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Liefbroer, A.I.

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Chapter 7. Multiple religious belonging among visitors of Dominican spiritual centers in the Netherlands³⁷

Abstract

In the religiously pluralized Western world, a trend called ‘Multiple Religious Belonging’ (MRB) has been identified. Although it is a much theologically debated concept, empirical research on the practice of MRB is limited. The present research project therefore explores the phenomenon of MRB among visitors of Dominican spiritual centers in the Netherlands (n=472). It investigates to what extent and in which ways such visitors combine elements from more than one religious tradition in their lives and what they perceive to be the benefits of combining elements. It links this information to their views on religion, the resources they draw from, their (religiously diverse) networks, and their motivations for attending spiritual activities. The results indicate that respondents who combine elements from more than one religious tradition (‘combiners’) are more likely than ‘non-combiners’ to: a) see religion as something that is constantly changing during the life course; b) have networks which are religiously diverse; c) place importance on nature, in-depth conversations, personal rituals or practices, and theological, philosophical, and spiritual texts as resources; d) be motivated to attend spiritual centers because of a focus on self-exploration.

Keywords

Religion; Spirituality; Multiple Religious Belonging; Motivation; Network

Introduction

“I combine elements from different religious tradition in my life.”

Yes, certainly—I think so—I don’t think so—No, certainly not.

In a study involving a representative sample of the Dutch population, 24% of respondents agreed to the above statement by choosing either “Yes, certainly” or “I think so”. This amounts to 3.1 million people in the Dutch population, who can be assumed to combine elements from several religious traditions in their lives, a phenomenon that has been described as ‘Multiple

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Religious Belonging' (MRB) (Berghuijs, 2017, p. 24). Having a clear picture of this form of hybrid religiosity is necessary to understand the changing form of religion in contemporary societies (Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski, & Tusting, 2005). Although MRB is a 'common experience' in Asia, in the Western world, it has only recently been identified as a phenomenon which is not as rare as it was perhaps previously assumed to be. Thus, the lived experience of people combining more than one religious tradition in their lives has only recently been subjected to research and reflection (Phan, 2011, p. xvii).

The concepts of MRB and the hybridity of religions have become highly debated. Within theology, the possibility and desirability of adhering to more than one religious tradition have been questioned (cf. Dupuis, 2002; Phan, 2003; Drew, 2011). Although some scholars stress the 'uniqueness of religious traditions' and others focus on a 'shared religious core' of traditions, feminist and post-colonial theologians challenge both viewpoints (Oostveen, 2017, p. 38). In our research, we think of MRB in an open and broad sense, thereby including people who combine elements from various religious traditions in their lives without necessarily identifying with or being a formal member of two or more religious traditions (Kalsky, 2017, p. 345).

While the theological debate continues, as indicated, empirical research on the phenomenon of MRB is limited. Thirty-three interviews on dual religious belonging were conducted by Goosen (2007, 2011), indicating that belonging to more than one religious tradition does indeed exist. Homrighausen (2015) conducted eight in-depth interviews with Buddhists who also identify as Christian, examining how they became 'dual believers' and how they combine the two religions. A first attempt to quantify MRB was conducted recently by Berghuijs (2017).

While the three studies provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of MRB, many questions remain unanswered. For instance, why do people combine elements from more than one religious tradition in their lives? What benefits do they gain from doing this? Which resources do they find important? How does combining elements from various religious traditions relate, for instance, to people's (religious) networks? Answering these questions is necessary to create a clearer picture of the phenomenon of MRB. This will help us gain a better understanding of the role religion(s) play(s) in the lives of 'ordinary' people.

The research project

Our explorative research project was set up by the Dutch Dominican Research Centre for Theology and Society in Amsterdam. The Dominicans are a Catholic religious order founded

by the Spanish priest Dominic de Guzman in 1216 in order to preach the Gospel. The order has always focused on teaching activities, often adapting to the social and intellectual circumstances of the times. In the Netherlands, as in the rest of the world, there are various Dominican spiritual centers that offer a wide variety of courses and activities, spanning various religious traditions. The central focus of our project was to unravel how and why visitors to these centers combine elements from different religious traditions and in what way this is (or is not) connected to other aspects of their lives. More specifically, the research questions were formulated as follows:

- (1) How many respondents combine elements from various religious traditions?
- (2) What do respondents perceive as the benefits of combining elements from various religious traditions?
- (3) What are respondents' views on religion and MRB?
- (4) What do respondents' (religious) networks look like?
- (5) What resources are important for the respondents?
- (6) What motivates respondents to attend spiritual activities?
- (7) To what extent and in what ways are questions (3), (4), (5), and (6) connected to MRB?

