

Religiosity in Ecclesial and Non-Ecclesial Funeral Rites

Exploring Whitehouse's Modes of Religiosity

Brenda Mathijssen

1. Introduction

The Dutch religious landscape has been changing drastically over the past few decades. Escalating pluralism, fuelled by immigration and individualization, has led to a diversity of religious practices and beliefs as well as freedom to choose among them.¹ Secularization seems to be rife in Dutch society, and as a result personal and collective identities are no longer self-evident. Cultural memory, a fixed element of our identity, is transforming and, as part of it, so is its religious component. Church membership, traditional Christian belief and, although to a lesser extent, belief in the supernatural are declining.² At present 51 percent of the Dutch population considers itself religious or spiritual and only 25 percent belongs to a church or religious institution.³ People who break away from the church or were not raised in it identify only partially with its teachings. Ecclesial rites are often no longer practiced and lived, but are merely reflected on and understood – if at all – from an outsider's point of view. Does it mean that we are no longer religious? The question is not easy to answer, as religiosity is complex and does not simply refer to institutional religious affiliation. The goal of this article is to explore the characteristics of religiosity in the Dutch ecclesial and non-ecclesial ritual field. In 2002 only 56 percent of funerals in the Netherlands were held in church and, even though this percentage is still dropping, there is a great need for ritual in these transitional periods in life.⁴ Although ritual is not necessarily confined to a religious environment, it often points to

¹ A. FELLING, J. PETERS & P. SCHEEPERS: *Individualisering in Nederland aan het einde van de twintigste eeuw. Empirisch onderzoek naar een omstreden hypothese* (Assen 2000) 33-34.

² T. BERNTS, G. DEKKER & J. DE HART: *God in Nederland 1996-2006* (Kampen 2007) 16-18; N. DE GRAAF & M. TE GROTENHUIS: 'Traditional Christian belief and belief in the supernatural: diverging trends in the Netherlands between 1979-2005?', in *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 47/4 (2008) 591.

³ P. NISSEN: 'The holistic revolution: contemporary transformations of religiosity in the Netherlands', in M. KALSKY & P. NISSEN (eds.): *A glance in the mirror. Dutch and Polish religious cultures* (Münster 2012) 25-26.

⁴ J. BECKER & J. DE HART: *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland. Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie* (Den Haag 2006) 17; J. DE HART: *Zwerende gelovigen. Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit* (Amsterdam 2011) 319.

the vital existence of religion.⁵ We ask ourselves whether people still experience transitional moments in life in terms of religiosity, and if so, what kinds of religiosity are involved.

We consider both ecclesial and non-ecclesial funeral ritual to gain insight into religiosity, for we argue that both types of rites display religious features. In the context of death religiosity becomes relevant and its relation with death is revealing, 'for in the face of death humans have long expressed what we value most and what we believe to be the nature of reality and the meaning of human life'.⁶ Religiosity plays a role in rites of passage, as we are unable to reflect on our lives without referring to cultural memory that has grown cumulatively over generations.⁷ To rise above the finality of death people express 'patterns of transcendence in the performance of death ritual in relation to the process of dying and the reality of death', drawing on their cultural memory.⁸ Here ritual is seen as a vehicle of religiosity to express and convey people's beliefs. When touched by the death of a loved one religious ideas and transcendental patterns are shaped by ritual practices, while at the same time religious identity is expressed and conveyed in ritual enactment of beliefs.⁹ As a result funeral rites enable us to explore substantial elements of participants' religious perceptions and behavior.

In view of the communication of religiosity in ritual we apply the idea of religious transmission in Harvey Whitehouse's cognitive theory of modes of religiosity. This theory enables us to identify characteristics of religiosity in funeral rites and, drawing on human cognition, to understand whether and how people's religiosity has been transformed. However, exploring elements of religiosity raises the problem of defining religion. Definitions often fail to clarify religion as experienced by individuals.¹⁰ Hence we prefer to take individual religiosity

⁵ J-P. WILS: 'Uitvaartrituelen op drift. Een fundamentele reflectie', in E. VENBRUX, S. BOLT & M. HEESSELS: *Rituele creativiteit. Actuele veranderingen in de uitvaart- en rouwcultuur in Nederland* (Zoetermeer 2008) 121-134.

⁶ K. GARCES-FOLEY (ed.): *Death and religion in a changing world* (New York 2006) ix; H. KNOBLAUCH: *Populäre Religion. Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 2009) 262.

⁷ J. ASSMANN: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München 1992) 50-53; R. BOYD & P. RICHERSON: 'Memes: universal acid or a better mousetrap?' in R. AUNGER: *Darwinizing culture: the status of memetics as a science* (Oxford 2000) 150-152; M. HEIDEGGER: *Being and time* (Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson) (Oxford 1962).

⁸ D. CHIDESTER: *Patterns of transcendence. Religion, death, and dying* (Belmont 2002) x.

⁹ E. SCHILLEBEECKX: 'Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten. Ritualisering van religieuze momenten in het alledaagse leven', in *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 40 (2000) 165.

¹⁰ A. TAVES: *Religious experience reconsidered. A building-block approach to the study of religion and other special things* (Princeton 2009) 24; M. MCGUIRE: *Lived religion. Faith and practice in everyday life* (Oxford 2008) 24-25.

ity as a starting point rather than institutionalized religion. Following Whitehouse, we define religion as 'any set of shared beliefs and actions appealing to supernatural agency'.¹¹ It is these beliefs and practices, not necessarily tied to institutions, that provide opportunities to explore people's religiosity. Whitehouse explains how religions are created, reproduced and transformed by examining the cognitive bases of religious phenomena. He finds that religious systems tend to move to two attractor positions: the imagistic and the doctrinal mode. Ritual actions that develop into the imagistic mode are characterized as high arousal, low frequency experiences, stimulating personal reflection and diverse religious representations, while inhibiting orthodoxy and authority. The doctrinal mode, by contrast, is marked by high transmissive frequency, low arousal, hierarchic leadership, abstract knowledge, centralization, orthodoxy and authority. When these attractor positions become less evident, basic modes emerge that are simpler, more spontaneous and natural.¹²

Do funeral rites display doctrinal and imagistic characteristics of religiosity? And if so, what tendencies are discernible? One might expect ecclesial funeral rites to incorporate more elements of the doctrinal mode than imagistic tendencies, whereas in non-ecclesial funeral rites imagistic elements will predominate. But is that not simplistic? Both types of funeral rites are linked to cultural memory, seeking stability and routinization.¹³ Besides, personal symbols that evoke emotional arousal and personal reflection may occur in both types.¹⁴ Hence our hypothesis is that both ecclesial and non-ecclesial practices are situated in the field of modes of religiosity, governed by the imagistic and doctrinal poles identified by Whitehouse. We suggest that both types of funeral rites encompass elements of the two attractor positions.

