

A Child Given

An Empirical Practical Theological Research on
Spirituality with Flemish Heterosexual Couples
During the Perinatal Period

Judith Cockx

Introduction

- ▶ Two passions
- ▶ Subject of (this practical-theological) research
 - ▶ lived spirituality of 'ordinary people' in their daily life and at life's milestones ('lived religion')
 - ▶ - *espoused theology*
- ▶ directed towards transformation
 - ▶ suggestions for spiritual care

Research Question

- ▶ How do Flemish heterosexual couples experience spirituality in the context of the pregnancy, the birth and the early parenting of a child,
- ▶ what could these experiences mean for (practical) theology,
- ▶ and how could the personal spirituality of (future) parents be supported in this specific context?

Research aims

- ▶ Pragmatic: research on experiences of spirituality in the perinatal period with a view to
 - ▶ spiritual support to (future) parents
 - ▶ increase attention to personal spirituality in the care for (future) parents
- ▶ Theoretical: gain deep insights into experiences of spirituality during the perinatal period
 - ▶ as a locus for theology
- ▶ Focus: '*human flourishing*' - '*life-giving spirituality*'

Research methodology

- ▶ 'practical-theological method' : praxis-theory-praxis
 - ▶ Osmer: 4 tasks
 1. descriptive- empirical task → empirical research with Flemish couples
 2. interpretive task } dialogue between own empirical research results
 3. normative task } and other empirical and theological research insights

→ life-giving spirituality
 - 4. pragmatic task → suggestions for spiritual and pastoral care

Empirical research method

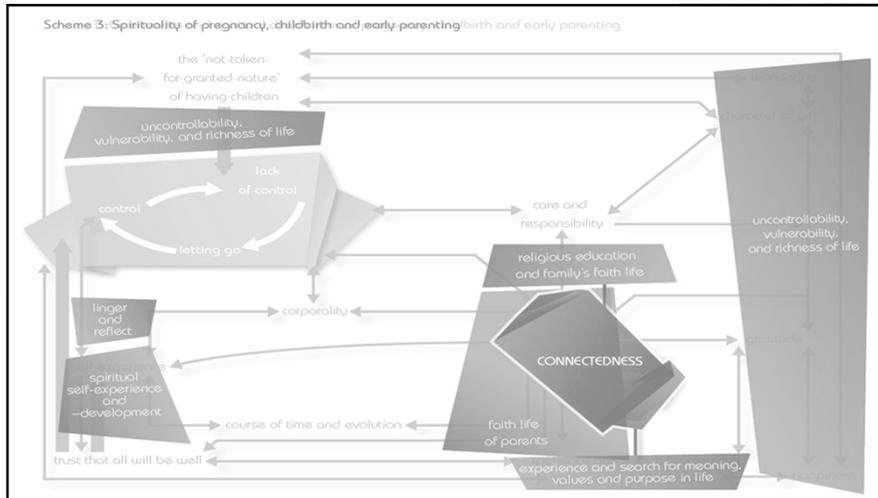
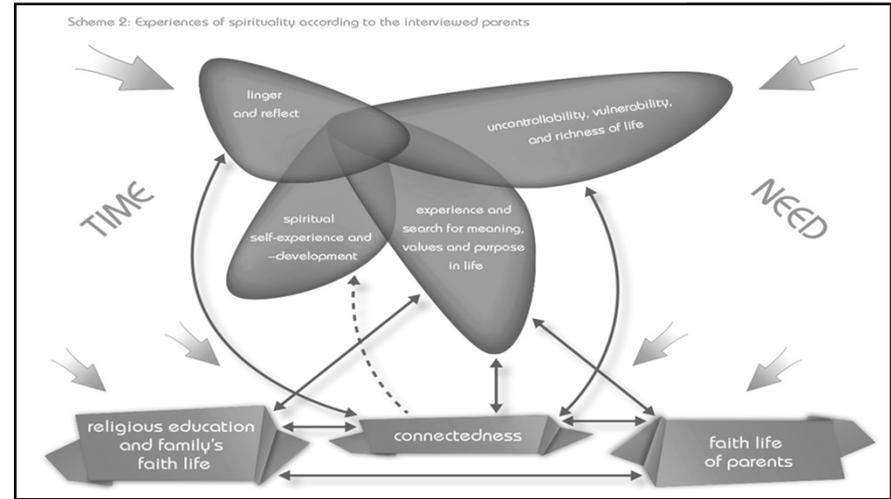
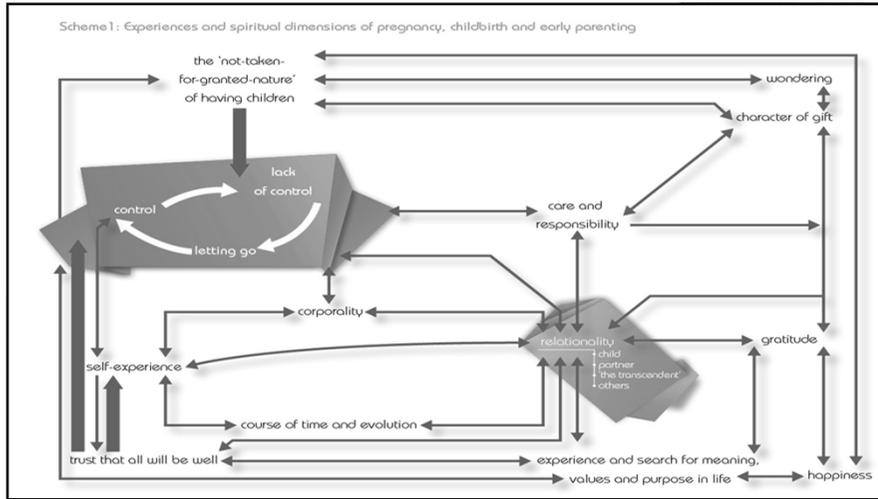
- ▶ Qualitative survey research: H. Jansen
 - ▶ Criterion-based sampling
 - ▶ 12 heterosexual Flemish couples
 - ▶ ! interested in Christian religion and spirituality
 - ▶ In-depth interviews
 - ▶ individual and joint interviews
 - ▶ Thematic content analysis

Lived religion and spirituality

- ▶ Broad and inclusive notion of spirituality
 - ▶ broader than conventional religious indicators (prayer, church attendance,...)
 - ▶ every person has a spiritual dimension
- ▶ Lived religion
 - ▶ research on 'lived religion' starts from what 'ordinary' people consider to be of a spiritual or religious nature

Empirical research question

- ▶ 3 scheme's = answer to the twofold research question
 - ▶ On the one hand: how do Flemish men and women experience pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting and in what ways are these experiences related to their spirituality? *scheme 1*
 - ▶ On the other: what do Flemish parents think of spirituality in general and according to their own experience, (*scheme 2*)
 - and how is this reflected in their experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting? (*scheme 3*)



Suggestions for spiritual and pastoral care

1. Room for reflection and meaning-making
2. Attention to connectedness and the relational nature of experiences
3. Rituals and other practices

Conclusion: life-giving spirituality?

- ▶ a spirituality that is balanced
- ▶ a spirituality that can achieve the 'right' balance between
 - ▶ positive and negative experiences
 - ▶ opposite attitudes and perceptions
- ▶ a spirituality that can endure ambiguity
- ▶ a spirituality that can put someone's heart at rest, that doesn't make great demands

Thank you!

Questions?