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Article

A Political End to a Pioneering Career: Marianne Beth and the Psychology of Religion

Jacob A. Belzen

University of Amsterdam, Oude Turfmarkt 147, NL-1012 GC Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mail: belzen@hum.uva.nl

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Abstract: Although forgotten in both *Religionswissenschaft* (the Science of Religion) and psychology, Marianne Beth (1880-1984), initially trained as a lawyer and already in 1928 called a “leading European woman”, must be considered as one of the female pioneers of these fields. She has been active especially in the psychology of religion, a field in which she, together with her husband Karl Beth, founded a research institute, an international organization and a journal. In 1932, the Beths organized in Vienna (where Karl was a professor) the largest conference ever in the history of the psychology of religion. Because of her Jewish descent, Marianne Beth fled to the USA when Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938. This brought an abrupt end to her career as researcher and writer. The article reconstructs Marianne Beth’s path into psychology, analyzes some of her work and puts her achievements in an international perspective.

Keywords: Marianne Beth; Karl Beth; Vienna; International Society for Psychology of Religion; international conference

No Female Pioneers in Psychology of Religion?

In the history of that branch of psychology, nowadays generally referred to as the “psychology of religion”,¹ women are even less represented than in the field of psychology at large. Partly, this has to

¹ In earlier times, the psychology of religion was occasionally referred to as “religious psychology”. Nowadays the latter term is, however, applied to such forms of psychology that are themselves religious in their substance and self-conception and which as a rule make an integral part of a religious tradition, such as, for instance, psychologically

do with the origin of modern psychology, among whose founding fathers and pioneers there were not only philosophers and medical doctors, but also theologians, some of the latter having also been engaged in the field of the psychology of religion. Since before World War II, there have been hardly any female theologians at all; it is understandable that no women from these ranks became active in the field of the psychology of religion.

A good number of the first major psychologists and psychiatrists of the pre-war time contributed to the psychology of religion. They were just as different from each other as were the approaches they developed in general psychology and applied to the psychology of religion: it is enough to mention such personae as Wundt [2], Stern [3,4], James [5], Hall [6,7], Freud [8-11], Janet [12,13], Ebbinghaus [14], or Jaspers [15]. Yet one does not find a single woman among these great names, and even if one might remember some female pioneers from these circles (such as, for example, Lou Salomé or Marie Bonaparte), they had nothing to do with the psychology of religion.

A third reason why the female pioneers from the field of the psychology of religion have generally sunk into oblivion, is that the psychology of religion, which initially represented a substantial branch of psychology at large,² has been marginalized over decades to such an extent, that already in 1963 Gordon Allport declared religion to be a taboo in psychology (in Farberow [16], p. 80). Numerous empirical studies have shown that by now psychologists represent the least religious group of scientists (Plante [17], p. 10-13). In their pursuit of scientific prestige, psychologists have been eagerly orientating themselves toward natural sciences, they purport to pass for hardy empiricists who only work with measurable and statistically significant entities and are loath to be reminded of their discipline's origin in such a "soft" domain.³ The fact that the beginnings of psychology are also rooted in theology and that the psychology of religion used to be so important and today is once again gaining

highly differentiated doctrines of Hindu or Buddhist traditions, which prominently foreground human subjectivity in their descriptions of spiritual development. Conversely, the psychology of religion does not belong to any religion and rather purports to keep a neutral stance with regard to the religious reality, which it explores. It considers religions as the object of its scientific enquiry and not as a basis, a point of departure, or a criterion. Therefore the psychology of religion should be rigorously discriminated from so-called "pastoral psychology", whose aim and legitimacy consists in the service to Christian churches, and in particular to its pastorate. Furthermore, the psychology of religion should also be distinguished from the approach called "Psychology and Religion", which can primarily be found in the US-American departments of religious studies and which is generally concerned with the dialogue between psychology and theology or with cultural theology with regard to its psychological (predominantly psychoanalytical) aspects. In general, one unequivocally understands the psychology of religion as any psychological research on religion, regardless whether it may be employed in pastoral psychology or theology. Being a field of application of different kinds of psychology, it is a heterogeneous field, sometimes practiced by other than psychologists (e.g. psychiatrists, anthropologists, theologians). For a more detailed account of these differences, see Belzen [1].

² See, for instances, the contributions by famous founding fathers mentioned already, see also the numerous bibliographical reports on the psychology of religion in journals like the *Psychological Bulletin* and *Psychological Review* during the first decades of their existence.

³ In an evident endeavor to make the special issue of the American *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, dedicated to "Religion and Culture" and planned for 2010, as scientific and acceptable for the "hardnosed" colleagues as possible, its guest editors have formulated their call for papers in an arrantly restrictive manner: Theoretical papers are not excluded, but they have to be conceived as psychological theory-driven papers making a specific theoretical argument heavily based on review of relevant empirical research". See Saroglou and Cohen [18].

ground, is still not willingly taken into consideration by many psychologists. Also, since even the contributions of the founding fathers of psychology to psychology of religion are hardly ever mentioned, it is not surprising that the less famous female pioneers of the psychology of religion have sunk right down into oblivion.

