of the Religious Meaning System Scale, and by conducting 8 semi-structured interviews with young adults in Uppsala. The analysis of these interviews were implemented through an abductive method. The theoretical perspective has been based on the concept Global meaning and the General attribution theory. My conclusion is that the participants describe their meaning differently depending on their religious meaning-system. Respondents with a highly central religious meaning-system tend to describe important events and existential questions in relation to a personal relationship to God. All of the important events refer to God while the meaning of life is mostly expressed as having a contact with God. All of the respondents also perceive death as some kind of afterlife where one is united with the divine. This differs from the participants with a central religious meaning-system who generally do not describe their meaning regarding these issues in reference to God or their faith. The thesis further indicates that the religious interpretations to a large degree were actualized by situational and dispositional factors. This suggest that the religious attributions were made to meet the participants need for meaning, control, and self-esteem. The religious attributions can be seen as attempts to understand and interpret experiences in terms of their religious meaning-systems. Finally, the study indicates that the centrality of one’s religion appears to inform the religious meaning-system, as well as, to function as a dispositional factor. The findings also suggest that the centrality of one’s religion can be an influential factor in how religious meaning is constructed regarding existential questions.
References


Appendix A

Centrality of the Religious Meaning-system Scale (COMS, Dezutter, Luyckx, Robertson, & Hutsebaut, in preparation).

What faith, religion or spirituality means to you.

Faith, religion and spirituality can mean many things. Some people call themselves Catholic, Protestant or Muslim and regularly visit a church/mosque. Other people consider themselves Christians and pray every now and then, but they don’t feel affiliated with a church. Some people believe that there is something more, something divine, but they don’t know exactly what. Others don’t believe in something divine and rather call themselves liberal or atheist.

Can you give a concise description of your faith, religion, or spirituality. What does faith, religion or spirituality mean to you? What does your faith, religion or spirituality look like?

Could you, with this description in mind, answer the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all true</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very much true</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73
My religion, spirituality, faith…

1. ... makes life worth living
2. ... influences how I act in daily life
3. ... is important for the meaning that I give to my life
4. ... is an important aspect of my life
5. ... defines to a large extent who I am
6. ... is central in my life
7. ... has influence on the choices that I make
8. ... is important for my identity
9. ... helps me to deal with difficulties
10. ... plays an important role in my life
11. ... makes me into the person that I am
12. ... offers me goals in my life
**Swedish version**

Vad tro, religion och andlighet betyder för dig.


Kan du ge en koncis beskrivning av din tro, religion, eller andlighet. Vad betyder tro, religion eller andlighet för dig? Hur ser din tro, religion eller andlighet ut?

---

Kan du, med denna beskrivning i åtanke, besvara följande frågor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inte sant alls</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Mycket sant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Min religion, andlighet, tro eller det sätt jag ger mening till livet…**

- ... gör livet värt att leva
- ... påverkar hur jag agerar i det dagliga livet
- ... är viktig för den mening jag ger till mitt liv
- ... är en viktig aspekt av mitt liv
- ... definierar till en stor utsträckning vem jag är
- ... är central i mitt liv
- ... har en inverkan på de val jag gör
- ... är viktig för min identitet
- ... hjälper mig att hantera svårigheter
- ... har en viktig roll i mitt liv
- ... gör mig till den person som jag är
- ... ger mig mål i mitt liv
Appendix B

Intervjuguide

1. Information innan intervjun


Jag kommer spela in intervjun för att sedan transkribera den. Inspelningarna kommer sedan att förvaras på en säker och låst plats.

Intervjun är helt anonym och jag kommer inte använda någon information som kan användas för att identifiera dig som person. Kortare citat eller egna beskrivningar kan komma att presenteras i uppsatsen. Det är enbart jag och min handledare som kommer ha tillgång till materialet och informationen kommer enbart att användas för forskningssyften. Om någon annan forskare vill ha tillgång till materialet måste de åta sig samma skyldigheter som jag, med andra ord att allt förblir helt konfidentiellt.