In order to answer these questions, a questionnaire was distributed among visitors to Dominican spiritual centers in the Netherlands. Using a quantitative method enabled us to question a relatively large group of people and to compare groups of respondents who combine elements from more than one religious tradition with those who do not, using statistical methods. Visitors to Dominican spiritual centers are an interesting group to explore MRB, for two reasons. Firstly, previous research on Christian spiritual centers (including Dominican centers) suggests that there are many 'MRBs' among the visitors. In a survey by De Groot, Pieper, and Putman (2013, 2015, p. 118), 25% of the respondents chose—going against the instructions they had been given—two or more religious traditions when asked about their affinities, which is, according to the authors, a possible indication of MRB. Secondly, the activities offered by Dominican spiritual centers reflect an interest in MRB. On the one hand, activities with a Christian signature are offered, such as Christmas services and rosary meditation; on the other hand, activities inspired by other, mainly Eastern, religious traditions are offered, such as courses on Zen meditation, Mantra singing, and Hatha yoga (Dominicanenklooster Huissen, 2016; Dominicanenklooster Zwolle, 2016). We therefore hypothesized that the number of people combining elements from more than one religious tradition in this sample would be much higher than in the general population. This group of people thus seemed to be an ideal group for investigating MRB.

Method

Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was distributed among visitors of spiritual centers of the Dominicans.³⁸ The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Firstly, questions were raised about respondents' views of religion and MRB, followed by questions about whether—and if so, why—they combined elements from different religious traditions, what their (religious) networks looked like, and which resources were important to them. Secondly, questions were asked about the activities respondents attended at the Dominican spiritual centers. Thirdly, instructors were asked about their views of the visitors, MRB, and the Dominican identity (these results are described elsewhere, see Liefbroer, 2017) and, finally, demographic characteristics were requested. Answering the questionnaire took about ten minutes.

Response

From 23 May 2016 to 3 August 2016, the questionnaire was distributed among visitors to Dominican spiritual centers in various ways, using social media, newsletters, announcements during services, and e-mail. This resulted in 569 people starting to fill in the questionnaire. However, some (17%, n=97) did not complete it.³⁹ When comparing the 'quitters' (n=97) and the 'finishers' (n=472) regarding the first four questions (which were about religion and MRB) which nearly all of them completed, no differences were found between the two groups. Since no demographic information is available of the 'quitters', they were left out of the analysis.

Respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 472 visitors,⁴⁰ of whom a large majority were women (73%). The mean age was 58 years, ranging from 21 to 88 years. Respondents were relatively highly educated, with 67% having a university or higher professional education degree; the comparable proportion in the total Dutch population is 27% (CBS, 2014). Although this is an exceptional group in terms of gender, age, and education, compared to the total Dutch population (CBS, 2014, 2015a, 2015b), the characteristics are comparable to those found

³⁸ Those who were unable (for whatever reason) to fill in the questionnaire online could complete the questionnaire using paper and pen.

³⁹ Various reasons might account for this. Respondents, for instance, may have felt that the questionnaire was too long, they may have become tired, something might have occurred that caught their attention, they could have lost interest, etc.

⁴⁰ One of the respondents was omitted from the analysis, because this person did not fill in the questionnaire 'properly', giving the same answer to every question.

among respondents in other research on Christian spiritual centers in the Netherlands (De Groot et al., 2013).⁴¹ The respondents in that study were also identified as being mainly elderly, relatively highly educated women. Most respondents (91%) in our sample visited one of two Dominican monasteries: either in Zwolle or in Huissen. The other respondents visited other centers of the Dominicans.

Our approach to measuring MRB

As mentioned in the introduction, using the concept of Multiple Religious Belonging (MRB) has become a highly debated topic, especially after the publications by Cornille (2002) and Bernhardt and Schmidt-Leukel (2008) on this subject. In following up on this debate, our research also uses the concept of MRB, which has certain limitations. Hedges (2017) has argued that the concept of MRB as generally conceived relies upon a problematic construction of ‘religion’, which can be expressed as the ‘World Religions Paradigm’, in which the various religious traditions are seen as having fixed boundaries. The notion of traditions with fixed boundaries has been questioned by scholars such as Droogers (1995; 2014), who approaches hybrid religiosity from the perspective of religion as a form of play. Within our research, the focus on the concept of MRB does, however, seem to presume such fixed boundaries. In addition, it is important to be aware of the qualitative differences between religious traditions; monotheistic religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, differ, for example, from Eastern religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. While the former tends to focus on orthodoxy (right belief), the latter are often more concerned with orthopraxy (right practice) (see e.g., Bell, 1997, pp. 191–197). Furthermore, those who identify as ‘spiritual, but not religious’ (Mercadante, 2014) will not, for example, identify as those belonging to multiple *religions*. As a result, the choice for using the concept of MRB rather than another concept could have affected what respondents stated about their religiosity.

The term ‘religious belonging’ is almost as contested as the term ‘religion’ (Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). In our research, the notion of belonging is explored by way of various dimensions to which people can belong in religious traditions (affinity, practices, and social participation, see below). Admittedly, such a dimensional approach means that belonging is always related to religious traditions, which has the possible shortcoming of failing to capture belonging in a broader sense, such as belonging to nature or to the bodily wisdom of daily life.