Still, they existed, and the main purpose of the present paper will be to analyze and contextualize the work of the perhaps most important of them. The lady in question has been anything but forgotten,⁴ but up to the present day her involvement in the field of psychology, and especially of the psychology of religion, has never been acknowledged. Her name was Dr. Dr. Marianne Beth, who was presented already in 1928 in a collection of essays, as one of “the leading women of Europe” (Kern [21]). Yet her story and along with it that of one of the most important initiatives in the field of psychology of religion had a tragic finale: while in the above-cited book she was regarded as a rising star, the political turmoil put an untimely end to her scientific activity. Who was she, why was she held in 1928 to be a “leading woman”, and above all, what did she have to do with psychology? Which and what kind of contributions did she make? How did she come to the psychology of religion and which merits did she have in this branch of psychology?

Marianne Beth (1890-1984)

Marianne Beth was born on March 6, 1890 into the family of an eminent Austrian lawyer, Dr. Ernst Franz von Weisl, who had been ennobled by Kaiser Franz Josef personally. Von Weisl first worked as a judge and later as a lawyer in Vienna and distinguished himself with his publications as a legal scholar. He had wished to have a son as his firstborn, and he raised Marianne in many respects as a boy, which also meant that he let her receive a very good intellectual education. (Out of the fear that the schools for girls of his day were not able to train in a strict and efficient manner, the father opted for a private tuition. At the age of 8, Marianne translated into French, and at the age of 9 she spoke Latin.) Since she was still a girl, one also required her to do domestic work and sewing, but her inclinations clearly lay in the intellectual sphere: “I cannot remember having ever remained without a printed page in my hands; indeed, to the indignation of my father I used to bury myself in a book even while putting on my shoes or dressing my hair” (Beth [22], p. 96). Little wonder therefore that she absolutely wanted to study at the university—study law, of course, in order to take over the solicitor chambers of her father. Yet in that epoch women were still banned from the faculty of law and therefore she entered the faculty of humanities where she studied “just everything”, from psychology and philosophy to general history of human culture and especially prehistory. As a point of departure she selected Oriental studies (Arabic, Syrian, Assyrian, Hebraic, later also Coptic and Egyptian).⁵ The study of law was by no means lost out of sight: in 1912 she completed her PhD dissertation *On the Alterations of Property in Babylonian and Biblical Law*. Besides, being a student at the faculty of humanities, she could also acquire sufficient knowledge as a guest student at the faculty of law and later, in 1918, when due to the political concession of equal opportunities to women the ban was relinquished, she completed in a shortest time the study of law. In 1921 she submitted her second

⁴ Förkl and Koffmahn [19]; Prost [20]; <http://www.fraueninbewegung.onb.ac.at>.

⁵ See the curriculum vitae composed by M. Beth herself (dated by 17.08.1938) in the Archive of Reed College (Portland, Oregon, USA).

dissertation, thus becoming the first Austrian woman in possession of two doctor titles and the first one who had ever taken a doctoral degree in law.

Still during her studies, Marianne von Weisl started traveling: first to Sweden and England, later also to the United States of America, mostly in the context of attending congresses with a ‘political’ tinge: “I found there friends, who in some ways stand closer to me than those who are not far from me in space. I used to return home with lots of inspiration. And as a natural consequence of it, my writing activities remained concerned with the problems of international politics” [22] (p. 111). Also later, after marrying in 1911 and changing her name to Beth, this remained the case: “In the beginning, my apolitical husband shook his head. But I persevered. [...] I published a lot, held a number of speeches.”⁶ Gradually, she made even this “hobby” one of her professions.

Marianne Beth tells in her “self-portrayal” [22] how she was confronted with distrust upon her first appointment as a “secretary” in the Viennese district court: during the first proceedings, at which she had the charge to keep the minutes, the president of the district court himself and other high officials were present in the auditorium a quite unusual practice. In April 1922 she entered the chambers of her father as the first female articulated clerk [*Konzipient*] in Austria. And she constantly undertook further tasks. She became the Secretary General of the International Association of Lawyers, wrote academic papers, and passed a state exam in English (thus becoming the first female court interpreter). She was the first woman in Austria to pass the lawyer exam at the Viennese Regional Appeal Court and in 1928 she became the first female “defense lawyer in criminal cases”. The founding of a credit institution for headworkers, the first vice-president of which she was appointed, led her to a collaboration with the “Central Council of Headworkers” [*Zentralrat geistiger Arbeiter*], the “Asylum for Mothers” [*Mütterheim*] and so on.

