IMPACT OF LIMINALITY AND DOUBT ON PERSONAL THEOLOGY

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I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and

2. to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Introduction

In August 2019 Marty Sampson, a Christian songwriter associated with Hillsong, posted on social media that he was "genuinely losing my faith".[1] The post was later deleted and he tried to correct that he had not "renounced" his faith but had instead found himself on "incredibly shaky ground".[2] His subsequent activity on social media, although also later deleted, revealed a man who had found himself going through a process of actively questioning exactly what it was that he believed. In his posts he appeared to have not necessarily lost what it was that he once believed but was struggling with how to use it to make sense of the world that he was experiencing.

In his original Instagram post Sampson asked a series of questions about preachers falling, miracles not happening, apparent contradictions in the bible, and the matter of hell, and each question was followed by the same statement: "No one talks about it".[3] Sampson was identifying that, at least in his personal experience, topics that might raise questions that could threaten the foundations upon which faith is thought to be built tend to be ignored. His response to the idea that "No one talks about it" was "I am not in any more. I want genuine truth." Sampson appears to be acknowledging, whether he consciously realises it or not, that there is inherent value in asking such questions, and that they can lead to a new and greater understanding.

In reflecting on Sampson's now deleted post, theologian Paul Jones identifies the issue that "No one talks about it" as "one of the biggest problems facing the church today".[4] Questions are not only not encouraged but, more dangerously, questions can also be actively discouraged. Some of these

[1] "Hillsong Songwriter Marty Sampson Says He's Losing His Christian Faith," 12 August 2019.
[2] Leah MarieAnn Klett, "Hillsong worship leader clarifies he hasn't renounced faith, but it's on 'incredibly shaky ground'," 13 August 2019; Michael Brown, "Reaching out to a Hillsong leader who is renouncing his faith," 12 August 2019.
[3] "Hillsong Songwriter Marty Sampson Says He's Losing His Christian Faith."
[4] Paul Jones, "Losing your faith? Let's talk about it," 15 August 2019.

views were reflected in the public response that occurred online to Sampson's post. There were people who were critical that Sampson would make such a statement that he was questioning what he believed on a public platform. Others argued that for Sampson to question rather than hold to certainty without any doubt indicated that he was never truly a Christian in the first place. Neither of these views or responses support the person who finds themselves in a liminal space and unable to ignore the questions that are arising for them. This type of response also does not acknowledge the potential value of doubt and questioning in faith formation and development.

This thesis will address this potential value in doubt and questioning by developing and presenting a model of the impact of liminality and doubt on personal theology. This model will constructively draw from similar trains of thought in several different disciplines, including theology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and the history of science. An analogy will also be developed alongside this model. This analogy will help explain the way in which an individual makes sense of their world, and how they can develop and move towards a new model of understanding when their previously accepted framework is no longer sufficient to make sense of what they are experiencing in their life.

For this analogy, imagine a jigsaw puzzle, the sort where all of the pieces are the same shape such that any two pieces will fit together. For some pieces the correct placement will be obvious, based on the colouring or image on the pieces, but for other pieces there may be multiple discernible possibilities. This jigsaw puzzle also has no edges, no maximum size, and no defined shape. It also does not come in a box with all the possible pieces already present. Instead, the puzzle pieces are collected over time. Sometimes pieces will seemingly come in a rush, and the puzzle might appear to rapidly grow outwards, possibly growing irregularly in one particular direction. On other occasions there may be long spans of time between new pieces being added. As the puzzle grows, and more pieces are added, sometimes the placement of pieces will need to be reassessed; the addition of a new piece might make

it obvious that a previously placed piece is now no longer appropriately placed, and a new location for it will need to be found.

But now imagine that something happens that upsets the puzzle. It gets knocked or bumped, and parts of the puzzle get messed up. Pieces that previously seemed to have an obvious place now do not, and the overall look of the picture that had been forming piece by piece is impacted, although not all of the pieces will be directly affected. Some parts will remain untouched while other parts will seem completely destroyed. A process must then begin of trying to put the pieces back together again. However, pieces may end up in different places to where they were before, as they now seem to make more sense when placed in another part of the picture and connected to different pieces. The overall image consequently changes.

These puzzle pieces each come about and are collected through life experiences. The process of working out how best to fit the pieces together mirrors the process of how an individual makes sense of their experiences. It also mirrors the nature of how each experience relates to other experiences and the sense of meaning that is created for each experience because of these relationships. From a theological perspective, the picture that forms as the pieces are placed together represents the individual's developing understanding of God. The overall image represents that particular individual's own personal theology. Each piece represents a particular belief or value of the individual. As the individual travels through life, and experiences more things, their understanding of the world, and how it works, grows. Some of the puzzle pieces that are collected from various experiences will be easy to place and make sense of. Other experiences and pieces will be more challenging and may take time to place and make meaning of. This might involve a process of testing how a piece fits in different places around the jigsaw and may even require the reassessment and movement of other pieces in order to find a place for the piece to belong.

Sometimes, though, there are also experiences and events that shake the jigsaw and rattle the pieces and have a more significant impact on the puzzle.

These can include major traumatic events that occur either communally, such as natural disasters, or individually, such as abuse or personal grief or loss, but can also include seemingly less significant events, such as a passing comment from someone or a scene within a movie, that can lead an individual to start to ask questions. Suddenly things may no longer seem as clear as they once did, and pieces that had previously been placed with great certainty may no longer appear to be so reliably placed. The confidence or certainty that had previously existed that a piece was in the right spot, the same confidence and certainty that was relied upon and gave the individual an ability to interpret the event or experience in a way that makes sense, is now replaced with doubt. This space of doubting and questioning might be described as a liminal or 'in-between' space, when the way in which the world was previously understood, the way in which the pieces were previously pieced together, no longer makes sense. The questioning that can characterise this space can include questions about the individual's own personal beliefs about the world, and about how they understand God and how God relates to the world.

The aim of this thesis is to consider the impact that liminality and doubt as an in-between space can have on an individual's own personal theology. A methodological approach of constructive engagement will be used. Typically, the constructive engagement strategy seeks to draw on numerous different philosophical traditions in such a way as to see how they can constructively engage with each other to lead to a greater understanding on a particular topic.[5] The approach that has been taken here differs slightly but follows the same principles. Rather than drawing on a range of traditions all from within the discipline of philosophy, the approach that will be taken here is to draw on

[5] Bo Mou, "On Constructive-Engagement Strategy of Comparative Philosophy: A Journal Theme Introduction," *Comparative Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2010); Stephen C. Angle, "The Minimal Definition and Methodology of Comparative Philosophy: A Report from a Conference," *Comparative Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2010); Bo Mou, "How Constructive Engagement in Doing Philosophy Comparatively is Possible," *Synthesis Philosophica* 62(2016); Bo Mou, "Constructive-Engagement Movement in View of Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: A Theme Introduction," ed. Bou Mo, vol. 27, *Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy: constructive engagement* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008); Bo Mou, "A Methodological Framework for Cross-Tradition Understanding and Constructive Engagement," in *Worldviews and Cultures: Philosophical Reflections from an Intercultural Perspective*, ed. Nicole Note, et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009).

traditions from a range of different disciplines including philosophy, as well as theology, psychology, anthropology and the history of science, with the aim to examine how these models of thought may constructively build on each other to develop a single combined new idea. Although this approach does not reflect a typical constructive engagement methodology, as one that takes place exclusively within the discipline of philosophy, it still similarly maintains the five methodological emphases that Bo Mou describes for the constructive engagement strategy: critical engagement; constructive contribution; interpretation of the thought from each thinker; aim to contribute to further development of thought; and comparative.[6]

This thesis will begin by looking at what constitutes a personal theology, particularly drawing on the thoughts of David Gortner. Gortner has developed a line of thought around the concept of an individual having a personal theology that has been developed within the context of their experiences and has implications for how the individual subsequently responds to and makes sense of their world. Personal theology could be seen as equivalent to an individual's 'philosophy of life'.

The concepts of liminality and doubt will then be defined. Although doubt can often be seen as a negative behaviour, it can also be seen as positive and constructive, which is the understanding that has been adopted here in this thesis. This line of thought has been drawn on from a wide range of literature. The concept of liminality, as presented here, will be primarily drawn from the work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, who first developed the concept in their work within the field of anthropology in regard to rites of passage. It is a concept that has subsequently also been picked up by other disciplines and applied more widely than in just the anthropological study of rites of passage. The relationship between the two concepts of liminality and doubt will be compared and analysed.

[6] Mou, "How Constructive Engagement in Doing Philosophy Comparatively is Possible," 266.

As a way of looking into the impact that liminality and doubt have on personal theology various models of meaning making will then be investigated. Many such models have been proposed throughout the literature and across multiple disciplines regarding how an individual makes sense of their world. In the second chapter, several of these models, drawn from the disciplines of theology, scientific theory, and psychology, will be presented. Walter Brueggemann, taking a progression first identified by Paul Ricoeur, identifies a movement within the psalms from orientation to disorientation to reorientation, or new orientation. This is the simplest of the three models to be presented. The second model will be Thomas Kuhn's proposal of how scientific research develops, from his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* This work draws on the fields of philosophy, sociology, and the history of science. The third model investigated will come from within the discipline of psychology, where there have been multiple different models of meaning making proposed, such as from within the area of trauma studies.[7] The work of Crystal Park in particular will be investigated here. Park proposes a model that incorporates two levels of meaning to show how a particular experience or event can be incorporated into how an individual understands the world. This model offers a way of understanding how an individual can potentially make sense of a significant event either with or without necessitating a need to necessarily change the understanding that the individual first brings with them. These three models will be brought into conversation with each other, allowing for similarities and parallels to be drawn, as well as differences to be noted. The concepts of liminality and doubt will then also be brought into the conversation, and a model will be constructed to show the impact that liminality and doubt have on personal theology, where personal theology is seen as a framework for meaning making.

In the third chapter a discussion will take place regarding the model that has been developed and how it might best be visualised and understood. This developed model will then be applied to a case study on the individual Nicole

[7] Examples of such work include that by Judith Herman and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman.

Conner in the fourth chapter, through the use of mostly online resources, including blogs and podcasts, as well as a book chapter that has recently been published. This will show the relevance and possible application of the model that will be developed and the value of research to the area of thinking about how an individual's personal theology can develop and change in response to life experiences and events.

Chapter 1: Personal theology, doubt and liminality

In order to look into the impact of liminality and doubt on personal theology each of the terms liminality, doubt, and personal theology will first be defined.

Personal theology

Some have used Anselm's phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*, meaning 'faith seeking understanding', as a definition for theology, acknowledging the intellectual side of theology that sits alongside what some might say the heart believes in terms of a faith.[1] Kasper suggests that "[a]ccording to this definition neither the asking nor the understanding is extrinsic to faith. Faith itself is understood as a faith that questions and understands."[2] Theology has been considered a science, or more specifically a science of faith, because of this viewpoint and the subsequent systematic and methodical approach that can be taken to theology.[3]

'Personal theology', as this thesis will use the term, might then be defined as the specific theology of a particular individual. It is the set of beliefs, ideologies, dogmas and doctrines that provide a framework within which that individual understands God, and through which that individual strives to understand their world and how God relates to that world.[4] It is unique to that particular individual, differing in response to and in recognition of the different experiences that each individual has, the different inputs and teaching they may have received, and the different ways in which each individual will make

[1] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1984). 7, 13; Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith seeking understanding : an introduction to Christian theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004). 2; John D. Witvliet, *Worship seeking understanding : windows into Christian practice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003). 13.
[2] Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*: 7.
[3] Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*: 7.
[4] Paul J. Rennick, "A Critical Dialogue between Theology and Psychology," in *Spirituality and Health: Multidisciplinary Explorations*, ed. A. Meier, T.S.J. O'Connor, and P.L. VanKatwyk (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 36.

sense of a particular event or situation.[5] David Gortner, in his work *Varieties of Young Adult Personal Theologies: Content, Formative Influences, and Current Relationships to Everyday Life*, understands the personal theology of an individual as the same as their 'philosophy of life', offering his own definition of personal theology as

> beliefs and values about the world, causality, human purpose, and the ideal human *telos* (ultimate aim) that are shaped and transmitted through cultural and developmental forces like social capital, family, education, and religion.[6]

Personal theology is more than just a set of creeds or doctrines as it is also reflective of an individual's own values and morals: personal theology might be defined as the combination of both an individual's beliefs as well as their values.[7] For this reason it sits within the disciplines of both philosophy and systematic theology.[8]

For Gortner there are four components to an individual's personal theology:

1. Worldview, or an individual's fundamental understanding and beliefs regarding the nature of the world;
2. Theodicy, or an individual's understanding of the nature of causality and 'why bad things happen';
3. Life purpose, or an individual's sense of their own place, purpose or meaning within the world;
4. Ultimate values, or the core ethical and moral values that drive the behaviour and ideals of a good person.[9]

Firstly, an individual's personal theology is shaped by how they understand and make sense of their world, that is their sense of worldview or global

[5] David Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life" (The University of Chicago, 2004), 2.
[6] Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life," xi.
[7] Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life," 4-5, 12.
[8] Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life," 25.
[9] Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life," 3-6, 13.

meaning. But this relationship between an individual's personal theology and their worldview is also reciprocal, in that not only is their personal theology shaped by their worldview, but their worldview is also shaped by their personal theology. Secondly, not only does an individual have a worldview that allows them to make sense of how the world normally operates but there is also a need for a way to attempt to make sense of things when the world does not operate as they would expect and to try to understand what the cause is for when 'bad things happen'. An individual's understanding of the nature of causality, or their theodicy, will often develop in response to their own experiences or the experiences of others that they observe. Thirdly, an individual needs to make sense of who their own self is within the context of the world, and what their role or purpose may be, and therefore what they should do with their life. This then leads into the fourth component, the question of how an individual should live, and what principles and morals should guide their behaviour. The importance of an individual's personal theology is that it provides the framework through which to view the world and make sense of it. It is the lens that is used for meaning making.

Within the context of the metaphor that was presented in the introductory chapter, the overall image of the jigsaw puzzle that takes shape is representative of that individual's personal theology, and each individual puzzle piece represents a belief or value. Gortner himself uses a comparable analogy to suggest that "[b]eliefs and values are thus primary building blocks in personal theologies."[10] The jigsaw puzzle analogy however goes a step further to also acknowledge that an individual's personal theology also incorporates the ways in which the puzzle pieces fit together and how each of these pieces relate to each other.

[10] Gortner, "Varieties of young adult personal theologies: Content, formative influences, and current relationships to everyday life," 12.

Doubt

There are various views and opinions about the experience of doubt. The concept of doubt can be seen as a negative experience, particularly when it is viewed as the opposite of belief and as incompatible with faith.[11] Before furthering a discussion on doubt it is worthwhile first acknowledging that these words 'belief' and 'faith' can either be used to refer to the same concept, or they can be used differently.[12] Some of the difficulty in their usage lies in the fact that they share the same verb, 'to believe'.[13] The consequence has been that in the English language the words 'faith' and 'belief' have become inexplicably linked. When the terms are used differently belief is more often used to refer to the cognitive side of things and what the head thinks.[14] It is related to asking intellectual questions and being grounded in ideas, concepts, creeds and doctrines. In comparison, faith is often used to refer to what the heart believes or feels.[15]

While doubt can be perceived as something negative, the view being taken in this thesis is that doubt can be a positive experience, as well as constructive. This interpretation is possible when the opposite of belief is instead defined as unbelief, and the opposite of faith as certainty, rather than these two terms simply being defined as the opposite of doubt.[16] This then allows doubt to be seen as a state of questioning and uncertainty that can coexist alongside faith and belief. Doubt becomes the "the awareness of difficulties or questions

[11] Frank D. Rees, *Wrestling with doubt : theological reflections on the journey of faith* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001). 3; Val Webb, "Celebrating Doubt as a Catalyst in authentic faith formation," 9.
[12] Gordon W. Allport, *The individual and his religion : a psychological interpretation* (New York & London: Macmillan, 1978). 123.
[13] Rees, *Wrestling with doubt : theological reflections on the journey of faith*: 3.
[14] Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Limited, 2014). 144.
[15] J. M. Geiderman, "Faith and doubt," *JAMA* 283, no. 13 (2000): 1661; Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*: 144.
[16] Gillies Ambler et al., eds., *Flourishing in faith : theology encountering positive psychology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 170; James W. Fowler, *Stages of faith : the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, 1st ed. (Blackburn, Vic.: Dove Communications, 1981). 31. Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith.* Quoted in Ben Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017). 181; Gary E. Parker, *The gift of doubt : from crisis to authentic faith* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1990). 6; Webb, "Celebrating Doubt as a Catalyst in authentic faith formation," 9.

about the content of belief or the meaning of faith."[17] It is possible for doubt to simply be an awareness without the judgment that would render doubt incompatible with faith and belief.