⁴¹ Explanations for the over-representation of women in ‘subjective’ or holistic spirituality can, for instance, be found in Woodhead (2007) and Sointu and Woodhead (2008).

Quantifying and operationalizing MRB is not an easy task, since people can belong to religious traditions in various ways and to various degrees (Cornille, 2003, p. 43; Drew, 2011; Berghuijs 2017, p. 22). Therefore, to address the diverse expressions of MRB, we decided to measure MRB in three different ways, some of which are comparable to the measurements Berghuijs (2017) used in her research among a representative sample of the Dutch population. The first and second way reflect the *emic* (or the respondents') perspective, whereas the third way more strongly reflects the *etic* (or the researchers') perspective. In the first way, which is the most direct way we used in order to measure MRB, respondents were asked if they combined elements from several religious traditions in their lives. Using this approach implies that MRB is understood in a broad sense, meaning that 'combining elements of more than one religious tradition' is sufficient to be seen as MRB.

In the second way, which narrows down the options, compared to the first, we asked respondents who combined elements from various religious traditions to indicate from which religious traditions they combined elements. Respondents who chose two or more religious traditions in answering this question were referred to as 'combiners'. The following religious traditions could be chosen from: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism or "other, please specify which religious tradition". Within the 'other' category, many religious traditions would 'count', such as shamanism, Daoism, and esotericism. There were, however, two restrictions. Firstly, denominations within religious traditions were not 'counted' as an extra tradition when the religious tradition itself had already been chosen. For example, if a respondent chose Christianity and noted Protestantism as another religious tradition, this would not be seen as a form of MRB, but as (mono-)belonging to Christianity. Secondly, Humanism (although this can be understood as a tradition) was not seen as a *religious* tradition; thus providing this answer as an 'other religious tradition' was not 'counted' as MRB.

In the third way, we measured MRB in a more complex manner, using a dimensional approach. The dimensions are derived from the nine dimensions of religious belonging that Berghuijs (2017) distinguishes, based on Glock and Stark (1965) and Smart (1998). In our questionnaire, for pragmatic reasons (to keep the questionnaire short), three out of nine dimensions were included and measured in a shorter form than that used by Berghuijs (2017). The dimensions that were included were: 1) affinity (having affinity with two or more religious traditions); 2) practices (practicing rituals or other customs from two or more religious traditions); 3) social participation (participating in meetings/celebrations, networks or discussion groups, being a member, providing financial support, volunteering and/or having a profession in two or more religious traditions). The dimension of origin was also measured, but

this was not taken into account when we determined MRB, since it does not represent an active element of religious involvement (Berghuijs, 2017, p. 26).

In the following, we describe and discuss the results for each of the research questions separately, except for the last research question, “To what extent and how are questions (3), (4), (5), and (6) connected to MRB?”, which will be integrated with the results and discussion for research questions (3) to (6). After presenting the results of the first research question, “How many respondents combine elements from various religious traditions?”, we will reflect on the three ways of measuring MRB as outlined above.

Results and discussion

1) How many respondents combine elements from various religious traditions?

As outlined above, three ways were used to measure MRB. For the first way of measuring MRB, respondents were asked to answer the statement “I combine elements from different religious traditions in my life” by choosing “Yes, certainly”, “I think so”, “I don’t think so” or “No, certainly not”. The percentage of respondents who gave a positive answer to this statement—either “Yes, certainly” (40%) or “I think so” (34%)—was 75%. Since this is a very high percentage compared to the 24% of the total Dutch population (Berghuijs, 2017, p. 24), it seems that our sample consists of a group of people who combine a lot of different traditions.

For the second way of measuring MRB, the respondents who had agreed to the previous statement (75%) were asked to specify which religious traditions they combined. Of the total sample, 14% chose only one religious tradition, mainly Christianity. This suggests that they might have understood the statement “I combine elements from different religious traditions in my life” in a different way, for example, in the sense that ‘religious traditions’ may include combining elements from various Christian traditions, such as Protestantism and Catholicism. In the following, we speak of ‘non-combiners’ when referring to respondents who do not combine elements *and* respondents who chose one religious tradition in the follow-up question, whereas the term ‘combiners’ is used to refer to respondents who chose two (31%), three (19%) or four or more religious traditions (11%)—amounting to 61% of the total sample (see Figure 1).

