

Toward Generative Relational Religious Studies: Divinity, Transcendence, and Transcendent Subject Formation

Wanhong HUANG
huangwanhong@serendip.ngo

Abstract

Religious phenomena involve heterogeneous relations among persons, symbols, rituals, institutions, material environments, normative orders, sacred references, and forms of transcendence. Their study therefore raises several questions at once: how religious forms emerge historically, how transcendence becomes manifest within finite relational systems, how divine configurations acquire persistence and efficacy, and how a transcendent reference can come to occupy a subject-like position capable of address, agency, witnessing, judgment, response, or care. This paper develops a preliminary framework for *Generative Relational Religious Studies* (GRR) organized around these problems.

The framework builds upon the distinction among possible ontological reality, relational manifestation, and relational reality. It treats relations, entities, subjects, systems, and generation as revisable analytical vocabularies and preserves the ontological status of possible transcendent referents as an open philosophical question. Within this methodological setting, *divinity* is analysed as a special relational configuration in which a relationally real form acquires sacred, transcendent, ultimate-reference, normative, or related significance. *Transcendence* is examined through relational positions that exceed the unilateral standpoint, possession, or authority of finite participants while remaining compatible with heterogeneous metaphysical interpretations.

The paper then distinguishes divinity from *transcendent subjecthood*. A sacred or transcendent configuration can operate without possessing a person-like structure. Transcendent subject formation concerns a further relational process through which a transcendent position acquires properties associated with subjecthood. This process is represented provisionally as $T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}$, where $\mathcal{U}_t$ denotes a historically situated process of subjectivation involving combinations of symbol, ritual, narrative, affect, normativity, memory, institutional mediation, material practice, and interpersonal relation. Once stabilized, the resulting transcendent subject position can participate recursively in desire, interpretation, obligation, value, knowledge, ritual practice, and the subsequent reproduction or transformation of the relational system.

This architecture creates a shared analytical domain across historical- material, religious- realist, idealist, naturalist, and other metaphysical approaches while preserving their substantive ontological disagreements. Historical analysis can reconstruct the conditions through which divine and transcendent positions are manifested, reproduced, contested, or transformed; religious and metaphysical traditions can continue to interpret the possible referent of those manifestations according to their own ontological commitments. GRR consequently approaches religion as a historically situated and recursively generative relational domain whose entities, subject positions, sacred configurations, and modes of transcendence remain open to comparative, critical, and revisable inquiry. The paper concludes by defining the initial research scope, analytical boundaries, and research obligations of GRR as a developing programme.

Keywords: Generative Relational Religious Studies; divinity; transcendence; transcendent subject formation; religious relationality

Discussion Paper Note

This note defines the disciplinary position, analytical scope, epistemic status, and research-programme standing of the present discussion. The paper is an initial attempt to formulate *Generative Relational Religious Studies* (GRR) as a developing field of inquiry. Its immediate objects are divinity, transcendence, and transcendent subject formation. Its wider purpose is to establish a relational and generative analytical space in which historically heterogeneous religious phenomena can be studied while competing metaphysical interpretations remain available for substantive disagreement.

The paper builds upon the prior distinction among possible ontological reality, relational manifestation, and relational reality. Let X^* denote a possible referent whose ontological status may remain unresolved, and let X_t^{rel} denote a historically situated manifestation within a relational system. Relational analysis concerns the latter and its participation in subsequent system dynamics:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (1)$$

The possible ontological referent remains analytically distinct:

$$\text{Ont}(X^*) = ?. \quad (2)$$

This distinction supplies the initial methodological condition of GRR. Historical, symbolic, psychological, ritual, institutional, material, and relational analysis may become increasingly detailed while the ontology of a possible transcendent referent remains open wherever the available inquiry does not determine it.

GRR consequently treats *relation*, *entity*, *subject*, *system*, *manifestation*, and *generation* as revisable analytical vocabularies. Their use permits structured inquiry into religious phenomena without assigning them the status of final ontological primitives. The relational vocabulary functions as a method of access to processes and configurations that may receive different metaphysical interpretations.

The initial domain of GRR can be represented provisionally as

$$\mathcal{D}_{\text{GRR}} = \{\mathcal{R}, \mathcal{S}, \mathcal{T}, \mathcal{D}, \mathcal{U}, \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{I}, \mathcal{M}\}, \quad (3)$$

where the elements denote relational structures, symbolic forms, transcendence, divine configurations, subjectivation, practices, institutions, and material conditions. The set is intentionally provisional and non-exhaustive. Subsequent research may add, divide, or reorganize these categories.

Three objects receive particular attention in the present paper.

Divinity concerns a special configuration of relational reality in which a form acquires sacred, transcendent, ultimate-reference, normative, or related significance and persistently participates in the organization of a relational system.

Transcendence concerns relational positions experienced, interpreted, or organized as exceeding the unilateral standpoint, possession, or authority of finite participants. This relational definition does not exhaust the metaphysical meanings of transcendence within particular philosophical or religious traditions. It identifies the dimension presently available to GRR analysis.

Transcendent subject formation concerns a further process through which a transcendent relational position acquires properties associated with subjecthood. These may include agency, addressability, witnessing, intention, judgment, response, memory, care, prohibition, command, or other forms through which a relation toward a transcendent Other becomes organized.

The distinction between divinity and transcendent subjecthood is therefore fundamental:

$$\text{Div}(X) ; \text{Subj}(X). \quad (4)$$

A sacred or transcendent configuration may possess little person-like structure. A transcendent subject position requires an additional process of relational subjectivation. The present paper represents this transition provisionally as

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (5)$$

where $\mathcal{U}_t$ denotes a historically situated process through which subject-like organization becomes stabilized.

The analytical content of $\mathcal{U}_t$ may include heterogeneous relations among language, symbol, ritual, narrative, memory, affect, normativity, bodily practice, material mediation, institutional authority, collective recognition, and interpersonal experience. These elements need not operate with equal weight across traditions or historical periods.

Equation 5 describes the formation of a *relational subject position*. It does not determine the ontological origin of the possible transcendent subject. A religious realist may interpret the process as the historical and relational conditions through which an independently real divine subject becomes accessible. A historical-material account may explain the subject position through the conditions and relations through which it is produced and reproduced. An idealist, naturalist, or other metaphysical account may interpret the same relational structure differently.

The distinction can be represented as

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (6)$$

where T^* denotes a possible transcendent referent and the semicolon preserves the absence of a predetermined metaphysical relation between that referent and the historically situated subject position.

This separation is particularly important for the language of *formation*. GRR uses the term to describe the relational formation of manifestations, positions, and modes of subjecthood within historically situated systems. The term carries no general claim that a possible transcendent reality itself is produced by those systems.

The resulting architecture permits several explanatory traditions to enter a shared analytical domain:

$$\mu_i \neq \mu_j, \quad \mathcal{A}(\mu_i) \cap \mathcal{A}(\mu_j) \neq \emptyset, \quad (7)$$

where μ_i and μ_j denote distinct metaphysical interpretations and $\mathcal{A}(\mu)$ denotes the domain of relational claims available to analysis under an interpretation.

Historical materialism can investigate the conditions through which religious forms, divine configurations, and transcendent subject positions emerge and are reproduced. Religious realism can preserve claims concerning realities whose existence exceeds those conditions. Idealist and other traditions can provide further accounts of the relation among consciousness, meaning, transcendence, and reality. GRR does not require these interpretations to converge upon a common metaphysics.

The paper therefore treats ontological plurality as compatible with shared relational inquiry. Such compatibility has limits. Metaphysical positions remain answerable to historical, empirical, logical, and practical commitments that fall within available inquiry. Ontological openness applies to underdetermined claims and supplies no general immunity from criticism.

GRR also preserves the historical specificity of religious traditions. Structural comparison concerns selected relations and generative processes. Similarity in a relational configuration does not establish theological, metaphysical, linguistic, ritual, or historical equivalence.

This requirement becomes especially important when comparing traditions in which transcendence is represented through person-like deities with traditions organized around impersonal

principles, cosmological orders, emptiness, non-duality, ancestral presence, sacred place, or other forms that resist translation into a single theological vocabulary. GRR therefore treats its own categories as provisional interfaces for comparison rather than as universal templates into which religious traditions must be fitted.

The framework further distinguishes religious classification from the analysis of divine-like relational configurations. Political orders, scientific authority, nation, law, reason, nature, mathematics, or other forms may under particular historical conditions acquire sacred, transcendent, or ultimate-reference dimensions. Such configurations can become objects of GRR comparison where their relational structure warrants it. Their possession of one or more divine-like dimensions does not independently classify them as religions.

The generative dimension of GRR concerns recursion. Once a transcendent or divine position becomes relationally operative, it can participate in the subsequent development of the system:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (8)$$

A transcendent subject position may reorganize desire, interpretation, obligation, ritual practice, interpersonal relation, institutional authority, material conduct, and collective memory. Those transformed conditions can in turn alter how the transcendent subject is subsequently represented, experienced, addressed, reproduced, contested, or transformed.

The central GRR sequence developed in this paper can therefore be stated as

$$\boxed{\begin{array}{l} X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \\ \quad \quad \quad \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \\ \quad \quad \quad \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \end{array}} \quad (9)$$

Here $\mathcal{S}_t$ represents sacralization or transcendent positioning, $\mathcal{U}_t$ represents relational subjectivation, and the subsequent arrows represent generative participation and recursive reproduction.

The formal expressions in this paper have conceptual and heuristic status. They specify analytical distinctions, possible dependencies, and research objects. They do not presently provide validated empirical metrics, causal estimates, or universal laws of religious development. Historical, ethnographic, psychological, linguistic, comparative, and computational operationalization remain later stages of the programme.

The present discussion also leaves several topics outside its immediate scope. It does not attempt to establish a comprehensive taxonomy of world religions, a universal theory of religious experience, a complete metaphysics of transcendence, or a normative theology. It does not adjudicate the existence of God or other transcendent realities. It does not yet develop the epistemology of cross-relational invariance through which different manifestations of a possible shared reality might be compared.

Its contribution is more limited and foundational. The paper proposes GRR as a revisable analytical programme for investigating how divinity, transcendence, and transcendent subject positions become manifest, acquire relational reality, enter generative dynamics, and undergo historical reproduction and transformation while their possible metaphysical referents remain open to further philosophical and theological inquiry.

Responsible Use and Rights Reservation

This section separates requested scholarly conduct from the legal permissions stated on the following page. It records an ethical request for responsible use and then defines the narrower scope of retained legal rights.

The author encourages good-faith discussion, criticism, independent inquiry, and responsible use of the material in this work. Separately from the licence's terms, the author asks users to consider foreseeable harms when adapting or applying the proposed framework. This ethical request leaves the licence's permissions and legally authorized uses unchanged.

The author retains the rights preserved under CC BY-NC 4.0 and may pursue remedies to which the author is legally entitled for breach of the licence or violation of the author's independently applicable rights. Reuse remains independent from authorial endorsement. Third-party rights require authorization from their respective holders where applicable. Copyright exceptions and limitations, including applicable forms of fair use or fair dealing, remain fully available.

Notices

This page consolidates the manuscript’s publication status, licence, development disclosure, research-programme relation, and suggested citation.

Status. This working draft records an evolving stage of the author’s position and is circulated for discussion. Definitions, section structure, formal statements, and numbering remain subject to revision. A systematic value-theory review, expanded recognition-theory review, empirical network cases, specialist statistical review, institutional design, and originality audit remain future research stages.

Licence. Except where otherwise indicated, copyright 2026 Wanhong Huang. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0). Subject to its terms, the licence permits sharing and adaptation for noncommercial purposes with appropriate attribution, a link to the licence, an indication of changes, and attribution that preserves the licensor’s independence from the reuse. Reuse is governed solely by that licence; the responsible-use request on the preceding page remains separate from its terms. The licence deed and legal-code link are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. The licence governs in case of conflict with this summary. Third-party material remains subject to the rights held by its respective rights holders.

Statement on the use of language models. The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved OpenAI’s ChatGPT. ChatGPT supported exploratory dialogue, formal reconstruction, source discovery followed by website verification, exact calculation, argumentative criticism, and drafting in L^AT_EX. The author selected the research questions, directed and approved the theoretical commitments and epistemic status of the claims, and bears sole responsibility for the manuscript, including its definitions, formal constructions, taxonomy, calculations, arguments, conclusions, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author. The access level and claim limit for every cited source are recorded in the accompanying literature audit.

1 Introduction

This section establishes the research problem, analytical scope, and initial contribution of Generative Relational Religious Studies (GRR). It begins from the heterogeneity of religious phenomena and the difficulty of analysing divinity, transcendence, and religious subjecthood within a single conceptual architecture. It then introduces the generative relational problem, situates GRR in relation to several established approaches to religion, defines the principal research objects of the paper, and states the scope and organization of the discussion.

1.1 Religious Phenomena and Heterogeneous Explanatory Domains

Religious life contains phenomena that enter inquiry through substantially different analytical vocabularies. A deity may be approached as a metaphysical referent, an object of devotion, a symbolic representation, a source of normativity, an imagined interlocutor, an institutional authority, a ritual presence, or a historically transmitted subject of narrative. Sacredness may be studied through classification, affect, ritual practice, material objects, spatial differentiation, collective representation, or claims concerning transcendence. Religious subjects likewise relate to gods, ancestors, sacred orders, ultimate principles, texts, places, institutions, and communities through heterogeneous combinations of belief, practice, memory, obligation, desire, embodiment, and interpretation.

No single one of these dimensions exhausts the religious phenomenon. Durkheim’s analysis of the sacred and collective religious life foregrounds social differentiation and ritual reproduction [5]. Feuerbach and Marx make religious forms available to anthropological, social, and historical analysis [6, 11]. Berger emphasizes the construction and maintenance of encompassing worlds of meaning [3]. Asad demonstrates that religion itself must be examined through the historical conditions and disciplinary practices under which it becomes a recognizable category [1]. Psychoanalytic approaches add another dimension by examining how symbolic authority and an Other-position participate in the formation of desire and subjectivity [8, 7].

These traditions illuminate different parts of a wider relational field. The problem addressed here concerns their possible articulation around a common set of generative processes while preserving the differences among their objects and explanatory commitments.

The starting configuration can be represented schematically as

$$\mathcal{Q}_t = (P_t, S_t, A_t, N_t, V_t, I_t, M_t, R_t, \dots), \quad (10)$$

where the components provisionally denote practices, symbolic forms, affect, normativity, value, institutions, material arrangements, and relational structures.

A religious phenomenon may participate in several components simultaneously. A ritual can reorganize bodily practice, symbolic interpretation, collective memory, affective orientation, and institutional authority. A deity can occupy a symbolic position while also becoming an object of address, normative reference, remembered presence, or anticipated judgment. A sacred place can be materially localized while acquiring meanings and obligations that extend far beyond its immediate physical properties.

The analytical challenge therefore concerns processes connecting these heterogeneous dimensions.

1.2 The Generative Relational Problem

Generative Relational analysis approaches this challenge by examining how relational configurations emerge, stabilize, participate in later development, and become transformed through that participation.

The prior concept of relational reality distinguishes a historically situated manifestation from both its possible ontological referent and its subsequent generative effects. The minimal structure is

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (11)$$

GRR takes this recursive structure as its point of departure and asks what additional processes become visible in the religious domain.

Three such processes organize the present discussion.

The first is *sacralization or transcendent positioning*. A relationally real form can acquire a position through which it becomes sacred, transcendent, ultimately referential, normatively authoritative, or otherwise differentiated from ordinary relational objects:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}}. \quad (12)$$

The second is *transcendent subjectivation*. A sacred or transcendent position can acquire properties associated with subjecthood:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{U_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (13)$$

The third is *generative participation*. Once such a position becomes relationally operative, it can participate in the development of desire, interpretation, normativity, value, practice, institutions, and further relations:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1}. \quad (14)$$

Together these transitions produce the central architecture of the paper:

$$\boxed{X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{U_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow Q_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (15)$$

Equation 15 does not propose a universal developmental sequence through which every religious phenomenon must pass. Its purpose is to distinguish analytically separable processes whose relations can be investigated historically and comparatively.

1.3 Divinity, Transcendence, and Subjecthood

The three central terms of the paper occupy different positions within this architecture.

Divinity concerns a special relational configuration in which a form acquires sacred, transcendent, ultimate-reference, normative, affective, or related significance. Divinity therefore concerns the configuration of a relational position.

Transcendence concerns a relation of exceeding. Within the limited GRR usage developed here, a transcendent position exceeds the unilateral standpoint, possession, or authority of finite participants in a specified relational system. The concept leaves open the further metaphysical question of whether the relevant reality exists independently of that system.

Transcendent subjecthood concerns a further organization of the transcendent position. A transcendent configuration can become addressable, responsive, witnessing, intentional, judging, caring, commanding, remembering, or otherwise organized through properties associated with subjectivity.

These distinctions can be represented as

$$\text{Div}(X) ; \text{Trans}(X) ; \text{Subj}(X). \quad (16)$$

The semicolons indicate analytical distinction. The three dimensions may be strongly coupled in some religious traditions and only weakly coupled in others.

A person-like deity may combine all three. A sacred cosmological principle may exhibit strong transcendence and divinity with limited subject-like organization. An ancestor may acquire substantial subject-like and sacred presence through ritual and memory while occupying a different metaphysical position from a creator deity. A sacred place may have intense divinity and relational efficacy with little person-like subjecthood.

GRR therefore treats the relation among these dimensions as a comparative problem.

1.4 The Formation of Transcendent Subjects

The formation of transcendent subjects constitutes the central new problem of the present paper.

Human subjects regularly enter relations with others whose presence is not reducible to immediate physical copresence. A deceased ancestor can be addressed. A deity can be asked, thanked, feared, obeyed, loved, or blamed. A sacred witness can be experienced as present during an oath or ritual. Divine judgment can organize conduct in situations without an observable human observer. A religious subject can understand an event as response, sign, prohibition, calling, or care.

The relevant analytical structure therefore exceeds propositional belief. A proposition of the form

“God exists”

captures only one possible relation. Transcendent subjecthood concerns an organized field of interaction:

$$\mathcal{J}_t = \left(A_t^d, W_t, E_t, R_t^s, C_t, M_t, N_t, \dots \right), \quad (17)$$

where the components provisionally denote addressability, witnessing, expected response, attributed agency, care, memory, and normative authority.

The notation does not imply that these dimensions are necessary or exhaustive. It identifies a family of relational properties through which a transcendent position can become subject-like.

A central GRR question therefore concerns the transition

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (18)$$

The process $\mathcal{U}_t$ may involve narrative attribution, ritual address, remembered interaction, inherited symbolic forms, linguistic personification, institutional teaching, collective recognition, affective experience, perceived response, material mediation, or other relational processes. Different configurations can produce different modes and degrees of subjecthood.

The process remains compatible with heterogeneous ontological interpretations. A religious realist may regard these relations as modes through which an independently real divine subject becomes accessible. A historical-material or naturalistic account may explain the subject position through historically generated relational mechanisms. GRR investigates the relational formation and operation of the position while preserving this metaphysical disagreement.

1.5 Subject Formation beyond Projection

The concept of transcendent subject formation must be distinguished from a simple model of projection.

Feuerbach provides an influential account in which divine predicates become intelligible through human self-objectification [6]. Such an approach remains relevant to GRR because subject-like properties attributed to transcendence may carry structures available within human relational life.

The generative relational problem extends further. Once a transcendent subject position becomes established, it can acquire effects that exceed the moment or agent through which a particular representation was produced. Symbols, rituals, institutions, inherited narratives, material environments, and collective memory can stabilize and transmit the position across subjects and generations.

The resulting sequence is recursive:

$$\mathcal{Q}_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1} \longrightarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (19)$$

The transcendent subject position can therefore become one of the conditions through which later subjects, practices, and institutions are formed.

This recursive structure also complicates a simple distinction between producer and product. A community may participate in the reproduction of a divine subject position while subsequently understanding itself, its norms, its history, and its future through relation to that position. The generated configuration enters the conditions of subsequent generation.

The relevant structure is

$$\boxed{\text{relational formation} \longrightarrow \text{transcendent subject position} \longrightarrow \text{further relational formation}.} \quad (20)$$

This recursive generativity constitutes one of the central objects of GRR.

1.6 Historical Materiality and Religious Transcendence

The generative structure also creates an interface between historical materialism and religious metaphysics.

Historical analysis can investigate the conditions under which a transcendent subject position acquires recognizable form:

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (21)$$

where Γ_t contains relevant material, linguistic, institutional, ritual, political, technological, and relational conditions.

Once the subject position becomes relationally real, it can participate in subsequent historical development:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1}. \quad (22)$$

The complete recursive relation is therefore

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1} \longrightarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (23)$$

Religious forms can consequently be historically conditioned and historically conditioning across successive stages.

The ontological interpretation remains a separate layer:

$$T^* ; \Gamma_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1}. \quad (24)$$

This architecture allows historical-material inquiry to analyse the complete historical life of a religious manifestation while permitting religious realism, idealism, naturalism, and other metaphysical positions to interpret T^* differently.

1.7 Generative Relational Religious Studies

GRR is proposed here as a research programme organized around the formation, operation, reproduction, and transformation of religious relational configurations.

Its basic unit of analysis is therefore neither a doctrinal proposition nor an isolated religious individual. The relevant unit is a historically situated generative relational configuration:

$$\mathfrak{G}_t = (\mathcal{N}_t, \mathcal{E}_t, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{C}_t, \mathcal{P}_t, \Gamma_t), \quad (25)$$

where $\mathcal{N}_t$ denotes participating nodes or positions, $\mathcal{E}_t$ relational events, $\mathcal{R}_t$ relational structures, $\mathcal{C}_t$ carriers and mediations, $\mathcal{P}_t$ practices and processes, and Γ_t wider generative conditions.

The categories are revisable and domain-dependent. Their purpose is to direct attention toward relations and transitions that disappear when religion is analysed only through beliefs, institutions, or isolated subjects.

Within such configurations, GRR asks how sacred distinctions emerge, how transcendent positions become stabilized, how subject-like properties are attributed and reproduced, how relations with transcendent subjects alter human subject formation, how religious configurations participate in wider historical dynamics, and how these processes differ across traditions and historical conditions.

The programme can therefore be represented through a family of transitions:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{R}_t &\longrightarrow X_t^{\text{rel}}, \\ X_t^{\text{rel}} &\xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}}, \\ T_t^{\text{rel}} &\xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \\ T_t^{\text{subj}} &\rightsquigarrow \mathcal{R}_{t+1}. \end{aligned} \quad (26)$$

The transitions organize inquiry without prescribing a universal historical sequence.

1.8 Contributions and Scope

The present discussion makes five initial contributions.

First, it proposes Generative Relational Religious Studies as a revisable research programme organized around religious relational configurations and their generative development.

Second, it distinguishes divinity, transcendence, and transcendent subjecthood as analytically separable dimensions whose coupling varies historically and across religious traditions.

Third, it introduces *transcendent subject formation* as a distinct research problem and represents it through the transition

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}.$$

Fourth, it places transcendent subject positions within recursive dynamics in which historically generated religious forms can subsequently become conditions of psychological, symbolic, institutional, material, and relational development.

Fifth, it provides a shared relational domain for metaphysically heterogeneous interpretations while preserving substantive disagreement concerning the ontological status of transcendent referents.