Although she did not champion feminist positions and certainly did not consider herself a feminist, Marianne Beth championed the betterment of the legal and professional position of women: in 1926, together with some other like-minded people, she founded the “Austrian Women’s Organization” [*Österreichische Frauenorganisation*], which was foremost concerned with the restructuring of political life and in 1928 she became one of the co-founders of the Professional Women’s Union [*Verein berufstätiger Frauen*]. First and foremost she was concerned with the legal enlightenment of women, whose necessity she realized ever clearer in the course of her activities as a lawyer. Apart from several articles, it was her two monographs—*New Matrimonial Law* [*Neues Eherecht*] [23] and *Women’s Rights* [*Das Recht der Frau*] [24] that met that challenge, even though the latter was conceived in the first place as a juridical guidebook for women. In 1930 she was representing Austria in the “International Federation of Business and Professional Women”, which was founded at the prompting of the American Lena Madelin Phillips (1881-1955), and where she also instantly became of its four vice-presidents. (In 1938 she also mentions her office as the Secretary General of the “World Alliance for Promoting Friendship through the Churches”, member of the board of the YMCA, President of the “Austrian Soroptimist Club” since 1928. Furthermore she reports: “I have taught for

⁶ In her curriculum vitae from 1944, written in English, she stated: “1921-1933 I developed a journalistic activity at the rate of 2 articles a day, writing leaders regularly, for the Viennese daily paper *Volkszeitung* and the Czechoslovakian *Grenzboten* and, incidentally, to many other papers. And besides that, many articles to psychological, theological and juridical reviews.” (Archive of Reed College (Portland, Oregon, USA).)

many years at the Protestant School for Social Workers, National Economics at the School for Social Workers of Ilse Arlt”, curriculum from 17.08.1938, see footnote 5).

Marianne Beth’s Route to Psychology

As this paper is not on the history of women's expanding opportunities in central Europe in the 1920s, but on an issue in the history of the psychology of religion, let us move quickly to the next question: how did this female lawyer come to psychology at all? The interest in this discipline, which emerged already during the time of her study and prompted her to attend the relevant lectures and pass exams, was certainly further boosted by her husband Karl Beth (1872-1959). Born in Förderstedt (Saxony, Germany) as a son of a school headmaster, Karl went to Tübingen and Berlin in order to pursue his studies of theology and philosophy. His teachers were, among others, celebrities like Adolf von Harnack, Reinhold Seeberg, Otto Pflieger and Wilhelm Dilthey. Beth obtained a degree of *licentiatus theologiae* in 1897, a degree of *doctor philosophiae* in 1898, and in 1901 he became a private lecturer in systematic theology in Berlin.⁷ Owing to the Friedrich Schleiermacher travel grant, in 1902 he was able to go on a research trip to the Greek and Turkish areas of the Mediterranean. His interest, which was initially directed at the history of Christianity, expanded evermore to an involvement with the history of religions in general and further also to a more systematic concern with research on religion and especially with its psychological aspects. In 1906 he was appointed as a part-time professor for systematic theology in Vienna (*Extraordinarius*), and in 1908 as a full professor (*Ordinarius*).

In the first decade of his scientific activity, his interest was directed at the relationship between Christianity and modern thinking (see Beth [25,26]). He was also concerned with specific subject themes, such as the meaning of the evolution concept for Christian theology (he compared it, among other, to the meaning of the *logos*-idea 1500 years earlier: Beth [27]) and historical-critical questions (e.g. see [28,29]). In the subsequent years he wrote some of his major works on the history of religion, for instance a book on *Religion and Magic in the Primitive Tribes: A Historical Contribution to the Question of the Origins of Religion* [30], in which he describes “awe” as a constitutive element of religion (comparable with Otto’s famous book, which, however, was published later, in 1917 [31]). His *Introduction to the Comparative History of Religion* [32] and his studies on mystics [33] also had a broad circulation. Gradually he became an internationally well-known scholar, not least due to his activities in the field of the psychology of religion. (One finds references to Karl Beth in most histories of German-speaking theology, a helpful introduction to secondary literature is: http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/b/beth_k.shtml.)

If not prompted by his father, who was a pedagogue, Karl Beth’s interest in psychology was definitely kindled in Berlin by professors like Pflieger and Dilthey. Karl Beth felt especially committed to the latter, whom he also valued highly as his teacher. Besides this, his marriage with Marianne von Weisl was also instrumental for his vocation for psychology: Marianne, among others,

⁷ A “private lecturer” (German: *Privatdozent*) is a unsalaried teaching position at a German university, held by an academic with all qualifications to nominate as a regular professor, but not yet appointed to such a position. At present, whoever serves longer than some six years as *Privatdozent* (PD) is granted an honorary professorship, *i.e.* the right to use the title Prof. (instead of the title PD).

was concerned with children's rights. One can most certainly say that the psychology of religion was the sphere of activity in which both worked together, especially—but not only—within the frame of the International Society for the Psychology of Religion, initiated in 1922 and officially registered in 1924, whose headquarters were located in the Beths' apartment in Zitterhofergasse 8, Vienna VII, where also the sessions of the Viennese Department of the International Society took place, and from which the First International Congress on the Psychology of Religion was organized.⁸