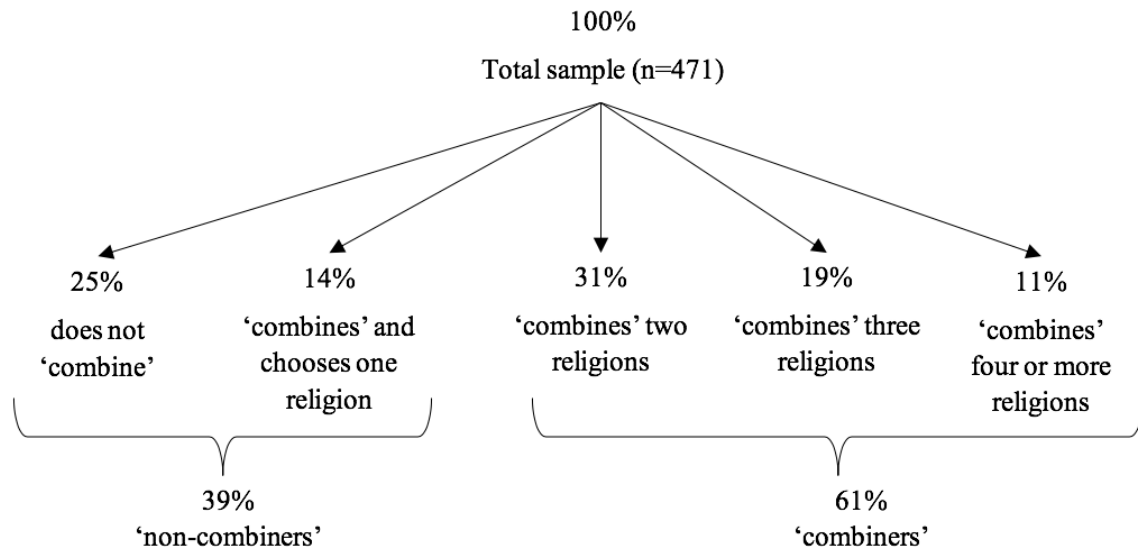


Figure 1: Overview of (multiple) religious belonging from participants, in percentages (n=471).

Nearly all 'combiners' (98%) chose Christianity as a religion they combine with another religion or with other religions. Similar to other research (De Groot et al., 2013; Berghuijs, 2017), a combination of Christianity and Buddhism was found to be most common, followed by the combination of Christianity and Judaism (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of the religious traditions chosen by respondents who combine two or more religious traditions (the 'combiners'), in percentages (n=290).

| <i>Christianity</i> | <i>Islam</i> | <i>Judaism</i> | <i>Buddhism</i> | <i>Hinduism</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 98 | 11 | 39 | 81 | 23 | 22 |

The results of the third way of measuring MRB, using different dimensions (see Table 2), indicate that most respondents in this sample have a Christian background (88%) and that hardly any had a multiple religious upbringing (2%), although this was not taken into account when we determined MRB.

When taking the three dimensions 'affinity', 'practices', and 'social participation' into account, the findings show that 38% of respondents chose two or more different religious traditions. When comparing the 'combiners' with the 'non-combiners' regarding this variable, it appears that the 'combiners' chose more different religious traditions than the 'non-combiners' (53% versus 16%; see Figure 2). This implies that, among those claiming that they do *not* combine, 16% *do* in fact have an affinity with, practise and/or participate in various religious traditions. Apparently, for these respondents, having an affinity with, practising and/or participating in more than one religious tradition does not mean that they also identify as

individuals who ‘combine elements from different religious traditions’. At the same time, it implies that of those claiming that they *do* combine, 47% do *not* have any affinity with, practise and/or participate in several religious traditions.

Table 2: Overview of the religious traditions respondents chose when asked: “Do you belong to a religious tradition in one or more of the following ways?”, per dimension and in percentages (n=471).

| | <i>Christianity</i> | <i>Islam</i> | <i>Judaism</i> | <i>Buddhism</i> | <i>Hinduism</i> | <i>Other</i> | <i>One or more religions</i> | <i>Two or more religions</i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Origin</i> | 88 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 89 | 2 |
| <i>Affinity</i> | 67 | 0 | 8 | 23 | 4 | 9 | 84 | 19 |
| <i>Practices</i> | 61 | 1 | 2 | 21 | 2 | 9 | 76 | 17 |
| <i>Social participation</i> | 72 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 19 | 82 | 18 |

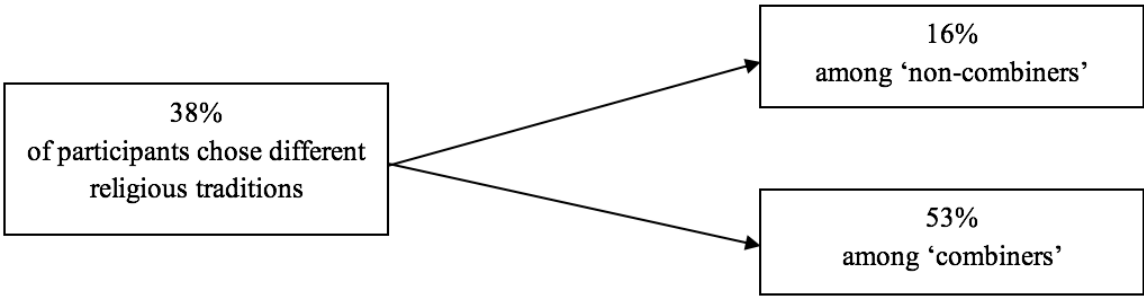


Figure 2: Overview of the percentage of participants who choose two or more different religious traditions across the dimensions ‘affinity’, ‘practices’ and ‘social participation’ (n=471).

