

**MOMENTS OF TRANSCENDENCE
A Psychospiritual Interpretation
of Psychic, Conversion, and
Mystical Experiences**

by Marie H. Bousquet

**B.A.(H) Psychology
Saint Mary's University, 1996**

**THESIS
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education (Counselling)**

**Acadia University
Spring Convocation 1998**

© Copyright by Marie H. Bousquet 1998



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-27577-9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge with sincere appreciation and affection the many people who have contributed to this work .

To the three participants who so willingly and openly shared their lives with me, and in doing so, have entrusted me with a great gift. I owe a great debt of gratitude.

To my friends Paul, Anne Marie and Brenda who believed in me and encouraged me along the way. I shall always treasure those times of laughter shared together in the warmth of your homes.

To my daughter Shelley whose faith, courage, intuition and objectivity often inspired me in the midst of difficult times.

To my thesis supervisor John Sumarah who has proven to be a most remarkable teacher and friend along the way. I have learned a great deal, as much from the things that were said, as those that were not. His constant encouragement has been a real blessing.

Last but not least, to my committee members and my colleagues for their help and insight along the way and their ongoing support.

This thesis is dedicated

to my daughter

Shelley

**whose sense of adventure,
compassion, friendship
and incredible courage provides me
with a great source of inspiration.**

**Her uncompromising attitude
towards her own sense of knowing
and her search for meaning
are nothing short of remarkable.**

**To the Glory of God
through Jesus Christ
Who is my source of Hope
Strength and Meaning**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	PAGE
1.	INTRODUCTION..... 1
	Purpose of the study..... 1
	Subjective experience as Object..... 1
	Process and Context..... 2
	Developmental Psychology and Subjective Experience.... 2
	Assumptions..... 3
	Creative Imagination..... 4
	Trauma, Fantasy, and Paranormal Experience..... 4
	Implications for Counselling..... 5
	Definitions..... 7
2.	REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE..... 10
	Paranormal Experiences..... 10
	Wholistic Model..... 11
	Attributive Model..... 12
	Metaphysics..... 13
	Philosophical Issues and Assumptions..... 15
	The Nature of Knowing..... 16
	Process Theory..... 16
	Interpretation..... 17
	Faith Perspective..... 17
	Source of Knowledge..... 17
	Mysticism..... 18
	Conversion as Mystical Experience..... 19
	Developmental Theories..... 20
	Subjective Knowing..... 20
	Psychological Perspective..... 21
	Spiritual Perspective..... 22

Four Stage Model of Spiritual Growth.....	26
Process and Stages Defined.....	27
Stage 1, Chaotic, antisocial.....	27
Stage 2, Formal, institutional.....	28
Stage 3, Skeptic, individual.....	28
Stage 4, Mystic, communal.....	29
Spiritual Growth.....	30
Conversion.....	32
The Insider Meaning.....	33
Implications for Counselling.....	34
3. METHODOLOGY	36
Procedure.....	38
In-Depth Interviews.....	39
Selection Criteria.....	39
Gender Issues.....	40
Identifying Phenomenological Events.....	40
Closure.....	41
4. NARRATIVES AND INTERPRETATION	42
Life narrative of John.....	43
Biographical Information.....	43
Experience of Fear/Trauma.....	44
Family Structure.....	45
Relationship with Father.....	45
Relationship with Mother.....	46
Family Dynamics.....	46
Self-Perception.....	47
Insight and Intuition.....	48
Visions and other Phenomenological Experiences.....	48
Creative Imagining.....	49

Religious Influences.....	49
Faith Formation.....	50
Conversion.....	50
Call to Ministry.....	51
Life narrative of L.....	53
Biographical Information.....	53
Experience of Fear/Trauma.....	54
Family Structure.....	55
Relationship with Father.....	55
Relationship with Mother.....	55
Family Dynamics.....	56
Self-Perception.....	56
Creative Imagining.....	57
Intuition and Insight.....	57
Déjà-vu.....	58
Religious Influences.....	59
Conversion.....	59
Visions and Mystical Experiences.....	60
Life narrative of Mark.....	62
Biographical Information.....	62
Experience of Fear/Trauma.....	63
Family Structure.....	64
Relationship with Father.....	64
Relationship with Mother.....	64
Family Dynamics.....	65
Self-Perception.....	66
Creative Imagining.....	67
Insight and Intuition.....	68
Visions and Other Phenomenological Events.....	69
Conversion.....	69
Mystical Experiences.....	70
Community.....	72
Researcher as Informant.....	75
Biographical Information.....	75

Experience of Fear/Trauma.....	76
Family Structure.....	77
Relationship with Father.....	77
Relationship with Mother.....	78
Family Dynamics.....	79
Self-Perception.....	79
Creative Imagining.....	81
Insight and Intuition.....	81
Visions and Other Phenomenological Events.....	83
Spiritual Development.....	85
5. SUMMARY, ANALYSIS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	93
A Psychospiritual Interpretation.....	93
Certain Knowledge.....	93
Psychic Experiences.....	94
Conversion Experiences.....	94
Mystical Experiences.....	95
Research.....	95
Narratives.....	96
Process.....	97
Applying the Four Stage Model.....	97
Antecedents and Creative Imagining.....	98
Informants as Converts.....	100
Source of Knowledge.....	100
Conversion as a Phenomenological Event.....	101
Phenomenological Events, Mediating Factors, and their Interpretation.....	103
Analysis of John's Narrative.....	103
Psychic experiences.....	103
Antecedents.....	104
Creative Imagining.....	104
Discussion.....	105
Conversion.....	107
Mystical Experience.....	108

Analysis of L's Narrative.....	109
Paranormal Experiences.....	109
Psychic Experiences.....	110
Conversion.....	111
Mystical Experience.....	112
Discussion.....	113
Association between Trauma, Fantasy, and Paranormal Experience.....	113
Analysis of Mark's Narrative	113
Childhood Conversion.....	114
Antecedents.....	115
Mystical Experience.....	115
Discussion.....	118
Analysis of Personal Narrative (Researcher as Informant).	119
Psychic Experiences.....	119
Trip to Aunt Laura.....	119
Metaphysics.....	119
Dissociative Episode.....	120
Creative Imagining.....	120
The Car Accident.....	122
Conversion.....	123
Mystical Experiences.....	124
Recommendations and Implications for Counselling.....	126
Future Research.....	127
Rationality.....	128
Faith.....	129
Defining Antecedents.....	129
Conclusion.....	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY	132
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Interview Question Guide	136
Appendix B: Subjective Paranormal Experience Questionnaire	137
Appendix C: Spiritual History	138

Abstract

This study examines various phenomenological events associated with a sense of knowing, the process that leads to them, and the interpretation given them by the informants. These events include but are not limited to psychic events (intuition, insight, experiences of fore knowledge or déjà-vu), conversion experiences, and mystical experience including visions.

Research on phenomenological experiences is limited and has been guided by a predominantly skeptic agenda. Psychic events, usually associated with paranormal manifestations and relegated to the field of parapsychology, continues to be associated with attributive models of psychopathology. While conversion and mystical experiences have a more positive connotation within the confines of faith community, the study of Hermeneutics and Depth Psychology, they have received little attention from a developmental perspective.

This research examines these events in the context of both psychological and spiritual development on the premise that psychic, conversion and mystical experiences are the product of natural creative processes inherent to the human experience, an active component of psychological functioning and development, and an integral part of our growth toward our higher goal, our quest towards Transcendence. Structure for understanding the process involved in each experience is provided in the four stage model of spiritual growth (Peck, 1987, ch.5).

Results are communicated both in terms of the informant's own understanding and in light of the existing theories. The research concludes with implications for counselling and recommendations for further research.

In the life of every person, there occurs from time to time, events which in the words of Rescher (1991) can only be referred to as "Baffling phenomena", meaning that such events are perplexing and at odds with our knowledge of the world. These events, experiences which cannot adequately be explained away on the basis of psychological functioning, defy our empirical and logical methods of inquiry. If we are to gain some understanding, we need to turn to a more constructive method of inquiry which considers both the objective and the subjective experience along with the processes and context which impinge on the experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify, analyze and interpret occurrences in the life of each informant which have some association with a sense of knowing, whether immediate or in retrospect. Although universally experienced, they tend to be viewed as aberrant, particularly in Western society. Experiences of intuition, insight, extra sensory perception (ESP) and déjà-vu are loosely defined experiences generally described in terms of psychic experiences associated with knowing. Other forms of knowing, including some dreams and visions can be classified as psychic or spiritual, while conversion and mystical experiences are generally thought to be spiritual. The premise of this study is that all of the experiences mentioned are both psychic(ological) and spiritual.

Subjective Experience as Object

Philosophy, and in particular, phenomenology offers a rationale for certain assumptions, often taken for granted, about the nature of the world and our consciousness

of it, by providing a way of understanding, defining and treating concepts as objects. "Object" is defined as all that is available to our conscious mind including our consciousness of it. In phenomenology, we are more concerned with multiple realities which emphasize "the subjective aspect of people's behavior...in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives". (Bogden and Biklen, 1982, p.31) Doing so "does not deny a reality 'out there' that stands over and against human beings, capable of resisting action toward it". (Bogden and Biklen, p.32) Based on the premise that informants are the expert of their own experience, the analysis will give attention to the informants' own interpretation of events.

Process and Context

The qualitative researcher is also more concerned with process and context - what is the natural history of the event and how do we connect concepts, ideas and abstractions in a way which makes sense. (Bogdan and Biklen, p.28) "Too often theories of knowledge emphasize the nature of knowledge as primarily structural. But knowing is part of living and living is essentially processual". (Bahm, 1995) To understand the process, the study will examine specific experiences in light of a four stage model of spiritual growth, attending to mediating factors or antecedents, and interpreting within the framework of the participants own experience. The resulting analysis should yield a psychospiritual interpretation of phenomenological experiences.

Developmental Psychology and Subjective Experience

Stages of psychological and spiritual development are considered integral to the study. Psychological and spiritual development are understood to be two distinct but not

mutually exclusive disciplines which are useful in understanding the processes in which we engage. **Psycho** or the study of the mind is concerned with how we understand our world and make sense of it, along with all of the components that shape us along the way. **Spiritual** is concerned with the element of "Other" as a substantive force in the lives of individuals. When dealing with spirituality, we interpret experience in light a universal consciousness or of a "Transcendent Other". While there are theories which inform our understanding of spiritual or faith development and the process which predisposes us to certain experiences, the experience itself is more illusive. Using theories of psychological and spiritual development will provide context and structure for analysing and may even provide some insight into some aspect of human functioning but it will not likely explain the event itself. Such experiences can only be understood by attending to the reports of those who have encountered them, by addressing the issues of subjectivity, of interpretation, and of tradition.

Assumptions

The assumption of this researcher is that such experiences are both a creative response to the environment in the process of growth and a tendency towards integration and Transcendence. How these experiences are interpreted defines the degree to which they are relevant to either past, present or future context. For example, in the case of intuition, insight and déjà-vu, the perceived knowledge can be linked to events which are occurring in the present or have occurred in the past. These experiences may be linked to the individual's sense of perception and ability to pick up subtle cues. On the other hand, visions and dreams may only become relevant at a later time. Although predictive in nature, there may be no

immediate awareness of their importance in terms of "knowing". Even if the predictive nature of the experience is identified, the person may be unable to articulate the content of the experience or may not have a forum in which to use the information in a useful way. Spiritual and mystical experiences are unique in that while ineffable, they can be interpreted within the context of tradition. Conversion, for example, is seen as an act of Grace which brings the person into relationship, and therefore knowledge, of a personal God. Visions, dreams and mystical experiences are understood as spiritual gifts which provide knowledge or insight about specific circumstances or spiritual truth.

Creative Imagination

My own experience of transcendence and knowing suggests a connection between fantasies as a key element which give rise to the phenomena being examined. This view appears to be supported by Robinson (1987) who addresses the role of creative imagination in the experience of mystery. Make-belief and fantasies are believed to be normal expressions of imagination and a creative process which, if uninhibited by structure, increases the potential for experiencing psychic and mystical experiences. Taken to the extreme, imagination combined with insight produces an experience we commonly refer to as "a vision", a process exemplified in meditation and guided imagery. This later explanation allows for the possibility that phenomenological experiences are a normal part of human development.

Trauma, Fantasy and Paranormal Experiences

Other research (Lawrence et al.,1995; Rao 1992) establishes partial causal effect between childhood trauma and a heightened development of a fantasy, which in turn leads

to a proneness towards paranormal experiences. Although framed in a different context, research and theories on religious development (James, 1961) and conversion experiences (Rennie, 1995) support in principle the notion of trauma (ie: suffering, depression) as antecedents to mystical experiences. The implication is that paranormal and mystical experiences are psychological responses which can be understood in terms of defense mechanisms in which creative processes are implicated. While these views may explain some potential reasons why paranormal and mystical experiences occur, they fail to tell us anything about why such experiences have such profound effects, often resulting in a sense of knowing, whether psychic or spiritual.

Implications for Counselling

Psychic and mystical experiences can be understood in terms of both spiritual processes and developmental processes. (Brent, 1991) It is important for counselling professionals to have a good understanding of issues around phenomenological events in order to encourage and reinforce their clients' own sense of knowing. Many people have come to accept that subjective knowing is something not to be trusted. The therapist must assure the client that not only can their sense of knowing be trusted, but that answers to their own difficulties lie within them.

Further, psychic and mystical experiences which result in a major shift in perception, as is often the case, or which allow us to open up to greater possibilities through creative imagining, may lead to significant healing and growth. One only needs to witness the dramatic changes as a result of various counselling strategies to understand the impact such experiences have.

Finally, it is important for professionals to pursue training which integrates spirituality in processes which facilitate growth. (Hinterkopf, 1994) Consequently, care givers need to be comfortable with their own sense of knowing and spirituality. In addition, professionals need to understand the characteristics which make them effective at their work. A good counsellor should demonstrate empathy, a characteristic which requires a degree of identification with the client, not only through experience, but as a result of having some insight into the issues concerning the client. Intuition plays a significant role in assessing and identifying significant areas for consideration. In addition, since not all clients are religious, spirituality needs to be defined broadly to include religious and mystical experiences, and definitions limited to psychic phenomena. Understanding the principles and processes that lead to greater insight and intuition is of benefit to both the therapist and the client.

Of major import to the client and the therapist is that of finding ways of reframing experience in a way that makes life meaningful. From a psychological perspective, mystical and psychic experiences need to be recognized for what they really are - a normal creative process that leads to knowing and ultimately, wellbeing. The myths which associate psychic and mystical experiences with psychological dysfunction and evil practices need to be subjugated. From a spiritual perspective, mystical and psychic experiences may very well be a gift interwoven in the complexity of human functioning, but nevertheless a gift.

Definitions

Conversion refers to any process or event which effects a dramatic change or transformation of an individual. Such events provide a compelling rationale for observable change in behaviour and motivation for action. Conversion can be ascribed to a dramatic change in philosophy or doctrine which is substantive to the area of belief. It can also be ascribed to psychological processes, such as grief or trauma, which have a profound impact on our behaviour. And finally, it can be ascribed to a paranormal or spiritual encounter which radically transforms our sense of being. While conversion can sometimes be associated with a specific event, the premise of this study is that conversion takes place in the context of our existence. Consequently, it is understood to be a creative, developing and ongoing process. In the Christian context, conversion is understood differently depending on the tradition. For some, conversion is found in the expression of faith and belief through a community which ascribes to the teachings of Jesus Christ. For others, and perhaps most Protestant traditions, conversion occurs at a defining moment when an individual accepts the Lordship of Jesus Christ as God revealed in their lives. Finally, there are those whose experience of conversion is evidenced in the on going work of God in the life of the believer. Here, conversion is seen as an continuous transformation effected by God which is a life long endeavour. The essential and uncompromising characteristic for all Christian traditions is that God is revealed in both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ though the power of the Holy Spirit and is the

transforming or converting Agent in our lives through an act of redemption.

Existential (ism) refers to a way of knowing which is rooted on one's understanding of life (existence) and one's view of the world from which values are derived. Stinnette (1970) described the existential thinker as "one who exists in his action-responses and through them creates a meaningful world".

Paranormal - The term paranormal is used in its broadest sense to include any psychic experience associated with knowing, sensing or perceiving. Paranormal can also be one of two subcategories of phenomenological events and distinguished from mystical experiences which tend to be of a religious nature. Both mystical and paranormal or psychic experiences are believed to be associated with the spiritual element of human functioning albeit at different levels of experience and interpretation. Further, paranormal experiences, except where they are associated with the practice of the occult, are not viewed as demonic or evil. In the same vane, mystical experiences which occur as a result of the use of intoxicants or interventions (ie: guided imagery) are not indicative of a more developed faith or of a relationship with a transcendent Other.

Subjective knowing has been defined by Belenki et al. (1986) as "a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private and subjectively known or intuited" and **subjectivism** as being dichotomous and absolutist thinking in the knower's assumptions about truth (p.15). Subjectivism is described as dualistic in the conviction that there are right answers, and internal truth can negate answers provided by the outside world. This internal truth provides a means of moving

towards greater autonomy, independence and connected knowing (p. 54).

Phenomenology refers to "eventuations that we encounter in the course of experience that perplex us because they are at odds with our [supposed] knowledge of the world" (Rescher, 1991). In the Husserlian tradition, phenomenology serves to explain objects and everything which is present, or given, including our consciousness of them, as well as all the ways of being conscious of something including what is perceived, remembered, represented, felt...including emotional and volitional consciousness processes. (Holmes, 1995)

Real or reality refers to the world as existing independent of our consciousness of it. What is real in the Cartesian tradition is said to belong to the "natural attitude". That is, the world exists apart from our consciousness of it.

Truth refers to "an approximate description or explanation of reality. Reality as what "is". Thus, "the closer an idea is to that which it represents, the closer to the truth it is considered to be". (Day, 1990, p.439)

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Knowledge of reality has never the certitude of complete evidence. The process of knowing is infinite. It never comes to an end except in a state of knowledge of the whole. But such knowledge transcends infinitely every finite mind and can be ascribed only to God. Every knowledge of reality by the human mind has the character of higher or lower probability. The certitude about a physical law, a historical fact, or psychological structure can be so high that for all practical purposes, it is certain. But theoretically the incomplete certitude of belief remains and can be undercut at any moment by criticism and new experience. The certitude of faith has not this character. Neither has it the character of formal evidence. The certitude of faith is 'existential' meaning that the whole existence of man is involved. It has,.... two elements: the one, which is not a risk but a certainty about one's own being, namely, on being related to something ultimate or unconditional; the other, which is a risk and involves doubt and courage, namely, the surrender to a concern which is not really ultimate and may be destructive if taken as ultimate...

Paul Tillich, 1957, p.34

Paranormal Experiences

Many people in the course of their lives experience psychic or mystical experiences. Although they may occur infrequently, they are not unusual in that most people experience them at some time or other. As such, they are common to the human experience across all cultures and boundaries. Research in the field of paranormal experiences, whether psychic or mystical, is limited. What we do know is that:

1. Psychic and mystical experiences vary in degree of saliency. We know that many people have experienced them, there are various levels of mystical encounters, they are often associated with a period of turmoil which seems to always begin with "a sick and longing soul but always ends, if not sidetracked, with the embrace of the Divine." (Burham, 1997,

p. 4-7) They often leads to a profound emotional and psychological transformation. While not everyone experiences psychic or mystical experiences, we know that most people can experience them and that such experiences are on the increase. When identified, psychic and mystical events are transformative, often healing, undeniably real. (p.5-7)

2. Some research (Lawrence et. al., 1995; Rao, 1992) suggest that psychic events are more common with people who have experienced trauma, which leads to a rich fantasy life, which in turn results in paranormal experiences.

3. Further, many individuals report experiencing some form of mystical experience as a result of engaging in certain disciplines such as meditation and guided imagery while others are induced by the use of chemicals or intoxicants.

4. Visions and psychic experiences are often associated with creative people. While Western culture finds such experiences problematic to the extent of viewing them as pathological, attitudes in the East are more accepting, considering them to be spiritual gifts.

5. There has been a long tradition of psychics, mystics, and sages who claim that their experience is given. Placed in the spiritual context, such experiences are seen as an interaction with a unifying Force where knowledge is given. Meditation, for example, has long been regarded by psychics, mystics, and sages of all cultural and religious traditions as providing a medium for opening oneself to a unifying Other.

Wholistic Model

Phenomenological experiences are of interest because they suggest an ability to integrate abstract thought, including the use of symbolic representation (visual or mental) and experience (sensory or emotive) with formal/rational thinking. This combination

provides a more holistic approach to knowing which takes into account the sensing or perceiving of inner and outer dimensions; dimensions generally indispensable in the creative world of poets, painters and artists but neglected in our modernistic empirical world. This sensing or perceiving is the fundamental object of this study.

Attributive Model

One explanation for psychic experiences is that they are dissociative episodes. According to Orloff (1996), paranormal experiences have historically been associated with "profound mental dysfunction" (xvii), particularly, psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia (p.69). Although we do not want to summarily dismiss the legitimacy of paranormal experiences, we need to raise the question of how much of these experiences might be associated with direct or indirect forms of dysfunction in the family (ie: alcoholism, history of abuse, mental illness). Some researchers associated with the U.C.L.A's Neuropsychiatric Institute (NPI), suggest that apparitions such as ghosts and other paranormal manifestations may be "an outgrowth of the anger or frustration within a family, an unconscious by-product of human emotions that created physical manifestations (psychokinesis)." (Orloff, 1996, p. 43) Lawrence et al. (1995) has made the connection between trauma, fantasy and paranormal experience. Trauma in this sense may not be connected to any particular event (such as abuse or tragedy) but may have been experienced as a result of exposure to circumstances which were highly provocative, confusing or threatening.

This view is not incongruent with the notion of antecedents in the process of conversion, the "Sick Soul" of William James or other theories which associate the experience of suffering with mystical experiences. (Rennie,1995; James, 1961; Israel, 1983;

Meyer, 1980) However, such psychological explanations, although relevant, may be too simplistic when defining phenomenological events. While these may suggest a reason for paranormal and mystical experiences to occur, they tell us nothing about their impact on the individual and the interpretation given them.

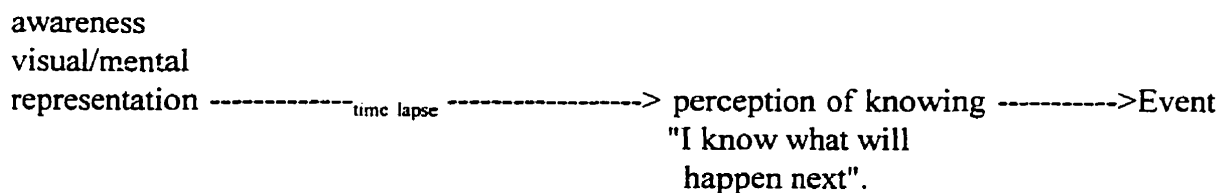
Metaphysics

Experiences of déjà-vu, clairvoyance and some forms of visions present us with a peculiar problem in terms of determining the time line in which the event occurred. Specifically, is the perception of the event in sync with the actual occurrence of that event? On one hand, an event occurs and the individual becomes aware of the experience on a delayed time line, that is, after the fact, followed by the sense of having already done whatever has occurred - reliving the experience. In the other instance, there is the clear and vivid perception that knowledge already exist, an anticipatory condition, prior the actual experience. The crucial question has to do with the point at which cognition takes place relative to the experience.

