Sundén's Role Theory – an Impetus to Contemporary Psychology of Religion

Nils G. Holm & J. A. Belzen (Eds.)

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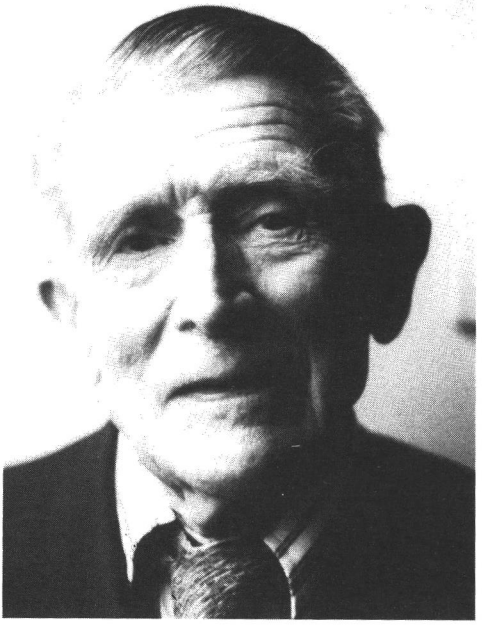

1908 - 1993

Gudmund Skuldbøl

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Presentation of Contributers

Hans Alma studied pedagogics in Leiden and psychology in Nijmegen (The Netherlands). She is an employee of the Theological Faculty at the Free University in Amsterdam and currently working on a dissertation on religious socialisation in which she employs Sundén's theory.

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Introduction

In June 1994, at the invitation of Professor Kurt Bergling, a conference on the psychology of religion was held in Lund, Sweden, at which the first session was dedicated to the memory of Professor Hjalmar Sundén, who had passed away on 30 December 1993. At that conference, three separate papers were presented which related to Sundén's scholarly achievement: Nils G. Holm's paper on religious symbolism and role-taking; J. A. Belzen's paper on role theory and narrative psychology; and the paper by H. A. Alma and M. H. F. van Uden on the relation between role theory and symbolic interactionism.

After the conference, J. A. Belzen suggested that these papers should be collected and published, in homage to Hjalmar Sundén's scholarly contribution to the psychology of religion. We decided to jointly co-edit the publication. Subsequently, it emerged that a number of other articles dealing with Sundén's achievement had also been written at about the same time as the conference. These have also been included in this commemorative volume. The contributions by Professor Owe Wikström and Dr. René Gothóni are both of a more personal character. Wikström recalls his first encounter as a young student with Sundén, and what this has subsequently meant for his own scholarly career; Gothóni offers a highly individual description of the experience of visiting the monastic peninsula Athos in Greece in the role of a pilgrim, and an analysis of this in terms of role theory. Gothóni's approach to explicating his own experience displays similarities with Sundén's own descriptions of his reactions to the horrors of the Second World War, which he wrote for his collection *Sjuttiotredje psalmen och andra essäer* ('Psalm LXXIII and other Essays', Stockholm 1956). It was in this book, incidentally, that Sundén first seriously set out

his role theory. Finally, among the more theoretically oriented contributions we have also included an essay by Hans Stifoss-Hanssen, in which he draws a comparison between role theory, attribution theory, and certain forms of psychodynamic theory formation.

Sundén's contributions to the psychology of religion are today recognized virtually throughout the world, but within the Nordic countries they have taken on crucial significance. Although the psychology of religion had earlier been encouraged by scholars such as Nathan Söderblom (subsequently Archbishop of Uppsala), it was not until Sundén's achievement that the discipline acquired such weight and solidity that in 1967 a personal Chair was created for him at the Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University. This Chair was subsequently reconstituted as a regular professorial position. Since Sundén's tenure, it has been occupied first by Thorvald Källstad, and is currently held by Owe Wikström. A Chair in the psychology of religion has also been created at the University of Lund, currently held by Kurt Bergling. No other Nordic country has created a professorial post dedicated to the psychology of religion; but the importance of the discipline has been recognized in many other ways, due not least to Sundén's contributions, e.g. within scholarly subjects such as comparative religion, practical theology, psychiatry, and general psychology.