In this paper we first discuss Whitehouse's modes theory (2) in order to operationalize his theory in the Dutch context (3). We delve further into our concrete case, exploring ritual experts' experiences and opinions on the matter.¹⁵ Their experiences and opinions are explored at three levels: the role of ritual participants (4), their role as ritual experts (5), and the ritual performance (6). Integrating these three elements with the field of modes affords insight into the transformation of characteristics of religiosity in contemporary funeral practices. We explore each level theoretically and illustrate it with practical impressions from our fieldwork. Finally, the paper ends with some concluding remarks (7).

¹¹ H. WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity. A cognitive theory of religious transmission* (Oxford 2004) 2.

¹² WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 17, 65-75.

¹³ ASSMANN: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* 16-17.

¹⁴ T. QUARTIER: 'Personal symbols in Roman Catholic funerals in the Netherlands', in *Mortality* 14/2 (2009) 134.

¹⁵ We regard our respondents as ritual experts because they are religious and ritual specialists or trained (pastoral) volunteers. They preside at funerals professionally on a regular basis.

2. Whitehouse's theory of modes of religiosity

The cognitive theory of the British anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse offers unique insight into religiosity in funeral rites. Focusing on the creation, reproduction and transformation of religious phenomena, his theory combines historical and ethnographic data with cognitive or psychological data. By sketching two modes of religiosity – the imagistic and the doctrinal – he looks into the development of religious systems, seeking ‘only to explain certain aspects of social morphologies in religious traditions in terms of a set of underlying patterns of cognitive processing and cultural transmission’.¹⁶ Whitehouse does not enumerate characteristics of religiosity or religious life. Instead, on the basis of his ethnographic fieldwork and the dichotomous models of earlier theorists, he sketches two attractor positions towards which religious systems evolve over time.¹⁷ Combining features of divergence in religious experience, he identifies sets of ritual dynamics that commonly cluster around two attractor positions. The attractor positions can be seen as two poles of religious practice, each with its own characteristics, but displaying a recurring pattern of interaction.¹⁸ In every set of beliefs and practices we find a tendency to move towards and interact with the attractor positions.

First, ritual actions can develop into the imagistic mode. Actions in this cluster are characterized as high arousal, infrequent experiences. They involve intense sensory ritual images and acts, and their dynamics activates episodic memory, triggering vivid, flashbulb memories among ritual participants. These ritual actions are viewed as highly emotional events in which multivocal, multivalent meaning is internally generated, also because of a lack of authority and orthodoxy. Second, ritual actions can evolve in the opposite direction, the doctrinal mode. These actions are marked by high transmissive frequency and lower arousal. Transmission of complex religious representations is triggered by repetition, reinforced by hierarchic, dynamic leadership, orthodoxy and authorization. As a result there is not much room for personal inspiration and partici-

¹⁶ W. PADEN: ‘Comparative religion and the Whitehouse project: connections and compatibilities?’, in *Method and theory in the study of religion* 16 (2004) 264.

¹⁷ Examples are theorists such as Max Weber, who distinguishes between routinized and charismatic forms; Roy Rappaport, who explores the numinous and sacral components of the holy; and Victor Turner, who distinguishes between *communitas* and structure. R. RAPPAPORT: *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (Cambridge 1999); V. TURNER: *The ritual process. Structure and anti-structure* (second imprint 2008) (New Brunswick / London 1969); M. WEBER: *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (published online Taylor & Francis 2005) (London / New York 1930).

¹⁸ T. VIAL: ‘The rubber meets the road: the cognitive science of religion and historical ritualized practices’, in *Method and theory in the study of religion* 16 (2004) 293; J. VAN SLYKE: *The cognitive science of religion* (Farnham 2011) 193.

pation in ritual is based on abstract knowledge encoded in semantic memory.¹⁹ In our study we create a framework, in which we use characteristics of Whitehouse's clusters of ritual dynamics of the modes to interpret our field data.

The theory of modes of religiosity is based on four principles that are fundamental to patterns and transformations of religiosity.²⁰ These principles, and the ideas derived from them, reveal the significance of this theory for our research and provide a matrix for the two modes. First, Whitehouse argues that religious phenomena are materially constrained and some of these constraints derive from human cognition. Phenomena such as cosmology, rituals and exegesis are limited to what we can recall, process and encode through our mental activity. Secondly, religious phenomena are selected. Human methods of processing information favor particular kinds of cultural concepts, so that some representations are easier to evoke than others.²¹ Third, the selection of religious phenomena is context dependent. The development and retention of religious knowledge is heavily dependent on – that is, both reinforced and restricted by – memory and prior learning relating to present conditions. Finally, Whitehouse assumes that religious transmission is partly motivated by explicit religious concepts. Although one could argue that explicit knowledge often consists of post hoc rationalizations of unconscious behavior, people do act consciously in certain contexts. Moreover, such knowledge is not wholly irrelevant because of its explicit nature. Whitehouse argues that in the domain of ritual action people make use of explicit knowledge, as they act counter to conventional ideas and urges.

This fourfold basis leads to a distinction between cognitively optimal and cognitively costly religion in Whitehouse's theory, both of which relate to the doctrinal and imagistic modes around which religious traditions tend to coalesce. Regarding cognitively optimal religion, Whitehouse cites Pascal Boyer, explaining that concepts that minimally violate intuitive ontological knowledge – that is concepts that dismantle a specific intuitive expectation or borrow features from another intuitive ontological domain of knowledge – are more noticeable and memorable than unambiguous, intuitive concepts and concepts that are merely strange.²² Minimal counterintuitive concepts, especially concerning agency, are both remarkable and recognizable, easily transmitted and occur quite naturally in all humans. They are visible in traditions that embody features

¹⁹ H. WHITEHOUSE: *Arguments and icons: divergent modes of religiosity* (Oxford 2000); IDEM: *Modes of religiosity*; IDEM: 'Modes of religiosity and the cognitive science of religion', in *Method and theory in the study of religion* 16 (2004) 325-335.

²⁰ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 15-27.

²¹ J. BARRET: 'Exploring the natural foundations of religion', in *Trends in cognitive sciences* 4 (2000) 29-34.

²² WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 29-47. P. BOYER: *Godsdienst verklaard. De oorsprong van ons godsdienstig denken* (Amsterdam 2002) 87-120 (translation of *Religion explained. The evolutionary origins of religious thought* (New York 2001)).

of modes, but when doctrinal authorities and ritual experts recede they become prominent and may be all that remains. Hence they are fundamental to individual beliefs. However, when they become more prominent it sets the stage for activities of reform to reinstate a doctrinal authority, re-evolving into the spectrum of modes.²³ One wonders whether basic modes with cognitively optimal concepts become more apparent with the decline of institutionalized religion.