The paper remains foundational and conceptual. It does not provide a universal taxonomy of religions, a general causal theory of religious belief, an empirical metric of transcendence, or a metaphysical adjudication concerning God or other transcendent realities. Its formal expressions specify research objects and dependencies whose empirical realization requires historical, comparative, ethnographic, psychological, linguistic, and other domain-appropriate methods.

Questions concerning cross-relational invariance and the possible symmetry of reality are reserved for a separate epistemological discussion.

1.9 Organization of the Discussion

The remainder of the paper develops GRR from philosophical antecedents toward a formal account of transcendent subject formation and a wider research programme.

Section 2 situates GRR in relation to major approaches to religion, the sacred, transcendence, subjectivity, ritual, and historical formation. Section 3 develops the generative relational architecture of religious phenomena and specifies the units and levels of GRR analysis. Section 4 examines divinity and transcendence as distinct but interacting relational configurations. Section 5 develops the formal account of transcendent subject formation, including addressability, agency, witnessing, response, memory, and normative authority. Section 6 examines recursive relations among transcendent subjects, human subject formation, ritual, institutions, and historical materiality. Section 7 develops the comparative and methodological programme of GRR across heterogeneous religious traditions. Section 8 states conceptual boundaries, objections, and research obligations. Section 9 concludes by defining the provisional standing of GRR and the research directions generated by the present framework.

2 Philosophical and Religious-Studies Lineages

This section situates Generative Relational Religious Studies within several philosophical, sociological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic lineages relevant to divinity, transcendence, ritual, and subject formation. The review is selective and problem-oriented. Its purpose is to identify conceptual resources for the processes distinguished in this paper:

$\mathcal{S}_t$ (sacralization and transcendent positioning),

$\mathcal{U}_t$ (transcendent subjectivation),

and

$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1}$ (generative participation).

The traditions considered below illuminate different portions of this sequence. GRR draws upon these resources while retaining its categories as revisable analytical instruments.

2.1 The Sacred and the Differentiation of Religious Reality

A major route into the study of religion begins with the differentiation of the sacred. Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* places the distinction between sacred and profane at the center of religious classification and emphasizes the role of collective practice in sustaining sacred representations and social bonds [5].

This perspective supplies an important resource for GRR because sacredness can be approached as a relational differentiation. An object, place, name, time, person, text, or practice can acquire a relational position whose treatment differs from that of ordinary objects:

$$\mathcal{P}_t(X) \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t} \mathcal{P}_t^{\text{sac}}(X). \quad (27)$$

The transition may alter permissible actions, forms of attention, affective orientation, normative expectation, spatial organization, or relations among participants.

Durkheim's framework is especially important for understanding the collective reproduction of such distinctions. Sacredness can persist through ritual, classification, collective memory, and recurring social practice. The sacred therefore acquires a history and a mechanism of reproduction.

Rudolf Otto develops a substantially different route into the same broad domain. In *The Idea of the Holy*, he emphasizes the *numinous* and the non-rational dimension of the experience of the holy [13]. His analysis directs attention toward qualities of religious experience that resist reduction to ordinary moral or conceptual classification.

For GRR, Durkheim and Otto illuminate different dimensions of sacred relationality. The first emphasizes differentiation and collective reproduction; the second foregrounds the experienced excess through which a religious object may appear as qualitatively different from ordinary experience.

These dimensions can coexist in a divine configuration:

$$\mathbf{S}_t(X) = \left(s_t^{\text{diff}}, s_t^{\text{exp}}, s_t^{\text{coll}} \right), \quad (28)$$

where the terms denote sacred differentiation, experienced sacred significance, and collective reproduction respectively.

Equation 28 is a comparative device. It does not reduce Durkheimian and phenomenological accounts to a common theory of the sacred. Their differences remain theoretically important.

2.2 Transcendence and Relational Address

Transcendence becomes especially relevant to GRR when it is connected with relation and address. A transcendent position may be experienced as exceeding the unilateral standpoint of a finite subject while simultaneously entering a relation with that subject.

Buber's philosophy of dialogue provides an important resource for thinking about this structure. In *I and Thou*, Buber distinguishes forms of relation organized around an I-It orientation from the I-Thou relation and develops the possibility of relation to an eternal Thou [4].

GRR does not adopt Buber's dialogical philosophy as a general ontology of religion. The relevant insight concerns the structure of address. A transcendent reality can occupy a position toward which a finite subject does more than attribute properties. The relation may involve

$$\text{address} \longleftrightarrow \text{anticipated or experienced response}. \quad (29)$$

This distinction becomes central to transcendent subject formation. Consider two configurations:

$$\begin{aligned} X_t^{\text{trans}} &: \text{a transcendent reference,} \\ T_t^{\text{subj}} &: \text{an addressable transcendent subject position.} \end{aligned} \quad (30)$$

The second includes an additional relational architecture. A participant may speak to, listen for, obey, thank, fear, accuse, trust, love, or await a response from the transcendent position.

Addressability therefore supplies one possible dimension of subjecthood:

$$a_t(T) > 0. \quad (31)$$

It does not by itself establish complete subject formation. It identifies one transition through which transcendence can become organized as an Other with whom a relation is possible.

2.3 Anthropological and Historical Production of the Divine

Feuerbach and Marx provide a contrasting lineage in which religious forms become available to anthropological and historical explanation [6, 11].

Feuerbach’s analysis is especially relevant to the attribution of subject-like properties to divinity. Predicates attributed to God can be examined in relation to human capacities and human self-understanding. This provides one possible account of how agency, knowledge, will, love, judgment, or other subject-like predicates become attached to a divine object.

A simplified attributional structure can be represented as

$$\mathcal{H}_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{A}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (32)$$

where $\mathcal{H}_t$ denotes historically available forms of human subjectivity and $\mathcal{A}_t$ a process through which subject-like properties become attributed to transcendence.

GRR treats this as one possible mechanism within the wider process $\mathcal{U}_t$.

Marx relocates religious formation within wider social and material conditions. Religious consciousness and religious institutions can thereby be studied in relation to historically organized forms of social life [11]. This opens the formation of transcendent subjects to analysis through institutions, authority, labor, social organization, material reproduction, and historically available symbolic forms.

The generative relational extension is recursive:

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1}, \quad (33)$$

where the transcendent subject position begins as historically conditioned and subsequently becomes one of the conditions through which later history is organized.

This recursive structure is important for GRR because it gives religious forms a historical genealogy and a subsequent generative role.

2.4 Genealogy and the Historical Category of Religion

Historical inquiry also applies to the category through which the object is identified as religious. Asad’s genealogical work challenges the treatment of religion as a universally transparent and transhistorical category and draws attention to the historical relations among religion, discipline, embodiment, power, practice, and modern classification [1].

GRR therefore cannot assume in advance that the same analytical vocabulary will map cleanly across all traditions.

Let

$$\mathcal{K}_t$$

denote a historically situated classificatory regime. The identification of a phenomenon as religious can then itself be represented as

$$X_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{K}_t} X_t^{(\text{religion})}. \quad (34)$$

The classification is part of the historical field rather than an invisible observer-independent operation.

This has direct implications for divinity and transcendence. Categories such as “God,” “deity,” “religion,” “sacred,” and “transcendence” may carry conceptual histories that fit some traditions more naturally than others. GRR must therefore distinguish between

$$\text{analytical comparability} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{category identity}. \quad (35)$$

A Buddhist, Daoist, ancestral, animistic, monotheistic, or other configuration may share selected relational structures while retaining conceptual systems that resist translation into one another.

2.5 Ritual as Generative Mediation

Ritual studies provides one of the most important resources for a generative account of religion because ritual places symbolic, bodily, material, temporal, spatial, institutional, and collective relations into organized action.

Turner's analysis of ritual process develops the significance of liminality, transition, symbolic action, and *communitas* within ritual transformation [15]. Ritual here is dynamically consequential for the participants and the relational structures through which they move.

Rappaport gives ritual an even broader role in the constitution and maintenance of religious and social orders, emphasizing the formal properties of ritual, communication, sanctification, and the relation between ritual and religious organization [14].

Bell's theory of ritualization further redirects attention from a fixed category of ritual toward strategic differentiation within practice and toward relations among ritual activity, embodiment, social structure, and power [2].

These approaches make ritual especially suitable for GRR analysis. Ritual can participate in the transition from a transcendent reference to an operative relational position:

$$X_t^{\text{trans}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{R} \sqcup_t} T_t^{\text{rel}}. \quad (36)$$

It can also contribute to subjectivation:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{R} \sqcup_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (37)$$

A ritual address can render a deity addressable. A witnessed vow can position a transcendent Other as witness. Repeated offerings can organize a relation of giving and anticipated reception. Prayer can stabilize relations of request, gratitude, confession, dependence, or response. Material objects and sacred spaces can provide durable carriers through which the subject position is repeatedly activated.

Ritual therefore enters $\mathcal{U}_t$ as one possible mechanism of transcendent subject formation:

$$\mathcal{U}_t = \mathcal{U}_t(L_t, Rit_t, N_t, A_t, M_t, I_t, \dots), \quad (38)$$

where the arguments provisionally denote language, ritual, narrative, affect, material mediation, institutional organization, and other relevant conditions.

The equation does not assign causal priority to ritual. Different religious configurations may stabilize transcendent subjecthood through substantially different combinations of mechanisms.

2.6 Symbolic Otherness and Subject Formation

Lacanian psychoanalysis provides another route toward the problem of transcendent subject formation. The big Other names a trans-individual symbolic position through which language, law, authority, knowledge, and subjective recognition can become organized [8, 7].

The relevance to GRR lies in the possibility that an operative subject position need not coincide with an immediately present empirical individual. A symbolic Other can influence desire and action through the place it occupies within the subject's relational field.

Let

$$O_t$$

denote an operative Other-position. Then

$$D_{t+1} = \Phi_D(D_t, O_t, R_t) \quad (39)$$

represents the participation of that position in the subsequent organization of desire.

A divine subject position may possess some structurally comparable properties. It may be experienced as knowing, witnessing, judging, desiring, commanding, permitting, or responding even in the absence of an observable human interlocutor.

GRR uses this structural possibility while preserving the distinction between a Lacanian symbolic Other and a religious deity. The comparison concerns the operation of an Other-position within relational and subjective dynamics. It does not establish psychological, theological, or ontological identity.

Lacan's account also introduces a further issue concerning guarantee. An Other-position can appear to secure meaning or authority while the symbolic order lacks a final self-guaranteeing foundation. This problem becomes important for later GRR analysis of divine witnessing, sacred guarantee, commitment, authority, and the regeneration of transcendence.

2.7 From Attribution to Relational Subjectivation

The lineages considered above suggest several mechanisms through which a transcendent position can become subject-like. These mechanisms can be provisionally grouped as

$$\mathcal{U}_t = \{\mathcal{U}_t^A, \mathcal{U}_t^L, \mathcal{U}_t^R, \mathcal{U}_t^N, \mathcal{U}_t^M, \mathcal{U}_t^I, \mathcal{U}_t^C\}, \quad (40)$$

where the terms denote attribution, linguistic address, ritual interaction, narrative organization, material mediation, institutional stabilization, and collective recognition.

The list is provisional and permits overlap. A prayer can simultaneously involve linguistic address, ritual form, narrative expectation, embodied posture, institutional teaching, and collective recognition.

Subject formation therefore concerns a configuration rather than a single mechanism:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} = \mathcal{F}_U(T_t^{\text{rel}}, \mathcal{U}_t, \Gamma_t). \quad (41)$$

The resulting subjecthood may be multidimensional. A transcendent position may be strongly addressable but weakly agentic, strongly witnessing but minimally responsive, strongly normative but weakly person-like, or organized through other combinations.

This observation motivates a subjecthood profile:

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t), \quad (42)$$

where the coordinates provisionally denote addressability, attributed agency, witnessing, responsiveness, memory, normative authority, and care.

The coordinates are conceptual. Their empirical and comparative validity remains a research obligation.

2.8 Relational Formation and Ontological Openness

The historical formation of a subject position does not determine the ontology of its possible referent.

The distinction can be represented as

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (43)$$

A historical-material interpretation may place explanatory weight on $\mathcal{U}_t$ and the conditions Γ_t . A religious realist may interpret those same mechanisms as finite historical modes through which an independently real transcendent subject becomes accessible, nameable, or relationally present.

Table 1: Selected intellectual lineages relevant to Generative Relational Religious Studies

Lineage	Resource for GRR	Boundary retained by GRR
Durkheim	Sacred differentiation, collective representation, and ritual reproduction	Collective formation supplies one family of mechanisms within a wider relational configuration
Otto	Experiential excess and the distinctive quality of the holy	GRR does not treat numinous experience as a universal essence of religion
Buber	Relation, address, and the possibility of orientation toward an eternal Thou	Dialogical relation supplies a resource for subjecthood without becoming the ontology of GRR
Feuerbach and Marx	Anthropological attribution and historical-material formation of religious forms	Historical formation leaves the ontology of a possible transcendent referent open within GRR
Asad	Genealogy of religion as a historically situated category involving discipline, practice, embodiment, and power	GRR categories remain provisional and require cross-traditional scrutiny
Turner, Rappaport, and Bell	Ritual as transformative process, ordered communication, embodied practice, ritualization, and power	Ritual constitutes one family of generative mechanisms and carries no universal explanatory priority
Lacanian psychoanalysis	Trans-individual Other-position, symbolic authority, desire, and the problem of guarantee	Structural comparison does not establish identity between the big Other and religious transcendence

The GRR claim at this stage concerns the relational process:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1}. \quad (44)$$

The metaphysical interpretation of

$$T^*$$

remains an additional question.

This separation allows attribution, ritualization, institutionalization, symbolic mediation, and collective reproduction to be studied with historical precision while avoiding an automatic inference from formation of a relational subject position to production of the possible transcendent reality itself.

2.9 Conceptual Interface for GRR

The principal resources from the lineages considered above can now be summarized in Table 1.

The lineages converge upon a common problem without supplying a single common answer. Sacredness can be differentiated collectively and experienced as excess. Transcendence can become a relation of address. Subject-like properties can be attributed, narrated, ritualized, institutionalized, and transmitted. An Other-position can participate in desire without being reducible to immediate physical presence. Religious forms can be historically generated and can subsequently reorganize the historical conditions of later relations.

GRR organizes these insights around three analytically distinct transitions:

$$\boxed{X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1}.} \quad (45)$$

The first concerns the formation of sacred or transcendent relational position. The second concerns the formation of subject-like organization. The third concerns the participation of that subject position in subsequent generation.

The conceptual opening for GRR lies in studying these transitions together. Existing traditions provide substantial accounts of sacredness, projection, ritual, collective representation, transcendence, symbolic authority, religious experience, and historical formation. GRR asks how these processes can be represented within a common generative architecture while their differences, historical specificity, and metaphysical disagreements remain visible.

Section 3 develops that architecture more formally by specifying the units, levels, events, carriers, relational positions, and generative conditions through which religious configurations evolve.

3 Generative Relational Architecture of Religious Phenomena

This section specifies the analytical architecture through which Generative Relational Religious Studies represents religious phenomena. Its purpose is to identify the units, levels, relational positions, carriers, events, practices, and generative conditions required to describe religious configurations without presupposing fixed entities or a single metaphysical account of religion. The section first defines the religious relational configuration, then distinguishes entities from positions, separates carriers from relational functions, introduces events and processes, and finally develops the multilevel dynamics through which sacred and transcendent configurations emerge and change.

3.1 Religious Relational Configurations

GRR takes a historically situated relational configuration as its principal unit of analysis. Let

$$\mathfrak{G}_t = (\mathcal{N}_t, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{E}_t, \mathcal{C}_t, \mathcal{P}_t, \mathcal{I}_t, \Gamma_t), \quad (46)$$

where

$$\mathcal{N}_t$$

denotes the set of relevant nodes or positions,

$$\mathcal{R}_t$$

the relations among them,

$$\mathcal{E}_t$$

the relational events occurring within the selected interval,

$$\mathcal{C}_t$$

the carriers through which relational forms are mediated,

$$\mathcal{P}_t$$

the practices and recurrent processes,

$$\mathcal{I}_t$$

the institutional and interpretive structures,
and

$$\Gamma_t$$

the wider historical, material, ecological, technological, political, and cultural conditions under which the configuration develops.

The decomposition in Equation 46 is analytical and revisable. Its elements do not constitute an ontology of religion. They provide a provisional vocabulary for distinguishing processes that would otherwise be collapsed into a single object such as “belief,” “religion,” or “God.”

A concrete religious configuration may include human participants, deceased ancestors, divine references, ritual specialists, sacred places, texts, objects, institutions, remembered events, normative expectations, and anticipated futures. These components enter the analysis according to the positions and relations through which they participate in the configuration.

The configuration evolves as

$$\mathfrak{G}_{t+1} = \Phi_t(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Delta_t), \quad (47)$$

where Δ_t denotes perturbations, encounters, events, or changes in generative conditions during the interval.

Religious continuity therefore does not require a static configuration. Persistence can arise through recurrent reconstruction across changing states.

3.2 Entities and Relational Positions

A central GR commitment is that the entities appearing in an analysis should not automatically be treated as fixed ontological primitives. Religious phenomena make this especially important. A deity may be represented as a person, name, image, lawgiver, witness, absence, presence, principle, or cosmological force under different relational conditions.

GRR therefore distinguishes a represented entity from the relational position it occupies.

Let

$$e_i$$

denote an identified entity within an analytical description, and let

$$\pi_i(t)$$

denote its relational position at time t . Then

$$e_i \longmapsto \pi_i(t) \quad (48)$$

records the position through which the entity participates in the selected configuration.

The position may contain several dimensions:

$$\pi_i(t) = \left(\rho_i^A, \rho_i^N, \rho_i^V, \rho_i^E, \rho_i^S, \rho_i^T, \dots \right)_t, \quad (49)$$

where the coordinates may represent agency, normative authority, value, epistemic authority, sacred significance, transcendent positioning, and other domain-relevant relations.

The same represented entity may therefore occupy different positions across historical contexts:

$$\pi_i(t_1) \neq \pi_i(t_2). \quad (50)$$

Conversely, a broadly similar relational position may migrate across different entities or carriers:

$$\pi_i(t_1) \simeq \pi_j(t_2), \quad i \neq j. \quad (51)$$

This distinction is particularly useful for analysing historical changes in sacred authority. The name or image associated with a deity can remain continuous while its position in normativity, desire, political authority, collective memory, or ritual practice changes substantially.

3.3 Relational Nodes beyond Human Individuals

The set $\mathcal{N}_t$ should not be restricted to physically present human individuals.

A node in GRR is a position that participates in the relational dynamics under analysis:

$$n_i \in \mathcal{N}_t \iff n_i \text{ participates in the selected relational configuration.} \quad (52)$$

Possible nodes include living persons, groups, institutions, ancestors, deities, sacred texts, ritual offices, imagined audiences, sacred places, or other positions that become consequential within the system.

This analytical inclusion does not establish ontological equivalence among the nodes. A living human participant, a corporation, a deity, and a sacred mountain can all enter a relational model while possessing radically different ontological interpretations.

The distinction between analytical participation and ontological identity can be expressed as

$$n_i, n_j \in \mathcal{N}_t \not\Rightarrow \text{Ont}(n_i) = \text{Ont}(n_j). \quad (53)$$

This principle allows GRR to model relations with transcendent or deceased subjects without first deciding the metaphysical status of those subjects.

3.4 Carriers and Relational Functions

Religious relations require media through which they become available, repeatable, and transmissible. These media are referred to here as *carriers*.

Let

$$\mathcal{C}_t = \{c_t^L, c_t^R, c_t^M, c_t^B, c_t^S, c_t^I, c_t^A, \dots\}, \quad (54)$$

where the terms may denote linguistic, ritual, material, bodily, spatial, institutional, affective, and other carriers.

A carrier supports a relational function:

$$c_{t,k} \xrightarrow{\Psi_t} \pi_i(t). \quad (55)$$

The same relational position may be supported by several carriers:

$$\{c_{t,1}, c_{t,2}, \dots, c_{t,m}\} \xrightarrow{\Psi_t} \pi_i(t). \quad (56)$$

A deity, for example, may be relationally present through prayer, iconography, scripture, ritual space, remembered narrative, institutional teaching, bodily gesture, and anticipated judgment at once.

Carrier multiplicity contributes to persistence because the weakening of one carrier does not necessarily eliminate the relational position.

If

$$c_{t,k} \rightarrow 0, \quad (57)$$

the position may remain operative through

$$\sum_{j \neq k} \Psi_t(c_{t,j}). \quad (58)$$

The notation is schematic. Its purpose is to represent distributed maintenance rather than numerical addition.

The reverse phenomenon is also possible. A carrier may survive after the relational function associated with it has weakened. A sacred building may remain physically present while its sacred authority declines. A ritual may continue as heritage or convention after its relation to a transcendent subject changes.

Carrier persistence and relational persistence must therefore be analysed separately.

3.5 Relational Events

Religious configurations develop through events. An event is a temporally localized change in relations, positions, carriers, interpretations, or conditions.

Let

$$\epsilon_k : \mathfrak{G}_{t-} \longrightarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+} \quad (59)$$

denote a relational event.

Examples may include initiation, conversion, ritual participation, revelation claims, institutional reform, doctrinal dispute, pilgrimage, death, commemoration, perceived divine response, destruction of a sacred site, or an encounter interpreted as religiously significant.

The importance of an event lies in the relational change it produces:

$$\Delta \mathfrak{G}_{\epsilon_k} = \mathfrak{G}_{t+} - \mathfrak{G}_{t-}. \quad (60)$$

The expression is structural rather than metrically defined.

Events can alter different levels simultaneously. A ritual initiation may change a participant's identity, normative obligations, access to sacred knowledge, relation to a deity, institutional position, and membership within a community.

Event-based analysis therefore permits GRR to study religious transformation without assuming that change occurs primarily through alteration of explicit belief.

3.6 Practices and Recurrent Processes

Individual events acquire different significance when embedded within recurrent practices.

Let

$$p_k \in \mathcal{P}_t$$

denote a recurrent practice. Repetition generates a sequence

$$\epsilon_1 \rightarrow \epsilon_2 \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow \epsilon_n \quad (61)$$

through which relational positions may be stabilized, intensified, transformed, or weakened.

Ritual provides a clear example. Repeated prayer can stabilize addressability. Repeated offering can maintain a reciprocal relation. Recurrent liturgy can preserve narrative memory and collective orientation. Periodic pilgrimage can renew relations among persons, places, histories, and sacred references.

Turner’s account of ritual transformation, Rappaport’s analysis of ritual and sanctification, and Bell’s emphasis on ritualization as embodied and strategically differentiated practice all demonstrate the importance of process rather than isolated symbolic content [15, 14, 2].

The GRR structure can be represented as

$$\mathcal{P}_{t:t+H} \rightsquigarrow \pi_{t+H}(T), \quad (62)$$

where recurrent practice participates in the maintenance or transformation of the transcendent position over a horizon H .

3.7 Generative Conditions

Religious relations emerge under conditions that enable, constrain, or redirect their generation.

Let

$$\Gamma_t = (\Gamma_t^M, \Gamma_t^L, \Gamma_t^I, \Gamma_t^P, \Gamma_t^E, \Gamma_t^C, \Gamma_t^T, \dots) \quad (63)$$

denote the relevant generative conditions, including material resources, language, institutions, power distributions, ecological conditions, cultural histories, technologies, and other historically situated constraints or possibilities.