Diagram 1: Retrospective View - Reliving the Experience

event occurs -----time lapse----->awareness = Experience of Déjà-vu
 or fore knowledge
 "I remember doing this before"

Diagram 2: Prospective View - Anticipating the Experience



In the first scenario, awareness is delayed, possibly due to a dissociative or altered state. Possible causes can include sleep deprivation, exhaustion, depression or other similar stressors. While these are associated with psychological defenses, altered states are not always a defensive or psychological response. Fasting and meditating, for example, have long been recognized as disciplines in the pursuit of enlightenment, spiritual awareness, and mystical experiences. Further, there is a growing recognition of the benefits of strategies akin to spiritual practices in the field of counselling including the use of meditation and guided imagery. These disciplines or strategies provide the necessary conditions for breaking down inhibitions which interfere with the creative process. In the second instance, there appears to be an ability on the part of the person experiencing the event, to set aside logic and structure, and naturally engage in the creative process. This creative process requires an openness, an ability to let the mind conceive of things as yet inarticulate and sometimes humanly inconceivable, what the Apostle Paul called faith. (Heb.11:1, NKJV)

Whether the process which leads to mystical and psychic experiences is one of

psychological functioning, of faith or of metaphysics, it is only relevant if it has some implication for future functioning. As our informant Mark has suggested,

...you have to give these experiences time to actually play out in your life...to really assess how life changing the event was.

Philosophical Issues and Assumptions

First, the foundational work needs to address philosophical issues and their underlying assumptions. This is accomplished by reviewing the work of major philosophers as it pertains to the area of phenomenology and our understanding of epistemology.

The Nature of Knowing

Schultz (1991) proposes that "discussions related to the nature of knowing, learning and emoting should be framed within the context of the goals and standards that emerge over the course of one's life" (Abstract). There are many ways of knowing, some of which may not fit the typical framework of scientific inquiry. Ballou (1995) addresses the need to include "multiple epistemologies and multiple experiences within feminist psychology" (Abstract). Varma (1989), in his inaugural presidential address to the Indian Psychiatric Society, contrasted Eastern and Western views concerning the role and legitimacy of intuition and introspection as methods of knowing about the mind and provided a rationale for considering non-normative approaches to human behaviour, which recognizes "the variability across individuals and the idiosyncratic nature of many mental phenomena." (p.14) According to Varma, science is limited and inadequate for dealing with some aspect of human experience such as spirituality and perception. Eastern thought, on the other hand,

offers more tolerance for ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions (p.19).

Process Theory

Psychic events or subjective knowing can be interpreted from the perspective of major philosophers. Descartes was concerned with presenting the world from the supposition of natural attitude. The "natural attitude" refers to the belief that experience "furnishes the reasons and criteria for further expectations and that these criteria will lead us to knowledge of the transcending world." (Holmes, R., 1995, 48) A phenomenological perspective (Schutz & Husserl) concerns itself "not only on the phenomena as they presents themselves but also on our consciousness of them" (Holmes, 1995, p.9) Of particular interest is what Rescher (1991) calls "process philosophy". This view is too pervasive to be ascribed to one particular school of thought or to one thinker, however, major proponents of this view include Heraclitus, Leibniz, Bergson, Peirce, William James, and more recently, Whitehead. (Rescher, 1991, p. 76) Process theory proposes that "everything is a matter of process, of activity, of change" and "all things are the product of its working". In addition, in the thoughts of Bergson (cited in Rescher, 1991), a fundamental leading principal is that "nature is a process". Temporality, historicity, change and passage are fundamental facts which need to be considered in our understanding of the world. In the Leibnizian tradition, "appetition - the striving through which all things endeavour to bring new features to realization" is central to the thought of Whitehead" (Rescher, 1991, p.75). Some basic propositions of process theory relevant to this work suggests that: time and change are among the principle categories of metaphysical understanding; several if not all of the major elements of the ontological repertoire (God, nature-as-a-whole, persons, material substances)

are best understood in process terms; and contingency, emergence, novelty, and creativity are among the fundamental categories of metaphysical understanding". For the process theorist, becoming is as important, if not more so, than being (p.76).

Interpretation

Second, the work looks at how individuals create meaning from lived experience. Attention is given to the participant's own insight as to the importance of the event and how they were integrated into a life narrative. A psychospiritual perspective requires taking into account both the "active character of human perception" and its "reflective reorganization of experience in terms of human meaning" (Stinnette, 1970). Knowing, part of the process of becoming aware and interpreting, is largely dependent on our psychological development, that is, our ability to process information at various levels of complexity and our ability to engage in the process of meaning-making.

Faith Perspective

Interpretation from a faith perspective is to be understood as lived experience of transcendent and existential meaning (ie: belief about life [existence] leads to action); and as a tradition which gives expression to that faith, which is more or less meaningful, and is sometimes limited to religiosity. Interpretation from an existential perspective can be philosophical and/or theological and addresses the spiritual aspects of the individual whether associated with a faith tradition or not.

Source of Knowledge

Insight, defined as "thorough knowledge", "discernment" or "penetration", is the

ability to apprehend and interpret concepts, ideas and situations. Intuition is defined as "a direct apprehension of a truth without reasoning". (Patterson, 1989). Rennie (1995) suggest that converts of Jesus Christ "often experienced God's power in the form of miracles or insights in His teachings". (p.51) Knowledge, such as intuition and insight, which appears to emanate from the inner recesses of one's mind or soul is often associated with some form of spiritual practice or belief. For example, in the Christian tradition, knowledge is considered a spiritual gift. Mystics and sages of all traditions believe that knowledge is given and clear intuition, wisdom and insight occurs through various practices such as meditation. (Burnham, 1997, p.17) In Classical Hinduism, the Way of Knowledge focused on mental disciplines which involved knowledge. It was a religion "based on secret wisdom, taught by sages and drawn from mystical experiences and esoteric sources not available to ordinary people". (Forman, ed., 1993, p. 115) Visions, experienced in the form of dreams or mystical experiences, are the apex of given knowledge or revelation characterized by imagery. Extra Sensory Perception (ESP), déjà-vu, and premonitions are generally classified as "paranormal" or outside of the natural experience, and in some instances, are associated with witchcraft, divination, and astrology. Intuition and insight tend to be less dramatic and generally more accepted forms of knowing.

Mysticism

Merrell-Wolff (1995) provides a critique of the four schools of modern Western philosophy (naturalism, neorealism, pragmatism and idealism) and a psychological critique of mysticism and mystical knowledge. This author, a mystic with a background in psychology, religion, and trained in philosophy and science, provides an interdisciplinary

approach to the topic of metaphysics and epistemology. He introduces the notion of consciousness transformation and *introception*, "the Power whereby the Light of consciousness turns back upon Itself toward Its Source", and integrates these notions in existing thought. (p.151). Mysticism is defined as:

Always alive and always very real and concrete. ...the mystic's attitude towards the Determiner of Destiny is one of intense, or at least, very real emotion. The individual's relation to the Beyond not only is believed in but seems actually to be experienced; and this experience is one of the most solid bits of concrete fact that ever comes into human life.

Pratt, 1945, p. 18

According to Harrison (1995), in order for mystical experiences to have any epistemological or metaphysical values, it should involve direct apprehension. (p. 271)

Conversion as Mystical Experiences

Conversion experiences can be classified as mystical in nature. According to the traditional model of mystical experience proposed by W.T. Stace (cited in Overall, 1982), mystical experiences are "given" to mystics. However, criticism suggest that such experiences are "objects of idiosyncratic interpretation" and the product of cultural, psychological and social context. This research is based on the assumption that both views are accurate. That a mystical experience is given does not preclude idiosyncratic interpretation nor can it be experienced apart from cultural, psychological, and social context. Conversely, it appears that some individuals are more sensitive to such experiences and it may be possible to identify factors which will make such events more likely.

Developmental Theories

They say that it is not the soul that struggles first toward God, but this Universe of Love which is fishing for us. God puts the longing in our hearts so that we will leap upstream, like a spawning salmon that throws itself against the river current, leaping up waterfalls in its passionate urge to reach the source, its birth place, spawning ground, and death.

Burnham, 1997, p. 15

Third, portions of developmental theories are examined to determine how insight, intuition and visions are related to creative and adaptive processes. Specific attention is given to relevant issues such as cognition, responses to trauma, defense mechanisms, and creativity. The four stage model of spiritual growth is the primary source for understanding the process leading to phenomenological events.

Subjective Knowing

A vast body of research suggests that subjective ways of knowing are developmental and due to environmental conditions. For example, Belinky et al. (1986) contend that "Women's growing reliance on their intuitive processes is...an important adaptive move in the service of self-protection, self-assertion, and self-definition" (p. 54). Clifford (1968) used the word "feeling" in a way prescribed by Schleiermacher "to denote a mode of awareness underlying and reaching beyond all our conceptual thinking and all our attempts at articulation"(p. 217). Knowing which is intuitive and insightful can be described as a gut level feeling which, at one end of the spectrum, is an impression that something is, while at the other extreme, it is certainty about events which have not yet occurred, and in retrospect, can be identified as precognitive.

Psychic events as a way of knowing refers to mental phenomena which are concerned

with the development of consciousness and awareness of thoughts, ideas, imagery, dreams, visions and the like, which originate from a source other than the objectified world. According to Jung (cited in McCaulley, 1991), there are four basic mental processes to consciousness: sensation (S), intuition (N) are perceptive processes; and thinking (T), and feeling (F) are judgement processes. Judgement is the process of interpreting and coming to conclusions. Jung defined these as "particular forms of psychic activity that remains the same in principle under varying conditions". (p. 26)

Psychological Perspective

According to Lawrence et al. (1995), much of the research on psychic events (PE) has been influenced by a "broadly sceptical research agenda" which resulted in an attributive model. Health professionals continue to associate psychic events such as clairvoyance and visions with psychotic disorders and psychological dysfunction. (Orloff, 1996, p.69-71) A colleague of Orloff suggested that some psychic activity such as ghosts and apparitions may be an "outgrowth of the anger or frustration within a family, an unconscious by-product of human emotions that created physical manifestations (psychokinesis). (p.43) Hollis (1993) refers to the work of Jung to describe how children interpret their environments and how the wounds and unconscious responses of the inner child "become strong determinants of the adult personality" (p.13). Research in the area of parapsychology establishes a causal relationship between childhood trauma, childhood fantasy, and psychic experiences. (Lawrence et al., 1995) Building on earlier research (Wilson & Barber, 1982; Myers & Austrain, 1985; Roll, 1982; Roll & Montagno, 1985), Rao (1992) suggest a positive relationship between fantasy-proneness and subjective paranormal experiences, describing

fantasy as "an important and pervasive aspect of human experience" which has implications for understanding psychic events. Fantasy is defined as imagination driven by motives and desires. Walton (1990) described make-believe as a universal urge of children which addresses very fundamental needs. Rather than outgrow these urges, Walton suggest that make-belief activities change significantly, becoming more subtle, more sophisticated and less overt as we mature. (p.12) According to Walton, make-belief "provides practice in roles one might someday assume in real life, helps one to understand and sympathize with others, enables one to come to grips with one's own feelings, and broadens' one's perspectives". (p.12) The literature makes no clear distinction between make-belief and fantasy. However, both suggest the use of imagination which plays "a profound role in our efforts to cope with our environment. (p.12) Crampton (cited in: Corsini, 1981) argued that when children are unable to meet their basic needs, either because of their own limitations or those of "significant others", they develop indirect and covert ways of compensating in order to meet their needs and protect themselves from injury. (p. 712) Creative imagination moves forward towards creating possibilities and new realities.

If the freedom that fantasy, pursued for its own sake, offers us is a delusion, what the truly creative imagination can do is to set us free, to open us up, or move precisely to enable us to open ourselves up, to an infinite world of possibilities: to reality.

Robinson, 1987, p.21

Spiritual Perspective

A theological method for understanding the phenomenology of knowing provides a means of self-understanding on the premise of faith. The word *faith* is used primarily in its

"phenomenological sense" consisting of a personal attitude of trust and honour toward a common object "which both organizes perception and mobilizes the person to act in response to that perceived reality" (Stinnette, 1970). Further, "where faith is prospective and syncretic, theological method is retrospective and analytic" (Stinnette, 1970).

Pratt (1945) defined four "typical aspects" of religion which is useful for interpreting religious experience. These aspects are Traditional, Practical or Moral, Rational, and Mystical. Traditional refers to the acquisition of beliefs based on attitudes from past authority including parents, teachers, tradition and church. This aspect of religious experience is intuitively adopted rather than experienced. The Practical or Moral aspect places emphasis on things that must be done as opposed to what must be believed or felt. This is a highly structured religion which pays attention to the finer points of the law. Rational refers to religious experience more autonomous in that it attempts to free itself from all authority and is based purely on reason and facts of verifiable experience. Mystical is concerned with a particular kind of experience, subjective in nature and therefore, not scientifically verifiable. (p. 14) Robinson (1987) rightly states that, "There are great pressures on us today to believe that such experiences are 'all in the mind', or 'purely psychological'." However, Robinson is in agreement with William James, when he suggest that the subconscious self is in no way the origin of mystical or religious experience. (p. 71)

In similar fashion, stages of faith have also been delineated by Fowler. Fowler (1995) describes stages of faith as different from cognitive and moral development stages:

Stages of faith deal with different domains of knowing than either the cognitive stages of Piaget or the moral stages of Kohlberg. Faith stages arise out of integration of modes of knowing and valuing that Piagetian and

Kohlbergian stages theories have intended to avoid. Faith stages are not identical with and cannot be reduced either to cognitive or moral stages or to some mixture of the two. Nonetheless, in any holistic approach to the human construction of meaning, account must be given of the relations of reasoning to imagination, of moral judgement making to symbolic representation, of ecstatic intuition to logical deduction. (p. 99)

Fowler acknowledges the importance of structural-developmental interactional approach, of which Piaget and Kohlberg are, on the development of faith as a way of knowing (p. 98), while also pointing us to some limitations.

The first limitation of Piaget and Kohlberg's theories is that they have conceptually separated cognition or knowing from emotion or affection (p. 101).

what we find in both Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories are accounts that begin (in the earliest stages) with a much broader and undifferentiated attention to cognitive processes. Successive stages in their theories represent steps in the differentiation of strictly logical forms of knowing from other important, if different, modalities of knowing. Successive stages represent qualitative movements in the 'purification' of reason.

While not losing sight of reason, Fowler suggest that we need to expand our notion of cognition to include more comprehensive forms of knowing, a process already begun by Kohlberg.

I have found useful, in this regard, to make a distinction between two kinds of reasoning, one that describes the relatively narrow understanding of cognition with which Piaget works and another that characterizes the necessary combination of rationality and passionality that faith involves. The first I call the *logic of rational certainty*. This mode of knowing aims at objectivity understood as a knowing free from all particular or subjective investigation. Its truth need to be impersonal, propositional, demonstrable and replicable. The logic of rational certainty, however, is a misleading ideal when we speak about forms of knowing in which the constitution of the knowing self is part of what is at stake. (p. 102)

The latter, a more comprehensive, constitutive form of knowing called *logic of conviction*

is one "in which the knowing self is continually being confirmed or modified in the knowing" (p. 102) and "there is a simultaneous extension, modification, or reconstitution of the *knower in relation to the known.*" (p. 103)

A second limitation of Piaget and Kohlberg's theories to which Fowler brings attention is the "restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning." (p. 103)

Piaget mainly understands imagination as a function of childhood fantasy. Imagination is the mode of playful fantasy in which the child assimilates the world into his or her schemes without attention to 'reality'. On the other hand, intuitive thought, for Piaget, is reality oriented. It is the precursor of logical operations in preoperational children, and it is *accommodatory* in the sense that in intuition the child attempts to shape his or her representations of the world in accordance with reality. It is intuition that goes to school in Piaget, not imagination. As the intuition shapes up into (and is superseded by) the reversible operations of concrete thought, the distorting temptations of imagination and fantasy are more strictly relegated to the play world. With the emergence of formal operational thought and its transcendence of the limitations of concrete experience, Piaget recognizes the return of a form of imagination, thought now closely disciplined by the logical structures and combinatorial processes of formal operations. (p. 104)

In Piagetian thought, imagination [childhood fantasy] and ideological visions [adult fantasy] belong to the realm of play and have little to do with knowledge. Fowler argues that the logic of conviction requires that we recognize the role of imaginative and ecstatic forms of knowing which involve giving attention to more aesthetically oriented and bihemispheric, bimodal forms of thoughts involved in constitutive-knowing.

To move in this direction requires coming to terms with modes of thoughts that employ images, symbols, and synesthesial fusions of sense and feelings. It means taking account of so-called regressive movements in which the psyche returns to preconceptual, prelinguistic modes and memories, and to

primitive sources of energizing energy, bringing them into consciousness with resultant restructurals of the experience world.(p. 104)

The works of Piaget, Pratt, Kohlberg and Fowler are all relevant to this study but it is not the goal of this study to provide an overview of these theories since these are readily available.

The main point of these theories as they relate to this research is that development occurs as a result of interaction between the subject and the environment, where conflict with the environment results in adaptive or creative responses, which results in development or maturation whether psychological or spiritual. (p.100)

Four Stage Model of Spiritual Growth

Having laid the foundation for cognitive restructuring which takes into account the role of imagination, I now turn to a way of understanding psychic and mystical experiences using stage theories of development. Peck (1987) serves as a primary source for understanding the experiences in terms of stages. While this model is concerned with spiritual growth, the principles it presents can be generalized to other applications.

There are several reasons for using this model. First, it provides a concise delineation of stages of spiritual growth which appears to take into account the structural-developmental interactional theories previously mentioned and draws equally well on research of depth psychology. Second, Peck clearly identifies the work of Fowler as fundamental and consistent with Fowler, takes into account both the logic of conviction and the logic of rational certainty. Third, unlike the previously mentioned theories, Peck suggests that stages of spiritual growth are spiral (as does Fowler) and fluid as opposed to linear or invariant (ie Piaget, Kohlberg and Fowler). That is to say that each stage brings with it a new level of

awareness and it is possible to move back and forth from one stage to another. Another distinction is that in Peck's model, one stage is not better or more desirable than the other - it simply is. Spiritual growth, and in fact all development, is not something that can be attained by following a prescribed method or formula or by believing certain things. This model better represents the assumptions of this researcher.

Process and Stages Defined

Developmental theories are based on the premise that we begin at birth as egocentric creatures and journey through life toward a higher self, and as some believe, towards a transcendent "Other" we commonly call God. From this view, life and many, if not all, processes in which we engage can be viewed in terms of stages - of development, of moral reasoning, of spiritual development, of life cycles. An analogy by which to simplify the theories is clearly represented in "stages of spiritual growth" (Peck, 1987).

Stage 1, Chaos/Antisocial

Stage one, Chaos/antisocial, is akin to our early infancy where we are all born as infants, undisciplined, acting intuitively, demanding that our needs be met. Essentially, it is an underdeveloped level of spirituality in which most children and one out of five adults fall into. Adults in this category tend to be unprincipled and self-serving, being governed primarily by their own will. This stage can be compared to the intuitive stage of early childhood. We begin on the premise that most people, including children, have the ability to move from stage one to stage two without difficulty unless they are hindered by psychological, emotional or mental dysfunction. Adults exhibiting pathological disorders would fall in this category. (ch.5)

Stage 2. Formal/Institutional

Stage two, formal/institutional, can be understood in terms of the child who begins to adopt unquestionably the rules and values of his or her family, church and community without real thought as to their appropriateness or relevance. It is described as resulting from an unconscious process where a person desperately seeks to escape the chaos of stage one. This is generally accomplished by submitting oneself to the governance of an institution such as jail, the military, a corporation, or most often the church. Individuals in this stage tend to mould themselves to expectations and have the appearance of stable responsible constituents. It is described as structural because of the dependency on the rules and regulations of the institution to provide clearly stated, dogmatic structure much as a parent does for a child. This stage is associated with most church-goers and emotionally healthy children in their 'latency' period. Individuals in this stage are characterized by their focus on form as opposed to essence; and their view of God as external and transcendent as opposed to immanent and indwelling. Although they consider God to be loving, they also see God as punitive. Stability is a principal value for this stage. If we view life as process, however, it is more likely to be characterized by change rather than stability. The very analogy of life cycle which moves from egocentric childhood to maturation suggest a tendency towards a more integrated and autonomous self, and toward the Transcendent Other. (ch. 5)

Stage 3. Skeptic/Individual

Stage three, skeptic/individual, can be compared to the teen years or mid-life crisis (since we go through more than one cycle in the course of our life). These are individualistic

people marked by a degree of skepticism. Individuals in advanced stage three are active truth seekers with a level of autonomy not found in either stage one or two. They are often deeply committed to social causes. This is a time for questioning, re-evaluating, challenging, rejecting, and even rebelling against the standards which have come to be viewed as ineffective. It is always a painful time characterized by confusion and discontent with the systems, ideologies and values that have failed. Because it is a painful time, most people retreat back into the safety and comfort of stage two, where they are content to remain, sometimes for the rest of their lives. But for a few others, it is the point at which they seek after something deeper, more meaningful, more authentic; and if fortunate, by Grace, they begin to grasp the bigger picture and move into stage 4, Mystic/communal. (ch. 5)

Stage 4. Mystic/Communal

Stage 4, Mystic/Communal is characterized by an underlying connectedness with the world and the universe. It is a place of mystery which deepens with every step of understanding. Individuals in stage four are most aware of the world as a community which is divided only by its lack of communal awareness. A further characteristic of stage four individuals is their apprehension of emptiness as something to be desired. This emptiness allows the individual to be more integrated, abandoning old defenses, and becoming more accepting and less judgemental. Individuals in stage four no longer feel threatened by different views and ideas. Mystic/communal can be viewed as the stage of maturity, the place of wisdom which can only be gained through patient persevering. Individuals in this stage have a strong sense of community, of connectedness to others and to the Universal "I Am". (ch. 5) They have learned the principles of life and of spirit which acknowledges that

real power, control and strength is found in weakness and surrender, a view accepted by most religious traditions. It is often found to be a lonely place where there is not much of a context in which to express the deep things of the soul to which stage four people are given to. (Peck, 1987, ch.5)

What has become evident is that models of life stages proposed by developmental theorists are the same stages, in effect, as of theories of faith development, of religious development, of conversion process, of stages of spiritual growth, and in some sense may find more resonance in conflict theories, as much as any other. Consequently, we can change the language but we are ultimately talking about the same principles which can be applied equally well to life as a whole or to individual events. At this point, one cannot escape the obvious parallels between the categories provided by each of the stage theorists. While dealing with different but related topics - religious experience, faith, spirituality and cognitive developmental psychology, each of the theorists examined to date have common themes which reoccur throughout their theories. The table which follows on the next page serves to illustrate this.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is a process related to our understanding of ourselves in relation to "Other". More specifically, it is the human capacity and drive to understand our existence relative to a Transcendent Power which, in many traditions, is called God. In the Christian tradition it is God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and experienced through the presence of the Spirit. It is important to recognize that the experience of "transcendence" is not limited the Christian tradition, or for that matter, to religious traditions. Transcendence is the human

encounter with spiritual powers, good or evil, and some might argue neither good or

Table: Psychological and Spiritual Stages of Development

Piaget	Kohlberg	Pratt	Fowler	Peck
Sensorimotor birth - 2 yrs.	Pre- conventional Stage 1 - obedience/ reward orientation Stage 2 - instrumental exchange		Intuitive- Projective	Stage 1 Chaotic/ Antisocial
pre- operational 2 to 7 years concrete operations 7 to 11 yrs.	Conventional Stage 3 - conformist Stage 4- law-and-order orientation	Traditional Practical	Mythic- Literal Synthetic- Conventional	Stage 2 Formal/ Institutional
formal operation 11 yrs. >	Post- Conventional Stage 5 - social-contract orientation	Rational	Individualistic/ Reflective	Stage 3 Skeptic/ Individual
	Post - Conventional Stage 6- Universal ethical principle orientation	Mystical	Conjunctive Universalizing	Stage 4 Mystic/ Communal

to evil, and interpreted in the context of one's tradition or belief system. Such experiences are intimate and personal and do not lend themselves to verification. The research can only provide evidence based on the experience of informants as they report them, on one's own experience of transcendence, and on the testimony of tradition developed over time.