Sundén's influence also reached the European continent and the impact has left traces behind; several of his books were translated into German and in The Netherlands he was 'discovered' by Han Fortman, professor for the psychology of religion at Nijmegen University. Jan van der Lans, a student of and nowadays successor to Fortmann, worked with Sundén's role theory in his dissertation and inspired several other researchers to apply this theory in their work. When some years ago at the University of Amsterdam a chair was established for the psychology of religion, the internationally attentive Board of the University oriented its interest not only to the impressive work of Antoon Vergote in Leuven (Belgium), but also to Scandinavian psychology of religion as it had developed itself in the wake of Sundén.

Both editors of this volume have been influenced greatly by the work and personality of prof. Sundén. This is especially so with Nils G. Holm, who had the pleasure and the privilege to study under him, and even more so to come to know him very personally. Over a period of about twenty years, they spent many splendid hours together. This introduction to a commemorating volume may be an appropriate place to express some thoughts on our personal relationship to prof. Sundén.

It was the German translation of Sundén's opus magnum, *Die Religion und die Rollen*, that initially attracted Jacob Belzen to the field of psychology of religion. His first personal encounter with prof. Sundén was in 1982. In subsequent years, Belzen visited him on several occasions at his home in Stockholm and every encounter turned into something special. Conversation with prof. Sundén conveyed intellectual delight: he would talk, or better: lecture, on each and every topic, he was charming, personal and fostering. He never permitted one to leave him without having had a great meal together. On one of these occasions, he would note in jest that in the Grand Hotel they still don't know how to deal with Pinot in a real french aperitif - though he had told them already back in the thirties...! In 1991, Belzen spent a week with Sundén, interviewing him extensively on his scientific development and life history. It was very impressive to witness how this bright man would be indulged in scholarly work until his last days, how he was still reading original biblical languages and having imaginary dialogues with great thinkers before him. He changed back and forth in his use of languages: when dealing with Freud, he talked German; telling about the time he spent in Paris and about his work on Bergson, he changed to French; only to switch over into English when he discussed developments in the contemporary psychology of religion. On Belzen's last visit to him in september 1993, Sundén handed over to him what was probably his last manuscript: on Teresa of Avila. It is scheduled now for publication in *Studies of Spirituality*. Teaching nowadays at Amsterdam University, Belzen time and again finds Sundén's work to be still one of the main sources of inspiration to students.

Nils G. Holm's interest in the psychology of religion was aroused during his undergraduate studies at Åbo Akademi University during the 1960s, when he read theology in the Faculty of Theology; music, and comparative religion in the Humanities Faculty. After completion of his licentiate thesis, on the sound structure of glossolalia, serious difficulties arose in the way of his further study at Åbo Akademi University, and it seemed natural to him to turn to Professor Hjalmar Sundén at Uppsala University, whom he had met briefly already earlier. Studying with Sundén was an exhilarating experience. As a professor he managed to create a dynamic and theoretically conscious research community that hardly had an equal in the Nordic countries. Pride of place in this research community in Uppsala belonged, of course, to Professor Sundén. In countless postgraduate seminars, religion was discussed and probed from a psychological perspective. The atmosphere was extremely open-minded, marked by the application of theories drawn from a very wide range of sources. Often the meetings evolved into veritable festivals of learning, as Professor Sundén would throw himself into powerful and inspiring expositions of points from his own research history: question such as Henri Bergson and his relation to Sigmund Freud, literature and philosophy in 19th-century France, the interpretation of passages from the Old Testament and of Jesus' parables, not forgetting, of course, the major figures both from depth psychology and also from mysticism and literature. This was a tremendously rewarding and enjoyable working environment. Nils G. Holm has been a member of this research community since 1973, when he registered as a postgraduate student at Uppsala for the doctor's degree.

Not only was Professor Sundén an excellent academic mentor; he also displayed considerable personal goodwill. In the spring of 1976, during the final year before the doctoral disputation, Holm visited him several times at his home in Bromma, where they together would probe the psychological depths of glossolalia, while Mrs. Sundén created culinary surprises of impressive proportions. Later, Holm often had the opportunity to visit Professor Sundén at his home on Ersta, and to realize that his own culinary

skills were in no way inferior to those of his wife; he would clear a space at on side of the desk for food and drink, and the two of them would reminisce over old times and enjoy the fruits of the table. Indeed, the last time Nils G. Holm saw him was at his home on Ersta, on 9 November 1993, where - after he had first delivered a two hours' lecture on everything essential in psychology of religion - Wikström and Holm took him out to a proper meal at a restaurant, in honour of his impending 85th birthday on 28 November. A few weeks later, he sent a thankyou card. It was to be his last message. The picture on the card was his own photograph, which has been reprinted in his volume.