Dictionary definitions of doubt, both in regard to its usage as a noun and as a verb, link it with the idea of feeling uncertain.[18] It is interesting to note the etymology of the word 'doubt', as the Latin root for the English word means 'two'.[19] This is even more apparent in the German word for 'doubt' *zweifeln*, where *zwei* means 'two'.[20] This conjures up the idea of a duality or sense of 'two minds'. This presents a clear comparison between certainty and doubt, where to be certain is to allow for a single possibility or option, or to be of 'one mind', whereas to doubt is to allow an awareness for the potential for multiple possibilities or options, or to be of 'two minds'.[21]

Ben Young uses this notion of duality and 'two-ness' and offers an analogy of doubt as "like the ice between the two [river] banks. The grassy bank represents belief, and the rocky bank symbolises unbelief. Doubting is the place in between belief and unbelief."[22] He suggests that doubt can be considered the neutral ground between belief and unbelief, and that from a state of doubt it is possible to move either to a state of belief or to a state of unbelief: "to be in doubt is to be…on the slippery surface of uncertainty. When you are on the ice of doubt, you can slide either way."[23] This idea of doubt as in-between belief and unbelief is reminiscent of the philosophical concept of the 'threshold view'.[24] This concept places doubt and uncertainty as in the middle of a spectrum, with belief at one end of the spectrum and unbelief[25] at

[17] Rees, *Wrestling with doubt : theological reflections on the journey of faith*: 133.
[18] The Pocket Oxford Dictionary. Quoted in Rees, *Wrestling with doubt : theological reflections on the journey of faith*: 2.
[19] Arne Unhjem, *Dynamics of doubt* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966). 39.
[20] Geddes MacGregor, *God beyond doubt : an essay in the philosophy of religion* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966). 179.
[21] Rees, *Wrestling with doubt : theological reflections on the journey of faith*: 2.
[22] Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith*: 35.
[23] Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith*: 35-36.
[24] Matthew Lee, "Belief, doubt, and confidence: A threshold account" (University of Notre Dame, 2014), 1-2; Scott Sturgeon, "Reason and the Grain of Belief," *Nous* 42, no. 1 (2008): 141.
[25] In their work Lee and Sturgeon specifically refer to 'disbelief' rather than 'unbelief', while Young refers to unbelief. While the two terms can be given slightly different definitions, they

the other end (Figure 1). Within this model, belief is therefore defined as "confidence that exceeds the relevant 'threshold' in the confidence spectrum".[26] This spectrum also allows a potential movement from belief to uncertainty to unbelief, or vice versa, to be visualised.[27] Comparing this spectrum to Young's model, the threshold and anti-threshold represent the point on either side of the river where the water or ice meets the riverbank. Once this threshold has been crossed, such that a place of belief or unbelief has been reached, the individual finds themselves standing on solid ground and in a place of certainty, confidence and stability of thought. This is in comparison to the slippery ice of doubt and uncertainty that exists in-between. Within both of these two models, the threshold view and Young's riverbank analogy, it is clear that doubt is not the opposite of belief, for the opposite of belief, as seen as the opposite end of the spectrum or the opposite side of the river, is unbelief. Doubt is the middle ground between the belief and unbelief. It is a place of tension between two different minds or ideas of thought.

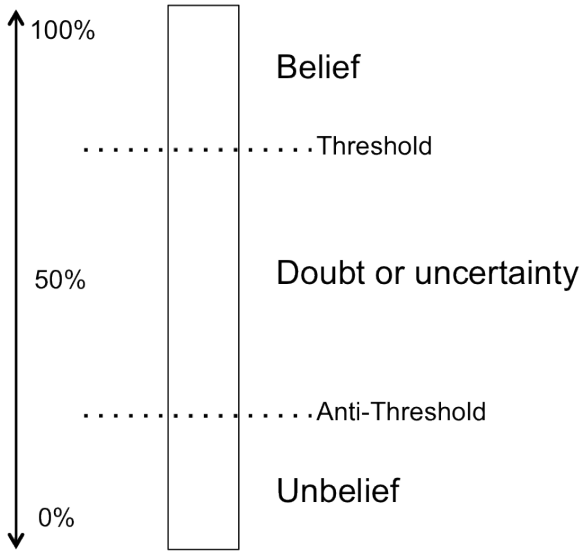

Figure 1: The threshold view is a confidence spectrum with belief and unbelief represented at opposite ends, and doubt and uncertainty placed in the middle. Adapted from Lee[28] and Sturgeon[29]

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are also used interchangeably. For the sake of simplicity and ease in this thesis only the word unbelief will be used to refer to both the opposite of belief and a lack of belief.

[26] Lee, "Belief, doubt, and confidence: A threshold account," 2.
[27] Lee, "Belief, doubt, and confidence: A threshold account," 1.
[28] Lee, "Belief, doubt, and confidence: A threshold account," 2.
[29] Sturgeon, "Reason and the Grain of Belief," 141.

As useful as these models may be, particularly in Young's analogy of the icy river between two banks there may be a danger in presenting either belief or unbelief as the two sole possible options or outcomes. These models present the idea that from a place of doubt the only possible outcomes are for the individual to either return to the belief they held before or to move to a place of unbelief. It may be worth considering the possibility of a third option, that from a place of doubt an individual may return to the belief they held before, or to a place of unbelief, or they could instead move towards a new belief (Figure 2). The acceptance of a new belief would still require the crossing of a threshold such that a new sense of confidence is achieved,[30] but this crossing of the threshold need not constitute a loss of belief. This view would then open up the potential for the place of doubt and uncertainty to not only be a transitional space but that it can also be a transformational space.

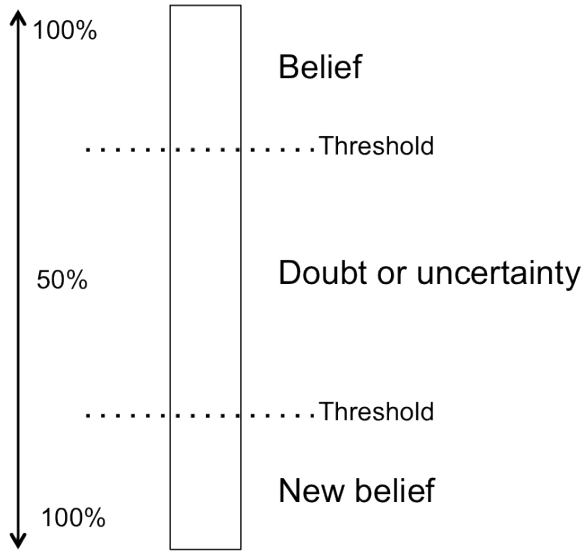

Figure 2: An alternative form of the threshold view that suggests that rather than simply moving from belief to unbelief, an individual may move from belief to new belief. This maintains the concept of having a confidence spectrum that marks the threshold between belief (or new belief) and doubt or uncertainty, but does raise the question of whether it is correct to say that doubt corresponds to 50% confidence.

[30] To use Lee's conditional definition of belief.

As well as being described as in-between belief and unbelief, or as in-between a previous belief and a new belief in the suggestion that I have introduced, doubt has also been seen as the discrepancy between belief and faith, when what the head intellectually believes and experiences seemingly no longer agrees with what the heart believes and feels.[31] Similarly, doubt has been referred to as "suspension between faith and unbelief".[32] This disconnect between the heart (faith) and the head (belief/unbelief) can lead to an experience of cognitive dissonance, "the discomfort that most of us feel when we encounter information that contradicts our existing set of beliefs or values".[33] But this idea can also create the image of doubt as acting like a bridge, either a suspension bridge or another type of bridge, that continues to create a connection between faith and belief when the two no longer seem to overlap (Figure 3). This connection allows an opportunity for communication to continue between the faith of the individual, what the heart believes, and the belief of the individual, what the head thinks and experiences, in the hope that the discrepancy between the two may be resolved.[34] This resolution will often require an adjustment to the individual's personal theology. It is worthwhile also acknowledging at this point that faith and unbelief do not need to be seen as incompatible when doubt is active. It is possible to continue to believe something in your heart even when it is in conflict with what the head believes and thinks and how the head is making sense of the world. Doubt offers the opportunity for faith and belief to remain in communication as the individual seeks to resolve the tension between the two through questioning and seeking.

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[31] Paul Thagard, "What is Doubt and When is it Reasonable?," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. sup1 (2004): 395; Webb, "Celebrating Doubt as a Catalyst in authentic faith formation," 9; Val Webb, *In defense of doubt : an invitation to adventure* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1995). 4.

[32] O. Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1996). 25-26.

[33] Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith*: 130. Chickering, "The resolution of religious doubt: Personal authority, religious maturity and faith journeys,"

[34] This communication will be more reminiscent of that Mark Davis which describes as "goes to the root of the word *'conversare*' and encourages the to-and-fro of dialogue that is intended to be an honest and creative exchange of ideas (rather than discussion which stems from the image of two combatants knocking each other to the ground)." Barbara Glasson, *A spirituality of survival : enabling a response to trauma and abuse* (London: Continuum, 2009). 114.

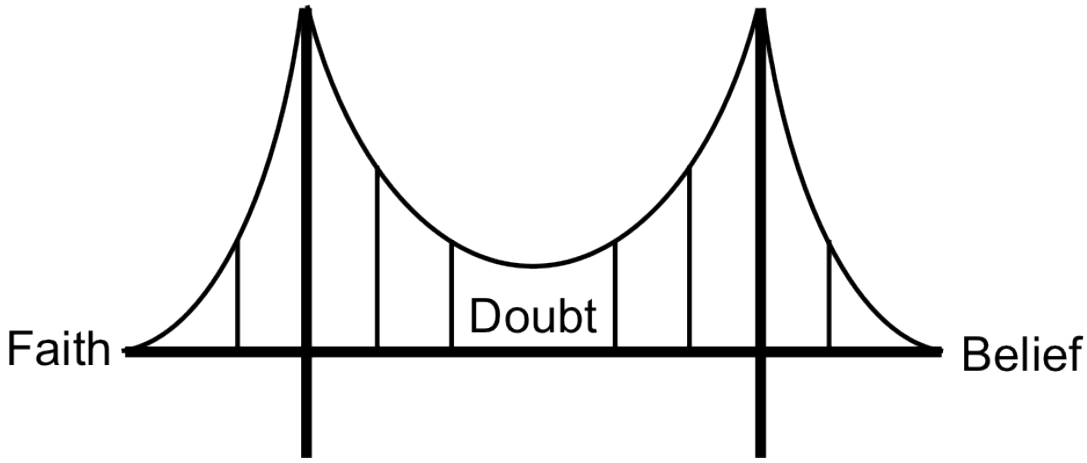

Figure 3: Doubt can provide a connection between faith and belief, bridging the two even when there seems to be a disconnect between what the head believes and what the heart feels.

This state of in-between, where a disconnect is experienced between what is believed and what is being experienced, is an uncomfortable and unsettling place. Belief offers a sense of safety and security where the individual feels settled: to use Young's analogy, belief is a solid riverbank on which to stand. Doubt, on the other hand, is the slippery ice that feels uncertain underfoot. When out on the ice (doubt) it is a challenge for the individual to remain on their feet, but with the stepping onto a riverbank (belief or unbelief) that challenge is no more. C.S. Peirce speaks strongly of this desire for resolution, suggesting that doubt "stimulates us to action until it [doubt] is destroyed."[35] Peirce suggests that this struggle with doubt to attain a state of belief can be termed 'inquiry', and that "the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion",[36] which will see the individual move towards a state of either belief or unbelief and a subsequent sense of confidence and certainty. This 'inquiry' is the same as 'questioning'. It is in this way that a definition can be reached that to doubt is to be uncertain and to be questioning the different possibilities or explanations for something. Questioning allows an individual to hold onto both faith and belief even when the two appear in conflict or against each

[35] Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Philosophy After Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 42.
[36] Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," 42.

other, and works to try to resolve the tension that might exist between them. It is this state of "radical questioning"[37] that can bring us back to Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*, or 'faith seeking understanding'. This also bears similarities to the ideas that "doubt leads to enquiry, and enquiry to truth", from the work of Abelard, and that "wonder proceeds to enquiry, and enquiry to knowledge", from the work of Aquinas (Figure 4).[38] Doubt is a crucial component of faith if it is to be one that questions in an attempt to find understanding. It is also doubt that can provide the motivation that leads to a deeper faith.[39]

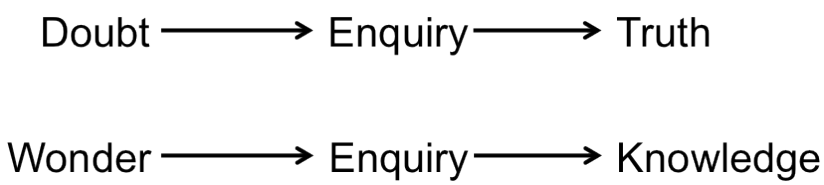

Figure 4: Ideas from the work of Abelard and Aquinas.[40] These bear similarities to Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*, or 'faith seeking understanding'.

It is this intellectual component of doubt that allows doubt to bind faith to reason, and the three concepts can be seen as relationally interconnected in a circular relationship (Figure 5).[41] Each of the three concepts has a need for or movement towards the next: if an individual starts in a place of doubt then the only way out is faith; if they start with faith, they need reason; and if they start with reason, they need doubt. There are consequences or implications for the individual for whom the balance of these three is out of kilter. If there is only doubt, and no room for faith or reason, then the individual is a sceptic. Similarly, if there is only faith, and no room for reason or doubt, then they are

[37] J.M. Shackleford, Faith Seeking Understanding: approaching God through science, (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), https://books.google.com.au/books?id=zrUdBAAAQBAJ.
[38] Ralph Norman, "Abelard's Legacy: Why Theology is not Faith Seeking Understanding," *Australian EJournal of Theology* 10(2007): 2.
[39] "Entry for 'Doubt'," in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Michigan: Baker Books, 1996).
Frederick Buechner said that "[d]oubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving". Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith*: 41.
[40] Norman, "Abelard's Legacy: Why Theology is not Faith Seeking Understanding," 2.
[41] Peter Kreeft, "Faith, Doubt, and Reason," (Villanova University, 2012).

naïve. And likewise, if there is only reason, and no room for doubt or faith, then they are rationalistic. Within the circular relationship there is no clear starting point, with no single concept that emerges first or is of greater significance than the others. As an alternative, it has been suggested that desire might be an additional component that should be included as an external starting point from which the three concepts then emerge at the same time.[42] This concept of desire as the starting point, either as a want or maybe more often as an inherent need, is an interesting thought. It acknowledges the need for the active participation of the individual in the process, be it willingly where it is driven by want, or perhaps unwillingly where it is driven by an inherent need. Such an inherent need may evolve where circumstances and experiences beyond the individual's control thrust them into a place of tension between what their heart believes and what their head thinks, or a conflict between what their beliefs say about the world and how they are experiencing the world actually operating in reality. Rather than simply jumping straight to the 'unbelief' side of the icy river the individual may find themselves in a place of doubting and questioning whilst still clinging to their faith, whilst also seeking answers and explanations that help them to make meaning and sense and resolve the tension they are experiencing.

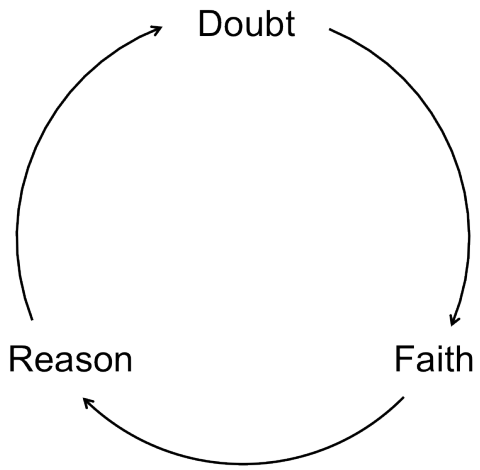

Figure 5: The relationships between doubt, faith and reason as suggested by Peter Kreeft.

[42] A member of the audience at Villanova University made this suggestion to Peter Kreeft during the question time at the end of Kreeft's lecture.