Experiences of transcendence are generally expressed in terms of mystery, mystical experiences, religious experiences, ecstatic manifestations, or psychic experience.

Conversion

A major determinant in the development of Christian faith is the experience of conversion. Rennie (1995) explores and defines conversion as a single event, as a process, as a quest, and/or as a response. As a quest, conversion is "an end point of longing or desire to have meaning in life." (p.53) As a process, conversions are transformations consisting of several common factors. For example, conversion is usually preceded by an awareness or perception of need in terms of life-meaning, spiritual poverty, and external conditions. (p. 54-55) A second factor found in conversion events is the resolution of internal conflict brought on by surrender. (p. 57)

In addition, Rennie proposes two paradigms for conversion. One is an unconscious process where the subject is passive and converted by external powers over which the person has no control; the other, a conscious process, where the subject actively participates by making a conscious decision regarding what will form a meaning-making paradigm. (Rennie, p. 45) The word "conversion" suggests a change from one position to another or a transformation which is ongoing. Lofland and Stark (1991, cited in: Pitt, 1991) were the first to understand conversion as a process regardless of whether the subject was active or passive.

Conversion, or *metanoia*, is always presented in scripture as a unified action which revolutionizes one's life. (Keating, 1996, p.123) The importance of conversion experience and the informants' understanding of conversion is an important consideration when

interpreting experience of knowing for several reasons. First,

The Christian Spiritual Path is based on a deepening trust in God. It is trust that first allows us to take that initial leap in the dark, to encounter God at deeper levels of ourselves. And it is trust that guides the intimate refashioning of our being, the transformation of our pain, woundedness, and unconscious motivation into the person that God intended us to be.

Keating, p.22

This openness and trust are necessary to transcend the boundaries and structures which prevent us from expanding our creative imagination, transforming our defense mechanisms and fears into faith and possibilities. This transcendence of structures is necessary not only to reach more profound stages of faith but also to open our minds and spirit to the possibility that there are realities beyond the physical world as we experience it.

The Insider Meaning.

If knowledge is given, it is important to know the source as reported by the informant. Typically, informants will speak of their knowing based on their understanding of tradition, experience, religion and context. For example, we would expect that Christians would speak of the spiritual gift of knowledge, wisdom and discernment. Someone with a different background might simply call them intuition and insight, while others yet might speak in terms of the paranormal or psychic experiences. Focusing on the meaning each informant holds, the insider meaning, will help us avoid the problem of making general characterization. Further, conversion is a point of change where attitudes and values can change significantly. Consequently, the informant may reframe the interpretation of an experience based on this new identity.

Finally, for some people, the experience of conversion is also their first significant

encounter with Transcendence. Such an encounter not only changes lives, it changes the whole frame of reference in terms of possibilities. It opens one to the language of mystery which is essentially and characteristically a language of imagination. (Robinson, 1987, p.6)

Implications for Counselling

The final analysis provides a discussion on the implications of this research for the counselling relationship. As Stinnette (1970) suggests, a theological perspective (and others) needs to be interpreted in such a way as to mobilize us towards future action. Understanding profound or subjective ways of knowing, whether psychic, religious, or mystical, challenges our present understanding of psychological and spiritual processes. They also provide us with a sense of vision and purpose for the future. Two things are important to consider: 1) Knowing apart from action and purpose, is wasted. By this I mean that "Unless revelation is related to the depths of human experience, it will not be revelation at all. It will be an abstraction" (Clifford, 1968). 2) Discovering and developing subjective ways of knowing provides us with a sense of vision essential for growth and healing. When we learn that we can trust our knowing, we have the freedom to become more authentic.

While knowing is intrinsically subjective, the experience of knowing is universal. As such, understanding personal experience and communicating that understanding to others blur the boundaries between subject-object relationship in the discovery of common experience. Consequently, value is given to the experience of the knower and the knower's interpretation of experience. This valuing is an important part of trusting oneself and one's own judgement. Fear of consequences, of ridicule, and of rejection has historically silenced the knower to the extent that most people do not trust their knowing. Legitimate ways of

knowing are suppressed and abandoned in favour of objectivity. Those who continue in the use of these ways of knowing begin to question their authenticity under the scrutiny of a society which interprets such knowledge as subjective, judgemental, closed-minded, or pathological. Such adversarial attitudes fail to foster the use and development of phenomenological events as ways of knowing.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The study of objects as they appear to our consciousness, including our consciousness of them, suggests a qualitative study grounded in phenomenology. The experience of knowing can only be communicated from the perspective of the knower, "from the actors' own perspective" and "with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Kvale, 1996, p.52). All research consists of interpretations made in a specific context and is subject to individual biases. However,

...as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term.

(James, 1961, p.386)

This research takes a constructivist approach in the exploration of psychic, conversion, and mystical experiences which are viewed as related phenomena. Consequently, various approaches to methodology are evident. First, the work draws heavily from phenomenology in that it seeks to describe abstract concepts as objects. Further, a phenomenological perspective includes "a focus on the life world, an openness to the experience of the subjects, ..., attempts to bracket foreknowledge, and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions" (Kvale, 1996, p.37) However, where phenomenology seeks to examine pure experience without concern for interpretation, this work considers context and interpretation as integral to the experience. An interpretationist approach uses an analytical path in order to explain "human action in terms of its meaning", then considers whether this explanation "can be reconciled with a causal treatment of desires

and beliefs” (Rosenberg, 1995, p.91) Practically speaking, this means that attention is given to the informants own interpretation (meaning), with consideration to psychological factors (causal treatment), in an attempt to understand phenomenological (psychic, conversion, and mystical) experiences (human action). This is accomplished in three stages. First, the related literature addresses the issue of causal treatment through the exploration of existing research in developmental psychology and by addressing philosophical issues around notions of objectivity, reality and truth where “subjectivist assumptions about the nature of lived experience” are derived from Alfred Schutz’s social phenomenology and Husserl’s more philosophical phenomenology. (Holstein and Gubrium, cited in: Denzin et al., 1994, p. 262) Second, life narratives for each informant are obtained through a series of in-depth interviews where attention is focused on "the symbolic in social life" and "meaning in individual lives." (Bertaux, 1984) Further, qualitative research is more concerned with process than outcome or product. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.28) Consequently, experiences described by informants are understood in terms of developmental and spiritual processes which can occur over the course of a life time or during a brief period of time. Finally, the writing of this thesis is one of giving voice to its informants and to this researcher in the process of turning experience into action (ie: what do we do as a result of our knowing) and meaning (how do we make sense of our knowing). As Bertaux (1984) suggests, "life story approach should be based on narratives about one's life or relevant parts thereof" (p.217). In-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing aimed at uncovering

the context and meaning of lived experience were used.

The research is motivated, and to some extent, guided by my own experience of knowing. Consequently, my story is presented "as if" I were an informant. A biography of each informant and myself provides context for each experience including relevant information concerning psychic, paranormal and mystical events. Each informant is considered an expert based on his/her own experience.

Procedure

Information was obtained through a series of three to five in depth interview of three informants. Bertaux (1981) proposes that "a good interview, and even more so, a good life story is one in which the interviewee 'takes over the control of the interview situation' and talks freely" (p.39) Interview guides are helpful when the interviewee is reluctant to take control. However, such guides need to reflect a synthesis of relevant information as it pertains to the underlying social structures. Consequently, the interview guide is in a constant state of modification predicated on prior interviews. (Bertaux, 1981, p. 39)

In broad terms, interviews should yield sufficient information 1) to uncover the informants life story in order to provide context for understanding the experience of knowing; 2) to identify and describe events experienced by the informants which can be considered psychic, paranormal, or mystical; 3) to explore the informants' interpretation of these events. Consideration is given to specific aspects such as childhood factors including trauma or perception of trauma, creative processes including fantasy life and imagination, and religious or spiritual development. The analysis provides a psychospiritual model for understanding the experience of knowing, its development, and its usefulness.

Interviews which are designed to uncover processes which have a profound effect on an individual's life need to be in depth. Consequently a measure of trust in the integrity of both the informants and the researcher is required. Informants were advised of their right to confidentiality and anonymity on all aspects of our exchange; and their right to end our dialogue at any time during the process. Further, each participant was given the opportunity to review the finished work to determine for themselves whether they have been fairly and accurately represented with the provision that they may request any changes, including complete withdrawal without prejudice.

In Depth Interview

Open-ended interviews designed to facilitate a life story narrative were used. (Appendix A) Other interview questions were derived from a number of sources including theory, experience and several scales which have been used in qualitative studies and reported in Rao (1992). (Appendix B) In addition, a spiritual assessment was conducted in a format recommended by Peck (1993, p. 251). (Appendix C) With the exception of these instruments, the interviews were unstructured with questions derived from the interaction itself.

Selection Criteria

To ensure the feasibility of the study and to help identify problem areas, a pilot project was conducted. The female informant used in the pilot project remained a participant in the study and was included as an informant. To ensure that participants were suitable for the study, informants of convenience of whom I had prior knowledge were selected. In addition to the informant used in the pilot project, two male informants were engaged on the

basis of recommendations from colleagues and other persons with whom I was acquainted. Initial contact was for the purpose of explaining the process and to formulate an agreement which delineated the rights of the participants. Informants were given an indication of the level of commitment required and a brief description of the area of research. Permission to tape, transcribe, interpret and use the material was obtained. Finally, informants were given an opportunity to address questions or concerns they may have had. None were expressed.

An autobiographic form presupposes a "developed individuality able to grasp itself as the organizer of its own life history." (Bertaux, 1981, p.64) While subjective knowing does not appear to be tied to a particular age there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it may be developmental. Consequently, the informants need to have negotiated a certain amount of life experiences. For this reason, I have selected informants ranging in age between thirty-five and fifty. Another important criteria is an ability to examine, reflect and articulate personal experience clearly.

Gender Issues

Historically, there has been an over representation in research of experience from the male perspective. However, this is offset by the perception that subjective ways of knowing are typically a female characteristic. While this research is not particularly guided by gender distinctions, it is incumbent upon me to give at least equal representation to both the female and male experience. This is done with an acknowledgement that gender is a complex construct consisting of fluid characteristics independent of biological definitions of sexuality.

Identifying Phenomenological Events

The first priority is to gain a sense of who the informant is and explore each

informant's experience of subjective knowing. The Interview Question Guide (appendix A), the "Subjective Paranormal Experience Questionnaire (SPEQ) (appendix B), and the Spiritual History Questionnaire (appendix C) are used for this purpose. The goal is to identify specific events which suggest a propensity for (or lack of) psychic, paranormal and mystical experiences. These may include experiences involving intuition, insight, premonitions, déjà-vu or foreknowledge, visions, apparitions, religious and mystical experiences including conversion. The main criteria is that the informant's sense of knowing is somehow implicated. Attention is given to antecedents, psychological factors which precede the events, and the ensuing interpretations.

I will explore the participants' life events which suggest conversion experiences and their understanding and interpretation of these events. Consideration will be given to their concepts of purpose and meaning, as well as their experience and understanding of spirituality, religion, spiritual and psychic gifts.

Closure

One session at the end of the study will be devoted to the issue of closure. Any process which requires individuals to share their personal experience and make themselves vulnerable has the potential for stirring up feelings and issues which need to be debriefed. This will also be a time to address any unresolved concerns. In addition, the termination of any work brings with it a sense of grief which may or may not be identified. It will be important for me to help identify and validate these feelings and provide participants with an opportunity for reflection on what has been accomplished and for leaving the work with a positive outlook for the future.

Chapter 4

Narratives and Interpretation

...for some people there is a clearly defined realm of experience that defies ordinary, physical, explanation. For someone with these beliefs there is a meaning and order which appears to transcend the physical world.

Holmes, 1995, p. 66

The following study is based on the life narrative of three informants who agreed to share their stories. These individuals have no particular distinction other than having been perceived by myself and by some of my colleagues as individuals who possess a certain degree of intuition and insight and who are known to be articulate. Their accounts strengthen this study by virtue of their position in the community which is evidence of sound, reasonable and reputable logic and personality. In some instances, a pseudonym or initial has been used to respect the anonymity of others who might be directly or indirectly implicated. Portions of my own story will be incorporated "as if" I were an informant.

It is also important to remember that childhood memories are cognitive reconstructions which reflect only those events which stand out in the mind of the informants and may not provide a full picture of actual circumstances. They are for the purpose of understanding the life of the informants *as experienced* in order to provide context for phenomenological events and the interpretations given them.

Life Narratives and Interpretation

John

Biographical Information

John describes himself as "a bit of a nomad" and "a fifth generation Christian". Born in India, John lived in Ghana and Ethiopia, West Africa and in the Philippines between the ages of three and eighteen. John enjoyed relatively good health throughout his life. Although he was exposed to a lot of poverty, he indicates that his parents' position ensured that "we had good housing, so I don't think we really felt need. Ample food, clothing, not flashy". However, childhood memories of "scraggly christmas trees in Ethiopia, which was always a disappointment", an awareness of the separation between "well to do ex-patriots", and the hardship experienced by his family when they arrived in Canada suggest at least some significant limitations, "a source of great stress psychologically and emotionally".

John's arrival in Canada at the age of eighteen was marked by disappointment and difficulties. Most striking was the sense of isolation and coldness, emotional distance, that stood in sharp contrast to his life in Ghana. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were evident throughout John's childhood, but especially so in his late teens and early adulthood. Although not intending to, John followed in the footsteps of his two grandfathers who were both ministers and very influential leaders and church planters of their respective churches.

John reports having had a happy childhood, experiencing a close relationship with his younger brother and both of his parents. He is presently forty-six years old, married and has two children. He is currently serving as the pastor of an influential church located in a small but affluent community.

Experience of Fear/Trauma Events

John's earliest memories begin with life in India where his family lived. His childhood was unusually rich in experiences and travel. John recounted several stories of adventurous, and sometimes dangerous journeys in the interior of Ethiopia to small, sometimes historic, and most often primitive villages.

By the age of eight, John had already witnessed the ravages of civil war and poverty.

He recalls the birth of his brother when he was six years old:

We drove in the middle of the night through the curfew so we were filled with a bit of anxiety about what might happen if we were stopped by soldiers. What if they were to start opening fire?

Other incidents in the course of their travels exposed him to the cruelty of poverty and war:

There was a lot of poverty but not desperate as we know now. I think of one village where we saw a man hanging in the middle of a village square. ... this man stole a chicken. ... he ate the whole chicken by himself and it could have fed a family of ten. So that was the extent of poverty, where stealing a chicken is a capital crime. A lot of poverty. ...seeing the leaders of the rebellion, maybe a dozen of them, again, hung there, in the central square of the city for all to see in public display. There's a grotesqueness. There they were, sort of swinging in the breeze - a life in them that wasn't real life at all.

When asked about the impact of these incidents, John replied that while there was a certain kind of fascination, there was also a sense of terror, a sense of injustice, "...an act of emotional outburst after the rebellion had been quelled", and a sense of foreboding, "...if you louse things up that way, then you can get in real trouble." Other incidents associated with civil war were equally traumatic and frightening. One such incident occurred near the capital where John attended primary school:

...school was let out early so we could get home but school was also near the royal palace. So there were groups of soldiers who came and dug trenches along the roadway. And to get from the school to the car, you had to walk in front of these guns. And I remember terror in that. Because here were guns pointing in your direction and you had to walk in front of that.

John speaks of his parents' attempts at shielding him from these events "driving by quickly, ...not talking about it." There were no opportunities to talk about feelings or events and they were quickly put out of mind.

Family Structure

Relationship with Father

It is in the context of this later incident that John describes the sense of love that he felt from his father:

My dad arrived and he was way out on the roadway. His car was there and I started walking, trembling. I remember the reassurance of his coming up to meet me, and taking me by the hand and walking me down. There was a lot of love there. You know, he didn't express his love very effusively by any means. There was a lot of love there.

In the process of trying to light a stove, alcohol was spilled and accidentally ignited:

...I screamed and my dad came running and he smothered the flames with his bare hands. You know, it just struck me, there he was, the need for help and he was available and risking himself smothering the flame.

Less threatening but equally powerful are positive experiences which were evidence of a good relationship.

...sitting by a lake, ...highly infested with crocodiles and hippos and so on. And just sitting on his lap, and the sense of adventure. Here we were on the edge of something that is very dangerous and there I was, you know? On my dad's lap.

Relationship with Mother

John's mother was one who ruled the household and looked after things. She liked people and was sociable:

...always busy around the house... There was a lot of affection, a lot of fondness with my mother. Easy going banter, you know. Not terribly deep. Easy going conversations. I would help her with little errands - the right hand person as it were, helping in the kitchen and with housework.

Family Dynamics

John described his father as passive, quiet and shy. The first born of his family, who liked to have his say, but one who "just accepted that in some areas, my mom would have the day." It seemed that he would tolerate a great deal only to be triggered by some small annoyances at which time he would explode. These eruptions would be characterized by a great deal of noise and yelling:

I think it created a fair bit of insecurity actually, because you weren't quite sure what might trigger his temper.

In spite of such outbursts, John reflected on his parents' dependency:

I think they needed each other, depended on each other, counted on each other. And there was the odd time, moments, when I think they really irritated each other as well.

There is no indication as to the frequency of such events but they carried a great deal of emotional power:

It always scared me when they were fighting. There was a lot of noise and mom would end up crying. So, in my eyes, dad was always the bad guy, and my mother always the victim.

As an adult, John has had opportunity to reflect and reframe these events suggesting that his mother may have been slightly manic:

...as you have grown, you realize it takes two to tango, and they are both implicated in the struggle. I've observed there are times when everything is rosy and wonderful with the world; and then there are other times when everything is very bad and gloomy. Those are the times, I think, especially when she has the most conflict with my dad. So I've wondered..."

Self-perception

John described himself as an extrovert in the sense that he "loves to be with people, interact and debate about every kind of issue". This has remained constant in his adult life although he has gained an appreciation for solitude which may come from a greater sense of self-understanding. In spite of this extrovert tendency, John indicated that "in many respects, [he] felt like a chameleon, an outsider in almost every culture". He speculates that this may in part be due to his colour and race, and in part to his being an expatriate, or perhaps not knowing the culture.

I think there's always been a sense of wanting to be part of the community and not always finding it. That's not to say that it's never been there. I think the richest areas of community, at least where I've found it, has been the church where there has been acceptance.

John described himself as competitive, daring and a bit of a rebel who always enjoyed taking risks, weaving through the traffic on his bike, riding along the steeply angled sides of drainage gutters. He described himself as "socially backward, not belonging, standing outside the party". He also enjoyed playing games where he would "rise to the challenge, eyes shining, ready to conquer". John had few friends outside the church. As a young adult in university, John described himself as "very sheltered, naive in the ways of the world, and too shy to date", the result of a strict upbringing.

Insight and Intuition

John's creativity is also expressed in the degree of insight and intuition which he possesses. As an adult, John recalled visiting a very ill patient who "in the midst of sickness, I think, was reaching out for spiritual truth. And there was a sense in me, where I should share with her more of the love of God, of Jesus Christ". This inclination was tempered by a sense of not wanting to take advantage of a vulnerable time which might otherwise be manipulative. A few days later, when he returned to visit, the woman had died.

I felt a tremendous sense of loss and regret that I hadn't listened in a way. And that kind of thing had happened a few times. A sense of 'now is the time to visit somebody. It's the time to say something or to do something'.

This sense of knowing or sensing was not the first of such experiences.

My mother has hinted that there have been times in my growing up years that I've wanted to do things, wanting to see somebody or help somebody, or things like that, which in retrospect, she felt was a very appropriate thing to have sensed. But not in a clear and dramatic way as some people have. Sort of a bit cloudy.

Visions and Other Phenomenological Experiences

One of the most striking event was experienced by John the age of nine or ten.

I don't know if it was a vision but maybe it was just a dream, my recollection fades, of my grandfather preaching and holding forth at a pulpit. And then, I looked a little more closely, and it was me.

When I asked about the importance of this vision or dream at the time, he replied that "I put out of my mind because there was no meaning to it at the time until much later. I found myself in ministry. As an adult, John looks back at that event and speculates as to its meaning:

It could be my subconscious. However that works, you don't know.

...subconscious in the sense that, somehow, there were religious impulses in me and maybe that is the kind of thing that I value. And so there it is, coming up to the light, and to face up to it. Somehow, it was there. I would say that maybe, somehow, God was saying "I have plans for your life. [It was significant] only in retrospect, only in looking back over many, many years. And as I recall it; because I don't even think that when I went into seminary, it was a meaningful event."

Creative Imagining

John does not recall being particularly imaginative as a child although he preferred spending study time doodling and daydreaming. He has no recollection of being introspective or of spending time in fantasy. At the age of fourteen, John was already showing some aptitude for teaching. As an adult, John's creativity is expressed in his vocation as a teacher of the Christian Gospel, in which his love of language and his ability to integrate knowledge from various sources are evident. Reflective time as an adult is through the means of journalizing rather than meditation although he does report a profound mystical experience as a result of meditation.

I was meditating on Jesus in Gethsemane and just thinking about Him. I told myself I was going to give myself a half hour or so just thinking about Jesus praying in the garden at Gethsemane. And for a moment, just imagined myself there. I can remember, it seemed as if Jesus was very alive and came and put His hand on my shoulder.

Religious Influences

John's childhood was immersed in church life. Both grandfathers had been influential and highly regarded in their respective traditions. John's social structure was entirely Christian and in particular, his family structure was immersed in the Anglican tradition. As an expatriate around the age of eleven, John found himself "vacillating a great deal [between traditions] depending on where the church was located and so on." During this time, John

began adopting a more evangelical language which was foreign to his prior experience and which caused him to question the authenticity of his parents' faith. However, other indications suggested an authentic Christian experience.