Initially, however, it was the interest in the history of religion that bound Marianne von Weisl with her future husband. She came to know him during her first study of the history of culture and languages. Being able to read Hebrew, she once helped a student of Protestant theology with his research on *Mishnah*-scriptures, who invited her to attend a lecture by the apparently really interesting professor Beth. The interest in the study matter evolved into an affection for the professor; they married and had two children. She eagerly participated in some projects of her husband (for example, they studied together the Egyptian hieroglyphic script), in the first place however in psychology of religion. One former student of Beth called her later “a devoted aide” (Schneider [35], p. 78), and one may conjecture that especially the International Society for the Psychology of Religion, which operated from their flat, has been the fruit of their common intellectual endeavor. Not only Karl, but also Marianne herself, as we have seen above, had international ambitions! At least Marianne was the person, who, next to Karl, submitted the most contributions to the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* [Journal for the Psychology of Religion], which had been founded later as the print medium of the Society. She adopted an “experimental-empirical” way of inquiry and line of thought, and also worked her way into such publication media that had nothing to do with psychology of religion—for instance, the *Kantstudien* [Kantian Studies] and the *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* [Archive for Comprehensive Psychology] [36,37]. And whereas Karl Beth remained, primarily, a theologian who was also interested in the comparative history of religion, we know from Marianne Beth in the 1930s only papers in the psychology of religion.

Psychology of Faith: An Award of the Kant Society

There is no need in explaining which of the Beths initiated their activities in the field of the psychology of religion. Being much older and an established scholar, Karl certainly influenced to a large extent the development of Marianne, and not only intellectually. Still, it is remarkable that the subject theme of the “psychology of faith”, which became at that time an important issue in the circles concerned with the psychology of religion, first surfaced in the publications of Marianne Beth. Soon after the International Society for the Psychology of Religion had been set up, it founded an Institute for Research in Psychology of Religion [*Religionspsychologisches Forschungsinstitut*], likewise situated in the Beths' apartment, which, from 1926 on, published irregularly volumes under the title *Religionspsychologie* [Psychology of Religion]. Apparently, these publications attracted reasonable

⁸ This International Society is not to be confused with the (German) Association for Psychology of Religion founded in 1914. That German association disappeared almost completely in the aftermath of World War I, but was re-founded several times by occasional individuals pretending continuation. Reacting to the initiative by the Beths, in 1930 the newly constituted board added “International” to the name of the Association. Contrary to the society founded by the Beths, the initially German association is still existing today (Belzen [34]).

interest and had a good rate of sales, and in 1928, following the first four “booklets” (the third of which had already, however, the length of 180 pages), the quarterly *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* was launched. Both the second and the third issues of *Religionspsychologie* included a long article by Marianne Beth on the psychology of faith [38,39]. Her turn towards “empiricism”, of which she speaks in her self-presentation in the book edited by Elga Kern [21], consists in the inquiry into religious experience, which she tries to approach through a descriptive analysis of the “multifarious language use of the word ‘faith’ [*Glaube*]”. She pinpoints that the word “faith” [*Glaube*] is used to describe “a large leeway of psychic attitudes”, and hopes to sketch out a way of differentiating between these.

By this token, her approach had nothing to do with the “experimental-psychological” method introduced in psychology by Wundt (and since then modified, among others, by Külpe and Bühler). With the expression “experimental-psychological” she probably meant, as back then was often the case, the “experiential-psychological”: that is, directed at, and informed by, “empirical reality”, a procedure quite distinct from the still predominantly classical theological, or normative-dogmatic, discourse of the day on religion and faith. When the reputable Kant Society [*Kant-Gesellschaft*]—in those years the worldwide largest society for philosophy—announced in 1928 an award in this very subject, “the psychology of faith”, one obviously considered the very exclusion of such theological standpoints as symptomatic of the “character of a strictly empirical, data-based research”. Quoting directly the text of the announcement:

“Works that take a stand on the problem of faith from a viewpoint of a specific religious creed, some confessional state, or in the form of a categorical asseveration, of pro and contra, are accordingly precluded from the conferral of the award. Works that serve the cause of an apology of a particular form of religious faith, religious school of thought and content matter of creed shall thus not be taken into consideration.” (The Eleventh Award Announcement of the Kant Society [*Elfte Preis Ausschreiben der Kant-Gesellschaft*], p. 1⁹)

The relationship between the award announcement of the Kant Society and Marianne Beth’s interest in the psychology of faith is not quite clear and, due to the lack of sources, can no longer be definitively clarified. The Kant Society was founded in 1904 on the initiative of the philosopher Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933) with the foremost objective to maintain and to promote the journal *Kant-Studien* [Kantian Studies] set up by him in 1896. It functioned as a kind of an umbrella organization binding the so-called “local groups” at home and abroad. These local groups hosted evening lectures and discussions and organized working circles in philosophy. It is quite likely that the Beths structured, or wanted to structure, their International Society for the Psychology of Religion in accordance with the model of the Kant Society. At least Karl Beth had a certain connection with the Kant Society: in 1925 he published, in the journal of this society, an article on the relationship between religion and magic (the topic owing to which he is still partly remembered in the circles dealing with the history of religion and with cultural anthropology, see Beth [40]). The Kant Society, which counted among its members such extraordinary personae of most diverse origins as Nicolai Hartmann, Max

⁹ Archive of the Kant Society [Archiv der Kant-Gesellschaft e.V.] at the philosophical seminary of the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz.