Psychology of religion owes much to prof Sundén. And, as may be clear, so do many psychologists of religion also personally. Some of these are present in this volume. We like to thank them for their contributions. We have been happy to work on this project to honour the memory of that dynamic professor of the psychology of religion, Hjalmar Sundén. Through his books he will continue to instruct us.

Åbo/Amsterdam 9 November 1994

Nils G. Holm *J. A. Belzen*

René Gothóni

Becoming the Pilgrim to be Interviewed - My Field Research in Retrospect

'Not role-taking, but role re-enacting'

These were the circumstances. I had only just finished proofreading my first volume on Athonite monasticism, and the second, dealing exclusively with pilgrimage, was well on its way. Tired, I finally managed to leave my duties and revisit the Holy Mountain of Athos for what was supposed to be a routine checking of some of my field notes.[1] I had every reason to expect this to be like any other of my previous field trips, which had been annual early-September fortnight-retreats since 1984. This one, however, was to be at Easter, as indeed had been the case in 1988. There was nothing to suggest that anything extraordinary would happen.

While proofreading the chapter on Monasticism and Mythology, I once more read the Athonite interpretation of the Fall, the Unseen Warfare - the spiritual struggle every monk has to endure to attain deification, theosis - and the Psalms of the Divine Liturgy described and analysed in my study.

In his role re-enacting theory,[2] Hjalmar Sundén considers this kind of re-reading to be the conditio sine qua non for experiencing a personal living God. Though familiar with his lines of thought, I did not deliberately think about them then; the proofreading just happened to provide the appropriate preparatory circumstances. Sundén convincingly points out that a religious

experience does not consist of specific feelings. It is rather a matter of perception, the process whereby sensory stimulation is translated into organized or meaningful experience, in other words the intuitive recognition of a 'truth'. This he demonstrates with the concept of role. Taking a role, he states, inevitably involves anticipating a partner, an 'other', in relation to whom the role is played. When, for example, a child pretends to be a seller, he anticipates a customer, and when he changes his role to that of a customer, he anticipates a seller. This duality is, in Sundén's view, an inherent part of any role. It contains specific expectations as to what the 'other' should or will do. Therefore, he argues, role-taking not only implies a readiness to act, but also a standing-by position for perception (Sundén 1956, 152-153; and 1987, 376).

The Biblical tradition provides us with behaviour models and role examples of how pious men/women have had dialogues with God and experienced His presence; roles ready to be identified with and re-enacted. The Psalms have proved to be a particularly good springboard for role re-enacting, an expression I prefer to use instead of Sundén's role-taking. My own field research illustrates that it is not a matter of intentionally adopting or taking a role, but of suddenly finding oneself re-enacting one within a specific interactional system, the human role in relation to the divine Partner, God, as it were (Sundén 1987, 376-377).

The decisive condition required for the role re-enacting to take place is, in Sundén's view, the being-in-need-of situation (1956, 159); in other words a distressful situation involving an unyielding longing and need for a solution - a release of tension! Verbalizing his experiences, Singer wrote: 'Whenever things grow extremely bad and I think that the end is near, something inevitable happens that seems a miracle' (Singer 1981, 16).

In a situation of utmost need, not seldom at the edge of despair, what comes to mind to a person who has patiently dwelled in the religious frame of reference and internalized a religious discourse are the promises God has fulfilled to Biblical persons; that is, roles. Rather than falling into despair or relying on his/her own unconvincing abilities, he/she humbly surrenders

to what, in the light of the religious tradition, has proved to be reliable and trustworthy. The line of thought seems to be: as God saved then, He will also do so now, but we must trust and rely on Him. The promises, no matter how hopeless the situation may seem, are eventually expected to be fulfilled.

These are the role aspects that, in Sundén's view, provide un système aperceptif for the soul to be touched and moved by a personal living God (1956, 169). This happens especially through hearing because, as Martin Luther correctly pointed out, it is by the ear (per auditum) that Christ enters the soul of man. Therefore, by reading the text aloud and by listening to it attentively at the same time, one eventually finds onself placed in the presence of God, coram Deo. 'God is omnipresent', Luther states, and he continues, 'but when he is present to you (personally) it is entirely a different matter.' By that coram Deo experience one becomes totally and unreservedly convinced of the existence of a personal living God, an experience which completely restructures one's way of conceiving the world and one's own position in it. Suddenly everything looks different and there is a 'deeper' purpose in life and in nature (Augustine 1953, I: 1-2. Cf. Sundén 1987, 379).