These findings raise questions about the way MRB is measured, which cannot be answered by this study alone and needs further exploration. Firstly, how can it be explained that almost half of the respondents who ‘combine’ do not have any affinity with, practice or participate in more than one religious tradition? Perhaps the dimensions we included were not measured properly and thus should have been measured differently and in more detail (e.g. by asking about specific practices instead of using the broad item ‘practices and rituals’). Another possibility is that respondents combine elements regarding dimensions other than the dimensions included in our questionnaire, for instance, ‘ideology’, ‘ethics’ or ‘experience’, as distinguished by Berghuijs (2017, p. 22).

Secondly, what do respondents mean when they say they combine elements from various religious traditions in their lives? What does this look like in practice? Thirdly, what

accounts for the finding that the three different types of quantifying MRB yield such different responses? Following the first way, it appears that 75% of the respondents combine elements from more than one religious tradition. However, this number drops to 61% when we examine the percentage of respondents' answers to the question which religious traditions they actually combine (second way). And, when we look at the dimensions 'affinity', 'practices', and 'social participation', the results indicate that 38% of the sample 'combine'. Measuring MRB or 'combining' is, apparently, not an easy task, with different ways of operationalizing MRB yielding different results. Moreover, it depends on the way MRB is defined by the researcher(s). This relates to our fourth question: which of the measurements is best? If the *emic* (or the respondents') perspective is taken into account, the first or second measurement would seem best. If the *etic* (or the researchers') perspective is valued more, the third measurement would be a likely choice, especially when one sees MRB as something one needs to have (at least) some affinity with, practice and/or participate in several religious traditions.⁴² In the following, we sometimes compare the scores of 'combiners' with those of 'non-combiners', using the second way of measuring MRB as a standard. This is, in our opinion, the best way to reflect the *emic* perspective of whether respondents identified themselves as persons who 'combine elements' as well as to restrict MRB to respondents who actually reported combining two or more religious traditions.

2) What do respondents perceive as the benefits of combining elements from various religious traditions?

Respondents who said they combined elements from different religious traditions (measurement 1) were asked to indicate what they perceived as the benefits of 'combining' by choosing from several items (see Table 3).⁴³ Some of these items mainly have to do with intellectual (e.g. "offers new insights") or spiritual deepening (e.g. "helps me to [further] develop my spirituality"), whereas other aspects focus more strongly on social (e.g. "offers me

⁴² This is notably a contested statement. Multiple (or double) religious belonging may have various forms: "from a light-hearted flirting with different religions to a serious commitment to more than one tradition" (Cornille, 2003, p. 48). It could, for example, be considered that in order to really belong to a (or more) religions, one must identify as such or be a member of one (or more) religious institution(s) (Borup, 2016, pp. 88-91).

⁴³ The open question "For what reason do you combine elements from different religious traditions in your life?" was also asked, in order to gain a broader and more detailed view of respondents' motivations for 'combining'. This question raised many different responses, which are described in detail in Liefbroer (2017).

special interactions with people”) or affective components (e.g. “gives me a sense of coming home”).⁴⁴

Table 3: Overview of answers to the question “What do you perceive as benefits of combining elements from various religious traditions?”, in percentages (multiple answers possible; n=351).

| <i>Combing elements from different religious traditions...</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Offers new insights | 76 |
| Helps me to (further) develop my spirituality | 75 |
| Helps me to deepen my relationship with God / the mystery / the Other | 57 |
| Is an ongoing learning process in interacting with people from a different background | 51 |
| Offers me special interactions with people | 44 |
| Provides me with guidance and grip in my life | 41 |
| Offers me moral frameworks, standards and values | 31 |
| Gives me a sense of belonging to a community | 28 |
| Gives me a sense of coming home | 27 |
| Gives me a sense of safety and protection | 22 |
| Gives me a sense of certainty | 9 |
| Other | 7 |

The results indicate that, for most respondents, combining elements from various religious traditions offers them new insights (76%) and helps them to (further) develop their spirituality (75%). It also helps them to deepen their relationship with God/the mystery/the Other (57%) and it involves an ongoing learning process in interacting with people from different backgrounds (51%). Aspects explicitly having to do with feelings (‘a sense of... [belonging/coming home/certainty]’) score lowest (9-28%) and thus seem less important to the respondents than the previously mentioned aspects and benefits such as ‘offers me special interactions with people’ (44%), ‘provides me with guidance and grip in my life’ (41%), and ‘offers me moral frameworks, standards, and values’ (31%). Lastly, ‘other’ indicates other aspects of ‘combining’, such as “Freedom, full independence and also connection, trust” (RP425), “It helps me to refrain from handling this in a fixed manner. I want to live with an open attitude.” (RP538), and “It gives me the feeling that I’ll ever find my own truth and guide line” (RP98). These results show that, although the benefits of combining elements from various religious traditions vary widely among respondents, aspects having to do with intellectual and spiritual deepening are mentioned most often.