Scheler, Max Horkheimer, Martin Heidegger, Karl Barth, Albert Schweitzer, Romano Guardini, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt und Martin Buber, time and again displayed interest in psychology and in psychological questions. The awards set up by the Kant Society were subvented by a certain patron of science, who also often determined the subject of a competition (Ruffing [41]). After the benefactor Emil Sidler-Brunner had placed 10,000 Reichsmarks at the disposal of the Society, the eleventh award announcement was called “Sidler-Brunner prize assignment.”¹⁰

It is unclear whether Marianne Beth had already been informed via some personal contacts about the interest of the Kant Society in the psychology of faith before the official announcement was made, or whether her relevant publications had called, at least, Sidler-Brunner’s attention to the subject.¹¹ What we do know, is that Marianne Beth was conferred the first prize.

Psychology of unbelief: the First International Congress on Psychology of Religion

The prize she won must have strengthened Marianne Beth’s interest in the issue of psychology of belief and unbelief. Karl Beth also approached this subject matter: in a paper given at a conference on psychopathology and psychology in Vienna on June 10, 1930 he precludes for the first time, albeit shortly, the topic of unbelief. In the same year the International Society for the Psychology of Religion also decided to organize a congress. In the beginning its subject theme was still not determined (it is not yet indicated in the first announcement about the upcoming congress made in the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*, 1930, p. 292), but the decision to launch the congress under the umbrella title “The psychic causes of unbelief” must have been taken soon afterwards. The congress which took place on May 26-31, 1931 in Vienna, became a remarkable event in the history of the psychology of religion: in fact, later, there was never again held such a big congress dedicated exclusively to the psychology of religion! A large number of internationally renowned scholars had been invited and agreed to participate, and Karl Beth had managed to persuade many of these to join the editorial board of the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*.¹²

One finds nearly all of them again in the various notifications and preliminary programs of the congress; in addition to members of the editorial board (see footnote 12), papers by quite a number of

¹⁰ Emil Sidler-Brunner was a banker from the city of Lucerne in Switzerland, who was intimate with the philosopher Paul Haeberlin and upon the solicitation of the latter in 1924 also set up the Foundation Lucerne [*Stiftung Lucerna*] aimed at the promotion and popular propagation of interdisciplinary discourse, especially in the spheres of sciences and arts.

¹¹ It is also quite possible that both initiatives took place independently of each other. Psychologists of religion had already shown interest in the subject of belief and unbelief before, in connection with both scholarly and church-solicitous matters. The Dutch Godsdienst-Psychologische Studievereeniging was founded in 1920 upon the solicitation of Van der Spek, anxious about the expansion of unbelief, see Belzen, [42].

¹² The front page of the issue n.1, year 3 flaunts the names of Ernst Cassirer (Hamburg), Albert Hellwig (Potsdam), C.G. Jung (Zurich), Kurt Kärber (Dortmund), Ernst Kretschmer (Marburg), Felix Krueger (Leipzig), Fritz Künkel (Berlin), G. van der Leeuw (Groningen, Netherlands), Konstantin Traugott Österreich (Tübingen), James B. Pratt (Williamstown, USA), Alfred Römer (Leipzig), H. Schlemmer (Frankfurt an der Oder), Eduard Spranger (Berlin), Edwin D. Starbuck (Iowa, USA), Robert H. Thouless (Glasgow, UK), Joachim Wach (Leipzig) and Georg Wobbermin (Göttingen).

people are mentioned,¹³ who all left traces in the history of philosophy, medicine, theology and religious studies, testifying to the scope of the academic background in which psychology, and especially the psychology of religion, originated. Although not all the pre-announced papers were really presented and not all the cited persons came to the congress, it nevertheless hosted over 400 participants from 20 different countries; the number of those who actually attended the sessions never sank below 150, twelve out of 27 speakers came from abroad.¹⁴

Since the present article is concerned with Marianne Beth as a pioneer of psychology, it would be somewhat a stretch to describe the congress in more detail. Let it suffice to note that at this congress, in whose organization she was actively involved, she presented a paper entitled “Unbelief as a manifestation of deficit” [*Unglaube als Ausfallserscheinung*], which may count as her most original contribution to the psychology of religion. It can probably be reconstructed which the text of that paper has been. Doing so, we should first of all note that it must remain unclear whether there was a relationship between the paper at this congress and the work which she had earlier submitted for the competition at the Kant Society: the archival records of the Kant Society were, in large part, destroyed during World War II, and the works submitted to different competitions got lost. On the one hand, therefore, it cannot be fully excluded that Marianne Beth read there a text, which had been published in the issues of *Religionspsychologie* [38,39], yet this conjecture remains rather improbable: although the competition announcement does not explicitly stipulate that the proposals should be new and original, such a premise went virtually without saying. Besides, this two-piece essay of Marianne Beth’s also does not correspond to the regulations established by the call for papers:

