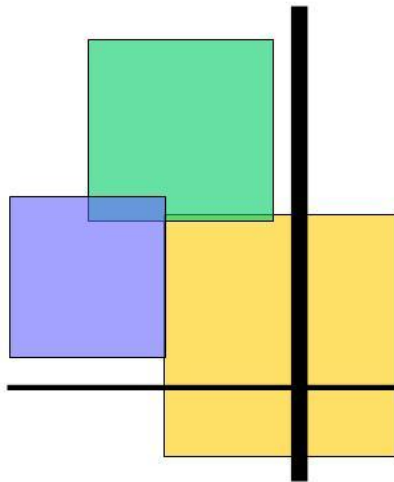
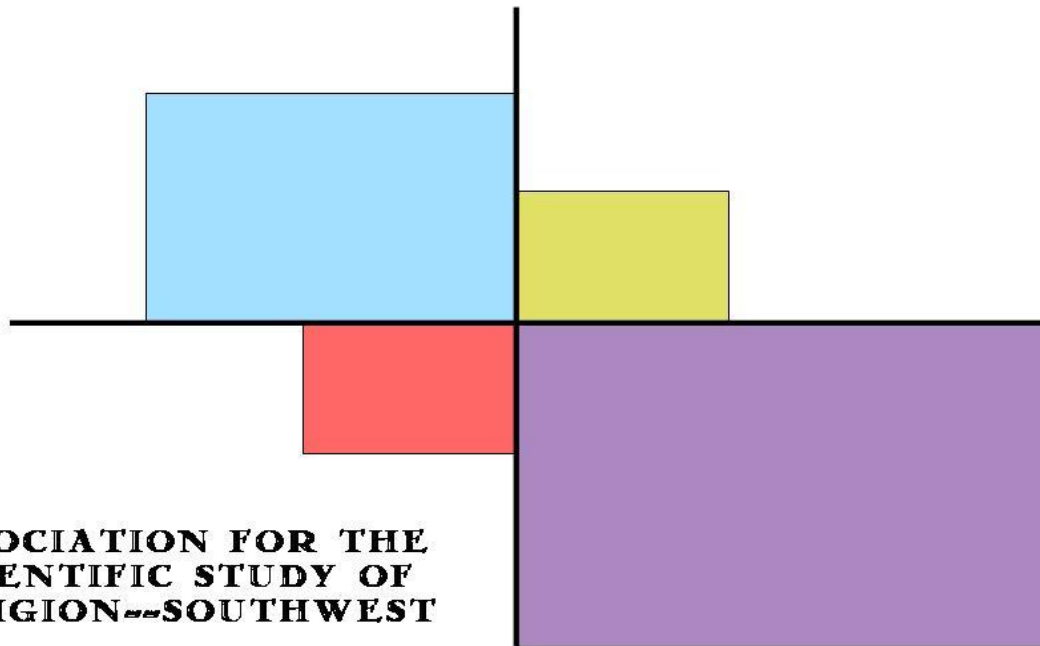


**ASSOCIATION FOR THE
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF
RELIGION--SOUTHWEST**



**THE YEAR 2007
PROCEEDINGS
OF THE ASSR-SW**



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Table of Contents

▪ Editor's Note	i
▪ Notes	ii
▪ Joe Barnhart, University of North Texas On Adoption as a Moral Imperative.....	1
▪ J. B. Watson, Jr., Stephen F. Austin State University <i>Drop Kick Me Jesus Through the Goalposts of Life: McDonaldization, Consumer Culture, and Modern Evangelical Churches</i>	4
▪ Walt Scalen, Angelina College / Stephen F. Austin State University <i>Driven Out On Purpose: The Reported Exodus From "New Paradigm" Churches</i>	12
▪ Todd Jay Leonard, Hirosaki Gakuin University (Japan) <i>Spirituality and Healing the Body, Mind, and Spirit through the Laying of Hands—A Study of Reiki Practitioners</i>	19
▪ Jon K. Loessin, Wharton County Junior College <i>Cioran and Worship of Apocalypse</i>	45
▪ Dennis Horton, Baylor University <i>The Quest for God's Will: Ministry Student Perceptions and Practices</i>	52
▪ Patrick Scott Smith (Republic, Missouri/formerly of SWMSU) <i>Why the Power of the Blood in Religious Culture-- From the Existential Point of View</i>	68
▪ Tom Segady, Stephen F. Austin State University <i>What Is Religion?</i>	84
▪ C. Emory Burton, El Centro College <i>The Social Gospel in America, 1865-1914</i>	92
▪ Stephen M. Matuzak, College of Saint Thomas More <i>Pedagogy in Ethics: Insights from Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II)</i>	97
▪ Diane Dentice, Stephen F. Austin State University <i>Christian Identity Theology: Diversity, Dissension, and the Quest for a White Centered Universe</i>	106
▪ Nathan Carlin, Rice University <i>The Rock Star's Gift: Popular Music and the Pastoral Care of Youth</i>	121
▪ Michael Dietz, University of Missouri, Columbia, and Karol Chandler-Ezell, Stephen F. Austin State University <i>Religion, Politics, and Gender in Humor: When is it Okay to Laugh?</i>	133
▪ Karol Chandler-Ezell, Stephen F. Austin State University <i>Perceptions of Religions: Classification and Tolerance Among University Students</i>	140
▪ Candace D. Loessin, Southwestern University <i>The Latest Crusade: A Study of Recent American Media Depictions of Christian and Islamic Movements</i>	158

Editor's Note

Welcome once again to the *Proceedings* of Association for the Scientific Study of Religion-- Southwest (ASSR-SW). It is again both an honor and privilege to serve as the editor for *The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW*. Year after year, the *Proceedings* are another fine collection of papers and presentations from both our perennial authors and presenters as well as a host of new academic talent who bring with them new styles and topics. Regardless of who contributes to this collection, the subject matter never tires or bores the reader. As usual, this year's papers are again both scholarly and exceptional.

The quality of these *Proceedings* attests not only to the fine work that has been accomplished by the efforts of many who participate and promote our meetings through research, writing, attending our sessions, and sponsorship through both donations and the purchase of this collection. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps to make the ASSR what it has been, what it is, and what it hopes to become. Joining the ASSR is still free of charge and all we ask in return is your support and participation in our yearly sessions and helping to make them successful by writing and presenting papers, chairing sessions, and attending the presentations of others. Once again, I want to thank all of you for your support.

It is important for our future that every member of the ASSR-SW not only encourages new membership at every opportunity but solicits scholars throughout the colleges, universities, and organizations at which you reside to become involved in our group through chairing sessions, writing and submitting papers, or holding office. Please let your leadership here at the ASSR-SW know of all who would like to become involved. We have grown significantly over the past few years and would like to see our organization become as inclusive as possible. Please encourage your friends, colleagues, and associates to join and become active next year!

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the officers of the ASSR for this past year. These are the people who, along with our presenters, truly made the Year 2007 meetings possible:

President: Jon K. Loessin, Wharton County Junior College

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I hope all of you have a good year and I will be looking forward to your participation in the ASSR in 2007-2008! Please visit our new Web Site at www.assr-sw.org complete with online publications of papers from past meetings (see the Archives on the site). Much is happening with ASSR-SW and 2007 is our largest meeting for many years, if not ever. Thanks again!