A religious configuration emerges through the interaction of these conditions:

$$\mathfrak{G}_{t+1} = \Phi(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t). \quad (64)$$

The conditions do not mechanically determine the resulting configuration. They define a structured field of possibilities within which different trajectories may become viable.

The concept is therefore closer to a generative landscape than to a linear cause:

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow \Omega_t, \quad (65)$$

where Ω_t denotes the set of relational trajectories that remain available under the selected conditions.

Religious change can then occur through modification of this possibility space:

$$\Omega_t \neq \Omega_{t+1}. \quad (66)$$

A new communication technology, political order, migration pattern, ecological crisis, legal regime, or institutional transformation can change the conditions through which sacred forms are transmitted and transcendent relations become possible.

3.8 Power and Differential Generative Capacity

Generative conditions are unevenly distributed. Participants differ in their capacity to authorize interpretations, preserve symbols, control sacred spaces, define orthodoxy, allocate resources, exclude rival practices, and institutionalize particular relational configurations.

Let

$$\Pi_t = \{\pi_i^{\text{prod}}, \pi_i^{\text{auth}}, \pi_i^{\text{circ}}, \pi_i^{\text{pres}}, \pi_i^{\text{sup}}\} \quad (67)$$

represent distributions of capacity to produce, authorize, circulate, preserve, and suppress religious manifestations.

The later configuration then depends upon both generative conditions and their asymmetric distribution:

$$\mathfrak{G}_{t+1} = \Phi(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t). \quad (68)$$

This prevents persistence from being interpreted automatically as collective agreement or theological validity.

Asad's attention to discipline, authority, embodiment, and historically specific formations of religion is especially important at this level [1]. GRR treats power as one set of relations shaping which religious forms can become visible, repeatable, authoritative, or marginalized.

Power itself remains generative. A religious institution can acquire authority through a historical configuration and subsequently redistribute the capacities through which later religious configurations are produced:

$$\Pi_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \Pi_{t+1}. \quad (69)$$

3.9 Multilevel Religious Dynamics

Religious phenomena unfold across several interacting levels. For analytical purposes, GRR distinguishes at least four:

$$\mathcal{L} = \{L_{\text{subj}}, L_{\text{rel}}, L_{\text{inst}}, L_{\text{hist}}\}, \quad (70)$$

where the levels denote subjective dynamics, interpersonal or local relational dynamics, institutional or collective structures, and wider historical conditions.

A change at one level can propagate into others:

$$L_i(t) \rightsquigarrow L_j(t+1). \quad (71)$$

For example, an individual experience interpreted as divine response may alter personal conduct. Repeated testimony may enter collective narrative. Institutional recognition may transform the interpretation into authorized teaching. That teaching may subsequently structure the experiences available to later subjects.

The sequence can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} L_{\text{subj}} &\rightsquigarrow L_{\text{rel}} \\ &\rightsquigarrow L_{\text{inst}} \\ &\rightsquigarrow L_{\text{hist}} \\ &\rightsquigarrow L'_{\text{subj}}. \end{aligned} \quad (72)$$

The direction is illustrative. Religious development can proceed through many cross-level pathways.

This multilevel structure helps explain how an initially local religious event can acquire historical persistence, and how historically inherited structures can become psychologically immediate within an individual relation to a transcendent subject.

3.10 Formation, Stabilization, Transformation, and Dissolution

GRR distinguishes four broad process classes within religious relational development:

$$\mathcal{P}_{\text{GRR}} = \{\mathcal{F}, \mathcal{K}, \mathcal{T}, \mathcal{D}\}, \quad (73)$$

where $\mathcal{F}$ denotes formation, $\mathcal{K}$ stabilization, $\mathcal{T}$ transformation, and $\mathcal{D}$ dissolution.

Formation concerns the emergence of a new relational position or configuration:

$$\emptyset_\pi \longrightarrow \pi_t(X). \quad (74)$$

The notation $\emptyset_\pi$ indicates absence of the specified relational position within the selected system. It makes no statement about the ontological existence of X .

Stabilization concerns the maintenance of relational structure across an interval:

$$\pi_t(X) \simeq \pi_{t+H}(X). \quad (75)$$

Transformation concerns substantial change while some historical continuity remains:

$$\pi_t(X) \longrightarrow \pi'_{t+H}(X). \quad (76)$$

Dissolution concerns loss of the operative position within the selected relational field:

$$\pi_t(X) \longrightarrow \emptyset_\pi. \quad (77)$$

These process classes apply to sacred distinctions, divine positions, transcendent subjecthood, institutions, rituals, and other relational structures.

Their inclusion prevents GRR from treating religion primarily through stable categories. Religious configurations possess trajectories.

3.11 Relational Memory and Historical Continuity

Continuity across time requires mechanisms through which prior relational states remain available to later configurations.

Let

$$\mathcal{M}_t^R$$

denote relational memory, including remembered narratives, texts, institutions, ritual sequences, material remains, bodily habits, spatial arrangements, archives, and inherited normative expectations.

The later configuration can then depend upon retained traces of earlier states:

$$\mathfrak{G}_{t+1} = \Phi \left(\mathfrak{G}_t, \mathcal{M}_t^R, \Gamma_t \right). \quad (78)$$

Memory need not preserve an earlier configuration faithfully. Transmission involves selection, interpretation, omission, reinterpretation, and recontextualization.

Accordingly,

$$\mathcal{M}_{t+1}^R = \Theta_t \left(\mathcal{M}_t^R, \mathfrak{G}_{t+1} \right), \quad (79)$$

where Θ_t represents historical reconstruction of inherited relational memory.

This becomes particularly important for transcendent subjects. Narratives of past divine action can contribute to expectations of future action. Memories of ancestors can preserve addressability after physical death. Ritual repetition can reactivate a transcendent position through inherited forms whose meanings have themselves changed.

Relational memory therefore participates in the temporal extension of religious subjecthood.

3.12 Observation and Interpretive Position

GRR analysis is itself situated within a relational system. The observer selects units, identifies nodes, interprets events, and applies categories such as divinity, transcendence, ritual, or subjecthood.

Let

$$O$$

denote the analytical observer and

$$\mathcal{K}_O$$

the observer's available conceptual and epistemic resources. The analytical description can be represented as

$$\hat{\mathfrak{G}}_t = \mathcal{O}(\mathfrak{G}_t; \mathcal{K}_O), \quad (80)$$

where $\hat{\mathfrak{G}}_t$ denotes the configuration as represented in analysis.

The distinction

$$\hat{\mathfrak{G}}_t ; \mathfrak{G}_t \quad (81)$$

records that the analytical model does not exhaust the phenomenon.

This reflexive condition is especially important in comparative religious studies because the observer's categories may originate in a philosophical, theological, linguistic, or disciplinary tradition different from that of the phenomenon being studied.

GRR therefore requires its categories to remain revisable under encounters with cases that resist the current model.

3.13 Architecture of Religious Generation

The elements developed above can now be assembled into a general GRR architecture.

A historically situated religious configuration develops under generative conditions and asymmetric capacities:

$$(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t) \longrightarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1}. \quad (82)$$

Within that development, relationally real forms may undergo sacralization:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}}, \quad (83)$$

and transcendent positions may undergo subjectivation:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (84)$$

The resulting subject position enters later religious generation:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1}. \quad (85)$$

The full structure is therefore

$$\boxed{(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t) \longrightarrow X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1}.} \quad (86)$$

Equation 86 represents the analytical architecture of the present paper. It does not assert that every religious configuration contains every transition or that the transitions occur in a fixed order. It provides a map of analytically distinguishable processes whose coupling can be examined in particular cases.

The architecture also remains ontologically open:

$$T^* ; \left(\mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t, T_t^{\text{subj}} \right). \quad (87)$$

A possible transcendent referent can therefore receive different metaphysical interpretations while the historical and relational architecture remains available for common inquiry.

Section 4 uses this architecture to examine more precisely how divinity and transcendence differ, how they can be coupled, and how sacred or ultimate-reference positions emerge without requiring person-like subjecthood.

4 Divinity and Transcendence as Relational Configurations

This section develops divinity and transcendence as related but analytically distinct relational configurations. Its purpose is to clarify the transitions represented by $\mathcal{S}_t$ before the analysis proceeds to transcendent subject formation. The section distinguishes sacred differentiation, divinity, transcendence, and ultimate reference; examines their possible couplings and separations; develops heterogeneous modes of transcendence; and specifies how these configurations can emerge, persist, migrate, and transform within a generative relational system.

4.1 Sacred Differentiation

The sacred provides the broadest point of entry. Durkheim's analysis of the sacred and profane demonstrates that religious life involves differentiated relations toward persons, objects, places, times, practices, and representations [5]. A form becomes sacred insofar as it acquires a relational treatment distinct from ordinary objects within the relevant configuration.

Let X_t^{rel} denote a relationally real form. Sacred differentiation can be represented as

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t^{\text{sac}}} X_t^{\text{sac}}, \quad (88)$$

where $\mathcal{S}_t^{\text{sac}}$ denotes the process through which special relational treatment becomes established.

Such treatment may involve reverence, prohibition, ritual restriction, specialized spatial access, differentiated bodily conduct, heightened attention, commemorative preservation, or other modes of relational distinction.

A provisional sacredness profile may therefore be written as

$$\mathbf{SC}_t(X) = (d_t, r_t, p_t, a_t, m_t), \quad (89)$$

where the dimensions denote differentiation, ritualization, prohibition, affective intensity, and mechanisms of maintenance.

The profile is comparative rather than definitional. Sacred configurations may arise through substantially different combinations of these dimensions.

Sacred differentiation alone does not establish transcendence, divinity, or subjecthood. A place may be sacred through ritual restriction while carrying limited ultimate-reference significance. An ancestral object may be sacred through memory and kinship while occupying a different relational position from a deity. GRR therefore retains sacredness as a broad configuration from which more specific structures can develop.

4.2 Divinity as a Special Configuration

The prior analysis of relational reality defined divinity as a special configuration within the domain of relationally real forms. GRR retains that definition and locates it within a wider religious architecture.

Let

$$\mathfrak{R}_{\text{rel}}$$

denote the general domain of relational reality and

$$\mathfrak{D}_{\text{rel}}$$

the domain of divine relational configurations. Then

$$\mathfrak{D}_{\text{rel}} \subseteq \mathfrak{R}_{\text{rel}}. \quad (90)$$

A divine configuration emerges when a relationally real form acquires a combination of sacred, transcendent, ultimate-reference, normative, or generatively authoritative dimensions:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t^{\text{div}}} T_t^{\text{div}}. \quad (91)$$

The process

$$\mathcal{S}_t^{\text{div}}$$

may include ritual differentiation, theological articulation, collective recognition, affective investment, narrative reproduction, institutional authorization, material mediation, or other historically situated processes.

A provisional divinity profile can be written as

$$\mathbf{DV}_t(X) = (s_t, \tau_t, u_t, n_t, g_t, \kappa_t), \quad (92)$$

where s_t denotes sacred differentiation, τ_t transcendent positioning, u_t ultimate-reference significance, n_t normative authority, g_t generative participation, and κ_t historical persistence.

No single coordinate is assumed to define divinity universally. The profile provides a space for comparing different configurations while preserving their theological and historical specificity.

4.3 Transcendence as a Relation of Exceeding

Transcendence requires separate treatment because sacredness and divinity can contain several forms of exceeding.

Within GRR, transcendence concerns the relational positioning of a form as exceeding some relevant boundary of finite participation. Let

$$B_t$$

denote a boundary within a relational configuration. A transcendent position may then be represented as

$$T_t \succ_{B_t} \mathcal{N}_t, \quad (93)$$

where $\succ_{B_t}$ indicates that T_t is relationally positioned as exceeding the relevant boundary with respect to participating nodes $\mathcal{N}_t$.

The boundary can differ across configurations. Transcendence may concern exceeding individual possession, ordinary temporality, local spatial presence, finite knowledge, unilateral authority, mortality, ordinary value, or the current symbolic order.

The term therefore describes a family of relational structures:

$$\mathbf{TR}_t(T) = \left(\tau_t^K, \tau_t^T, \tau_t^S, \tau_t^N, \tau_t^V, \tau_t^A, \dots \right), \quad (94)$$

where the dimensions may denote epistemic, temporal, spatial, normative, axiological, and agential forms of exceeding.

A deity represented as omniscient may possess strong epistemic transcendence. An ancestral presence may exceed ordinary temporal boundaries through a continuing relation between living and dead. A sacred law may exceed the unilateral authority of any present participant. A cosmological principle may exceed ordinary spatial and temporal localization without acquiring person-like agency.

Transcendence therefore possesses several possible axes and does not imply a single metaphysical model.

4.4 Relational and Metaphysical Transcendence

The relational concept of transcendence must remain distinct from stronger metaphysical claims.

Let

$$T_t^{\text{rel}}$$

denote a form that occupies a transcendent position within the relational system. Let

$$T^*$$

denote a possible metaphysically transcendent referent.

The distinction can be expressed as

$$T^* \ ; \ T_t^{\text{rel}}. \quad (95)$$

Relational analysis can establish that

$$T_t^{\text{rel}}$$

is treated, experienced, represented, or enacted as exceeding specified boundaries within a system. Such analysis leaves the independent metaphysical status of

$$T^*$$

available to further inquiry.

A theological realist may interpret

$$T_t^{\text{rel}}$$

as a finite relation toward a genuinely transcendent reality. A historical materialist may explain the formation of the transcendent position through historically situated relations and practices. Other philosophical traditions may provide further accounts.

GRR therefore distinguishes

$$\text{Trans}_{\text{rel}}(T) \ ; \ \text{Trans}_{\text{ont}}(T^*). \quad (96)$$

The first is a relationally investigable configuration. The second belongs to metaphysical interpretation.

4.5 Ultimate Reference

A further dimension concerns ultimate reference. Certain religious configurations establish a position toward which questions of value, truth, meaning, legitimacy, obligation, or existential orientation are referred when ordinary local references become insufficient.

Let

$$U_t$$

denote such an ultimate-reference position. Its relational function can be represented as

$$(V_t, N_t, K_t, M_t) \xrightarrow{\mathcal{R}_U} U_t, \quad (97)$$

where V_t , N_t , K_t , and M_t denote value, normativity, knowledge, and meaning respectively.

The direction of the arrow indicates referral. Questions arising within these domains are oriented toward U_t as a higher-order reference through which they receive interpretation or authorization.

Ultimate reference can be concentrated:

$$U_t = T_t^{\text{div}}, \quad (98)$$

as in configurations where a deity functions as the principal source of value, truth, and normativity.

It can also be distributed:

$$U_t = \{U_t^V, U_t^N, U_t^K, U_t^M\}, \quad (99)$$

where different ultimate-reference functions are carried by different positions.

This distinction matters for comparative religious study. A tradition need not organize all forms of ultimacy around a single person-like deity.

4.6 Sacredness, Divinity, Transcendence, and Ultimate Reference

The four configurations can now be distinguished:

$$\boxed{\text{Sac}(X) ; \text{Div}(X) ; \text{Trans}(X) ; \text{Ult}(X)}. \quad (100)$$

They may overlap without being identical.

A sacred object may have limited transcendence.

A transcendent principle may possess weak ritual sacredness.

A divine figure may possess strong sacred, transcendent, and ultimate-reference dimensions.

An ultimate value may function as a powerful reference while lacking person-like divine subjecthood.

The possible coupling can be represented as a profile:

$$\mathbf{RT}_t(X) = (\text{Sac}_t, \text{Div}_t, \text{Trans}_t, \text{Ult}_t). \quad (101)$$

Different religious configurations occupy different regions of this space.

The profile helps prevent a common comparative error in which all forms of religious excess are translated into the model of a single transcendent personal God.

4.7 Transcendence without Subjecthood

One important consequence follows immediately. A form may acquire substantial transcendent significance while possessing little or no subject-like organization.

Formally,

$$\text{Trans}(X) > 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \text{Subj}(X) \approx 0 \quad (102)$$

is an admissible configuration.

Such a structure may occur where transcendence is organized around an impersonal principle, cosmological order, sacred law, ultimate truth, emptiness, non-duality, natural order, or another configuration whose own conceptual tradition resists personification.

This possibility is crucial for GRR because it prevents transcendent subjecthood from functioning as the universal endpoint of religious development.

The sequence

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}$$

therefore describes a possible transformation, not a necessary stage.

A transcendent configuration can remain stable without developing strong addressability, agency, witnessing, or response.

4.8 Subjecthood without Strong Transcendence

The reverse configuration is also possible. A relational subject position may possess substantial agency or addressability while exhibiting limited transcendent positioning.

For example, ancestral, spirit, or other non-human subject positions may be experienced as addressable and agentic while remaining strongly localized within kinship, place, ecology, or historical memory.

Formally,

$$\text{Subj}(X) > 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \text{Trans}(X) \text{ may remain limited.} \quad (103)$$

This distinction prevents GRR from using transcendence as a necessary criterion for every religious subject.

The relationship among divinity, transcendence, and subjecthood is therefore contingent and historically variable:

$$\mathbf{C}_t(X) = (\text{Div}_t(X), \text{Trans}_t(X), \text{Subj}_t(X)). \quad (104)$$

Different traditions and historical periods may generate different configurations of these three dimensions.

4.9 Heterogeneous Modes of Transcendence

The relational approach permits a preliminary taxonomy of transcendence according to the boundary being exceeded.

Table 2 provides analytical coordinates. It does not establish that traditions using similar language share the same metaphysics.

The last row is especially sensitive. Ontological transcendence is included as an object of religious and philosophical claim. GRR can analyse how such a claim becomes relationally manifest while preserving its metaphysical truth as a separate question.

Table 2: Selected relational modes of transcendence

Mode	Boundary exceeded	Possible relational expression
Epistemic transcendence	Knowledge available to finite participants	Omniscience, revelation, hidden knowledge, ultimate truth
Temporal transcendence	Ordinary individual or historical duration	Eternity, ancestral continuity, eschatological orientation, timeless order
Spatial transcendence	Ordinary local presence	Omnipresence, distributed sacred presence, cosmological extension
Normative transcendence	Unilateral human authority	Divine law, sacred obligation, inherited command, cosmic norm
Axiological transcendence	Locally negotiated value	Ultimate good, sacred worth, absolute value, final orientation
Agential transcendence	Ordinary human capacity for action	Providence, divine intervention, fate, cosmological agency
Ontological transcendence	Ordinary categories of finite existence	Claims concerning an unconditioned, absolute, empty, non-dual, or otherwise fundamentally exceeding reality

4.10 Configuration, Coupling, and Historical Change

The dimensions developed above interact dynamically. Let

$$\mathbf{DTR}_t(X) = (\mathbf{SC}_t(X), \mathbf{DV}_t(X), \mathbf{TR}_t(X), U_t(X)) \quad (105)$$

denote the broader divine-transcendent relational configuration of X .

Its historical development can be represented as

$$\mathbf{DTR}_{t+1}(X) = \Phi_{\mathbf{DTR}}(\mathbf{DTR}_t(X), \mathfrak{G}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t). \quad (106)$$

Changes in ritual, institutional authority, political power, material conditions, language, collective memory, or individual experience may alter different dimensions unevenly.

A deity can retain high sacredness while losing normative authority.

A sacred institution can retain ritual importance while losing ultimate-reference significance.

A transcendent principle can acquire stronger subject-like organization through new forms of narrative and address.

A formerly person-like divine subject can become increasingly abstract, symbolic, or philosophical.

Religious transformation therefore often involves a change in configuration:

$$\mathbf{DTR}_{t_1}(X) \neq \mathbf{DTR}_{t_2}(X). \quad (107)$$

The persistence of a name or carrier supplies insufficient evidence of continuity in the underlying relational configuration.

4.11 Migration of Divine and Transcendent Functions

Sacred, transcendent, and ultimate-reference functions may also migrate among different relational positions.

Let

$$F_t^{\text{div}}$$

denote a selected divine relational function. Migration can be represented as

$$F_t^{\text{div}}(X) \longrightarrow F_{t+1}^{\text{div}}(Y). \quad (108)$$

The same historical field may therefore preserve a function while changing its principal carrier.

A normative guarantee once concentrated in a deity may later become institutionalized through law. A sacred relation to nature may be reorganized through ecological or national symbols. An ultimate-reference function may move from theological language toward reason, history, science, humanity, or another culturally authoritative form.

Such transitions require careful historical analysis. Functional migration does not establish theological continuity or identity between the old and new carriers.

The distinction is

$$F_t(X) \simeq F_{t+1}(Y) \not\Rightarrow X \simeq Y. \quad (109)$$

This allows GRR to investigate historical movement of sacred or transcendent functions without classifying every functionally similar structure as the same religion or deity.

4.12 Generative Effects of Divine and Transcendent Positions

Once stabilized, divine and transcendent configurations can participate in subsequent relational development.

Let

$$T_t^{\text{rel}}$$

denote the operative divine-transcendent position. Its generative effects can be represented as

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow (D_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, V_{t+1}, K_{t+1}, P_{t+1}, R_{t+1}), \quad (110)$$

where the dimensions denote desire, normativity, value, knowledge, practice, and relational structure.

The position can orient aspirations, establish prohibitions, reorganize interpretation, support collective memory, legitimate institutions, alter material conduct, or reshape relations among participants.

Its effects may also reconfigure the transcendent position itself:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (111)$$

This recursion gives divinity and transcendence historical trajectories.

4.13 Transition toward Transcendent Subjecthood

The architecture developed in this section now permits the transition to the central problem of Section 5.

A sacred and transcendent configuration can exist with limited subject-like organization:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} = (\text{Sac}, \text{Div}, \text{Trans}, \text{Ult})_t. \quad (112)$$

Under particular relational conditions, further properties may emerge:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (113)$$

The process $\mathcal{U}_t$ concerns the organization of addressability, agency, witnessing, responsiveness, memory, care, judgment, intention, command, and related subject-like properties.

The distinction developed throughout this section is therefore essential:

$$\boxed{\text{sacredness ; divinity ; transcendence ; ultimate reference ; subjecthood.}} \quad (114)$$

These dimensions can become strongly coupled without losing their analytical distinctness.

Section 5 now examines the relational mechanisms through which the final dimension emerges and becomes sufficiently stable to participate recursively in the formation of religious subjects and religious worlds.

5 Transcendent Subject Formation

This section develops the central mechanism of the present paper: *transcendent subject formation*. The preceding sections distinguished sacredness, divinity, transcendence, ultimate reference, and subjecthood. The present task is to specify how a transcendent relational position can acquire subject-like organization through historically situated relational processes. The section first defines transcendent subjecthood, then develops its principal dimensions, examines the mechanisms of subjectivation, and finally considers stabilization, response, reciprocity, and recursive participation in the formation of human subjects and religious worlds.

5.1 From Transcendent Position to Transcendent Subject

Let

$$T_t^{\text{rel}}$$

denote a relationally manifested transcendent position. Such a position may already possess sacred, divine, normative, or ultimate-reference significance while exhibiting limited subject-like organization.

Transcendent subject formation concerns a further transformation:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (115)$$

where $\mathcal{U}_t$ denotes the historically situated process through which subject-like relational properties become organized and sufficiently stable to participate in subsequent relational dynamics.

The transition in Equation 115 concerns a relational position. It carries no general claim concerning the ontological production of a possible transcendent subject.

The wider architecture remains

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (116)$$

where T^* denotes a possible transcendent referent.

