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The Latin term "religio" is rooted in a juridical context reflecting a special approach of the Romans to the world of the sacred. This special starting was modified by a long historical process which subsequently changed the meaning of the term and concept of whatever might be understood as "religion". This should encourage us to be quite careful when using the term "religion". For answering the question of the evolution of religious experiences we focus on the believing process as relevant. We are accustomed to use the adjective religious when we talk about (religious) experience. But the adjective religious is a bipolar term which comprises the systemic or cultural category "religion" as well as anthropological categories like "religiosity", "religiousness", "attitude" or "spirituality". Thus, referring to religious experiences merely from the prevailing systemic view of "religion", as done in many psychological, neuroscientific, or cognitive-emotional discussions, is an inadequate reduction. Similarly, this monopolar use of "religion" in context of the relationship between "religion and evolution" will lead to a trap.

When speaking about "evolution of religion," we may be talking about the role of religions in the evolution of mankind, or vice versa, about the evolution of mankind and its effects on the surrounding environment, among which religion is comprised. I will show problematic aspects of the debate between these two approaches, and will highlight an innovative approach to unravel the relation between evolution and religion. For our understanding of evolution of religiousness, we can focus on different aspects of the overall process. One is the interrelationship between the evolution of the brain and the enlargement of human capacities. Among those emerging capacities the "capacity to believe" (credition) should be listed. The importance of this capacity was highly underestimated and understudied until recently, but it has enjoyed growing scientific interest in the last few years. Credition is understood as normal (i.e. non pathological) processes of believing brought about by brain function. Credition is not about religion; rather, creditions take place in religious as well as in secular contexts.

I will highlight that for any understanding of the relation between "religion and evolution" an understanding of the evolution of the brain and its consequences for the mental ability to believe is needed. I will present four functions of the believing process as fundamental constituents of the concept of credition. Within the credition framework I will show how the believing process can be related to an evolutionary perspective on religious experiences. Finally, avoiding the concept "religion", I will focus on anthropological aspects of the phylogenetic development of humans referring to meaning making, valuation, and the formation of beliefs.