This is how it happened to me

As soon as I embarked on the Athos ferry with about one hundred other pilgrims, my mood changed. With one book in press and the other practically finished, I was no longer driven by demands to collect data or to accomplish specific field research programmes. On the contrary, I was feeling a great relief simply in being one of them, albeit a foreigner among pious Greek pilgrims. This lack of strain took me by surprise and it gave me exceptional pleasure and satisfaction. I realized then that there was no turning back, not that I had any second thoughts, and now I am glad I did not. I no longer needed to be the participant-observation-programmed

anthropologist, but merely an ordinary human being, a vulnerable anthropos, (who logos) on a pilgrimage with a personal quest, a personal spiritual transformation journey, as it were (Gothóni 1994, 189-195).

During the four days that, as a foreigner, I was allowed to stay on the Holy Mountain and tour its monasteries, I still had to experience the bitter taste of the severe hardship of an austere pilgrimage: walking, fasting, attending prolonged services, getting cold, falling ill, and, eventually, experiencing the blessing of recovery and salvation.

After hours of lonely walking on the narrow winding mountain paths, first in the boiling sun and then in icy rain - because the Easter weather is so unpredictable in northern Greece -, I arrived at the monastery. The guest-master monk immediately showed me to the church where vespers were being celebrated. I stood wet and cold for about three hours, until I was shivering and feeling so stiff that, in order to survive, I went out of the church and walked around it, at first slowly, then faster about half a dozen times to warm myself up. Then back again into the church I went.

After vespers, the guest-master showed me to the room where I was to lodge. It had four beds, the others being occupied by middle-aged Greeks. One of these was snoring loudly, another going time and time again to the toilet or just walking restlessly about. And, as all of us were taking part in the all-night vigils more or less idiorrhythmically, the door creaked all through the night; it was impossible to sleep.

On Good Friday, my third day on the Holy Mountain, when, after a prolonged liturgy, all pilgrims were being given bread, halvah, olives and water, which we had to eat standing up, I was already feeling quite weak. Freezing cold as it was in the refectory and hungry as we were, all of us frantically stuffed our mouths, our hands shaking, with as much bread and halvah as we possibly could, not knowing when we were to be given the next meal, or when the reader, who was reciting from the commentaries of the Fathers while we were eating, would stop reading as a sign that we were to stop eating.

During the late afternoon, all of us rested in our beds. As the Greeks did, so I changed into my pyjamas, and there we were, all of us, lying between the sheets. One was reading the Divine Liturgy, another was deep in sleep, a third was trying to have a conversation with me, while I felt too exhausted and cold to be any inspiring company. It occured to me that it was like a hospital; the white walls, the simple beds, the sandals beneath each bed and the expectant atmosphere - all reminded me of that. It was as if we were waiting for major surgery, which in a way we were - the resurrection of Christ.

This was how, in 1993, we prepared ourselves for the Easter service. At one point my temperature was rising. Luckily, by knowing the guest-master monk well, I managed to get hot tea and raki to warm myself up. I felt somewhat better later in the evening and dragged myself to the Easter service, which some hours before I was afraid would be impossible. Although I do not believe I am a particularly sinful person, perhaps no more than any ordinary man, I was touched and moved by the angelic antiphonic singing of the choirs and especially by the words Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy on me), perpetually repeated until I realized they were my 'own words'. The singing was so beautiful and soothing that tears kept on coming to my eyes. I needed the strength to survive this journey so badly, and even more to be convinced that the personal problem I had been living with in recent years was going to be solved. Perhaps most of all I needed relief from the anguished nagging distress of being the one accused, and the tension that entailed. While my heart cried Kyrie eleison, my soul sensed the deep meaning of these words. Then, whether I had the strength to survive the service or not did not matter at all, as long as I could feel and be convinced of the presence and mercy of God.

The resurrection of Christ was celebrated outside the church, each one of us carrying a candle and singing 'Christ is risen ...' (Christos anesti). When finally, in the early morning hours, I went to bed, all I heard was Kyrie eleison and I could not sleep, because I began to worry how I would be able to walk the next day in my feverish state and with my heavy

rucksack. It was ten kilometres, about five hours, across the mountain to Daphne harbour, from where the ferry was to take me to the mainland.