A religious realist may interpret T_t^{subj} as a historically conditioned mode through which an independently real divine subject becomes accessible. A historical-material or naturalistic interpretation may explain the position through relational processes occurring within the historical system. GRR analyses the formation and operation of the relational subject position while leaving this metaphysical disagreement open.

5.2 Subjecthood as a Multidimensional Configuration

Subjecthood should not be reduced to a single property such as agency or personhood. A transcendent position may possess some subject-like properties strongly and others weakly.

Let

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t), \quad (117)$$

where the dimensions provisionally denote:

a_t addressability,

g_t attributed agency,

w_t witnessing,

r_t responsiveness,

m_t relational memory,

n_t normative authority,

c_t care or relational concern,

and

i_t attributed intention.

The profile is provisional and comparative. No coordinate is assumed to be universally necessary for every religious subject.

A transcendent subject can therefore occupy different regions of the subjecthood space:

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T_1) \neq \mathbf{TS}_t(T_2). \quad (118)$$

A deity may be strongly agentic, addressable, and responsive. An ancestor may be strongly addressable and remembering while possessing more localized agency. A sacred witness may possess strong witnessing and normative authority with limited responsiveness. A transcendent lawgiver may be normatively powerful while affective care occupies a weaker position.

GRR therefore treats transcendent subjecthood as configured rather than categorically uniform.

5.3 Addressability

Addressability provides one of the clearest transitions from transcendent reference toward transcendent subjecthood.

A transcendent object can be contemplated or represented without being addressed. A transcendent subject position permits a relational orientation of the form

$$h_i \xrightarrow{\text{addr}} T_t, \quad (119)$$

where h_i denotes a human participant.

Prayer, invocation, confession, praise, accusation, gratitude, petition, vow, and ritual greeting can all instantiate forms of address.

Buber's dialogical philosophy provides an important philosophical resource for understanding the distinction between treating something as an object and entering a relation structured through address [4]. GRR does not generalize Buber's I–Thou relation into a universal account of religion, but it retains the importance of address as a distinct relational structure.

Repeated address can stabilize the transcendent position:

$$\{\text{addr}_1, \text{addr}_2, \dots, \text{addr}_n\} \rightsquigarrow a_{t+H}(T). \quad (120)$$

Addressability therefore concerns more than linguistic personification. It creates a relation in which the transcendent position becomes a possible recipient of action.

5.4 Attributed Agency

Subjecthood also involves the capacity to become a source of events within the relational interpretation of participants.

Let

$$e_t$$

denote an event. Attribution of agency occurs when the event is interpreted through a relation

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\text{ag}} e_t. \quad (121)$$

The event may be interpreted as divine action, intervention, permission, punishment, protection, guidance, coincidence, calling, or another mode of transcendent agency.

The relevant GRR object is the relational attribution and its subsequent effects:

$$e_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{I}_t} \text{Ag}(T) \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1}, \quad (122)$$

where $\mathcal{I}_t$ denotes the interpretive process through which the event becomes related to the transcendent subject.

GRR does not infer from

$$\text{Ag}(T)$$

that the metaphysical causal relation has thereby been established. It studies how agency attribution becomes relationally real and generatively consequential.

Feuerbach's anthropological critique provides one possible genealogy of such predicates by relating divine attributes to human capacities [6]. GRR includes attribution within $\mathcal{U}_t$ while allowing alternative theological and metaphysical interpretations of its source.

5.5 Witnessing

Witnessing constitutes a distinctive form of transcendent subjecthood because it permits a subject position to become relationally present without direct intervention.

Let

$$h_i$$

perform an action A_t . A transcendent witness relation can be represented as

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\text{wit}} A_t. \quad (123)$$

The relation can become generatively consequential even when no observable human witness is present:

$$\text{Wit}_t(T) \rightsquigarrow (D_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, A_{t+1}), \quad (124)$$

where the later dimensions include desire, normativity, and action.

A participant may act differently because an action is understood as seen, remembered, judged, or accompanied by a transcendent Other.

This structure is relevant to oaths, vows, confession, moral restraint, ritual commitments, and intimate or collective promises. The witnessing position can provide continuity across contexts in which human enforcement or observation is absent.

Lacanian analysis of the Other provides one structural resource for understanding how an apparently trans-individual position can organize action and desire [8, 7]. GRR preserves the difference between such symbolic structure and theological claims concerning divine witnessing.

5.6 Responsiveness

Addressability alone does not establish responsiveness. A participant may address a transcendent reference without expecting a response.

Responsiveness emerges when the relation includes a possible return:

$$h_i \xrightarrow{\text{addr}} T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\text{resp}} h_i. \quad (125)$$

The response need not appear as linguistic speech. It may be interpreted through an event, affective change, dream, divination, text, ritual outcome, natural phenomenon, interpersonal encounter, silence, or another relational carrier.

Let

$$y_t$$

denote an encountered event or form. Response interpretation can be represented as

$$y_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{I}_t^R} \text{Resp}(T). \quad (126)$$

The important relational structure is the completed loop:

$$h_i \rightarrow T \rightarrow y_t \rightarrow h_i. \quad (127)$$

Once such loops become recurrent, the transcendent subject can acquire a stronger interactive position.

This process also illustrates why transcendent subject formation cannot be reduced to explicit doctrine. A tradition may contain formal teachings about divine response, while the subject-like reality of the divine position is generated through concrete histories of perceived interaction.

5.7 Relational Memory

A subject-like relation develops differently when the transcendent position is understood as retaining a history of prior interactions.

Let

$$\mathcal{H}_{i,T}(t)$$

denote the relational history between participant i and transcendent subject T . Relational memory can then be represented as

$$m_t(T) = \mathcal{M}(\mathcal{H}_{i,T}(t)). \quad (128)$$

The transcendent subject may be understood as remembering promises, wrongs, acts of devotion, prior requests, ancestral history, covenant, or collective events.

This memory can be carried through scripture, oral tradition, ritual commemoration, institutional records, material objects, or personal memory. The relational effect may therefore be distributed across carriers while being attributed to the transcendent subject.

A remembered relation changes the temporal structure of interaction:

$$(h_i, T)_t \neq (h_i, T)_{\text{first}}, \quad (129)$$

because later interactions are interpreted through a history.

Relational memory consequently contributes to the stabilization of transcendent subjecthood across time.

5.8 Normative Authority

A transcendent subject can also become a source, interpreter, witness, or guarantor of normativity. Let

$$N_t$$

denote a normative configuration. Transcendent normative authority can be represented as

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\text{norm}} N_t. \quad (130)$$

The relation may involve command, prohibition, exemplarity, judgment, authorization, covenant, sacred law, or another structure.

Normative authority can become recursively generative:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow N_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}, \quad (131)$$

where P_{t+1} denotes subsequent practice.

The transcendent subject shapes norms; normative practices reproduce the relation through which the transcendent subject remains authoritative.

This recursion also makes power analytically relevant. Institutions may possess unequal capacities to define which commands, interpretations, or normative claims are attributed to the transcendent subject. The study of divine authority therefore requires simultaneous attention to transcendent subjecthood and the human relations through which its normative voice becomes interpreted and circulated.

5.9 Care, Attachment, and Affective Relation

Subjecthood may also develop through affective relations. A transcendent subject can become loved, trusted, feared, missed, resented, depended upon, or experienced as caring.

Let

$$A_t^{hT}$$

denote the affective relation between a human participant and transcendent subject. Its evolution can be represented as

$$A_{t+1}^{hT} = \Phi_A \left(A_t^{hT}, \mathcal{H}_{hT}(t), E_t, R_t \right), \quad (132)$$

where E_t denotes relevant events and R_t wider relations.

Affect can substantially stabilize subjecthood because a relation of trust, fear, gratitude, or love can persist across intervals in which explicit representation is absent.

The transcendent subject thereby becomes embedded in the participant's psychological dynamics:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow D_{t+1}. \quad (133)$$

The relation also moves in the opposite interpretive direction. Existing desire and affect shape how the transcendent subject is encountered:

$$D_t \rightsquigarrow T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (134)$$

The coupled structure is therefore

$$D_t \rightleftharpoons T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (135)$$

This coupling provides a more dynamic model than one in which religious belief is treated as a stable proposition held by an otherwise independent subject.

5.10 The Mechanisms of Transcendent Subjectivation

The dimensions above can be generated and stabilized through heterogeneous mechanisms.

Let

$$\mathbb{U}_t = \{U_t^L, U_t^R, U_t^{Nar}, U_t^A, U_t^M, U_t^I, U_t^C, U_t^E\} \quad (136)$$

denote a provisional mechanism set comprising linguistic address, ritual, narrative, affect, material mediation, institutional stabilization, collective recognition, and interpreted experience.

Transcendent subject formation can then be represented as

$$\mathbf{TS}_{t+1}(T) = \Phi_U(\mathbf{TS}_t(T), \mathbb{U}_t, \Gamma_t). \quad (137)$$

Different mechanisms may contribute to different subjecthood dimensions.

Linguistic address can strengthen addressability.

Narrative can organize attributed agency, intention, memory, and continuity.

Ritual can repeatedly instantiate relations of address, offering, witnessing, request, or response [15, 14, 2].

Material objects and sacred spaces can stabilize the carriers through which a transcendent subject becomes repeatedly accessible.

Institutions can authorize interpretations and transmit subject-like properties across generations.

Collective recognition can stabilize a subject position beyond any single participant.

Perceived events can strengthen responsiveness or agency attribution.

The mechanisms therefore operate as a heterogeneous coupled system:

$$\mathbb{U}_t \rightsquigarrow \mathbf{TS}_{t+1}(T). \quad (138)$$

No single mechanism is assigned universal priority.

5.11 Distributed Formation of a Transcendent Subject

A transcendent subject position can be distributed across many human and non-human carriers.

Let

$$\mathcal{C}_T = \{c_1, c_2, \dots, c_n\}$$

denote the carriers associated with a transcendent subject. Then

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} = \Psi_t(\mathcal{C}_T, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{P}_t) \quad (139)$$

represents the subject position as relationally maintained through carriers, relations, and practices.

The subject position may therefore persist even when no single carrier is continuously present.

A deity may remain addressable through prayer in one context, scripture in another, ritual iconography in another, memory in another, and institutional teaching in another. What persists is a relationally connected subject position distributed across these mediations.

This distributed persistence also explains how transcendent subjecthood can exceed the lifespan of any individual participant:

$$H(T) > H(h_i), \quad (140)$$

where H denotes the relevant horizon of relational persistence.

The resulting subject can become intergenerationally real within a relational system.

5.12 Stabilization and Thresholds of Subjecthood

Because subjecthood is multidimensional, its stabilization should be treated as gradual and configuration-dependent.

Let

$$\Theta_{\text{subj}}$$

denote a provisional threshold region within the subjecthood space. A transcendent position becomes sufficiently subject-like for a specified analysis when

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) \in \Theta_{\text{subj}}. \quad (141)$$

The threshold is domain-dependent. A study of prayer may require addressability and responsiveness. A study of moral witnessing may require witnessing and normative authority. A study of divine care may require addressability, affective attachment, and interpreted responsiveness.

There is therefore no universal scalar boundary separating subject from non-subject.

A more appropriate relation is

$$\text{Subj}_D(T) = F_D(\mathbf{TS}_t(T)), \quad (142)$$

where D denotes the analytical domain.

This formulation permits strong subjecthood in one relational domain and weak subjecthood in another.

5.13 Human Subject and Transcendent Subject Co-Formation

The formation process becomes genuinely generative when the human subject and transcendent subject enter reciprocal development.

Let

$$H_t^{\text{subj}}$$

denote the historically situated human subject and

$$T_t^{\text{subj}}$$

the transcendent subject position.

Their coupled development can be represented as

$$\begin{aligned} H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} &= \Phi_H \left(H_t^{\text{subj}}, T_t^{\text{subj}}, \Gamma_t \right), \\ T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} &= \Phi_T \left(T_t^{\text{subj}}, H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}, \Gamma_{t+1} \right). \end{aligned} \quad (143)$$

The first transition describes the participation of the transcendent subject in human subject formation. The second describes how transformed human subjects participate in later representation, interpretation, ritualization, and reproduction of the transcendent subject.

The coupled recursion is

$$\boxed{H_t^{\text{subj}} \Leftrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow (H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}, T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}})} \quad (144)$$

This formulation avoids treating either side as analytically self-contained.

A religious subject becomes a particular kind of subject partly through its relation to the transcendent Other. At the same time, the historically available form of that Other is reproduced, interpreted, contested, and transformed through the subjects who enter that relation.

The resulting process is one of co-formation.

5.14 Asymmetry within Co-Formation

Co-formation does not imply symmetry.

Within many religious self-understandings,

$$T^*$$

may be regarded as ontologically independent of human participation, while the human subject is radically dependent upon the transcendent. GRR leaves this metaphysical asymmetry available.

At the relational level, asymmetry may also arise through authority, knowledge, normativity, agency, or dependence:

$$R(H, T) \neq R(T, H). \quad (145)$$

A human subject may petition a deity while the deity is represented as commanding. The participant may be understood as finite while the transcendent subject is omniscient. The relation may therefore contain strong directional asymmetries.

Co-formation means that both relational positions can participate in later system development. It does not imply equal power, equal dependence, or metaphysical equivalence.

This distinction is essential for analysing religious authority and domination in later GRR work.

5.15 Subject Formation without Ontological Reduction

The generative account can now be stated precisely.

GRR may reconstruct a process

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{Q}_{t+1} \quad (146)$$

without inferring

$$T^* = T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (147)$$

It may likewise refrain from inferring

$$T^* = \emptyset. \quad (148)$$

The relational subject position is the object whose historical formation can be investigated. The ontological status of its possible referent remains a separate question.

This distinction allows strong historical analysis and strong metaphysical disagreement to coexist within the same research programme.

5.16 Transcendent Subject Formation as a Generative Cycle

The full process developed in this section can be summarized as

$$\begin{aligned}
T_t^{\text{rel}} &\xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \\
&\rightsquigarrow H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} \\
&\rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{G}_{t+1} \\
&\rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}.
\end{aligned} \tag{149}$$

The subjectivation of transcendence therefore becomes part of a wider generative cycle. A transcendent position acquires subject-like organization; the resulting subject participates in the formation of human subjects and religious practice; those transformed relations become conditions for the subsequent reproduction or transformation of the transcendent subject position.

The process can be condensed as

transcendent position $\rightarrow$ subjectivation $\rightarrow$ relational interaction $\rightarrow$ co-formation $\rightarrow$ reconfigured transcendent sub
--

(150)

This cycle constitutes the central theoretical proposal of GRR developed in the present paper.

Section 6 extends the analysis from the formation of the transcendent subject itself to its recursive participation in ritual, institutions, material conditions, human subject formation, and historical transformation.

6 Recursive Religious Generation and Historical Transformation

This section extends transcendent subject formation from the relation between human and transcendent subjects to the wider dynamics of religious systems. A transcendent subject position acquires historical persistence through ritual, institutions, material carriers, collective memory, normative structures, and recurrent interpretation. These same structures are subsequently reorganized through their relation to the transcendent subject. Religious continuity can therefore be analysed as recursive generation across multiple relational levels.

The section develops this recursion through ritual reproduction, institutional stabilization, material mediation, relational memory, human subject formation, authority, contestation, and historical-material change.

6.1 From Subject Relation to Religious Generative System

The co-formation developed in Section 5 can be embedded within a wider religious configuration.

Let

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} = (H_t, T_t, P_t, I_t, M_t, N_t, V_t, K_t, R_t, \Gamma_t), \tag{151}$$

where the components denote human subject positions, transcendent subject positions, practices, institutions, material arrangements, normativity, values, knowledge, wider relational structures, and historical generative conditions.

The configuration develops through

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} = \Phi_t(\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}}, \Delta_t), \tag{152}$$

where Δ_t denotes events, perturbations, encounters, conflicts, or other changes relevant to the selected interval.

A transcendent subject occupies one dynamically consequential position within this system:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}}. \quad (153)$$

The transformed religious field subsequently participates in the next manifestation of that subject:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (154)$$

The central recursive structure is therefore

$$\boxed{T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (155)$$

Religious continuity arises through repeated reconstruction within this cycle.

6.2 Ritual Reproduction

Ritual constitutes one of the clearest mechanisms through which transcendent subject positions become recurrently instantiated.

Let

$$P_t^{\text{rit}}$$

denote a ritual practice. A minimal ritual cycle can be written as

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow P_t^{\text{rit}} \rightsquigarrow H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (156)$$

The transcendent subject gives relational significance to the practice. Participation in the practice modifies the human subject. The transformed participants subsequently reproduce, reinterpret, or transform the transcendent position.

Prayer provides a simple instance. Its recurrence can maintain addressability:

$$P_t^{\text{prayer}} \rightsquigarrow a_{t+1}(T). \quad (157)$$

Confession may reproduce witnessing and judgment:

$$P_t^{\text{conf}} \rightsquigarrow (w_{t+1}, n_{t+1}). \quad (158)$$

Offering may reproduce agency, reciprocity, gratitude, dependence, or care, depending upon the relational configuration.

Ritual therefore functions as a recurrent generator of relations rather than as a simple repetition of already completed representations. This is compatible with process-oriented accounts of ritual in Turner, Rappaport, and Bell [15, 14, 2].

6.3 Ritual and Relational Re-Actualization

Repetition does not imply exact duplication.

Let

$$P_{t,k}^{\text{rit}}$$

denote the k -th enactment of a recurrent ritual. Then

$$P_{t,k}^{\text{rit}} \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \quad (159)$$

takes place within conditions that differ from those of previous enactments.

Consequently,

$$T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} = \mathcal{R} \left(T_t^{\text{subj}}, P_t^{\text{rit}}, H_t, \Gamma_t \right), \quad (160)$$

where $\mathcal{R}$ denotes relational re-actualization.

A ritual tradition may appear highly stable while the subject position generated through it changes gradually across generations.

Repetition therefore provides a mechanism of both continuity and transformation.

6.4 Institutional Stabilization

Religious relations can exceed the temporal horizon of local interaction through institutional stabilization.

Let

$$I_t$$

denote the relevant institutional configuration. Institutions may preserve texts, authorize ritual specialists, regulate sacred spaces, transmit doctrines, organize education, recognize legitimate experiences, and define acceptable forms of interpretation.

The stabilization relation can be represented as

$$I_t \rightsquigarrow \mathbf{TS}_{t+1}(T), \quad (161)$$

where institutional processes participate in maintaining selected dimensions of the transcendent-subject profile.

The relation is reciprocal:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1}. \quad (162)$$

An institution may derive authority from a transcendent subject while simultaneously shaping how that subject is represented, addressed, and interpreted.

The resulting loop is

$$\boxed{T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (163)$$

Institutional continuity thereby becomes one mechanism of intergenerational transcendent subjecthood.

6.5 Material Mediation

Religious relations are also materially mediated. Architecture, images, texts, clothing, ritual instruments, bodily postures, sound, food, landscape, and technological media can participate in the accessibility and reproduction of transcendent positions.

Let

$$\mathcal{M}_t^T = \{m_{t,1}, m_{t,2}, \dots, m_{t,n}\} \quad (164)$$

denote the material mediators associated with T .

Their participation can be represented as

$$\mathcal{M}_t^T \rightsquigarrow T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (165)$$

A sacred image may support addressability. A temple can organize spatial orientation toward transcendence. A text can preserve attributed speech or memory. Bodily gesture can reproduce hierarchy, reverence, submission, or intimacy.

Materiality therefore enters subject formation through relational functions:

$$m_{t,k} \xrightarrow{\Psi_{t,k}} \mathbf{TS}_t(T). \quad (166)$$

The physical continuity of a material carrier and the continuity of its religious function remain distinct. The same object may acquire, lose, or transform its sacred relational position across historical contexts.

6.6 Distributed Persistence

The combination of ritual, institutions, narratives, material carriers, and human memory creates distributed persistence.

Let

$$\mathcal{D}_t(T) = (P_t, I_t, M_t, L_t, C_t, H_t) \quad (167)$$

denote the distributed support configuration of transcendent subject T .

Then

$$\mathcal{D}_t(T) \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (168)$$

No single carrier must contain the whole subject position.

A prayer may disappear while narrative remains.

An institution may collapse while family memory preserves an ancestor.

A sacred building may be destroyed while liturgical or textual forms sustain the relation elsewhere.

A language may change while selected relational functions migrate into translation.

Persistence therefore belongs to the configuration of supports:

$$\text{Pers}_H(T) = F(\mathcal{D}_{t:t+H}(T)). \quad (169)$$

This gives transcendent subjecthood resilience through redundancy, substitution, and migration among carriers.

6.7 Relational Memory and Religious Time

Religious recursion also depends upon memory.

Let

$$\mathcal{M}_t^R$$

denote relational memory. It may preserve narratives of revelation, intervention, covenant, miracles, suffering, salvation, ancestry, persecution, migration, ritual precedent, or other events through which the relation to a transcendent subject acquires temporal depth.

Relational memory enters later interpretation:

$$\mathcal{M}_t^R \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{I}_{t+1}(T). \quad (170)$$

It also enters expectations concerning future relations:

$$\mathcal{M}_t^R \rightsquigarrow \mathbb{E}_{t+1}[T]. \quad (171)$$

A remembered history of divine care can generate expectations of future care. A history of judgment can generate anticipatory restraint. A remembered covenant can organize obligations across generations.

Religious temporality can therefore link past manifestation, present relation, and anticipated future:

$$T_{t-1}^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{anticipated}}. \quad (172)$$

The transcendent subject thereby acquires a temporally extended relational identity.

6.8 Human Subject Formation

The recursive process becomes especially consequential when transcendent relations participate in the formation of human subjectivity.

Let

$$\mathbf{H}_t = (D_t, I_t^H, V_t, N_t, K_t, A_t, R_t) \quad (173)$$

denote selected dimensions of the human subject: desire, identity, value, normativity, knowledge, affect, and relational orientation.

The participation of a transcendent subject can then be represented as

$$\mathbf{H}_{t+1} = \Phi_H(\mathbf{H}_t, T_t^{\text{subj}}, \Gamma_t). \quad (174)$$

Religious subject formation can influence how a person understands the self, the body, responsibility, suffering, death, family, strangers, nature, authority, history, and future possibility.

The resulting human subject subsequently participates in religious reproduction:

$$\mathbf{H}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (175)$$

The process can therefore be expressed as

$$\boxed{T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathbf{H}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (176)$$

This cycle gives concrete historical form to the co-formation developed in Section 5.

6.9 Collective Recognition

A transcendent subject may also acquire stability through recognition across a community.

Let

$$H_t = \{h_1, \dots, h_n\}$$

denote participating human subjects. Collective recognition can be represented as

$$\mathcal{CR}]_t(T) = \mathcal{F}(R(h_1, T), \dots, R(h_n, T)). \quad (177)$$

Collective recognition can stabilize shared names, expectations, narratives, ritual forms, and normative relations.

Durkheim's analysis of collective religious life provides an important precedent for understanding such stabilization [5].

GRR adds a generative emphasis:

$$\mathcal{CR}]_t(T) \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{CR}]_{t+1}(T). \quad (178)$$

The collective participates in sustaining the transcendent subject, while relation to that subject participates in organizing the collective.

6.10 Authority and Interpretation

The speech, intention, or judgment attributed to a transcendent subject usually requires interpretation.