On Adoption as a Moral Imperative

Joe E. Barnhart
University of North Texas

Introduction. Sixty years ago, Milton Steinberg in *Basic Judaism* contended that “Judaism holds it to be man’s duty to marry and rear children. Conversely, it views voluntary abstinence from marriage as a triple sin—against the health of body, the fulfillment of soul, and the welfare of society” (75). In the Summer 2006 issue of the fundamentalist journal *Southern Seminary*, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, R. Albert Mohler Jr., announced that for a married couple to choose to have no children is “rebellion against God’s design and order.” He labels this growing social pattern as “insanity,” “sinful,” and an “epidemic” (7). Biblical scholars and social scientists of religion will recognize that Mohler is invoking the pollution model.

He argues that childless couples rely “on others to produce and sustain the generation to come.” Given that our species has currently produced what some regard as far more children than can be cared for, a question arises: why the pressure to generate more children? I suggest one ancient assumption is operating and can be stated thusly: “Our tribe is at war with rival tribes. We must generate more warriors if we are to save our tribe from defeat or extinction.” According to the final sentence of Mohler’s article, “To demand that marriage means sex—but not children—is to defraud the Creator of His joy and pleasure in seeing *the saints* raising His children” (italics added). By his own fundamentalist premises, however, Mohler cannot say that the Creator experiences joy and pleasure upon seeing Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and other non-Christians birth and nurture their children in their religion.

Drawing from their own belief-system, those Christians who regard childlessness as sinful might for three reasons become more receptive to a morality that encourages adoption. First, to adopt and raise children as Christians is to save them from being raised by non-Christians who will not teach them the Christian way. Second, for those Christians who believe the *population explosion* is a serious global environmental issue, adoption would be not only a moral option, but also perhaps an imperative. Third, those who regard abortion as wicked or even as murder could, by their own theology, regard adoption as one of the most effective missionary programs ever advanced. It would be, furthermore, a missionary program that seeks not only to save the soul, but also to provide food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, education, and nurturing at a variety of levels. I suggest this would be an area in which social scientists could fruitfully explore and enlighten us about the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of various religious cultures.

Biological Genes and Cultural Genes. Those driven to gain genetic immortality through their offspring tend to regard adoption as the second-best choice. Others may, however, consider the transmission of the values they have inherited and perhaps revised to be more important than the survival of their biological traits. Because some birth-parents insist that the adoptive parents nurture the children in the values and religion of the birth-parents, accommodations are often made. To transmit one’s cultural genes to a child is to transmit what many would regard as the most important aspects of oneself and one’s family.

Adopting Ancestors. Our neighbors who oppose “artificial birth control devices” could serve as adoptive parents in several ways other than by formally adopting children. Most of us adopt the values and beliefs of not only some of our biological ancestors, but

also of people unrelated to us. We become so profoundly identified with their cultural genes that they become a part of who we are. We have chosen teachers, friends, and even individuals long deceased to become our *cultural kin*. We want their values and beliefs to live on in us and our children. Teachers often regard their students as their children or grandchildren in the sense of transmitting their culture to them. Just as students identify with some of their teachers, so teachers identify with some of their students.

Aunts and Uncles. I know of no book on the profound influence of aunts and uncles on their nieces and nephews in Western society. Yet, in some cultures, aunts and uncles are as significant as parents in nurturing the children and shaping their lives. In a highly mobile society or in a society where parents have few or no siblings, their children may informally adopt adults who function as aunts and uncles. Parents may have friends who function as aunts or uncles to their children.

Neighbors and Adoption in Degrees. Many of us recall neighbors who adopted us informally and played major roles in shaping our values and expectations. Sociologists could perhaps tell us more about neighbors who have adopted children informally and in varying degrees. This kind of adoption is less likely to happen in a highly mobile society than in a society where neighbors remain in the same community for decades. With the loss of the sidewalk and the front porch in communities, neighbors on the same street or in the same housing development have perhaps begun to play a less significant role. On the other hand, the cell phone makes access to people outside the immediate community more likely. Indeed, neighborhoods today may be defined less in terms of physical approximation and more in terms of voice access. Email, too, can expand the range beyond anything our grandparents could imagine. I had a great aunt who would not talk to anyone she could not look at, which meant she refused to use the phone. In my youth, long-distance phone calls were reserved for emergencies and unique events like weddings.

Given the increasingly easy access to each other's voices and emails, peripheral adoptions and adoptions in degrees have become phenomena that some social scientists have studied fruitfully. I suggest that the phone in some cases increases the intimacy between friends and relatives. The privacy of the phone conversation often reinforces an openness that would not develop in face-to-face conversation. Paradoxically, the physical distance may increase closeness.

Birth Control, Abortion, and Adoption. A half century ago in the United States, children born outside wedlock could be labeled as *illegitimate* while the word *bastard* lost most of its original meaning. In the West, religious condemnation of birth control by *artificial* means has decreased steadily even though the Roman Catholic hierarchy continues to speak against it partly because Catholics in the *global South* are increasing their numbers. The current growth in Christianity is not in the West. While Pentecostals in America practice birth control, Pentecostalism in the global South is expanding partly by the generation of large families.

In the West, by contrast, Protestant and Catholic couples, including Pentecostals, have fewer children than did their grandparents. As condemnation of abortion continues, a rising concern about the fate of *unwanted children* may increase. Those opposed to abortion have perhaps begun to feel a faint moral pressure to provide care for the *unwanted children*. Members of the clergy of the religious right, nevertheless, generally have not called for an increase in adoption. In short, no sustained, articulated ethic of adoption has emerged among them. While Catholic priests in America and Europe have reduced the number of sermons condemning *unnatural* birth control, there has developed no compelling theology of

adoption. This is striking in light of the fact that the analogy of God's adopting men and women as his children stood at the center of Pauline theology (Campbell 109-11; Eisenbaum 671-702).

Biographical Note

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Drop Kick Me Jesus Through the Goalposts of Life: McDonaldization, Consumer Culture, and Modern Evangelical Churches

J.B. Watson, Jr.
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I think of the old slavery, and of the way the economy has now improved upon it. The new slavery has improved upon the old by giving the new slaves the illusion that they are free. The economy does not take people's freedom by force, which would be against its principles, for it is very humane. It buys their freedom, pays for it, and then persuades its money back again with shoddy goods and the promise of freedom. "Buy a car," it says, "and be free. Buy a boat and be freely. Buy a beer and be free." Is this not the raw material of bad dreams? Or is it maybe the very nightmare?

Wendell Berry in *Jayber Crow* (2000:332)

Introduction

The accelerating impact of consumer culture on American society in recent decades has been well-documented by scholars. The emergence of consumer capitalism in the U.S. has been both praised and reviled by commentators. While the secularization of religion is a long-standing concern of sociologists of religion, the impact of consumerism (on religion) has also begun to receive attention in the social sciences. Kosmin and Keysar, in their book, *Religion in a Free Market*, noted that consumer-based economic activity creates a cultural context where "religion becomes a product that can be marketed by entrepreneurs alert to the needs that religious affiliations can satisfy" and "charlatans and fanatics will appear alongside saints and prophets" (2006:13). This dimension of the McDonaldization of religion in the U.S. will be examined in this paper, with special attention to its impact on evangelical churches. In particular, the church growth movement embraced by evangelical churches has accelerated the emphasis on consumer-based products and packaged spiritual programs. The implications of this growing relationship between consumerism and evangelical religious practices will also be explored, and relevant sociological concepts will be applied to shed light on "consumer evangelicalism."

Several limitations of this analysis should be noted. There are variations among evangelical churches in terms of the degree to which they have embraced various elements of consumerism. In addition, contemporary evangelical religious groups are diverse in terms of historical development and doctrinal beliefs. In making generalizations about evangelical churches (and consumer culture), specific observations and conclusions noted may not apply in all cases.