Part of the challenge of doubt and the questioning it entails is that it can, or some might say does, lead to change. And the challenge of change, as Richard Rohr puts it, is that "[t]he human ego prefers anything, just about anything, to falling or changing or dying. The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo, even when it is not working. It attaches to past and present, and fears the future."[43]

Liminality

The concept of doubt as a place of tension has similarities to the concept of liminality. This term originally emerged from within the field of anthropology, where it was used in relation to rites of passage and to explain part of the process by which social structures and social statuses change.[44] The term was first proposed by Arnold van Gennep, and then the idea was subsequently further developed by Victor Turner.[45] The word 'liminality' comes from the Latin *limes*, meaning 'threshold', and is also etymologically related to the Latin *limen*, meaning 'boundary' or 'limit'.[46] The term's original usage was used to describe the middle phase within a rite of passage, where a person is no longer occupying the space or identity that they did before, but they have also not yet transitioned to their new space or identity. This creates the sense of a liminal space as being an in-between space, or 'betwixt and between' as Turner coined.[47] Three different phases to or types of rite of passage have been described: preliminal rites, or rites of separation, which act to separate an individual from a previous world; liminal or threshold rites, or rites of transition; and postliminal rites, or rites of incorporation, by which the individual is incorporated and integrated into a new world, or

[43] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life* (London: SPCK, 2012). xxiv.
[44] Harry Wels et al., "Victor Turner and liminality: An introduction," *Anthropology Southern Africa* 34, no. 1-2 (2011): 1.
[45] Wels et al., "Victor Turner and liminality: An introduction," 1.
[46] Shackleford, *Faith Seeking Understanding: approaching God through science*; Wels et al., "Victor Turner and liminality: An introduction," 1.
[47] Victor Turner, *The ritual process : structure and anti-structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969). 95.

reincorporated and reintegrated back into their old world but in a new way.[48] For an individual who is in a liminal, in-between space they are simultaneously both 'no longer' and 'not yet'; they are 'no longer' part of their old world while at the same time 'not yet' part of a new world.[49] Turner describes individuals in this liminal space as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[50]

Starting from within anthropology, the concept of liminality has now been taken and applied to and used within the fields of sociology, psychology, history, literature, education, and religion.[51] Within the realm of religion and theology liminality provides a hermeneutic for looking at how transformation takes place.[52] It provides a way for explaining this sense of in-between, an experience that also occurs in contexts beyond just the formal rites of passage where it was initially proposed. To enter into a liminal space requires the crossing of a "definitive threshold"[53] into a space that is undifferentiated, and that can lack the normal classifications, stability and understanding that exists on the other side of the threshold, where the individual was before. This again draws parallels to the threshold view model introduced earlier in this chapter, and the concept of the threshold as marking a level of confidence.

The idea of a liminal space as an undifferentiated space that lacks the normal classifications and understandings may highlight some of the discomfort that the broader society or community can feel around and about an individual who is in such a space. Mary Douglas suggests that "what is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tends to be regarded

[48] Arnold van Gennep, *The rites of passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). 11, 21.
[49] By 'world' this is not meant in the literal sense but more referring to a sense of worldview, and how the individual, as well as potentially the rest of the community, understands the world and the individual's place within it.
[50] Turner, *The ritual process : structure and anti-structure*: 95.
[51] Timothy Carson, "Introduction," in *Neither Here Nor There: The Many Voices of Liminality*, ed. Timothy Carson (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2019), xxii.
[52] Carson, "Introduction," xxii.
[53] Carson, "Introduction," xxiii.

as (ritually) unclean."[54] Within the context of traditional indigenous rites of passage this can lead to a person within the liminal stage as being viewed as essentially invisible for as long as they are in that state of "no longer classified and not yet classified". [55] Consequently, such individuals are also often placed or housed separately during this time. Turner notes that

> Often the indigenous term for the liminal period is, as among Ndembu, the locative form of a noun meaning 'seclusion site'. The neophytes are sometimes said to 'be in another place'. They have physical but not social 'reality', and hence they have to be hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal, to see what ought not to be there![56]

It is important to note though that this liminal stage is only ever meant or intended to be temporary; it is a stage through which an individual simply passes as they move between two phases of life.[57]

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[54] Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in *The forest of symbols : aspects of Ndembu ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 97.

[55] Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," 96. Adam Pryor, "Intersections, Kairos, and Cyborgs," in *Neither Here Nor There: The Many Voices of Liminality*, ed. Timothy Carson (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2019), 142.

[56] Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," 98.

[57] Arpad Szakolczai has defined such events that trigger a movement between two phases of life as 'transformative events'. Szakolczai offers the following definition and explanation:

> A transformative event, as a technical term for sociological analysis, can be defined as something that happens in real life, whether for an individual, a group, or an entire civilization, that suddenly questions and even cancels previously taken-for-granted certainties, thus forcing people swept away by this storm to reflect upon their experiences, even their entire life, potentially changing not only their conduct of life but their identity. The degree and direction of the change depends on a number of factors: the strength and extent of the change and of the surviving fragments of previous identities, the existence of external reference points that remained more or less intact, and the presence or absence of new models, forms, or measures.

An experience such as a terrorist attack, natural disaster or personal trauma, as something that has happened that triggers questioning and doubt in a liminal space, is consistent with this idea of a transformative event. This definition can then give to the concept of liminality, as exemplified in the anthropological analysis of the rites of passage, explanatory power when applied to other phenomena. Within this context there is then provision for the experience to be assessed and meaning to be made of it. It should be noted that such an experience requires leaving behind some previous understandings or assumptions as the individual steps over the threshold, resulting in a metaphorical death and creating "a *tabula rasa*, through the removal of previously taken-for-granted forms and limits".
Arpad Szakolczai, "Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events," *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009): 158.

The Franciscan brother Richard Rohr views liminal space as a unique spiritual space. He speaks of this liminal space as being encountered on the journey from the first half of life to the second half of life. It is interesting to observe that Rohr speaks of the journey of the first half of life but then the journey into the second half of life.[58] He sees life as having two tasks, firstly to build a container, and secondly to find the contents of said container, each corresponding to the respective half of life.[59] The first half of life is about developing a sense of security, stability and predictably, through "law, tradition, custom, authority, boundaries, and morality".[60]

This sort of structure is important early in life, allowing an individual to then have developed "a very strong container to hold the contents and contradictions that arrive later in life".[61] The individual can then set out on a journey, leaving the familiar behind them and often experiencing some sort of wounding along the way.[62] This journey represents a liminal time and space. Eventually the individual will return home, however the home to which they return is now experienced and related to differently as the individual has entered their second half of life. The first and second halves of life have different languages, the latter of which is only known to those who have experienced both halves of life.[63] Rohr specifically highlights that those in their own second half of life retain an understanding and awareness of the first half of life. In other words, nothing is lost but rather things are simply different or changed, as the first half becomes integrated into the second half.

Conclusion

In this chapter the key terms in the research question 'the impact of liminality and doubt on personal theology' have been addressed and defined. Personal

[58] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: vii.
[59] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: xiii.
[60] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: 25.
[61] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: 26.
[62] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: 18-19.
[63] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: xxvii.

theology is seen as the theology of an individual. It is personalised and specific to the individual, differing from person to person, and provides the lens through which that particular individual views and makes sense of the world. Doubt has been defined as a state of questioning that can be both constructive and positive. It exists as a place of tension between belief and unbelief, between previous belief and new belief, or between head (belief) and heart (faith). Although the challenge that doubt presents to the individual is important to acknowledge it is also key that the potential that doubt has to be constructive for the individual is seen as well. Doubt should not be seen and defined as negative. The concept of liminality might then give a clearer identity to this in-between space found in the place of tension. Liminality, with its roots in the anthropological study of rites of passage, gives a name to this space between what was before and what is yet to come. It is a space that can be socially awkward and unaccepted because of the lack of descriptors and classifications for it.

Although not yet addressed, the concept of the term ‘impact’ being used is comparable to the idea of influence or effect, acknowledging that doubt and liminality can be influential experiences that can lead to a change in an individual’s personal theology. This idea will be further developed in the next chapter, where different models of meaning making, and how thoughts, frameworks and understandings can change, develop and adapt, will be presented.

Chapter 2: Models of meaning making

When personal theology is seen as providing a way for an individual to look at, understand and make sense of the world, the impact that liminality and doubt may have on personal theology can then be investigated through the study of models of meaning making. Steger offers the suggestion that:

> the use of the word *meaning*…pertain[s] to the ways in which people attribute significance to life events in relation to their broader understanding of their lives. The interaction of the meaning people give to traumatic events and the meanings they have accrued or built in their lives as a whole is the core phenomenon of interest in the meaning-making model.[1]

Such meaning making models exist in a wide breadth of disciplines. In this chapter, three different models will be presented, each from a different discipline. The aim of each of these models is to describe the process by which an individual makes sense of and interprets their experiences of the world. The first of these is by Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament biblical scholar, who developed an idea originally proposed by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. The second model was proposed by Thomas Kuhn and aims to describe the development of accepted ideas within scientific disciplines. Although he initially expected it to be primarily philosophical, his work also turned out to also be relevant to the areas of sociology and the historiography of science. The third model is from the research of Crystal Park in the area of psychology, and draws on research about human coping and responses to stress and trauma. The models will be addressed in order of complexity and number of elements, beginning with the simplest. Despite the differences in the disciplines from which these model originate there are apparent parallels between them that will be discussed. A new model based on these ideas will

[1] Michael F. Steger and Crystal L. Park, "The creation of meaning following trauma: Meaning making and trajectories of distress and recovery," in *Trauma Therapy in Context: The Science and Craft of Evidence-Based Practice*, ed. Robert McMackin, et al. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2012), 172.

then be proposed to show the relationship between liminality, doubt and personal.

Brueggemann

The first and simplest of the three models that will be investigated is taken from the field of biblical studies. As part of his work on the psalms, the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann identified a series of movements present within the psalms, which he also labelled as characteristic of the life of faith.[2] The description of these movements first evolved within the field of philosophy in the thought of Paul Ricoeur, but it is Brueggemann who has most significantly worked on and developed the idea.[3] He saw a movement from orientation to disorientation initially, followed by a second movement from disorientation to reorientation (Figure 6).

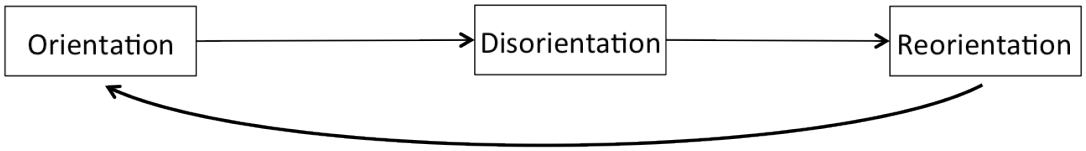

Figure 6: Model proposed by Walter Brueggemann of a movement from orientation to disorientation to reorientation (or new orientation). Brueggemann observed this model within the psalms, with different psalms corresponding to different phases of the model.

Initially, there is a sense of orientation, where the world makes sense and everything appears to be ordered as it should. Something then happens that both disorientates the individual and disorientates their understanding of the world. No longer is there the sense of equilibrium and stability that existed before. Brueggemann describes this movement to disorientation as

[2] Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms : engaging scripture and the life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. ed. (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2007). 2.
[3] Walter Brueggemann, *The psalms and the life of faith*, Psalms & the life of faith (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). 8; Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4(1975): 114.

"dismantling of the old, known world and a relinquishment of safe, reliable confidence in God's good creation".[4] Over time the individual will then (hopefully) reorientate themselves, once again establishing a sense of safety, reliability and confidence, where one is "surprised by a new gift from God, a new coherence made present to us just when we thought all was lost".[5] These phases of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation could also be described or summarised as phases of equilibration, chaos or disorder, and new order, respectively.[6] It needs to be noted however that the final phase is not a return to the original orientation, but rather it is a reorientation to a new orientation. This phase of reorientation will then function as a new orientation such that the cycle may continue and there may subsequently be a new movement into a phase of disorientation.

It was from within the psalms that Brueggemann saw an expression of each of these phases, with specific psalms being able to be classified as each of the three phases. Psalms of orientation stand as affirmations of God's goodness and faithfulness, as well as affirmations of the order and reliability of the world. Psalms of disorientation are represented within the laments, where the psalmist works to maintain their faith in the midst of grief, sorrow and despair that the world is no longer as good as it once seemed. Psalms of reorientation are then celebratory declarations after the crisis has passed and the psalmist has seen a sense of stability, security and safety be restored.[7]

Kuhn

The second model to be investigated is drawn from the work of Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn, in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,[8] presents a model of

[4] Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002). 10.
[5] Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*: 11.
[6] Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms : engaging scripture and the life of the Spirit*: 8-9.
[7] Brueggemann, *The psalms and the life of faith*: 24; Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*: 72.
[8] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (United States of America: The University of Chicago, 1970).

how scientific research develops within a community, drawing on the fields of philosophy, sociology and the historiography of science.[9] Kuhn's model presents the development of scientific research as having an initial pre-paradigmatic phase that is subsequently followed by three phases: normal science, crisis, and scientific revolution (Figure 7).[10] It is these three phases of his model that are of particular relevance to the discussion here. Normal science is the usual state of research in which the scientific community normally operates.[11] It is based on and reliant upon the established and well-accepted paradigms that exist within the community.[12] Of the key terms that Kuhn uses throughout *Structure* – 'paradigm', 'normal science', 'puzzle', 'anomaly', 'crisis', and 'revolution' – the most significant was Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm'.[13] Amongst the multitude of different ways that Kuhn uses the word, Kuhn defines a paradigm as a concept, exemplar, theory, model or belief.[14] He says that a paradigm consists of "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community."[15] One of the outcomes of such a paradigm is that it will hold a group of individuals together, specifically a scientific community in Kuhn's context, but also consequently "when a paradigm is threatened by crisis, the community itself is in disarray".[16]

It is worth noting that Kuhn's model specifically describes a process of understanding that takes place within the context of a scientific community, that is it is a model of communal meaning making. This is different to the other models that are discussed and will be developed within this thesis, which all focus on the level of the individual. Despite this different emphasis and

[9] Paul Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing scientific revolutions : Thomas S. Kuhn's philosophy of science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). xii.
[10] Alexander Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* (Chesham, Bucks.: Acumen Publishing, 2000). 25. Ian Hacking, "Introductory Essay," in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, ed. I. Hacking (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xi.
[11] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 10.
[12] Howard Sankey, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," 36(2002): 821.
[13] Sankey, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," 821.
[14] Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1967).
[15] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 175; Hans Küng, *Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1995). 60.
[16] Hacking, "Introductory Essay," xxiv-xxv.

approach, his model bears significant similarities to the other models presented here.

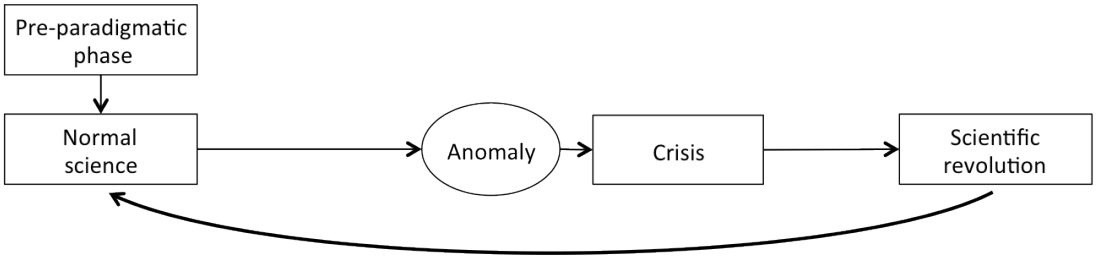

Figure 7: Thomas Kuhn's model of the structure of scientific paradigms. This model offers a suggestion for how scientific research develops.

During the process of normal science, that is the normal state in which scientific research occurs, novelties may arise that have the potential for putting the validity of a foundational paradigm upon which the science is based into question.[17] This poses a challenge for the community for, as Kuhn puts it,

> Normal science…is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost.[18]

It is through paradigms that a scientific community knows what the world is like, and it is upon paradigms that scientific research is founded. Therefore, anomalies have the potential to shake the foundations upon which the relevant science is based. As a result, a common response to novelties is to work to suppress them.[19] In some situations such ignorance is possible and seemingly accepted, based on the assumption that "[t]here are always some discrepancies" between theory and nature.[20] Where such disregard is inappropriate and the anomaly requires addressing in some manner there are

[17] Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing scientific revolutions : Thomas S. Kuhn's philosophy of science*: 231.
[18] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 5.
[19] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 5.
[20] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 81.

two possible approaches.[21] The first of these possible approaches is to reassess and reinterpret the anomaly in such a way that the anomaly can then be seen as in agreement with the paradigm and therefore ceases to be an anomaly. The psychologist Jean Piaget describes this as a process of assimilation.[22] The alternative approach is more dramatic, and involves identifying that there is an issue with the associated paradigm and thus requires the paradigm itself to be reassessed and changed. For Piaget, this would be considered an example of accommodation. The first of these two approaches, to reinterpret the anomaly so that it makes sense without needing to change broader understandings, is an example of the innate human desire to resist change and instead show a preference for maintaining the current frames of understanding.[23] It is easier and less confronting, both at the individual as well as communal level, to go through a process of assimilation rather than to go through a process of accommodation.[24]

An example of the innate human resistance to change can be seen in an experiment where participants were shown either a normal playing card or a 'trick' playing card (for example a black four of hearts) and then asked to identify the card.[25] It was observed that the 'trick' cards were almost always incorrectly identified instead as one of the normal possibilities within a usual deck of cards (for example a black four of spades), as the participants were only expecting to see normal cards and therefore adjusted their observations in order to align to their expectations.[26] However, over time as the participants were increasingly exposed to the 'trick' cards the participants were more likely to recognise that things were not as expected, adjusting their expectations to

[21] Steven J. Heine, Travis Proulx, and Kathleen D. Vohs, "The Meaning Maintenance Model: On the Coherence of Social Motivations," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 92.
[22] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992). 29-30.
[23] Edwin El-Mahassni, "An Analysis of the Applications of Key Ideas from the Philosophy of Science to the Understanding of Doctrinal Development" (Flinders University, School of Humanities and Creative Arts, 2017), 73.
[24] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma*: 30.
[25] Jerome S. Bruner and Leo Postman, "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm," *Journal of Personality* 18, no. 2 (1949); Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 63.
[26] This is an example of assimilation.

now match their observations.[27] Despite an initial resistance to the unexpected, over time and with an increased awareness of the existence of the anomaly, adjustments were made so that the anomaly would then fit within the realm of expected.