Next morning, the guest-master monk gave me some tea, an aspirin and two eggs saying, 'Be blessed.' These words had a special meaning for me then; it was as if God himself had answered my cries for mercy, and it was also as if He thereby wanted to comfort me and dismiss my doubts about my return. I knew there was no way I could walk all distance uphill - I was simply too exhausted. Before I left the monastery, the guest-master reminded me: 'Every step on the Holy Mountain is protected by the Blessed Virgin.'

When I reached the road, a pick-up truck came as if from nowhere. The driver offered me a seat in the open beside an Athenian with a bad back and a Cretan with a broken leg. During our one-hour ride through the mountain, in the back of the pick-up, under the open sky, wondering about the sunbeams peeping down from between dark rainy clouds - an àltar-fresco indeed - I felt blessed in my heart; I knew I was going to recover and to be saved from this ordeal. I was so moved that I uttered aloud several times: 'Father, you gave me mercy.' [My line of the dialogue]

When the ferry eventually landed in Ouranoupolis and I took my first steps on the paved jetty, the village looked different, strange and unreal. My worlds were turned around. The Athonite world had become my world and, for a moment, the mundane world seemed the strange place I was to visit. I realized that I had experienced quite a personal relation to God, one I had never had before, and one that moved me thoroughly and made me convinced of the existence of a personal living God. My experience was perhaps not as dramatic as the cases described and analysed by Sundén, but turbulent enough to convince me of the validity of his theory. I had indeed inadvertently found myself in a role situation. My first thought was that I needed to get this experience on paper as soon as possible. And this I did.[3]

* * *

Ten years ago, in 1984, when I first interviewed Athos pilgrims about their experiences, a Greek student of medicine said to me: '... it is impossible for me to translate my thoughts into words, it was the kind of experience you can live, not explain - I found myself there, I returned to my roots as a human being' (Gothóni 1993, 129). Now there was no need for me to ask any more questions. I had first-hand experiences and I had myself become the pilgrim to be interviewed.

By 'becoming the pilgrim to be interviewed' I imply that ...

Field research is a very human endeavour. To study chromosomes and fellow humans is an entirely different enterprise. For the former you need a microscope through which you can observe the chromosomes and register their structure, function and position in the chain. You sit conveniently behind your research instrument and the chromosomes are on plates in front of your lens. The observations are objective and scientific in the sense that they can be checked by scholars who repeat the same study procedure. From this distant detached point of view you are calm, cool and collected. It is only when you begin to speak about your findings that emotion enters the scene, especially if someone objects to your results. Then you defend them as if they were religious doctrines!

In anthropological field research, however, each scholar is his own principal research instrument. To study fellow humans, in my case Athos pilgrims, therefore, implies living as close to them as possible and thereby becoming familiar, also on a personal level, with their mentality - the pilgrims' habit, as it were - and with the religious values, attitudes and norms on which pilgrimage is based. For this kind of research a detached approach will not do. What is needed is courageously to abandon the preprogrammed and detached standpoint, to become involved with and to surrender to the religious frame of reference concerned, and to accept the

possibility that the God pilgrims speak about really might exist (see Turnbull 1992, 273).

The difference between chromosome and pilgrimage studies, then, is that, whereas testing in the former is possible from a detached point of view, in the latter, where the aim is to explain and understand fellow humans, testing the truth requires a temporal involvement, surrendering to the belief system concerned and making that belief system one's own (for the time of the study) - unreserved participation, suspension of disbelief or controlled subjectivity, as it were (see Coleridge 1817, 6 and Turnbull 1992, 273-274).

My path to pilgrimage elucidates how field research involves being in the midst of a psychodynamic triangle, the extreme points of which can be called involvement, detachment and commitment.

Involvement is a precondition for all research. You have to get involved in your subject and its inherent problems, with all the emotional and ethical tensions that meddling in 'other people's' affairs involves. Walking on Mount Athos with other pilgrims, I shared their experiences. It was true involvement to be exhausted by walking, to be welcomed by the guest-master, to be shown to a room together with the other pilgrims, to wash after hours of walking, to rest awhile, to take part in the services in the church, to eat communal meals with the monks, to listen to the pilgrims' experiences, to sleep in the same room with other pilgrims, and to follow the pilgrims' routines on the Holy Mountain.