Economic Transitions and the Emergence of Consumer Religion

Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, in their book, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (2002), argue that modern religious organizations, especially U.S. churches, were principally influenced by capitalism. Pastoral leadership changed from the goal of doctrinal teaching and support of local parishioners to serving as a clerical sales force for their church or denomination. Evangelistic outreach became primarily a marketing strategy embellished with a few doctrinal pronouncements. The acceptance of an economic model of religious organization is so complete that most church leaders never question its validity or fully recognize the unprecedented nature of this pattern in religious history. They assert that the evidence of this dominant pattern can be noted in all forms of religious organization - Protestant, Catholic, and even new religions. Since the First Amendment prohibited state-

sanctioned religion, American churches were drawn to a consumer-driven model of religious practice, according to Finke and Stark (2002). Religious affiliation became a matter of choice, and religious organizations were required to compete for participants, where the "invisible hand" of the marketplace is as unforgiving of ineffective religious firms as it is of their commercial counterparts" (Finke and Stark, 2002:17).

The U.S. economic system has experienced a number of significant transitions, influenced by both technological changes and globalization. These changes will not be summarized here. Rather, this paper is concerned with the increasing dominance of consumer capitalism in modern economic activity, and its transformative impact of evangelical religious practices. Drawing on the work of Marx and Weber, it is a "sociological given" that economic activity holds the potential to shape other spheres of social life, including religion. Alternatively, culture and religion may initiate economic activity, as Max Weber notably articulated. Rodney Stark recently applied Weber's thesis in his controversial book, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (2006). Stark asserted that Europe's successful economic and political development was due largely to its embrace of Christianity, and its emphasis on theological progress as an essential element of religious belief systems. This doctrinal emphasis encouraged medieval scholasticism, and ultimately, "Renaissance capitalism" by influencing developments based on reason. Geographic regions with sizable Christian populations thus held a tactical advantage in developing commerce (Stark, 2006). Regardless of the causal direction of economic influences, Stark's work is exemplary of the widely held sociological notion that economic activity and religious activity are inextricably linked.

The economic transition of modern capitalist societies to a new form, consumer capitalism, has been documented and debated by economists and sociologists for several decades (Trumbull, 2006). The leading role of the United States in the promotion of consumerism in the global marketplace is also commonly recognized and a source of frequent critiques from a variety of political, moral, and religious perspectives (Beabout and Echeverria, 2002; Ritzer, 2006). The impact of consumer-based economic activity on modern social institutions has received considerable scholarly attention in the Social Sciences, thanks to George Ritzer's pioneering work on McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2000; Ritzer, 2006). Less attention, however, has been given to the unintended consequences of consumer capitalism in other areas of social life. Evangelical writer Rodney Clapp (1996) observed that modern consumer-based economic activity leads to a shift:

...toward the cultivation of unbounded desire. We must...realize that...consumption as we now know it is not fundamentally about materialism or the consumption of physical goods. Affluence and consumer-oriented capitalism have moved us well beyond the undeniable efficiencies and benefits of refrigeration and indoor plumbing. Instead, in a fun-house world of ever-proliferating wants and exquisitely unsatisfied desire, consumption entails most profoundly the cultivation of pleasure, the pursuit of novelty, and the chasing after illusory experiences associated with material goods (Clapp, 1996:1).

One feature of consumer capitalism has received much attention: the ubiquitous forms of advertising and branding promoted through the mass media promoting consumer products. Branding, according to James Twitchell (2004), is not simply "commercial" storytelling. In his book, *Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld*, he asserted that brands are part of a larger social narrative associated with specific products and lifestyles. The special taste of Evian bottled water, for example, is imputed to the brand, not the water. Instead of having a negative impact on the larger society, Twitchell (2000) argues that consumerism paradoxically serves as a new source of

social solidarity, as consumer products replace "birth, patina, pews, coats of arms, house, and social rank" and religion as touchstones of social identity. Adults, adolescents, and even young children immediately recognize imputed status and identity exemplified by the Nike logo, or any other skillfully promoted commercial product in popular culture. Thorsten Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption can now be practiced by the masses, not just the economic elite. Consumption, according to Twitchell, is now essential to the construction of self-identity; the symbolic value of the product exceeds its practical value in most cases. Twitchell (1999; 2004) reframes the notion of "you are what you buy" and suggests that consumerism is now strongly woven into the social fabric - it provides products purchased for their practical value, but also for the crucial security value they can provide in an increasingly secular age. Consumerism is the ultimate paradoxical intervention: individuals find a sense of self through material objects in response to perceived needs. Twitchell rejects the common distinction between "real" and "false" needs promulgated by advertising. Rather, there are no "false" needs - all needs are legitimated by the act of "wanting." If individuals seek greater self-confidence through the purchase of clothing brands or a particular model of automobile, the act of acquiring the product is a deliberate act of building self-confidence (Twitchell, 2000).

In a magazine interview, Twitchell illustrated his analysis of modern consumerism with this observation (about his academic colleagues):

Here's my idea for an independent film...to set a camera on the head of my colleagues...I want to see what they do when they're left alone, to study the difference between saying and doing. It seems to me that reaching into the wallet is a much more powerful articulation of desire and belief than delivering the lecture...I think the market essentially shows this. What is being consumed is what people really do think is entertaining them, satisfying them, making them happy...it is the illusion perhaps that is so powerful. And this illusion seems to be making American culture incredibly attractive to others and making other cultures essentially mimics of American popular culture. Whatever this stuff is in advertising, it's incredibly powerful. It's pushed all these other things aside - literature, art, religion. It's eating everybody's lunch. Maybe that's because most people most of the time want that for lunch. Maybe it really is resolving the concerns that they have, as hard as that is for us to believe (McLaren, 1999:7).

The Consumer Approach to Evangelical Religious Practice

Branding has become so successful in American culture, that even social institutions traditionally antithetical to branding are now aggressively pursuing this modality. Institutional representatives of religion, higher education, and museums, and the art world have worked identify a "Madison Avenue" strategy or lose market share. Twitchell pointed out that most ministers, college presidents, and museum curators would likely insist that branding has nothing to do with the usual discharge of their professional duties, yet he argues that wherever supply exceeds demand, branding follows. In particular, the rise and increasing cultural dominance of megachurches represents a case study in the branding of contemporary religion. From its inception, most megachurches were designed not to compete directly with traditional churches but rather to attract the "unchurched" - individuals who might otherwise be playing golf, strolling through the mall, or at the lake on Sunday morning. This "seeker-friendly" approach, advocated by proponents of the church growth movement, has been popular among evangelicals. Willow Creek Community Church, just outside of Chicago, one of the oldest megachurches, was highlighted by Twitchell (2004) as the paragon of the branded evangelical church. The role of Willow Creek in the church growth movement will be discussed in a later section.

