

ABSTRACT

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The Ideal Religious Experience

(Under the Direction of Dr. Leonard L. Martin)

In previous studies, participating in religious experiences has correlated with better coping with loss, cancer, and alcoholism. This experiment is attempting to help researchers discover the best type and place for a person to achieve a religious experience and whether religiosity is useful for people. Participants were asked to answer a number of different surveys and open-ended questions. The different surveys used were the Allport and Ross Religious Orientation Scale, Batson's Quest Scale, the NEO-FFI Scale, and a religiosity scale designed by Laura B. Koenig, Matt McGue, and William G. Iacono. These surveys were used to categorize the participants into groups relating to their personalities, religiosity, and background information. The open-ended questions asked the participants what happened during their ideal religious experience and where they would most likely achieve it. The participants' answers to these questions were then grouped together based on common language used in the essays. The study found that people who truly believe in their religion (have intrinsic personalities on the Religious Orientation Scale) tend to have higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion. Also, there was a correlation between people with certain types of personalities and the religious experiences they will most likely achieve. People who have intrinsic religious personalities are more likely to have religious experiences where they feel secure, and people who are more extraverted and not neurotic are more likely statistically to have their ideal religious experiences when they are alone.

INDEX WORDS: Religious experience, Psychology, Allport and Ross Religious Orientation Scale, Batson's Quest Scale, NEO-FFI Scale, Personality, Religiosity

THE IDEAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

BY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There has been much research exploring the effects of religiousness and religious orientation on people's lives. In research done by Marvin Acklin, Earl Brown, and Paul Mauger, it was discovered that cancer patients with intrinsic orientations toward religion (people who truly believe in their religion) had higher levels of life meaning, lower levels of despair, and lower levels of social isolation than cancer patients who did not have intrinsic orientations toward religion (1983). Other research has shown that cancer patients with religious beliefs tend to have greater life satisfaction and report significantly lower levels of pain than cancer patients without these beliefs (Yates, Chalmer, St. James, Follansbee, & McKegey, 2006). Dr. Maria Carroll's research has shown that spirituality and how it interacts with psychological well-being were important factors in helping people overcome alcoholism (1997). This is further emphasized in the Alcoholics Anonymous program that places a large emphasis on a growth in spirituality (2001). Furthermore, other research has shown that parents who have lost a child to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) had an easier time coping with the loss if they had greater religious participation and placed greater importance on religion. Specifically, these parents showed increased perception of social support and greater meaning found in the loss if they had greater religious participation, and they showed better cognitive processing and finding meaning in the death if they found importance in religion (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1995).

However, there has been little research as to what comprises the ideal religious

experience for different types of people and if there are predicting factors that could possibly help a person achieve a religious experience. This study is measuring the relationship between peoples' personalities, attitudes towards religion, background information, what comprises their ideal religious experiences, and where those experiences occur. This information can hopefully be used by individuals or therapists to assist others in achieving religious experiences. Just having these experiences can be beneficial to people; however, it is also possible that having religious experiences would promote someone into joining a religious community, and this could possibly provide additional benefits as well.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study used one hundred and fifty-nine male and female undergraduate students who received partial credit in their introduction psychology class for participating in the experiment.

Materials

The background questions used in this study (see Appendix A) were self-made. The questions were designed to ascertain information about the participants' history, family information, and religious beliefs. The Koenig et al religiosity scale (see Appendix B) was designed to see how often people perform religious activities. It focuses on how often people pray, go to religious services, etc. However, this data has not yet been analyzed.

The Allport & Ross Religious Orientation Scale (see Appendix C) measures people's orientation towards religion. It categorizes people as being either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic people turn to religion because of something inside of themselves. People who are intrinsic toward religion choose to be religious and perform religious activities on their own accord. Extrinsic people turn to religion because of something outside of themselves. For example, they go to church because their parents made them go. The next inventory used was Batson's Quest Scale (see Appendix D). This also measures peoples' orientations toward religion. The three

dimensions measured in the Quest Scale are “readiness to face existential questions without reducing complexity,” “self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive,” and “openness to change.” People who are high on any of these dimensions are searching for more meaning with their religion.

