

Not often do we find in the [American Anthropologist](#) material of clear Cognition and Culture relevance. Here is a noteworthy exception: "The Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity" (vol. 112, March 2010 issue, available [here](#)) by [Tanya. M. Luhrmann](#) (whose LSE-ICCI lecture on the same topic is now [online](#)), [Howard Nusbaum](#), and [Ronald Thisted](#). They say that their approach "builds on but differs from the approach to religion within the culture-and-cognition school."

The article begins: "How does God become real to people when God is understood to be invisible and immaterial, as God is within the Christian tradition? This is not the question of whether God is real but, rather, how people learn to make the judgment that God is present. ... it may be the case that hearing God speak and having other vivid, unusual spiritual experiences that seem like unambiguous evidence of divine presence might be, in some respects, like becoming a skilled athlete. In this article, we argue that something like talent and training are involved in the emergence of certain kinds of religious experiences."

The conclusion: "Religion and spirituality are enormously complex human phenomena. Here we suggest that we may be able to identify one kind of skill that can be cultivated, for which some may have more of a proclivity or talent than others. Absorption does not explain religion and far less does it explain it away. But to understand that some people may have developed their talent more than others may help us to understand why some people become gifted practitioners of their faith and others with the intention and desire to do so struggle and do not. And it reminds us, as Maurice Bloch (2008) remarks, that at the heart of the religious impulse lies the capacity to imagine a world beyond the one we have before us."