Virginia journalist Bart Hinkle (2006), writing for the conservative publication, *The American Enterprise Online*, described an increasingly common megachurch experience echoing a national trend:

On Super Bowl Sunday...a couple thousand people found their way to a Richmond auditorium...in front of a large stage with two huge flat-screen TVs built into the walls at either side. A live band was warming up... In a few minutes it got down to business as a blonde in fetching attire appeared...belting out an upbeat tune...clapping, swaying, singing along. There was a palpable sense that something...exciting... was about to happen...cameras recorded the proceedings, which would be broadcast across the area and beyond. But the people in the seats had not gathered for pre-game festivities attendant upon the Steelers-Seahawks game. Nor had they come for a rock concert - though it seemed, at times, that's what they were about to get. They had come to listen to ...the leader of Faith Landmarks Ministries, one of the largest churches in Virginia, with a membership of more than 6,500. He and his wife, Cherie (she's the blonde), have been in the business of saving souls for a quarter-century, and now operate out of a sprawling, immaculate complex...covering several acres. This morning...Gilbert delivered the day's main message..."You are the light of the world."... Then, "it's testimony time," time to "walk in the spirit." More traditional churchgoers may... wonder why the sanctuary contains no Christian iconography. If you couldn't hear, you might think you were watching, say, a motivational speaker. In a way, you are. As at most megachurches, the experience... is designed to be uplifting. As she warms up the crowd, Cherie Gilbert tells parishioners, "If you're feeling heavy, throw it off..." (Hinkle, 2006).

Consumer Religion I: Adolescent Religious Beliefs

Smith and Denton (2005), in a major national survey of religious beliefs and practices among U.S adolescents characterized the basis belief system of teenagers as "moralistic therapeutic deism" and noted that this "...ethos perfectly serves the needs and interests of U.S. mass-consumer capitalist economy by constituting people as self-fulfillment-oriented consumers subject to advertising's influence on their subjective feelings" (Smith and Denton, 2005:162). Moralistic therapeutic deism is based on a form of radical individualism, where the self is the source and touchstone of authentic moral knowledge and authority, with individual self-fulfillment as the ultimate purpose in life. This finding is a logical outcome of the changing social patterns described by sociologist James Nolan in his book, *The Therapeutic State*: "where once the self was to be brought into conformity with the standards of externally derived authorities and social institutions, it now is compelled to look within...no longer is society something a self must adjust to; it is now something the self must be liberated from..." (Nolan, 1998:3). Moral decision-making among teenagers is now largely based on "individual self-referencing" and "not by external moralities derived from religious teachings, natural law, cultural tradition or the requisite collective social functioning" (Smith and Denton, 2005:173).

There are five other core beliefs associated with moralistic therapeutic deism – (1) a God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over individuals; (2) God wants individuals to behave properly with each other, consistent with the Bible and other sacred texts; (3) God's involvement in one's life is not routinely needed, except to resolve a problem; (4) when "good" people die, they go to heaven; and (5) one's main goal in life is to be happy and to "feel good" about oneself (Smith and Denton, 2005). This emergent religious pattern, especially the last core belief listed, can be interpreted as a direct consequence of the emphasis on consumerism. This demographic segment is highly attuned to and routinely targeted by mass media advertising. The U.S. adolescent

population surveyed by Smith and Denton (2005) has spent their entire lives immersed in popular culture, so it is not at all surprising that their religious beliefs and practices reflect those socializing influences. The centrality of consumer goods in this process, however, where “self equals consumption” wields a greater sway on the religious beliefs of contemporary adolescents, in contrast to earlier generations where church doctrinal teachings and parental influences played a greater role in religious socialization.

Consumer Religion II: The Church Growth Movement

The church growth movement has led to a consumer-driven model of church organization adopted by many evangelical churches, where the senior minister functions as a chief executive officer, and another ministerial staff member often serves as the “minister of marketing.” The target market for evangelical churches (organized on this model) is not necessarily the economic elite of the local community; rather, the “correct demographic” is often young families with growing disposable incomes. The development of contemporary worship services, children’s ministries, and church recreational programs to reach out to local communities are often as essential parts of an effective outreach strategy for both new church starts and established evangelical churches (Fitch, 2005). This “spiritual as technique” approach takes advantage of the changing mind set of churchgoers as consumers of religion. Protestant Theologian David Wells describes the resultant pattern in modern evangelical churches:

The evangelical church today ...is replete with tricks, gadgets, gimmicks, and marketing ploys as it shamelessly adapts itself to our emptied-out, blinded, postmodern world. It is supporting a massive commercial enterprise of Christian products ... and is always begging for money to fuel one entrepreneurial scheme after another, but it is not morally resplendent... There is too little about it that bespeaks the holiness of God. And without the vision for and reality of this holiness, the Gospel becomes trivialized, life loses its depth, [and] God becomes transformed into a product to be sold ... (Wells, 1998:180).

Many modern evangelical churches and religious organizations position themselves as “the last great hope” to resist secularization, arguing that they are the only “remnant” capable of maintaining traditional evangelical church doctrines and practices (McGuire, 2002). In contrast, adherents of the church growth movement seem to openly embrace this unique form of secularization, welcomed by evangelical church leaders as a formula for short-term and long-term growth. Sociologist Alan Wolfe, in his book, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*, suggests that modern church’s intoxication with corporate business culture, self-improvement perspectives, and pop culture is part of a larger trend – secularization (Wolfe, 2003). Secularization, as defined by sociologists, is the process by which religion in a society begins to lose influence and the interest in other-worldly or idealistic religious ideas is replaced by greater emphasis on material success and other pragmatic concerns (McGuire, 2002). According to sociologist Will Herberg, America is “at once the most religious and the most secular of nations” (Herberg, 1983:41). Wolfe puts it another way: “In every aspect of the religious life, American faith has met American culture - and American culture has triumphed,” and “the faithful in the United States are remarkably like everyone else” (Wolfe, 2003:3). In other words, modern evangelical churches in America have “succeeded by failing.” Wolfe defends his position by citing a significant number of quantitative and qualitative studies on contemporary American religion. What is especially interesting is that it is not only evangelical Protestantism that is undergoing transformation; Catholic, Mormon, Jewish, and Moslem groups are feeling the pressure to modernize in order to appeal to prospective

members. In all of these religious communities, there is evidence that an emphasis on the teaching of doctrine is disappearing, replaced by revised codes of personal morality, popular culture elements, and “branded” evangelical products.

In the church growth movement, branded products and seminars are the order of the day. Two prominent megachurch leaders in the church growth movement, Bill Hybels, Pastor of Willow Creek in suburban Chicago and Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback in southern California, have published numerous books and regularly conduct training seminars for church leaders. The purpose of all these products is to provide the information and skills necessary to replicate the Willow Creek or Saddleback model of church growth in any geographic setting. Topics ranging from how to greet visitors on the parking lot, logo development, implementing contemporary worship services, and the latest technology are covered in training seminars targeted to church leaders. Warren, the more prominent of the two evangelical leaders, founded Saddleback Church in 1980; more than 20,000 people attend its services every weekend. In addition, he launched pastors.com, a website that provides sermons and other resources to more than 140,000 ministers each week. Finally, he published a blockbuster best-seller, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. (2002). More than 20,000 churches conducted local “purpose-driven” programs based on the book; there also a related website, *purposedriven.com*. The purpose-driven program for local churches has been popular nationally with Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians (Nussbaum, 2006). Perhaps in response to criticism, Warren has given most of the millions made to his church and three non-profit foundations he has established, and also ceased taking his \$110,000 annual salary. He describes him and his wife as “reverse tithers” - keeping 10 percent of their income and giving away other income, including \$13 million in 2004 (Nussbaum, 2006). Still, he clearly wields great influence through his pastorate, training seminars, and national prominence as the heir-apparent to be “America’s Pastor” or the next Billy Graham (Symonds, 2005).