The other questionnaire used in the experiment was the NEO-FFI Scale (see Appendix E). This scale measures the Big-Five personality traits of introversion/extraversion, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. These five traits are broad dimensions of the personality developed through lexical analysis (Goldberg, 1993). The participants then answered three different essay questions relating to their ideal religious experience (see appendix F). The first question deals with what the participants believe happen in their ideal religious experience. The participants’ responses were then grouped into five categories based on the language in their essays. The five common emotions that the participants thought were important during the experience were clarity, happiness, security, a connection, or not possible. The second question deals with how many times the participants have achieved this experience, and the third question deals with where they are most likely to achieve this experience. The participants’ responses to this question were also grouped into five categories based on common language in the responses. The five places the participants felt were most conducive to a religious experience were at a crucial life event (ex. Wedding, Bar Mitzvah, etc.), anywhere, alone, on a retreat/with others, or at a religious institution.

Procedure

The participants came to the psychology building where they filled out a consent form and received instructions for how to do the study. The entire study was on the computer. The

participants began by filling out background questions relating to their living environment, family background, and religious history. Then, the participants proceeded to answer several different questionnaires relating to their religiosity, religious orientation, and personality. All of the different questionnaires used Likert scales. Finally, the participants answered the three essay questions. After the participants finished the study, they received a debriefing statement giving them some information relating to the purpose of the experiment.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

To analyze the data, the answers to the background questions were looked at, and the participants were grouped as either Christian or non-Christian. The religiosity scale has not yet been analyzed. The participants were then placed into other categories based on their answers to the questionnaires. The essays were then coded by the experimenters based on common language used by the participants. After these pairings and groupings were made, the different groups that the participants were placed in were correlated together. This analysis was done using two-tailed t-tests. There were several significant results that were gathered from the responses and correlations. The data from several of the background questions and the religiosity scale have not yet been analyzed. The results are presented in the following tables.

* = Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1

Correlations between Different Dimensions of Essay 1

Essay 1 Groupings		Essay 1 Group (Happiness)	Essay 1 Group (Connection)
Connection with God	Pearson Correlation	-.166*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	
	N	159	159
Religious experience not possible	Pearson Correlation	-.179*	-.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.010
	N	159	159

Table 2

Correlations between NEO-FFI Scale and Essay 1

NEO-FFI Groupings		Essay 1 Group (Clarity)
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	-.156*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050
	N	159

Table 3

Correlations between Religious Orientation Scale and Essay 1

Religious Orientation Scale Groupings		Essay 1 Group (Security)
Intrinsic	Pearson Correlation	.180*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023
	N	159

Table 4

Correlations between Quest Scale and Essay 1

Quest Scale Groupings		Essay 1 Group (Security)
Self-criticism and perception of self doubt as positive	Pearson Correlation	-.156*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049
	N	159
Openness to change	Pearson Correlation	-.216**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006
	N	159

Table 5

Correlations between Essay 3 and Essay 1

Essay 2 Groupings		Essay 1 Group (Happiness)	Essay 1 Group (Not possible)
With others	Pearson Correlation	.160*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	Not significant
	N	159	
Anywhere	Pearson Correlation		-.162*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Not significant	.042
	N		159

Table 6

Correlations between Different Dimensions of NEO-FFI Scale

NEO-FFI Groupings		NEO-FFI Group (Extraversion)	NEO-FFI Group (Neuroticism)	NEO-FFI Group (Conscientiousness)
Neuroticism	Correlation Coefficient	-.326**	1.000	-.443**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	159	159	159
Agreeableness	Correlation Coefficient	.357**	-.364**	.221**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.005
	N	159	159	159
Conscientiousness	Correlation Coefficient	.306**	-.443**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	159	159	159

Table 7

Correlations between Batson's Quest Scale and the NEO-FFI Scale

Quest Scale Groupings		NEO-FFI Group (Extraversion)	NEO-FFI Group (Neuroticism)	NEO-FFI Group (Openness)	NEO-FFI Group (Agreeableness)	NEO-FFI Group (Conscientiousness)
Readiness to face existential questions without reducing complexity	Correlation Coefficient	.176* -	.206**	.194*		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.009	.014	Not significant	Not significant
	N	159	159	159		
Self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive	Correlation Coefficient		.157*	.279**	.223** -	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Not significant	.048	.000	.005	Not significant
	N		159	159	159	
Openness to change	Correlation Coefficient		.243**	.172*	.182* -	-.188*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Not significant	.002	.030	.022	.018
	N		159	159	159	159

Table 8

Correlations between Religious Orientation Scale and NEO-FFI Scale

Religious Orientation Scale Groupings		NEO-FFI Group (Extraversion)	NEO-FFI Group (Neuroticism)	NEO-FFI Group (Agreeableness)	NEO-FFI Group (Conscientiousness)
Extrinsic	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	Not significant	Not significant	.217** .006 159	Not significant
Intrinsic	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.310** .000 159	-.250** .001 159	.355** .000 159	.236** .003 159