Faith Formation

Much of John's understanding and formative views of God were predicated on the strong religious teachings which emphasized the fear, judgement and wrath of God, and how to escape the clutches of purgatory.

My vision of God was of a harsh, vindictive, punishing God. I remember thinking about what purgatory would be like, you know, ridding bodies in pain, Dante's inferno, that sort of imagery. And so I was fearful of death and of what I might face on the other side of this life. I think well into my teens, I had a sense of fearfulness rather than awe of God because He was someone who terrorized. Still, that was a profound influence.

Conversion

It was at the age of fourteen that faith in God became more crystallized in the mind of John. This was a time of questioning, "what is my life all about?" John was younger than his peers, beginning to develop physically and disappointed in his lack of strength. There is the indication that he may have suffered from some depression.

I think at fourteen, when I came to the realization of a need for personal faith, one of my motivating factors was this terrible fear of God. I wanted to be put right with God because when I died, I didn't want to be put in the hands of an angry God. There was motivation in that sense.

As time progressed, John struggled with the notion of whether or not he was truly accepted by God, wondering if he was doing enough to satisfy God, "Does God really accept me? Does He really love me? Is there more that I should be doing to satisfy Him."

It is in this context, motivated by fear and a need to please God and be accepted of

Him, that John committed his life to Christ. This point of decision and invitation proved disappointing since John did not experience any apparent changes. He repeatedly committed his life to Christ, praying the same words several times over the next few days, until "I almost got tired of saying, 'Jesus Christ, come into my life!'" Suddenly, it occurred to John that "faith means simply to assume that what you have asked for has happened." In retrospect, John is able to identify the following six months as "the most ironic in my life", indicating that he felt peaceful and couldn't remember doing anything wrong, "I can remember an immense amount of joy in my life."

Another way John's understanding of God changed after his conversion was in the way he experienced his relationship with God:

When I think of God, I think of the warmth and love that I feel and that is within me. Most of the time, there would be a sense of personal warmth, personal reassurance and love.

Conversion, however, is not a panacea. John indicated that he continues to struggle with the question of "where does judgement come into the whole picture? How liberal is God anyways?"

We think someone like Hitler would certainly be judged. And other people who may do bad things, children of their genes or their nurture. And you think that maybe they never really had a chance, both nature and nurture against them. And what about those people who have rejected the gospel? Whose fault was it? ...the communicator? ...the Christian church? There are questions like that for which there are no clear answers and an enigma from my perspective.

Call to Ministry

By the time John entered university, he had become more articulate about his faith.

By the end of his undergraduate degree, John still had no indication that he would enter the

ministry suggesting that he “entered the ministry by default” on the recommendation and encouragement of those around him. In spite of recognition, a call to ministry, and evidence of giftedness, John continued to struggle with “is this where God wants me?” At a more fundamental level, John expressed confidence in his faith.

I don't think I seriously considered anything but Christianity. I became aware of other religions but I don't think any of them were serious options. Generally, I don't have a struggle with the notion that there is God. I think that is fundamental. And yet, in rare moments, I might wonder if it's all illusion. Most of the time, it's like that flashing light, momentary doubt. And yet, I don't think that's bad. ...I think one has to confront those kinds of issues.

L...

Biographical Information

L was born in a large Canadian metropolitan city in Ontario where she resided until moving to the suburb at the age of fourteen. She left the suburb at the age of twenty-six to pursue employment and eventually returned to school. It was during this period of time that L experienced a conversion to Christianity. At the age of thirty-three, L married and moved to New Brunswick. L has been separated for four years and divorced for less than a year. L is now forty-nine years old and the single parent of one teenage son with whom she reports having a good relationship. L's older sibling, a brother, and her mother live some distance away and they have maintained limited contact. L is presently pursuing graduate studies towards Christian ministry.

L describes herself as having been "a pretty happy kid", spending time with her friends. However, her relationship with her family and in particular with her mother seemed to have been strained:

I think in the family, I've come to realize that there wasn't a lot of real emotional closeness. I spent a lot of time alone, a lot of time in my room, not relating to the family. We never talked about anything.

This emotional distancing spilled over into other relationships:

As a teenager, I emotionally distanced myself from people to some extent. I think for the most part I was liked. I'm not sure how deep I feel that would go. I guess I never felt that anyone was a real bosom buddy to me and I wasn't a real bosom buddy to anybody. I guess I cared about people but I tended to keep to myself.

Experience of Fear/Trauma Events

L described a very fearful childhood. L has suffered significant childhood emotional trauma as a result of a dysfunctional family, a history of abuse in early adolescence, and several significant losses in adulthood. Her mother's family, including her mother, grandmother, grandfather and brother, have a long and unusual history of experiencing paranormal manifestations. Dramatic stories of "hands floating down the stairs...towards [my mother], ugly hands, with long nails; her brother who "saw a man in bed between my mother and father", a man who was not really there by other accounts; her grandmother uncovering a half body in the basement of the family home that "wasn't really a body, it was like an apparition." L's grandmother had made a pact with her sister requiring that whichever one died first would come back and tell the other what heaven was like. "I guess my grandmother's sister came back three times but my grandmother fainted each time so she never did find out." These kinds of events were not limited to family members or to the same locations. A boarder residing in her grandparents' home during the depression years also experienced a sighting of "this great big black man...at the top of the stairs". Both L's parents' and their family shared a common interest in the occult, attending séances, going to fortune tellers and having their tea leaves read, an interest not shared by L:

Talk about your ghosts and stuff, and I would go to fortune tellers, but I drew the line at seances. There was no way you were going to get me involved with a seance.

L's fear associated with "that supernatural business", persisted into adult years. Although L has not personally experienced any sightings of such nature, she recounts one incident which may have some relevance:

I remember one night, I woke up frightened and I heard three steps coming into my room. And I was screaming. My father came in and said, 'there's nothing here, go to sleep.' That was his way of dealing with it. But when I got up in the morning, I took three steps into my room and I ended up at the head of my bed. So for the next month or so, I was probably terrified again.

As an adult, and particularly after her conversion, L has chosen not to be involved with any occult practices because "not all spiritual powers are from God." L's conversion and faith has provided a means of reframing her childhood experiences, suggesting that "the impact is different now. Before I was saved, I was afraid, I didn't like being alone at night."

Family Structure

Relationship with Father

L describes her relationship with her father as one where they did things together, memories of skating, swimming, building and using tools together. As a child, her father was the one to rock her when she was sick. At times, he could be quite vulgar and crude, particularly if he had been drinking. He could be abrupt, especially when having to deal with emotional things, "he would never have anything to do with a girl who was airy-fairy". For L, this meant that she often had to "just deal with it as best as you could". L remembers her father as one who "always encouraged me to do things, take risk and go for it", an attitude L feels has contributed to her strength of character.

Relationship with Mother

L described her mom as "coming from an alcoholic family". Her mother was very fearful and suffered from low self-esteem, probably because of "growing up in an alcoholic home" where "life was out of control". In addition, L reported that her grand-

parents "put the fear of everything in her" L described her mother as very superstitious, a characteristic which seemed to have been handed down through her family. L's relationship with her mother was strained, lacking emotional connectedness. L's mother communicated a lack of acceptance for her, in contrast to her brother who could do nothing wrong, which resulted in feelings of being unwanted and abandoned. Reflecting back on her childhood, L can identify that "some things were very hurtful for my mother".

Family Dynamics

Generally, L's parents maintained a united front when dealing with the family. One stressful area was the fearfulness of L's mother which tended to spill over into other relationships making them difficult. In adult years, L became more aware of the impact of alcoholism on her family and on herself. In particular, L recognises the tendency towards defensive responses to people and situations around her which "tend to get worse as I get older...responding very aggressively, thinking people are out to hurt you." In retrospect, L wonders how her father stayed with her mother, indicating that "he didn't have a great upbringing but he didn't belittle her. It must have worn him down".

Generally, L sees her family as fairly normative in so far as conflicts were involved. Arguments generally resulted in sustained periods of silence between her mother and father which could last for several days.

Self-Perception

L described herself as "a fun loving kid...who was always quick with a come back." She indicated that she inherited her mother's tendency to get upset easily at people

and situations far sooner than most people. Generally, L did not have anyone to go to when upset. Consequently, she might spend some time crying and depressed but ultimately, "you just got over it!". As a child, L spent a great deal of time in her room, a place she enjoyed, where she spent many hours in fantasy.

Creative Imagining

L reported having a rich fantasy life which began prior to the age of five and carried into her adult life. She described the function of fantasies as one where she would "slip into another world where everything was fine. I was wise and made all the right decisions and choices and I was popular". In her fantasy world, L took on a new identity, "it wasn't me and I wasn't who I was". L did not make any distinction between imagination and fantasy indicating that in her understanding, "it is all make belief." L does not consider herself to be very creative although she reflects back with some regret at having lost one picture she had done in high school.

Intuition and Insight

L did not describe herself as intuitive or insightful, indicating that "it depends on how much is going on". At times, she finds more clarity in understanding about different people when she spends time in prayer. She sees herself as someone who has a lot of common sense, defined as "sensible and sound thinking, ...as someone who thinks things through". L tends to approach life in a very rational, organized and structured manner. Her definition of intuition, however, seems to be limited to a sense of foreboding. When asked about occurrences when she felt having any kind of intuitive feelings, she described the following incident:

I was visiting friends in New Brunswick. I got off the bus and I was heading in one direction. A man was coming toward me and we passed in this corridor. It crossed my mind that I wouldn't want to be caught alone with him. I just had a sense of being uncomfortable, not being safe. I didn't know him, I had never seen him before in my life and I never gave it another thought. When I arrived at my friend's place, her husband was not home. We were having tea when he arrived. I couldn't see him at first when he came in but when he entered my line of vision, I realized that he was the man I had seen before. It turns out he was quite a lady's man, not to be trusted.

When asked about the source of her feelings, L indicted that it was just some kind of feeling or thought that came to her mind. She suggested that she tends to be pessimistic and thinks of the worse possible scenarios when things are not as they should be. When she did not receive an expected phone call from her brother, for example, she "got a sense that something was wrong somewhere. When I finally phoned home, I learned that there had been a tragic accident involving my brother". L concedes that the lack of phone call could have been a clue. She also indicated that this sense of premonition is not something which she could trust due to her tendency to be fearful in "assuming the worse".

Déjà-vu

L also reported experiencing an event of déjà vu or fore-knowledge while meeting with an insurance agent:

I was in the midst of something and I felt like I had been there before, to the point of asking the person I was with if he had talked to me before or had he been there before. And he hadn't. But when I was speaking with him, I said to him, 'have you been here before talking to me?' Because that is how strong an impression it was. The whole thing, sitting at the table, in that room, at the place where I was living at that time, and the surroundings, and we had done this.

Religious Influences

Apart from her family's history with paranormal experiences, L had very little exposure to structured religion. Her exposure to Christianity was limited to teachings received while belonging to various groups such as Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT) and Brownies. She does recall that as a child, she found great comfort in the midst of her fear by singing some of the hymns and children's songs which had some association with Jesus. L has a strong sense of spiritual warfare around her. She speaks of the presence of God in her life, of angels good and evil, and Satan as an oppressor.

I don't believe that I can be possessed now because I'm sealed in the Holy Spirit. But there are times when just everything is going wrong. ...there is a very real sense of Satan or demons being there. You can either have a very close sense of God or His angels looking after you; or the demonic world attacking.

L described an incident where she was given unexplainable knowledge to witness about her faith as she was speaking with someone:

I'm thinking 'where is this coming from?' I would dare to say that it was the Holy Spirit using me as a channel for God. I don't consider that mystical or supernatural. For me, it is natural because the Holy Spirit does work through us if we leave ourselves open and available.

Conversion

In her early adult years, L recognized the potential for becoming an alcoholic, suggesting that lunches and after work hours were spent at the bar drinking with her friends. The chaotic direction of her life shifted when at the age of twenty-six, "I came to the Lord soon after my abortion. To me, it was more of an awesomeness that God could

still forgive me and love me." L described her conversion as "the most significant" and "transforming" event in her life, "a gradual process" for which she has no exact date. The first indication that a change had occurred was the sense of wanting to be involved in everything:

I started going to church. I couldn't get enough of it. It was just phenomenal. I wanted to be baptised... and I also attended Sunday School and anything that was teaching the Bible. By the time I got through all that, I realized it was Christ I was searching for and that I wanted a relationship with Him.

L's understanding of conversion is that it is both an event fixed in time and a process:

There's a time when I was converted to Christ. Letting Christ come in and start running my life. It's taking me off the throne and putting Christ on the throne. It's also a process. I'm still experiencing that conversion because all of my life is coming in the conformity to Christ.

Visions and Mystical Experiences

During another difficult time in her life, preceding her separation and subsequent divorce, L reported a religious experience:

My self-esteem was very low, my marriage was just gone crazy, and I was probably somewhat depressed. I was really frustrated that God didn't seem to be doing anything to help the situation. Being stressed out, I was mad at everybody including God. I went downstairs to do some laundry and I had a vision of the Lord standing there with His arms held opened for me, just waiting. A sense that He still loved me and He was still there for me. As a Christian, I guess I was having trouble reconciling a lousy marriage with my faith.

L has not experienced any other form of mystical experiences. She generally does not practice any form of meditation. As a rule, her prayer tends to be structured following a particular format although she will abandon structure in favour of spontaneity when deeply moved or concerned. As a divorced, single parent, she struggles to find her

place within the church community. However, recent developments in her life have affirmed her in her gifts for ministry. L hopes to complete her studies and go on to a pastorate where she can make a difference.

Mark

Biographical Information

Mark, the third informant of the study, is thirty-nine years old, married and the father of three children. Born in Halifax, Mark lived in a rural community in Prince Edward Island for a short while but spent most of his growing up years in Halifax. He described his home of origin as very stable and loving, filled with positive memories of family and community. Mark is the oldest of five siblings. Growing up, Mark had a good relationship with all of his siblings with the exception of his first sister, the second child in the family, with whom there was a great deal of rivalry. Mark came from a strong Christian tradition, "conservative, evangelical, old fundamentalist kind of upbringing." Although his childhood was marked by several moves prior to the age of nine, Mark does not appear to place any particular significance to them. As a child, Mark remembers playing with his siblings, "having fun with them, but never being specifically responsible for looking after them". He remembers lots of opportunities for friends to visit, describing his family as "very hospitable".

As the oldest child, Mark felt the weight of high parental expectations. Pre-adolescent and adolescent years appear to have been more difficult. Family social structures were deeply entrenched in a church community distinct from his neighbourhood. Mark found himself living in two different worlds, with two separate sets of friends, and ultimately, two sets of social rules and expectations. This duality was

the source of complex inner struggles and discomfort, resulting in a high level of secrecy, anxiety and guilt. This inner conflict continued throughout Mark's teen years and into adult life. Mark only began to find some measure of resolution of this conflict as he matured as an adult and in his faith. As an adult, Mark describes himself as being an introvert with a rich inner life. For Mark, emotions and the effect of experiences are difficult to identify although he is increasingly comfortable dealing with paradox and has come to a greater acceptance of himself.

Experience of Fear/Trauma Events

Mark described his childhood as relatively stable and free of traumatic events. He does not recall any significant losses although three of his grandparents died by the time he was five years old. The loss of a grandmother when he was eleven or twelve was more significant.

Mark described his Junior High years as "not at all pleasant" and "probably the most painful years of [his] life". During those years, Mark described himself as being "pretty distracted a great deal of the time, daydreaming, fantasies, just a general sort of spaciness that was pretty strong." It was also during these years that Mark became aware of various aspects of his father's character and temperament which had profound psychological impact on him. Mark described one incident where he had concealed an inadvertent error from his father:

He didn't say anything at the time. But when I came home, my mom told me that he was very upset. What is really vivid for me is that it wasn't his anger. It was a profound sense of disappointment, a kind of withdrawal on his part into a kind of melancholy. ...And I remember I hadn't seen this before, but it left a very vivid impression. It seemed to me out of

proportion to the event. It seemed like I had crushed him. ...I think I felt a lot of pressure from that point on, realizing that barriers, misdemeanours, you had a real price to pay in terms of this profound disappointment, letting down expectations. ...There was a whole area of your life, mainly conflict, tension, failure, stupidity, all the things where you failed, which I felt much that I had to hide ...because I didn't feel there was a place to share them. It was very hard for me to deal with it because although I knew there was something wrong with that kind of response to failure, I'm not sure I knew any other way to deal with that.

Family Structure

Relationship with Father

Mark's father was the youngest of a family of eleven who was also greatly affected by the weight of parental expectations, "...the son that fully pleases". Mark described his father as authoritative and domineering, "a very forceful person" who had no tolerance for sauciness and disrespect, "much more commanding when he expressed his anger or disappointment." Physical discipline for disobedience was a possibility although never uncontrolled or unpredictable.

On the other hand, Mark had a great deal of appreciation for the way his father was "great with my friends", especially when he was younger. Mark also described his father as selfless, one who would do anything, giving sacrificially of himself; "a man with enormous contradictions, from someone with that great personality and emotional strength" to someone who could be "very melancholic, brooding personality".

Relationship with Mother

Mark's mother was the oldest of two children from Scottish decent. She came from a family which exercised a great deal of social pressure and high expectations. Mark described his mother as a very quiet and patient; very loving in her actions; not

really expressive emotionally; as one who "did not get very excited about things", and as one who internalized a lot of pain.

I don't think I've ever heard her yell or raise her voice, or just loose it. [She] was very busy around the house. Did an awful lot. Was very reliable, you could count on her. I remember the home as being stable that way. I think mom would deserve a lot of the credit. She could be stern, a bit stern. She could be annoyed. But certainly never inspired fear in the way that my father did. I never felt overwhelmed or afraid.

Family Dynamics

Mark described his parents' as "very loving" and affectionate, especially in early years. However, during his pre-adolescent years, Mark became aware of some real tensions in his family life.

Part of it I think, was just the realization that some dynamics in the family weren't particularly healthy and the effect it was having on me. I began to feel troubled and confused, but at least externally, there was a measure of stability and a relative amount of ease. I became aware that my inner life did not always mirror the ease and appearance of my outer life.

Mark described his family as "not highly communicative at the emotional level." He recalls feeling a lot of tension, conflict and internal discomfort. Mark's inner tensions were created by the lack of emotional honesty; the incongruence of living a dichotomous lifestyle, one within the church community, the other around the neighbourhood and broader community; the feeling that "to fall short of [my father's] expectations was to risk his emotional health as much as anything else." Unlike his siblings who left home unexpectedly and under painful circumstances, Mark remained in his parent's home until the age of twenty-three when he married.

Evidence of circumstances within the family structures became known later which

explained some of the secrecy and emotional tension present in the family. This revelation has had a significant impact on how Mark understands his relationship to his family. but more significantly, sheds light on the source of confusion and tension he felt in his teenage years. "These last few years, it's been a time of seeing beyond some of that conflict ...just the cloudedness of all that experience in growing up." In spite of these tensions, Mark's relationship with his parents was very affirming in other ways. He looks on his home life as a place where he grew up "in an atmosphere of faith" and a place where he was loved.

I never doubted growing up that I was loved by my parents; that they really cared about me; that they had my best interest in view. I mean they are limited, they are flawed. Like me, they don't communicate their love as purely as they want to. But I never had, in my life, a moment were I have doubted that I have been loved.

Self-perception

Mark described himself as someone who was pretty easy to get along with, as an introvert, "not particularly expressive" and "guarded around other people". Mark also sees himself as someone concerned with pleasing, moulding to situations easily, a characteristic he associates with being a first child. As a teenager, Mark described his temperament as easy going and timid, having little autonomy.

Mark recognises within himself some of the strengths and weaknesses that are the legacy of his family. He speaks of the profound connection he has with his children, as primarily relational, "a person that works well in relationship with people", and in terms of social settings, "vocation, church, neighbourhood, family". Mark also sees himself as being in a relationship with God and desiring to model something of the Christian life.

He describes himself as an intensely loyal person, has someone having a rich inner life amidst the complexity and confusion. It is this complexity in his inner life that Mark sees as the source of defensiveness which he describes as "a way of distancing myself from immediate experience and trying to step back from it." Paradoxically, Mark sees his inner life as being a "tension between the reality of enriching your life" and "yet, it's a fragility."

It's not easy for me to know what I feel and it's just frustrating at times, but at least in this part of my life, it's often when I withdraw from the immediacy of the experience that I can actually determine what I feel. I think where I experience my emotions mostly is in my relationship with God. And vividly in terms of whether it's tears welming up in my eyes, whether it's weeping, whether it's a deep sense of joy, whether it's a wholeness emotionally that I feel, I experience those things in solitude. But in solitude, ultimately, in a sense of being aware of the presence of God.

When asked about his fears, Mark suggested that he has "all sorts of fears, ...fears bred by insecurity, emotional fear, fear of disappointing [his] father", still living with the tension from the lack of a strong sense of self, a timidity which irritates him. Reflecting back on an early childhood memory of shadows and noises through the window, Mark indicated that "sometimes the darkness outside might scare me."

Creative Imagining

As a child, Mark recalls loving the outdoors, playing hockey, winter kinds of things. Mark did not engage much in make-belief nor does he claim to have had a good imagination. However, he remembers engaging in play activities which in retrospect, reflected his adult interest and gifts.

You know it's funny! I remember as a kid, the importance of play, right?

and the way play sometimes indicates where we're gifted and what we're interested in. And I remember as a kid, Sunday afternoon, our family would all have friends over from church, and sometimes we would play church. And invariably, I would be the one who would be doing the teaching or speaking or whatever.

By the time Mark was in grade six, he was leading a Sunday School class, "doing all the work for it and enjoying it". Mark also found expression for his creativity in his writing,

...a place where, I communicate with some measure of vulnerability with people, and where I communicate what God is actually doing in my life. ...I think we all have to be really creative. It's part of that insight and seeing what is happening in your life, and trying to create and respond to it.

As an adolescent, Mark reported a general "spaciness", which he attributed to this incongruence between his external life and his inner conflicts. Mark did not engage in fantasizing beyond what would be considered normal adolescent development.

Insight and Intuition

For Mark, imagination and intuition are things which he has discovered later in life.

I think I've tended to be very analytical in my thinking. And part of that is kind of a defensive way of living. ... And in a sense, it's curbed the life of imagination and intuition. So I'm trying to find a healthier balance in my life.

Mark sees intuition as a gift from God which can be trusted, "a gut reaction which comes from some deep place in yourself that's actually to teach and instruct you", something very distinct from "other reactions which are defensive, bred from insecurities". For Mark, insight is the product of reflection and a process of interpreting,

the ability to “stand back from the immediacy of experience, trying to penetrate it and find something that unites, that connects, that makes sense of all your fragmentary experiences and the business of life”.

