Räisänen’s immanent approach, supported by his insistence on demythologizing and his reluctance to accept any idea of a divine kerygma, necessarily puts emphasis on human behavior. The “panorama of natural religion,” proclaimed in the *Authority*, longs for a detailed theory that would not only be able to explain the nature of religion but, more importantly, the genesis and construction of religious beliefs. In the 1980s, Räisänen found his answer in sociology. He joined forces with Peter Berger and his Weberian tradition. Here Räisänen no longer strayed from the mainstream—if in fact he was ever in it in his opposition to the Bultmannian current. New Testament scholars seldom refer to Berger whose theory Räisänen uses at length. Berger, originally a theologian himself, is best known in the spheres of the science of religion and sociology of religion. His sociology of knowledge has been used to explain the basic nature of religion, and Räisänen, too, uses it when explaining his chain of interpretation from a theoretical point of view. Roots go deep, though. Standard sociology was never indifferent to religion and theology—instead, Weber, Durkheim and their followers wrote extensively on these issues. In fact, early sociology of religion can be seen as the cradle of the modern science of religion. Post-Bultmannian theological hermeneutics is indeed indebted to sociological explanations but the actual theory itself becomes influential through Berger’s work.¹

### 3.1. *Weber on the Sociology of Religion*

Already in his early works Räisänen was interested in the science of religion and, as one recalls the methods used in that field in the 1970s, sociology. His hermeneutical theory also focused on social phenomena. Therefore,  

¹ An overview on Berger’s theories has been offered in the collection *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion* (edited by Linda Woodhead). There is also an informative presentation in Connolly’s *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, see pp. 204–206.
it is no wonder that later, when developing his hermeneutical theory and working on its details, Räisänen became more involved with sociology. In his *Beyond New Testament Theology* Räisänen presents a theoretical justification for his hermeneutical approach. One of the most important sources for his thinking, according to this book, is Peter Berger’s hermeneutical theory of sociology: “I join those exegetes who have recently drawn on the sociology of knowledge as developed and applied to the study of religion by Peter Berger in particular.”\(^2\) These scholars first provided some important terminology. “Berger’s (and Thomas Luckmann’s) concept of the ‘symbolic universe’ seems extremely helpful, along with Berger’s emphasis on the dialectic between experience and interpretation.”\(^3\) For Räisänen, Berger’s theory is a useful tool for investigating how people understand their “fundamental experiences.” This view came as a welcomed relief since already since his early writings Räisänen had struggled with the problems of defining experience.\(^4\) Now the sociology of knowledge provided a solution.

Sociology had been applied in the investigation of religion long before Berger made it an integral part of subject. It belongs in fact to the seven essential approaches for studying religion.\(^5\) Early sociological theories suggest several different and even contradictory explanations of the relation between society and religion. The main difference lies between Durkheim and Weber, but Marx has greatly influenced these traditions.

Whereas Durkheim emphasized the role of religion in integrating society, Weber seemed to develop a theory which showed that religion is a phenomenon *sui generis* which influenced economic and social evolution rather than being influenced by the general development.\(^6\)

Durkheim provided a functionalist explanation, which is of minor importance here because it has mainly affected Thomas Luckmann, the scholar

\(^2\) Räisänen uses four books by Berger, one of these written with Thomas Luckmann. This was the first one, and probably the most famous, was *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967). The other three books are *The Social Reality of Religion* (1969), *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (1970), and *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (1980). There is no reciprocal mention, however. Berger never refers to Räisänen in these works.

\(^3\) Räisänen, *Beyond*, xvii.

\(^4\) See the discussion on the defining of experience in 2.5.

\(^5\) For these approaches, see the collection edited by Peter Connolly, *Approaches*, v, especially pp. 193–225. The work presents essays on anthropological, feminist, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological, sociological, and theological approaches.

\(^6\) See Kehrer and Hardin, *Contemporary Approaches II*, 163.