Table 9

Correlations between NEO-FFI Scale and Essay 3

NEO-FFI Groupings		Essay 3 Group (Alone)	Essay 3 Group (Religious Institutions)
Extraversion	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.168* .034 159	Not significant
Neuroticism	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.173* .029 159	Not significant
Agreeableness	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	Not significant	.227** .004 159

Table 10

Correlations between Religious Orientation Scale and Batson's Quest Scale

Religious Orientation Scale Groupings		Quest Scale Group (Readiness to face existential questions without reducing complexity)	Quest Scale Group (Self-criticism and perception of self-doubt as positive)	Quest Scale Group (Openness to change)
Extrinsic	Correlation Coefficient	.199*	.295**	.271**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.000	.001
	N	159	159	159
Intrinsic	Correlation Coefficient		.273**	.290**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	Not significant	.000	.000
	N		159	159

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study gathered several significant results from correlations between different dimensions of people's personalities, religious beliefs, and experiences. The study found that extraverted people are more likely to achieve their ideal religious experience alone rather than in a group. This information could be useful in a clinical setting for a person who is trying to put more religion into his/her life. Often times a supportive religious community is important in helping people overcome difficult situations and times. Having an ideal religious experience could possibly influence a previously non-religious person into wanting to be part of a religious community, and this could help this person possibly overcome alcoholism or cope with cancer.

The finding that people who are agreeable will most likely have their ideal religious experience in a religious setting such as a church or synagogue is also interesting and possibly useful for therapists. If there is somebody who takes the NEO-FFI Scale and has an agreeable personality, then that person could be recommended to go to a religious institution if he/she wanted to have a religious experience. However, therapists promoting going to a religious institution and becoming more religious could possibly have ethical issues associated with it.

Another finding of this study was that people who truly believe in their religion (people who have intrinsic personalities) are more extraverted, more conscientious, more agreeable, and less neurotic than people who do not truly believe in their religion (people who have extrinsic and quest personalities.) The causation of this relationship cannot be determined by this study

because it is measuring correlations. However, this data could also be useful for therapists or people in general in the future if the reasoning for this correlation is determined. If it is discovered that truly believing in something can cause all of these positive personality traits, then that could be helpful for people who lack those traits. If it is discovered that people with those traits are more likely to truly believe in some sort of religion, then that could be useful for people who could use religion to overcome their trying times. Other outside factor(s) could also cause this correlation, and discovering the other factor(s) would be useful as well.

Also, people who have intrinsic personalities are most likely to feel secure during their ideal religious experience while people who are quest do not usually feel secure during their ideal religious experience. This finding suggests that people who truly believe in their religion often times are looking for a sense of safety in their troubled/busy lives. People with intrinsic personalities usually have to make sure that everything is going to be fine, and that is why they have turned to a higher power and religion. This is contrasted to the people who are still searching for what they truly believe in. Often times, people with quest personalities do not need the security in knowing that everything is going to be fine with their lives. Instead, they are looking for what they consider to be the truth, and this is not necessarily a comforting discovery.

Another finding was that people who believe that the ideal religious experience is important because it gives them a connection with God usually do not have positive emotions during this experience. This is a difficult correlation to interpret. However, it seems to suggest that people who have a religious experience where they feel connected to God have an experience that is not confined by positive emotions.

Performing this study in a country that is not predominantly Christian would be helpful in seeing if this study could be extrapolated to other religions and people. Also, in the future it would be useful if this study was given to a larger more diverse group of participants. Furthermore, it would be interesting if the study was given to people of varying ages or at different stages of life (before and after going to college, marriage, having children, etc.) That way it could be known if the relationship between people's personalities and religious beliefs are different at varying times.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER RESEARCH

A follow up study to this experiment is currently being conducted. It is entitled “The Ideal Religious Experiment II.” This other study is looking to see if people try to do activities that are conducive to having religious experiences. Also, it is testing why people do the activities that they do. This study has the participants answer background questions, complete several questionnaires, and answer essay questions. The different questionnaires that are used are the Cozzarelli & Karafa Cultural Estrangement Scale, the Boyd and Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, the Paulhus Scale, the Ryf Wellbeing Inventory, and two self-made surveys.

The Cozzarelli & Karafa Cultural Estrangement Scale is designed to measure if people feel that they have similar values to the society that they live in (in this case, American society). Also, it measures if people think that their activities/culture is similar to that of other people in society. The purpose of using this scale for the study is to determine if people do many of the activities that they do because they feel that this is what they are supposed to do because they are American.