Visions and Other Phenomenological Experiences

Mark has had profound experiences of a religious or mystical nature. His descriptions of encounters with the presence of God are very compelling:

There is a sense in which when one is vividly aware of God, there's a self-forgetfulness. There have been moments, experiences which are qualitatively different in terms of the degree of intimacy with God. There is a sense of wholeness that He gives me in His grace which is different than anything else I have ever experienced - a different sense of consciousness.

One such encounter in late adolescence involved several young people at camp who collectively experienced a sense of oneness, a vivid sense of God's presence where "the actual sense of reality is something that defies description." Other mystical experiences involved meditation:

I remember as an adolescent, there was a very powerful experience of actually seeing Jesus and seeing Him on the cross. Seeing His blood falling down, falling on me and actually cleansing me and making me white. And actually, quite vividly feeling that with a kind of heat and a kind of light and whiteness. ...other experiences of light, heat, and warmth ... Experiences that are hard to talk about.

Mark described these kinds of visions as "intimate encounters with God", isolated experiences which are transforming, life changing.

Conversion

Mark grew up in a tradition which emphasized "the one time nature of conversion". However, thinking of conversion as an event poses some difficulties for

Mark because as an event, it is something for which he has no first hand memory.

Consequently, Mark's experience of conversion is that of a continuous process which had its inception in early childhood.

I think of my conversion as the most significant event [in my life]. ...I approached my father and told him that I wanted to invite Jesus into my heart. I don't remember that but just knowing the context of my family, the fact that it wasn't coercive that way, the fact that my father pointed out that I was the only one in my family to actually come up and talk to him about that and ask him. I look back at that and say that God was actually doing something in my life and that was the beginning of the process. And in a sense, it was the seed of the whole process of conversion. In a funny way, I pour all of the meaning of my experience of conversion, my experience of God's love, and in a sense, I can say it was all in its seed form in that experience. But on the other hand, it's an experience that I only have second hand memory of.

As an adult, Mark communicates his understanding of conversion by way of symbolism, powerfully captured in a painting which hangs in his office:

Jesus bearing the cross...the kind of powerful, obviously central symbol of the Christian faith. But just in terms of my own experience, conversion is very much death to self, and dying to self in order that new life will come. The process of being changed by God's Holy Spirit and transformed into a person more in keeping to His desire. That symbol has meant a lot to me as I tried to deal with pain, confusion, loss, disappointment, bewilderment. All of those very human experiences ultimately find resonance and find meaning in the cross.

Conversion, according to Mark, is something initiated by God's Spirit which requires a response and needs to be personally appropriated.

Mystical Experience

At the age of forty-one, Mark had a significant mystical or religious experience which he describes "as the most powerful experience I've ever had in my life of God's presence and His love". This experience has radically changed Mark's understanding and

perception of God:

I found myself identifying with the story [of the prodigal son] as one wants to in meditation. But somehow, that identification with the story just sunk down very deeply into my heart, into my being. And so I felt like somehow, I was fully engaged in the story; in reflecting about my own relationship with God and the relationship with the prodigal and the Father, and what it meant to turn back to God, and recognizing inside, that I found it very difficult to accept His love. ...That experience of love and forgiveness overwhelmed my sense of the depth of my sinfulness. It just overwhelmed it. And a sense, a very vivid sense of his love. I just found myself weeping and joyful in the midst of my weeping, and a very vivid sense of God's presence being actually with me and loving me. A very powerful experience.

Mark also described a later experience which stands out:

...meditating on a passage in Isaiah and experiencing a lot of frustration in my spiritual life, ...this tendency to judge myself, some kind of perfectionist stream. Maybe more than that, a sense that I need to perform to win approval, first child kind of syndrome. And so all of these are part of the inner workings of my mind. And one of the ways this is played out spiritually is that you get frustrated with yourself. Because when you think about what God calls us to and how persistently and aggressively we fall short of that, it gets very frustrating. So I really wrestle with this voice that condemns myself. And I suppose it flows over into some kind of frustration with God.

In the context of this passage in Isaiah, I was very much into this frame of mind. And I don't know why but this verse literally, it knocked me over in a sense. The verse was basically the Lord speaking to the people of Israel, but the phrase that almost quite literally hit me was 'do you think I lack the power to save?' And I realized that all that self-questioning, ...this self-recrimination, ...this lack of patience, was really saying in the face of God, 'do you think I lack...?' I was questioning God, not believing that He had the power to save. And this very vivid sense of power. ...All of it, kind of a wonderful, loving, powerful rebuke to my own self-questioning and I suppose it's also a questioning of God. That is an experience that I look back on because since that time, I have felt a new patience in terms of what it means for me to be converted. Not that I don't struggle and get frustrated, but I honestly never think of it in the same way from that point on.

Community

Mark sees himself has having a strong sense of community, not only as part of the local church community but also of the broader Christian community. For Mark, being part of community is an integral part of faith and of the experience of worship.

In terms of church, it's a loyalty that you have. It's something that you know is right, and so you commit yourself to it. As much as faith is intimate and personal, I really believe a healthy spirituality is a communal spirituality. A healthy Christian spirituality is never an individualistic thing. And so I think it's really important to be involved in the life of my church, both in terms of what I receive in worship, in the sacrament of communion, in hearing the word preached. But also in terms of what I can give, whatever gifts I have, whatever contribution I can make in the life of this community, I'm anxious to make it in some sort of way.

Mark thinks of his different ways of being involved in community as disciplines.

For Mark, community is something which is more real and true when "I can be more myself and understood, talk about personal matters of faith, and have them heard and interacted with."

I invariably struggle in community. In a sense I often have to push myself. ...having experiences and not really feeling the freedom to talk to people about them or feel like they could genuinely be shared. There just didn't seem to be any context for the depth of intimacy that I was looking for. ...there has been some degree of isolation.

Mark sees himself as "being called to understand more of [God's] love", to be shaped by it in very practical ways:

It's not mystical experiences that I'm looking for, it's actually love. It's actually God that I'm searching for. Experience has become less important to me in some ways, and just searching for God is what is really important. Everyday, my life is full of contradictions, tensions that chafe up against that calling. There are times when that sense of intimacy with God is something I can experience through the day. But that is something that is not persistent. Something I have to work at, really pulling my awareness

of God's presence from my spiritual discipline into all of life. It doesn't come as easily with me as it does with some people. But when I'm occupied with that, that's when I really think I'm doing what's really important and what's really life shaping.

Mark seems to have a propensity for understanding and knowing deeply.

Although he sometimes struggles with doubt within the context of faith, his "natural inclination", which he describes as a gift, "is to believe, to have faith":

I've always felt a closeness to God, in a strange way. Sometimes, I think I locate it more in the area of my conscience. Obviously, as we grow older, are able to think more abstractly, your conception of God deepens intellectually. I think in terms of my experience of God, I've gradually become more aware of a God of love; a God with whom I can experience intimacy; a God that fully accepts me; a God who is calling me to a good and hopeful future. These concepts of God have become more central, not to the denial of the other things I've learned about God, but I think, 'God as angry God' or 'judging evaluator' of my moral life, that conception of God, which I think has a big impact on relationship with Him, that has been diminishing.

Mark's experience of God is one that is personal and internal. This immediacy of the presence of God is one which Mark describes as "an ongoing struggle for us to appropriate" but one which "is always there whether we can feel it or not." Mark finds resonance in the name "Almighty Father".

I find myself drawn to that expression of who God is. In terms of my experience of God, one can never lose awe in the sense of reverence and mystery. And yet, there is also the experience of immediacy and intimacy. One can experience a sense of awe and a sense of God's grandeur and yet at the same time, be aware intimately of His presence. In the past, I tended to think of the two as mutually exclusive categories. I experienced God either this way or that way. Maybe I'm being called to experiencing Him more just in His fullness and not put one of His qualities in tension with the other. I've always been interested in paradox, ironies and apparent contradictions. I think I went through a stage when my approach towards faith was very much more rational. And I believe that there is a rational side to Christianity. I think that my understanding of Christianity is

probably most full when there's a balance between the institutional, the mystical and the intellectual. There can actually be a wholeness between all three. But in terms of my own personal experience, I have found myself less and less preoccupied with needing to have a rational answer for things; and more and more content to live in mystery and paradox.

Mark does not report any other form of psychic or mystical encounter. His sense of knowing is always in the context of faith and the presence of God.

The Researcher as Informant

I was born in a small rural community just outside the city of Montreal. The first of four children, I was the only girl. I grew up with two brothers who were three and five years younger respectively. My third brother was born after I was married and contact with all of my brothers has been limited. For the first twelve years of my life, I lived in a community which is reported as being the most disadvantaged in Canada. Although both of my parents were francophones, my mother spoke a combination of broken French and English. As a result, I alternated between both languages depending on who I was speaking to. In addition, I attended French schools while living in a predominantly English neighbourhood.

At the age of twenty, I married an anglophone whom I met during my first week of military service in Halifax. My first child was born the following year, with a congenital liver disorder that would end his life when he was only four years old. My second child, was born three years after the first child and she was eight months old when he died. In addition to my own children, I was a foster parent to several others.

For the twenty years that I was married, I was committed to a traditional relationship where home and children were the primary focus. This was in part due to my ideals about family values which were reinforced by my religious beliefs. A lack of confidence, my desire to stay home with my children, and implied family expectations were also contributing factors.

Experience of Fear/Trauma Events

My earliest memories at the age of five are that of my second brother being born in our small four and a half room flat two days after my maternal grandfather died. My faint memory of a tall, gaunt man, an alcoholic for whom no one seemed to be particularly grieved by his death. I sense that I was afraid of him, or at least, I disliked him intensely, although I don't know why. Later conversations with my mother suggested that abuse may have been a factor.

Memories of illness, spending three months in hospital with a painful disease which did not appear to improve with time, being strapped to the hospital bed each night. Returning to school after four months of absence only to be ridiculed by my grade three teacher in front of the whole class because my hair had been shaven. Other memories from those early years, of my father coming home drunk after a banquet; or of my mother's illness, her inability to work outside the home, and my brothers and I being placed in foster care. Being the oldest of twenty-four children in care, I became overburdened with chores and responsibilities of the household duties of the home. In retrospect, I feel I was used as slave labour. However, this year presented me with an opportunity to learn some valuable skills that I did not learn at home. At the first suggestion that we were being mistreated, my parents did not hesitate to come and get us and take us home, an indication that in spite of all the difficulties, they did care for us.

As a child, I remember being very afraid of the dark, always insisting that my door be left opened. Once, my father found me trying to climb the wall on the side of my bed in an attempt to get away. I remember being afraid of going into my bedroom closet

and sometimes, as I looked in the mirror, I would be gripped with fear as my features appeared to change before my eyes, becoming more and more distorted, the product of an overactive imagination. I never understood the source of those fears which seemed to vanish after going to foster care, and never returned after we moved to a new apartment when I was fourteen.

After the move to a country house shortly after the birth of my first child, I began to experience events which again were very fearful. I remember having the impression that there were unfriendly presences around me, perception of shadows and forms that suggested the intrusion of an unknown nature. Sounds of doors opening and closing and the fall of foot steps in the hall. Wanting desperately to convince myself that there was nothing there, I would look down the hall where I found nothing but an eyre feeling, a sense of light being distorted as if there was a mist in the air, and an overwhelming sense of fear. I would go to sleep with lights on, the pillow over my head, praying that God would protect me and take authority over whatever was there, surrendering even my fear. Eventually, the sounds and shadows ended, the fear dissipated never to return.

Family Structure

Relationship with Father

My father was very quiet and unobtrusive man, who for me, seemed to be more of a stranger than my father. Leaving early for work, he would not return till after supper. I vaguely remember him working in the tool shed and in the winter, he would go to the local skating rink to play hockey with my brothers. Once, I received the spanking of my life for having, what must have seemed to him, a temper tantrum, because I was afraid of

getting a needle. The only other time I ever saw my father lose it was when he and my brother had an argument and my father went after him. Had it not been for my mother running interference, I'm sure my dad would not have let go the strangle hold he had on him. Mostly, dad worked, watched sports on T.V. and slept, often till late in the day on his days off, a constant source of argument. For the most part, I would say that my father was non-existent, a stranger living in our house. It was only as an adult that I was able to develop a relationship with him. I received my first hug from him when I was thirty-five years old after I initiated the action. He later told me that he had never hugged me, not because he didn't love me, but because that was the way he was raised.

Relationship with Mother

My mother used to get upset at my father because he never wanted to do anything. I remember her crying a lot. She attempted going to work for a short while but found it to demanding emotionally. Memories of her sitting at the table drinking coffee and smoking, staring into space, anxious, or crying, the house in complete disarray; other times working obsessively to have everything spotless. Other memories of being hit across the head and face; accused of stealing and lying when a quarter went missing; being told that she would not be married had it not been for being pregnant (for me). Later in my teen years, I remember her desperate pleas for me to stay home, objecting to every outing, suggesting that I would get myself in trouble. Finally, threatening suicide if I did not acquiesce to her wishes, a tactic which in the end, I chose to challenge. In retrospect, I know that my mother suffers from generalized anxiety, depression and perhaps even paranoia, symptoms of her severely abusive upbringing.

Family Dynamics

I don't remember ever sitting at the table with the whole family for a meal except for very rare occasions. Family gatherings were always undermined by discord between mom and some other member of the family who "were jealous and only wanted to break-up [her] marriage". As I recall, there was very little interaction between any of my family members while growing up. I remember my father's frustration at my mother's desperate attempts at trying to bring the family together only to be rejected and criticised, mostly out of lack of understanding for her illness. With the exception of one or two family outings and taking care of my brothers while we were in foster care, all before the age of ten, I have no recollection of any interaction with my brothers. I joined the navy at nineteen and except for rare visits, never returned home. Although I have the freedom to return, there is no sense of identity, connectedness or belonging and the separation that existed between my brothers and I in childhood has become greater in adult years.

Self-perception

I remember feeling responsible for my mother's unhappiness since I was the reason she "had to get married". In grade school, I remember deliberately sitting by the window where I would spend time getting lost "out there, in the warmth of the sun and the hypnotic allure of leaves wrestling in the trees". I never did well in school mostly because I was uninterested and unmotivated. I barely squeezed through each grade, getting high marks in the very few subjects I enjoyed and barely passing or being pushed through most others. I remember a turning point in grade four, when I enthusiastically asked for an explanation on a math problem, suggesting to my teacher that I needed to

understand the why behind the process. "That is just the way we do it, don't worry about the reason why" was his reply. From that point on, learning without understanding seemed to me an impossible proposition. As a result, I lost all interest in school work and learning in general.

As a child and teenager, I was fearful of asking what I needed of others. I spent most of my teen years in isolation in my room and yet, I have no memory of that room being mine. It was there that I spent many hours constructing a world and an identity that brought with it feelings of excitement, sadness, pain, adventure, fantasizing about future relationships and mysterious, exciting and dangerous careers. In retrospect, I know this was my attempt at breaking through the flatness, the lack of feelings either good or bad, that was pervasive in my life at that time. I would not have identified these feelings as rejection, isolation or depression although I have come to the conclusion that early in life, I had shut down emotionally and I likely suffered from low grade chronic depression until my mid thirty's.

I remember as a teenager, thinking that I had no feelings at all and that I must be some kind of robot. In fact, what I was experiencing was the same isolation I felt when my grandmother died. I remember not being particularly impulsive and often sat on the sidelines feeling totally alone and unwanted. The reason for this, I thought, was that I was dumb, stupid and ugly, feelings which I carried through my teen and early adult years. A major depressive episode in my mid thirties was the turning point where I began to develop a sense of identity, working hard at reconstructing past memories, and gaining a sense of self and autonomy.

Creative Imagining

I did not think of myself as a very creative child. I have few memories of painting, colouring or doing crafts although I spent several summers in programs at the local Boys and Girls Club where I engaged in all sorts of activities, none of which seemed to have captured my interest. One of my more positive memories is of receiving a wood burning set and a paint-by-number oil paint set for Christmas. Although I had expressed an interest in ballet and piano, I was instead enrolled in a tap dance class, a major preoccupation of my mother's. There was little exposure to music and arts except for a few songs that my mother liked to sing.

I remember vividly sitting in class, looking out the window, caught up in the warmth of the summer sun and being reprimanded for daydreaming, something for which apparently I had a propensity for doing. Around the age of sixteen, I began developing an elaborate fantasy world which began with a fictional relationship with "a boyfriend" and evolved to include detailed activities as "an agent of the secret service." Other fantasies were associated with having a family. Although some of these could be attributed to normal teenage development, others would become more meaningful at a later time.

Insight and Intuition

My creative ability found more expression in my mid to late twenties when I discovered that I possessed what I and others have called "common sense". I also discovered that I was fairly intuitive about people and their character. I sometimes felt that I knew things about people, often without knowing them or even speaking to them. I made accurate predictions about events that concerned them. Some predictions were

pleasant ones, such as the sex of their expected baby; but occasionally, they would be premonitions of impending disaster. One such event occurred when I was travelling back from my parents' home in Montreal to Nova Scotia where I lived.

We were driving past the Quebec/New Brunswick border when I suddenly became overwhelmed with anxiety and grief. The feelings were so intense that I started to cry. My husband, who was driving the car at the time, looked over and asked what was wrong. I told him that I did not know exactly, but that I felt as if something terrible had just occurred. We were both puzzled by this but in the absence of more details felt there was nothing more we could do. Compelled by something which I did not understand, but with a sense of urgency, I began to pray but lacked the words to be specific. I just felt as if I should somehow allow myself to surrender to the feelings and remain there until I felt a degree of peace and calm. Half an hour later, we came upon an intersection where a serious car crash had occurred. As we approached the scene, the same flood of anxiety and grief returned. We were waved on by an RCMP officer and the next day, I heard in the news that three people had been killed in the crash.

Such extreme occurrences of intuition were not frequent. However, I began to notice with a certain amount of fearfulness the extent to which they appeared to be accurate. I began experimenting by predicting the sex of expected babies and found fifty accurate prediction out of fifty-three; and calling out bingo numbers before they were in the hands of the caller. More useful was my intuitive sense of knowing, particularly when dealing with people. My intuitive sense was brought into question when I learned that opinions based on subjective experience was tantamount to passing judgements on the basis of first impressions. On the basis of reason, I began to distrust something, which until then, had served me well. I later regretted that choice and had to learn to trust my judgement all over again.

Visions and other Phenomenological Experiences

The first experience that I would identify as one which suggested gaining some knowledge about events through supernatural or paranormal means, occurred when I was twelve or thirteen years old. Mom and I went to visit her aunt Laura, whom I had never met. We sat in her living room for some time. Mom and her aunt spent time talking about different family members while I sat quietly listening, though I had no idea what they were talking about. Finally, aunt Laura told mom that her son had recently married and was living in the apartment next door. After indicating that he was home, we accepted an invitation to visit him and his new wife.

As the following events occurred, they did so with an awareness that I had experienced them before. Consequently, I had a full mental representation of every detail and could anticipate the next step as if I were hearing, seeing and reliving this segment of time for the second time:

Mom knocked on the door; a man answered and invited us in; as I watched the events unfold amazed that all the details were familiar. I felt as if I had already experienced them before, seeing them for the second time: The layout of the room, each sentence spoken, every detail, and the people who were present. I felt a bit strange, as if my mind was not fully engaged with my body or with my surroundings but acutely aware of all my sensations. I was stunned by this event and it would be many years before I would tell anyone about it much less try to understand what happened.

This somewhat dramatic experience was unique in that it was the only such event which I ever experienced in a public situation. It is also the only event where I felt that what was currently happening was simultaneously a very vivid memory. Up until then, I had never experienced anything unusual except for one incident shortly after my

grandmother had died:

I was twelve years old when I decided to take the bus to come home from school. I had never taken the bus on my own and this felt like a very daring thing to do without permission. As I made my way to the front door to leave the bus, I was overcome by a feeling that someone was watching me. As I looked around, I saw a woman who I believed to be my grandmother. Startled, I looked away. When I looked again wanting to assure myself that I must be mistaken, the person I had seen was no longer there or anywhere else on the bus. This took place in a matter of seconds and there had been no stops to explain the disappearance of this person. Although frightened at the time, I later concluded that it was my grandmother's spirit (ghost) and that she was looking out for me.

Other incidents of fore knowledge were not recognized as such at the time of their occurrence. Teenage fantasies, initially believed to be foolishness, took on new meaning as they began to unfold in reality:

I would marry a sailor; have two children, a boy and a girl, in that order. As I acted out the fantasy in my mind, the scenario unfolded much as it does in a play. My first pregnancy would prove difficult, threatening to miscarry early on and for several months. My first child, a son, would be born with some medical problem. The doctor would tell me that he would not live very long to which I replied 'if there is a way for this child to live, then he will'. In this fantasy, I also knew the exact weight of each of my children and how long overdue each of them would be. I also knew that my second child, a daughter, would have some medical problem that she would outgrow by the time she was a year old.

I never gave these fantasies much attention. At one point, I realized that spending so much time dreaming up extraordinary scenarios which provoked intense feelings was not healthy. I remember a decisive moment when I realized that I needed to stop doing this or I would surely go insane. A few years went by and I had all but forgotten about these experiences. It was only after my second child was born that I came to the realization that all of the details of the fantasy previously described had become reality.

Only in retrospect did I come to think of these as a form prophetic knowledge. However, I struggled to understand why I would be given such a gift, which at times felt more like a curse.

Spiritual Development

At the age of eighteen, I experienced a life transforming event which I later came to understand as a conversion experience. The years that followed can be described as a process of conversion where faith in Jesus Christ became central to my understanding of life and the primary focus of my existence. Growing up, there was the sense that it was important to be baptized, confirmed, have our first communion, marry and be buried in the church. Although my mother attempted to ensure that I went to church as a child, I remember insisting that I would not return because neither she or my father attended. Consequently, there was little church influence within my family structure.

I attended French Catholic schools where I was instructed by nuns. The Lord's prayer, the Apostles's creed, and questions on catechism were part of daily routine until grade three. What was perhaps most significant for me were the times I spent vacationning at my grandparents. They lived next door to what seemed like a large cathedral and the convent where the Sisters lived. I remember going through the gardens and sitting on the double swings with them although the conversations elude me. I remember the large weeping willows across the street by the edge of the river where I caught my first and only fish; and the gardens along the path which led to the cemetery at the back of the grounds where my grandparents are now buried. Somewhere along the way, I think I had some notion that perhaps some day, I would become a nun. Memories

that were quickly forgotten after my grandmother died when I was twelve years old. By the time I was ten or twelve, there was no longer any religious influences in either home, school or extended family.

My experience of conversion has always been a source of inspiration and evidence of the power of God to save. There was, at the time, no apparent reason for me to seek out the experience and no one in my life to lead me, as the expression goes, to Christ. The event began with the realization that I believed in God as Creator of the Universe. I remember walking home one night on my way home from high school, looking up at the sky and thinking that the world could not simply come into existence by accident. It was too perfect and there had to be a master plan by a Master Creator. Wanting to put this belief to the test, I invited, by way of a simple prayer, that God should reveal Himself to me. I remember vividly the sense of wellbeing as I walked the rest of the way home. I began to sing, what in retrospect, I can identify as praise songs - something which I had never done before and had no context with which to understand the experience. All I know is that for the first time in my life, I felt alive and connected to the universe, feelings that stood in sharp contrast to the emptiness that had preceded it.