Conclusions and Implications

A key principle of Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis is the achievement of the optimum means to a given end as the predominant feature of particular social structures (Drane, 2006) Evangelical churches have traditionally been focused on the attraction of new converts to evangelical faith and the spiritual development of “the faithful.” In seeking to carry out this activity in the context of modern consumerism, “one-size-fits-all formulas” have an intoxicating attraction. The packaging of religious messages to the level of “consumables” for the masses presents a number of perils and pitfalls to modern religious practice. In a classic essay, “The Church Against the World,” prominent Protestant theologian Richard Niebuhr (1935) applied his sociological imagination to the problems faced by churches in Western societies:

In the faith of the church, the problem is not one of adjustment to the changing, relative, and temporal elements in civilization but rather one of constant adjustment, amid these changing things, to the eternal. The crisis of the church from this point of view is not the crisis of the church in the world, but of the world in the church. What is endangered in the church is the secular element: its prestige as a social institution, its power as a political agency, its endowment as a foster-child of nation or of class. And this very peril indicates that the church has adjusted itself too much rather than too little to the world in which it lives. It has identified itself too intimately with capitalism, with the philosophy of individualism, and with the imperialism of the West... (Niebuhr, 1935:4).

The future of consumer religion is uncertain. Conceptually, consumer religion involves a “hybrid” of both economic and religious activity that influences contemporary beliefs, practices, and religious organization. The discussion in this paper has centered on evangelicals. Two additional hybrid concepts in the Sociology of Religion may have some parallel to this discussion: civil religion, and “sportianity.” Civil religion incorporates many elements of traditional religion and rituals associated with patriotic fervor (Bellah, 1975). “Sportianity” posits the notion that sports is supplanting traditional religion in modern societies as spectators and fans identify with a “body of believers” and follow the “high priests of sports.” According to advocates of this concept, Sportianity has developed a corresponding ideology, not unlike an institutionalized religion - a repertoire of behavior, well-orchestrated rituals, and core beliefs that bind believers together (Eisen, 1998). While there is debate about the sociological sustainability of each of these three social phenomena noted above, both the religious and non-religious dimensions of each concept hold the potential to generate new outcomes for the social order. Modestly, this paper has attempted to provide a description of a few “prototypes” of consumer religion among evangelicals. A number of important research questions are suggested by this analysis. Will the “domestic captivity of religious belief in consumer culture” lead to countermovements (Miller, 2003:228)? Alternatively, is it possible to see a return to historical patterns where evangelicalism emphasized the “informing of culture” instead of absorbing elements of secular culture into its “sacred center” (Hammond, 1963)?

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Driven Out On Purpose: The Reported Exodus From "New Paradigm" Churches

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According to pollster/sociologist George Barna in his recent book, *Revolution*, there is an exodus of people from so-called "Purpose-Driven" (PD) or "Seeker-Sensitive" (SS) churches, and their numbers may be in the millions (Barna, 2005). Why are they leaving these reportedly "popular" churches? What is it about this relatively "new paradigm" (NP) for doing church that some find so objectionable? This paper will explore the possibilities. Based on informal interviews, observations, and other sources, the author will examine the issues which ex-members report to be their greatest concerns.

"Helen Seinfeld" was fond of asking the hypothetical question, "who could not like Jerry?" "He is such a wonderful boy," she would say. In the real world, many evangelicals ask the same question with regard to Rick Warren. Who could not like him? He is a best-selling author, "successful" megachurch pastor, frequent guest on national talk shows. Some are calling him "America's Pastor" and are suggesting that he is the heir apparent to famous evangelist Billy Graham. But there is more, he is on a mission for world peace. He is now working to make Rwanda the world's first Purpose-Driven Nation. Indeed, who could not like Rick Warren? He preaches in Hawaiian shirts and wears no socks. He sings "Purple Rain" at conferences. He is jovial, and has more aphorisms than Dell has computers. Surely, everyone is happy with Rick Warren and his relentless efforts to make every church, temple, mosque, and nation in the world "Purpose Driven," which apparently is his working definition of world peace.

On September 05, 2006, an article appeared in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) which blasphemously suggested that there are actually people in the world that are not too thrilled with Rick Warren and his Purpose Driven paradigm, which had "taken over their churches" (Sataline, 2006). They were also upset that after voicing their displeasure, they had been marginalized, isolated, and, in some cases, voted out of churches they had attended and supported for decades. To some this article came as a shock, but to those of us who have been studying the ecclesiastical tsunami who is Rick Warren and his Purpose Driven paradigm, it was only the tip of a much larger "iceberg."

Numerous articles in a variety of publications have characterized Warren's wildly popular model for church growth as a corporate business strategy. When interviewed by *Business Week*, Warren said "our goal is not to turn the church into a business" (Symonds et al., 2005:1-2). This statement comes from a person who called Peter Drucker his mentor (Sheler, 2005). The sales of Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, was significantly boosted by requiring every church participating in his virtually ubiquitous program, The Forty Days of Purpose, to purchase copies for all their members. Once "transitioned" into a Purpose Driven Church, participating congregations then become part of a massive marketing network which endlessly offers training materials, videos, conferences, and other PDL products. Perhaps Warren didn't intend to make churches into a business, but he certainly knows how to do business in churches.

Warren is not to be underestimated. He claims that he has trained 400,000 pastors worldwide, that thousands of churches have been "transitioned" into his PD model, and they represent a multiplicity of different denominations (Sataline, 2006). He has even "sold" his ideas to some Jewish congregations (Eshman, 2006). One can only assume that even Moslems will want to become Purpose Driven. What is the appeal? Why have so many pastors led their congregations into Warren's paradigm? The answer is profoundly simple.

Marketing of the PD model confronts pastors with a frightening prospect, "change or die." They are told that the "old way" of "doing church" won't work in a modern world, ergo, their church must modernize and the Forty days of Purpose will show them how. The end result will be more members and more contributions. With their new found success they can then enlarge the Kingdom. The haunting question is, whose kingdom?

The WSJ article is one of the few if only discussions of the "dark side" of the Purpose Driven Movement in the national media. However, the internet blogs are filled with testimonies of individuals who vehemently disagree with Rick Warren's ideas and are angry at the fact that their churches were "transitioned" into a PD model. Interestingly, many respondents identify themselves as in there twenties, thirties, and forties which challenges the notion that PD opponents are "older." (Sataline, 2006). In fact, many of the individuals who were informally interviewed by this author were college students from a variety of classes. One conclusion is clear, there appears to be a good bit of "stereotyping" on both sides of this debate.

The merit of our inquiry is rooted in the unprecedented nature of the New Paradigm Church movement itself. It represents a virtual revolution in American Christianity. Perhaps beginning with Robert Shuller, coming into the national and international spotlight though the efforts of Bill Hybels and Willowcreek Church in Chicago, and becoming a virtual tidal wave of change through the boundless ambitions of Rick Warren. Unquestionably, Warren is the indisputable "flavor of the day" in all things related to church growth and change. Furthermore, has there ever been in the history of religion in America and perhaps religion anywhere a movement that systemically, and under the cover of anonymity, completely changed the "culture" of tens of thousands of churches of different denominations by enforcing virtual unanimity and then marginalized and ultimately removed resisters? One can point to doctrinal shifts in seminaries that were felt years later in churches of the same denomination. Many of the so-called "mainline" churches would fall into this category. Certainly there are examples of religious groups changing their doctrines or practices over extended periods of time such as the Roman Catholic Church or many Protestant denominations. However, one will look in vain to find anything to compare with the Purpose Driven phenomena.

The focus of this paper is to examine the reasons why evangelicals are leaving voluntarily or involuntarily churches that have adopted or in the process of adopting the new paradigm or PD model of doing church. What are their objections? Are their concerns matters of style or substance? Do their complaints address peripheral issues or essentials? Our inquiry is largely ethnographic in nature, no pretense is made that this is a quantitative study. The author used informal and unstructured interviews, listened to personal stories, and made several direct observations. Our findings form the basis for more empirical studies in the future.