Cognitively costly religion, on the other hand, deals with the transmission of more complex, 'unnatural' religious phenomena that require cognitive maintenance by way of study, time and discipline. Phenomena in both doctrinal and imagistic traditions are of a cognitively costly nature, although, as noted already, cognitively optimal concepts occur as well. An example that relates to funeral rites may illustrate the difference between these categories. The belief in an afterlife can be seen as cognitively optimal, for we export the existence of mental states to another domain of ontological knowledge: death. As Jesse Bering points out, we believe in life after death because we are unable to assume the elimination of mental states.²⁴ When it comes to death we also find more complex beliefs relating to Jesus Christ. Not only mental but also biological states are ascribed to him after death. After being resurrected Jesus greeted the women who visited his grave and they clasped his feet (cf. Matthew 28, 9). In addition Christ was assigned many attributes in Christian theology and tradition. The many counterintuitive concepts assigned to him make it a cognitively costly belief. Whitehouse makes a distinction between representations that are regarded as fictional (e.g. fairies), simple religious representations (e.g. ghosts) and complex religious representations (e.g. gods). The first two are located around the cognitively optimal position, easily recallable and transmittable, whereas the third form makes heavier demands on human memory. More complex religious phenomena are more context dependent, but we do find a global distinction between complex religious concepts that are not cognitively appealing but highly valued on the one hand, and simpler, less esteemed, minimally counterintuitive representations on the other.²⁵ The interaction between costly and optimal religious concepts plays a crucial role in doctrinal-imagistic processes, enabling the religious system to transform and survive.²⁶

The theory of the modes of religiosity is appealing for our research, as it shows the importance of both implicit processing and bodies of explicit knowledge. This combination can deepen our understanding of religiosity. Highly valued and complex religious representations are preserved and transmitted through bodies of explicit knowledge, which are created and maintained by institutionalized religious groups, for example by way of organized weekly or

²³ WHITEHOUSE: 'Modes of religiosity and the cognitive science of religion' 328.

²⁴ J. BERING: 'The cognitive psychology of belief in the supernatural: a by-product of the ability to reason about the minds of others may offer evolutionary advantage', in *American scientist* 94/2 (2006) 142.

²⁵ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 49-58.

²⁶ WHITEHOUSE: 'Modes of religiosity and the cognitive science of religion' 328.

monthly meetings. However, the Dutch religious landscape has changed greatly and ritual demonstrates these transformations and embodies the two attractor positions.²⁷ Traditional funeral rites vividly exemplified doctrinal characteristics. Today these are less in evidence. By applying the modes theory to ritual practice in the Netherlands we are able to position death rites in the field of the two modes, moreover illustrating interacting doctrinal, imagistic and counterintuitive features of religiosity in our concrete cases. Also, this theory enables us to explore what happens to complex religious concepts and acts in a situation of declining institutionalized religious groups. Are these representations still transmitted? And do concepts maintain their complexity and 'high value', or do minimally counterintuitive concepts dominate contemporary ritual practice?

3. Ritual participant, ritual expert and performance in the field of modes

To determine the position of contemporary funeral rites in the field of modes we integrate religious concepts about funeral liturgies with Whitehouse's framework of modes of religiosity. Although he explains that characteristics of the modes are closely interwoven and none is more important than any other, we open up his conceptual framework. After all, it is not our aim to test the characteristics of modes theory, but to apply it to gain insight into the religiosity of people in contemporary funeral rites.

In a study of personal symbols that characterize the deceased in Roman Catholic funerals in the Netherlands Thomas Quartier explains that the symbol's function in funeral rites is 'to unify the "worlds" of the participants, the deceased and the religious in one and the same form'.²⁸ His explanation highlights the importance of the connectedness between actors and actions. By definition actors are acting persons and as such they inevitably perform actions. Actors fulfill different roles in the performance of funeral rites and each role entails its own actions and distinguishable position.²⁹ Consequently we incorporate this relationship into our model. Exploring categories of actors and actions that play an important role in funeral rites leads us to three key categories that constitute important, necessary components of death rites: the ritual participant, the ritual expert, and the performance itself.

In the second place we ask ourselves how we can incorporate these three concepts into Whitehouse's framework of modes. Looking for characteristics

²⁷ Q. ATKINSON & H. WHITEHOUSE: 'The cultural morphospace of ritual form. Examining modes of religiosity cross-culturally', in *Evolution and human behaviour* 32 (2011) 50-62.

²⁸ T. QUARTIER: 'Personal symbols in Roman Catholic funerals in the Netherlands' 141.

²⁹ C. VENHORST: *Muslims ritualising death in the Netherlands. Death rites in a small town context* (Münster 2013) 37.

of actions and actors to create a model which positions funeral rites in the field of modes of religiosity, we identify six key terms: leadership and orthodoxy, religious representations and ritual meaning, and transmission and expressivity. As we have shown, Whitehouse's field of modes is characterized by two attractor positions: the imagistic and the doctrinal pole. The key concepts are operationalized and situated in the modes field by assigning them an imagistic pole and a doctrinal pole.

	<i>Imagistic mode</i>	<i>Doctrinal mode</i>
<i>Ritual Participant</i>	Diverse religious representations	Centralised religious representations
	Creative ritual meaning	Traditional ritual meaning
<i>Ritual Expert</i>	Dynamic leadership	Static leadership
	Non-orthodox	Orthodox
<i>Performance</i>	Inductive transmission	Deductive transmission
	Active expressivity	Passive expressivity

Table 1: Integration of religious concepts relating to funeral liturgies with Whitehouse's framework

Having outlined our framework, we now move to a theoretical and practical exploration of the three levels: ritual participant, ritual expert and performance. We compiled a list of codes that are operationalizations of the key concepts [Table 1], which we used to analyze the data gathered from experts.³⁰ We discuss the key concepts in our theoretical framework and show how we inferred them from Whitehouse's theory. Then we apply our theoretical exploration to impressions from our fieldwork.

4. Ritual participant

Ritual participants are important for the transmission of religiosity, since people are the vehicles of religion. Religious beliefs and ideas are transmitted to and through them. We position participants in the field of modes by exploring two characteristics: ritual meaning and religious representations. We are interested in participants' lived experiences and beliefs, and we gain access to these via the opinions and experiences of ritual experts.

³⁰ In 2012 we conducted 16 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with ritual experts in the Arnhem-Nijmegen region in the Netherlands. Eight were ritual coaches conducting non-ecclesial funerals and eight were pastors. Four of the pastors were affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and four to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. H. BERNARD: *Research methods in anthropology* 208ff.