⁴⁴ These aspects are derived from discussions between the authors and another scholar and were tested by some participants in the field.

3) What are respondents' views about religion and MRB?

Besides asking questions about the extent and the reasons why respondents combine, we were eager to know more about how respondents view religion and MRB. Therefore, the following three statements were presented. Firstly, "For me, religion is something that is constantly changing during your life." Many respondents (87%) agreed with this statement, a percentage that is much higher than that reported in the research (37%) which used a representative sample of the total Dutch population (Berghuijs, 2017, p. 24).

Secondly, "For me, religion is a fixed framework of convictions, standards, and values." Here, the responses were more diverse. Most respondents did not agree (56%), but many others did (43%). A small percentage (2%) answered "Don't know". The two statements are negatively correlated ($r=-.16$; $p<.01$). Thus, whereas, for most respondents, religion is something that changes constantly during the life course, this does not necessarily mean that they disagree with seeing religion as a fixed framework (and vice versa).

Thirdly, a statement about MRB as a normal phenomenon was presented: "In my view, it is normal when people combine elements from various religious traditions." Clearly, most respondents (51% indicated "Yes, certainly", 35% "I think so") feel this is the case. Only 9% do not (3% stated "No, certainly not", 6% "I don't think so"). Again, few (5%) answered "Don't know". It seems therefore that, although not everyone sees him- or herself as a 'combiner' (25% do not), nearly all respondents think of MRB as a normal phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are differences between 'combiners' and 'non-combiners'.⁴⁵ 'Combiners' see MRB as a more 'normal' phenomenon than 'non-combiners' (99% versus 77%). In addition, whereas 'combiners' feel more strongly that religion is something that changes during the life course (95% versus 76%), 'non-combiners' see this more often as a fixed framework (60% versus 33%). This implies that the way respondents feel about religion and MRB relates to whether they 'combine' themselves.

4) What do respondents' (religious) networks look like?

Do respondents who combine elements from more than one religious tradition have more religiously diverse networks than those who do not combine? Our results suggest that this is indeed the case.

⁴⁵ All reported group differences are significant ($p<.05$). When we compared 'combiners' with 'non-combiners', variables were controlled for gender, age, educational level, and the location where respondents took part in the study.

Table 4: Overview of participants' religious network, as answered to the question: "Do you have contact with people belonging to (a) religious tradition(s)? And if so, which? Multiple answers possible", in percentages (n=471).

| | <i>Not religious</i> | <i>Christian</i> | <i>Islamic</i> | <i>Jewish</i> | <i>Buddhist</i> | <i>Hinduist</i> | <i>Other</i> | <i>One or more religions</i> | <i>Two or more religions</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Partner</i> | 45 | 50 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 54 | 7 |
| <i>Friends</i> | 12 | 80 | 14 | 9 | 20 | 6 | 17 | 89 | 34 |
| <i>Family</i> | 24 | 75 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 77 | 8 |
| <i>Colleagues</i> | 42 | 48 | 13 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 53 | 19 |
| <i>Religious leader / teacher / pastor</i> | 37 | 56 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 62 | 7 |
| <i>Religious group or network</i> | 37 | 54 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 63 | 8 |
| <i>Other social groups (e.g. sport- or hobby club, street or neighborhood)</i> | 68 | 22 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 11 | 33 | 7 |
| <i>Internet contacts</i> | 73 | 20 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 26 | 7 |
| <i>Other</i> | 68 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 3 |
| <i>Overall</i> | 95 | 95 | 30 | 17 | 32 | 12 | 32 | 98 | 61 |

Respondents were asked to indicate which religious traditions were present in their networks, for each kind of relationship (with partners, friends, family, etc.). The results show that nearly all respondents (95%) have contact with Christians (see Table 4). Friendships are religiously most diverse: 34% of the respondents have contact with persons coming from various religious backgrounds. Overall, 61% of respondents have contact with people belonging to different religious traditions. For ‘combiners’, this percentage is significantly higher than for ‘non-combiners’ (71% versus 46%). This raises the question how these items are connected: does having contact with people from various religious orientations lead to ‘combining’—as in “The Life of Pi”, where Pi meets people from diverse religious traditions, explores these traditions, and feels connected (Martel, 2001, as described in Kalsky, 2008)? Or is it the other way around? Are those who are combining elements from several religious traditions more eager to get in touch with religiously diverse groups of people? Questions like these cannot be answered by our study. Moreover, the questions are probably intertwined, in the sense that a person who ‘combines’ is more likely to have contact with people from various religious backgrounds and, by meeting people from various religious backgrounds, this person is more likely to ‘combine’ (Verkuyten, 2010, pp. 174, 175). What we do see is that there are differences

between religious traditions. Although respondents have a relatively high amount of contact with Islamic friends and colleagues, Islam is hardly mentioned as a religion respondents use to ‘combine’ (see Table 1).