Let

$$Y_t$$

denote a text, event, ritual sign, remembered saying, experience, or other possible carrier. An interpretive relation can be written as

$$Y_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{I}_{k,t}} \text{Meaning}_k(T), \quad (179)$$

where k identifies an interpreter or interpretive position.

Different interpreters may produce different attributions:

$$\mathcal{I}_{i,t}(Y) \neq \mathcal{I}_{j,t}(Y). \quad (180)$$

The question of who can authorize an interpretation therefore becomes central.

Let

$$\Pi_t^I$$

denote the distribution of interpretive authority. Then

$$\Pi_t^I \rightsquigarrow \text{Voice}_t(T) \quad (181)$$

represents the role of power in determining which interpretations are publicly recognized as the speech, command, intention, or judgment of the transcendent subject.

This provides a direct interface between GRR and genealogical approaches to religion attentive to discipline and authority [1].

6.11 The Relational Production of Divine Voice

The problem of interpretation permits a further distinction between a transcendent subject and its historically manifested voice.

Let

$$V_t^T$$

denote the relationally available voice attributed to T . Then

$$V_t^T = \mathcal{V}(Y_t, \mathcal{I}_t, I_t, \Pi_t^I, \Gamma_t). \quad (182)$$

The divine voice encountered within a historical system may therefore depend upon texts, interpreters, institutions, translation, ritual, authority, and available conceptual vocabularies.

The possible transcendent referent remains analytically separate:

$$T^* ; V_t^T. \quad (183)$$

This distinction has considerable methodological importance. Historical analysis can examine how a divine command becomes linguistically, institutionally, and politically available without thereby determining the possible metaphysical source of transcendence itself.

It also permits critique of human claims to speak for transcendence.

6.12 Contest, Multiplicity, and Branching

Religious reproduction rarely produces only one trajectory. Disagreement over ritual, doctrine, authority, revelation, ethical obligation, or sacred memory can generate multiple successor configurations.

Let

$$\mathfrak{R}_t$$

denote an initial configuration. A contested event may produce

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \longrightarrow \{\mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{(1)}, \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{(2)}, \dots, \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{(m)}\}. \quad (184)$$

The transcendent subject may likewise develop into differently interpreted positions:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \longrightarrow \{T_{t+1}^{(1)}, T_{t+1}^{(2)}, \dots, T_{t+1}^{(m)}\}. \quad (185)$$

Different branches may share names, texts, narratives, or historical memory while attributing different agency, intentions, normative demands, or modes of response to the transcendent subject.

Religious plurality can therefore emerge through divergence within a shared relational genealogy.

6.13 Power and Differential Reproduction

Branching and persistence occur within unequal distributions of generative capacity.

Let

$$\Pi_t$$

denote capacities to produce, interpret, authorize, circulate, preserve, and suppress religious forms.

Then

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1} = \Phi(\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t). \quad (186)$$

A configuration may acquire persistence through broad participation, institutional resources, political authority, control of sacred spaces, education, media, coercion, or combinations of these conditions.

Persistence therefore requires analysis of its generative pathway:

$$\text{Pers}(T) ; \text{GenPath}(T). \quad (187)$$

Two religious forms may possess comparable historical persistence while being sustained through substantially different relations.

GRR consequently treats the conditions of reproduction as part of the religious phenomenon itself.

6.14 Historical Materiality

The wider religious configuration exists within historically changing material conditions.

Let

$$\Gamma_t$$

denote the material and relational conditions available at time t . The historical formation of religious structures can be represented as

$$\Gamma_t \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}}. \quad (188)$$

Once established, religious configurations can participate in the transformation of later conditions:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1}. \quad (189)$$

The resulting historical-material recursion is

$$\boxed{\Gamma_t \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1} \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}}}. \quad (190)$$

Religious forms can therefore be historically conditioned at one stage and historically conditioning at a later stage.

This formulation develops the recursive historical materiality introduced in the preceding paper. It allows material, institutional, symbolic, normative, and religious configurations to enter successive rounds of historical generation rather than assigning them permanently fixed causal positions.

Historical-material analysis can consequently investigate how religious formations emerge within economic, political, technological, ecological, and institutional conditions while also examining how established religious relations subsequently reshape those conditions [11, 1].

Proposition 6.1 (Recursive religious materiality). *A religious configuration that acquires relational reality may become part of the historical conditions through which subsequent material, institutional, symbolic, normative, and religious configurations are generated.*

6.15 Transformation of the Transcendent Subject

Historical change may modify individual dimensions of transcendent subjecthood.

Recall

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t). \quad (191)$$

Its development can be represented as

$$\mathbf{TS}_{t+1}(T) = \Phi_{TS}(\mathbf{TS}_t(T), P_t, I_t, M_t, H_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t). \quad (192)$$

Different dimensions may change independently.

A deity may remain highly addressable while perceived responsiveness declines.

Normative authority may weaken while affective attachment persists.

Institutional decline may accompany increased private intimacy.

A transcendent witness may retain moral significance while losing attributed agency.

A philosophical reinterpretation may preserve ultimacy while reducing person-like properties.

Historical transformation can therefore move through the multidimensional subjecthood space rather than through a single transition between belief and unbelief.

6.16 Desubjectivation

The same framework permits analysis of processes in which a transcendent subject loses subject-like organization.

Let

$$\mathcal{U}_t^-$$

denote a process of *desubjectivation*. Then

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t^-} T_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (193)$$

A formerly person-like deity may become interpreted increasingly as symbol, principle, metaphor, cultural memory, philosophical abstraction, or historical heritage.

Desubjectivation need not entail disappearance of relational reality:

$$\text{Subj}_{t+1}(T) < \text{Subj}_t(T), \quad \text{RR}_{t+1}(T) > 0. \quad (194)$$

Likewise, divinity or sacredness may persist after strong subjecthood weakens.

This gives GRR a symmetric analytical vocabulary for subjectivation and desubjectivation.

6.17 Desacralization and Resacralization

Sacred status can undergo related transformations.

Let

$$\mathcal{S}_t^-$$

denote desacralization:

$$X_t^{\text{sac}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t^-} X_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (195)$$

A sacred place may become heritage.

A ritual may become performance.

A divine image may become an aesthetic object.

A religious law may become cultural convention.

The reverse process can also occur:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t^+} X_{t+1}^{\text{sac}}. \quad (196)$$

A previously ordinary place, memory, object, or person may acquire sacred significance through historical events and later relational practices.

Sacralization therefore has a trajectory:

$$\text{Sac}_t(X) \longrightarrow \text{Sac}_{t+1}(X). \quad (197)$$

This gives GRR a framework for studying secularization, revival, conversion, heritagization, reform, and religious transformation without treating them as a single linear process.

6.18 Critical Transitions and Religious Reconfiguration

Because religious configurations are recursively maintained, apparently small changes can sometimes accumulate without immediately altering the dominant relational structure. Under other conditions, a perturbation can produce substantial reconfiguration.

Let

$$\lambda_t$$

denote a control parameter relevant to a selected configuration. Near a critical region,

$$\lambda_t \rightarrow \lambda_c, \quad (198)$$

the system may become increasingly sensitive to perturbation:

$$\delta \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow \Delta \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}, \quad \|\Delta \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}\| \gg \|\delta \mathfrak{R}_t\|. \quad (199)$$

In religious history, such transitions may involve institutional collapse, political change, technological disruption, charismatic events, doctrinal crisis, migration, ecological catastrophe, persecution, or accumulated changes in practice and interpretation.

The formalism is heuristic. Identifying genuine criticality requires domain-specific evidence.

The conceptual point is that historical change can alter the generative conditions under which a religious configuration remains self-sustaining.

6.19 Religious Attractors and Historical Path Dependence

Recursive reproduction can also produce path dependence.

Suppose a configuration

$$\mathfrak{A}$$

possesses sufficient self-reinforcing structure that trajectories entering its region tend to remain nearby:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \in \mathcal{B}(\mathfrak{A}) \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+\tau} \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}, \quad (200)$$

where $\mathcal{B}(\mathfrak{A})$ denotes a provisional basin of attraction.

Ritual repetition, institutional authority, collective memory, material infrastructure, normative commitment, affective attachment, and interpretative habits can jointly contribute to such self-reinforcement.

This formulation helps explain why historically contingent configurations can later appear natural, inevitable, or timeless from within the system.

Attractor language remains a heuristic description until the relevant state space and dynamics can be operationalized.

6.20 Recursive Religious Generation

The mechanisms developed throughout this section can now be assembled.

A transcendent subject participates in human subject formation, practice, institutions, memory, material mediation, normativity, and historical conditions:

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow (H_{t+1}, P_{t+1}, I_{t+1}, M_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, \Gamma_{t+1}). \quad (201)$$

These transformed structures participate in subsequent transcendent subject formation:

$$(H_{t+1}, P_{t+1}, I_{t+1}, M_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, \Gamma_{t+1}) \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (202)$$

The complete cycle is therefore

$$\boxed{\begin{aligned} T_t^{\text{subj}} &\rightsquigarrow H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} \\ &\rightsquigarrow (P_{t+1}, I_{t+1}, M_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, R_{t+1}) \\ &\rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1} \\ &\rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \end{aligned}} \quad (203)$$

This cycle expresses the central generative claim of the section. A transcendent subject can become a condition of subsequent religious and historical development, while the resulting historical field becomes a condition of the transcendent subject's later relational manifestation.

The possible ontological referent remains analytically distinct:

$$\boxed{T^* ; T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} .} \quad (204)$$

The historical evolution represented on the right side supplies no necessary temporal evolution of T^* .

Section 7 turns from this general architecture to the comparative problem: how GRR can study configurations across heterogeneous religious traditions while preserving differences in language, metaphysics, ritual structure, sacred ontology, historical conditions, and internal self-understanding.

7 Comparative Analysis across Religious Configurations

This section develops the comparative methodology of Generative Relational Religious Studies. Comparative inquiry is necessary because sacredness, divinity, transcendence, subjecthood, ritual, and ultimate reference are organized differently across religious and philosophical traditions. Comparison nevertheless creates a persistent danger: categories developed within one historical tradition can become implicit universal standards through which other traditions are interpreted.

GRR approaches this problem by treating its comparative categories as provisional relational coordinates. The aim is to compare selected structures, processes, and generative relations while preserving differences in self-description, historical development, metaphysical commitment, ritual practice, and conceptual vocabulary. Comparison therefore operates through partial correspondence rather than presumed equivalence.

7.1 The Comparative Problem

A comparative theory of religion requires some common analytical vocabulary. Without common terms, comparison becomes difficult. Excessively strong common categories, however, can erase precisely the differences that comparative inquiry seeks to understand.

The methodological problem can be written as a tension between

$$\mathcal{C}_{\text{common}} \quad (205)$$

and

$$\mathcal{L}_k, \quad (206)$$

where $\mathcal{C}_{\text{common}}$ denotes the provisional comparative vocabulary and $\mathcal{L}_k$ the historically situated conceptual language of tradition or configuration k .

A successful comparison requires sufficient common structure for analysis while preserving the conceptual specificity carried by $\mathcal{L}_k$.

GRR therefore represents comparison as

$$\mathcal{L}_i \longrightarrow \mathcal{C}_{\text{common}} \longleftarrow \mathcal{L}_j, \quad (207)$$

where the arrows denote partial analytical mappings.

The common vocabulary functions as an interface. It does not replace either tradition's own conceptual system.

This principle is especially important for categories such as “God,” “religion,” “transcendence,” “sacred,” and “subject.” Asad's genealogical analysis demonstrates the historical specificity of the modern category of religion and the importance of discipline, practice, authority, and historical formation in its production [1]. GRR consequently treats the portability of its categories as a research problem rather than a prior assumption.

7.2 Local Conceptual Vocabularies

Let

$$\mathcal{L}_k = \{\ell_{k,1}, \ell_{k,2}, \dots, \ell_{k,n}\} \quad (208)$$

denote the relevant conceptual vocabulary available within configuration k .

The elements may include indigenous or tradition-specific concepts concerning sacredness, ultimate reality, spirits, ancestors, liberation, emptiness, divine agency, ritual obligation, cosmological order, revelation, purity, place, or other religious relations.

GRR does not require a one-to-one translation

$$\ell_{i,p} \leftrightarrow \ell_{j,q}. \quad (209)$$

Instead, comparison may involve a partial relation

$$\ell_{i,p} \tau_{ij} \ell_{j,q}, \quad (210)$$

where τ_{ij} records the dimensions along which comparison is meaningful.

The map may remain undefined for other dimensions:

$$\tau_{ij} : D_{ij} \subseteq \mathcal{L}_i \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_j. \quad (211)$$

Partiality is therefore an expected feature of comparative religious analysis.

A term from one tradition may correspond closely to another term in ritual function while diverging in metaphysics. Two concepts may share normative roles while differing in subjecthood. Similar experiences may receive different cosmological interpretations. Comparable social practices may be embedded within substantially different accounts of reality.

Comparison should preserve these differences explicitly.

7.3 Emic Description and Analytical Reconstruction

GRR distinguishes the internal description of a religious configuration from the researcher's analytical reconstruction.

Let

$$\mathcal{E}_k$$

denote the emic conceptual description available within configuration k , and let

$$\widehat{\mathfrak{G}}_k^{\text{GRR}}$$

denote its GRR representation.

The relation can be written as

$$\mathcal{E}_k \xrightarrow{\mathcal{A}_{\text{GRR}}} \widehat{\mathfrak{G}}_k^{\text{GRR}}, \quad (212)$$

where $\mathcal{A}_{\text{GRR}}$ denotes the analytical operation through which the case is reconstructed.

The transformation inevitably selects and reorganizes information. GRR therefore requires the analytical description to remain traceable to the tradition-specific materials from which it was developed.

The two levels should remain visible:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{E}_k ; \widehat{\mathfrak{G}}_k^{\text{GRR}}}. \quad (213)$$

A GRR category such as transcendent subjecthood may illuminate relational structures within a tradition even where the tradition itself contains no direct lexical equivalent. In such cases the analytical category should be presented explicitly as a comparative reconstruction rather than attributed to the tradition as its own concept.

7.4 Comparison through Relational Profiles

The multidimensional profiles developed in the preceding sections provide one means of comparison without requiring category identity.

Recall the religious-transcendence profile

$$\mathbf{RT}_t(X) = (\text{Sac}_t, \text{Div}_t, \text{Trans}_t, \text{Ult}_t), \quad (214)$$

and the transcendent-subject profile

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t). \quad (215)$$

Two configurations can be compared dimension by dimension:

$$\mathbf{RT}_t^{(i)} \rightsquigarrow \mathbf{RT}_t^{(j)}, \quad \mathbf{TS}_t^{(i)} \rightsquigarrow \mathbf{TS}_t^{(j)}. \quad (216)$$

The relation

$$\rightsquigarrow$$

indicates structured comparison rather than equality.

For example, two configurations may both contain strong relations of address while differing substantially in attributed agency. Two traditions may organize normative transcendence through very different metaphysical vocabularies. A sacred place and a person-like deity may both possess intense sacred differentiation while exhibiting radically different subjecthood profiles.

The comparative question therefore becomes:

$$\Delta_{ij}^{(d)} = \text{Cmp}_d(\mathfrak{G}_i, \mathfrak{G}_j), \quad (217)$$

where d denotes the explicitly selected relational dimension.

No global measure of religious similarity is assumed.

7.5 Configurations beyond the Personal-Deity Template

The distinction among sacredness, divinity, transcendence, ultimate reference, and subjecthood becomes especially important when comparison extends beyond religions organized around strongly person-like transcendent deities.

A personal-deity configuration may exhibit

$$\mathbf{C}_A = (\text{Div}^+, \text{Trans}^+, \text{Subj}^+). \quad (218)$$

Another configuration may exhibit

$$\mathbf{C}_B = (\text{Div}^+, \text{Trans}^+, \text{Subj}^{\text{low}}), \quad (219)$$

while another may possess

$$\mathbf{C}_C = (\text{Sac}^+, \text{Subj}^+, \text{Trans}^{\text{local}}). \quad (220)$$

These expressions represent analytical possibilities.

They permit GRR to examine person-like deities, ancestors, spirits, sacred places, cosmological principles, ultimate truths, and other configurations without arranging them along a scale whose endpoint is a transcendent personal God.

The comparative space is therefore multidimensional:

$$\mathfrak{C}_{\text{relig}} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (221)$$

where the dimensions correspond to explicitly defined relational properties.

The Euclidean notation is heuristic. It indicates multidimensionality rather than a validated metric geometry.

7.6 Relational Function and Theological Identity

Two religious forms may perform similar relational functions while remaining theologically distinct. Suppose

$$F_d(X_i) \simeq F_d(X_j)$$

for a selected relational function d . This supports a limited comparative claim:

$$F_d(X_i) \simeq F_d(X_j). \quad (222)$$

The wider configurations may remain different:

$$\mathfrak{G}(X_i) \neq \mathfrak{G}(X_j). \quad (223)$$

For example, two religious positions may both organize witnessing. Their accounts of who witnesses, how witnessing becomes possible, what is observed, what follows from observation, and what kind of being the witness possesses may differ substantially.

Similarly, two traditions may contain ultimate-reference functions while locating ultimacy in different ontological, ritual, or epistemological structures.

GRR therefore compares

function within configuration

rather than isolated function alone.

7.7 General, Special, and Particular in Comparative Inquiry

The dialectic of general, special, and particular developed in the preceding paper also applies to comparative religious studies.

Let

$$\mathcal{G}_t$$

denote the current general GRR vocabulary,

$$\mathcal{S}_{k,t}$$

a special family of religious configurations, and

$$\mathcal{P}_{k,j,t}$$

a particular historical case.

The methodological movement is

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}_t \longrightarrow \mathcal{S}_{k,t} \longrightarrow \mathcal{P}_{k,j,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{t+1}.} \quad (224)$$

The general categories orient inquiry into a particular case. The case can then reveal distinctions that the current categories fail to capture. The general vocabulary is subsequently revised.

Comparative work therefore has a generative role in theory formation:

$$\mathcal{P}_1, \mathcal{P}_2, \dots, \mathcal{P}_n \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{t+1}. \quad (225)$$

A framework that remains unchanged regardless of the traditions it encounters would fail this dialectical requirement.

Proposition 7.1 (Comparative revisability). *A GRR category should remain revisable when engagement with a particular religious configuration reveals relational structures that the current general category cannot adequately represent.*

Comparative research is therefore a means through which GRR itself develops.

7.8 Internal Heterogeneity

A religious tradition should not be represented as a single configuration.

Let

$$\mathcal{T}$$

denote a named religious tradition. Its historically situated configurations may be represented as

$$\mathcal{T} = \{\mathfrak{G}_1, \mathfrak{G}_2, \dots, \mathfrak{G}_n\}. \quad (226)$$

Variation may occur across historical period, geography, institution, school, class, gender, language, ritual community, generation, political condition, or individual practice.

Accordingly,

$$\mathbf{TS}_{\mathcal{T}} \quad (227)$$

should not be treated as a single fixed transcendent-subject profile.

A more appropriate formulation is

$$\mathbf{TS}_{\mathcal{T}} = \{\mathbf{TS}_1, \mathbf{TS}_2, \dots, \mathbf{TS}_n\}. \quad (228)$$

Comparative inquiry therefore operates both *between* traditions and *within* traditions.

This principle also prevents canonical texts or official doctrine from being treated automatically as complete descriptions of lived religious configurations.

7.9 Historical Time and Comparative Scale

Comparison must also specify temporal scale.

Let

$$\mathfrak{G}_{i,t_1}$$

and

$$\mathfrak{G}_{j,t_2}$$

denote two configurations. Comparison across them requires explicit attention to

$$t_1, \quad t_2,$$

because the relational structures of a tradition may change substantially across historical periods.

A comparative statement should therefore be indexed:

$$\text{Cmp}(\mathfrak{G}_{i,t_1}, \mathfrak{G}_{j,t_2}; D), \quad (229)$$

where D specifies the selected comparative dimensions.

The same requirement applies to scale. A household ancestral relation, a local shrine network, a monastic institution, a national religious organization, and a transnational tradition occupy different relational scales.

Let

$$\sigma$$

denote analytical scale. Then

$$\mathfrak{G}_t^{(\sigma_1)} \neq \mathfrak{G}_t^{(\sigma_2)} \quad (230)$$

may hold even where both descriptions concern the same broader religious tradition.

Comparison should therefore specify both temporal horizon and system scale.

7.10 Translation, Transformation, and Conceptual Loss

Cross-cultural comparison frequently depends upon translation. Translation is itself a generative relational event.

Let

$$\ell_i$$

denote a concept within one linguistic-religious configuration. Translation into another vocabulary produces

$$\ell_i \xrightarrow{\tau_{ij}} \tilde{\ell}_j. \quad (231)$$

The translated concept may preserve some relations and reorganize others.

Define a provisional relational profile

$$\mathbf{R}(\ell)$$

for the concept. Translation produces

$$\Delta_\tau = \mathbf{R}(\tilde{\ell}_j) - \mathbf{R}(\ell_i). \quad (232)$$

The expression is qualitative unless an operational representation is available.

The important point is that translation can alter the relational field of a religious concept. A term translated as “God,” “spirit,” “religion,” “soul,” or “heaven” may acquire associations carried by the receiving language that were absent, weaker, or differently organized in the source configuration.

Translation therefore belongs inside the comparative model:

$$\mathfrak{G}_i \xrightarrow{\tau_{ij}} \tilde{\mathfrak{G}}_j. \quad (233)$$

GRR should analyse translated religious forms as historically transformed relational manifestations rather than transparent copies.

7.11 Power in Comparative Classification

Comparative categories have histories of power.

Colonial administration, missionary translation, legal classification, academic disciplines, state institutions, censuses, education, and international governance have all participated in determining which practices are recognized as religions and which concepts become legible through dominant classificatory vocabularies. Asad’s genealogical approach is particularly important for maintaining this dimension of analysis [1].

Let

$$\Pi_t^C$$

denote the distribution of classificatory power. The public classification of a configuration may then depend upon

$$\text{Class}_t(X) = \mathcal{K}(X, \mathcal{L}_t, \Pi_t^C, \Gamma_t). \quad (234)$$

Comparison is therefore never only a neutral mapping among already established categories.

GRR must ask who possesses the capacity to name a phenomenon “religion,” “superstition,” “philosophy,” “culture,” “myth,” “ritual,” or “secular practice,” and what consequences follow from those classifications.

Research Obligation 7.2 (Classification reflexivity). Comparative GRR should identify historically consequential classificatory regimes whenever the categories through which a religious configuration becomes visible are themselves objects of institutional or political power.

7.12 Comparability without Equivalence

The central comparative principle can now be stated.

Two configurations may be comparable with respect to a selected relational dimension while remaining non-equivalent in their wider organization:

$$\text{Cmp}_D(\mathfrak{G}_i, \mathfrak{G}_j) > 0 \quad (235)$$

can coexist with

$$\mathfrak{G}_i \neq \mathfrak{G}_j. \quad (236)$$

More precisely,

$$\boxed{\text{Comparability}_D ; \text{Equivalence}.} \quad (237)$$

This permits meaningful comparison without constructing a hidden universal religion.

The dimension D must remain explicit. A pair of configurations may be highly comparable with respect to ritual repetition and weakly comparable with respect to metaphysical transcendence. They may possess similar subjecthood structures and radically different accounts of ultimate reality.