In the WSJ article, displaced members complained about the inappropriate use of modern management techniques, messages changing from traditional Biblical topics such as "self-denial" to modern topics such as "self-fulfillment" and "stress," a virtual war on church traditions, and the "hard ball" tactics used against opponents. The individuals interviewed by this author leveled similar complaints. A compilation of our findings identified several common concerns of those who have left New Paradigm churches either voluntarily or involuntarily. Essentially they are the same as the complaints noted in the WSJ article, but in a bit more detail. They are as follows:

1. "Implementation of the Purpose Driven Model into my church occurred in a clandestine, manipulative, and deceptive manner."

This was clearly the most commonly heard complaint during the author's informal discussions with displaced members. It is also supported by first hand observations of two

churches that implemented the model. In both cases, it appeared that the pastors alone knew of their plans to make the transition. In one case the pastor represented the "new ideas" as revelations he had received from God. In one message he actually said that "I hear from God and you hear from me," and added, "if you don't like what's going on, then get out." In the second church, the "plan" was gradually implemented, but never publicly explained to the congregation. Changes occurred in a piecemeal fashion. The pastor and a member of his staff went to "training" at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, but no one else in leadership or in the congregation at large seemed to be familiar with Rick Warren or the Purpose Driven Model.

Such stories are amazingly common, but accounts of open forums on the merits of the New Paradigm model seem non-existent. This author did not encounter one account of a church's congregation being fully informed of the pros and cons of making such a transition in a timely, open, and democratic way. In all cases, members became aware of the fact that their churches had been transitioned, in some cases, years after the transition was initiated. Many of the members interviewed in actively "Purpose-Driven" churches seemed oblivious to any controversy surrounding this model of doing church and seemed to know very little about it even though they had participated in the "Forty Days of Purpose" program.

Those members or ex-members who now oppose the changes that have occurred in their churches expressed a deep sense of betrayal. Some are angry and many are sad. They report that their churches have changed to such a degree that they feel like a visitor. Some have left, others are looking. In some cases, after years of gradual change they are just now beginning to search for answers. Ironically those looking for other churches report encountering the exact characteristics they are fleeing even in churches of different denominations. Obviously, this recurring pattern of the Purpose Driven model being implemented in a clandestine way is not coincidental. In an article in USA today, Rick Warren calls himself a "stealth evangelist" and suggests that his ideas have flown under the radar into churches of all kinds including "Catholics, Methodists, Mormons, Jews, and ordained women" (Grossman, 2003, 3) He states that he is not going to get into "a debate over non-essentials"....."I've got a target, it's called the globe" (Grossman, 2003, 3). The contents of the book *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* written by Dan Southerland and the Transitioning conferences both endorsed by Rev. Warren shed further light on the strategies recommended for implementing the PD model into existing churches (Southerland, 2000). The author, Dan Southerland, recommends that an inner circle of confidants work out the details and the general congregation should not become a part of the process until after the transition is established (Southerland, 2000). Furthermore, resisters are to be dealt with sternly. In the WSJ article Southerland is reported as saying in an interview, "you've got to play hardball...you can not placate every whiny Christian along the way." (Sataline, 2006)) Speakers at a Church Transitions Inc workshop in Austin Texas in a session called "dealing with opposition" reportedly recommended that members who do not stop objecting should be asked to leave. They also recommended that pastors should call the new churches of these disposed dissenters and suggest that they be "barred from any leadership role" (Sataline, 2006).

Such tactics seem particularly mean spirited in view of the fact that what is being described is essentially a "corporate style" takeover of an existing church that represents a systemic paradigm shift, a replacement of one culture with another. The fact that these transitions are occurring without the knowledge or will of the congregations involved accounts for the growing resentment of displaced members. If advocates of the PD or New Paradigm model were to establish new congregations in an open and above board way then resisters could be called intruders, however when existing congregations are transitioned into a new paradigm, the PD advocates are seen as the intruders. Depending on ones'

perspective, the literally hundreds of personal stories posted on internet blogs placed by PD refugees can be seen as the sour grapes of "whiney" Christians, or as the legitimate complaints of those who were the victims of deception and manipulation.

2. "Our Church Has Become a Business."

This was second most commonly heard complaint from those who are either looking for another church or have already been displaced. This comment was especially common among college and university students who are particularly sensitive to issues of corruption in corporate America, manipulative tactics in marketing, and ubiquitous consumerism. The McDonaldisation of all societal institutions is a common topic in sociology classes (Ritzer, 2004).

During the several informal conversations this author had with advocates of the PD model they seemed oblivious to any connection between their perspective and the corporate business model. They saw no difference between advertising and marketing. They noted no difference between the architecture of new paradigm churches which resemble corporate headquarters and traditional churches. They defended elaborate and never ending building programs as a necessity for "growing churches." They defended the placement of "for-profit" chain restaurants, boutiques, bookstores, ATM's, cappuccino bars, and other business establishments within church buildings as necessary modern amenities. They didn't seem concerned about the vast majority of their church's budget being used to support burgeoning professional staffs, elaborate facilities, and expensive recreational and entertainment oriented programming. They viewed these characteristics as the traits of a modern and progressive church. Despite these obvious connections to a corporate business paradigm, all respondents on this subject persisted in their denial that their church or any new paradigm church was engaged in copying a corporate instead of a Biblical model of doing church.

The corporate world does not agree. In an article entitled, "Earthly Empires: How Evangelical Churches are Borrowing from the Business Playbook" in *Business Week*, the authors state that the runaway success of this "new generation of evangelical entrepreneurs... is modeled unabashedly on business" (Symonds et al., 2005:2) The article goes on to say that "evangelicals' eager embrace of corporate-style growth strategies" is giving them a significant advantage in the race for "religious market share" (Symonds et al., 2005:1-2). The authors interviewed Rick Warren who gave them a remarkable quote. He said that "our goal is not to turn the church into a business" (Symonds et al., 2005: 3). This is truly an amazing quote from someone who is actively and aggressively promoting ideas that are clearly borrowed from a corporate/managerial model.

Luisa Kroll in an article entitled, "Christian Capitalism: Megachurches, Megabusineesses," in *Forbes* magazine described the "megabusiness of megachurches, where pastors often act as chief executive and use business tactics to grow their congregations" (Kroll, 2003:1-2). She goes on to discuss how such New Paradigm churches are focused on material success and mimic the corporate business organizational model to achieve it. Clearly, the business community has taken note of the New Paradigm churches and their leaders. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Discussions of New Paradigm churches modeling after business structures seem to be common everywhere but in New Paradigm churches where such talk is, well, a tad embarrassing. In 2005 the Leadership Network, a consulting firm and Hartford Seminary conducted a survey called "Megachurches Today 2005" (Myths about Megachurches, 2006). They sent questionnaires to 1800 churches, 400 responded. The churches that responded were apparently asked questions about what they were like. Apparently, when asked whether or not their churches were "all about money" responding churches said they

weren't. This is reassuring news to be sure. Unfortunately, few living in the "real" world apparently believe it.