The Boyd and Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory measures the influence of past, present, or possible future events on peoples’ actions. This questionnaire is primarily being used to determine if people do many actions because of the influence of possible future events. For

example, do people work now to have money for a future vacation? However, knowing if people do actions because of past events or because of present circumstances, is interesting as well.

The Paulhus Scale is designed to determine if people are giving socially desirable answers as opposed to honest answers, or if people are giving self-inflating answers as opposed to honest responses. This is a useful scale for this study because answering questions about how often a person performs religious experiences can be uncomfortable for participants. Even though peoples' answers are anonymous, participants might continue lying to themselves or possibly to others.

The Ryff Well Being Scale is constructed to determine how happy people are with their lives. This is important in this study to see if the actions that people do give them a sense of well-being. That could be another reason why people do the actions that they do.

The first self-made survey asks the participants how often they perform certain activities. Some examples of the activities asked about include going to school, taking walks in the woods, praying, etc. The second self-made survey asks the participants how conducive each of the activities are to providing a religious experience. These questionnaires are designed to see how often the participants perform activities that they would consider could give them a religious experience.

Finally, the participants answered two essay questions. The first question asks the participants if they believe that they spend an adequate amount of time performing activities that are conducive to having a religious experience. The second essay asks the participants how they can have religious experiences in the future if they desire. If the participants do not wish to have

religious experiences or do not believe that the experiences are possible, that was asked to be explained by them as well.

APPENDIX A
BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your age
2. What is your gender
3. With what religion would you most identify with: Please include specific denomination/level (e.g. Baptist Christian or Conservative Jew)
4. What religion would your family most identify with: Please include specific denomination/level (e.g. Baptist Christian or Conservative Jew)
5. In what city and state do you currently reside?
6. In what city and state does your family currently live?

APPENDIX B

KOENIG ET AL RELIGIOSITY SCALE

The nine items were as follows (response ranges in parentheses):

frequency of attending religious services (0–4),

(0=never, 1=seldom e.g. on holidays, 2=monthly, 3=weekly, 4=daily)

frequency of prayer (0–3),

(0=never, 1=seldom e.g. on holidays, 2=monthly, 3=daily)

frequency of reading scripture (0–4),

(0=never, 1=seldom e.g. on holidays, 2=monthly, 3=weekly, 4=daily)

frequency of discussing religious teachings (0–4),

(0=never, 1=seldom e.g. on holidays, 2=monthly, 3=weekly, 4=daily)

frequency of deciding moral actions for religious reasons (0–3),

(0=never, 1=sometimes, 2=often, 3=always)

frequency of observing religious holidays (0–3),

(0=never, 1=sometimes, 2=often, 3=always)

membership in religious youth groups (0–1),

(0=no, 1=yes)

having friends with similar beliefs (0–4),

(0=not important at all, 1=not very important, 2=neutral, 3=somewhat important, 4=very important)

and the overall importance of religion in daily life (0–4).

(0=not important at all, 1=not very important, 2=neutral, 3=somewhat important, 4=very important)

APPENDIX C

ALLPORT AND ROSS RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION SCALE

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each item below by using the following rating scale:

- A Strongly disagree
- B Disagree
- C Uncertain/neutral
- D Agree
- E Strongly agree

Extrinsic Orientation Subscale:*

1. Although I believe in my religion, I feel there are many more important things in my life.
2. It doesn't matter so much what I believe so long as I lead a moral life.
3. The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection.
4. The church is most important as a place to formulate good social relationships.
5. What religion offers me most is comfort when sorrows and misfortune strike.
6. I pray chiefly because I have been taught to pray.
7. Although I am a religious person I refuse to let religious considerations influence my everyday affairs.
8. A primary reason for my interest in religion is that my church is a congenial social activity.
9. Occasionally I find it necessary to compromise my religious beliefs in order to protect my social and economic well-being.

10. One reason for my being a church member is that such membership helps to establish a person in the community.

11. The purpose of prayer is to secure a happy and peaceful life.

Intrinsic Orientation Subscale:*

12. It is important for me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and meditation.

13. If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, I attend church.

14. I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.

15. The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services.

16. Quite often I have been keenly aware of the presence of God or the Divine Being.

17. I read literature about my faith.

18. If I were to join a church group I would prefer to join a Bible study group rather than a social fellowship.

19. My religious beliefs are really what lie behind my whole approach to life.

20. Religion is especially important because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.

* The ordering of all 20 items should be scrambled

APPENDIX D

BATSON'S QUEST SCALE

(Items arranged by subscale)

All items will be administered with a 5-point Likert scale:

A Strongly disagree

B Disagree

C Uncertain/Neutral

D Agree

E Strongly agree

Readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity

1. I was not very interested in religion until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life.
2. I have been driven to ask religious questions out of a growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relation to my world.
3. My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious convictions.
4. God wasn't very important for me until I began to ask questions about the meaning of my own life.

