Self-narratives are popular in the study of religion. Some ten years ago I bought a reader entitled *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones (1997). It included articles on narrative in theology over the past five decades, including the work of Johann Sebastian Metz, which we as theology students read with great interest in the mid-1970s. This line of thinking can be characterized as:

1. starting from a self-evident idea of the Christian religion,
2. drawing on philosophical speculations about the self but without regard to socio-scientific theory, and
3. (largely) based on a foundational epistemology.

In this chapter I present a different approach to the study of self-narratives. Why? The first reason is that our object of study is rapidly changing in late modernity: religion in societal and personal life is transforming to the point of virtual disappearance. Researchers are poorly equipped to explore our changing and disappearing object of study in terms of the foregoing three assumptions. My second reason concerns the depth and width of the theories we build. If we proceed from the epistemic knowledge base of the Christian religion, we can only address our ideas to members of this community. We are hardly able to engage in public debate on religion in people's personal lives. I argue that we need to be involved in larger epistemic communities, both in Christian theology and in religious studies. I describe a pragmatic perspective on scientific inquiry into religious self-narratives, which enables us to sail between the Charybdis of strong rationality and the Scylla of relativism. A pragmatic epistemology works with a weak notion of rationality. This enables us to incorporate the notions of the traditions that we study. At the same time it makes those notions fit for public debate, both academic and in society at large (Anderson 1998).

The chapter is structured as follows. I start with key concepts of the self as narrative in personality psychology, which offer insight into the dynamic
process of autobiographical reasoning and narrative processing. Next I examine the notion of weak rationality, which avoids both absolute truth claims and relativism. The concept of weak rationality, while assuming that all knowledge derives from a specific epistemic community, acknowledges the need to enter into conversation with other epistemic communities. Finally I outline the characteristics of a study of religious self-narratives based on a pragmatic epistemology. These include the type of theory, knowledge, rationality, reasoning and methodology required in a pragmatic inquiry into self-narratives.

1. Narratives of the Self

How do people know who they are and what role do narratives play in this process of self-knowledge? I ground my ideas about self-narratives in the psychology of personality, more specifically that of authors who define the self as narrative. Religious self-narratives are not a category *sui generis*, distinct from other narratives of the self (Taves 2009: 17–22). In line with our argument that religion in late modernity is transforming and/or disappearing, I proceed from the broad premise that all self-narratives can be evaluated in terms of moral/spiritual fullness. According to Charles Taylor (2007: 5) this means that our self-narratives always imply some understanding of fullness or wholeness, that is of life as fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, and more like how it should be. From a psychological perspective human fullness is a driving force or personal striving. It manifests itself in self-narratives reflecting something human beings long for. From a symbolic or meaning perspective human fullness may be defined as a conception of the good life. It is concerned with ways of living and acting, with commitment to a specific conception of the good and to a way of life empowered by participation in that good (Ward 2004: 180). According to Paul Ricoeur (1992) this refers to the good life with and for others in just institutions and (as I like to add) a sustainable society. The source of human fullness can be a power either beyond or within human existence. For our argument this suffices to clarify what we mean by religion in the study of self-narratives. The rest of this section deals with the role of narrative in the process of self-knowledge aimed at human fullness.

(1) The construction of a narrative about the self presupposes a *capacity for self-reflection*. The idea of self-reflexivity was developed by one of the found-