4.1. Ritual meaning

How can Whitehouse's theory help us to explore ritual meaning among participants in funeral rites? Whitehouse makes a distinction between learnt or acquired ritual meaning in the doctrinal mode, and internally generated meaning in the imagistic mode. He maintains that knowledge about religious narratives and beliefs is stored in semantic memory through frequent performances of ritual. On-going routinization means that people experience these rituals implicitly, no longer explicitly reflecting on them, thus constituting learnt meaning. Concerning the imagistic mode, he explains that rarely performed acts trigger very detailed episodic memories. Participants remember the ritual occasion vividly, not just the doctrines or stories; instead they are stimulated to reflect personally on the meaning of ritual acts.³¹ Whitehouse thus focuses primarily on the transmission of ritual meaning, but as we are concerned with ritual meaning itself rather than with how it is generated, we adjust Whitehouse's concept. As mentioned in our introduction, ritual creativity is on the increase in Dutch society. Funeral rites are no longer entirely standardized but commonly address relatives and the deceased.³² Besides the visible individual creativity, ritual patterns are discernible in performances associated with death.³³ A longing for communicative memory (connectedness with the group) as well as a desire for cultural memory (connectedness with a mythical dimension in time) is evident among ritual participants.³⁴ According to ecclesial and non-ecclesial experts that we interviewed this is manifested as a yearning for both personal and traditional elements. We argue that the processes of both internally generated meaning and learnt meaning are evident in the orientation of ritual acts. Hence we study these two types of meaning in the orientation of rites by looking at creativity at the imagistic pole and traditional features in the doctrinal cluster. We ask how creative and traditional meaning relate, and whether meaning in non-ecclesial funerals is more creative than traditional meaning in ecclesial funerals.

The interviewed ritual experts explained that participants are occupied with both creative and traditional meaning. Moreover, both types of meaning are to be found in individual funeral rites. Among participants ritual experts encountered traditional beliefs in life and the afterlife, for instance general notions of the continued existence of the 'soul', but also specific ideas such as reincarnation and resurrection. Ritual patterns are discernible across the spectrum of our experts' funeral rites in the form of centralized beliefs exemplified in them.

³¹ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 65-75.

³² L. VAN TONGEREN: 'Individualizing ritual. The personal dimension in funeral liturgy', in *Worship* 78/2 (2004) 117-138.

³³ E. VENBRUX, J. PEELEN & M. ALTENA: 'Going Dutch: individualisation, secularisation and changes in death rites', in *Mortality* 14/2 (2009) 97-101.

³⁴ ASSMANN: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* 16-17; T. QUARTIER: *Bridging the gaps. An empirical study of Catholic funeral rites* (Zürich 2007) 40-42.

Both pastors and ritual coaches, for example, noted participants' desire for the symbol of water in the funeral rite, sometimes conveying the relatives' desire for eternal life, at other times because of the families' familiarity with this particular symbol. This relation between symbol and meaning became clear in the interviews, because the experts explained the exegetical meaning of the symbol for participants as well as the meaning of symbols for themselves.³⁵ Creative meaning is also found, for example in the use of personal symbols that characterize the deceased. One ritual coach gave us an exegetical account of the meaning of stones for a particular family. They always brought back stones from their holidays, which were used in the ceremony and later placed in their garden where 'new' water flowed over them. In that way the stones became a personal symbol referring to both new life and the deceased. This not only becomes clear in the family's explanation of the preparation of the funeral, but also when we explore how the symbol is used. The operational meaning reveals the continuing flow of water, which signifies the continuance of life.³⁶ Pastors likewise cite various examples of personal symbols, such as balloons, mobiles and pottery.

We might wonder whether the ritual meaning conveyed by personal symbols is truly creative, or whether they only express meaning in a creative form, which, of course, is not a creation *ex nihilo*.³⁷ Our field data suggest that general concepts underlie both traditional and creative accounts of meaning. Individual images, closely related to the deceased's life and therefore mostly recognizable to the in-group at the funeral, are widespread and often refer to traditional beliefs. This corresponds with the cognitively optimal nature of certain concepts, of which the most outstanding instance in the interviews is the belief in an afterlife. However, we do find creative meaning and interaction between traditional and creative meaning. Traditional cultural images and symbols such as water, flowers and light are commonly invoked, expressing both traditional and personal belief regarding the deceased and the relatives themselves. In the majority of cases that the ritual experts discussed traditional meaning relates creatively to the family and the deceased. One of the pastors told us about a woman who did embroidery, showing how the cognitively optimal belief in the afterlife is related specifically to grandma and has creative meaning as well.³⁸

Her oldest grandchild then stitched a little cross in grandma's embroidery with the idea of: 'Well grandma, I am sure that wherever you are, and I do not know where that might be, your embroidery will be finished one day.' That is something that people find supportive, the idea that her life is not finished yet, it goes on.

³⁵ V. TURNER: 'Symbols in African ritual', in *Science* 179 (1973) 1103.

³⁶ TURNER: 'Symbols in African ritual'.

³⁷ R. GRIMES: *Deeply into the bone. Re-inventing rites of passage* (Berkeley 2000) 4.

³⁸ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, April 2012. Our translation.

Our two types of meaning are also found in the orientation of rites, although not closely interrelated. One of the ritual coaches told me how she brought stones with her when she went to discuss a father's funeral with his three sons. She asked each of them to pick a stone and tell their wishes and a story around it. 'They immediately understood and did not have to think about it,' she explained.³⁹ The meaning was grasped instantly, personally reflected on by the sons. Here one observes an emphasis on characteristics of the imagistic cluster: internally generated meaning relating to the actual person, so that the unconventional context triggers spontaneous reflection. Emphasis on traditional meaning, signifying doctrinal elements, is also found. Some pastors told us about participants' wishes to just celebrate God in the ceremony, to express traditional belief. A similar trend is visible among some non-ecclesial participants. They ask for a religious ceremony centering on belief in God, expressed through traditional, standardized rites such as prayer and blessing. Here complex, cognitively costly religious concepts are apparent, which points to ongoing transmission of these concepts or their storage in semantic memory through past routinization. Impressions from our fieldwork, then, suggest that traditional beliefs are common to both ecclesial and non-ecclesial funeral rites, often creatively adjusted and expressed, resulting in an interaction of creative and traditional meaning. In addition we found cases emphasizing either imagistic or doctrinal dynamics.

4.2. Religious representations

In the second place, we position ritual participants in the field of modes by asking what religious representations they employ. Representations are closely related to ritual meaning, as noted in the preceding section, but they also concern structure, which is our next focus. Not only do representations possess structure; they also lead to social cohesion, transform individuals' experience and structure the funeral itself.⁴⁰ Ritual acts and meaning are associated with religious representations, affording insight into participants' religiosity. Whitehouse mentions representations when he explores techniques of revelation and agreement on religious teachings. At the doctrinal pole there is agreement on religious teachings, which fixes teachings in people's minds. This results in uniform images. In the imagistic mode representations acquire meanings personally ascribed to them, leading to multivocal, multivalent interpretations of religious images.⁴¹ We look at the religious representations in ritual participants' wishes and performances. Are representations diverse, situated in the imagistic mode, or centralized, clustered at the doctrinal pole? We also examine how representations are used to actualize and organize the ceremony.

³⁹ Ritual coach, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

⁴⁰ T. QUARTIER: *Die Grenze des Todes. Ritualisierte Religiosität im Umgang mit den Toten* (Münster 2011) 148; E. DURKHEIM: *The elementary forms of religious life* (Oxford 2001) 258.

⁴¹ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 69-70.