In the same year, 2005, the Boston Globe published an article entitled, "Megachurches Spread the Word via High-tech; Digital Aids Alter the Act of Worship" (Boston Globe, 2005). Interestingly the article appeared on the business page. The author, Hiawatha Bray, reported that megachurches typically have more "computing firepower that you will find in many businesses"(Bray, 2005). Bray went on to write that "churches are becoming a significant market for high technology....from sophisticated lighting and sound systems, to advanced administration programs, large churches are spending billions on the same kind of hardware and software you'd find in a Wall Street boardroom or a Broadway theater" (Bray, 2005). Megachurches are described as "substantial business operations with dozens or hundreds of full-time employees, and operating budgets running into the millions of dollars" (Bray, 2005). According to the report, one church in Grapevine, Texas spends 15 percent of its \$30 million annual budget on technology. Megachurches may not think they are "all about money," but they sure seem to have a good deal of it.

After directly observing two churches undergo the PD transition, visiting at least 25 other PD churches, many more than twice, and interviewing over 100 individuals of all races, ages, and denominations on both sides of the issue, this author is convinced that the NP churches are clearly modeled after business structures. From the corporate style logos apparently designed to create "brand loyalty," to the corporate style training programs, to the buildings modeled after corporate headquarters, to the myriad of commercial enterprises, and the ocean of amenities, NP churches are "doing business." While in obvious denial that they are business oriented, supporters argue that they just trying to be culturally relevant. PD refugees see their opponents as "moneychangers in the temple" who are modeling the same kind of materialism that Jesus taught against. In their view, the "moneychangers" have taken over and they have been driven out.

3. Everything Has Changed; It Is Like A Whole New Culture.

This commonly heard complaint may be the root of the controversy. Advocates of the PD model clearly see themselves as progressives who are reaching "a new generation for Christ." They are highly critical of "traditional forms" and believe they are simply changing the methods but not the message. To them it is all about being culturally relevant. They demonize opponents as "old codgers" who are out of touch with the modern world and are lost in the fifties clinging to the King James Version of the Bible and Heavenly Highways Hymnals. Opponents vehemently disagree. Essentially they view the Church as a culture in itself, a shared reality created in the ancient world by Christ and his disciples. They value Biblical traditions, symbols, and language. Many admit that their churches have strayed from the New Testament patterns, but believe PD churches, despite their claims of orthodoxy, are moving even further away from Biblical teachings.

Clearly, these comments suggest that disagreements are over essentials, not matters of style as some suggest. Religious scholars tend to agree. University of Chicago professor and religious historian Martin Marty notes that modern evangelicals have shifted from "otherworldliness" to this "worldliness." He claims that prosperous megachurches appear to be willing to do whatever is necessary to attract customers. To his amazement evangelicals who once disapproved of the popular culture now imitate it. Marty believes that many modern evangelical churches have become market driven. By so doing, he points out, they are losing their distinctiveness, their identity, and perhaps, their Faith. In Marty's opinion, consumerism is a threat to the culture and evangelicals are on the wrong side of this debate (Marty, 2000).

Sociologist and religion scholar Alan Wolfe agrees. Wolfe claims that many modern evangelicals are copying corporate business culture, embracing pop psychology, and

imitating popular culture. He observes that evangelical leaders are turning away from historical religious ideals and leading their congregations into a kind of pragmatic materialism. In his ethnographic studies during which he visited evangelical churches across America including Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Los Angeles, he noted that many evangelicals appear to be de-emphasizing historic Christian teachings, traditions, and moral values. If this trend continues, Wolfe points out, there will be little difference between evangelicals and their cultural counterparts (Wolfe, 2003).

PD refugees who were interviewed made similar observations. Many described the PD transitions made in their churches as a shift in culture, nothing remained the same. They consistently report the disappearance of traditional Christian symbols such as the Cross. In one church, crosses reappeared to promote Mel Gibson's *Passion of Christ* but disappeared soon thereafter. Corporate style logos were designed and placed on hats, t-shirts, rugs, plastic pulpits, virtually everywhere. Architecture or decorations were redesigned to resemble the "Mall" or corporate style offices. Video screens and monitors became ubiquitous, even in restrooms. Sermons became focused on counseling topics such as depression, stress, self-fulfillment, success, and prosperity. Sermon series were often named after popular television shows like "Desperate Housewives" or "American Idol." New members were required to attend corporate style training programs and sign covenants committing them to regular "tithing" and "volunteer" service to the church. Professional fundraisers were hired to raise money for never ending "capital" projects. Biblical language was replaced with business rhetoric: "niche marketing," "target populations," "brand loyalty," "demographics," "team-building," etc. and a host of colloquial terms such as "getting on board," "stepping up to the plate," "being a team player," and "casting a vision." Entertainment and multiplication of endless self-help or recreational programs became a priority. Perhaps the most serious charge is that the Christian Gospel has been transitioned from a "supernatural work of the Holy Spirit" to a "decision" much like joining a civic club.

Critics of the PD or NP churches ask how gratuitous imitation of an ever increasingly vulgar popular culture can result in transformation of the culture. For them, NP churches are examples of "Contextualism Gone Wild." Sociologist Alan Johnson once wrote that "a religion either defines a culture or reflects a culture." (Johnson, 1986). As one critic put it, "Mr. Warren is gutting Christianity." (Sataline, 2006). This is a serious charge to be sure and is illustrative of the rapidly deepening divide within evangelical circles. The national media may report a unified evangelical church, but this is certainly not the case. The NP or PD churches seem to have all the material resources, media attention, and popular appeal, but there is a growing number of "revolutionaries" as Barna calls them who are challenging the legitimacy of the NP or PD movement to represent their Faith. At this point their numbers are hard to determine, but their voices are growing increasingly loud.

Obviously, many evangelicals are not quite as enamored with Rick Warren as Helen Seinfeld is with Jerry. Interested observers might be cautioned to not become too fixated on the tsunami that they miss the earthquake occurring under their feet. The PD movement has largely minimized and neatly disposed of opposition, but a groundswell of resistance may be growing. Rick Warren claims he is bringing a New Reformation, but his opponents are planning a Revolution. Since there may be as many as 50 million evangelicals in the U.S., this is an unfolding story worth following.

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Spirituality and Healing the Body, Mind, and Spirit through the Laying of Hands—A Study of Reiki Practitioners

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**Just for today, do not worry;
Just for today, do not anger;
Honor your parents, teachers, and elders;
Earn your living honestly;
Show gratitude to every living thing
-Mikao Usui**

Introduction

In today's modern world, medical technology has made great strides in treating, and even curing, a variety of imbalances and ailments of the human body. Working alongside the scientific and medical communities, as a complement to modern medicine, is a growing movement that focuses on a natural method of healing using a "laying of hands" technique on clients as an alternative to traditional and mainstream medicine. This healing method is widely and simply known as "Reiki." It is practiced by "practitioners" who have been empowered by a Reiki Master-Teacher through a series of "attunements."

Reiki practitioners—those who offer healing through this energy source—are quick to point out that it is not a religion. At the very least, however, it could be categorized as a form of "spirituality" in that the Reiki energy is believed to be a part of a higher power or realm, coming from a divine source which some people refer to as God; the Creator; the Almighty; a Supreme Being; Great Spirit; or Infinite Intelligence.

Reiki is regarded as the Universal Life Force Energy that is present in all living and non-living things. The Chinese call it *ch'i*; the Japanese call it *ki*; and Hindus call it *prana*. (Barnett and Chambers, 1) It is a part of the divine-source energy that assists in healing and giving those who receive it a sense of equilibrium and well-being.