Of the two general responses to an anomaly – to reassess the anomaly in order to fit the paradigm (assimilation), or to reassess and change the paradigm in order to accommodate the anomaly – the latter can lead both the individual scientific researcher, as well as the scientific community as a whole, into a phase of crisis. With the "collapse of a previous universal consensus" that had existed under a shared and commonly accepted paradigm the result is a "science in crisis".[28] The scientists find themselves no longer able to rely on the previously unquestioned paradigm as a foundation upon which to work. Kuhn offers the following quote by Albert Einstein as an example of an experience of an acute crisis: "It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built."[29] The assumptions that played a role in the functioning of normal science can no longer be held with the same certainty, which leads to questions being raised about the validity of the science that is being conducted, as well as potentially of the science that has previously been conducted.[30] This resulting sense of instability and uncertainty can cause anxiety and distress for the affected scientific community.[31]

Kuhn suggests that there are three possible endings to a crisis: the anomaly is put aside to be addressed at a later time; a way is found so that the anomaly can be addressed by the current paradigm; or a new paradigm is necessary in order to accommodate the anomaly.[32] The last of these possible

[27] This is an example of accommodation.
[28] Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing scientific revolutions : Thomas S. Kuhn's philosophy of science*: 169.
[29] Albert Einstein. Quoted in Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 83.
[30] Bird, *Thomas Kuhn*: 25; Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 90.
[31] Travis Proulx and Michael Inzlicht, "The Five "A"s of Meaning Maintenance: Finding Meaning in the Theories of Sense-Making," *Psychological Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (2012): 317.
[32] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 84; Hans Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," in *Paradigm change in theology*, ed. Hans Kung and David Tracy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 27-28.

endings represents a 'scientific revolution', "a science's reorientation by paradigm change", as Kuhn puts it.[33] This will result in "a discontinuous shift from one paradigm to another".[34] The paradigm that had previously set the community's orientation, and provided the framework through which the community understood the world, is replaced by a new paradigm that provides a new framework and a new worldview for the affected scientific community. The individuals who propose this new paradigm are often "either very young or very new to the field",[35] with the suggested reasoning for this being that this cohort represents individuals who are "not fully indoctrinated".[36]

Kuhn describes a transition to a new paradigm as "a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalisations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications." [37] Such an acceptance of new theory will necessitate and involve "the reconstruction of prior theory and the re-evaluation of prior fact, an intrinsically revolutionary process that is seldom completed by a single man and never overnight."[38] Prior interpretations and assumptions, as well as other paradigms besides the paradigm that has now been replaced, will require reconsidering and could be open to new interpretation in light of the new paradigm. This change has been compared to a gestalt switch, with the classic example of the image that, in the viewer's mind, switches back and forth between a rabbit and a duck (Figure 8).[39] The image itself does not change, but how it is interpreted in the viewer's mind can change, such that a different animal is then seen. Similarly, prior fact does not change but how it is interpreted or viewed can be open to change.

[33] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 85.
[34] F. J. Dyson, "Is science mostly driven by ideas or by tools?," *Science* 338, no. 6113 (2012): 1426.
[35] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 90.
[36] John Horgan, "Profile: Reluctant Revolutionary," *Scientific American* 264, no. 5 (1991): 40.
[37] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 85.
[38] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 7.
[39] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 120.

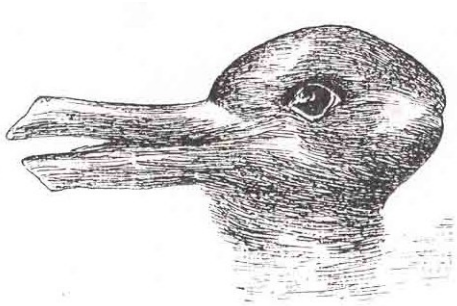

Figure 8: The classic rabbit-duck illusion as an example of a gestalt switch.

Comparison of the models of Brueggemann and Kuhn

The state of normal science that Kuhn describes is reminiscent of the state or phase of orientation that Brueggemann describes observing within the psalms. Both represent a state of stability within which the individual or community has a clear understanding of how to make sense of their world. The state of disorientation that Brueggemann observes could then be seen as parallel to Kuhn's state of crisis, however Kuhn first incorporates the concept of anomaly. This concept of anomaly is not something that is absent from Brueggemann's model for it is involved in the movement from orientation to disorientation but it is just not explicitly described. It could be debated where exactly along this progression from orientation to disorientation the concept of anomaly lies. A crisis will not occur, nor will a state of disorientation be experienced, without the presence of an anomaly, but the identification of an anomaly also does not necessarily guarantee that a crisis will follow, depending on how the anomaly is handled. When a crisis does occur it is then followed by a scientific revolution, which Kuhn coincidentally himself defines as "a science's reorientation by paradigm change", making the parallel between this phase and Brueggemann's state of reorientation clear.[40]

[40] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 85.

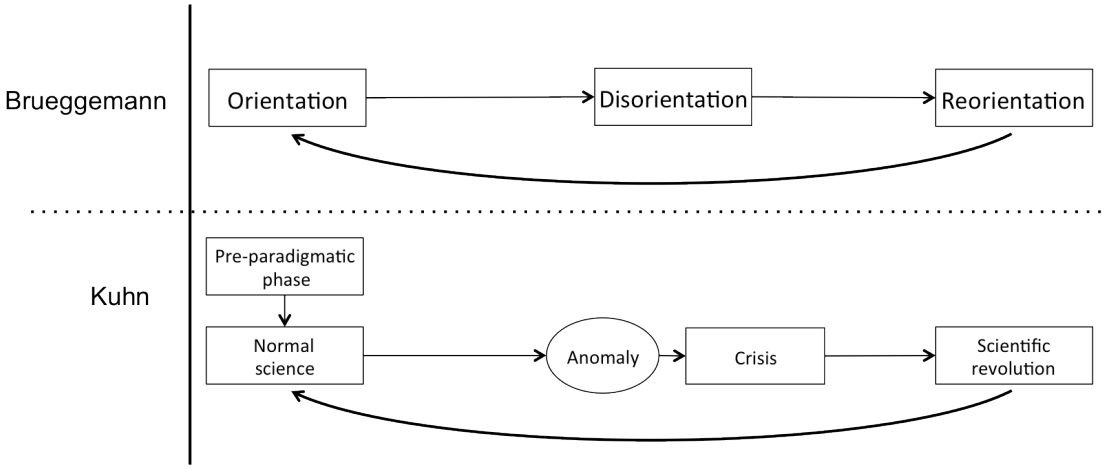

Figure 9: Comparison between the models proposed by Walter Brueggemann and Thomas Kuhn.

Park

The third model to be investigated comes from the discipline of psychology and contains the most components of the three models presented here. Crystal Park's model of meaning making is built on the idea that there are two different levels of meaning: global meaning and situational meaning (Figure 10). Global meaning encompasses an individual's 'big picture' or overarching understanding of the world, and functions as that individual's general orientating system for interpreting their experiences within the world.[41] It includes the basic assumptions that the individual makes about their world, relating to fairness, justice, benevolence, control, predictability, and trustworthiness, as well as how they define their own identity and self-worth within the context of this world.[42] The development of an individual's global

[41] Steger and Park, "The creation of meaning following trauma: Meaning making and trajectories of distress and recovery," 172-73. Crystal Park and Carol Blumberg, "Disclosing Trauma Through Writing: Testing the Meaning-Making Hypothesis," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 26, no. 5 (2002): 599. Jeanette Harris, Joseph Currier, and Crystal Park, "Trauma, faith and meaning-making," in *Psychology of Trauma*, ed. Thijs van Leuwen and Marieke Brower (Hauppauge, N.Y: Nova Science Publishers, 2013), 4.

[42] Irene Smith Landsman, "Crises of Meaning in Trauma and Loss," in *Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Traumatic Loss*, ed. Jeffrey Kauffman (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 19; Elizabeth Boase, "Fragmented Voices: Collective Identity and Traumatization in Lamentations," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 51. Jeffrey Kauffman, ed. *Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Traumatic Loss* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 1.

meaning is life-long, based on their experiences, context, and faith, and therefore differs between different people based on their different experiences.[43] Within this context then, situational meaning refers to the day-to-day meaning making processes, and involves the perception, appraisal and interpretation that is performed in regard to a specific individual event. Situational meaning is derived from an individual's global meaning through the individual applying their global meaning to a particular situation and context.[44]

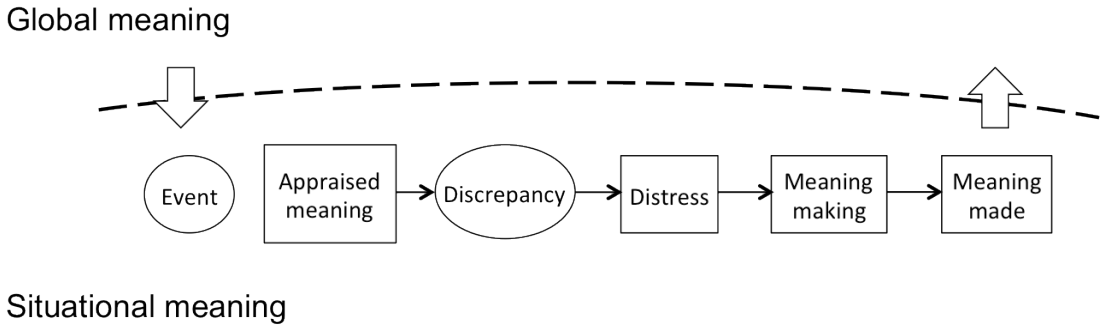

Figure 10: A model of meaning making proposed by Crystal Park incorporating two different levels of meaning.

Within her model Park describes that distress is caused when a discrepancy arises between an individual's global meaning and their situational meaning in terms of how the individual has made sense of a particular event.[45] This distress acts as a trigger for a meaning making response in the individual, resulting in either a change in their situational meaning, how they understand that particular event, in order to match their global meaning, or a change in their global meaning, their 'big picture' understanding of the world, in order to

[43] Jeanne M. Slattery and Crystal L. Park, "Spirituality and making meaning: Implications for therapy with trauma survivors," in *Spiritually oriented psychotherapy for trauma*, ed. Donald F Walker, Christine A Courtois, and Jamie D Aten (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 129.
[44] Crystal L. Park, "Meaning Making in the Context of Disasters," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 72, no. 12 (2016): 1235.
[45] Crystal L. Park, "Meaning, Coping, and Health and Well-Being," ed. Folkman Susan, *The Oxford Handbook of Stress, Health, and Coping* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195375343.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195375343-e-012. 4,8; Crystal L. Park, "The meaning making model: A framework for understanding meaning, spirituality, and stress-related growth in health psychology," *European Health Psychologist* 15, no. 2 (2013): 40.

accommodate their situational meaning.[46] To use the terminology of Piaget that was introduced in relation to Kuhn's model, the first of these responses is an example of assimilation, while the second is accommodation.[47] Human beings have a predisposition or bias towards assimilation rather than accommodation, that is they have a "powerful tendency to maintain rather than change the fundamental beliefs that have enabled us to make sense of ourselves and our world".[48] It is within an individual's global meaning that these fundamental beliefs lie. This tendency is particularly significant at the level of the individual's fundamental basic assumptions, that is the individual's understandings and beliefs surrounding benevolence, meaning and self-worth.[49]

For Park, the process of meaning making is the process by which meaning is made of an event for which a discrepancy has been observed and distress has been experienced. The process involves "coming to see or understand the situation in a different way and reviewing and reforming one's beliefs and goals in order to regain consistency among them".[50] In the model presented diagrammatically above, global meaning provides an overarching framework for understanding how the world works, providing the basis for both the development of a situational meaning and being reflected in the cognitive processing and appraisal of meaning that occurs following an event. Upon experiencing an event an individual will make an initial interpretation of the meaning and significance of the event, termed the 'appraised meaning'. This appraised meaning is then brought into conversation with the individual's

[46] Park and Blumberg, "Disclosing Trauma Through Writing: Testing the Meaning-Making Hypothesis," 597, 99-600; Crystal L. Park and Amy L. Ai, "Meaning Making and Growth: New Directions for Research on Survivors of Trauma," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 11, no. 5 (2006): 392-93; Park, "The meaning making model: A framework for understanding meaning, spirituality, and stress-related growth in health psychology," 40; Crystal L. Park, "Trauma and Meaning Making: Converging Conceptualizations and Emerging Evidence," in *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*, ed. Joshua A. Hicks and Clay Routledge (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 63-65; Crystal L. Park, "Religion and Meaning," in *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013), 360; Steger and Park, "The creation of meaning following trauma: Meaning making and trajectories of distress and recovery," 174.
[47] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma*: 29-30.
[48] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma*: 40.
[49] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma*: 42.
[50] Park, "Religion and Meaning," 360.

global meaning in the hope that the two align. When this is the case and there is no discrepancy noted between the appraised situational meaning and the individual's global meaning the process depicted halts and no distress is caused. However, when there is a discrepancy noted by the individual between the appraised situational meaning and their global meaning this causes distress for the individual and a process of meaning making begins in an attempt to bring both their situational meaning and their global meaning into agreement. The simpler way for this agreement to be reached is through an adjustment of the appraised situational meaning such that it aligns with the global meaning (a process of assimilation). Where this is not possible then the overarching global meaning will require adjustment (a process of accommodation). The ultimate goal of this process is that meaning is made of the event, which in turn will have an influence on responses to and interpretations of future events. There is a continual feedback loop that exists between the global meaning and situational meaning such that the two are in communication until they are able to coexist in agreement with each other.

Comparison of the models of Kuhn and Park

While Kuhn's concept of an anomaly was unique between his and Brueggemann's models, Park's model includes a similar concept in what she describes as a discrepancy. Both an anomaly and a discrepancy describe an aberrant interpretation of an event as something that does not seemingly fit within or agree with the frameworks that are being used to make meaning. It is in the experience of this anomaly or discrepancy that the community or individual are moved into a state of crisis or distress, where crisis and distress can be seen as equivalent experiences. Unique to Park's model is that she explicitly incorporates the event and determination of an appraised meaning of that event prior to the elements of discrepancy and distress. She also explicitly incorporates meaning making as a step between distress and the state of having made meaning. These elements are not absent in Kuhn's model, nor in Brueggemann's, but have simply not been explicitly identified in

their models. Kuhn does briefly speak of the movement from crisis to scientific revolution as being a time of ‘extraordinary science’.