In the experts' accounts we find centralized representations, as in the case of ritual meaning. Culturally recognizable images such as nature and light are used to express beliefs. One of the pastors cited the image of the rose as an example. She explained that during the ceremony one can convey the idea that '[the rose] should be planted first. It should die first in order to live again.' This in turn can be related to Christian faith: 'Jesus was the seed that died in the earth, to arise for all of us' (cf. John 12, 24). Although this idea of Jesus can be considered cognitively costly, the cycles of nature are natural. As a result this representation is understandable to a large group of participants, whether familiar or unfamiliar with religious teachings. We see this in practice, for the expert assigned the image of the rose a key place in the ceremony for that very reason: 'People who do not believe in Jesus also understand this.'⁴²

On the other hand, diverse representations are profound, for beliefs are expressed in ways that appeal to the particular group of participants, also because representations often relate to the life of the deceased. One of the pastors told us about a woman who made pottery. In the service her pottery was used to refer to her, her life and works. At the same time it was used to pour water, accompanied by words symbolizing 'that life had fled from her' and expressing the belief that 'she will return to the primal source'.⁴³ Although the image of water mentioned here is very central, participants may interpret it in many ways. For some water symbolizes eternal life, which in this case is the exegetical meaning expressed by the pastor.⁴⁴ For other respondents in our fieldwork it specifically refers to baptism, to life in general, or it is just water. Moreover, it is the pottery that symbolizes the life of the deceased, inspiring the specific group of relatives that identify the lost loved one with this symbol. Hence participants, depending on their context, do not interpret images in the same way. Representations move between the two modes distinguished by Whitehouse.

Religious representations are not only structured themselves; they also structure the funeral rite. Experts stress that representations offering hope to participants are presented towards the end of the ceremony. Furthermore, images that participants identify with are used as a central theme throughout the funeral. In non-ecclesial rites these are often things characterizing the deceased like their job or hobby, and they refer to transcendental meaning. In ecclesial funeral rites this also happens. An interesting example was cited by a pastor, which illustrates how religious representations and personal symbols can structure the ceremony:⁴⁵

A colleague told me about a young man, who had died in a traffic accident on his motorbike. Together with the pastor, it was decided to start the funeral with the sound of the engine. (...) This triggered so much emotion in the people and in the

⁴² Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, April 2012. Our translation.

⁴³ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012. Our translation.

⁴⁴ TURNER: 'Symbols in African ritual' 1103.

⁴⁵ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012. Our translation.

pastor himself that it was a holy experience. No requiem could have done that. It cut through the bone.

Some pastors find these 'new' ways of structuring the funeral problematic. The question of authoritative sources arises: are representations that stem from participants themselves permissible? In addition some participants (and experts) feel that expressed religious beliefs and representations should be authorized by the tradition or religious texts. This applies to both ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, although it is more apparent in the former.

As in the case of ritual meaning, we thus find that representations have both imagistic and doctrinal characteristics. There are uniform, cognitively optimal images that are very natural. At the same time there are cognitively costly images expressed in religious teachings, which can be interpreted in both uniform and pluriform ways as in the example of the rose. Furthermore, centralized and diverse representations are used side by side and are sometimes combined. Thus the accent may be on imagistic or doctrinal characteristics, depending on the participants' context and the funeral.

5. Ritual expert

To position the ritual expert in the field of modes, we explore leadership and orthodoxy. These two areas are interesting to explore, because experts regularly encounter religiosity in their professional capacity. Besides, they influence whether and what kinds of religious beliefs and practices are transmitted.

5.1. Leadership

Leadership is an important factor in religious transmission, for the religious leader conveys religious beliefs and ideas. We are asking what kind of leadership ritual experts acquire, for the role of the religious leader influences people's religiosity and leadership structures the funeral rite. Whitehouse contrasts the two modes of religiosity by way of passive or absent leadership at the imagistic pole and active or present leadership at the doctrinal pole. He shows that actions and proclamations of the religious leader can become the basis of religious narratives and the belief system. The absence of leadership, by contrast, inhibits the transmission of exegesis.⁴⁶ In our view the religious leader is the one who guides the group, teaches it, imposes rules, performs rites, and conveys beliefs and ideas. In funeral rites leadership is always apparent, but it does not display the same qualities all the time. Hence we opt for static and dynamic rather than present and absent leadership.

⁴⁶ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 65-75

Static leadership, situated in the doctrinal mode, refers to clearly defined, stable leaders. They are the ones in authority and therefore are elevated above the rest of the group. Beliefs, experiences and ideas among group members are greatly influenced by the leading person. Furthermore, the leader guides the ritual participants through the unstable situation in which they find themselves. At the imagistic pole dynamic leadership indicates unstable leadership. The leader, as Whitehouse points out, may elevate the group socially and this is expressed in the ritual choreography.⁴⁷ However, she has less influence on the group's beliefs. The leading person acquires authority, but not exclusively, and authority is not centralized. The leader is on a par with the group and there is no hierarchical structure.

Exploring whether leadership is static, dynamic, or has elements of both, we found that the interviewed experts clearly assume a leading role. To relatives they appear to be a 'tower of strength', and in fulfilling this role they exercise static leadership. The same applies to the experts' tasks, namely to create the funeral ceremony, guide the people through it, and support them in the preparation of the funeral. On the other hand, the type of leadership they exercise may be regarded as dynamic, since they encourage relatives to write texts, to perform during the ceremony, and to offer suggestions for the funeral. Pastors and ritual coaches allow the family to leave their own mark on the ceremony and create room for participants' ownership. This means that when relatives are reluctant to do so, the leader's influence increases. We found that the form of leadership often depends on the wishes of the family, in both ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, and therefore signifies dynamic characteristics:⁴⁸

Mostly, I ask for the family's wishes. (...) Some ask me to [read a certain text], because they are scared of performing during the ceremony in case they cannot speak out. Then I read it for them. Whereas others would like to read or do something, and I create the possibility for them.

The coin, however, has another side. Mainly in Roman Catholic but also in Protestant and non-ecclesial funerals the expert may exercise authority over the form and nature of the ceremony, reflecting doctrinal leadership characteristics. In the Roman Catholic Church, moreover, the priest is the only one authorized to administer certain sacraments, for example anointment of the sick and the Eucharist. This role as a special agent, implying that the expert is necessary for the proper performance of ritual, enhances his status as leader. Some experts perceive it as their task to express their beliefs, use a specific text or introduce particular ritual forms into the ceremony and determine its orientation. We show that the role of the leader depends greatly on the particular situation and that leadership may acquire different qualities in the preparation of the ceremony and during the funeral itself. The local community, institution and leader

⁴⁷ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 65-75

⁴⁸ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

may demand static leadership, for example by not allowing the expression of certain beliefs that the family subscribes to. On the other hand, they may stimulate dynamic leadership, taking the family's beliefs and needs as a starting point. The nature of leadership depends greatly on the needs of relatives. They may or may not need a leading figure, and they can have certain wishes and requirements regarding the ceremony. Hence the position of ritual coaches and pastors is not fixed in the middle of the modes field, but moves between the two attractor positions, embodying static as well as dynamic characteristics of leadership.