5) *What resources are important for the respondents?*

The fifth question focused on the resources respondents find important and whether respondents who combine elements from several religious traditions draw from different resources compared to those who do not combine. In order to address these questions, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of several resources (see Table 5).

Table 5: Overview of the importance of resources for participants, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=very important; 5=very unimportant) (n=470).

| <i>Resource</i> | <i>Total importance (n=470)</i> | <i>Importance for ‘combiners’ (n=285)</i> | <i>Importance for ‘non-combiners’ (n=185)</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <i>Nature</i> | 1.62 | 1.52** | 1.78** |
| <i>In-depth conversations</i> | 1.73 | 1.66* | 1.84* |
| <i>Music, literature, movies and other creative expressions</i> | 1.94 | 1.89 | 2.00 |
| <i>Personal rituals or practices (e.g. meditation, prayer, yoga, fasting)</i> | 1.99 | 1.88** | 2.17** |
| <i>Theological, philosophical or spiritual texts</i> | 2.02 | 1.95* | 2.11* |
| <i>Role models and inspiring figures</i> | 2.23 | 2.19 | 2.29 |
| <i>Religious texts (e.g. the Bible, Quran, Bhagavad Gita)</i> | 2.26 | 2.34 | 2.14 |
| <i>Celebrations with (a) group(s) of people</i> | 2.27 | 2.32 | 2.19 |

*A significant difference between ‘combiners’ and ‘non-combiners’ at $p < .05$.

**A significant difference between ‘combiners’ and ‘non-combiners’ at $p < .01$.

As presented in Table 5, all the resources are at least of moderate importance to the respondents. However, resources such as nature, conversations, and creative expressions are of higher importance to them than more traditional sources such as religious texts and group celebrations. In addition, differences can be found in the responses of ‘combiners’ and ‘non-combiners’. For the former, nature, in-depth conversations, personal rituals or practices, and theological, philosophical, and spiritual texts are more important than for the latter. Other resources are of equal importance to both groups.

6) *What motivates respondents to attend spiritual activities?*

Why do respondents attend spiritual activities? Are ‘combiners’ motivated by different reasons

compared to ‘non-combiners’? De Groot et al. (2013) asked their respondents about motivations for attending activities at spiritual centers. What they indicated could be clustered into three categories: the self, others, and God/faith. In these authors’ research, MRB was not included as an explicit category. In order to gain insight into the question whether MRB plays a role in the motivations of respondents for attending spiritual activities, we added this fourth category to our questionnaire, using three to four items per category (see Table 6).

Table 6: Overview of the motivations for attending spiritual activities, clustered into four (pre-factor analysis) and three (post-factor analysis) categories.

| <i>Categorization beforehand: Motivation focused at...</i> | <i>Categorization based on factor analysis</i> | <i>Motivation</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Self</i> | 1/2 | To contemplate / to reflect on my life |
| | 1 | To increase the mind-body balance |
| | 1 | To discover and / or develop my talents |
| | 1 | To relax |
| <i>Faith</i> | 2 | To deepen my relationship with God / the mystery / the Other |
| | 2 | To gain a better understanding of the Christian tradition |
| | 2 | To connect to the Dominicans’ spirituality |
| <i>The other</i> | 2 | To meet like-minded people |
| | 2 | Because I want to share my questions with others |
| | 2 | To mean something for another person |
| <i>MRB</i> | 3 | To combine elements from various religions in my life |
| | 3 | To engage in practices from diverse religious traditions |
| | 3 | Because this place opens up the possibility to be inspired by more than one tradition |
| | 3 | To understand more from diverse religious / worldview traditions |

To investigate whether the four categories are connected, a factor analysis was conducted. The results indicate that not four, but three categories can be distinguished in the respondents’ answers: (1) focus on the self; (2) focus on God/faith and the other; (3) focus on MRB. Thus, the focus on God/faith and the other is more strongly connected than expected.

In our sample, as in the sample in the study by De Groot et al. (2013, p. 101), most respondents are motivated by a focus on the self.⁴⁶ Interestingly, ‘combiners’ are more strongly