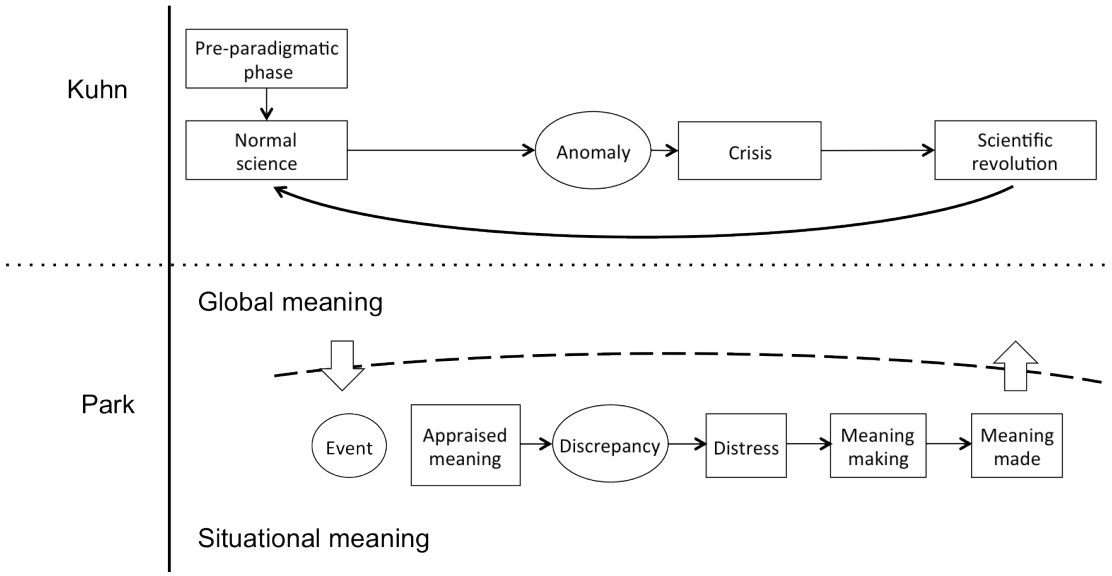

Figure 11: Comparison between the models proposed by Thomas Kuhn and Crystal Park.

Comparison of the three models

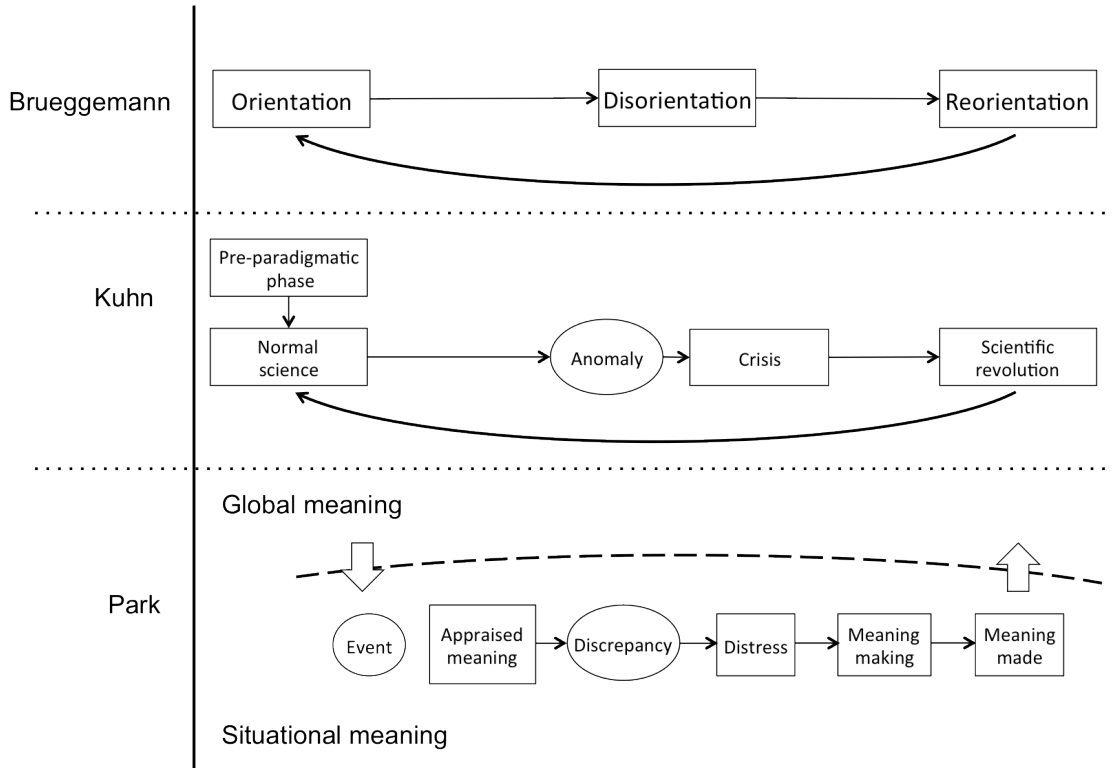

Figure 12: Comparison of the three models described so far.

All three models that have been presented here begin their movement in the state that Brueggemann refers to as ‘orientation’. Colloquially it might be described as the state where ‘everything is well in the world’. An individual’s understandings of the world, their global meaning, and their paradigms make sense and are not threatened by what is experienced in day-to-day life, and the individual or community are able to function as normal. Things begin to change with the experience of what Park refers to as a ‘discrepancy’ between an individual’s global and situational meaning. This is comparable to what Kuhn describes as an ‘anomaly’, where a scientific observation appears to not be in agreement with the paradigm held by the community. Both a ‘discrepancy’ and an ‘anomaly’ describe an aberrant event that does not align to what that particular individual or community would expect to experience based on their understanding of the world, and both a ‘discrepancy’ and an ‘anomaly’ pose the risk of challenging the assumptions that form the framework by which the world is understood. When this challenge does eventuate and cannot be ignored or easily resolved it leads to a collapse of this structure or framework, leading the individual or community into a state of ‘disorientation’, ‘crisis’, and ‘distress’. This is followed by what Park refers to as ‘meaning making’ or what Kuhn refers to as ‘extraordinary science’, and represents the journey from disorientation to reorientation, where reorientation is seen as the ultimate goal or end point where once again ‘everything is well in the world’. For Park this is achieved when meaning has been made and the event can be successfully interpreted within the context of the individual’s global meaning. For Kuhn this is achieved through a scientific revolution and the adoption of a new paradigm by the community.

It is important to highlight that these models are cyclical or circular rather than linear. The progression from orientation through disorientation to reorientation, for example, is not something that will be experienced only once but is a repetitive process. It is also important to note that while these models can be presented as cyclical in nature and the state of reorientation is able to function as a new state of orientation, to use Brueggemann’s model as an example, the state of reorientation is not a return to the original state of orientation.

Applying Brueggemann's model to the book of Job, Young notes that "[b]ecause he has come out on the other side of suffering, Job's belief is reoriented or modified. His view of God has changed."[51] In addition, not only does the way in which the individual or community views the world change, but the individual or community themselves also change. Job returns to a state of equilibrium but those things that he lost do not return to him, at least not in the same form as they were before. Speaking in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hit parts of the United States in August 2005, Deacon Julius Lee offered the following description of the situation: "The storm is gone, but the 'after the storm' is always here."[52] When the event that led to the state of disorientation is one of trauma, for example, even if healing has successfully occurred and meaning has been made of the traumatic experience, there is not a return to the previous state of innocence.[53] This is evident within Brueggemann's classification of the psalms, where the psalms of reorientation arise "from a time of return to equilibrium, but [while still] referring to the previous experiences".[54] Kuhn is also emphasising this when he, as well as later scholars, noted the impact of a paradigm change as both positive and negative, that it is "a destructive as well as a creative event",[55] and only comes about through the "discarding [of] some previously standard beliefs or procedures".[56]

Comparison of the three presented models to the concepts of liminality and doubt

Just as parallels can be drawn between the models presented above, similarities can also be noted between these models and the concepts of

[51] Young, *Room for Doubt: How Uncertainty Can Deepen Your Faith*: 54.
[52] Shelley Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2010). 1.
[53] Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). 41.
[54] P.D. King, *Surrounded by Bitterness: Image Schemas and Metaphors for Conceptualizing Distress in Classical Hebrew* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012). 79.
[55] Horgan, "Profile: Reluctant Revolutionary," 40.
[56] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: 66.

liminality and doubt that were introduced in the previous chapter. In the same way that Brueggemann noted the three steps of orientation, disorientation and reorientation within the psalm, van Gennep identified three different phases to a rite of passage: preliminal, liminal and postliminal. Each of these three steps and phases align respectively. Parallels between orientation, disorientation and reorientation and the rites of passage model become even more apparent when considering Timothy Carson's notation of the preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases as corresponding to states of structure, anti-structure and re-structure, respectively (Figure 13).[57] In particular, conceptual parallels can be drawn between disorientation and the concept of liminality. Both disorientation and a liminal phase describe an in-between phase characterised by disequilibrium, between what was before that has now been lost, and something new that is to come but that has not yet come. To use Carson's language, it is a phase within which structure is lost or absent. Similar parallels can then also be drawn between the concept of a liminal phase and Kuhn's 'crisis' and Park's 'distress'.

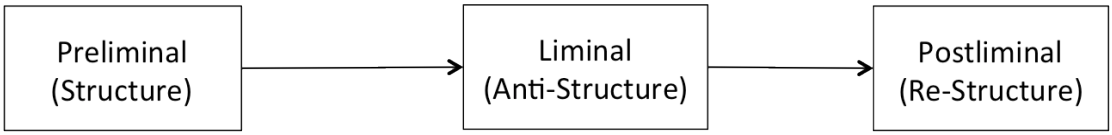

Figure 13: Rites of passage model drawn from the work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, with additional notation suggested by Timothy Carson.

[57] Timothy L. Carson, *Liminal Reality and Transformational Power* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: The Lutterworth Press, 2012). 76.

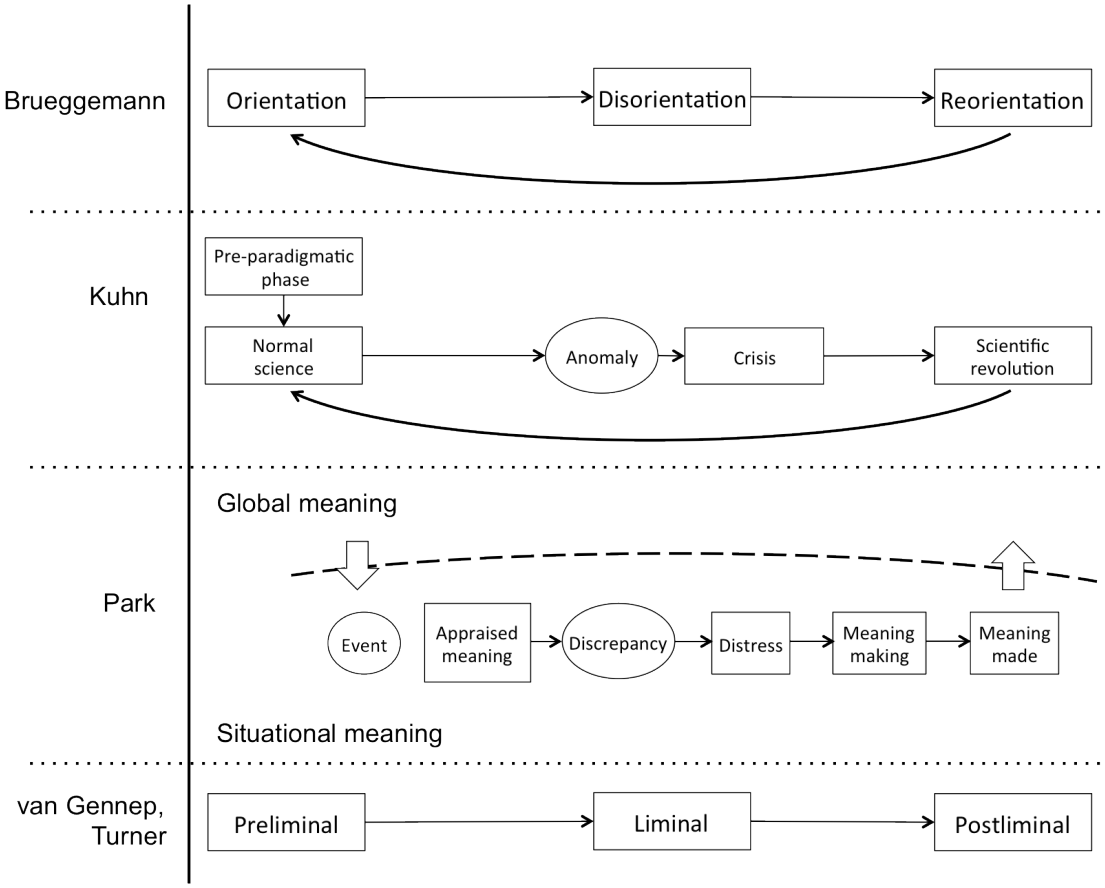

Figure 14: Conceptual model of liminality aligned to the three previously described models of meaning making.

When disorientation is seen as the way to move from a previous orientation to a new orientation, discrepancy and distress as a way to move from a previous global meaning to a new global meaning, anomaly and crisis as a way to move from an old paradigm to a new paradigm, and liminality as a way to move from a preliminal space to a postliminal space, it is then possible to appreciate where the idea of doubt fits into this image (Figure 15). Both Young's analogy of the icy river and the threshold view present the idea of doubt as in-between belief and unbelief, and that doubt presents a way of moving from one to the other. A word of caution was offered in the previous chapter that doubt may not only allow an individual to either return to the belief they held before or move to a place of unbelief, but that doubt may also offer the possibility for the individual to move from their previously held belief to a new belief. With this view the concept of doubt then sits in line with the

central component of each of the above previously described models. Again it should be noted that, although it is represented here as linear, this too is a cyclical repetitive process, whereby the new belief may become doubted in time, leading to the acceptance of and replacement by another new belief.

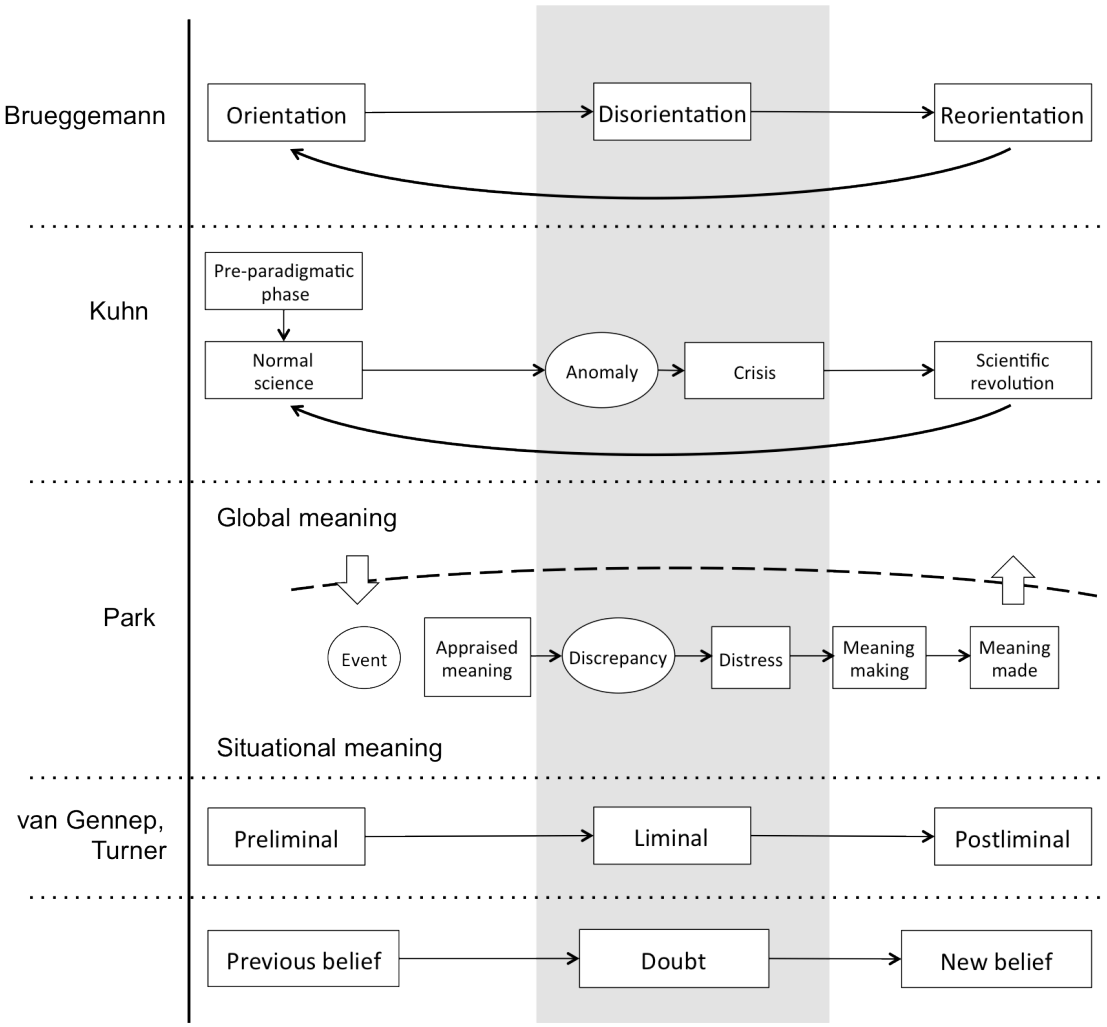

Figure 15: The presented models aligned, with the central portion representing a liminal space and aligning to doubt highlighted.