“In order to explore the subject it would be most pertinent to proceed from a careful description of the phenomenon of belief in its totality, that is, not merely to depart from a description of a religious faith, showing subsequently the connection of this phenomenon with the whole rest of life’s structure. A further task in this regard would be the representation of the differentiation of belief in its core functions and main forms. Here, the requirement to effect an absolutely objective explication of the phenomenon on the whole always remains decisive.”¹⁵

On the other hand, one could suppose that her article, published in 1932 in *Kant-Studien*, represented the award-winning paper.¹⁶ At the same time, there are also some facts speaking against it: (1) the title of the article has nothing to do with the topic of the competition;¹⁷ (2) it is not mentioned

¹³ See, inter alia, the notifications in the issues of the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* of that year and the preliminary program, which Karl Beth attached to his letter to the Ministry for Education [*Unterrichtsministerium*] from January 23, 1931 (Austrian State Archive, General Administrative Archive [*Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv*], call number 1931/4958).

¹⁴ Kürber [43] speaks of 36 pre-announced and 28 actually given papers but cites 21 names (pp. 310-311); Kunert [44] reports of 19 papers (p. 182); Beth’s [45] own detailed review mentions 27 speakers (see pp. 191-195). Also see Beth [46].

¹⁵ The text of the eleventh award announcement is still extant in several locations. The reference here is to the copy in the Archive of the Kant Society, p. 2 (paragraph 3).

¹⁶ According to the paragraph “m” of the regulations of the award announcement, “the direction of the Kant-Studien has the right but no obligation to print the award-winning works in its journals or its supplementary issues” (ibid., p. 2).

¹⁷ Although the article makes reference to “belief”, both religious and otherwise, it is correlated with the third differenced modality of the psychic. Marianne Beth speaks of thinking, reacting, and experiencing; she discriminates between 1) a

anywhere that this text represents, or has as basis, a work awarded a prize by the Kant Society; (3) in the text Marianne Beth cites publications from the year 1931, therefore it could not be a work that had had to be submitted until December 31, 1929 (unless it had been thoroughly revised); (4) a publication in *Kant-Studien* in 1932 seems rather late for a work that would have been awarded a prize by the Kant Society itself in the beginning of 1930; (5) the text absolutely does not correspond to the above-quoted guidelines of the announcement of competition, has anything but an “empirical” character and in no way offers the required “careful description of the phenomenon”.¹⁸ Yet it clearly results from the text published in the *Kant-Studien* that Marianne Beth had further pursued in her research in psychology: she refers several times to the contemporary publications of such scholars as Bleuler, Lévy-Bruhl, Krüger, Jaensch, Stern and Oesterreich.

The text “Unbelief as a manifestation of deficit”, which was published in 1935 in the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* [47] may well be the paper Marianne Beth presented at the Viennese Congress for psychology of religion.¹⁹ Marianne Beth distinguishes, in the first instance, between phenomenal and fundamental unbelief. In the case of the former, “unbelief only concerns the manifestations of belief”; regarding the latter, unbelief connotes the general incapacity to be devout (p. 210). Like in her earlier work, she describes religiosity as “the psychic capability to believe”; being able to be devout represents a result of a certain “aptitude” (which she herself writes between inverted commas, p. 211). The core part of her article from 1935 consists in “attracting attention to particular properties of the aptitude, whose absence is noticeable in fundamental unbelief” (p. 215). She discerns four characteristics of this aptitude: (1) the capability to embrace the absolute; (2) the (emotional) faculty to get “shaken”; (3) a specific form of beholding (related to the thought form of “being”, as described by her in 1932); (4) the volitional intention of a personality directed at the absolute. She concludes: “A fundamentally unbelieving person is characterized by an absence of one, several, or all factors necessary for becoming aware of the archetypal phenomenon [*Urphänomen*]. It is a manifestation of deficit in psychic aptitudes” (p. 221).²⁰ Although the topic “unbelief” was not new to the psychology of religion, Marianne Beth’s way of dealing with it was a quite original analysis of the phenomenon, in

modality of intellectual, reasonable thinking; 2) a modality of “soul” (in original also introduced in inverted commas), that is, the embedded, down-to-earth, comprehensive, contemplative thinking; 3) a modality of “being”, of an acquisition of meaning and structure.

¹⁸ As noted before already, there were different ways in which “empirical” was understood in those days. Notwithstanding, M. Beth’s “Threefold modality of the psychic” [36] can hardly be regarded as empirically oriented; rather, it is a theoretical-psychological work, in which she only once, fleetingly, gives an example of empirical evidence (“I personally knew a highly educated man...”, p. 265).

¹⁹ The delay in publication might possibly have been entailed by financial problems. Initially, a publication of all papers and contributions to discussions had been planned. In 1933, Karl Beth published a “third part” of the proceedings. Parts 1 and 2 have, however, never been published. Probably, only the part dedicated to the “psychology of youth” could find a publisher. In 1935, several papers that had been presented at the congress but not yet published, appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*. In this regard it is also significant that after 1933 it was no longer the publishing house Ungelenk, but the “Publishing House of the International Society for the Psychology of Religion” that published them.