The invitation for a revelation apparently did not fall on deaf ears. It occurred to me that in order learn more about God, I should perhaps start by attending church. Coincidentally, a local priest had begun conducting a Wednesday morning mass at my school. To my recollection, I only went the once. I have no impression of the service itself. Only that when it was over, I remained alone, sitting, eyes transfixed on the crucifix that sat by itself on the table covered with white linen. There were no words, no

sounds, only a profound moment when I experienced what can only be described as a mystical or religious experience:

I had no awareness of anything around me. My eyes were fixed on this cross. I became conscious of the reality of Christ as a person, as God - God crucified. I knew with absolute certainty that He had died for the world, and for me. I felt the importance of that event and I understood that I was now in the midst of an encounter which was beyond comprehension, yet I had the sense that I understood. It's as if I was there at Calvary with Him, and yet, Calvary was also here with me in this present moment. I was witnessing His agony and the injustice of what was happening to Him. I know that He was present as assuredly as I was conscious of my own being. There was a dialogue not of audible words - although I heard His voice, and I knew with certainty that it was His voice - but of intimate communication that takes place in the soul. I was overwhelmed with feelings I had never experienced before and I responded - "Lord, for all that it's worth, I offer my life to you, to serve you, if you will just lead the way". Gently and gradually, I found myself sitting, again transfixed on the cross, my soul flooded with joy and peace.

At the time this event took place, there was nothing unusual occurring in my life.

The only frame of reference I had for serving God was in my childhood memories of the convent and the nuns in the garden. Serving God meant a cloistered life of prayer and service. Inquiries about becoming a novice were quickly discouraged on the basis of not having adequate education. In my naivety, I interpreted the refusals as God's refusal to use me in service. As I walked home, hurt and angry at God for rejecting me, I remembered the exquisite furnishings and art work at the convent which now seemed to imply a wealth disproportionate to the poverty of most of the world. I realized, as if somehow I had been imparted with some knowledge, that a life of service to God would never be within the walls of an institution. On that day, I turned away from the only church I knew and went forward with the assurance that to be a Christian would mean to

live life with integrity and to treat others as I would want to be treated. Except for my wedding, performed at a Catholic military chapel for the sake of my family, I would have no further connection with religion of any kind for the next ten years.

What little concept of God I had as a child was that of a God out there - the God of churches and nuns and catechisms. I had heard the Christmas story once or twice and seen some of the classic movies, stories of the Crucifixion and of Moses and the Exodus. After my conversion experience, I went for over ten years without any church affiliation, although my awareness of the presence of God in my life was becoming more evident. It was through faith in God that I was able to move past the fears which had haunted me, believing in the authority and power of Jesus Christ to keep me safe from any other presence, real or imagined. In the course of time, the birth of my first child prompted me to search out other traditions. Eventually, I was challenged to decide whether or not I believed that the scriptures were the Word of God. Once I assented, the appropriate passages were used to convince me that I needed "to be born again", something I did willingly and believed at that time to be my moment of conversion. Unlike the first commitment as a teenager which was purely experiential, this one was purely intellectual.

It was at this time that I began engaging in the disciplines of the Christian community. Although evidently new in the faith, I seemed to have no difficulty understanding and interpreting difficult passages of scriptures and according to some, "possessed such pearls of wisdom". These statements were disturbing for me since it was my understanding that the spiritual gift of knowledge could only be received if one was in relationship with the Spirit of God. In my experience, I had evidence of such a gift long

before I was "led to the Lord". It was this incongruence that caused me to venture into new territory and began to meditate:

I lay on my bed in the late hours of the night. I began to centre my thoughts on the person of Jesus Christ. I could feel my body and my mind quieting. I entered a deep, peaceful state with only one purpose - to seek God and find understanding. I remember feeling as if I were dreaming although I was still awake. Images and thoughts crossed my mind in what seemed like a prolonged encounter of a transcendent nature. In this dream like state, or as I have come to believe, this vision, I was mentally transported to that day in the gymnasium of my school and remembered with absolute clarity the experience of that day as if I were reliving it again. Then each step of my life, my marriage, my children, each significant place became infused with meaning and purpose. I was now beginning to enter into the knowledge of my conversion experience which had occurred ten years before. In a moment, everything was made known and I understood.

When the vision was over, I realized that I had lost all perception of time. Further there were no longer any incongruence between what I understood to be God's word and what my experience had been. Church community became important for reasons other than the need to be accepted. I continued to study and learn what the scriptures had to say but with one major difference. I no longer accepted the teachings of others without questioning every detail and searching out for myself other possible interpretations. I began to trust and give my own understanding precedent over the teachings of others, believing that it was the Spirit of God that leads to all truth.

The concern over issues of poverty which had been a reason for leaving the Roman Catholic church returned with the difference that now I felt compelled to respond to it. During a three year stay in British Columbia, I became involved with a street outreach where my vision for responding to the needs of the poor began to take shape. It

was during that time that I was confronted with a form of depression that I had never experienced before:

I was supposed to help a friend move that morning. Feeling very depressed, I decided to drop-in at the outreach hoping someone would notice that I was in trouble. The failure for anyone to take notice (to my knowledge), confirmed my feelings that no one cared and heightened my sense of isolation and despair. As I left to make my way back home, and to my friend's to help with her move, I was unable to make the necessary turn. Instead I continued to drive not knowing where I was going. I remember a windy road, a glance at my speedometer which read 85, a flash of a speed limit sign that said 30. I pushed my foot down hard on the gas peddle hoping it would all end. Somehow, I made it to a provincial park on the remote shore of the Straight of Juan de Fuca. I walked along a path and came face to face with a large cliff. I remember thinking that I felt as if this cliff was resting on my shoulders, crushed by its weight, dark and heavy. The path meandered around the side and eventually, to the top. From there, I could look down the precipice that dropped almost straight down to the ocean. It's easy, I thought. Just close my eyes and step forward and it will be over. Just then, I heard a voice deep in the recesses of my mind. 'Do you love me?' I recognized the familiar passage of scripture - the familiar Voice. 'Do you love me?' Yes, Lord you know that I love you. The memory of having committed my life to Christ surfaced. I was at once aware that if I jumped, I would effectively be taking my life out of Christ's hands and I would be giving it over to Satan. This became a double bind situation where I could neither jump, nor could I go on with my life. For a third time the question came forward, 'Do you love me?' This time my answer blurted out with despair and frustration as I collapsed to the ground - 'I love you Lord but I can't do this any more.' The impression of a reply can be summed up in one word - 'Finally!'.

At that moment, I literally felt as if this great weight was being lifted off my shoulders and the light of day came on as the veil of darkness that had been with me for five months lifted. I was overwhelmed by the brightness of the sun and the beauty of nature that surrounded me. The cliff I was standing on, that had seem so big before appeared to be nothing but a hill in comparison to the majestic mountains across the Straight. I knew that my problems, which had seemed as big as this cliff before, were

nothing but a pebble in comparison to the majesty and power of God. Reassuring verses of scripture came to mind: "Fear not...; You are mine..., I have called you by my name..., I will help you..., I will not forsake you..., that which I have begun, I will finish..." I sat for several hours totally engaged in this experience of Mystery. I gradually came to the realization that I would have to leave this place and go on with my life. But I now had the assurance that whatever I felt, God would go before me and all would be well. Later that day, I began reading a passage of scripture, Isaiah 41:9-13, 43:1, which in essence was a reiteration of the words I had heard earlier. This passage has continued to have a powerfully compelling impact for my life from that time on.

I would like to say that this was an instant cure. Somehow, had that been the case, I think I would have been robbed of a unique and wonderful opportunity. The process of recovery began at that moment and this experience was not only the turning point in this depression but also became the source of inspiration for facing whatever the future might hold, even depression if need be. I have learned that it is in weakness that one becomes strong. Interestingly, I have not had any recurring episodes of depression since then. I now see depression as a welcomed friend rather than the enemy that I once feared more than anything. It was this experience, more than any other, which has brought me to a place of faith where I can trust that no matter what I think, feel or believe, I will never be alone or abandoned. This experience has also shattered the myth that it is possible for anyone to have control in or over their life or that God always wants to bless. The experience has transformed my life. Instead of being satisfied with holding back, observing, and feeling safe, I have become a full participant in life, daring to take

risks, believing that in the end, all will be well since nothing, neither powers or principalities, shall separate [me] from the love of God. (Romans 8:37-39)

My greatest struggle continues to be in the area of incongruence between what I feel is the life I have been called to and the demands of a market economy and a materialistic society. I have had some periods when I have left the church community for a time as I struggle to find ways to live out my faith without the legalism that is often associated with mainstream religion. In recent years, however, I am less concerned with religion and right or wrong behaviour and more concerned with right attitude and authenticity. I have come to a place where I have a great deal of empathy for those who suffer and resonate with those who are the unlovable of our society. It seems to me that the more I grow in my faith, the greater my sense of being loved, not in spite of my weaknesses, but because of them. What is clearly important to me is that to the best of my ability and with God's grace, I can be fully known and fully honest about who and what I am, to myself and to others.

Chapter 5

A Psychospiritual Interpretation

Summary

Two types of our general knowledge are characterized by certainty. One is our knowledge of self-evident propositions. The other is faith. There are not many self-evident propositions; some philosophers claim there are none. Faith is also certain knowledge; it is knowledge that is revealed to us by God. If the revelation is direct, as it was, Moses said, in his case, then there is no question about it. It is more difficult for some than for others to accept with utter finality and certitude any second-hand revelation without God's help, his grace. No matter how hard you try, according to this line of argument, you cannot have faith--which is absolute certainty that God exists, for instance--without God's grace. If you ask, How do I know I have received God's grace? the answer is: If you know with certainty that God exists, then you have received it; if not, not.

Van Doren, 1991, p. xxii

Certain Knowledge

According to Van Doren, the only cure for the universal and insatiable desire for knowledge has been faith, the grace of God. It is not surprising, then, that mystics throughout the ages and across all cultures have been associated with some form of religious or spiritual practice. It is not surprising, either, that our search to understand how people know has taken us beyond the philosophical and theological debates to the place where knowing is experienced. Based on the narrative of the informants, three types of experiences are discussed:

Psychic Experiences

Psychic experiences of déjà-vu, clairvoyance and premonitions, including intuition and certain visions, are grouped as one category. A distinguishing feature of these psychic events is that they have some connotation of "sensing" or "knowing". They contain the element of gut level feeling which informs and brings into awareness. These may be predicated on some subtle clues, integrated at a subconscious level. In some instances however, the experience may not be recognized as containing this element until much later in life.

Conversion Experiences

The second type are conversion experiences which can be associated with a turning point or change in perception, ideology and/or behaviour. These are treated separately since they provide a natural division in terms of experience and interpretation. Christian conversion is generally associated with a dramatic change in relationship between the convert and their experience of God. It is a point at which the Power out there, abstract, distant and judging becomes the God within, real, intimate and loving. Although conversions are generally associated with religious experiences, not all conversions are of a religious nature. It is possible for instance to be converted from one theoretical framework to another or from one religious system to another. In the broader context, conversion is part of the process of change which is effected by needs, tensions, conflict and the tendency towards a higher goal - it is part of the creative process of becoming. Spiritual conversion, however one defines it, is not dependent on a religious system but on the awareness of entering into relationship with a Transcendent Other, a

personal God; a relationship which, once encountered, cannot be ignored. Although always mystical in the traditional sense of the word, conversion experiences need not be experienced as mystical.

Mystical Experiences

The third and final category is that of mystical experiences. These are generally spiritual in nature and while they may be mediated by psychological factors, they tend to be experienced as a gift of Grace resulting in a deepening understanding or knowledge of Mystery. Fundamentally, however, there may be little distinction in the psychological processes involved in each of the three categories described. The hallmark of authenticity is found in the degree to which the experience impacts or transforms the individual towards a more integrated self, a lasting quality which translates into a greater sense of community or connectedness.

Research

Research in the field of parapsychology has been guided by a predominantly skeptic agenda and while more serious inquiry has graced the studies in Hermeneutics and Depth Psychology, these continue to be the subjects of great debate. Limited research in the field of parapsychology has made an association with trauma, fantasy and paranormal experiences. Research in Hermeneutics and Depth Psychology support the view that conversion experiences are preceded by antecedents, psychological factors which are implicated in the overall process. Finally, research and writings on the topic of Mystery, which also includes the experience of conversion, all suggest that experiences of Transcendence are mediated through suffering and a deep longing of the soul which can

only be satisfied by Divine Grace.

To my knowledge, no attempt has been made to examine psychic experiences, conversion experiences and mystical experiences as similar processes which result in some form of "knowing". Reasons for this is a matter of speculation. However, one possible explanation is that psychic experiences, usually understood to be synonymous with paranormal experiences, are generally thought to be associated with divination and witchcraft and at odds with Christian beliefs. Consequently, while psychic experiences, conversion experiences and mystical experiences are all paranormal, the term paranormal seems to imply a clear division between spiritual experiences and psychic experiences. While spiritual experiences are unusual and baffling for most people, they command a certain degree of reverence which makes them more acceptable in certain environments. If given any credibility at all, they tend to be seen in a more positive light than psychic experiences. In fact all of these experiences bring with them a new awareness which requires a leap of faith.

Narratives

A review of the life narratives of each informant provides us with sufficient details as to allow the identification of phenomenological events which fit our definition, whether psychic, conversion, or mystical, which are in some way associated with a sense of knowing. Further, these experiences and the awareness or knowledge gained by them are said to be subjective in that they are the product of internal processes which cannot be verified apart from the informant's own interpretation. Objectively, the events are made known and interpreted in light of shared experience, of tradition, and of history.

Process

As previously mentioned in Chapter two, process theory proposes that "everything is a matter of process, of activity, of change" and "all things are the product of its working". We can summarize from this that each step, stage, cycle, or event does not come into being apart from being a response to the condition which preceded it - the psychological antecedents; and in itself becomes the catalyst that propels us towards a higher goal - our spiritual quest, or our lower goal - retreat to apparent safety. It is on this premise that phenomenological events, whether being of a lower order such as insight, intuition, and premonitions, or a higher order, such as conversion, visions and mystical experiences, all of which can be of a religious nature or not, are examined.

Applying the Four Stage Model

Let's assume as we did in our description of the four stages of spiritual growth that most people, unless deficient in some way, have no difficulty moving from stage one to stage two. This suggests that we are all born as Jung suggests with stable qualities for mental processing (sensation, intuition, thinking, feeling). Each event presupposes a starting point, a preexisting condition of relative calm where there is little understanding, knowledge or anticipation of something different; where the status quo is maintained, but which is beyond the intuitive, egocentric state of stage one - a comfortable place relatively free of conflict. We can also assume, based on developmental theories, that we are in the process of growing, moving through various stages towards a more integrated and autonomous self; and that within each stage exists all of the elements to either propel us forward or cause us to retreat back and that the natural tendency, if unhindered, is to

move forward.

Antecedents and Creative Imagining.

Of specific interest are the mediating factors or antecedents, psychological and emotional tensions, which may have contributed to onset of each experience; the role of symbolic representation as a creative process through the use of imagery (ie: make-belief, fantasy, meditation); and the way in which each informant interpreted the event.

Under this paradigm for understanding phenomenological events, the childhood experience of trauma, the sense of confusion and isolation of adolescence, the depression precipitated by some crisis, the mid-life crisis, the deep longing of the soul are all antecedents to psychic, conversion, and mystical experiences. Further, these are seen as evidence of stage three, skeptic/individual, as described in chapter three. In short, life as it is no longer works. It is this conflict, sometimes experienced as cognitive dissonance, which provides the necessary condition for breaking through our defenses, attitudes which normally keep us focused and intense. It is a point of surrender where we allow the creative process to direct us by opening ourselves up to other possibilities. For the child or adolescent experiencing trauma or isolation, this surrender is manifested in fantasy which provides, not only a coping mechanism for self-preservation, but a way of creating new realities where essential needs are being met. In this altered state of mind, structures and boundaries which enslave to the "real world" give way to abstract thought which reaches out to a more nurturing environment. In doing so, the child does what children do best, becomes receptive and opened to new possibilities.

For many adults, however, fantasy has become associated with idle fancy or

disfunction. We all remember the abrupt interruptions of our daydreams, moments of vision which carried us to some far off land, or maybe just a few feet away, out of the cold of our environment into the warmth just outside our reach. Fantasy is often viewed as an irrational preoccupation which has no basis in reality. At best, fantasies are the object of psychoanalysis which, in Freudian terms, are the product of unresolved conflicts. There is a proverb which states that where there is no vision, we perish. Adults who have no means of dealing with their unresolved conflict quickly begin to lose hope and fall in a state of depression. For the most part in our society, we have lost the art of having vision, whether it be in the form of fantasy, daydream or visions, or whether it is found in the hope for a better future. With no means of resolving our conflicts, the tensions can become unbearable and in our weakened state we surrender to the process. For many, the moment of surrender - a reaching out beyond ourselves to something or someone more hopeful - is experienced as a conversion or a mystical experience, or both.

Our society, however, does not deal with conflict and pain very well. Our natural tendency is to alleviate our own suffering as soon as possible. For the most part, the first line of defense is to ignore our difficulties and hope they will go away. When they persist, we often try to distract ourselves by engaging in all sorts of behaviours which only seem to make matters more conflicted. As a last resort, we turn to others for an explanation and direction on how to fix it - we seek counsel.

Many people seek solutions to their conflict long before the tension becomes great enough to precipitate a conversion or mystical experience. For some, relief can be found through the process of counselling which makes use of various strategies which requires

the use of imagination and visualization. These strategies contain the same characteristics of openness and creative imagery that are found in fantasy. Meditation, whether practised as a spiritual discipline or a relaxation technique also has these same properties, as does the condition induced by hypnosis. The only distinction between fantasy, which is the child's natural solution to conflict, and these strategies is that in counselling, the process is guided by the therapist.

The Informants as Converts

All three informants as well as this researcher identify themselves as having experienced conversion to the Christian faith, defined as both an event and a process. From our current enquiry, however, I think the point has been made that all events are a matter of process. The process of conversion is one of antecedents leading to conversion and ongoing transformation which is in itself evidence of conversion. It is in the process that faith is developed, examined, questioned, and integrated into the life of the person as a reasonable possibility. This integration, according to developmental theorists, can only occur if certain stages have been negotiated. Further, integration does not occur all at once. A person might find some areas of their life more integrated than others or might find themselves oscillating between one stage and another. Finally, while integration and revelation are idealistic goals possible for everyone, few of us if any, ever achieve this in every aspect of life.

Source of Knowledge

A fundamental issue in a psychospiritual interpretation of phenomenological experiences is that of their origin. In the mystic tradition, and more specifically in the

Christian tradition, knowledge is believed to be a gift of Grace. The issue becomes more complex, however, when we consider that not all knowledge is God-given, and not everyone who receives the gift of knowledge is of necessity a Christian. Since all of the informants in this study have identified themselves as Christians, their interpretation is one which takes into account their relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Conversion, in the Christian experience, is a significant transforming agent which, if authentic, places the knower in a particular relationship with its Source. Since relationships are intimate and personal, there is no expectation that one person's experience should in any way resemble that of the others, except where history, tradition and revelation provides a framework for understanding the experience.

Conversion as a Phenomenological Event

Conversion experiences are significant to this research for several reasons. First, as an experience, conversion fits into our definition of phenomenological events which results in some form of knowing. Consequently, evidence of conversion may be manifested in the individual's ability to apprehend certain truths which would, apart from conversion, remain a mystery. Second, conversion from a Christian perspective, is the gateway to relationship and knowledge of the Other. At this point, converted individuals have opened themselves up to a dimension not available to non-converts. This does not suggest that knowledge is not available to other traditions or non-religious individuals. The assumption is that all individuals are spiritual and therefore have access to given knowledge. However, conversion, from a Christian perspective, places the convert in a distinct relationship which may provide a qualitatively different source of insight. Third,

conversion suggests that the individual has negotiated certain levels of development in terms of appropriating for themselves the faith which they profess. From a purely psychological perspective, this means that creative processes have become engaged, or re-engaged, which allows the person to reach beyond the formal/rational structures into more subjective, experiential and mystical forms of knowing. In adult life, imagination and fantasy may be more sophisticated than those of childhood make-belief.

Fundamentally, however, they do represent a re-integration of creative processes which were originally attributed to early stages of development. Further, if the experience is given, as is the belief in many religious traditions, psychological factors may be incidental. Consequently, if God or Mystery is revealed to a child, it would be of little consequence that the child has not reached appropriate developmental stages. Similarly, religious or mystical experiences which are mediated by antecedents such as trauma, fear or depression does not detract from the experience as given by Grace.

Phenomenological Events, Mediating Factors,
and Their Interpretation.

Analysis of John's Narrative

Psychic Experience

John recalled "a vision, or perhaps a dream", which he experienced around the age of nine or ten which, in retrospect, may have been predictive of his future vocation. No significance was attached to this experience at the time, believing it to be "foolishness". At the time of the event, John had not yet experienced a conversion. However, home environment was steeped in tradition and religious community. John speculates as to two possible explanations for this vision.

Well, you know, I don't understand it. It could have been simply a miraculous gift of God at that point; and something that has been a source of encouragement perhaps, as I continue in ministry. It is there, and I look back on it, probably as something that was amazing, as perhaps a sign from God. I don't even think it was a factor as I entered into ministry. I had no intention of going to the ministry. That was the farthest thing from my mind.

As a child, the vision was dismissed and forgotten, having no particular influence for decision making, only to be recalled at a later time where it is viewed as a gift. John also introduces the idea that the vision may have been a projection of some psychological functioning associated with possible desires or impulses.

It could have been my subconscious. However that works, you don't know. Was that God? There may have been religious impulses in me. Maybe that is the kind of things that I value. And so there it is, coming up to the light, and to face up to it. Somehow it was there.

Antecedents

John indicated that his childhood experience was that of a loving, stable home environment. John had a good relationship with all members of his family of origin. By the age of nine, John had experienced certain events associated with civil war and poverty which may have had serious psychological ramifications. However, these seemed to have been counteracted by John's overall sense of security attributable to his home environment and in particular, to his relationship with his father. Another factor which may account for some psychological tension was some discord between his parents which were anxiety provoking. In retrospect, John is able to identify factors which might suggest that his mother suffered from manic depression, a factor which may have been implicated in his father's unpredictability.

Creative Imagining

Although John claims that he was not particularly creative or imaginative, he does report spending his study time doodling and daydreaming. As a child, John did not engage in fantasy. There are some subtle indicators that John may have had some predisposition towards intuitive or psychic knowing as a child, based on his mother's indication which suggested that he "knew things", intuitively sensing or being aware of the particular needs of individuals.

This same sensitivity and intuitive knowledge, which was evident in childhood, is one which has remained constant in adult life. John recounts an incident which occurred during his internship at a hospital "there was a sense in me, where I should share with her [a patient] more of the love of God." Having missed the opportunity to do so, John felt

"a tremendous sense of loss and regret that [he] hadn't listened in a way. And that kind of thing had happened a few times - a sense of now is the time to visit somebody, it's the time to say something or do something". While the childhood vision or dream was predictive, looking forward, the hospital incident was immediate.