5.2. Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy relates closely to religious transmission and religious leadership. The presence of religious leaders stimulates orthodoxy and dissemination of beliefs and inhibits renewal. The term 'orthodox' might make us think immediately of the creeds of the Christian church. However, we must remind ourselves that these represent orthodoxy in the narrow sense. In the broader sense that we use it the term stresses correct, accepted norms and these are most probably found in both ecclesial and non-ecclesial settings. We suggest that leaders in funeral rites might bring along their own belief system over which they exercise authority. In addition, according to the modes theory, we expect to find a lack of orthodoxy at the imagistic pole, whereas at the doctrinal pole we find orthodoxy and the monitoring and propagation of beliefs.⁴⁹

In differentiating between orthodox and non-orthodox approaches one particular difference between ecclesial and non-ecclesial ritual experts caught our attention. Whereas ecclesial experts stress the importance of explicit statements of belief in the ceremony, some non-ecclesial experts consider this taboo. Although the beliefs of pastors vary and they do not always adhere to orthodox religious tenets, the funeral should at least relate to faith. Orthodoxy in the sense of mandatory expressions of belief is sometimes considered problematic in the non-ecclesial field. A key function of ritual coaches is their translation of the family's beliefs, stimulating personal reflection and inspiration. Some of them feel they should not bring their own beliefs into the ceremony. Hence orthodoxy in the strict sense is problematic for some ritual coaches, but also for some pastors. Several of them focus on personal experience, whereas others rely on the transmission of religious teachings and conduct funeral rites 'the right way'. They allow for innovations of the institution or the church board.

When we scrutinize the experts' accounts more closely and look at orthodoxy in the broad sense apart from the distinction between 'religious faith' and norms and values, all our respondents mention values and ideas that they find important. They try to integrate their values with the funeral ceremony by relating to the family to help them cope with their loss. One pastor explained that the funeral could focus more on worship or more on the family, depending on the wishes of relatives, adding that he will 'always will bring a tradition more

⁴⁹ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 67-73.

than a thousand years old along'. Ritual coaches said that they would rather not express an atheistic view directly. They also emphasized the importance of expressing beliefs that create hope for the family. So experts clearly influence the family's values and beliefs, at least inasmuch as they interpret their wishes and ideas in terms of their own frame of reference. The expert's background is also conveyed to the family in the preparation and conduct of the funeral. Hence there are doctrinal features, for experts emphasize certain norms and values.

In regard to orthodoxy pastors and ritual coaches appear to position themselves in different areas of the modes spectrum. Differences occur throughout our group of respondents. One ritual coach, for instance, emphasized that the funeral should not be about her. Many of the experts agree on this point, but in this particular case she explained: 'I am an instrument of the family and concur with their views and convictions. (...) It is their story; it has nothing to do with me.'⁵⁰ We encountered experts who agreed with this, whereas others stress that they bring themselves along to the funeral. This becomes clear in the comment of a pastor who endorses the central role of the family: 'You give words to their [relatives'] grief out of human respect: they will miss him [the deceased].' But he also stresses the importance of doctrinal statements: 'I especially express the hope that he will be with God. That is the core. That is what I want to express, and what is expressed in the prayers. (...) I do speak freely about the resurrection, for if I were to compromise on that, the message would no longer be clear.'⁵¹ It should also be noted that orthodoxy can help the family and the expert, for it clarifies where they stand. The expert's belief system is what characterizes him and the ceremony, both within and outside the churches. One ritual coach who applies the Christian faith explained that people hire him precisely because of his belief system and its expression in the ceremony. Others told us they were hired because of their spiritual or down-to-earth approaches.

We have seen that some experts bring along key tenets of a belief system, traditional beliefs or ideas they advocate themselves. Others claim their own ideas are irrelevant to the funeral rite. According to them the meaning of the ceremony should derive from participants. Then there seems to be a third group, positioning themselves somewhere in between: they bring along their own ideas and beliefs, while ultimately leaving it to the deceased's family to decide on the funeral's content. In both non-ecclesial and ecclesial settings we found pluriform teachings, although central, cognitively optimal beliefs and topics also feature, as in the case of ritual meaning. Both orthodox and non-orthodox characteristics, as well as interaction between them, are to be found among ritual experts.

⁵⁰ Ritual coach, interview Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012. Our translation.

⁵¹ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

6. Performance

Thirdly we look at the role of ritual performance – the ritual acts per se. What do ritual experts do? Again we consider two concepts: expressivity and transmission.

6.1. Expressivity

What kind of expressivity is manifested in the ritual performance? By expressivity we mean the expression of beliefs and feelings. The term often refers to behavior and social relations, and it is used to differentiate between verbal and nonverbal communicative forms.⁵² Following Ronald Grimes, we use the term to denote the opposite of performativity, arguing that words either express (describe) or perform (do).⁵³ In addition Edmund Leach identifies a technical aspect (something which does something) and an aesthetic aspect (something which says something).⁵⁴ Whitehouse differentiates between verbal and nonverbal forms of conveying religious beliefs. At the doctrinal pole people explicitly refer to the meaning of teachings. However, routinization may stimulate participants to go through the motions in a procedural way by acting rather than referring to the meaning of words. In the imagistic mode beliefs are inspired by collective ritual performances rather than by verbal teachings.⁵⁵ This distinction between action and speech helps us to determine the place of death rites in the modes spectrum. We distinguish between active and passive expressivity. Active expressivity, at the imagistic pole, refers to nonverbal acts in the performance in which people participate. It also refers to speech that people enact in ritual, words that imply something is done. The clusters of actions in the doctrinal mode are marked by passive expressivity. Here participants are more likely to behave like an audience, listening passively to the words of religious leaders. Words say something, mean something and describe something; they also refer to religious beliefs. However, they do not do something. Words at this pole do not make an event happen.

Both ecclesial and non-ecclesial experts consider the way beliefs are expressed important. The meaning of words, speeches, music and poetry should be recognizable to participants, for identifying with the meaning of what is said helps them to move on. However, experts disagree on comprehension of words.

⁵² J. PLATVOET: 'Ritual: religious and secular', in: J. KREINATH, J. SNOEK & M. STAUSBERG (eds.): *Theorizing rituals. Issues, topics, approaches, concepts* (Leiden 2006) 161-162.

⁵³ R. GRIMES: 'Performance', in: KREINATH, SNOEK & STAUSBERG (eds.): *Theorizing rituals* 379-394.

⁵⁴ J. KREINATH: 'Semiotics', in: KREINATH, SNOEK & STAUSBERG (eds.): *Theorizing rituals* 435-436; E. LEACH: 'Ritual', in D. SHILS (ed.): *International encyclopaedia of the social sciences* 13 (1968) 520-526.

⁵⁵ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 65-75.

Some of them maintain that understanding what is said is not important at all: people do not have to understand it, they have to immerse themselves in the ceremony. Other experts set store by the specific meaning of certain words, as well as comprehension of teachings and beliefs. We also found that ritual participants stress the value of recognizing themselves and the deceased in the verbal performance, and that experts anticipate that relatives will attain this ideal.