Detachment, on the other hand, is the sine qua non of all critical research. It involves the human capacity of (temporary) freedom from emotional aspects and feelings of affinity. It implies looking at things from a distance with discernment and sound judgement. In the anthropological study of religion this is done by keeping a diary, collecting verbatim statements, writing down observations and reflections, and by reading books on the subject. In field conditions, diary writing is a form of coping with feelings - in fact therapy. The routine of writing makes you feel at home, provides the familiar in the very heart of the strange. Writing becomes a means of surviving. You have to write your experience out of you. Your

diarist 'I' is at work, the writer or scholar 'I' taking over only after the field research has been done; that is, at your writing desk when you are absorbed in otium litteratum.

Commitment denotes the subjectivity that is the result of emotional involvement. If you are committed, you will have a vested interest in the matter whether you admit it or not, and that is a serious hindrance to critical and balanced research.

Therefore, the first thing you need to do is to get involved in your subject, but then commit yourself only to sincere, simple and sensitive seeking for truth. From time to time you will need to detach yourself from your involvement to get an 'objective' or rather, an intersubjective, view of what you have studied. This means that you must dangle between involvement and detachment, constantly taking care not to fall into the trap of commitment. What you really need is sound and clear discernment to record and scrutinize the pilgrimage process, or as Horace put it: 'I am not bound to swear allegiance to any master, wherever the wind takes me I travel as a visitor'(Epistels bk. I, no 1. 1.14)

To avoid any misunderstandings, I must stress that the issue here is not and never can be whether, in general terms or ultimately, God exists or not. It is only the fact that, under given conditions, man experiences the presence of a personal living God within the Judeo-Christian-Islamic worldview, or religious frame of reference as Sundén prefers to call it. This I know, not only from interviewing other pilgrims, but also from personal experience. The point then is that, apart from a so-called scientific truth, there is what I would prefer to call an existential truth.[4] This is not the same as a subjective truth but, for the sake of avoiding dwelling on misleading trivial lines of thought, it may be conceived of as a truth that, under given conditions - in this case within the framework of the Orthodox belief system - is intersubjective and even vital for human existence. It has in fact proved to be so vital that many wars have been fought because of it, and millions of people have been killed because they have been considered infidels. What is even more real is that even today millions of

people are prepared to die - and what is worse even to kill - for their beliefs. This shows how powerful the existential truth is - recall Luther's statement 'but when God is present to you it is entirely a different matter' - and therefore to get an insight into the dynamics within the soul of man may one day prove to be of crucial importance for the survival of mankind.

God surely exists for the person who so believes, and that fact is as vital as any scientific truth can ever be. For the believer it is a personally experienced empirical truth, vital for his existence. It gives life its meaning and direction, in other words its generative drive and goal.

By inadvertently becoming the pilgrim to be interviewed, I realized that surrendering meant having a dialogue within a specific discourse. Discourse (L. discursus) literally means running to and fro, hence conversation (around a topic); this implies all the connected expressions, statements and concepts. One example is moral, scientific or religious discourse. In a narrow sense, we may speak about Christian, Muslim or Buddhist discourse, and even more specifically of Greek Orthodox, Shia or Theravada discourse. The basic line of thought here is that our relation to reality is always expressed through discourse, and that the discourse concerned dictates our sense of reality to the extent that we are ensnared by it. Lack of understanding, or misunderstanding, accordingly is the result when, in our communication with other people, we are in different discourses or, to put it in everyday terms when we are not on the same wavelength because of different frames of reference. May the concept of pilgrim elucidate this point.

The concept of 'pilgrim' in a comparative perspective

The Latin word for 'pilgrim', peregrinus, connotes the aspect of travelling, the journey. This is natural, since the journey to Jerusalem was long and demanding. From the lexicon we know that peregrinus principally refers to one who is walking (in an alien land; from peregre 'abroad', from perger

'being abroad', from per 'through' and agr-, ager 'land', 'field'). Originally peregrinus meant a foreigner who lived outside the territory of Rome (ager Romanus), and travelled or walked around. It was synonymous with traveller or wayfarer, someone who passes through life as if in exile from a heavenly homeland, or in search of some higher goal, such as truth. A pilgrimage, then, simply means the 'journey of a pilgrim', especially a journey to a shrine or sacred place. Its wider meaning is the course of life on earth.