Development of a model of the impact of liminality and doubt on personal theology

The aim of this thesis is to address the question of the impact that liminality and doubt can have on personal theology. Personal theology can be seen as

containing an individual's beliefs and values such that it provides a framework through which to view the world and make sense of it. Within the above aligned models the periods both before and after the liminal space are representative of stable beliefs, frameworks, and ways of understanding the world. These concepts of both paradigm and global meaning could be said to be components of what constitutes that individual's personal theology. Within this understanding of personal theology these models presented above then provide a means for understanding the impact that doubt and liminality can have on personal theology. Doubt, as a state of questioning, occurs within a liminal space after what was previously accepted as a framework for understanding collapses, and it is doubt and questioning that provides the means by which an individual can move from their previous framework of thinking to constructing a new framework that (hopefully) better incorporates their lived experience.

Doubt also plays a role in how the individual first comes to enter this liminal space. It is in the identification of a discrepancy or anomaly as something that needs to be questioned, further investigated and addressed, which shifts an individual into a liminal space. At the risk of over simplifying, this creates a model whereby it is doubt that facilitates the transition from a previous personal theology to a new personal theology, within the liminal space that is present between the two (Figure 16). By grouping together the concepts of anomaly and crisis, and the concepts of discrepancy and distress, in Kuhn's and Park's models respectively, this also emphasises that this central step is not only something that occurs in response to but is also the way by which an individual, or community, can move from a previous understanding to a new understanding. This transition does not represent a complete replacement of the entirety of the previous personal theology with a new personal theology, but rather is indicative of aspects of the previous personal theology changing such that, as a whole, it is no longer the same as it was before. Within the liminal space there is a loss of the certainty and stability that the structure of the personal theology once offered, such that the liminal space can look like a deconstruction of parts of the previous personal theology. This is then followed by the reconstruction of the various components into a new personal

theology, possibly with the addition of some new ones. The new personal theology then offers certainty and stability for the individual once again.

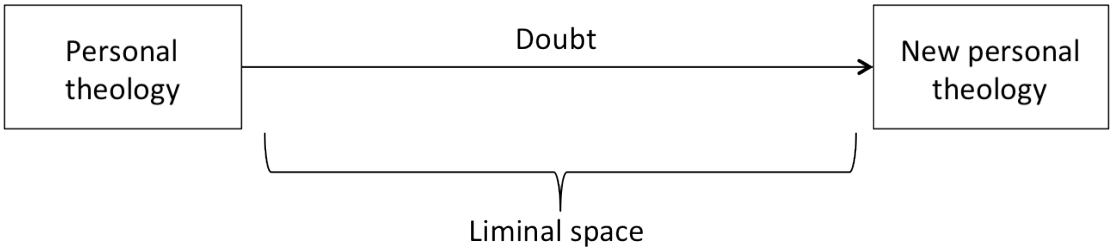

Figure 16: Proposed model for the role of doubt and liminality in the transition from a previous personal theology to a new personal theology.

To refer back to the analogy that was presented at the beginning of this thesis in the introduction, each of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle represent a belief or value that together form the larger image that is an individual's personal theology (Figure 17). When something happens that disrupts this image, and when the way in which the pieces once fitted together no longer makes sense, the individual finds themselves in a liminal space where there is no clear image, or at least the image does not have the same clarity that it once did. The jigsaw puzzle no longer looks as it did before, but it also has not yet been pieced together into a new image. This process of piecing the puzzle back together involves a period of questioning, trying different pieces in different places and asking whether that combination of pieces creates an image that makes sense within the wider context of the jigsaw puzzle. This questioning, testing and trialling is reminiscent of the process of doubt. As these doubts and questions are addressed, and pieces are tried together in different combinations and places, a new image can begin to take shape. Once the previous image has been broken apart and the pieces are loose the only way forward, and the only way by which an individual can create a new image, is through this process of questioning and doubt. It is an active, not a passive, process.

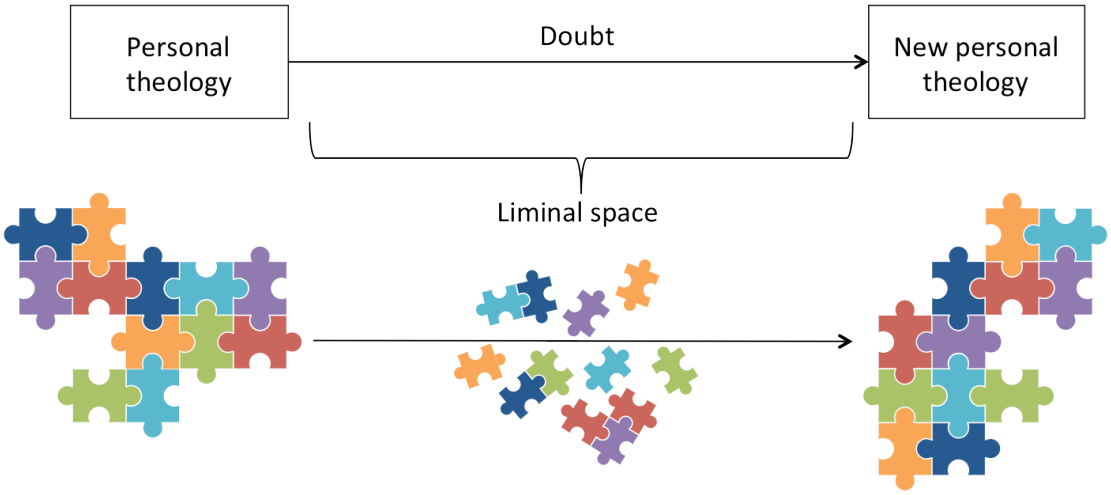

Figure 17: Proposed model aligned to a diagrammatic form of the suggested jigsaw puzzle analogy as a way of representing how a personal theology develops.

Much like each of the previous models that have been described in this chapter, this model is circular rather than linear, despite how it is depicted here. The new image that is formed is not a definitive end point. The possibility remains that the pieces will become messed up again, and subsequent new images will need to be pieced together.

Although this model has been simplified to appear to be a straightforward process this can neglect some of the inherent challenges within it. The experience of traveling through this process is not necessarily simple. The liminal space that an individual finds themselves in, where their personal theology is lying in pieces, can be a difficult, painful and troubling space. Although the individual beliefs and values still exist, and the pieces of the puzzle have not been lost, there is a loss of understanding about how they fit together and how they can be used to make sense of the world. Much as Kuhn's normal science is dependent on the assumption that the accepted paradigms are correct and reliable foundations upon which to build, an individual's personal theology provides a similar foundational support. Its existence and reliability must be assumed in order to be able to function normally. When an individual finds themselves without what they had

previously believed they could rely upon, and without a reliable means to make sense of the world, they find themselves lost in a liminal space.

The manner in which the analogy has been diagrammatically illustrated above is, of course, oversimplified. An individual's personal theology is much larger and contains many more pieces than illustrated above. And when an individual is in a liminal space, and going through the process of questioning and doubting, it will not be the entirety of their personal theology that has come apart and needs piecing back together. Rather it will only be a smaller portion, although the process of putting these pieces back together may have an impact on other pieces and have a ripple effect on the placement of other neighbouring pieces.

It has also only been briefly mentioned thus far, that not only does doubt play a role in moving through the liminal space between a previous personal theology and a new personal theology, but doubt is also responsible for first leading the individual into that liminal space. Although it is not always a conscious or desired process an individual's personal theology does not simply just fall apart. It will be doubt or questioning that first starts to loosen some of the pieces. This could be triggered by a significant event such as a traumatic experience, but it can equally be caused by something seemingly more innocent and naïve. Webb suggests that doubts are "catalysts that move us to new thinking".[58] This characteristic of doubt and questioning as a precipitant is included in some of the models presented earlier. For Kuhn the journey to a scientific revolution first requires the acknowledgement of an anomaly as something of significance that needs addressing. Such an acknowledgement requires questions about the fundamental reliability and validity of the foundational paradigm to begin to be asked. It is these questions that can then lead a community into crisis. Similarly, for Park, it is an active observance of a discrepancy between global meaning and the specific situational meaning that causes an individual to begin to question the accuracy of their meaning making frameworks, which in turn leads to a state

[58] Webb, "Celebrating Doubt as a Catalyst in authentic faith formation," 2.

of distress. Thus, the impact of doubt is that it causes an individual to begin to question their personal theology, leading them into a liminal space and assisting in the formation of a new personal theology.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The model that was proposed at the end of the previous chapter to show the impact of liminality and doubt on personal theology was developed by constructively engaging concepts and models from various different disciplines in a conversation with each other. The result is a model that builds on previously developed ideas and applies these ideas to a new context. The resultant model is functional in many ways, but there are also some potential critiques as well as questions that it raises that are worthwhile discussing and that may further develop our understanding of how personal theologies develop.

All of the models in this thesis thus far have been visually depicted linearly when in fact they follow a more circular progression. But the progression of each of these models is also not truly circular as there is never a true return to the original starting point, rather it is a reorientation to a new orientation, to use Brueggemann's language as an example. This new orientation is then able to take the place of the original orientation such that the cycle can continue. This is not a concept that is easy to visually represent.

One possible visual depiction that is worthwhile considering is that which has been used to show the Hegelian dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.[1] This dialectic views synthesis as the outcome of the thesis and antithesis being in dialogue with each other. This does not directly mirror the models presented here, as rather than being a three-step progression the model follows a more additive pattern. It does, however, bear a similarity to the circular progression trying to be described in the way that the synthesis developed is then used as a new thesis, able to then be in dialogue with another antithesis such that the cycle continues. This is sometimes depicted in a tree-type diagram to show how the synthesis subsequently functions as a new thesis. This form of

[1] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998). 29; R.C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). 23-24.

representation has been tried below (Figure 18), however there is a weakness in depicting the model in this way. Although it is true that it takes both a prior personal theology and a period of doubt in order to come to a new personal theology, and in this way it mirrors the Hegelian dialectic process, to represents the process solely in this way neglects the importance of doubt as the way by which the individual progresses from the prior personal theology to the new personal theology. To represent the model in this way does not accurately depict the role that doubt plays in facilitating this progression.

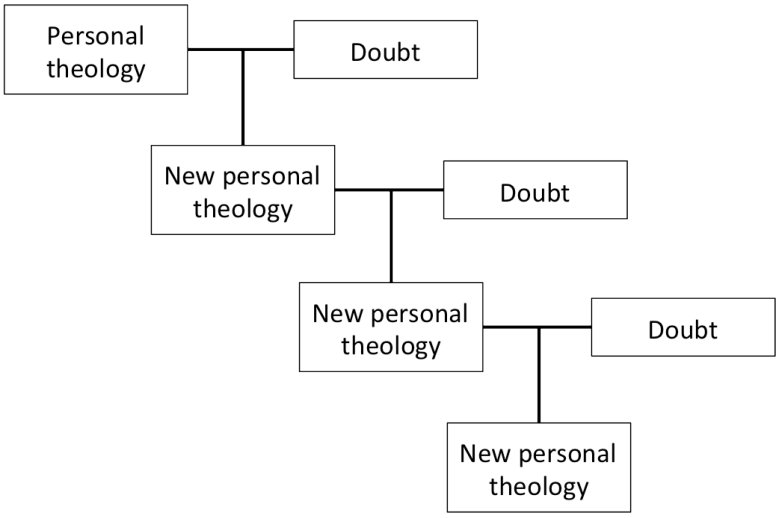

Figure 18: A model of doubt depicted in a similar tree-type format as the Hegelian dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is sometimes visually represented.

In trying to himself find a way of acknowledging that the progression of the rites of passage model is not linear, but rather has a more dynamic and circular or cyclic nature, Carson produced a diagram that bears some similarities to this tree-type model (Figure 19).[2] The advantage of his model is that he incorporates the idea of the liminal space as occupying the movement or progression between preliminal and postliminal phases. He also incorporates a progressively upward movement, suggesting an increasing or growth component to the process. This representation is however still restricted to a linear format, albeit one with an obvious repetitive unit.

[2] Carson, *Liminal Reality and Transformational Power*: 76.

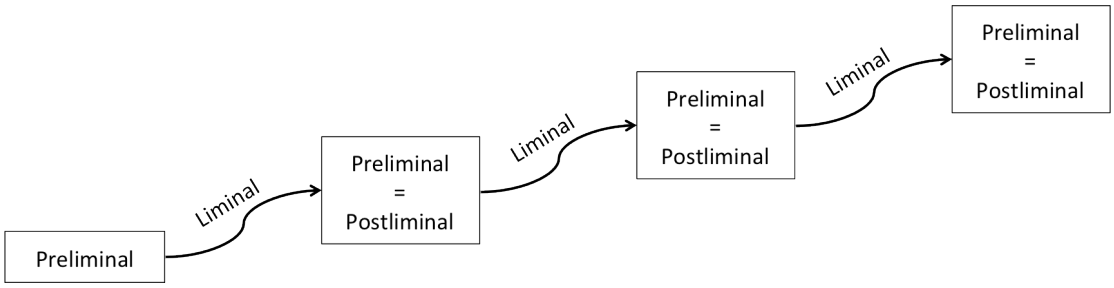

Figure 19: Timothy Carson's attempt at depicting the dynamic and circular or cyclic nature of the rites of passage model.[3]

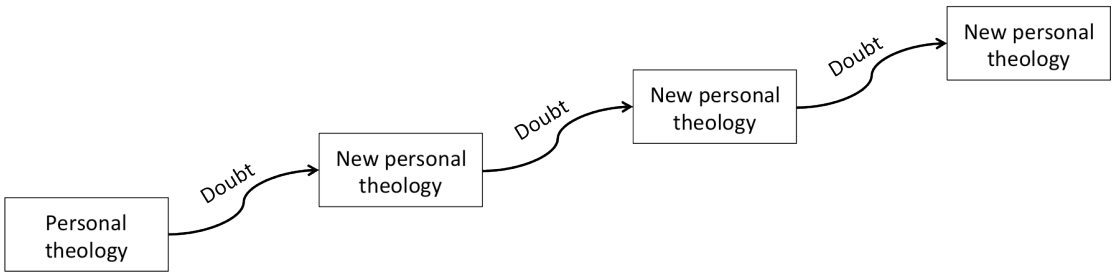

Figure 20: Model of doubt depicted in a similar format to that used by Carson. This format is an attempt at depicting the circular or cyclic nature of the model.

An alternative idea could be to visually represent the progression from personal theology through doubt to a new personal theology as a spiral (Figure 21). Above the horizontal dotted line represents a stable state of equilibrium, whereas below the line represents a state of disequilibrium. To depict the model in such a way does raise a further question though of whether the same state of doubt is returned to each time, as per the spiral on the right, or whether the experience of doubt differs each time, and thus the spiral on the left would be a more accurate representation.

[3] Carson, *Liminal Reality and Transformational Power*: 76.

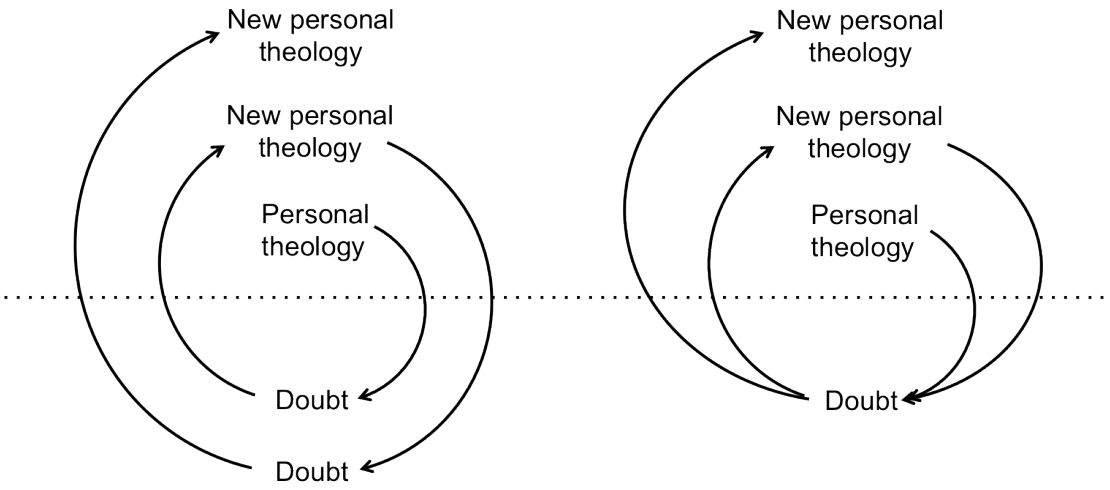

Figure 21: Model of doubt represented as a spiral as a potential way of visually depicting the process as cyclic. The advantage of a spiral is that it emphasises that, from doubt, an individual does not return to an identical form of their previous personal theology. This depiction, however, does raise the question of whether doubt looks the same each time, hence the two possible variations.