Discussion

There are two factors which may have precipitated the childhood vision experienced by John. The first is concerned with the experience of trauma as an antecedent. Although no specific trauma can be associated directly with the childhood vision, there is sufficient evidence to suggest the existence of psychological tensions which could constitute trauma. Specifically, there is a suggestion that John's mother may have suffered from depression. In addition, John's father occasionally was given to explosive and unexplainable outbursts. Both of these factors contributed to parental conflict which John described as characterized by a great deal of noise and yelling which "created a fair bit of insecurity".

In addition, John's childhood is filled with external events, which from a child's perspective, would be cause for serious emotional trauma. John experienced the effects of civil war at a very personal level, "I remember the terror", and from a very young age. However, John downplays the impact of these events, suggesting that his parents did everything to shield him, "driving by quickly, ...not talking about it." However, it is difficult to conceive of such impressionable events as having no effect on a child between ages six to ten years. Although these events may have acted as a catalyst for the vision experienced by John, there is nothing to suggest that trauma was internalized. Further, if

we accept that there is a relationship between the experience of trauma and fantasy which leads to proneness for paranormal experiences, John lacks the necessary mediating fantasies. John reports not being particularly introspective or imaginative as a child. Although he spent study time doodling and daydreaming, he has no memory of engaging in fantasy.

The second important factor from a developmental perspective is the age of formal operation and moral development. It may be that children around the age of nine or ten become more aware of abstractions and are impressed more deeply by initial experiences which are reflective. Processes which may not have been noticed earlier may now have a greater impact which comes with the ability to reason and interpret. A vision at this point may be more indicative of a flash of insight or the reflection of creative processes which become consolidated as a child matures.

The vision or dream was dismissed as foolishness and forgotten, "I put out of my mind because there was no meaning to it at the time until much later", only to be remembered years later, "I found myself in ministry". Only then did it take on new meaning and has served as source of encouragement for continuing in ministry. Whether the vision was the product of trauma or developmental processes, we cannot escape the fact that it was a vivid representation, a creative imagining which represented something which later became reality. The event was later interpreted in the context of faith and vocation and continues to be viewed as a gift of God which serves to sustain.

The second experience, which appears to have been an intuitive sensing, occurred at a time when John was an intern at a hospital. There is no indication of antecedents or

that John engaged in any form of creative imagining. However, this intuitive ability is one which had been manifested throughout his childhood,

"my mother has hinted that there have been times in my growing up years that I've wanted to do things, wanting to see somebody or help somebody...things like that, which in retrospect, she felt were very appropriate things to have sensed."

This experience appears more likely to have come from a gut level feeling, perhaps due to a sensitivity or an openness to the person's needs. From a spiritual perspective, it could have also been evidence of a connectedness which in terms of spiritual growth, is indicative of stage four, mystical/communal. The fact that John did not take this sensing seriously suggests a failure to recognize the importance or accuracy of his knowing. However, even if he had been sufficiently aware, the desire to respect the patient's vulnerable condition may still have prevailed.

Conversion

John's conversion was not experienced as a mystical one. His decision at the age of fourteen, was an intellectual one, motivated by fear, a vision of God as "harsh, vindictive, punishing..." At the time, John was experiencing a growing sense of isolation and confusion, questioning whether or not he was truly accepted and loved by God, wondering "is there more that I should be doing to satisfy Him". The lack of physical or emotional evidence of conversion initially created some doubt as to whether or not conversion had occurred. After repeated invitations, John came to the conclusion that faith suggests that having asked, he had received. Reflecting back on the experience, John can identify a shift in perspective, from viewing God as an angry judging God to a

"a sense of personal warmth, personal reassurance and love". John described the six months that followed his conversion as "the most ironic in my life...I can remember an immense amount of joy". John's experience of conversion did not affect his framework for interpreting events since he already had a context for interpretation within the tradition of his family and the community in which he belonged.

Consistent with research, John's conversion was preceded by antecedents, the confusion, chaos, and isolation of early teen years, the sense of not belonging, which he reports as having been significant. Further, John indicated that perhaps he was experiencing a degree of depression at the time. It was also a time of questioning, of wondering, "is there more that I should be doing to satisfy Him".

The enduring quality of John's conversion and the change in perception of an angry, vindictive God to a sense of "personal warmth, personal reassurance and love" are indicative of developed mystical/communal faith which finds expression in the Christian community.

Mystical Experience

John's definition of mystical seems to be more grounded in tradition and interpretation than in subjective experience.

Mystical is such a vague word in a way. It's been viewed differently. In the mid-century, any experience of God was described as mystical. In that sense, there's a wonderful sense of God. I think that one has to be careful because there will be some experiences that may be some abuse and others where God is clearly present. I think it has something to do with how experiences are interpreted and how consistent they are with the experiences of the community of faith, and also the testament through the years. Otherwise, people can be misled very easily.

For John, the experience of God seems to be more a matter of faith. Another mystical experience reported by John was the result of time spent in meditation focusing on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemene where "it seemed as if Jesus was very alive and came and put His hand on my shoulder". Although the experience was personally meaningful at the time, John does not report any significance or interpretation beyond the actual experience.

John does not usually practice any form of meditation preferring instead to write his thoughts through a process of journalizing, a method consistent with his love for language, his ability to integrate knowledge from various sources, and his extrovert personality.

Analysis of L's Narrative:

Our second informant, L was originally chosen for a pilot project. The information uncovered at that time suggested that she had a substantive history with paranormal experiences. Since she also met the criteria for becoming an informant, she was included in the study.

Paranormal Experiences

Although L reported many fascinating stories of paranormal manifestations experienced by her family, she has never experienced any of these herself. For as long as L can remember, she has engaged in fantasy activities where "I would slip into another world where everything was fine. I was wise and made all the right decisions and choices and I was popular". These fantasies were ones which gave L a new identity "I took on a

new identity, ...it wasn't me, ...it was all make-belief".

Psychic Experience

L reported a few experiences where there was the perception or awareness that something was out of sorts but she could provide no indication as to the source of this knowledge. The first such incident was while visiting a friend in New Brunswick when she encountered a man whom she felt leary of. Later, she found out the man was related to the person she was visiting and her assessment of him suggested that he was not to be trusted. A second incident involved the visit of an insurance agent making a house call to sell a particular product. During this visit, L became intently aware that this event had occurred before. The feelings of prior knowledge were so intense that L inquired as to the possibility that he had previously engaged her in a similar meeting. A third incident was a feeling of foreboding when she did not receive an expected call from her family. When she finally called them, she learned of a tragic accident in which her brother was involved.

All of these events occurred during L's adult years. Although no specific trauma can be identified, L has experienced most of her life with stressors of dysfunctional family both in her family of origin and in her marriage. However, there is no indication that these intuitive events are in any way related to those stressors. They do suggest an intuitive sensitivity which may be part of an adaptive process towards self-protection. Experience may have taught her to be more attentive to subtle cues which would alert her to something being wrong.

Research which suggests that trauma leading to fantasy proneness, which in turn

leads to paranormal experiences, is not supported in this case. The experience of rejection by her mother, the high degree of isolation, the turmoil of facing an abortion, the road to alcoholism, the abusive marriage relationship were all significant enough stressors to fit our definition of trauma. These traumatic episodes, coupled with the pervasive history of fantasy life, from early childhood and continuing into her forties, and given the family history revolving around paranormal manifestations, would suggest that L would be a prime candidate for paranormal experiences. However, with the exception of a few intuitive moments previously mentioned, L does not report any psychic experiences.

If psychic experiences are related to a creative process rather than adaptive ones, it would be essential for a person to open him/herself up to the possibilities of psychic phenomena. In L's case, psychic, or more precisely, paranormal experiences were something she did not understand, found to be fear provoking, and to be avoided. In addition, L's understanding of psychic and paranormal experience are clearly identified as "not of God". Consequently, as a Christian, she consciously chose not to be involved with anything which suggested a connection with paranormal or psychic connotations. L was further motivated to avoid any paranormal experience by her fear stemming from childhood exposure to various manifestations. In L's experience, there is no connection between the paranormal manifestations of her family and the intuitive events which she experienced. The latter, from her perspective, were isolated incidents, "something that happens from time to time".

Conversion

L's conversion was preceded by a chaotic lifestyle and a time of tremendous

turmoil. She had left home to move to the city where she had gained employment, she had recently had an abortion, she was well on the way to becoming an alcoholic, and she suffered from a degree of depression. In addition, L reported that her relationship with her family and particularly with her mother, was distant and strained, often feeling isolated, devalued, and rejected. L indicated that she needed to find a better way to live. Her decision to invite Christ into her life was evidenced by a markable interest in church activities and a desire to learn everything that she could about God and scriptures.

As a result of her conversion, L has made significant changes in her lifestyle which included turning away from the use of alcohol and dealing with the impact of alcoholism on her family. L's faith has provided her a context with which to rationalize the paranormal experiences of her family, on the one hand, suggesting that they were highly superstitious and on the other hand, framing the experiences in terms of "not all spiritual powers are from God."

Mystical Experience

L had a mystical experience where "I had a vision of the Lord standing there with His arms held opened for me, just waiting." This came at time of great emotional conflict associated with the end of her marriage. L reported that she was depressed and discouraged. In addition, she indicated that she was "really frustrated at God because He did not appear to be doing anything to help the situation." L was having some difficulty reconciling her Christian faith with the fact that she had a bad marriage.

L's experience at the time of this vision is indicative of stage three, skeptic/individual where life circumstance have precipitated a crisis which allowed her to

pose some searching questions about God's action in her life. The vision helped L to resolve the crisis and provided her with what was necessary for moving forward.

Discussion

L's conversion experience was preceded by antecedents, specifically, an abortion and a propensity for alcoholism. Her conversion experience, which she describes as "the most significant" and "transforming" event in her life, is evidenced in her overwhelming desire for becoming part of the faith community, wanting to take in all that she could. Her mystical experience also seems to fit the pattern, being preceded by antecedents.

Association between Trauma, Fantasy, and Paranormal Experience

There are clear indications that L grew up feeling the tension that existed between her and her mother. In addition, her father would often dismiss her feelings. Although L reports several incidents of paranormal activities, none of them were actually experienced by herself. Consequently, her tendency to live within a world of fantasy does not appear to have resulted in any experience of a paranormal nature.

L reported that she is not particularly intuitive or insightful. Her background in dealing openly with a dysfunctional family however suggests a more developed sense of practical understanding which can be considered insightful.

Analysis of Mark's Narrative

Mark's experience is one which is fully interpreted from a Christian perspective. Consequently, he does not report any event which can be related in terms of paranormal or psychic ability. Instead, Mark identifies several experiences which he relates in terms

of spiritual gifts and mystical experiences in the context of faith experience.

Childhood Conversion

Mark suggested that the most significant experience in his life is that of his conversion, an event he has no first hand memory of. While childhood conversion may be questionable from a developmental perspective, and some might argue from a theological perspective, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Mark's experience was genuine and non-coercive. His sensitivity for the things of God and spiritual gifts were evident from a young age and before any other religious experience. For example, Mark engaged in play activities which reflected his gift for ministry in teaching and preaching. Although Mark did not regard these play activities as indicative of future vocation, they do reflect the possibility that they may have been an expression of inner knowledge. In addition, Mark's gifts for ministry were recognized at an unusually young age, having been given responsibilities for preparing and teaching Sunday School classes by the time he was twelve years old, a responsibility he enjoyed and was good at.

The most convincing aspect however is found in Mark's statement "I've always felt a closeness to God, in a strange way." In addition, Mark's perception of conversion as a process which began with this childhood conversion, an experience in which "I pour all of the meaning of my experience of conversion, my experience of God's love. And in a sense, I can say it was all in its seed form in that experience", is also compelling.

Early childhood conversion raises a number of questions. The first concern is a developmental one which has to do with the notion that conversion needs to be appropriated at a personal level. In fact, what we are asking is, 'Is it possible for a child

to respond to an act of Grace independent of developmental abilities?' Although a child may not have the language to attach to an experience or the concrete/operational thought structure to interpret, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the experience is genuine much in the same way we would not deny the experience of a child gifted in musical or artistic ability. If psychic, conversion and mystical experiences are viewed as product of creative processes in which creative imagining is implicated, rather than a response to antecedents, it would mean that children are especially well equipped for experiencing mystery without being prejudiced by structure. To the degree that Mark was developmentally able, he seemed to have appropriated his faith in ways that were evident even in early years. In addition, Mark's conversion is characterized by a stable and lasting quality which has not relented, and in fact has strengthen in adult years.

Antecedents

A second question raised by early childhood conversion is that of the need for antecedents. The lack of first hand memory suggests that Mark's conversion experience occurred sometime between the ages of two (post linguistic) and five. Although there is no evidence of traumatic events, this was a time when Mark's family experienced several moves. The uncertainty of these move may have been a contributing factor. However, since we cannot ascertain this, we cannot draw any firm conclusions. At this time, I am unaware of any literature that addresses early childhood conversion.

Mystical Experience

A recurring theme in Mark's life is the profound inner conflict which began in childhood and continues to this day. Mark has been conscious of a rich, if not somewhat

conflicted, inner life which has been the source of tremendous struggle and growth throughout his life and in particular in his teen years. This inner conflict, partly in response to incongruences in family relationships, is one which seems to have been the antecedent for all of Mark's mystical experiences. In a sense, Mark has experienced several events which can be considered converting. The first, as a child may have been primarily intuitive. As an adult, however, Mark experienced a number of mystical events which were more significant in terms of appropriating his faith for himself. The most significant of these was one where Mark identified with the story of the Prodigal Son, where the relationship between Father and son was significantly altered. It is this event, more than any that Mark describes as "the most powerful experience I've ever had in my life of God's presence and His love". A place where "there's a self-forgetfulness", experiences that are "qualitatively different", where there is "a sense of wholeness", "a different sense of consciousness".

In terms of individual experience of God, I think it's the depth with which you know that you are known and understood by God. It transcends, by far transcends, what a human being is able to fully understand. And yet, I have experienced a sense of a God who knows me completely, who knows the parts of myself that I don't know, and can embrace me in a far fuller way than I can even embrace myself. There is a depth and intensity there that is different than anything that human can offer. And I experience it at a deeper and more intense place.

Mark does not report any experiences outside of the context of faith. However, he does speak of intuition as "a gift from God which can be trusted. A gut reaction which comes from some deep place in yourself that's actually to teach and instruct you". Mark sees this gift as the product of reflection, the ability "to stand back from the immediacy of

experience, trying to penetrate it and find something that unites, that connects, that makes sense of all your fragmentary experiences and the business of life."

With the possible exception of his early childhood conversion, Mark's experience supports the notion of antecedents for experiencing mystical events. In addition, Mark indicates that as an adult, he finds himself increasingly drawn to a place where imagination and intuition are part of his faith experience through the practice of meditation. For Mark however, his sense of knowing is found more concretely in his experience of God in relationship:

I think I laboured for a long time under the rationalistic sense of knowing. Coming out of the enlightenment and focus on science and technology, and forever feeling that's what really knowing means. There are different kinds of knowing and while that's a very important form of knowing [rationalistic], and it's very appropriate in terms of studying the material world, it's not the kind of knowing that I could take into my relationship with my wife. That's a very expert kind of knowing, a relational knowing, interaction to persons, much more complex, impossible to define and put under a microscope. And yet very real and very valid as a form of knowledge. So if I think of God as a personal God, then I think about knowledge being relational. I know that I'm experiencing the presence of God when I'm conscious about being in a relationship with another person, in this case, God.

Mark distinguishes between mystical experience as a gift of Grace and altered stated of mind that can be achieved through various strategies:

I think it's a prevailing emotional state, or I would say it's the presence of peace in me which has become a key indicator of the presence of God. At the same time, I'm quite aware of God in awe, in wonder, in anger, in virtually every emotion. I'm conscious of some of these experiences of peace and love as a gift, not something that you've been able to gain through some sort of technique to a certain level of consciousness. I'm very aware that they come to me as surprises. I know that I've experienced the presence of God when I see that my life has changed and has become more loving. I know that I've actually encountered a love that is at the centre of reality, of the universe. A sense that I'm being taught through experience, through relationships and in the things that are happening in

my life. There is a pattern, and [a sense] that somebody is actually telling a story through all the random details and moment by moment fragments of my life. And that I'm not the story teller. I participate in it but I'm very aware, as a human being, that I'm part of something much bigger and that God is really at the heart.

Discussion

Mark's experience raised some interesting questions concerning the need for antecedents in the process of conversion. His narrative suggest deep inner conflict from a young age. Such conflict is consistent with our view of spiritual growth and lend further credence to the authenticity of his early conversion. Mark did not engage in fantasy until his adolescent years where he reports a "kind of general spaciness" and "tendency to daydream and fantasize". He attributes this tendency to the inner turmoil and dichotomous lifestyle he was living.

As an adult, Mark is able to identify the incongruences which contributed to his distress. Further, it is as an adult that Mark has discovered his intuitive and imaginative abilities and how they relate his sense of knowing. The role of creative imagining experienced through meditation is becoming more significant in Mark's life. This suggest that a willingness or openness to experience is more significant than the need for antecedents. However, openness apart from motivation may not be sufficient for explaining phenomenological events. While Mark's inner life continues to challenge and frustrate him, an indication of stage three in our model of spiritual growth, there are strong indications of stage four development evidenced by his strong sense of community in every aspect of his life and his propensity for feeling and experiencing deeply.

Analysis of Personal Narrative
(Researcher as Informant)

Psychic Experiences

Three experiences can be identified which suggest an awareness or knowing which are phenomenological in nature. The first, a visit at aunt Laura's, was experienced as a vivid awareness of events prior to their actual occurrence. The second is found in the acting out of teenage fantasies, or as I prefer to think of them, creative imaginings or visions, which later became reality. The third psychic event was that of a strong intuitive sense concerning a serious accident. Each of these are now examined in turn.

The Trip to Aunt Laura's

The impression that I knew what was going to happen and what was going to be said before it happened left me totally astonished at the realization that my thoughts were becoming reality. The experience at aunt Laura's remains an enigma. There were no apparent antecedents to the experience and no apparent reason for having the experience in that it did not serve a purpose. It is possible, however, to speculate about the process that occurred.

Metaphysics

One possibility is that the event was a metaphysical manifestation. Such an explanation suggests that there are time/space distortions which might account for the perception that a person has prior knowledge of an event. However, this view is beyond the scope of this research. This line of inquiry, however, is an important one to pursue since it might have some implications for understanding dissociative episodes, which is

the second possible explanation.

Dissociative Episode

Another possibility is that these experiences are the result of dissociative episodes. This suggests a history of abuse which cannot be substantiated. There are, however, indicators or clues which suggest the possibility of abuse in pre-linguistic years, particularly given my mother's history of abuse. These include an undefinable sense of fear associated with sounds, shadows and distortions, an unexplained fear of the dark, and in particular of the closet in my room; the pervasive lack of emotions either positive or negative, a flatness which continued into adult life; and finally, the overwhelming lack of memories from childhood to the age of eighteen, most of which have been recovered in adult years. However, all of these symptoms can also be attributed to neglect, sensory deprivation, isolation, and rejection. Further, it is possible that some of the feelings described were a result of a form of transference reflecting my mother's experience and anxiety. An attributive model would also suggest that the tendency as a child to daydream and in teen years, to spend an inordinant amount of time in an elaborate fantasy world may also be an indicator.

Creative Imagining

Other experiences which resulted in knowledge of future events are the fantasies of my teenage years. While these might have been indicative of a deeply troubled youth, they were not perceived as anything unusual or meaningful until after the events which had been fantasized had become a reality many years later. A number of questions can be raised from these experiences. First, were the fantasies the result of a creative process

which suggested a form of knowing about future events? Second, is there any possibility that these fantasies were self-fulfilling prophecies? Third, if these fantasies were an expression of given knowledge, why were they not recognised for their prophetic nature and how does one make sense of such experiences?

The degree of isolation experienced in my teenage years provided a natural condition, devoid of distraction, for the purpose of "creating" a new environment. At the time, there was no indication that the events being constructed had any basis in reality. While spending so much time in fantasy is decidedly not a healthy way to live, it does point to a number of issues which are worth considering. The first question it raises for me, is, 'Is fantasy a coping mechanism? A defensive mechanism? or a creative process?'

In my experience, I would have to say it is all three. Fantasy provided a forum for dealing with the sense of isolation by providing imaginary positive relationships. Fantasies also provided a catalyst for resolving conflict and expressing feelings. This took the form of provocative scenarios which offered a reasonable basis for feelings which could not otherwise be expressed. In addition, some of the scenes played out mentally held the potential for a more positive future. Consequently, fantasy was a creative response to the environment in the act of self-preservation, and a creative process in the act of becoming.

However, a difficulty arises when we examine the nature of the fantasies. For instance, we can understand why someone might fantasize about having a family or of being a hero. But why fantasize about the possibility of losing a child? While it might be possible to suggest that some parts were self-fulfilling prophecies, others seem to be

predictive and could not, in so far as we know, be self-fulfilling. Had this part of the fantasy not come into being, it could have been dismissed as a means of resolving feelings of grief or fear. However, the fact that events unfolded in the same manner depicted in the fantasy suggests that something more profound was happening. What is also interesting is that coming to terms with the actual events was ultimately found in the context of a spiritual framework which allowed for the possibility that knowledge was given.

The third question that was raised is that of purpose. What possible benefit could there be to having prior knowledge, as seemed to be the case here, about events leading to the birth and death of a child. This is a complicated question for which there is no adequate answer. However, as the interpreter of my own experience, I have come to understand the wisdom of being prepared and supported through difficult times. It is not in the immediate but in retrospect that the experience became meaningful, reaffirming the knowledge that there is more in heaven and earth than that which is evident.

The Car Accident

The third incident of interest has to do with the intuitive knowledge of "something terribly wrong" while travelling in New Brunswick. While there was no conceivable way I could have known about the accident, this event suggest that a perception took place which had a profound impact on my being. This suggests a universal connectedness, or if we prefer, a way of being which is mystical and communal. It also lends further strength to the possibility of metaphysical explanations involving time and space. As I struggled to make sense of this event, I could find no purpose for the experience other than to allow

the intense grief overwhelm me and in it, identify and pray for the unknown circumstances. As a Christian, I believe that knowledge was given for the specific purpose of intercessory prayer. This was not something I was familiar with at the time but did intuitively.

While it is possible to suggest a purpose to this psychic event, there is nothing to support the view that there were antecedents, nor was there any sense of imagining or visualizing. Consequently, this event, while decidedly associated with "a sense of knowing", does not fit our assumptions with respect to the process that leads to psychic experiences. From a spiritual perspective, we are led to the conclusion that knowledge, for whatever reason, was given.