Comparability is therefore local to the problem under investigation.

7.13 Structural Correspondence and Metaphysical Difference

GRR also distinguishes structural correspondence from metaphysical agreement.

Suppose two configurations contain a relation

$$H \xrightarrow{\text{addr}} T. \quad (238)$$

This shared relational pattern permits comparison of addressability.

The ontological interpretation of T can nevertheless differ:

$$\mu_i(T) \neq \mu_j(T). \quad (239)$$

One tradition may interpret the addressee as an eternal creator. Another may understand the relevant subject through ancestry, localized presence, or another ontology. The structural correspondence carries no requirement that these metaphysical interpretations converge.

Likewise,

$$T \xrightarrow{\text{wit}} H \quad (240)$$

may occur in different configurations while the meaning of witnessing differs substantially.

GRR therefore treats structural correspondence as an opening for inquiry:

$$\text{Struct}_D(i, j) \longrightarrow \text{Compare}_D(i, j), \quad (241)$$

followed by examination of the differences surrounding that structure.

7.14 Negative and Limiting Cases

Comparative analysis should include cases that resist GRR categories.

Suppose a religious configuration contains no stable subject-like transcendent position:

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) \approx \mathbf{0}. \quad (242)$$

Such a case should not be treated as deficient. It provides evidence concerning the limits of transcendent subjecthood as a comparative category.

Likewise, a configuration may contain strong ritual practice with weak sacralization, strong sacredness with weak transcendence, or substantial ultimate-reference significance with little person-like subjecthood.

These limiting cases are theoretically valuable because they help distinguish dimensions that might otherwise appear naturally coupled.

A comparative programme should therefore sample across the configuration space:

$$\{\mathbf{RT}^{(1)}, \mathbf{RT}^{(2)}, \dots, \mathbf{RT}^{(n)}\} \quad (243)$$

rather than selecting only cases that closely resemble the conceptual model from which the theory was initially developed.

7.15 Comparative Research Design

A GRR comparative study can proceed through a sequence of analytical stages.

First, the system boundary, temporal horizon, and scale are specified:

$$\Sigma = (B, H, \sigma). \quad (244)$$

Second, the emic conceptual vocabulary and historically relevant categories are reconstructed:

$$\mathcal{L}_k. \quad (245)$$

Third, the religious relational configuration is described:

$$\mathfrak{G}_{k,t} = (\mathcal{N}, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{E}, \mathcal{C}, \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{I}, \Gamma)_{k,t}. \quad (246)$$

Fourth, the dimensions relevant to the research problem are selected:

$$D \subseteq \{\text{Sac}, \text{Div}, \text{Trans}, \text{Ult}, \mathbf{TS}, \dots\}. \quad (247)$$

Fifth, each configuration is reconstructed within those dimensions while maintaining links to its local conceptual vocabulary.

Sixth, comparison identifies correspondences, divergences, missing dimensions, and structures that resist the common model.

Seventh, the general GRR categories are revised where necessary.

The process is therefore recursive:

$$\boxed{\text{local description} \rightarrow \text{relational reconstruction} \rightarrow \text{partial comparison} \rightarrow \text{difference} \rightarrow \text{revision}.} \quad (248)$$

7.16 Comparative Matrix

The methodological dimensions can be summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparative dimensions in Generative Relational Religious Studies

Dimension	Comparative object	Methodological requirement
Local vocabulary	Tradition-specific concepts and distinctions	Preserve emic terminology and identify limits of translation
Sacred configuration	Differentiation, ritualization, prohibition, affect, maintenance	Specify the relational dimensions through which sacredness is compared
Transcendence	Boundaries represented as exceeded	Identify the particular epistemic, temporal, spatial, normative, axiological, agential, or ontological dimension
Ultimate reference	Higher-order sources of value, normativity, knowledge, or meaning	Allow concentrated and distributed forms of ultimacy
Subjecthood	Addressability, agency, witnessing, response, memory, authority, care, intention	Treat subjecthood as multidimensional and historically variable
Practice	Ritual and recurrent relational processes	Examine what relations are produced or transformed through practice
Material mediation	Objects, spaces, bodies, texts, technologies, landscapes	Separate carrier continuity from continuity of relational function
Historical conditions	Material, institutional, political, ecological, and technological conditions	Index comparison to time and scale
Power	Authorization, classification, preservation, circulation, suppression	Identify differential capacities shaping the visible configuration
Translation	Transformation across linguistic and conceptual systems	Record partial correspondence and conceptual loss

7.17 Comparative Knowledge and Ontological Openness

Comparative GRR can generate substantial knowledge even where traditions maintain incompatible metaphysical commitments.

Let

$$\mathcal{K}_{ij}^{\text{GRR}}$$

denote the knowledge generated through comparison of configurations i and j . It may include

$$\mathcal{K}_{ij}^{\text{GRR}} = \{\Delta \mathbf{RT}, \Delta \mathbf{TS}, \Delta \mathcal{P}, \Delta \Gamma, \Delta \Pi, \Delta \tau, \dots\}. \quad (249)$$

Such knowledge can concern differences in subjecthood, ritual reproduction, historical persistence, material mediation, power, or translation.

The ontological claims associated with the configurations may remain different:

$$\mu_i \neq \mu_j. \quad (250)$$

Comparative inquiry therefore takes the form

$$\boxed{\mu_i \neq \mu_j, \quad \mathcal{K}_{ij}^{\text{GRR}} > 0.} \quad (251)$$

Metaphysical plurality does not eliminate comparative knowledge.

At the same time, GRR does not translate every metaphysical claim into a purely relational statement. Claims concerning ultimate reality remain available as claims in their own right and can be studied philosophically, theologically, historically, or through other appropriate modes of inquiry.

7.18 Boundaries of Comparative Generalization

Comparison creates knowledge at specified levels. Generalization requires an additional inferential step.

Suppose a relational pattern R is observed in cases

$$\mathfrak{G}_1, \dots, \mathfrak{G}_n.$$

The observation supports

$$R \in \{\mathfrak{G}_1, \dots, \mathfrak{G}_n\}. \quad (252)$$

A universal claim

$$R \in \forall \mathfrak{G}_{\text{relig}} \quad (253)$$

requires substantially stronger justification.

GRR therefore distinguishes

$$\text{ObservedPattern} ; \text{GeneralStructure} ; \text{UniversalStructure}. \quad (254)$$

The present paper proposes several general analytical dimensions. Their universality remains an open research question.

This restraint is especially important for transcendent subject formation. The process

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}$$

defines a research object wherever such a transition can be meaningfully identified. It does not establish transcendent subject formation as a necessary structure of religion.

7.19 The Comparative GRR Programme

The comparative programme can now be summarized through three levels:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{L}_k \longrightarrow \mathfrak{G}_k^{\text{GRR}} \longrightarrow \mathcal{C}_{ij}^D \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}'_{\text{GRR}}.} \quad (255)$$

Here

$$\mathcal{L}_k$$

denotes the local conceptual vocabulary,

$$\mathfrak{G}_k^{\text{GRR}}$$

the relational reconstruction of the case,

$$\mathcal{C}_{ij}^D$$

a dimension-specific comparison,

and

$$\mathcal{G}'_{\text{GRR}}$$

the revised general framework produced through comparative inquiry.

The final transition is essential. Comparison should generate changes in the framework itself when new cases reveal structures outside its previous descriptive capacity.

GRR therefore understands comparative religious studies as a recursive process of theoretical learning:

$$\boxed{\text{theory} \rightarrow \text{case} \rightarrow \text{comparison} \rightarrow \text{difference} \rightarrow \text{revised theory.}} \quad (256)$$

The framework enters a tradition with provisional categories and should leave the encounter capable of having been changed by what it encountered.

Section 10 turns to the conceptual boundaries and research obligations generated by this programme. It examines the risks of overextension, hidden theological assumptions, anthropocentrism, reification of relational categories, causal ambiguity, problems of operationalization, comparative distortion, and the conditions under which GRR itself should be revised.

8 Preliminary Case Studies

This section applies the GRR framework to selected Buddhist and Daoist configurations. The cases serve two purposes. First, they demonstrate how the distinctions developed in the preceding sections can clarify religious configurations that do not concentrate sacredness, transcendence, ultimacy, and subjecthood in a single personal deity. Second, they function as theoretical stress tests. Each case exposes assumptions carried by the initial GRR vocabulary and thereby contributes to revision of the general framework.

The discussion remains preliminary. “Buddhism” and “Daoism” designate internally heterogeneous historical traditions, and the configurations examined below should not be treated as exhaustive descriptions of either tradition. The purpose is to identify structural possibilities that become visible through particular philosophical and religious materials.

8.1 Buddhist Configurations and Relational Reality

Selected Buddhist philosophical traditions provide an especially demanding case for GRR because they place pressure upon a distinction frequently presupposed in theories of religion: the distinction between an already real human subject and a religious object subsequently produced by that subject.

Madhyamaka analyses deny intrinsic or self-subsistent nature (*svabhava*) to phenomena while preserving conventional existence, dependent arising, and the practical significance of causal relations [12, ?]. Emptiness therefore cannot be identified with simple nonexistence or causal nullity. The absence of intrinsic nature remains compatible with historically and practically effective relations. This interpretation also avoids turning emptiness itself into a further underlying substance. Contemporary philosophical discussions of Madhyamaka similarly emphasize that emptiness concerns the absence of inherent nature rather than metaphysical annihilation.

For GRR, this distinction can be represented schematically as

$$\text{Svabhava}(X) = 0 \quad \text{while} \quad X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (257)$$

Equation 257 is an analytical translation rather than Buddhist doctrinal notation. It distinguishes intrinsic self-subsistence from causal and relational efficacy.

The distinction immediately clarifies the concept of relational reality. A form may lack intrinsic self-subsistence and nevertheless acquire sufficient stability to participate in subsequent relational generation:

$$\boxed{\text{IntrinsicSubstance}(X) ; \text{RelationalReality}(X) ; \text{GenerativeEfficacy}(X)}. \quad (258)$$

These three analytical questions need not receive the same answer.

8.2 The Human Subject as a Dependently Arisen Form

The Buddhist case becomes especially important when the same analysis is applied to the ordinary human subject.

A simple constructionist account of religion can be represented as

$$H \longrightarrow G, \quad (259)$$

where an independently given human subject H produces a religious object G .

Such a representation gives the human subject an explanatory privilege that itself requires justification.

Within a Buddhist-informed GRR reconstruction, the human subject can instead be represented as a dependently formed configuration:

$$H_t^{\text{subj}} = \mathcal{E}_H (\mathfrak{R}_t, B_t, M_t, L_t, D_t, \Gamma_t), \quad (260)$$

where bodily processes, memory, language, desire, relations, and historical conditions participate in the stabilization of the form conventionally identified as a person.

The resulting subject remains highly consequential:

$$H_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (261)$$

The same analytical architecture can be applied to a religiously significant form:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} = \mathcal{E}_T (\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t), \quad T_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (262)$$

The comparison does not establish ontological identity between human and religious subjects. It removes an automatic analytical privilege:

$$\boxed{H_t^{\text{subj}}, T_t^{\text{rel}} \in \mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{generated forms}}}. \quad (263)$$

Both require an account of formation, stabilization, persistence, and subsequent efficacy. GRR therefore replaces the question

“Which already existing subject constructed the other?”

with the wider question

“Through which relational processes do different stabilized forms emerge and participate in subsequent becoming

8.3 Religious Forms without Intrinsic Substance

This reconstruction also permits a different treatment of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, tathagatas, vows, karmic structures, and other religiously significant forms.

GRR need not establish the independent metaphysical existence of a religious referent before examining its relational reality:

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow (D_{t+1}, N_{t+1}, V_{t+1}, P_{t+1}, R_{t+1}). \quad (264)$$

A bodhisattva-form, for example, can participate in compassion, vow, ritual practice, ethical interpretation, artistic production, institutional life, or interpersonal care. These effects become historically observable regardless of whether the ontology of T^* has been settled.

This provides an especially clear interpretation of relational reality:

$$\boxed{\text{absence of intrinsic substantiality} \quad \text{is compatible with} \quad \text{persistent relational efficacy.}} \quad (265)$$

The Buddhist case therefore suggests the principle of *generative reality without intrinsic substance*.

8.4 Dependent Causality and Configuration-Level Significance

A further consequence concerns the location of sacred or ultimate significance.

The initial GRR vocabulary often used expressions such as

$$\text{Ult}(X) \quad \text{or} \quad \text{Div}(X),$$

which implicitly privilege entity-like objects.

Selected Buddhist configurations place pressure on this grammar. Dependent arising, karmic consequence, paths of practice, and soteriological transformation concern relational and causal structures rather than a supreme creator subject. Madhyamaka additionally prevents these structures from being reified as self-subsistent foundations [12, ?].

GRR should therefore permit ultimate or sacred significance to characterize a relational configuration:

$$\text{Ult}(\mathfrak{R}_t, \mathcal{C}_t) > 0, \quad (266)$$

where $\mathcal{C}_t$ denotes the relevant causal organization.

The expression should not be read as the claim that Buddhism itself calls causality “divine.” It identifies an etic GRR possibility: a religious configuration may locate profound soteriological and normative significance in dependent causal organization without concentrating that significance in a creator deity.

The case therefore revises the grammar of GRR:

$$\boxed{\text{Ult, Div} : \{\text{entity, relation, configuration, process}\} \longrightarrow \text{relational significance.}} \quad (267)$$

8.5 The Emptiness of the Relational System

The same discipline must be applied reflexively to GRR.

If individual entities are treated as relationally arisen while $\mathfrak{R}$ itself becomes an ultimate self-subsistent reality, GRR would replace substance ontology with a reified relational ontology.

The Buddhist case instead suggests

$$\text{Svabhava}(\mathfrak{R}) = 0 \quad \text{while} \quad \mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (268)$$

Relation remains a method of access and description. Its generative efficacy does not establish relation as the final substance of reality.

This case therefore supports a core methodological discipline of GR:

$$\boxed{\text{relation can be generatively effective without becoming ontologically ultimate.}} \quad (269)$$

8.6 Daoist Configurations and the Relational Reality of Generativity

Daoist materials create a different challenge. The central issue is less the causal efficacy of empty forms than the possibility that generativity itself acquires sacred, ultimate, or orienting significance.

The *Daodejing* presents Dao as the source of the ten thousand things while resisting ordinary description and intentional agency. Dao manifests without deliberative design, and *ziran* and *wuwei* become central concepts for describing spontaneous generation and modes of action responsive to such generation [?].

GRR should avoid translating Dao into a supreme entity:

$$\text{Dao} \neq \text{a transcendent generator standing outside generation.} \quad (270)$$

A more useful analytical distinction separates possible generativity itself from its historically situated manifestation:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}^* ; \mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}}} \quad (271)$$

Here $\mathcal{G}^*$ denotes whatever generative character reality may possess independently of a particular finite mode of access. GRR leaves its ultimate ontology open.

The term

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}}$$

denotes the manifestation of generativity available within relational system a at historical time t .

This distinction prevents the statement

$$\text{“generativity is relational reality”}$$

from becoming an ontological assertion.

The relationally accessible form of generativity can itself acquire relational reality when it persistently participates in subsequent generation:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{a,t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{a,t+1}^{\text{rel}}} \quad (272)$$

The relational reality of generativity is therefore itself generated.

8.7 Generativity without a Generator

This structure gives the Daoist case a distinctive contribution to GRR.

A personal-deity configuration may represent generation through

$$G \xrightarrow{\text{agency}} W, \quad (273)$$

where a transcendent subject G generates or directs a world W .

Selected Daoist configurations permit another architecture:

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{Z}} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1},} \quad (274)$$

where $\mathcal{Z}$ provisionally represents a *ziran*-like mode of self-so generation.

The transition does not require a privileged agent outside the system.

This yields a GRR comparative principle:

$$\boxed{\text{generation does not logically require a privileged generator.}} \quad (275)$$

The point is analytical rather than a claim that Daoism can be reduced to the formula. It identifies a form of religious-cosmological intelligibility in which spontaneous becoming itself carries high-order significance.

8.8 Sacralized Generativity

The distinction in Equation 271 also clarifies the location of Daoist divinity within GRR.

GRR need not claim

$$\text{Div}(\mathcal{G}^*) > 0, \quad (276)$$

because this would assign divine status to reality independently of historical manifestation.

It can instead examine the transition

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} \mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{div}}, \quad (277)$$

where the relational manifestation of generativity acquires sacred, ultimate, normative, or orienting significance.

The resulting claim is considerably more limited:

$$\boxed{\text{generativity, as historically manifested, may itself become a divine or sacred relational configuration.}} \quad (278)$$

The divinity lies neither necessarily in a personal deity nor in $\mathcal{G}^*$ as an asserted metaphysical substance. It lies in the historically generated relational significance of generative becoming.

This produces a recursive formulation:

$$\boxed{\text{generation} \rightarrow \text{manifested generativity} \rightarrow \text{sacralized generativity} \rightsquigarrow \text{further generation.}} \quad (279)$$

The divinity of generation is itself a relationally generated phenomenon.

8.9 Historical Grammars of Generation

The manifestation of generativity requires symbolic and conceptual mediation.

Let

$$\Sigma_{a,t}$$

denote a historically situated generative grammar through which system a represents, interprets, and acts upon perceived patterns of change.

The sequence can be written as

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \Sigma_{a,t}. \quad (280)$$

Within Chinese intellectual history, such grammars have included heterogeneous models of polarity, cyclical change, temporal correspondence, spatial configuration, and symbolic combination. Where historically appropriate, trigrams, hexagrams, or correlative classifications can function as examples of such symbolic mediation. These forms should not be treated as uniquely Daoist or collapsed into a single historical tradition.

The crucial GRR point concerns their relational status.

A symbolic grammar is not the generativity of reality itself:

$$\Sigma_{a,t} \neq \mathcal{G}^*. \quad (281)$$

Yet it may acquire substantial relational reality:

$$\Sigma_{a,t} \rightsquigarrow A_{a,t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{a,t+1}. \quad (282)$$

A representation of generation can therefore become a participant in actual generation. The complete structure is

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}^* ; \mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \Sigma_{a,t} \rightsquigarrow A_{a,t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{a,t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{a,t+1}^{\text{rel}}}. \quad (283)$$

This provides a GRR interpretation of how historically situated understandings of generation can enter the generation they seek to understand.

8.10 Heterogeneous Access to Generativity

The index a in

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}}$$

is theoretically important.

Suppose two relational systems a and b possess different perceptual, cognitive, linguistic, bodily, mathematical, or temporal capacities. Even if they encounter the same possible generative reality $\mathcal{G}^*$, their manifestations may differ:

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \neq \mathcal{G}_{b,t}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (284)$$

Their symbolic grammars may likewise differ:

$$\Sigma_{a,t} \neq \Sigma_{b,t}. \quad (285)$$

Both may nevertheless possess substantial relational efficacy within their respective systems.

The thought experiment demonstrates why GRR should distinguish generativity from its manifestation. Human cosmologies, mathematical theories, symbolic systems, and divinatory grammars remain historically and cognitively situated forms of access.

Questions concerning structures preserved across such heterogeneous manifestations belong to the later problem of cross-relational invariance.

8.11 Daoist Divinities and Distributed Subjecthood

The preceding interpretation of Dao and generativity does not exhaust Daoist religion. Historical Daoist traditions contain extensive divine configurations, ritual systems, celestial bureaucracies, revelations, immortals, and person-like sacred subjects [?].

GRR can therefore represent a distributed architecture:

$$\boxed{\text{Ult}(\mathcal{G}^{\text{rel}}) \quad ; \quad \text{Subj}(D_1, \dots, D_n)}. \quad (286)$$

Ultimate generative significance and divine subjecthood need not occupy the same node.

The Daoist case therefore reinforces a wider GRR conclusion:

$$\boxed{\text{Ult, Div, Trans, Subj}} \quad (287)$$

can be distributed across entities, relations, processes, and configurations within one religious world.

8.12 Comparative Consequences

The Buddhist and Daoist cases revise GRR in complementary directions.

The Buddhist case suggests

$$\boxed{\text{generative efficacy without intrinsic substantiality.}} \quad (288)$$

The Daoist case suggests

$$\boxed{\text{generativity without requiring a privileged generator.}} \quad (289)$$

Together they challenge three assumptions that can silently enter religious theory:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{reality} &\Rightarrow \text{substantiality,} \\ \text{generation} &\Rightarrow \text{generator,} \\ \text{divinity} &\Rightarrow \text{divine entity.} \end{aligned} \quad (290)$$

GRR instead permits

$$\boxed{\begin{aligned} \text{relational reality} &\rightarrow \text{persistent generative efficacy,} \\ \text{generativity} &\rightarrow \text{process or configuration,} \\ \text{divinity} &\rightarrow \text{entity, relation, process, or generative mode.} \end{aligned}} \quad (291)$$

The cases therefore perform the general–special–particular dialectic proposed earlier:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}_{\text{GRR}}^{(0)} \longrightarrow (\mathcal{P}_{\text{Buddhist}}, \mathcal{P}_{\text{Daoist}}) \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{\text{GRR}}^{(1)}} \quad (292)$$

9 Discussion: Relational Reality, Mediation, and the Generation of Actuality

The preceding cases suggest that relational reality should be understood more precisely through the capacity of stabilized relational forms to mediate subsequent generation. This section develops that implication and compares the religious cases with familiar forms from political economy. Money, credit, and social personhood provide useful cross-domain examples because their efficacy does not depend upon their being substantial forms of material production. They are relationally constituted and nevertheless participate directly in the organization of production and reproduction.

The comparison does not identify religious subjects with economic forms. Its purpose is structural. It asks whether substantially different phenomena can share a generative architecture:

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}.} \quad (293)$$

9.1 Relational Reality as Generative Mediation

The concept of relational reality can now be sharpened.

A form X_t is generated within a relational configuration:

$$X_t = \mathcal{E}_X(\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t). \quad (294)$$

Once stabilized, the form can participate in subsequent dynamics:

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (295)$$

The transformed field can subsequently participate in reproducing or transforming the form:

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+1}. \quad (296)$$

Relational reality therefore concerns a recursive form of generative mediation:

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \overset{\text{med}}{\rightsquigarrow} \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.} \quad (297)$$

The concept requires no prior commitment that X_t possesses intrinsic self-subsistence.

A provisional definition can therefore be stated:

Definition 9.1 (Relational causal mediation). A relationally stabilized form exhibits relational causal mediation when its presence, recognition, or operation participates in the transition from one relational configuration to another over a specified temporal and systemic horizon.

Relational reality can then be understood through persistent participation in such mediation.

9.2 Money as a Relationally Real Form

Money provides a relatively intuitive example.

A monetary form is neither labor, machinery, raw material, nor the productive activity through which commodities are generated. Its economic efficacy depends upon historically organized relations of exchange, recognition, property, institution, and social practice.

Yet once the money-form is established, it can participate directly in the allocation of resources and labor:

$$M_t \rightsquigarrow (L_{t+1}, K_{t+1}, P_{t+1}), \quad (298)$$

where L , K , and P denote labor, productive resources, and production.

The relevant architecture is

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{exchange}} \rightsquigarrow M_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{production}}.} \quad (299)$$

The money-form is relationally generated and subsequently enters material production.

Marx's analysis of the commodity and money forms is particularly useful here because social relations can acquire objective forms that subsequently confront participants as features of the social world [9].