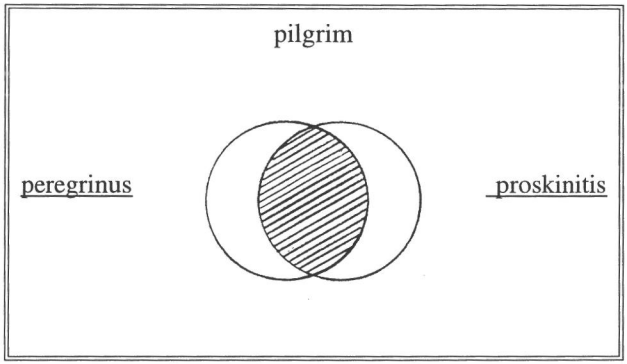
The Greek word for pilgrim, proskinitis, however, meaning 'worshipper', from the verb proskino, 'to fall down and worship', 'to do obeisance to the gods or their images', 'to avert divine wrath', has an entirely different connotation. Greeks go to shrines and sacred places to kiss the icons, to venerate the relics, to make confession and to discuss personal matters with their spiritual fathers. As shrines were everywhere, the Greeks never had much interest in travelling to Jerusalem.

From the lexical meanings, then, we know that peregrinus principally refers to one who is walking (in an alien land), whereas proskinitis denotes one who kneels down, for example, in front of an icon.

When the connotations of these two words are compared, it seems as if peregrinus is more closely connected with the New Testament and the practice of identifying oneself with Christ, re-enacting his Passion and thereby purifying oneself; that is, imitatio Christi. Proskinitis, on the other hand, is more closely connected with the Old Testament and the reliving of the Fall, with the recitation of the Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy on me a sinner) being the manifest sign of the renewed relationship between Lord and humble servant.

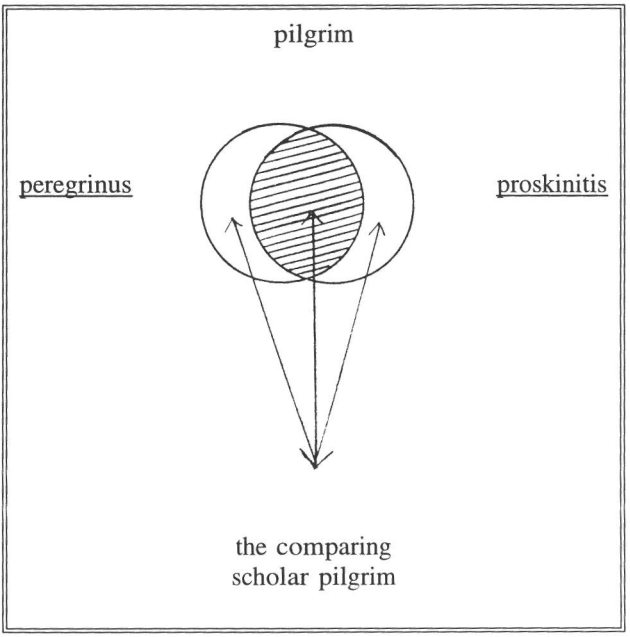
Both the Latin and the Greek words, however, are translated into English as pilgrim. This, as depicted in figure 1, indicates that, although both words have quite specific separate connotations, they have something in common and they partly overlap.

Fig. 1 The synonymity area of peregrinus and proskinitis



Now, when we ask what it implies on a personal or existential level to be a pilgrim on Mount Athos, 'to walk' and 'to kneel down' do not satisfy us, and the answer cannot in fact be found in the lexicon. We need to interview pilgrims and to ask what the journey meant to them; by unexpectedly becoming pilgrims ourselves, as a by-product of participant observation, we also need to ask what it means to us. The scholar's awareness is thus moving towards the pilgrim's. When they coincide, the scholar has become the pilgrim to be interviewed, in other words he now has personal insight into what pilgrimage is all about and he has himself become the case to be studied. As well as his field notes he also has the notes in his head (Sanjek 1990, 144ff.). These lines of thought are depicted in figure 2 by arrows indicating the comparative approach of the scholar pilgrim dangling between involvement and detachment.