The significance of identification and its relation to expressivity is best illustrated by a frequently cited example: music. People identify with music for numerous reasons, such as sound, personal affinity with the piece, and the lyric. In the case of music we observe the importance of both active and passive expressivity. Music, verbal and nonverbal, inspires people during the ceremony, besides inspiring experts in their usage of words in sermons or their choice of music. One ritual coach told us that her opening words always relate to the music that was played while the family was entering the venue, because people are inspired by it. She explains that 'people often do not recognize that the words beautifully relate to their story, and therefore I always try to borrow words from the song to give people the idea that, okay, this is what it is about today. This is what we came for.'⁵⁶ The value of music also lies in its active expressivity. People immerse themselves in the event and, especially in churches, they do so by singing.

Besides the meaning of words, participation by relatives is seen as crucial. Relatives sometimes find themselves nonplussed. They are caught up in their grief. The experts stimulate participation, before and during the ceremony, so participants have something to do and can start working on their feelings. For instance, they can buy candles with the grandchildren in their favorite colors and light them during the funeral. Afterwards they take the candles home and light them when they miss their grandmother, on her birthday, or when they feel sad. In that way they connect with the beloved relative and the loss.

Participation also makes the family feel that they can perform a final act for the deceased. It is something to look back on, feeling proud and satisfied: 'We have done this for Mom.' Relatives can carry the deceased into the church, read a text or a poem, light candles, sing, play an instrument and so on. By actively engaging in the performance people rely on a framework larger than themselves and feel supported in this liminal, rather unstable period. One pastor explained that the importance of participation lies in the comfort it brings.⁵⁷ He explained that nothing brings so much consolation as ritual forms. When you no longer have control over the situation yourself, the forms are so strong that you can immerse yourself in them. You let go and feel comfortable. Another example

⁵⁶ Ritual coach, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

⁵⁷ Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, April 2012. Our translation.

shows how people can participate and how participation can be a symbol, here of sending the deceased to his final destination:⁵⁸

Three years ago a bus driver died. I conducted his funeral ceremony. (...) All drivers wished to attend (...) and they formed a double line from the entrance to the auditorium to the place where the deceased would be placed. (...) Carrying him in the midst of all his colleagues was the most beautiful ritual one can have. (...) Then I started addressing the participants (...) I said: '[Vince], we stand here with you and we can think of only one thing: [Vince] cannot live without his suitcase, not in death either.' And then one of his colleagues came forward to bring [Vince's] suitcase.

Both verbal and nonverbal expressions of teachings and beliefs, as well as participation, are regarded as crucial in the ritual performance. Since our respondents did not advocate the exclusive use of either passive or creative expressivity, we see it as situated somewhere in the middle of the field of modes.

6.2. Transmission

The second concept at the performance level is the transmission of religious ideas. How is knowledge transmitted in the performance and how does it structure the performance? Whitehouse does not deal with methods of transmission, but examines the efficiency of dissemination via the two modes. Routinized religious acts, verbal expression of teachings and the presence of religious leaders contribute to the rapid and efficient dissemination of teachings and religiosity. On the imagistic side, by contrast, it is slow and inefficient because of lack of leadership and the existence of local, exclusive communities.⁵⁹ Following Whitehouse, we argue that transmission of religiosity hinges on the presence of a religious leader. Hence we differentiate between inductive (imagistic) and deductive (doctrinal) transmission. Inductive transmission results from participation by participants, bottom-up. Deductive transmission, on the other hand, proceeds top-down from above, stimulated and passed on by religious officials.

Although Whitehouse illustrates the importance of religious leaders in transmission, we wish to add a few remarks. People do not acquire knowledge exclusively through ritual or teaching in general. Rather, as Thomas Lawson argues, 'an important aspect of human knowledge is intuitive in the sense that it is present without having been taught'. He explains that emotional stimulation by sensory pageantry increases the probability of ritual transmission.⁶⁰ The trauma of losing a close friend or relative may stimulate transmission. Another argument is the following: 'If the performance of ritual acts and utterances is con-

⁵⁸ Ritual coach, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

⁵⁹ WHITEHOUSE: *Modes of religiosity* 65-75.

⁶⁰ T. LAWSON: 'Cognition', in: KREINATH, SNOEK & STAUSBERG (eds.): *Theorizing rituals* 317.

sidered to be the basic social act, then it is not the transmission of information or the communication of messages but the performance of ritual actions that is crucial for the establishment of social order.⁶¹ This raises an important question: are funeral rites about the transmission of knowledge and beliefs, or about establishing a stable social order that people may hold on to and immerse themselves in as suggested in the previous section?

Keeping these issues in mind, we see that deductive transmission is visible and structures the choreography of the ceremony. The ecclesial experts – mainly Roman-Catholic, but some Protestants and non-ecclesial experts as well – mostly use an overarching liturgical form for this purpose. Pastors try to transmit the hope they experience (through faith), and by expressing it they seek to help people in their time of sorrow. Both personal and religious teachings – for instance, ones that refer to hope, love or biblical themes – are expressed in their sermons. Among more orthodox experts the word of God, and therefore transmission as well, occupy a prominent place in the liturgy. More liberal experts aim to relate teachings to the life of the deceased and the bereaved family. One pastor told us, for example, that religious matters must be raised in the ceremony, but should be related to the deceased to be meaningful for all funeral participants. Then deductive transmission of religious teachings takes place, but in a specific, personal way: ‘The proclamation you will hear is that of your mother’s life, including its religious elements.’⁶² Non-ecclesial experts, too, transmit beliefs deductively and verbally. These beliefs are either abstract or natural. The belief in life after death is commonly invoked and is seen as important, but is seldom linked to complex religious teachings. Even in religious funerals this does not always happen, although some pastors explicitly cite traditional doctrines such as the cognitively costly concept of Christ’s resurrection. People’s different interpretations of these teachings can result in the transmission of different beliefs, even though their expression in the ceremony is uniform.

Religious teachings and beliefs are inductively transmitted through the group. However, the group seldom performs acts collectively. Instead beliefs are inductively transmitted to a specific group that performs certain rites, for example the lighting of candles. According to the experts, people feel that they are surrounding the deceased with warmth and light and are contributing to the ceremony in honor of their loved one. Thus people from the audience come forward, sometimes in small groups, and tell or perform something. Expressions surrounding these ritual acts explicitly and implicitly evoke beliefs and meanings people hold on to, making them inductive ways of conveying belief.

Inductive transmission also occurs in the preparation of the funeral. This is very important, for during the preparation participants strongly influence the

⁶¹ M. HOUSEMAN: ‘Relationality’, in: KREINATH, SNOEK & STAUSBERG (eds.): *Theorizing rituals* 426.