This final example of the model as a spiral may be the closest to the true process that is taking place. By starting in the centre and moving outwards with each subsequent circle bigger than the last it depicts that the overall outcome of this process is that an individual's understanding of the world grows in size with the development of each new personal theology. To refer to the jigsaw puzzle analogy, with each cycle the jigsaw puzzle is growing larger. The placement of each new personal theology on top of the previous also corresponds to the idea that each new personal theology builds on the ideas of the previous one, rather than completely replacing them. The depiction of doubt as below the line also seems appropriate. The personal experience of doubt for an individual can be one of grief and loneliness, and has been described as like 'falling down the rabbit hole', a metaphor that will be introduced properly in the next chapter.[4] But there is the question of whether it is more accurate to depict the spiral as returning to the same doubt each time, as per the spiral on the right, or whether the experience is more reminiscent of the spiral on the left. One disadvantage of the spiral on the left is the possible

[4] Nicole Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole," in *Neither Here Nor There: The Many Voices of Liminality*, ed. Timothy Carson (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2019).

unintentional yet consequential assumption that each subsequent experience of doubt is more extreme and personally challenging than previous experiences. The spiral on the right also has the disadvantage if the equivalent assumption is made that the experience of doubt is the same each time. Neither of these, that the experience of doubt becomes more challenging nor that the experience is always the same, are accurate. Rather it would be closer to the truth to simply say that the experience is different each time while also bearing some similarities.

Another potential limitation in the way that each of the models has been visually depicted thus far is that each stage has been defined as a discrete unit. It has not yet been discussed in this thesis whether such boundaries can be explicitly defined, and, if so, what the limits or boundaries are that surround and define a liminal space.

A component of the models of Kuhn and Park that is absent in the model of Brueggemann is the explicit inclusion and mention of an anomaly or discrepancy, respectively. The identification of an anomaly or discrepancy is necessary for the subsequent experience of crisis or distress, but it also does not necessitate that such a response will occur, depending on how it is interpreted. It has also been previously mentioned that doubt plays a similar role in how an individual first comes to enter a liminal space. But likewise, the beginning of an experience of doubt will not necessarily thrust an individual into a liminal space if the questions instead are avoided or ignored. In figure 15 in the previous chapter, which shows all of the models aligned and in which the central portion is highlighted to correspond to a liminal space, the elements of anomaly and discrepancy have been included within this shading. It might instead have been more accurate to have these elements also partly outside of the shaded portion, to indicate that they can exist without a complete destabilisation of the individual's or community's understanding of how the world works (Figure 22). This realisation also suggests that defining the point at which an individual crosses over a line and into a liminal space may not necessarily be clear cut, although in hindsight it may prove easier to

look back and identify significant events, experiences or questions that made a significant contribution to entering the liminal space.

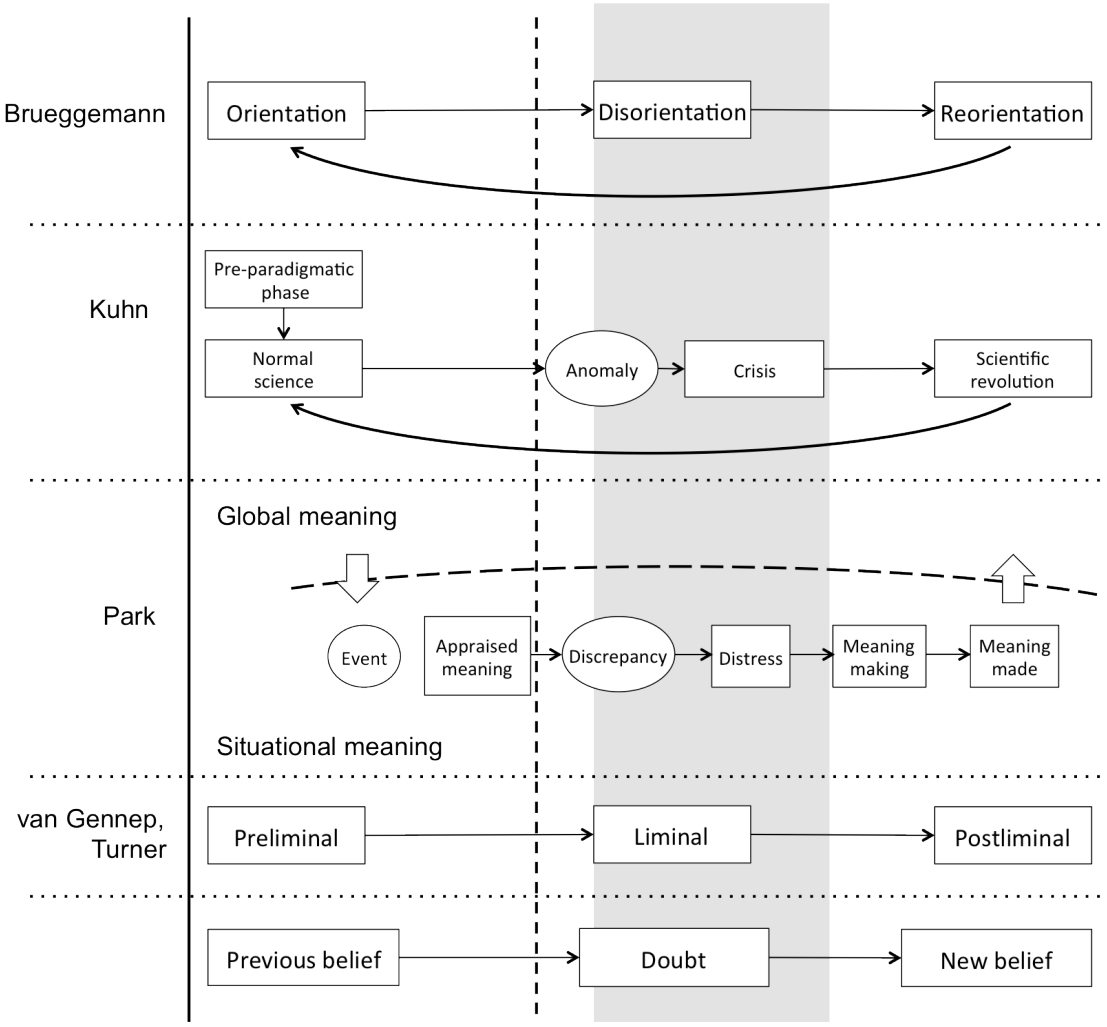

Figure 22: Presented models aligned. The vertical dashed line represents where the shading corresponding to the liminal space began when included in the previous chapter. It may however be more accurate for part of the anomaly and discrepancy components to be outside of this shading as the observation of an anomaly or discrepancy does not guarantee that the individual will end up in a liminal space.

If the components of preliminal, liminal and postliminal, as an example, therefore cannot be defined as completely distinct units with defined start and end points this also poses a further challenge for how to visually represent the model. Each of the various depictions so far in this chapter, particularly the first, tree-type representation, treats each phase as a unit separate from the

previous and subsequent ones. A solution to this would be to present the model as more like a spectrum or continuum (Figure 23): when an individual is in the centre of a phase it is clear where they are, but there is no definite start or end point for when the individual has definitely entered or left that phase. While the example of an individual who appears to suddenly and quite rapidly lose their frameworks of understanding may suggest that there is such definite entry or exit points, it would instead be more accurate to envisage them as simply having travelled through that section of the continuum quickly. Presenting the model as a continuum would also allow the model to explain the experience of individuals whose personal theologies change, generally over an extended period of time, without an apparent significant experience of doubt or liminality. In the absence of a defined start or end point to the experience of liminality, and where the experience of doubt does not send the individual to significant depths, the individual may progress through it without realising, until the change in their personal theology is noted at the end.

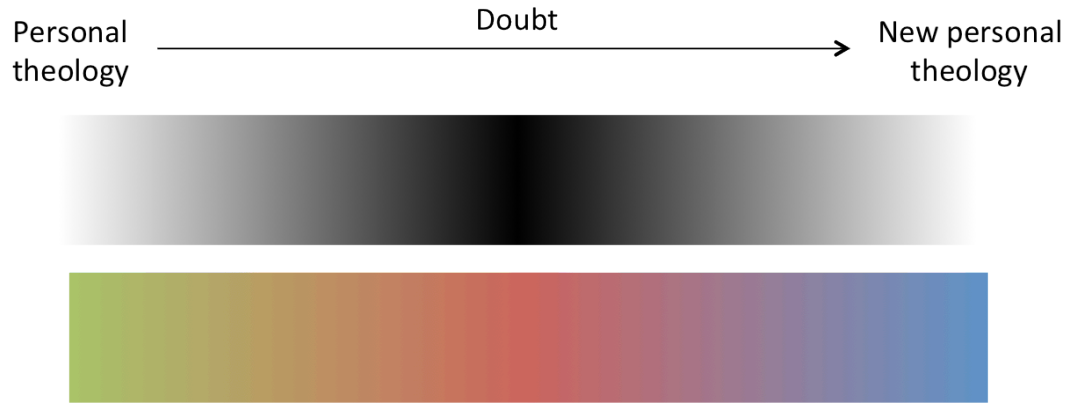

Figure 23: Concept of the model as existing more as a spectrum or continuum. This could be imagined as per the black and white gradient, whereby the intensity of black is representative of the level of doubt, or inverse to the level of certainty. Another option would be to imagine a spectrum of colour, whereby green on the far left in this diagram corresponds to personal theology, red in the centre corresponds to doubt, and blue on the far right corresponds to new personal theology, but the in-between areas are hard to specifically define.

It does need to be noted, however, that to view liminality as without a discrete start and finish stands in contrast to the concept as it was initially described

within the field of anthropology by van Gennep and Turner. For them, liminality was very much a defined experience such that for a boy, for example, as he left the village he would be entering a liminal space, and upon his return to the village as a man he would be exiting the liminal space. This difference need not be seen to discredit the proposal that is being made here, but rather be seen as an example of adapting a concept for a different field.

A further danger in representing the components of the model as discrete units is it may suggest that each unit operates as a closed system. In regard to the jigsaw puzzle analogy, there is the question of whether the time that is spent in the liminal space is solely for the putting back together of the already collected pieces, or whether there is the potential for new pieces to also be added during this period. The former would suggest that liminality is a closed system, but the latter would mean that liminality is an open system and open to external input. The example of a child who leaves the village to learn the things necessary to allow them to then return as an adult is an example of how the experience of liminality is an open system, as pieces are being added to their puzzle as they learn and are introduced to new things, while also shifting and altering some of their previous understandings. The idea that an individual who is doubting may be actively asking questions and seeking to find answers would also make liminality an open system. In the next chapter I will describe how Nicole Conner's experience of liminality saw her on a "journey of unlearning. I started conversations. I started friendships…And I started reading, widely."[5] These conversations, friendships, and books and articles would have introduced new pieces to the puzzle that made up her personal theology. These new pieces would then have also served to assist her to put together the pieces she already had and understand new ways in which these pieces could relate to each other. This would suggest that, in terms of an individual's thought, liminality is an open system. It would appear that Kuhn would also support this idea, in terms of a community being an open system during the in-between liminal or crisis phase. He viewed the

[5] Dean Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5)." https://joy.org.au/wordforword/2015/04/courage-under-fire-and-brimstone-nicole-conner-an-inside-ex-gay-postscript-episode-5/ (accessed 28 October 2019).

“scientific community as an essentially closed society, intermittently shaken by collective nervous breakdowns followed by restored mental unison”.[6] The community would operate as a closed system while in a phase of normal science, but become open while in crisis, before returning to a closed system upon the acceptance of a new paradigm.

The converse idea, to see liminality as a closed system, could also be a possibility. One component of liminality that is emphasised in its use regarding rites of passage is that it involves separation. Preliminal rites were seen as rites of separation that act to separate the individual from their previous world. This stands in contrast to the postliminal rites by which the individual is then reintegrated. Turner has also noted that “Often the indigenous term for the liminal period is, as among Ndembu, the locative form of a noun meaning ‘seclusion site’.”[7] This separation, such as in the rites by which a child becomes an adult to use that example again, would be represented by a physical separation. In this way liminality could then be considered a closed system, as there are limits in place in terms of external exposure and influence.

There is the question of in what ways separation might be a common component of liminality. It may be the experience of an individual who finds themselves excluded from their community because of their questions. Inversely, an individual may withdraw from their community to create space to allow the pursuit of their questions. An example of a variation of this would be the student who leaves their community to study. Their time away as a student would represent a liminal experience as well as a phase of separation. Regardless of the reasons how or why the separation occurs, there are subsequent implications for the individual upon their return to the community, as they will not return as the same person they once were. This is what Rohr is referring to when he speaks of the final stage of the hero or

[6] John Watkins, "Against 'Normal Science'," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1967), 26.
[7] Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," 98.

heroine's journey as when "[t]he hero or heroine then returns to where he or she started, and 'knows the place for the first time'."[8]

The process by which an individual develops a new personal theology can occur in isolation to the rest of the members of their community and be unique to a particular individual, as happened in the case that will be presented in the next chapter. But that does not mean that the process will not have an impact beyond just the individual. The psychiatrist Judith Herman writes, "not only must she rebuild her own 'shattered assumptions' about meaning, order, and justice in the world but she must also find a way to resolve her differences with those whose beliefs she can no longer share."[9] An individual adopting new beliefs can find himself or herself brought into conflict with other members of their community with whom their beliefs now differ. Kuhn's model operates at the level of the community, but in much the same way a crisis that leads to a paradigm change can also affect the way that a particular group of scientists relate to the broader community. He writes,

> I [Kuhn] take them [crises] to be the crucial symptoms of the speciation-like process through which new disciplines emerge, each with its own lexicon, and each with its own area of knowledge. It is by these divisions, I've been suggesting, that knowledge grows.[10]

This point now starts to go beyond the main aim of this thesis, to look at the impact on personal theology, that is the theology of a particular individual. However, that the changing theology of an individual may have a wider impact is worthwhile acknowledging and could be an area for future research.

There are limitations and consequently disadvantages or weaknesses to any model that might be proposed. In this chapter, some of these have been discussed regarding the model that was proposed in the previous chapter. In

[8] Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life*: 19. In this last six words Rohr is quoting T.S. Eliot in his fourth piece *The Gidding* of the set *Four Quartets*.
[9] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, Revised ed. (London: Pandora, 1998). 178.
[10] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The road since structure* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 100-01.

the next chapter this model will be applied to a case study to demonstrate its relevance and real-life application.

Chapter 4: Case study

So far in this thesis a model has been developed and presented of the impact that liminality and doubt may have on an individual's personal theology. This model proposes that when an individual's previous framework of understanding is threatened and met with doubts and questioning an individual can find themselves in a liminal space characterised by further doubt. This liminal space and period of questioning is constructive and leads the individual to develop a new personal theology that now incorporates that which first threatened their previous personal theology. Alongside this model an analogy has also been used to assist to explain this process, by representing an individual's personal theology as like a jigsaw puzzle where individual pieces each represent a particular belief and the way in which these pieces interact with each other is of importance. Doubt raises questions about the way in which particular puzzle pieces interact with each other, such that the liminal space is then a process of moving pieces around until a new suitable arrangement is identified, corresponding to the development of a new personal theology.

In this chapter a case study will be presented to test and further unpack this proposed model, as well as provide a way to see the relevance and applicability of the model that is being proposed. Nicole Conner's story has been chosen for this purpose. Conner lives in Australia and has publicly shared about her struggle with a changing understanding of what she believes, speaking about it on podcasts,[1] writing about it on her own blog,[2] and also recently contributing a chapter about her story to an edited book.[3] She also herself uses the language of liminality to describe her experiences,

[1] Such as the following referenced here: Dean Beck, "The Second Coming – Nicole Conner Returns," https://joy.org.au/wordforword/2017/08/the-second-coming-nicole-conner-returns/ (accessed 28 October 2019); Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5)."; Faith Disrupted, "30: Nicole Conner on doubt and liminality," www.faithdisrupted.com/30-nicole-conner-on-doubt-and-liminality/ (accessed 28 October 2019).
[2] http://www.nicoleconner.com.au/
[3] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."

as well as describing herself as having an addiction to certitude,[4] providing an intriguing case study to which to apply the model that has been proposed.

Conner was born in Germany to non-Christian parents before moving to South Africa as a seven year old because the trauma her parents had experienced during the Second World War made living in Germany too difficult for them.[5] Growing up Conner would hear stories from both her parents and her grandparents about their experiences during the war. Her father was just three months old when Conner's paternal grandmother was forced to flee with him and his sister.[6] Her mother, who was older at the time, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for much of her life from what she herself remembers witnessing as a child during the war. Upon moving to South Africa, and there being exposed to the system of apartheid that was in place at the time, Conner then found herself witnessing cruelty and suffering with her own eyes; she was no longer simply hearing about it through the stories of others but now also seeing it for herself.