Self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive

5. It might be said that I value my religious doubts and uncertainties.
6. For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.
7. (-) I find religious doubts upsetting.
8. Questions are far more central to my religious experience than are answers.

Openness to change

9. As I grow and change, I expect my religion also to grow and change.

10. I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.

11. (-) I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years.

12. There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing.

Note: A minus sign indicates that the item is reverse-scored.

APPENDIX E

NEO-FFI SCALE

Instructions: Read each statement carefully. For each statement circle the response that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly			Strongly			
	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree		
1. I am not a worrier.	1	2	3	4	5	N	R
2. I like to have a lot of people around me.	1	2	3	4	5	E	
3. I don't like to waste my time daydreaming.	1	2	3	4	5	O	R
4. I try to be courteous to every one I meet.	1	2	3	4	5	A	
5. I keep my belongings clean and neat.	1	2	3	4	5	C	
6. I often feel inferior to others.	1	2	3	4	5	N	
7. I laugh easily.	1	2	3	4	5	E	
8. Once I find the right way to do something I stick to it.	1	2	3	4	5	O	R
9. I often get into arguments with my family and coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5	A	R
10. I'm pretty good about pacing myself so as to get things done on time.	1	2	3	4	5	C	
11. When I'm under a great deal of stress, sometimes I feel like I'm going to pieces.	1	2	3	4	5	N	
12. I don't consider myself especially "lighthearted."	1	2	3	4	5	E	R
13. I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature.	1	2	3	4	5	O	
14. Some people think I'm selfish and egotistical.	1	2	3	4	5	A	R
15. I am not a very methodical person.	1	2	3	4	5	C	R
16. I rarely feel lonely or blue.	1	2	3	4	5	N	R

17. I really enjoy talking to people.	1	2	3	4	5	E
18. I believe that letting students hear controversial speaker can only confuse and mislead them.	1	2	3	4	5	O
19. I would rather cooperate with others than compete with them.	1	2	3	4	5	A
20. I try to perform all the tasks assigned to me conscientiously.	1	2	3	4	5	C
21. I often feel tense and jittery.	1	2	3	4	5	N
22. I like to be where the action is.	1	2	3	4	5	E
23. Poetry has little or no effect on me.	1	2	3	4	5	O R
24. I tend to be cynical and skeptical of other's intentions.	1	2	3	4	5	A R
25. I have a clear set of goals and work toward them in an orderly fashion.	1	2	3	4	5	C
26. Sometimes I feel completely worthless.	1	2	3	4	5	N
	Strongly			Strongly		
	Disagree	Disagree	Neural	Agree	Agree	
27. I usually prefer to do things alone.	1	2	3	4	5	E
28. I often try new and foreign foods.	1	2	3	4	5	O
29. I believe that most people will take advantage of you if you let them.	1	2	3	4	5	A R
30. I waste a lot of time before settling down to work.	1	2	3	4	5	C R
31. I rarely feel fearful or anxious.	1	2	3	4	5	N
32. I often feel as if I'm bursting with energy.	1	2	3	4	5	E
33. I seldom notice the moods or feelings that different environments produce.	1	2	3	4	5	O R
34. Most people I know like me.	1	2	3	4	5	A
35. I work hard to accomplish my goals.	1	2	3	4	5	C
36. I often get angry at the way people treat me.	1	2	3	4	5	N

55. I never seem to be able to get organized.	1	2	3	4	5	C	R
56. At times I have been so ashamed I just want to hide.	1	2	3	4	5	N	
57. I would rather go my own way than be a leader of others.	1	2	3	4	5	E	R
58. I often enjoy playing with theories or abstract ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	O	
59. If necessary, I am willing to manipulate people to get what I want.	1	2	3	4	5	A	R
60. I strive for excellence in everything I do.	1	2	3	4	5	C	

NEO Five Factor Inventory, by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae, Copyright 1978, 1985, 1989, by PAR, Inc (Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc). This is not a legal reproduction of the survey.

Note: The 2nd from right column is the factor name column (E = extraversion, etc.). The rightmost column notes whether the item is reverse-scored.

APPENDIX F
ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1) What would you think happens in the ideal religious experience (the time when a person feels closest to God/higher being)? If you do not believe this is possible, explain why not.
- 2) How many times have you achieved this ideal religious experience?
- 3) Where do you think you would be most likely to achieve this ideal religious experience and why?

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