The point for GRR is independent of any claim that money and religious forms are identical. Money demonstrates a more general possibility:

$$\boxed{\text{a relationally constituted form can become a real condition of material generation.}} \quad (300)$$

9.3 Credit and the Generation of Future Production

Credit makes the structure even clearer.

A credit relation may concern a claim upon future payment or future productive capacity. It is therefore partly organized through expectations, obligations, institutional guarantees, and anticipated future production.

Let

$$C_t = \mathcal{E}_C (\text{claim, trust, law, expectation, institution})_t. \quad (301)$$

Credit can subsequently participate in investment:

$$C_t \rightsquigarrow I_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow P_{t+2}. \quad (302)$$

A relational claim concerning future production can therefore participate in bringing that future production into existence.

Marx's discussion of commercial and banking credit explicitly situates credit within the reproduction process and describes transferable claims and bills of exchange as central components of the credit system [10].

The structure can be condensed as

$$\boxed{\text{relation to a possible future} \rightarrow \text{present relational form} \rightarrow \text{future material realization.}} \quad (303)$$

This is a particularly clear example of relational reality mediating the generation of actuality.

9.4 The Social Person as a Stabilized Relational Form

Political economy also clarifies the status of the ordinary human subject.

Within production and reproduction, the person becomes legible through relational positions such as worker, owner, creditor, debtor, consumer, contracting party, household member, or legal subject.

Let

$$I_t = \left(\pi_t^{\text{worker}}, \pi_t^{\text{owner}}, \pi_t^{\text{debtor}}, \pi_t^{\text{consumer}}, \pi_t^{\text{legal}}, \dots \right) \quad (304)$$

denote a provisional social person-form.

This form arises within existing relations:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{PE} \rightsquigarrow I_t, \quad (305)$$

while the person subsequently participates in production and reproduction:

$$I_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{PE}. \quad (306)$$

The complete structure is

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t^{PE} \rightsquigarrow I_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{PE}.} \quad (307)$$

The social subject therefore occupies the same general dynamical form as other relationally stabilized entities without becoming identical to them.

The comparison further undermines the assumption that the human subject must enter social explanation as an already completed metaphysical primitive.

9.5 Alienation, Reification, and Relational Forms

The political-economic comparison also reveals a possible pathology of relational stabilization.

A relational form can become sufficiently stable that powers generated through relations appear as intrinsic properties of the stabilized form:

$$\text{Power}(\mathfrak{R}) \longmapsto \text{Property}(X). \quad (308)$$

The social power of money can appear as a property naturally belonging to money. Institutional authority can appear as an intrinsic property of an office. Socially formed personhood can appear as the action of an entirely self-subsistent individual.

Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism offers a classical account of a related process in which relations among producers take objective social form in relations among things [9].

GRR can describe the wider structure as

$$\boxed{\text{relational stabilization} \rightarrow \text{effective form} \rightarrow \text{reification of relational efficacy as intrinsic property.}} \quad (309)$$

The first two transitions are constitutive of relational reality. The third introduces an additional interpretive move.

This distinction matters for both religious and secular forms.

9.6 Relational Reality and Religious Subjecthood

The same architecture can now be returned to religion:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}}. \quad (310)$$

A divine or transcendent subject position may arise through relations, practices, narratives, institutions, material carriers, and interpreted experience. Once stabilized, it may reorganize desire, obligation, value, care, social practice, or material conduct.

The comparison with money and credit provides an important clarification:

$$\boxed{\text{historically generated} \quad \text{does not imply} \quad \text{causally unreal.}} \quad (311)$$

A relational form can participate in producing conditions that did not exist before its stabilization. For example,

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \text{vow}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow \text{care}_{t+2} \rightsquigarrow R_{t+3} \quad (312)$$

describes a pathway through which a religiously mediated form can participate in materially and interpersonally consequential action.

The metaphysical status of

$$T^*$$

remains separately open.

9.7 From Relational Form to Realized Consequence

The discussion suggests a useful three-level distinction:

$$\boxed{\text{intrinsic or ontological status ; relational reality ; realized consequence.}} \quad (313)$$

The first concerns whether a possible referent possesses independent ontological status.

The second concerns whether a historically manifested form becomes sufficiently stabilized to participate in relational dynamics.

The third concerns the later states generated through that participation.

Thus

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow Y_{t+2}^{\text{realized}} \quad (314)$$

may hold even where no claim of intrinsic substantiality has been established for X .

The analysis yields a general proposition:

Proposition 9.2 (Generative efficacy without intrinsic substantiality). *A form need not possess established intrinsic self-subsistence in order to become relationally stabilized and participate in the generation of later psychological, social, institutional, or material states.*

The proposition captures a structural intersection among the Buddhist, Daoist, religious, and political-economic discussions without identifying their philosophical contents.

9.8 Reality Generated through Relationally Real Forms

A further implication follows.

A relationally generated form can become a condition for the emergence of forms commonly regarded as materially or institutionally concrete:

$$\boxed{\text{relationally generated form} \rightsquigarrow \text{relational reorganization} \rightsquigarrow \text{new actuality.}} \quad (315)$$

Credit can participate in generating a factory.

A legal person can enter contracts that reorganize material resources.

A religious vow can alter patterns of care, labor, consumption, or interpersonal conduct.

A historically formed understanding of generativity can alter decisions and thereby change the trajectory through which later relations develop.

The distinction between “symbolic” and “real” therefore becomes insufficient whenever symbolic or relational forms themselves participate in causal generation.

A more useful question is:

$$\boxed{\text{Through which pathways does a relational form enter subsequent generation?}} \quad (316)$$

9.9 Generativity as Object and Generativity as Manifestation

The Daoist case adds another layer to this problem.

GRR distinguishes possible generativity

$$\mathcal{G}^*$$

from a historically situated manifestation

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}}$$

The latter may itself become relationally real and subsequently affect generation:

$$\mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}} \rightsquigarrow \Sigma_{a,t} \rightsquigarrow A_{a,t+1} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{a,t+1}. \quad (317)$$

This produces an unusual recursion:

$$\boxed{\text{generativity} \rightarrow \text{manifestation of generativity} \rightarrow \text{action upon generativity} \rightarrow \text{new generative conditions.}} \quad (318)$$

A finite relational system can therefore develop a theory, symbolism, ritual, or practical grammar of generation, and that grammar subsequently becomes one of the conditions influencing the system’s own development.

The relational reality of generativity is itself generative.

9.10 Divinity beyond Entity-Centered Grammar

The Buddhist and Daoist cases also require revision of the grammar of divinity.

The initial notation

$$\text{Div}(X)$$

suggests that divinity is a property of an identifiable entity.

The cases motivate a wider domain:

$$\boxed{\text{Div} : \{X, R, \mathfrak{R}, P, \mathcal{G}\} \longrightarrow \mathcal{D}_{\text{rel}},} \quad (319)$$

where the arguments respectively permit entity-, relation-, configuration-, process-, and generativity-centered forms.

This does not imply that every generative process is divine.

A divine configuration requires historically situated sacralization or ultimate significance:

$$Y_t \xrightarrow{S_t} Y_t^{\text{div}}. \quad (320)$$

The object Y_t may now be an entity, relation, process, or generative configuration.

GRR can therefore recognize:

$$\text{Div} \left(T_t^{\text{subj}} \right), \quad (321)$$

as in a strongly person-like divine subject, and also

$$\text{Div} \left(\mathcal{G}_t^{\text{rel}} \right), \quad (322)$$

where generativity itself has acquired sacred or ultimate relational significance.

9.11 Convenient Forms and Generative Reality

The political-economic and Buddhist discussions also clarify the GR methodological idea of provisional entities.

A complex relational field can be compressed into an analytically and practically usable form:

$$\mathfrak{R}_t \xrightarrow{\mathcal{K}} X_t, \quad (323)$$

where $\mathcal{K}$ denotes provisional stabilization or coarse-graining.

The resulting form may be called “I,” “money,” “credit,” “firm,” “deity,” “ancestor,” or another context-specific entity.

Its usefulness becomes dynamical when

$$X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}. \quad (324)$$

A convenient form can therefore become part of the world it helps organize.

This provides a possible criterion for analytical usefulness:

$$\text{Value}_{\text{analytic}}(X) \sim \text{Capacity}(X_t \text{ to track consequential relational structure}). \quad (325)$$

Provisionality and efficacy can coexist.

The methodological error arises when successful stabilization is converted into an unwarranted claim of intrinsic self-subsistence.

9.12 Implications for Generative Relational Religious Studies

The discussion produces several revisions to GRR.

First, relational reality should be defined through persistent generative mediation rather than through substantial existence:

$$\boxed{X_t \text{ is relationally real over } H \quad \text{when} \quad X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t:t+H} \rightsquigarrow X_{t+H}} \quad (326)$$

under appropriate conditions of persistence and identifiable participation.

Second, the human subject receives no automatic ontological privilege within relational analysis:

$$H_t^{\text{subj}} \quad ; \quad T_t^{\text{subj}} \quad (327)$$

are both analyzable through formation, stabilization, efficacy, and reproduction.

Third, divinity can characterize configurations and processes as well as entities.

Fourth, generativity itself must be separated from historically situated manifestations of generativity:

$$\mathcal{G}^* \quad ; \quad \mathcal{G}_{a,t}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (328)$$

Fifth, relationally real forms can become conditions of materially realized futures:

$$\boxed{\text{relational reality} \rightsquigarrow \text{conditions of subsequent actuality.}} \quad (329)$$

These revisions substantially widen the scope of GRR while simultaneously strengthening its ontological restraint.

9.13 Comparative Synthesis

The three domains examined in the case studies and discussion can now be summarized structurally:

Buddhist case:	efficacy without intrinsic substantiality,	(330)
Daoist case:	generativity without a privileged generator,	
political economy:	relational forms mediating material production and reproduction.	

Their historical and philosophical meanings remain substantially different. The structural comparison identifies a shared generative problem:

$$\boxed{\mathfrak{R}_t \rightsquigarrow X_t \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}.} \quad (331)$$

A form emerges through relations, becomes sufficiently stabilized to mediate later relations, and may subsequently participate in its own reproduction.

This architecture gives relational reality its principal explanatory role.

The question for GRR is therefore broader than whether a religious object “really exists.” It concerns how different forms of reality become relationally available, how they acquire generative efficacy, how they participate in the formation of persons and worlds, and how the worlds so generated subsequently transform the forms through which reality is encountered.

10 Conceptual Boundaries and Research Obligations

This section specifies the conceptual boundaries, methodological risks, and research obligations of Generative Relational Religious Studies. The framework developed in the preceding sections is intentionally broad: it permits analysis of sacred differentiation, transcendence, divinity, subjectivation, ritual, material mediation, institutional reproduction, historical transformation, and metaphysical plurality within a common relational architecture. Such breadth requires corresponding constraints.

The discussion therefore examines the provisional status of GRR categories, the possibility of hidden theological assumptions, the cross-cultural limits of subjecthood and transcendence, the distinction between relational formation and ontological production, problems of operationalization and causal inference, observer dependence, power, system boundaries, normative evaluation, and conditions under which GRR should be revised.

10.1 Provisional Status of the Framework

GRR begins from a methodological commitment to revisability. Its basic vocabulary—relation, entity, subject, system, transcendence, divinity, generation, and manifestation—functions as an analytical language rather than a final ontology.

Let

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{GRR}}^{(t)}$$

denote the vocabulary available at a given stage of inquiry. Subsequent historical, comparative, philosophical, or empirical work may motivate

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{GRR}}^{(t)} \longrightarrow \mathcal{L}_{\text{GRR}}^{(t+1)}. \quad (332)$$

Revision may involve adding distinctions, removing categories, changing relations among concepts, or abandoning a category whose explanatory value has become insufficient.

This applies equally to the central transition

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (333)$$

The transition is a proposed research object. Its usefulness depends upon whether subject-like organization can be identified with sufficient conceptual and empirical specificity across actual religious configurations.

Research Obligation 10.1 (Framework revisability). GRR categories should remain open to revision whenever historical or comparative cases reveal distinctions that the existing framework cannot adequately represent.

10.2 Hidden Theological Assumptions

A major risk arises from the history of concepts such as deity, transcendence, subject, agency, revelation, and divine will. Several of these concepts have been elaborated extensively within traditions organized around strongly person-like and transcendent understandings of God.

A framework constructed from such categories may reproduce this architecture implicitly even when it intends to support wider comparison.

The present paper attempts to reduce this risk by distinguishing

$$\text{Sac} ; \text{Div} ; \text{Trans} ; \text{Ult} ; \text{Subj}. \quad (334)$$

The separation permits configurations in which these dimensions are coupled differently.

For example,

$$\text{Trans}(X) > 0, \quad \text{Subj}(X) \approx 0 \quad (335)$$

remains fully admissible.

Likewise,

$$\text{Subj}(X) > 0, \quad \text{Trans}(X) \text{ remains locally bounded} \quad (336)$$

can characterize configurations involving ancestors, spirits, localized presences, or other religious subjects.

The adequacy of this multidimensional strategy remains an empirical and comparative question.

Research Obligation 10.2 (Theological reflexivity). Applications of GRR should identify which analytical categories carry historically specific theological assumptions and examine whether those assumptions distort the configuration under study.

This requirement is especially important when concepts developed within Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Daoist, Indigenous, or other intellectual traditions are transferred across substantially different historical fields.

10.3 The Portability of Subjecthood

The concept of *subjecthood* itself requires scrutiny.

The profile introduced in Section 5,

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t), \quad (337)$$

contains dimensions such as addressability, agency, witnessing, responsiveness, memory, normative authority, care, and intention.

These dimensions were selected because they identify recurrent forms through which a relational position may become subject-like. Their selection does not establish a universal theory of subjectivity.

Different traditions may organize subjecthood through other dimensions. Some may distribute capacities that GRR presently groups together. Others may question the conceptual separation between subject and environment, subject and community, subject and cosmos, or subject and process.

Accordingly, the current profile should be interpreted as

$$\mathbf{TS}_t^{(0)}(T), \quad (338)$$

an initial version subject to comparative revision.

A later configuration may require

$$\mathbf{TS}_t^{(1)}(T) = \mathbf{TS}_t^{(0)}(T) \cup \{q_1, \dots, q_m\}, \quad (339)$$

or a more substantial reconstruction of the profile itself.

Research Obligation 10.3 (Subjecthood revisability). Transcendent subjecthood should be operationalized through dimensions appropriate to the configuration under study, with explicit justification for the inclusion, exclusion, and interpretation of those dimensions.

10.4 Relational Formation and Ontological Production

The language of *formation* carries a particularly important ambiguity. A statement such as

“a divine subject is formed”

can be interpreted ontologically, psychologically, sociologically, or relationally.

GRR gives the term a restricted analytical meaning.

The process

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \quad (340)$$

describes the formation of a subject-like relational position within the selected generative system.

The possible transcendent referent remains represented separately:

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}. \quad (341)$$

This distinction must be preserved consistently throughout GRR research.

A historical reconstruction may establish that a particular representation of divine agency became available only after specified institutional, linguistic, or ritual transformations. Such a reconstruction directly concerns

$$T_t^{\text{subj}}.$$

Any further claim concerning

$$T^*$$

requires an additional argument.

The same discipline applies in the opposite direction. Affirmation of an independently real transcendent subject leaves open the historical question of how that reality becomes relationally manifested within a particular human system.

Research Obligation 10.4 (Level separation). Claims concerning relational subject formation should specify whether their object is a manifestation, relational position, interpretive structure, historical practice, or possible ontological referent.

10.5 Ontological Openness and Evidential Accountability

Ontological openness provides room for metaphysical plurality. It also creates a possible methodological danger if openness becomes a general means of protecting claims from evidence.

GRR therefore distinguishes underdetermined ontology from historically or empirically accessible commitments.

Let

$$\mu_k$$

denote a metaphysical interpretation and let

$$C(\mu_k)$$

denote the set of observable, historical, logical, or practical commitments generated by that interpretation.

Where

$$c_j \in C(\mu_k), \tag{342}$$

evidence concerning c_j remains relevant to evaluating μ_k .

Ontological openness applies to the residual domain:

$$\mathcal{O}_{\text{open}} = \mathcal{O} \setminus \mathcal{O}_{\text{determined}}, \tag{343}$$

where the available inquiry leaves multiple ontological interpretations possible.

Research Obligation 10.5 (Evidential accountability). Ontological openness should be restricted to claims whose status remains underdetermined by the available mode of inquiry. Historical, empirical, and logical consequences of metaphysical claims remain subject to evaluation.

This maintains philosophical humility together with critical inquiry.

10.6 The Cross-Cultural Status of Transcendence

The category of transcendence also requires careful treatment.

Section 4 defined relational transcendence through a boundary B_t :

$$T_t \succ_{B_t} \mathcal{N}_t. \quad (344)$$

This formulation deliberately leaves the boundary unspecified until a particular configuration is examined.

A tradition may organize exceeding through temporality, knowledge, authority, death, spatial presence, ordinary value, conceptual determination, or another boundary. In some configurations, the most appropriate local concept may have no close equivalent to the philosophical vocabulary of transcendence.

GRR should therefore analyse

$$B_t^{(k)} \quad (345)$$

before assigning

$$\text{Trans}(X)$$

to a case.

The research question becomes:

Which boundary is relationally exceeded, and according to whose conceptual description? (346)

The answer may reveal that another analytical term is preferable.

Research Obligation 10.6 (Boundary specification). A claim of relational transcendence should identify the relevant boundary, the participants with respect to whom exceeding occurs, and the local conceptual materials supporting that interpretation.

10.7 Emic Description and Analytical Imposition

Every GRR reconstruction involves an analytical transformation:

$$\mathcal{E}_k \xrightarrow{\mathcal{A}_{\text{GRR}}} \hat{\mathfrak{G}}_k. \quad (347)$$

The transformation creates the possibility of analytical gain and conceptual distortion simultaneously.

A researcher may identify addressability where participants use another conceptual structure. A ritual may appear to the analyst as subjectivation while practitioners describe it through purification, continuity, obligation, cosmological alignment, or another vocabulary.

GRR therefore requires traceability between analytical claims and the materials from which they are reconstructed:

$$\hat{\mathfrak{G}}_k \xrightarrow{\text{trace}} \mathcal{E}_k. \quad (348)$$

The map need not be one-to-one. It should make visible where the researcher's conceptual contribution enters the analysis.

Research Obligation 10.7 (Interpretive traceability). A GRR analysis should distinguish participant descriptions, historical sources, researcher reconstruction, and higher-order theoretical interpretation whenever these levels materially affect the argument.

10.8 Operationalization of Relational Profiles

The profiles developed throughout the paper remain conceptual.

For example,

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t) \quad (349)$$

does not presently specify a validated metric.

Likewise,

$$\mathbf{RT}_t(X) = (\text{Sac}_t, \text{Div}_t, \text{Trans}_t, \text{Ult}_t) \quad (350)$$

defines dimensions of analysis rather than numerical observables.

Empirical application therefore requires a mapping

$$\mathcal{O}_D : \mathcal{D}_{\text{concept}} \longrightarrow \mathcal{D}_{\text{obs}}, \quad (351)$$

where $\mathcal{O}_D$ denotes a domain-specific operationalization.

Possible evidence may include ritual interaction, linguistic address, narratives of divine action, testimony concerning perceived response, institutional rules, bodily practice, material organization, historical documents, patterns of normative attribution, or longitudinal change.

Different dimensions may require different methods.

For example,

$$a_t$$

may be investigated through prayer language and ritual address, while

$$w_t$$

may require examination of moral practice, oaths, confession, or narratives of divine observation.

The existence of one indicator should not be treated as sufficient evidence for the complete profile.

Research Obligation 10.8 (Multimethod operationalization). Empirical GRR should operationalize each relevant relational dimension through evidence appropriate to that dimension and should state the uncertainty of the resulting reconstruction.

10.9 Subjectivation as Process and Causal Inference

The notation

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \quad (352)$$

can easily be read as a causal claim.

At the present stage, $\mathcal{U}_t$ denotes a family of possible subjectivation processes. A stronger causal interpretation requires evidence concerning the mechanisms connecting initial and later configurations.

Let

$$\mathbb{U}_t = \{U_t^L, U_t^R, U_t^{\text{Nar}}, U_t^A, U_t^M, U_t^I, U_t^C, U_t^E\}$$

denote the candidate mechanism set introduced earlier.

A domain-specific causal analysis would require estimating or otherwise establishing relations of the form

$$U_{t,k} \longrightarrow \Delta \mathbf{TS}_{t:t+H}(T). \quad (353)$$

Historical coincidence, correlation, sequence, and causal participation should therefore remain distinguishable.

Research Obligation 10.9 (Causal specification). Claims that a particular ritual, institution, narrative, material structure, or experience produces a dimension of transcendent subjecthood should specify the proposed causal pathway and plausible competing explanations.

The broader symbol

$$\rightsquigarrow$$

should continue to indicate generative participation where causal identification remains incomplete.

10.10 Recursive Causation and Endogeneity

GRR frequently employs recursive structures such as

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow H_{t+1} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}. \quad (354)$$

Such recursion introduces endogeneity. Human subjects participate in forming the later manifestation of the transcendent subject, while the transcendent subject participates in forming those human subjects.

A simple correlation between

$$H_t$$

and

$$T_t^{\text{subj}}$$

therefore provides limited information about directionality.

Empirical work should distinguish at least:

$$H_t \rightarrow T_{t+1}, \quad T_t \rightarrow H_{t+1}, \quad Z_t \rightarrow (H_{t+1}, T_{t+1}), \quad (355)$$

where Z_t denotes common conditions.

Longitudinal, historical, comparative, experimental, or process-tracing methods may provide different forms of evidence for these relations.

Research Obligation 10.10 (Recursive identification). Empirical claims concerning co-formation should distinguish reciprocal participation from common-cause dependence wherever the available evidence permits such distinction.

10.11 Distributed Subjecthood and the Problem of Localization

The distributed account of transcendent subjecthood creates another question: where exactly is the subject position located?

The framework proposes

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} = \Psi_t(\mathcal{C}_T, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{P}_t). \quad (356)$$

This expression distributes relational maintenance across carriers, practices, and relations. It does not imply that the transcendent subject can be reduced to the physical sum of those components.

At the analytical level, localization may itself be plural:

$$\text{Loc}_{\text{rel}}(T) = \{\text{text, ritual, memory, institution, body, place, } \dots\}. \quad (357)$$

The subject position is re-actualized through different parts of this configuration at different moments.

This creates a research obligation to distinguish distributed maintenance from ontological location.

Research Obligation 10.11 (Localization discipline). Claims concerning distributed transcendent subjecthood should specify the carriers through which the subject position becomes relationally available while leaving the ontological location of a possible referent as a separate question.

10.12 System Boundary and Scale Dependence

Relational configurations are always described within a selected analytical boundary.

Let

$$\Sigma = (B, H, \sigma) \quad (358)$$

denote system boundary B , temporal horizon H , and analytical scale σ .

A transcendent position may exhibit strong subjecthood within one configuration and weak subjecthood within another:

$$\mathbf{TS}_{\Sigma_1}(T) \neq \mathbf{TS}_{\Sigma_2}(T). \quad (359)$$

A deity may possess strong institutional authority at the level of an official religious organization and limited relevance within a particular household. An ancestor may occupy a powerful subject position within a family while having little relational presence at a national scale.