⁶² Pastor, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation.

beliefs and teachings expressed. This affects the nature of inductive transmission, since it relates them concretely to one's own life. As a result these beliefs are connected with hopes and wishes that the relatives recognize. We also observe a 'packaging' of beliefs, as Jens Kreinath puts it. The preparation of a ritual enhances the relevance of cultural values by 'packaging them in the form of highly memorable relational enactments, the experience of which provides participants with self-referential contexts in whose light these values and ideas may be justifiably put into effect'.⁶³ By connecting teachings with a personal frame of reference they are both concretized and abstracted, and can be transmitted more easily. All this is decided in dialogue with the pastor or ritual coach, so the transmission of beliefs that will occur later during the funeral starts collectively. As ritual experts also influence this, inductive and deductive transmission go hand in hand.⁶⁴

Transmission, then, occupies a position in between the modes. Imagistic and doctrinal elements are intertwined particularly in the preparation of the funeral. During the actual ceremony the expert deductively expresses many beliefs and hopes, but since involvement of participants is encouraged, inductive transmission also occurs.

7. Conclusion

To explore elements of religiosity in Dutch funeral rites we drew on Whitehouse's theory and applied it to the ritual field. We conclude that the two clusters of dynamics – the doctrinal and imagistic modes – afford insight into characteristics of religiosity in funeral rites. Because of their extreme positions as opposite poles of attraction they allow us to sharpen our focus. With the aid of Whitehouse's theory we showed that elements of religiosity are visible in both ecclesial and non-ecclesial funeral rites, and that its characteristics are transformed. Whereas traditional funeral rites characterized by routinization and verbal transmission of standardized religious teachings focused on the doctrinal wing, nowadays funeral rites are no longer clustered round the doctrinal mode but are positioned in the field of interacting modes. However, they are not perfectly positioned in the middle of the field. In regard to our six concepts, we found imagistic and doctrinal elements functioning side by side as

⁶³ KREINATH: 'Semiotics' 460.

⁶⁴ [Expression of beliefs] really has to do with what people believe, how they think about the afterlife, and what the deceased thought about it. Then I try to adjust my sermons to that. (...) I think it is beautiful to give people something to take home. As some sort of wish. When we sit together I always ask them [about the afterlife]. And usually people say something like: "We do not believe, but we hope father will see mother again, or his brother, or someone else." That is what I appeal to.' (Ritual coach, interview Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012. Our translation).

well as interactively, with the accent on either one or the other. Cognitively optimal beliefs featured in all of the interviews with experts, but complex and cognitively costly beliefs also entered into these, albeit less profoundly. The exact position, and therefore the type of religiosity, greatly depends on the particular situation, such as the type of the funeral, the rules and politics of the institution, the needs of the family and the beliefs and method of the leader.

At the level of ritual participants both creative and traditional meanings play a role. Centralized beliefs are expressed, often in relation to the individual context. Hence there are hybrid religious representations and interpretations. Diverse expressions and meanings occur, frequently related to traditional images and meanings. For all these reasons we argue that participants' meanings and representations are positioned in the middle of the field of modes, sometimes extending to imagistic or doctrinal matters. In both ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals we encountered concepts surrounding the cognitively optimal position, most importantly the idea of life after death. Cognitively costly teachings are directly expressed less often, but when they are they are related to the concrete case of the family and to minimal counterintuitive expressions that appeal to a larger group of participants, in particular when the group does not consist exclusively of church members. Our hypothesis that cognitively optimal beliefs have become more prominent in funeral rites with the decline of institutionalized religion in our society is supported by our field observations, but further research is needed to establish the prominence and influence of counterintuitive concepts.

Ritual experts were studied by exploring orthodoxy and leadership. Ritual coaches and pastors exercise authority by means of their teachings and most of them explained they find certain beliefs and values important, considering the needs of the family and/or their own background and belief statements. In addition non-ecclesial and some ecclesial ritual experts felt that the final decision on the contents of funeral rites lies fully with the relatives. They find themselves in an ambivalent position regarding orthodoxy, often conveying their own beliefs and ideas while simultaneously perceiving orthodoxy as negative. Other experts, by contrast, rely heavily on the transmission of orthodox teachings, some because of the importance ascribed to these teachings, others in order to conduct funeral rites 'properly'. Thus both orthodox and non-orthodox dynamics, as well as interaction between them, are found in the ecclesial and non-ecclesial fields, depending on the context and the particular group of relatives. As for leadership, we have seen that experts make use of either doctrinal or imagistic elements at certain moments. First, they guide the family and embody a stable factor at a time when the family needs it. In regard to the dissemination of religious ideas, we find experts implement teachings they themselves find important, again exercising static leadership. Nonetheless experts also allow the family to assume ownership. Most of them take the family as their point of departure and relate their teachings to the relatives; sometimes – especially in the non-ecclesial field – the family has the final say. Thus leader-

ship is not fixed in the middle of the modes field, but moves between the two attractor positions during the funeral ritual process.

Thirdly, at the level of performance, we again find a mixture of modes elements. Both verbal and nonverbal expressions of teachings as well as acts and participation are seen as significant. It was emphasized that people should identify with the meaning of words in order for them to be meaningful. Disagreement exists about the extent to which people need to understand the spoken words. The importance of physically participating in and performing certain rites was stressed. Since pastors and ritual coaches do not advocate the exclusive use of either passive or creative expressivity, we situate the concept in the interactive field of modes. Our last concept, transmission, occupies the same position. Many beliefs are transmitted deductively through sayings of experts. However, the conveyed beliefs are influenced by the beliefs and wishes of the family, and therefore also have an inductive character. Experts feel that participation in and influence on the ceremony are important, not only to give people something to do and enhance their coping process, but also because this evokes beliefs and meaning they can hold on to.

Finally, we present some discussion and suggestions for further research. The expression of characteristics of religiosity in funeral rites is likely to be influenced by the death of a loved one. While we argue that religiosity plays an important role in Dutch society, people probably do not adhere to the same ideas in daily life. The idea of situational belief may be illuminating in this regard and further research on these lines can deepen our insight into the role of religiosity in the Netherlands.⁶⁵ Since we studied the opinions of sixteen experts – from the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the non-ecclesial field – it is very likely that different cases will lead to different conclusions. To determine whether people employ interactive modes of religiosity and whether cognitively optimal beliefs have become more profound calls for replication, consolidation and extension of research methods. For example, to gain insight into people's religiosity liturgical forms should be examined from the perspective of religiosity. Also, eschatological images could be studied through interviews and/or a survey, focusing on what people themselves believe instead of what experts say they believe. Our study of characteristics of religiosity in funeral rites indicates that further research taking religiosity as a starting point would be fruitful.

Brenda Mathijssen MA is a PHD researcher at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Her thesis explores the role of religion in contemporary Dutch society, by studying the ways wherein Christian tradition relates to individual people's religiosity and spirituality in the face of death.

E-mail: b.mathijssen@ftr.ru.nl.

⁶⁵ M. STRINGER: 'Towards a situational theory of belief', in *Journal of the anthropological society of Oxford* 27 (1996) 217-234.