²⁰ One may mention in this regard the parallels to the comprehension of religion in the works of Marianne Beth’s contemporaries: Jung, Maeder, Rümke and many others related to the Zurich school in psychoanalysis, which rivaled with Freud’s Vienna school, see Belzen [48].

the light of contemporary psychology. (It will be obvious, however, that things, as so often in the psychology of religion, can nevertheless be seen and presented quite differently, depending on different presumptions.²¹)

A Tragic End of a Career and Specialization in the Psychology (of Religion)

Marianne Beth's publications in the psychology of religion from the subsequent years increasingly establish her as an empirically oriented scholar. She gets ever more concerned with concrete data, specific persons or experiences [47,53-62; one can also observe this tendency in her numerous book-reviews]; her juristic background comes out only once (in an article on legal right and the extent of religious suggestion [58]), and her contributions to the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* can no longer be identified as philosophical. Yet her career as a psychologist of religion was brought to an abrupt end.

The victory of national-socialists in Germany in 1933 must have alarmed the Beths already at the very outset and had a negative impact on their work in the psychology of religion. Marianne Beth descended from a Jewish family; her father had, from early on, been a follower of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), and her brother Wolfgang (Binyamin Ze'ev) von Weisl (1896-1974) was even a militant Zionist. By all probability, the Beths have been informed about the fate of the Jewish population in Germany and therefore could take timely measures. Following the annexation (deceptively called *Anschluß* ["joinder"]) of Austria by Nazi Germany (March 13, 1938), they sent both their children away from the country (to the United States of America; their daughter Eleanore must have been in Canada in 1939). Soon after the "Anschluß", the Gestapo searched the Beths' apartment and confiscated a suitcase full of documents.²²

²¹ Psychologists in general don't reflect and often are not even aware of the presumptions much of their empirical work depends on. The works of both Karl and Marianne Beth on the psychology of belief and unbelief display a tendency to regard a devout person (and a Christian into the bargain) as a 'norm'. Being 'religious', whatever that should mean, is virtually normal, therefore 'unbelief' has to be 'explained'; an unbeliever is considered deficient. However hard both try to avoid this stance, they can't get away from this apriori. Still, it corresponded to the general contemporary thought and was obviously entrenched in the so-called modern-positive [*modern-positiv*], and yet, with regard to its contents, generally conservative protestant theology, primarily influenced by Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), which Karl Beth professed (see also Lessing [49,50]). As it also results from the books by Beth, such as, for instance, *The Development of Christianity to a Universal Religion* [51], the earlier-mentioned rigid distinction between religion and magic serves a similar apologetic cause. Apparently, Antoine Vergote (*1921), a philosopher and psychoanalyst of Lacanian stamp, was the first European professor for the psychology of religion not to champion the idea of the human being naturally religious. (Vergote [52] endorses the view that the human being is neither religious nor unreligious by nature, but, rather, can pursue either way in the course of a complex biographical process without ever getting entrenched in a firm position.) A more detailed analysis of the premises underlying the positions of both Beths would, however, exceed the scope of the present article.

²² It is reported in a letter from November 15, 2002, sent to me (J.A.B.) by the son Eric W. Beth. The confiscation might represent one of the possible explanations for the fact that no documents pertaining to the activities of the Beths in the psychology of religion and to the organizations which they had founded (the Research Institute, the International Society and the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*) are retrievable: the Beths might have destroyed all of them (also in order not to attract the attention of the Gestapo to their collaborators); Karl Beth's faculty of theology—in case the documents had ever been placed into its custody—might have destroyed them; the records, wherever they were, might

Some scholars report that Marianne Beth “emigrated” in 1938 to the USA (see Prost [20]; there is, however, no source reference), I would prefer to say: she fled to the USA. In February or March 1939 she came to Portland (Oregon), where she taught Sociology and German as a visiting lecturer at Reed College between 1939 and 1943. Although Marianne Beth had many years before, in 1921, converted to the protestant confession and had been active in the Protestant Church and theology, due to his marriage to a Jew, Karl Beth had been forced into retirement. Despite the formal divorce from Marianne on July 4, 1938, he was stripped of his pension in 1939. Thereupon he followed his family to the USA, where he was a visiting lecturer teaching comparative theology at Meadville Theological Seminary in Chicago (Illinois) between 1941 and 1944. As it shows in the few remaining documents, both must have lived for several years away from each other and in abject poverty. In 1944, Marianne Beth was granted American citizenship. In the file on Marianne Beth in the archives of Reed College is a letter from September 5, 1980 by Dorothy O. Johansen, at that time the college archivist, in which the following is listed:

February 1944: She was employed at the Chicago Home for Girls

June 1944 : Her husband “had his last year at Meadville”

March 1958 : “... I landed ... in the oil industry ... and had a good time there.” She retired at 65 and “I am working for them now on a free-lance basis.”