Conversion

Consistent with the work of James, Fowler, Peck and Rennie, conversion seemed to have provided a turning point in a period of chronic low grade depression experienced as the complete sense of isolation and lack of emotional expression. Conversion was experienced as something given, which awakened feelings of joy and peace that had never been experienced before. The event of conversion is one which spanned a period of a few days, beginning with the walk home where I first became conscious of the existence of God as Creator of the Universe, to the mystical experience a few days later, where God became known through Christ, in personal relationship.

A significant point in this experience is that there does not seem to have been any influences in my life at the time which could explain this experience. There was nothing in my childhood history which would suggest prior knowledge of conversion experiences

as a personal encounter. Nor did I have a framework for interpreting the experience as "conversion" at the time of its occurrence. Language fitting the experience only became accessible some ten years later. This in itself has been significant in my understanding and experience of a God who mediates the encounter, independent of our personal circumstances.

Conversion, from my experience, is also a process. It is the continuous work of transformation that leads to deeper, more integrated knowledge of God as both transcendent and eminent. It is a level of consciousness which goes beyond human description but which is ultimately more real than any other experience. It involves every aspect of being including cognitions, perceptions, senses, and emotions. It affects how one thinks and how one interprets the world around them. More importantly, spiritual consciousness as an experience, penetrates areas of the psyche which are not accessible through human endeavours and understanding of psychological functioning. It is through spiritual awareness that psychological dysfunction, whether in the experience of fear or in clinical depression, was healed.

Mystical Experience

In addition to conversion, two significant mystical experiences were reported. The first was mediated through the process of meditation and was motivated by a desire to know something of the nature of God and the process that had brought me to a place of confusion. The event began with an invitation and a sense of expectancy in the midst of conditions which were free of distractions and allowed for deep relaxation to occur. In counselling terms, one could suggest that I had independently placed myself in an altered

state which provided the necessary condition for experiencing the same kind of process encountered in guided imagery.

This raises the question of whether the event was a product of my imagination or whether it was mediated by an outside Intervener. The insight that was gained can be explained in psychological terms. For instance, the memories could have been allowed to surface as a result of the altered state. With the retrieval of relevant information, the confusing issues were clarified.

What was particularly significant about the experience, however, was the vividness of imagery which accompanied the experience and the sense of relational interaction to someone outside of myself, the sense of Other. It is this relationship, more than anything, which allowed me to integrate the new (or old) information in a way that was meaningful. Other experiences in meditation have produced similar results in terms of visions, but they lacked the relational component that made this particular experience more real and qualitatively different from guided imagery.

In psychological terms, the experience was consistent with our paradigm where the antecedent was the need to sort out the deep sense of confusion, and a process of creative imagining was involved. The experience is further authenticated in that the resulting changes have had lasting consequences which are fundamental to my sense of meaning and existence.

The second mystical experience was the turning point in a second episode of clinical depression which had lasted more than six months. It is therefore consistent with the notion of antecedents. This experience was unquestionably one which was totally out

of my control. It was experienced as an interaction between myself and the presence of Other in a way that was more real than anything I have ever experience either before or since. In my view, the healing that was effected that day, in the space of a few moments, cannot be duplicated by any psychological process, intentional or otherwise. The experience was profoundly converting in the sense that it brought me past any notion I might have had about God or any expectations I might have put on myself in response to my faith or my circumstances. It was a place of complete surrender.

Although the experience did not have any visual components, there was the sense of being in a conversation initiated by Someone Other than myself. There were also physical manifestations, when *I literally felt as if this great weight was being lifted off my shoulder, and the light of day came on as the veil of darkness lifted* - something akin to the sun breaking through a dark cloud. Whether this qualifies as a form of creative imagining or not is unclear. I have difficulty ascribing this experience to the realm of "imagining" creative or otherwise, since I have no doubt as to the Source of the experience. However, the implication is that our whole being is involved in our sense of knowing and phenomenological experiences are not limited to cognitive modalities.

Recommendations and Implications for Counselling

Intuitive and psychic forms of knowing which are mediated through creative imagining may simply be a normal adaptive process in the development of human functioning. A process which, at this time, is poorly understood. However, a wholistic

approach to human functioning considers all aspects of our being including physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. As such, our understanding of psychic, conversion, and mystical experiences cannot be limited by what we know to be psychological processes. We need to consider as part of our natural development, the impact of spiritual processes that may or may not be mediated by psychological factors but which ultimately, are of an existential, aesthetic and phenomenological nature.

A normative and constructivist view of phenomenological events recognizes the important role of spiritual development in the life of the individual, a development which is moving towards integration and community. Some events which have been pathologized can be revisited with the view that they may have been a practical and normal response to the environment, while others may have been a gift of Grace. Genuine events of “knowing” through psychic, conversion and mystical experiences can be distinguished from delusions or pathology, not by their content necessarily, but by their accuracy and their positive impact towards healing, growth and integration. Counsellors can assist their clients in the process of creative discovery by affirming those experiences which, ultimately, suggests a deeper sense of knowing whether intuited or gifted. In order to accomplish this, the counsellor must first believe that such experiences are genuine and useful.

Future Research

There are many factors which need to be explored. More research is needed to determine to what extent the process which leads to psychic, converting, and mystical experiences is a defensive or creative one. So far, we have determined that inner conflict

is sometimes implicated but not always. While we have established an association, in so far as our informants are concerned, between antecedents and conversion experiences, the role of antecedents relative to psychic and mystical experiences is less clear. This suggests that phenomenological experiences are not always mediated by antecedents. Further, where we expected to find evidence of an association between trauma, fantasy, and paranormal experiences, we have failed to do so.

Another area of research which needs to be investigated is that of childhood conversion. The existing research and assumptions on conversion have proven inadequate for the experience presented by Mark. Early childhood conversion suggests that antecedents are not essential for conversion and mystical experiences. If that is the case, antecedents may only be a manifestation of the tension that exists where our tendency towards integration, autonomy, and our drive toward Other intersects with our tendency towards self-preservation. This would give more strength to the position that psychic, conversion and mystical experiences are fundamentally a creative process (moving towards), rather than a defensive one (retreating back).

Rationality

The role of creative imagining in psychic, conversion and mystical experiences also suggest an openness to experience. Creative imagining in the form of fantasy and visions represents an unstructured way of thinking that is limited only by the boundaries of our beliefs. A similar process is involved when we engage in various approaches to counselling (existential, cognitive, rational-emotive and logotherapy) where the goal is to open up to the experience and the insight it provides. We either expand the boundaries of

rational structures to consider new possibilities or we incorporate irrational structures (humanly speaking) to become part of our frame of reference. The issue of rationality or irrationality is largely dependent on our whole experience and what we consider to be a reasonable assumption, our logic of conviction. In this way, we can justify making use of strategies such as guided imagery, which from a purely human perspective is nothing more than an expression of imagination and belief. In doing so, we make way for endless possibilities in the service of healing and wellbeing. This process is the same creative genius involved the perceiving of solutions to problems and the creation of new realities. The degree to which such strategies are effective is largely dependent on what the person believes can happen.

Faith

The idea of openness has something to do with what we believe and expect. If we have faith that there is a Transcendent Other, we are more likely to find Him/Her than if we believe there is nothing. This may explain why some people are prone to mystical experiences while others are not. However, here again, we cannot account for those who do not have faith and whose lives are transformed by such encounters; or those who do have faith and do not experience them. The distinction may lie in the balance between openness and defenses, a complex interaction of psychological and spiritual processes; or it might suggest that the revelation, ultimately, is not one that is dependent on psychological functioning.

Defining Antecedents

In our inquiry, we have found that antecedents are not always implicated.

However, we need to define more clearly what is meant by antecedents. For example, is the experience of personal trauma (ie: abuse) distinct from impersonal stressors (ie: war or poverty)? Is trauma always dependent on external factors or can it be the outcome of inner conflicts? Does the physical effects of some disciplines, such as fasting and sleep deprivation, constitute conditions which can be considered antecedents? What is clear from our inquiry is that whatever the cause, it was only relevant if trauma was internalized. Consequently, the informants most typically spoke of confusion, feelings of isolation, inner conflict, fear and depression, in association with psychic, conversion and mystical experiences.

In addition, each informant and this researcher had similar history with respect to their relationship with their parents. In all four cases, informants described situations where their mother may have suffered from some form of psychological dysfunction which had a significant impact on the family. Each informant also suggested that their relationship with their father could sometimes be the source of anxiety and fear, which brought with it devastating psychological impact. The most salient factor shared by all four informants, however, was the lack of communication, emotional honesty and connectedness which characterized their relationship with their parents, resulting in feelings of isolation, confusion and depression, feelings which were evident from early adolescence to adulthood. While not directly implicated as antecedents, these factors may play a role in the development of personality, the tendency to internalize feeling and ultimately, the tendency to engage in creative imagining.

Our stages of spiritual growth model used for examining phenomenological

experiences suggest that antecedents are indicative of stage three, skeptic/individual.

This stage, characterized by turmoil, questioning, reevaluating and suffering is critical to the process of growth. How we respond to it, based on our understanding, will determine whether we retreat back into an earlier stage or move forward into a more integrated, mature stage. Viewed from this perspective, antecedents become opportunities for participating willingly in the process that will lead to healing and growth.

Conclusion

Understanding psychic, conversion and mystical experiences from a developmental stage perspective allows for a normative model where these experiences are viewed, not as indication of pathology, but as integral to the growth process. Further, they are viewed as natural adaptive and creative drives towards integration and transcendence, the ultimate goal of human functioning. The premise that gaining insight through the process of counselling is useful for effecting healing and growth suggests that counselling has less to do with empirical, rationalistic forms of enquiry and more to do with phenomenological issues, the domain of philosophy, and ultimately, of Spirituality. Effective counselling requires that we address aspects of the whole person which takes into account not only psychological functioning of the individual but also those elements which bring meaning and purpose. Ultimately, psychic, conversion and mystical experiences are transcendent moments, which for those who have experienced them, are evidence of not only our nature as physical and spiritual beings, but of the absolute reality of Other. It is this certainty which in the face of despair provides the necessary ingredient for healing and for a vision of a more hopeful future.

Bibliography

- Bahm, A.J. (1995). Theory of Knowledge. [On-line]. Available: <http://www.unm.edu/~ajbahm/epistemo/contents.html>
- Ballou, M. (1995). Women and Spirit: Two Nonfits in Psychology. Special issues: Women's Spirituality, Women's Lives. Women and Therapy. Vol. 16(2-3):9-20.
- Belenki, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., & Tarule, J.M. (1986). Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. USA: Basic Books, Inc.
- Bertaux, D. (1984). The Life Story Approach: A Continental View. Annual Review of Sociology. 10:215-237.
- Brent, J.S. (1991). Existential Group Therapy as a Treatment Modality for Exiting Christian Fundamentalists. Counseling and Values. 35:228-229.
- Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (1982). Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Bouyer, L. (1990). The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism. Trans. Iltyd Trethowan. Edinburg: T & T Clark.
- Burnham, S. (1997). The Ecstatic Journey: The Transforming Power of Mystical Experience. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Clifford, P.R. (1968). The Place of Feeling in Religious Awareness. Canadian Journal of Theology. 14:214-221.
- Corsini, R.J. (ed.) (1981). Handbook of Innovative Psychotherapy. Toronto: John Wiley and Sons.
- Day, Bryon (1990). Convergent Themes Across Jamesian and Jungian Thought. Journal of Counseling & Development. 68:438-442
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

- Fowler, J.W. (1995). Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Fritz, R. (1984). The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life. NY: Fawcett Columbine.
- Hinterkopf, E. (1994). Integrating Spiritual Experiences in Counselling. Counseling and Values. 38:165-175.
- Hollis, J. (1993). The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife. Toronto: Inner City Books.
- Holmes, R. (1995). The Transcendence of the World: Phenomenological Studies. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- James, W. (1961). The Varieties of Religious Experience. Macmillan Publishing Company. New York: Collier Books.
- Jung, C.G. (1971). The Portable Jung. (R.C.R. Hull, Trans.). J.Campbell (ed.) New York: Viking Penguin Press. (Original Works published 1875-1961).
- Keating, T. (1996). Intimacy with God. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Kvale, S. (1996). Postmodern Thought, Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Dialectics. InterViews. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.
- Lahav, R., and da Venza Tillmanns, M. (eds.) (1995) Essays on Philosophical Counselling. New York: University Press of America, Inc.
- Lawrence, T., Edwards, C., Barraclough, N., Church, S., & Hetherington, F. (1995). Modelling Childhood Causes of Paranormal Belief and Experience: Childhood Trauma and Childhood Fantasy. Personality and Individual Differences. 19(2):209-215.
- McCaulley, M.H. (1981). Jung's Theory of Psychological Types and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator In: P. McReynolds (ed.) Advances in Psychological Assessment. Vol.5, Ch.6. pp.294-352. Jossey-Bass, Publishers.
- Merrell-Wolff, F. (1995). Transformations in Consciousness: The Metaphysics and Epistemology. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Meyer, F.B. (1980). The Gift of Suffering. W.J. Peterson (ed.), Connecticut: Keats Publishing, Inc.
- Orloff, J. (1996). Second Sight. New York: Warner Books.
- Overall, C. (1982). The Nature of Mystical Experience. Religious Studies. 18:47-54.
- Patterson, R.F.(ed.)(1989). New Expanded Webster's Dictionary. Florida: P.S.J. & Associates, Inc.
- Peck, M.S. (1987). The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace. Toronto: Simon & Schuster Inc.
- Peck, M.S. (1993). Further Along the Road Less Travelled: The Unending Journey Toward Spiritual Growth. (Edited Lectures) Toronto: Simon & Schuster Inc.
- Peck, MS (1996). In Heaven as on Earth: A Vision of the Afterlife. New York: Hyperion.
- Pratt, J. (1945). The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Rao, P.V.K. (1992). Fantasy-Proneness, Reports of Paranormal Experiences and ESP Test Performance. Journal of Indian Psychology. 10(1,2):27-34.
- Religions of the World (3rd Ed.). (1993). New York, NY: St. Martin Press, Inc.
- Rennie, R. A. (1995). Elements of Christian Conversion. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Acadia Divinity College, Acadia University. Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- Rescher, N. (1991). Baffling Phenomena and Other Studies in the Philosophy of Knowledge and Valuation. Maryland, U.S.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Robinson, E. (1987). The Language of Mystery. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Rosenberg, A. (1995) Philosophy of Social Science (2nd. ed.), Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

- Schultz, P.A., (1991). Goals in Self-directed Behavior. Educational Psychologist. Vol. 26(1):55-67.
- Shaffer, D.R. (1996). Developmental Psychology: Childhood and Adolescence. (Fourth Edition) Toronto: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Stinnette, C.R. (1970). Existence and Faith: A Theological Method as Focused in Psychosocial Perspectives. Journal of Pastoral Care. 24:165-177.
- Tillich, P. (1957). Dynamics of Faith. New York: Harper Row Publishers.
- Van Doren. C. (1991). The History of Knowledge: Past, Present, and Future. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Varma, J.K. (1989). The Epistemology of "Mental" Phenomena. Indian Journal of Psychiatry. 31(1):3-21.
- Walton, K.L. (1990). Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Weiskel, T. (1986). The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press Ltd.

Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Psychological Development

- How would you describe yourself?
- Tell me about your background?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was your childhood like?
- What was your family like? (interaction with family members)
- How did you get along with your mom, dad, siblings?
- How did you experience growing up? (affect)
- Did you feel you were creative? (describe/give examples)
- What kind of imagination did you have? (vivid? rich? sparse?)
- Do you still consider yourself to be creative, imaginative?
- What were your teen years like?
- What was your fantasy life like? (vivid? rich? sparse?)
- Have you ever experienced serious losses? (death of relative or friend)
- Have you ever suffered from serious illness?

Spiritual Development

- Have you ever experienced anything unusual?
(paranormal or mystical)
- What did you think was going on at the time?
- What do you think about that (those) experiences now?
- What has happened to shape your understanding of these events?
- Do you consider yourself spiritual?
- What does it mean to you to be spiritual?
- Do you practice any form religious ritual?
- What meaning do they (it) have for you?
- Do you belong to a religious community?
- How do you see yourself interacting with that community?
- Do you believe in any absolutes (truth? beings? reality?)
- Have you ever experienced conversion experiences?
- Have you ever felt you were in the presence of God (Higher Power)?
- Have you ever experienced something which you would consider a spiritual gift?
- Has anyone in your family ever experienced these kinds of events?

Participants' Experience of Knowing

What do you understand the following expressions to mean? What has been your experience of...?
faith; truth; meditation; intuition; insight; vision; conversion; prayer; clairvoyance; esp or extra sensory perception; religion.

NB: Questions will be added or refined as they become evident through the pilot project.

Appendix B

Subjective Paranormal Experience Questionnaire (SPEQ)

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|----|
| 1. | Have you ever had a rather clear and specific dream that matched in detail an event that occurred before, during, or after your dream, and that you did not expect at the time of the dream? | yes | no |
| 2. | Have you ever had a dream involving someone, and later learned that person had the same dream as you did at the same time? | yes | no |
| 3. | Have you ever had, while awake, a strong feeling, impression, vision, or knowledge that a previously unexpected event had happened, or was going to happen, and later learned that you were right? | yes | no |
| 4. | Have you ever had, while awake, a vivid impression of seeing, hearing, smelling, being touched by, or just strongly being aware of (sensing) another being, which impression, as far as you could discover or knew, was not due to any external physical or 'natural' causes? (Please do NOT include here experiences of the Christ or other religious figures.) | yes | no |
| 5. | Have you ever seen a light or lights around a person's head, shoulders, hands, or body (ie., a halo or aura) which, as far as you could tell, were not due to 'normal' or 'natural' causes? | yes | no |
| 6. | Have you ever communicated with the dead as a medium in a seance or believed yourself to have been controlled or 'possessed' by a 'spirit'? | yes | no |
| 7. | Have you ever had the experience while 'healthy' in which you were located outside of or away from your physical body: that is, the feeling that your consciousness, mind, or centre of awareness as at a different place from your physical body? (If in doubt, please answer 'no') | yes | no |
| 8. | Have you ever had what seemed to be a memory of previous lifetime (ie., 'reincarnation' memory)? | yes | no |

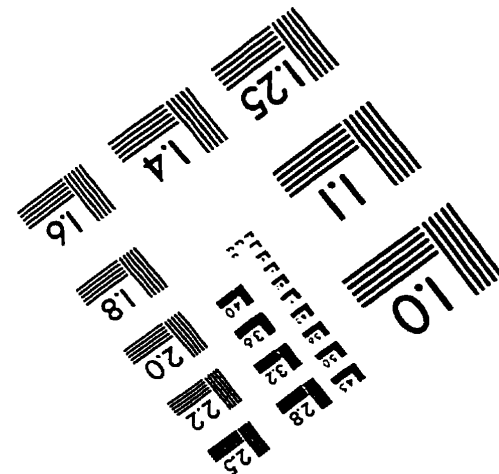
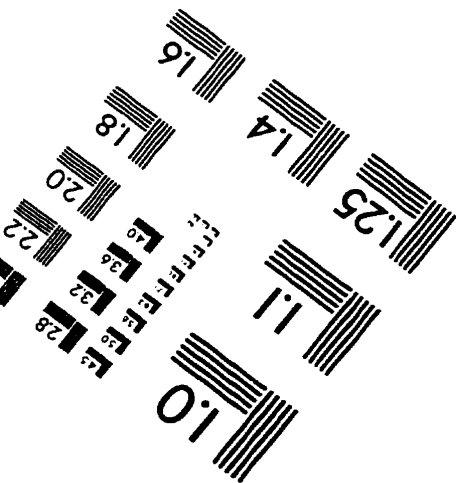
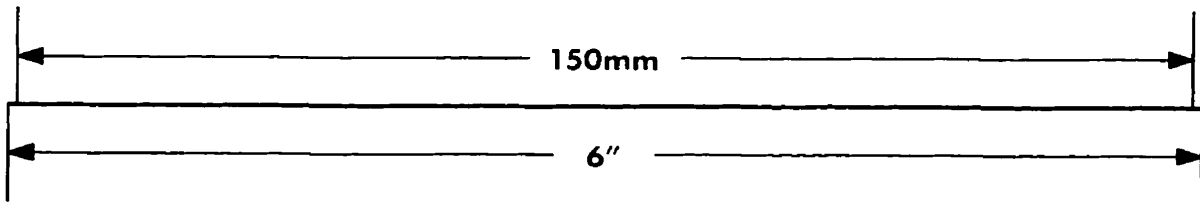
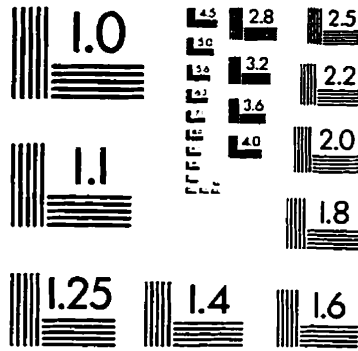
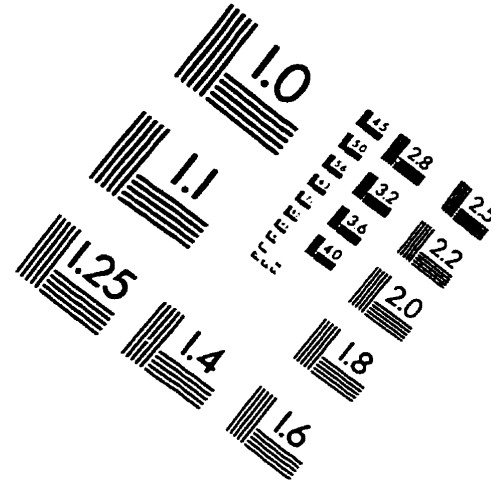
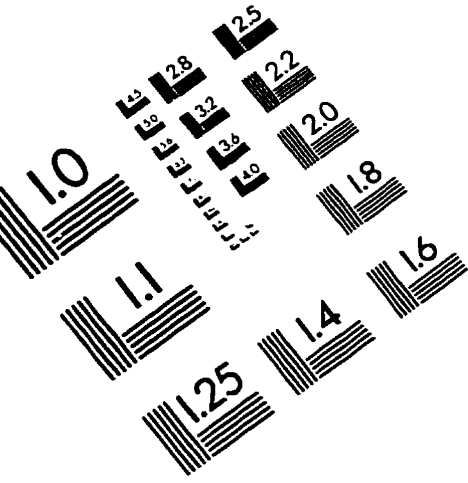
Rao, P.V.K. (1992) Fantasy-Proneness, Reports of Paranormal Experiences and ESP Test Performance. Journal of Indian Psychology. 10(1,2):33

Appendix C

Spiritual History

1. What religion were you raised in?
2. What denomination?
3. Are you still in that same religion?
4. The same denomination?
5. If not, what religion do you adhere to, and how did the change come about?
6. Are you an atheist?
7. Are you an agnostic?
8. If you are a believer, what is your notion of God?
9. Does God seem abstract and distant, or does God seem close to you and personal?
10. Has this changed recently?
11. Do you pray?
12. What is your prayer life like?
13. Have you had any spiritual experiences?
14. What were they?
15. What effect did they have upon you?

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied image, Inc., All Rights Reserved