⁴⁶ The number of respondents who answered this question is slightly lower than that of the rest of the questionnaire (n=361), since this question was only asked of respondents who explicitly identified as ‘visitors’. Some of the respondents identified as leaders of spiritual activities and, for reasons we are unsure of, some identified as neither visitors nor leaders. Since the questionnaire was distributed among visitors and leaders of the Dominican spiritual centers and since the invitation explicitly indicated that

motivated than ‘non-combiners’ not only by the focus on MRB (3), but also by the focus on the self (1), whereas those who do not ‘combine’ are more often motivated by the focus on God/faith and the other (2). Does this imply that ‘combiners’ are more egocentric and less socially engaged than ‘non-combiners’? Research by Berghuijs, Bakker and Pieper (2013) suggests that this is not the case. Firstly, they show that gender, age, and educational level are “stronger predictors of social engagement than religious and spiritual beliefs, experiences, or practices” (Berghuijs et al., 2013, p. 775). Secondly, when they look at the religious and spiritual variables, “connectedness with self, others and nature” turns out to be the most important predictor of social engagement (ibid). In addition, and as a means to nuance the impression of the ‘combiners’, the focus on God/faith is not absent—not even among the ‘combiners’. As reported previously (see Table 3), spiritual development and deepening one’s relationship with God/the mystery/the Other are among the most important reasons for respondents to ‘combine’.

Other observations

MRB does not only relate to respondents’ views on religion, their networks, the resources they find important, and the motivations they have for attending spiritual activities, but also relates to their gender and educational level. Women in our sample more often combine elements from several religious traditions than men. This difference is found with regard to all three measurements of MRB (1: 78% versus 64%; 2: 66% versus 48%; 3: 42% versus 28%). Thus, not only are women over-represented in our sample—as is also the case among visitors to other Christian spiritual centers (De Groot & Pieper, 2015, pp. 109, 110), and in the field of subjective or holistic spirituality in general (Heelas et al., 2005; Woodhead, 2007, p. 115)—they also ‘combine’ more than men. This raises the question why men combine less than women in our sample and the question where men who ‘combine’ can be found, given that, as shown by Berghuijs (2017, p. 32), in the total Dutch population, men combine just as much as women.

Respondents who have low levels of education ‘combine’ less than all the other categories of respondents, according to the second measurement of MRB (low educational level: 21%; middle educational level: 64%, high educational level: 63%). This is supported by other research of the Dutch population, which indicates that MRB is more common among the well- educated (Bernts & Berghuijs, 2016, p. 135; Berghuijs, 2017, p. 32). This may be

the questionnaire was meant for those particular participants, the ‘neither’ group was excluded from the dataset.

explained by the likelihood of those groups having easier access to knowledge about diverse religious traditions (Bernts & Berghuijs, 2016, p. 135). Nevertheless, in our sample, the link between educational level and MRB is not as clear as it may seem, as for the other measurements of MRB (1 and 3) no significant differences between the low, middle, and high educational levels were found.

Finally, as shown in the research of representative samples of the total Dutch population (Bernts & Berghuijs, 2016, p. 135; Berghuijs, 2017, p. 32), respondents did not differ in terms of age in relation to combining elements from various religious traditions.

Conclusion

In this study, the phenomenon of MRB was explored using a questionnaire for visitors to Dominican spiritual centers (n=472). With regard to our research questions, the results indicate that 61%–75% of respondents combine elements from various religious traditions in their lives (measurements 1 and 2). When a dimensional approach to measuring MRB is used, based on the dimensions of affinity, practices, and social participation, results indicate that 38% combine elements from various religious traditions (measurement 3). Although respondents perceived various benefits of ‘combining’, aspects having to do with intellectual and spiritual deepening were mentioned most often. Furthermore, it was shown that respondents who combine elements from more than one religious tradition are more likely than ‘non-combiners’ to: a) see religion as something that is constantly changing during the life course; b) have networks which are religiously diverse; c) place importance on nature, in-depth conversations, personal rituals or practices, and theological, philosophical, and spiritual texts as resources; d) be motivated to attend spiritual centers because of a focus on self-exploration.

Given that the respondents in our study are mainly elderly, highly educated women, it seems unlikely that these results can be generalized in relation to the Dutch—or even more broadly to the Western—population. Nevertheless, it does seem likely that this sample of visitors to the Dominican spiritual centers is representative of a larger group of visitors to Christian spiritual centers in the Netherlands, since the respondents’ characteristics are comparable to those of respondents in a larger sample drawn from 41 Christian spiritual centers (De Groot et al., 2013).

This study has allowed a clearer picture of the phenomenon of MRB to emerge and, by doing so, it helps to gain a better notion of the new forms religion has taken in a contemporary Western society. However, several questions remain unanswered. Based on our research findings, we suggest that future research should focus on the following questions: a) what

measurement of MRB best reflects respondents' religiosity? b) What does it mean when respondents 'combine'? c) What role do resources—such as nature, in-depth conversations, personal rituals or practices, and theological, philosophical, and spiritual texts—play in the (religious or spiritual) lives of 'combiners'? d) What is the role of networks in people becoming 'multiple religious belongers'? e) How can we explain the gender difference between women and men, especially in the light of the finding that, in the total Dutch population, both men and women 'combine' just as much (Berghuijs, 2017)? By answering such questions, future research could explore the phenomenon of MRB in more detail, helping us to understand better the way people combine religious traditions and what role this plays in, and the meaning this adds to, the lives of 'ordinary' people.

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