After the war, neither of the Beths ever resumed their activities in the psychology of religion. Karl Beth taught theology at Meadville College (Chicago, U.S.A.) According to Prost [20], Marianne Beth defined herself after 1945 as a “private scholar”. She would have conducted literary research in ten languages and translated into eight. (It is unclear in which period of time this was the case or where those works were published.) Karl Beth died on September 9, 1959 in Chicago (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1959, p. F). After having lived for some more years in New York (Stöckl [63]), Marianne Beth died on August 19, 1984 at the age of 95 in New Jersey.²³

Marianne Beth’s Inducement: Psychology of Unbelief

The activities of both Beths in the psychology of religion have largely sunk into oblivion. (On the webpage “Frauen in Bewegung” [Women on the move] of the Austrian National Library, Marianne Beth is mentioned not as a psychologist but rather as a sociologist.) Yet Marianne Beth’s interest in the psychology of belief and unbelief brought about a certain effect. Let us take a brief look only.

Whereas it was obviously easy to realize that in the psychology of religion one should take belief—however it may be oriented in its contents—seriously, the same attitude with regard to unbelief (and later numerous other, partly non-Christian spiritual phenomena) was anything but self-evident. Unbelief appeared on the agenda only on a specific solicitation. There is a classical study from The

have been immolated in a shelling or a fire; the Gestapo might have also sequestered the respective papers. In the last case, there is also a chance that the documents—in case they had survived the vicissitudes of the war—might have been transported by the Red Army to Russia. I have closely pursued all the leads without obtaining any definitive certainty: nothing can be found.

²³ <http://www.fraueninbewegung.onb.ac.at>.

Netherlands, which by all probability might owe its existence to the scholarly interest of Marianne Beth and to the congress, in whose organization she participated. In 1933, the publishing house Ten Have in Amsterdam launched a popular-psychological series *Psychology of Unbelief*, whose initiator and editor Kohnstamm, a Dutch pioneer of psychology, was also mentioned in the notifications of the First International Congress on the Psychology of Religion.²⁴ It is quite probable that Kohnstamm either got onto this subject or, at least, was further encouraged in his interest precisely owing to the Congress. He was an intimate friend of G. van der Leeuw, who, similarly to Beth, was a historian of religion interested in psychology. Van der Leeuw, who published articles in the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*, was a member of its editorial board and led a friendly correspondence with Beth (which is archived in the University library of Groningen, Netherlands, the city where Van der Leeuw was a professor). It may well have been Van der Leeuw who recommended Kohnstamm to the Beths as a speaker for the Viennese congress (see Belzen [64]).

Even more recent psychological studies of “unbelief”, in what way ever conceptualized, even if not owing exclusively to Marianne Beth, have been heirs to her initiatives. In 1939, in the series edited by Kohnstamm, there appeared a short book with the title *Karakter en aanleg in verband met het ongeloof* [Character and disposition as connected to unbelief] [65], which became a classic of the psychology of religion and definitely a Dutch bestseller in it: in the Netherlands it has been re-printed twelve times and is still on sale. It was written by the psychologist and psychiatrist Rümke (1893-1967), who is considered to be one of the most eminent exponents of these disciplines in The Netherlands and one of the very few who got also known abroad. His publication is the only work in the psychology of religion from the Netherlands that has three times been translated into other languages: twice into US-English, and once into Spanish (Belzen [48]). When, years later, such internationally renowned psychologists of religion as Paul Pruyser (1916-1987) and Antoine Vergote, independently from each other, put the subject of “unbelief” on the agenda of the psychology of religion [66,52], they had been influenced, if not directly by Rümke’s book on unbelief, then at least in their approaches by his other influential psychological works [67-72]. Pruyser was a native Dutchman, who in 1946 emigrated to the USA, completed his studies in psychology there and made a scientific career as a leading psychologist of religion [73] (he was, among others, the editor of the internationally leading *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*). During his studies, Pruyser got acquainted with Rümke’s works in psychology and psychopathology and, as it follows, from his well-known *A dynamic psychology of religion* [74], had also read the latter’s study on the psychology of unbelief. The already introduced Vergote is a Flemish (Dutch speaking) Belgian, who was very well acquainted with Rümke’s work and for years discussed his psychology of unbelief in his seminars at the University of Leuven. Without as much as even knowing her name, Pruyser, Vergote and present-day psychologists of religion are, in any case, heirs of an inducement originally came from Marianne Beth.

²⁴ Philipp Abraham Kohnstamm (1875-1951) was originally a professor in thermodynamics at the University of Amsterdam, who got increasingly interested in philosophy and psychology. In the 1930s he was a tenured professor in pedagogy both in Amsterdam and in Utrecht.

Archives

Austrian State Archive (Vienna, Austria)

Archive of the Kant-Society, Philosophical Seminary of the Johannes Gutenberg University (Mainz, Germany)

Archive of Reed College, Portland (Oregon, USA)

Archive of the University Library, University of Groningen (The Netherlands)

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