She was first introduced to the church through a mixed and diverse congregation in South Africa in the 1970s that she described as "radical" and that did not "pull the apartheid line".[7] She later gained a different experience when she moved to Australia with her parents as a young adult. She there found herself part of a small, extremely conservative community, standing in contrast to the church in South Africa that might be described as progressive. It was within the conservative nature of this new community, and what she describes as fundamentalist frameworks of belief, that Conner found the certainty and safety for which she was longing:[8]

> Fundamentalism, with its overtures in literalism and dogmatism, became the strong tower that produced my concept of God…Finally, I had found

[4] Nicole Conner, "My Addiction to Certitude," 24 April 2018.
[5] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).".
[6] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[7] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).".
[8] Conner, "My Addiction to Certitude."

> something that soothed my angst over what appeared to be a harsh, confusing and meaningless world.[9]

This suited her for a time, until, through a series of events, she had an "oh my gosh, I think I got this wrong" moment. She then found herself on what she describes as a "journey of unlearning. I started conversations. I started friendships…And I started reading, widely."[10] And as she began to open herself up to new ideas and new voices beyond those she had previously been exposed to, or been receptive to, she describes herself as beginning to "fall down the rabbit hole".[11] She found herself starting to question what it was that she had previously believed, and the dogmas and ideologies that she had previously been taught. She started to notice more and more things about her previous beliefs and the institution to which she belonged, observations that only led to more questions.[12] It was through her conversations, new friendships and reading that she then ultimately came to a new understanding, one that she felt she could accept with integrity.

Conner's story is an example of a journey from a prior personal theology through a liminal space characterised by doubt and questioning, that then leads to a new personal theology. Her story mirrors the progression that forms the model that has been proposed in this thesis. Conner herself, in reflecting back after the fact on her journey of changing beliefs, uses the concept of liminality to describe what she experienced, adding weight to the applicability and relevance of this model.[13] She describes finding in the language of liminality a way in which she could understand and explain to others what had happened to her.

Conner has described how the stories that her parents and grandparents told her about the war, as well as her own experiences of apartheid South Africa, were key features of her childhood. These functioned as "pre-liminal stories

[9] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[10] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).".
[11] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[12] Beck, "The Second Coming – Nicole Conner Returns".
[13] Faith Disrupted, "30: Nicole Conner on doubt and liminality".

and life experiences", events and experiences that played a key role in the development of how she understood the world and who she wanted to be within it.[14] But her experiences within her conservative community after she moved to Australia, with its fundamentalist beliefs, also had an important role in the development of her frameworks, similarly providing Conner with preliminal stories and life experiences. She writes:

> I would dream of a better world. In my imagination I was the super-hero who would put every bully in his place and liberate the oppressed. I was a child waiting to become a zealot, looking for a cause. More than that, I was a child desperately looking for belonging, safety, and predictability. I found it in institutional fundamentalist religion.[15]

To use the jigsaw puzzle analogy presented earlier, each of these preliminal stories and life experiences from her childhood and early years in the church, both in South Africa and in Australia, were pieces being added to Conner's developing puzzle. These stories and experiences would also have played a role in assisting Conner in working out how best to put together these pieces. Some of these pieces, and their placement and relationships to each other, would likely have been shared with or at least similar to those of other members of her family and of her church community, such that her relationships with other individuals would also have reinforced and encouraged the framework that Conner was creating for herself. This framework served her well for a time. The image that her jigsaw puzzle was forming, or the beliefs that defined her personal theology, gave her a framework through which she could view the world and make sense of it. It offered her a sense of safety, security and certainty, and functioned as something upon which she could rely. This is what Kuhn speaks of when he describes normal science, and is the most comfortable mode in which for humans to operate, where everything appears stable and nothing is being questioned or under threat.

[14] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[15] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."

But then, as does often occur, something happened that would lead to the destabilisation of Conner's framework and ultimately to a new framework and personal theology. Although there are countless ways by which this can occur, in Conner's particular situation it was reading a Bible passage that sent her on a "journey of unlearning".[16] This Bible passage was from Ezekiel 16:49: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." When she read this verse on this occasion Conner interpreted it as saying that the sin of Sodom was "being absolutely inhospitable and unkind, and discriminating against the stranger."[17] This stood in contrast to her prior understanding that the sin of Sodom was that of homosexuality. Her internal response was one of "oh my gosh, I think I got this wrong". Her interpretation of the verse, regarding what the sin of Sodom was, was different on this occasion compared to how she had previously interpreted the passage, with this new interpretation now also standing in conflict to some of her other broader understandings. The reading of this particular Bible verse on this occasion created for Conner what Kuhn would refer to as an anomaly, and what Park would refer to as a discrepancy. It presented Conner with a concept that stood in contrast to and in conflict with the framework that she had created and that she relied upon to understand her world and also help her navigate how to behave. Her new interpretation of the Bible passage became a puzzle piece that did not seem to fit within the rest of the jigsaw puzzle that she had pieced together.

There are a few comments to be made about this anomaly or discrepancy that Conner encountered. Firstly, the particular bible verse that elicited such a response from Conner would not trigger the same response from all people. It is also possible that Conner had encountered this verse numerous times before without it ever presenting itself as a discrepancy or anomaly or eliciting a response from her. There was something about this particular occasion when Conner read it that meant it was identified as being in conflict with her

[16] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).".
[17] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).".

personal theology. This may have been because of other things that were occurring within her context or because of the specific nature of framework that she was using at that particular time. It is also possible that this particular idea about how strangers should be treated had been present to Conner previously but this occasion was the first time that it became a conscious threat to her framework.

The second comment that can be made is that it would appear that, although the bible passage that first triggered her questions conflicted with the preliminal stories of who God is that she developed within the context of her church community in Australia, her new interpretation of the verse stood in agreement with her early childhood experiences. Her childhood saw her make friends with “the children of the cleaners and helpers at my mother’s hair salon”, from whom she also learnt to speak Zulu.[18] This behaviour of hers would have stood in contrast to some of the behaviour she observed in other people at the time. Conner grew up showing hospitality and kindness to the stranger, despite the discrimination that she saw others show towards them. But it appears that this had not remained a dominant part of her framework for understanding and interpreting the world, otherwise this particular bible passage, and her interpretation of it, may not have been encountered as an anomaly or discrepancy in the same way. At the same time however, the impact of her childhood experiences should not be dismissed, as they likely played a role in why Conner interpreted the verse in the way she did such that it presented a conflict on this occasion.

The model that was proposed in the second chapter, to refer also to the analogy presented, is based on the understanding that pieces of the puzzle, once they have been collected, are never lost or discarded. Rather, their placement within the overall jigsaw and how they interact with and are placed relative to other pieces may change over time. It would appear that this can be observed within Conner’s story. The pieces of the puzzle that she had collected from her experiences within her church community in Australia were

[18] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."

positioned within a dominant part of her overall jigsaw puzzle and thus had a significant influence on how she understood and interpreted the world. On the other hand, the pieces that she collected in her early childhood in South Africa were still present, but their placement was in a less dominant part of her overall jigsaw puzzle and thus had less of an influence on how she understood and interpreted the world. She had the pieces of the puzzle that would have allowed her to have a framework that could incorporate her interpretation of the bible passage, but at that particular point in time the pieces were not pieced together in such a way that such incorporation was a simple possibility for her.

Once she had encountered it, her response to the bible passage could have been to simply ignore it, to find a different way of interpreting it such that she could fit it into her current framework, or her framework was going to need to break apart and be reconstructed in order to allow its incorporation. The second and third of these would represent the processes of assimilation and accommodation, respectively, described by Piaget and introduced in the second chapter. It was the last option, accommodation, that was ultimately how Conner responded, although not without resistance. And although her response was active rather than passive, active should not be seen as equivalent to being by choice. It is human nature to be resistant to the disruption of the frameworks that provide safety, security and certainty to the individual.[19]

The process of her framework being broken apart and then reconstructed would involve questioning and doubt. Conner describes that she was "brought up in a home where you always embraced the question, you always go to the question, if there is suspicion there is nothing wrong with embracing the question".[20] But this acceptance of questioning was given limited time within her church's fundamentalist tradition;[21] she recalls being asked by a church leader whether she had adopted a "new kind of spirituality", a question that

[19] Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions : towards a new psychology of trauma*: 40.
[20] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).". Beck, "The Second Coming – Nicole Conner Returns".
[21] Faith Disrupted, "30: Nicole Conner on doubt and liminality".

silenced her for several months.[22] Resistance to the process of doubt is not just a characteristic of individuals but also something that exists more widely, such as at the level of a community. One example of the way in which resistance to the concept of doubt by a community can be observed is in the altered relationship of the community with an individual who may be doubting and questioning. This is what Conner experienced. The result when a community has such an attitude is that the individual is discouraged from doubting and instead is encouraged to resist and ignore any questions that may be arising for them. This is also what happened to Conner for a time, but she ultimately found that once she started asking questions she was already falling down the rabbit hole, or had already started to open Pandora's box, to use another description she offers:

> once we engage with that niggling doubt that will not leave us alone, like an itchy mosquito bite, we crack open Pandora's box – and all hell breaks loose…Questions were the red carpet on which Pandora made her appearance and entrance. Once you see her, you cannot look away.[23]

The ultimate result of her questions was, as Conner writes:

> My fervently constructed ideas of God and church lay shattered. I looked at the pieces and knew there was no rebuilding – I had to let it all go. Yet it is so hard to trust that letting go process.[24]

She had found herself within a liminal space, one that would affect her relationship with her community and eventually see her separated from them, but that would also lead her to a new framework and personal theology.

I would argue that, although it may feel that way to the individual, within the model that has been proposed the individual does not need to completely let go of the pieces and that there is a process of rebuilding that occurs. The inclusion into the model of the idea that pieces are never lost acknowledges that each of the pieces of the puzzle that an individual has represents an idea,

[22] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[23] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."
[24] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."

be that a belief, value or commitment, that was valid to the individual at least at one point in time. Each piece has also played a role in the formation of who that person is and what they have come to believe, that is, their personal theology. Therefore, rather than letting go of the pieces and what they had previously represented, what the individual does need to let go of is how some of those pieces relate to each other; individual pieces themselves are not lost, however the relationships and connections between them may need to be let go of. When these bonds between pieces are broken this then allows new relationships between the pieces to be formed. How the pieces are put back together and the structure or image that is rebuilt may look very different to before, and the value and emphasis that may have previously been placed on particular pieces may no longer be the same. This can carry some grief with it. The sense of safety and security that the stable jigsaw had provided for the individual must also be let go of for a time in order to allow this process to occur.

While she was struggling with the accompanying grief from what had seemingly been lost, a friend made the following comment to Conner:

> Nic, I don't even pretend to understand what this must all feel like, but as your friend I can tell you that the world and structure you were part of is really, really small. Your world is about to get so much bigger.[25]

I do not interpret this comment as a critique of fundamentalism, nor as a critique of the worldview that Conner held beforehand. Rather this is a hope-filled statement about the potential for what can happen to an individual's worldview once they have been through this sort of experience. There is the potential and opportunity that their world can get bigger. Where certainty, and the safety that that brought with it, had previously only allowed a single, narrow frame of thinking about and understanding of the world, suddenly there is the opportunity to see a greater number of interpretations and possibilities for how things work and how the world might make sense. In terms of the jigsaw puzzle analogy this can look like gaining an appreciation

[25] Conner, "Falling Down the Rabbit Hole."

for the numerous different ways in which the different pieces may be put together, with each different arrangement representing a different way to see the world. Practically, this can lead to an increased acceptance of and tolerance for views that differ from the individual's own. The rebuilding of the jigsaw also allows for the opportunity that how the pieces are put back together may not be as tightly packed as it was previously. In other words, spaces may be created within the jigsaw puzzle as it is rebuilt. These spaces may then drive and motivate the individual to go in search of pieces to fill in some of the gaps.

It was mentioned earlier that Conner's childhood in South Africa had provided her with experiences that would have given her the puzzle pieces necessary to have a framework that could incorporate the bible passage that she had read, however at that point in time the pieces were not pieced together in such a way that such interpretation or incorporation was possible. Instead, it was the pieces that she had collected from her experiences in her church community in Australia that appear to have had a more significant role within the framework that she found the bible passage conflicted with. Conner's time within a liminal space, during which she was actively questioning, would represent time spent moving pieces around and trying new configurations and interactions between pieces. Although the diagrammatic representation of this process in an earlier chapter may appear to be a static three-step process (see figure 17), the activity within the middle step that corresponds to a liminal space is, in reality, dynamic. It requires the individual to be involved in the active questioning and pursuing of answers to those questions. This will then allow for various different ideas and frameworks to be tested out by the individual before a new framework is settled on that allows for the incorporation of whatever it was that first caused the individual to begin to question it. In Conner's case she has described that this process involved conversations, the development of new friendships with people she had previously not had relationships with, and reading from sources she had not previously studied. The result was a new framework in the form of a new personal theology.

Conner's story of being confronted by interpreting a Bible verse in a new way that led her onto a journey of doubting and questioning and changing personal theology is reflective of the model that has been proposed. Coming from a place of safety, predictability and certainty she found her growing doubts and questions impacting on what she had formerly believed, leading her into a liminal space of further questioning. From this she emerged with a new personal theology that allowed her a different way of understanding the world.

Conclusion

In this thesis a model has been presented that describes the impact that the process of doubt, which both creates and occurs within a liminal space, can have on an individual's personal theology. The thesis began by introducing and defining the concepts of personal theology, doubt and liminality. A series of three models of meaning making from various disciplines were then presented. A methodology of constructive engagement brought these models into conversation, firstly with each other, and then into conversation with the concepts of doubt and liminality. This allowed the development of a model that addressed the aim of this thesis. An analogy of a jigsaw puzzle was also developed and used to help explain the way in which doubt can been seen as a positive and constructive activity that assists an individual to journey through a liminal space and form a new personal theology when their previous personal theology and framework is no longer sufficient for allowing them to adequately make sense of their world.

The relevance of the model presented, and the value in allowing a process of questioning and doubt, was observed in the case study that was then presented on Nicole Conner. Conner's story exemplifies the way in which questioning and doubt can lead an individual to a new personal theology when their old framework appears to fall apart. It also shows some of the varied attitudes to doubt that existed in those around her. She experienced her church community looking upon her questioning, and subsequently also her person, with a level of scepticism, such that she found herself trying to silence her questions for several months. But she also has described being "brought up in a home where you always embraced the question, you always go to the question, if there is suspicion there is nothing wrong with embracing the question".[1]

[1] Beck, "Courage Under Fire and Brimstone – Nicole Conner: An Inside Ex-Gay Postscript (Episode 5).". Beck, "The Second Coming – Nicole Conner Returns".

Some of the negative views that exist around the idea of doubt and questioning have evolved from a definition of doubt as the opposite to and incompatible with belief and faith, the consequence then being that for someone to be doubting means that they no longer have faith. It has been demonstrated in this thesis that this does not need to be the way, and should not be the way, in which doubt is defined. Instead, doubt can be seen as contributing constructively and positively to the experience of faith and belief, and as a critical component in transforming and developing faith and belief.

Some of the discomfort around the idea of doubt is also likely related to Douglas' suggestion that was first mentioned in the first chapter, that "what is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean."[2] Doubt, as well as liminality, can be difficult to define. These concepts and experiences can therefore be difficult to understand which can lead to a resistance to it. This lack of understanding need only lie within the subconscious of the individual or community for it to lead to resistance. Observing doubt in another person can also appear to pose a threat to oneself, as it could lead an individual to begin asking their own similar questions, which could consequently destabilise their own understanding and lead them into their own liminal space.

This final point highlights that the idea of a liminal space is often something that is feared. This would in part be due to the invisibility and uncleanness that can be associated with liminality, but also the fact that to travel through a liminal space changes the individual. But despite this fear, the journey through a liminal space can be a positive experience itself, as well as leading to a positive outcome in terms of personal development and growth.

The introduction to this thesis began by talking about Marty Sampson as a public figure who has revealed that he is questioning and doubting what exactly it is that he believes. From the model and analogy that have been presented in this thesis, Sampson appears to have found himself in a liminal

[2] Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," 97.

space where the image formed by his jigsaw puzzle that he previously strongly held to and replied upon has come apart and the pieces are lying scattered. He is now in the middle of a process of identifying which pieces are most important to him and how they relate to other pieces, so that he might begin to put the puzzle back together and develop a new image. He is currently in a liminal space, characterised by doubt and questioning, that will hopefully lead to a new framework and personal theology that he can once again hold onto and rely upon.

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