Uppsatsen kommer publiceras på portalen DIVA och jag kommer även meddela dig när den är klar. Innan den publiceras kommer du även få möjligheten att läsa igenom studien för att se om du själv tycker att mina beskrivningar är korrekta.

Syfte idag - att höra dig berätta om hur du förstår livet och viktiga händelse i ditt liv.

2. Bakgrund

Kan du beskriva din religiösa bakgrund?
(Hur?, Var?, När?, Varför?)

Kan du berätta om någon eller några som på ett betydande sätt har påverkat din tro?
Kan du så detaljerat som möjligt beskriva din tro?

3. Viktiga händelser

Kan du så detaljerat som möjligt berätta om någon viktiga händelser i ditt liv?

Vad i denna händelse skulle du betrakta som viktigast?

Vilka eventuella frågor väcks i samband med dessa händelser?

Har någon eller några personer kommit att betyda något särskilt i samband med händelserna?

Hur har du valt att förstå livet i ljuset av dessa händelser?

4. Existentiella teman

Brukar du tänka på existentiella frågor?

Hur viktiga är existentiella frågor för dig?

Vad anser du vara ”Livets mening”? 77
Hur känner du inför livets mening?

Vad är viktigt i ditt liv?

Vad anser du att ”Döden” står för?

Vad känner du inför döden?

5. Kontext

Med Vem/Vilka har du pratat om de frågor som jag ställde kring livets mening och döden?

Var har dessa samtal tagit plats som oftast?

Kan du berätta mer om i vilka sammanhang?

Kan du minnas varför ni kommit att prata kring dessa frågor – någon särskild händelse eller omständighet?

5. Avslutning

Vill du göra några ytterligare tillägg eller kommentera något innan vi avslutar intervjun?
Hej!

Jag är glad över ditt visade intresse för att delta i min D-uppsats och vill därför ge dig ytterligare information om enkäten och intervjun.

Mitt namn är Sacharias Wirén och jag är masterstudent i religionspsykologi vid Uppsala Universitet med lektor Önver Cetrez som handledare.

I detta mail har jag bifogat en enkät med några frågor om din tro. Enkäten är helt anonym och består av en öppen fråga där du ska formulera ditt eget svar och 12 stycken påståenden där du ska fylla i hur väl dessa stämmer överens med ditt eget liv. Om det är någon fråga som är otydlig eller som du har någon fundering kring enkäten så hör gärna av dig. Svaren kommer att vara helt anonyma och det är enbart jag och min handledare som kommer att ha tillgång till materialet.

Beroende på vilket resultat jag får efter att ha sammanställt svaren från de utskickade enkäterna så kan jag komma att höra av mig till dig för en intervju. Under intervjun kommer jag att berätta om några viktiga händelser i ditt liv och hur du tänker kring existentiella frågor så som döden och livet.


Intervjun kommer att ske på en plats som vi båda två tycker är lämplig och ska i minsta möjliga mån innebära några kostnader för dig. Intervjun kommer att ta mellan 45 till 60 min. Som tack för ditt deltagande i intervjun kommer du att få en biobiljett.

Eventuellt kan jag behöva göra en kompletterande intervju och jag hoppas att du i så fall även vill delta i denna. Du har självklart möjlighet att dra dig ur projektet när du vill om du önskar det.

Hör gärna av dig om det råder några eventuella oklarheter kring enkäten eller intervjun. Om du vill ha information av en representant från universitetet så finns möjligheten att kontakta Önver Cetrez vid Teologiska institutionen. Han kan nås på email: onver.cetrez@teol.uu.se eller tel: 076-6324185.

Med vänliga hälsningar
Sacharias Wirén
2014-07-08
Appendix D

Informerat samtycke

Undertecknad ________________________________

har tagit del av information om studiens syfte i enlighet med inbjudan och fått möjlighet att ställa frågor angående studiens upplägg. Undertecknad samtycker till att delta i studien.

______________________________________________

Datum, Plats och Namn