Fig. 2 The synonymity area of peregrinus and proskinitis in a field perspective



The distinction between the field researcher speaking as a scholar and the field researcher speaking, in this case, as a pilgrim, is fundamental in analysing the field research process of becoming the pilgrim to be interviewed.[5] I would like to suggest the concept 'living the part' to designate the process and technique whereby the field researcher intentionally tries to adopt the 'internal frame of reference' of, in this case, the Athos pilgrim without losing his own identity.[6] In this process there are two phases of participant observation: imitative preparation, involving intentionally living the part, and perceptive[7] culmination, an unexpected

peak experience, during which the distinction between self and other is temporarily dissolved and, to one's own surprise, one becomes 'the part', the pilgrim to be studied. One feels touched and moved by God, irrespective of whether, in general terms, God exists or not. This process is more or less unexpected and inevitable, the more so the more power the scholar has to live the part of the pilgrim. The by-product of this surprising experience is an insightful empirical understanding of, in this case, the word proskinitis, an understanding different and more substantial than the one obtained from the lexicon. Therefore it is relevant to distinguish between the lexical and the empirical meaning of the word proskinitis.

Eventually, the comparative approach of the scholar-pilgrim presupposes looking at the Athos pilgrims first from the proskinitis point of view, then from the peregrinus point of view, and finally withdrawing to the point of detachment in order to compare and scrutinize the similarities and the differences of the viewpoints and connotations with reference to one's own field experiences. This is how, as a by-product of participant observation, one reaches a personally witnessed or first-hand experiential and yet intersubjective understanding of what I have here called the insightful or empirical meaning of the word proskinitis, in other words, the religious experience and phenomenon the word proskinitis is, by ordinary Greek pilgrims, used to denote.

Summa summarum

Sundéns role re-enacting theory proved to be indispensable in interpreting my 'becoming the pilgrim to be interviewed' or, to paraphrase Holm, my finding myself enacting the 'inner existence space' of a Greek pilgrim. By perceiving the empirical meaning of what the word stands for under my own skin in reference to Sundén's theoretical discussion, I sensed and, so I would like to believe, realized the spirituality embraced in the word proskinitis. The kissing of the icons, the veneration of the relics, the

kneeling down before the abbot (hegoumenos) and the praying for the Lord's mercy (Kyrie eleison) are only the outward manifestations of a profoundly humble attitude in front of the sacred and in front of 'our Lord'. These acts mirror the opening up of our hearts in front of God, and the praying for mercy and for grace to enter one's soul, the aim of which is communion with God and deification, theosis.

Peregrinus, on the other hand, denotes that, by walking and suffering, one pays off the reward there is to be attained; in other words one justifies the reward. This manifests itself, for example, in pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela. A peregrinus who has done this pilgrimage on foot is entitled to a shell tattood on his arm as a sign of having completed a true pilgrimage, of having, in some sense, earned the grace. The key concept then is the Latin word justificare, which is also reflected in the theology of peregrinus.

The spirituality of a proskinitis rests on the belief that, by oneself, one cannot be saved. Therefore, one becomes humble. It is not the walking that is of major importance to the Greeks, other than perhaps that by exhausting oneself the opening up of one's heart becomes easier as one experiences one's smallness in front of relentless nature - the boiling heat and the icy rain. It is the perception of transformation from one level of spirituality to another, to a more profound and lasting spirituality that attracts the Athonite pilgrims, Greeks and foreigners alike, to annual or recurrent journeys to the Holy Mountain of Athos.

Notes

1 For my studies on Athonite monasticism and pilgrimage, see Gothóni 1993 and 1994.

2 Sundén has written extensively on his role theory, but the best of his many presentations still remains the first essay he ever wrote on the subject, Sundén 1956: 150-175. For an English presentation of the theory, see Sundén 1987 and the discussion in the Journal for the Scientific Study of

Religion 3/1987. I have here renamed the role theory the role re-enacting theory because, as Sundén himself clearly states, it is not a matter of intentional role-taking, but of unexpectedly finding oneself enacting the human part in relation to the divine partner, God. It is a re-enactment, because the Biblical tradition provides us with the behaviour models and roles, which we then surprisingly find ourselves re-enacting.

3 This description is a revised extract from my Field Diary 1993.

4 For an analogical distinction between scientific validity and existential validity, see Biezais 1979: XXIII-XXVIII.

5 For an analogical distinction between Dante as a pilgrim and Dante as an author, see Fergusson 1953: 9-10 and Lagercrantz 1964: 239-240.

6 For analogous lines of thought, see Lipps's concept Einfühlung, Lipps 1903 and 1905 and Anschütz 1915.

7 I use the concept 'perceptive' here in Sundén's sense of the term.

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