No contradiction follows from these differences. They arise from changes in the system under analysis.

Research Obligation 10.12 (Scale specification). GRR studies should state their system boundary, temporal horizon, and analytical scale before making claims concerning relational reality, subjecthood, persistence, or generative effect.

10.13 Power and the Construction of Religious Legibility

Religious configurations are generated within asymmetric fields of authority. Some participants possess greater capacities to define orthodoxy, interpret texts, authorize ritual, classify experience, preserve archives, control sacred spaces, or suppress alternative forms.

Let

$$\Pi_t$$

denote the relevant distribution of generative capacities. Then

$$\Pi_t \rightsquigarrow \hat{\mathfrak{G}}_{t+1}^{\text{public}} \quad (360)$$

represents the participation of power in determining which religious forms become publicly visible and authoritative.

The observed religious configuration may therefore differ from the broader field of possible or suppressed configurations:

$$\hat{\mathfrak{G}}_t^{\text{public}} \subseteq \mathfrak{G}_t^{\text{possible}}. \quad (361)$$

Genealogical approaches to religion make this problem particularly visible [1].

GRR should consequently examine how authority affects the formation of what appears to count as the voice, intention, doctrine, or legitimate relation of a transcendent subject.

Research Obligation 10.13 (Power-sensitive reconstruction). Research on transcendent subject formation should examine differential capacities to authorize, reproduce, contest, circulate, preserve, and suppress particular manifestations of the transcendent subject.

10.14 The Divine Voice and Human Mediation

The distinction

$$T^* ; V_t^T \quad (362)$$

introduced in Section 6 creates a particularly sensitive research boundary.

A historically available divine voice may be mediated through

$$V_t^T = \mathcal{V} \left(Y_t, \mathcal{I}_t, I_t, \Pi_t^I, \Gamma_t \right). \quad (363)$$

This permits detailed analysis of scripture, interpretation, translation, institutional authority, ritual performance, and historical conditions.

Such analysis can also reveal contestation:

$$V_t^{T,(1)} \neq V_t^{T,(2)}. \quad (364)$$

Different groups may attribute incompatible commands or intentions to the same named transcendent subject.

GRR can analyse how these voices are generated and authorized. Evaluation of their relation to a possible metaphysical source requires additional theological, philosophical, historical, or epistemological argument.

This distinction supplies a critical resource without predetermining metaphysical conclusions.

10.15 Relational Reality and Normative Evaluation

A religious configuration can possess strong generative efficacy while producing very different ethical consequences.

Let

$$G_t(T)$$

denote the strength of generative participation and

$$J_t(T)$$

a separate normative evaluation.

Then

$$G_t(T) ; J_t(T) \quad (365)$$

records their analytical independence.

A highly persistent transcendent subject may support solidarity, compassion, care, restraint, trust, and long-term cooperation. Another configuration may support domination, exclusion, fear, persecution, epistemic closure, or destruction. A single configuration may participate in several of these processes simultaneously across different subjects and scales.

GRR therefore requires an additional normative layer for judgments concerning justice, harm, domination, flourishing, or desirable generativity.

Research Obligation 10.14 (Normative separation). Relational persistence, sacredness, transcendence, and generative efficacy should not be treated as evidence of ethical legitimacy or justice.

The development of a specifically Generative Relational ethics or justice framework lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

10.16 Conceptual Overextension

GRR also faces a risk of classifying too many phenomena as religious.

Political leaders, nations, legal systems, scientific institutions, markets, technologies, or ideological movements may acquire properties such as ultimate-reference significance, ritualization, witnessing, normativity, or subject-like attribution.

Their possession of these dimensions creates legitimate possibilities for structural comparison.

It does not independently determine their classification as religion.

Let

$$\mathbf{RT}(X)$$

denote a religious-transcendence profile. Then

$$\mathbf{RT}(X) > 0 \tag{366}$$

provides a relational observation.

Classification requires a separate function:

$$\text{ReligClass}(X) = \mathcal{K}(X, H, L, I, C), \tag{367}$$

where historical, linguistic, institutional, and cultural conditions enter the classification.

GRR should therefore preserve a distinction between

$$\text{religious-like relational structure ; classification as religion.} \tag{368}$$

10.17 Formalism and Epistemic Proportionality

The equations throughout this paper provide conceptual organization. Their formal appearance can exceed the precision supported by present evidence.

Expressions such as

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t) \tag{369}$$

define coordinates without assigning validated scales.

Similarly,

$$\mathfrak{R}_{t+1} = \Phi(\mathfrak{R}_t, \Gamma_t, \Pi_t) \tag{370}$$

specifies a dependency architecture without identifying a unique transition function.

The degree of formalization should therefore remain proportional to the available epistemic support.

Research Obligation 10.15 (Formal proportionality). Mathematical notation in GRR should introduce distinctions, dependencies, or testable structures that improve analytical precision. Additional formal complexity requires corresponding conceptual or empirical justification.

10.18 Research Programme and Empirical Development

The framework generates several families of research questions.

Historical research can reconstruct trajectories of transcendent subjectivation:

$$\mathbf{TS}_{t_1}(T) \longrightarrow \mathbf{TS}_{t_2}(T). \tag{371}$$

Ethnographic research can examine how addressability, witnessing, response, care, or normative authority are enacted within lived religious relations.

Linguistic research can analyse pronouns, address forms, reported speech, agency attribution, and translation through which transcendent subjecthood is organized.

Ritual studies can investigate how repeated practices re-actualize particular dimensions of a transcendent subject.

Material-religion research can examine how objects, spaces, bodies, sound, images, and technologies mediate relational presence.

Institutional research can reconstruct the processes through which particular interpretations acquire authority.

Comparative work can examine how different traditions distribute sacredness, transcendence, ultimacy, and subjecthood across different configurations.

Longitudinal and historical work can investigate subjectivation, desubjectivation, sacralization, desacralization, migration of relational functions, and branching religious trajectories.

These research programmes need not share a single empirical method. GRR functions as an analytical architecture through which heterogeneous evidence can be related to common research problems.

10.19 Conditions of Revision

A foundational framework should specify circumstances under which its concepts lose explanatory value.

The present proposal would require substantial revision under several conditions.

First, if

$$\text{Sac, Div, Trans, Ult, Subj}$$

cannot be distinguished with sufficient conceptual or empirical consistency, their separation would require reconstruction.

Second, if the profile

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T)$$

systematically imposes person-like structures upon traditions whose own relational configurations resist such description, transcendent subjecthood would need narrower scope or alternative formulations.

Third, if the process

$$\mathcal{U}_t$$

cannot be distinguished from already established concepts such as personification, attribution, projection, ritualization, collective representation, or institutionalization, its independent explanatory role would be reduced.

Fourth, if the distinction

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{subj}}$$

produces no analytical consequences in concrete cases, the architecture of ontological openness would require reconsideration.

Fifth, if comparative applications repeatedly require incompatible meanings of the central GRR categories, the general framework may need to fragment into more local theoretical families.

Sixth, if relational analysis consistently obscures structures made clearer through another vocabulary, GRR should yield to that vocabulary within the relevant domain.

These possible failures can be summarized as

$$\mathcal{F}_{\text{GRR}} = \{F_{\text{dist}}, F_{\text{bias}}, F_{\text{redund}}, F_{\text{ont}}, F_{\text{comp}}, F_{\text{adequacy}}\}, \quad (372)$$

denoting failures of distinction, cultural adequacy, explanatory non-redundancy, ontological separation, comparative portability, and wider descriptive adequacy.

Claim 10.16 (Revisability of GRR). Generative Relational Religious Studies warrants retention to the extent that its relational distinctions and generative architecture produce explanatory, comparative, or critical gains that remain unavailable with equal adequacy through existing conceptual frameworks.

10.20 Research Obligations

The preceding discussion generates a provisional set of research obligations:

$$\mathfrak{O}_{\text{GRR}} = \{O_R, O_T, O_S, O_E, O_C, O_P, O_B, O_N, O_F\}, \quad (373)$$

where the terms denote revisability, theological reflexivity, subjecthood specificity, evidential accountability, causal specification, power-sensitive analysis, boundary specification, normative separation, and formal proportionality.

These obligations should accompany the use of the framework rather than function as later qualifications appended after analysis.

The research cycle can therefore be represented as

$$\boxed{\text{provisional theory} \rightarrow \text{historical configuration} \rightarrow \text{relational reconstruction} \rightarrow \text{empirical or comparative challenge} -} \quad (374)$$

This cycle extends the general–special–particular dialectic into the methodological organization of GRR itself.

10.21 Boundary of the Present Contribution

The present paper establishes a provisional architecture for Generative Relational Religious Studies around the sequence

$$\boxed{X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}.} \quad (375)$$

It distinguishes sacred and transcendent positioning from subjectivation, treats transcendent subjecthood as multidimensional, places human and transcendent subjects within recursive co-formation, embeds religious relations within material and institutional history, and develops a comparative methodology in which encounters with particular traditions can revise the general theory.

The architecture preserves a separate variable for possible ontological reality:

$$\boxed{T^* ; X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}.} \quad (376)$$

The left side remains a possible object of theological and metaphysical inquiry. The right side identifies the historical and relational processes that constitute the primary domain of GRR.

Several questions remain for later work: the detailed epistemology through which claims concerning transcendence are evaluated, possible cross-relational invariants among heterogeneous manifestations, normative evaluation of religious generativity, and concrete comparative studies capable of testing and revising the proposed categories.

Section 11 concludes by drawing together the resulting definition of GRR and the research programme generated by these distinctions.

11 Conclusion

This paper has proposed *Generative Relational Religious Studies* (GRR) as a provisional research programme for studying the formation, stabilization, transformation, and recursive participation of religious relational configurations. Its central concern has been the relation among divinity, transcendence, and transcendent subject formation within historically situated generative systems.

The discussion began from a methodological distinction inherited from the concept of relational reality:

$$T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}}, \quad (377)$$

where T^* denotes a possible transcendent referent and T_t^{rel} a historically situated relational manifestation.

This distinction permits detailed analysis of religious manifestation while leaving the ontological status of a possible transcendent referent open to further philosophical, theological, historical, and other forms of inquiry. GRR therefore locates its primary analytical domain within the processes through which religious forms become relationally available and generatively consequential.

11.1 The Generative Architecture of GRR

The central architecture developed throughout the paper can be summarized as

$$\boxed{X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{U_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}.} \quad (378)$$

The transitions in Equation 378 represent analytically distinct processes.

The first,

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}}, \quad (379)$$

concerns sacralization, divine configuration, or transcendent positioning.

The second,

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{U_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}, \quad (380)$$

concerns transcendent subject formation.

The third,

$$T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}}, \quad (381)$$

concerns the generative participation of the transcendent subject position in later psychological, normative, ritual, institutional, material, and relational development.

The final transition expresses recursion. The transformed religious field becomes one of the conditions through which the transcendent subject is later manifested, interpreted, reproduced, contested, or transformed.

This architecture supplies a processual vocabulary for religious development without requiring every religious configuration to follow the same sequence. The processes may occur with different strengths, in different orders, and through different historical mechanisms.

11.2 Divinity, Transcendence, and Subjecthood

A central contribution of the paper has been the separation of several dimensions frequently treated together:

$$\boxed{\text{Sac} ; \text{Div} ; \text{Trans} ; \text{Ult} ; \text{Subj}.} \quad (382)$$

Sacredness concerns relational differentiation.

Divinity concerns a special relational configuration involving sacred, transcendent, ultimate-reference, normative, generative, or related significance.

Transcendence concerns a relational position that exceeds a specified boundary of finite participation.

Ultimate reference concerns higher-order orientation in domains such as value, normativity, meaning, or knowledge.

Subjecthood concerns the organization of properties through which a position becomes addressable, agentic, witnessing, responsive, remembering, normatively authoritative, caring, intentional, or otherwise subject-like.

The distinction permits heterogeneous religious configurations to be described without adopting a personal transcendent deity as their universal form.

A configuration may exhibit substantial transcendence with limited subjecthood:

$$\text{Trans}(X) > 0, \quad \text{Subj}(X) \approx 0. \quad (383)$$

Another may exhibit strong subjecthood within a localized relational field and comparatively limited transcendence:

$$\text{Subj}(X) > 0, \quad \text{Trans}(X) \text{ remains locally bounded.} \quad (384)$$

The coupling among these dimensions therefore becomes an empirical, historical, and comparative question.

11.3 Transcendent Subject Formation

The central new research object of the paper is

$$\boxed{T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (385)$$

Transcendent subjecthood was represented as a multidimensional configuration:

$$\mathbf{TS}_t(T) = (a_t, g_t, w_t, r_t, m_t, n_t, c_t, i_t), \quad (386)$$

where the dimensions provisionally denote addressability, attributed agency, witnessing, responsiveness, relational memory, normative authority, care, and intention.

This formulation permits degrees and configurations of subjecthood. A transcendent position can be highly addressable while weakly responsive, strongly witnessing while minimally agentic, strongly normative while weakly person-like, or organized through other combinations.

Subjectivation was further analysed through heterogeneous mechanisms:

$$\mathbb{U}_t = \{U_t^L, U_t^R, U_t^{Nar}, U_t^A, U_t^M, U_t^I, U_t^C, U_t^E\}, \quad (387)$$

including language, ritual, narrative, affect, material mediation, institutional stabilization, collective recognition, and interpreted experience.

The theoretical contribution of $\mathcal{U}_t$ therefore lies in the organization of these heterogeneous processes around the development of a multidimensional transcendent subject position.

The framework leaves the ontological question separate:

$$\boxed{T^* ; T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t} T_t^{\text{subj}}}. \quad (388)$$

The formation represented on the right concerns relational manifestation and subject position. The possible ontology of T^* requires additional argument.

11.4 Human and Transcendent Subject Co-Formation

The generative structure becomes especially significant when human and transcendent subject positions participate in one another's subsequent development.

The relation was represented as

$$\boxed{H_t^{\text{subj}} \Leftrightarrow T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow (H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}, T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}).} \quad (389)$$

Human subjects participate in reproducing, interpreting, ritualizing, remembering, and contesting the historically available form of the transcendent subject. The transcendent subject position can simultaneously participate in the formation of desire, identity, normativity, affect, knowledge, practice, and relations among those human subjects.

Co-formation describes reciprocal generative participation. It carries no assumption of symmetry. Religious relations may involve substantial asymmetries of knowledge, authority, dependence, agency, or value.

This formulation creates a research object wider than propositional belief. The question becomes how a person is formed through relation to a transcendent subject and how that transformed person subsequently participates in the historical life of the transcendent position.

11.5 Religious Recursion and Historical Materiality

The co-formation of subjects occurs within wider ritual, institutional, material, and historical systems.

The paper therefore developed the recursive structure

$$\boxed{T_t^{\text{subj}} \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}}.} \quad (390)$$

Ritual can repeatedly re-actualize addressability, witnessing, response, normative authority, or other dimensions of subjecthood. Institutions can preserve and authorize relational forms across generations. Material carriers can provide durable sites of religious presence. Collective and relational memory can connect previous interactions to later expectations. Interpretive authority can shape the historically available voice attributed to the transcendent subject.

The distinction

$$T^* ; V_t^T \quad (391)$$

was introduced to preserve a further analytical boundary. The historically available divine voice V_t^T may depend upon texts, translation, interpretation, institutions, ritual practice, power, and historical conditions. These mediations can be investigated without requiring a prior judgment concerning the metaphysical source represented by T^* .

The same recursive logic extends to historical materiality:

$$\boxed{\Gamma_t \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_t^{\text{relig}} \rightsquigarrow \Gamma_{t+1} \longrightarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}}.} \quad (392)$$

Religious configurations emerge within historically structured material, political, linguistic, technological, ecological, and institutional conditions. Once relationally established, they can participate in the subsequent transformation of those conditions.

Religion can therefore occupy successive positions as both historically conditioned and historically conditioning.

This recursive historical materiality creates a shared analytical domain in which historical-material approaches can reconstruct religious generation while religious-realist and other metaphysical positions retain their different accounts of ultimate reality.

11.6 Transformation and Religious Trajectories

GRR also treats religious configurations as trajectories.

Subjectivation may be followed by stabilization, transformation, or desubjectivation:

$$T_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_t^+} T_t^{\text{subj}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{U}_{t+1}^-} T_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (393)$$

Sacralization may be followed by desacralization or resacralization:

$$X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_t^+} X_t^{\text{sac}} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{S}_{t+1}^-} X_{t+1}^{\text{rel}}. \quad (394)$$

Such changes permit religious transformation to be described through changes in configuration rather than through a single scalar measure of religiosity.

A named deity may retain strong sacredness while losing subject-like responsiveness. A ritual may retain cultural persistence while its transcendent function weakens. A formerly abstract principle may acquire greater agency and addressability. A sacred function may migrate from one carrier or institution to another.

Religious history can consequently be analysed as movement through a multidimensional relational space.

11.7 Comparative Generativity

The comparative programme developed in this paper treats GRR categories as interfaces among historically heterogeneous conceptual systems.

Let

$$\mathcal{L}_k$$

denote the local conceptual vocabulary of a religious configuration. Comparison proceeds through a provisional relational reconstruction:

$$\mathcal{L}_k \longrightarrow \mathfrak{G}_k^{\text{GRR}}. \quad (395)$$

Two cases can then be compared along explicitly selected dimensions:

$$\text{Cmp}_D(\mathfrak{G}_i, \mathfrak{G}_j). \quad (396)$$

Comparability is local to D . Similarity along one relational dimension carries no general inference of theological, metaphysical, historical, or ritual equivalence.

The comparative method therefore follows the cycle

$$\boxed{\text{local description} \rightarrow \text{relational reconstruction} \rightarrow \text{partial comparison} \rightarrow \text{difference} \rightarrow \text{revision}.} \quad (397)$$

The final transition gives comparative inquiry a generative role in theory development.

This expresses the wider dialectical relation among general, special, and particular:

$$\boxed{\mathcal{G}_t \longrightarrow \mathcal{S}_{k,t} \longrightarrow \mathcal{P}_{k,j,t} \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{G}_{t+1}.} \quad (398)$$

The general framework guides inquiry into special domains and particular historical cases. Particular cases may disclose relations excluded or distorted by the existing framework. GRR should then permit the general categories themselves to change.

Comparative religious studies thereby becomes one of the mechanisms through which GRR develops.

11.8 The Standing of Generative Relational Religious Studies

GRR can now be characterized through several methodological commitments.

It studies religious phenomena as historically situated relational configurations with generative trajectories.

It distinguishes relational manifestation from possible ontological reality.

It separates sacredness, divinity, transcendence, ultimacy, and subjecthood where their analytical distinction improves inquiry.

It treats transcendent subjecthood as multidimensional.

It examines the heterogeneous processes through which subject-like religious positions are formed, stabilized, transformed, and dissolved.

It places human and transcendent subject positions within recursive co-formation.

It includes ritual, institutions, material mediation, memory, interpretation, and power within the conditions of religious generation.

It permits historical-material and metaphysically heterogeneous approaches to share relational objects of inquiry while preserving their differences.

It treats comparative categories as revisable interfaces and allows particular traditions to transform the general framework through which they are studied.

These commitments can be summarized as

$$\boxed{\text{GRR} = \langle \text{relationality, generation, historicity, recursion, plurality, revisability} \rangle .} \quad (399)$$

The expression identifies methodological orientations rather than ontological primitives.

11.9 Research Directions

The present framework generates several immediate directions for subsequent work.

First, transcendent subject formation requires concrete historical and comparative investigation. The dimensions represented in $\mathbf{TS}_t(T)$ should be examined through actual religious practices, texts, institutions, narratives, experiences, and material environments.

Second, the mechanisms contained in $\mathbb{U}_t$ require empirical differentiation. Future work should ask which combinations of ritual, language, narrative, material mediation, institutional authority, collective recognition, affect, and interpreted experience contribute to particular dimensions of transcendent subjecthood.

Third, comparative studies should test the portability of the distinctions among sacredness, divinity, transcendence, ultimacy, and subjecthood across substantially different religious and philosophical traditions.

Fourth, recursive religious generation requires historical case studies capable of tracing how transcendent subject positions participate in institutions, norms, material practices, human subject formation, and later religious transformation.

Fifth, the role of power requires sustained investigation. Particular institutions and actors possess unequal capacities to authorize divine voice, define orthodoxy, preserve religious memory, classify legitimate experience, and suppress alternative manifestations.

Sixth, normative questions concerning generative religious configurations require a separate ethical framework. Persistence and generative efficacy do not establish justice, goodness, or flourishing.

A further epistemological programme concerns heterogeneous access to possible reality. Different relational systems may manifest a possible shared referent through substantially different structures:

$$T^* ; T_t^{(1)}, T_t^{(2)}, \dots, T_t^{(n)}. \quad (400)$$

The question of whether any structures remain invariant across such manifestations belongs to subsequent work on cross-relational invariance and the epistemology of reality.

11.10 Final Synthesis

The principal proposal of this paper can now be condensed into one relational cycle:

$$\begin{array}{c}
 T^* ; X_t^{\text{rel}} \xrightarrow{S_t} T_t^{\text{rel}} \\
 \xrightarrow{U_t} T_t^{\text{subj}} \\
 \rightsquigarrow H_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} \\
 \rightsquigarrow \mathfrak{R}_{t+1}^{\text{relig}} \\
 \rightsquigarrow T_{t+1}^{\text{subj}} .
 \end{array} \tag{401}$$

A possible transcendent reality occupies the ontologically open position on the left. The remaining sequence describes the domain of GRR: manifestation, sacralization, transcendent positioning, subjectivation, relational participation, human subject formation, institutional and material reproduction, and historical regeneration.

The framework therefore permits the study of a religious subject as something more than a proposition believed by human beings. A transcendent subject may be addressed, remembered, witnessed by, responded to, loved, feared, obeyed, contested, interpreted, institutionalized, materially mediated, and carried across generations. These relations can acquire sufficient persistence to participate in the formation of persons and worlds. The persons and worlds so formed then participate in the later manifestation of the transcendent subject.

Generative Relational Religious Studies takes this recursive field as its principal object of inquiry.

Its concepts remain provisional. Its comparative categories remain open to transformation through the traditions they encounter. Its historical analyses remain answerable to evidence. Its metaphysical boundaries remain explicit. Within these disciplines, GRR offers a framework for studying how religion becomes relationally real, how transcendence acquires historically situated forms, how transcendent subjects become relationally organized, and how those subjects subsequently participate in the continuing generation of religious life.

References

- [1] Talal Asad. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.
- [2] Catherine Bell. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.
- [3] Peter L. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1967.
- [4] Martin Buber. *I and Thou*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1970.
- [5] Émile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Free Press, New York, 1995.
- [6] Ludwig Feuerbach. *The Essence of Christianity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011. English translation first published in 1854.

- [7] Adrian Johnston. Jacques lacan. In Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, editors, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, spring 2026 edition, 2026.
- [8] Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2006. Translated by Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg.
- [9] Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume 1. Penguin Books, London, 1990.
- [10] Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume 3. Penguin Books, London, 1991.
- [11] Karl Marx. A contribution to the critique of hegel’s philosophy of right: Introduction. In Joseph J. O’Malley, editor, *Marx: Early Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, pages 57–70. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.
- [12] Nāgārjuna. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.
- [13] Rudolf Otto. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1958. English translation originally published in 1923.
- [14] Roy A. Rappaport. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Number 110 in Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
- [15] Victor W. Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, 1969.