Reiki is a gentle, powerful, hands-on healing technique. It is based on a specific energy attunement process in which ancient mantras and symbols are used to amplify the flow of life force energy and to open up the inner healing channel. ...Reiki revitalizes body, mind, and soul, relieves pain and stress, and helps in many conditions, always supporting the natural healing process. (Honnervogt [a], 12)

The technique for harnessing this energy is ancient, originating in records of cosmology and philosophy delineated in Tibetan Buddhist sutras (Müller and Günther, 13). The particular method that is the focus of this research study is called *Usui Shiki Ryoho* in Japanese (known as "The Usui System of Natural Healing" in English). This system of healing is a holistic therapy which supports the effectiveness of traditional and complementary treatments. As mentioned earlier, it is not categorized as a religion, as it does not have a creed or doctrine.

Reiki energy is a smart energy that automatically goes to the area in the body that needs healing. The Reiki treatment is a non-invasive healing method that offers those who receive it relaxation, peace of mind—and in many cases—a physical, mental or emotional healing, relieving pre-existing conditions.

Reiki is different from other healing methods and forms of bodywork in that the practitioner has been attuned with “empowerments” which serve to fine-tune the physical and etheric bodies to a higher vibratory level. Through the attunement process, a person’s energy centers are opened up and aligned to allow the person to channel the life force energy more ably and in greater amounts.

A Reiki practitioner is attuned by a Reiki Master-Teacher who is able to impart into the person’s aura the symbols used in Reiki. Practitioners can be attuned to Level I (allowing them to give treatments to themselves and others); Level II (enabling them to send Reiki to someone in a distance healing); Level III-a (being attuned with the Master symbol); and Level III-b (empowering them to teach and attune others to Reiki, becoming a “Master-Teacher”).

The Reiki practitioner channels this Reiki energy through their hands to the recipient. Never does the recipient have to remove any clothing. The therapy is non-intrusive, merely a “laying of hands.” There is no manipulation of the body or deep tissue massage involved in a Reiki treatment. The practitioner is not a healer in the true sense of the word, but only a “channel,” acting as a vehicle for the healing Reiki energy to pass through his/her body and hands. The recipient draws the needed energy offered from the channel (Reiki practitioner).

Anyone can offer another magnetic energy by laying his/her hands upon the other person. The difference, however, between someone who has not been attuned to the Reiki energy, and one who has, is the tremendous amount of energy transferred to the person. A Reiki graduate’s hands are much hotter and the energy is more noticeable from a Reiki practitioner.

A Brief History of Reiki

Reiki was rediscovered by Dr. Mikao Usui¹ who is believed to have read the original sutras in Sanskrit, translating them into Japanese. Still, the secret to how the healing took place eluded him until he experienced a 21-day fast and meditation on a sacred mountain called Kurama-yama,² in his native Japan. On the last day of his meditation and fast, a speeding ball of light appeared in the sky and rushed toward him; he decided to allow the light to penetrate his being, wherein he experienced profound spiritual enlightenment. The ancient symbols appeared to him in clear bubbles hovering in the air; he memorized each one and how it was to be used in the attunement process of the healing system.

Usui-sensei quickly left the mountain to make his way back to the Buddhist monastery where he was living. As he hurriedly ran, he stubbed his toenail, causing it to bleed profusely. He intuitively placed his hand over the toe and the bleeding ceased. This is considered by Reiki adherents to be the first healing miracle associated with Reiki.

As he descended the mountain, Usui-sensei came upon a roadside restaurant. He ordered rice, vegetables, and hot tea. The proprietor could see he had been fasting on the mountain and insisted Usui-sensei wait for him to prepare a softer food made of rice gruel so as not to overwhelm his digestive system (having not eaten solid food for three weeks). Usui-sensei insisted upon eating the cold, leftover rice. He ate it and had no ill effect from doing so. This is considered to be the second miracle associated with Reiki.

As the proprietor’s granddaughter was serving the food to Usui-sensei, he noticed she was wearing a white cloth around her head and jaw. Realizing she was suffering from a

¹ The title “doctor” is often afforded to Mikao Usui—not through higher academic learning—but through his healing work. (Petter [a], 18) The Japanese honorific title “sensei” (meaning “teacher”) is also used in conjunction with the surnames of the prominent figures in Reiki’s long and colorful history. To view Dr. Usui’s photo, see Figure 1.

² To view the Shinto shrine located on top of Mount Kuramayama, see Figure 2.

toothache, he put his hands on her cheeks, and nearly instantly, the pain was gone. He had healed her toothache with his healing touch. This is considered to be the third miracle associated with Reiki.

Figure 1.



Dr. Mikao Usui

Upon arriving at the monastery, he learned that the head-monk was bedridden from an acute case of arthritis. He immediately healed the monk, experiencing the fourth miracle of Reiki.

This story of the four Reiki miracles has been passed down through the ages from Reiki Master-Teachers to their students. Nearly all of the versions are basically the same concerning Usui-sensei's fast, enlightenment of the Reiki symbols, and four miracles. However, other aspects of Usui-sensei's original motivation to rediscover the ancient healing technique are disputed.

The traditional Reiki story begins in the mid-1800s with Mikao Usui, who was principal of Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, and also a Christian minister. Asked by his students to be shown the method by which Jesus did healing, Usui began a ten-year quest to find and learn the skill. When Christian authorities in Japan told him that this healing was not talked about, much less known, Usui sought the information through Buddhism. There are striking resemblances between the life of Buddha in India (Gautama Siddhartha, 620-543 BCE) and the life of the historical Jesus. Usui was told by Buddhist monks that the ancient spiritual healing methods had been lost, and that the only way to approach them was by entering the Buddhist teachings, the Path to Enlightenment.

Mikao Usui then traveled to the United States, where he lived for seven years. When he received no further answers from Christians there, he entered the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is said to have received his Doctor of Theology degree there, where he studied comparative religions and philosophies. He also learned to read Sanskrit, the ancient scholarly language of India and Tibet. Usui still found no answers in his quest to learn the methods of healing. There is no further mention of Mikao Usui as a Christian or minister, but only as a Buddhist, who after his return to Japan, resided in a Zen monastery. (Stein, 9)

Several Reiki researchers have meticulously researched this story, only to find that Mikao Usui is not listed as ever having been involved with Doshisha University—as a teacher, researcher, minister, or student; nor can university archivists at the University of Chicago find any information connecting him to their institution (Stein, 9; Petter [a], 18)

It is now believed by a growing number within the Reiki movement that the “Christian connection” was most likely included later when it was being exported to the West. (Stein, 9; Petter [a], 18) It was perhaps felt by later Reiki adherents that an aspect related to the Western-Christian tradition was needed in order for such a healing therapy to be accepted by the general public. By connecting the healing energy to Jesus, who was also a healer, and by portraying Usui-sensei as a Christian minister in search of a basic Christian belief and truth, would make it more appealing to fundamental and mainstream Christians who tend to dismiss categorically any belief that is not explicitly rooted in Christianity.

Figure 2.



A Shinto shrine on Mount Kuramayama.

Usui-sensei named Reiki by combining two Japanese characters: *rei* which can mean spirit, soul, or ghost; and *ki* which can be interpreted as energy, mind, atmosphere, heart, soul, feeling, or mood. (Petter [b], 29) When the two are combined, it can be translated in English as “life-force energy.”

With this new healing energy, Dr. Usui wanted desperately to assist the downtrodden, poor, and destitute beggars of the Kyoto slums. He was discouraged, however, after healing

a number of people because they returned to their old ways. He realized then that unless people have some type of personal commitment, like an investment, into their own healing, it was of no use.³

Usui-sensei then set out as a pilgrim, journeying with a torch in daylight—signifying “lighting the way”—offering lectures on his newly rediscovered healing method. This attracted a number of disciples to him, one of which was Chujiro Hayashi,⁴ a retired naval officer still on reserve status (Stein, 13) Hayashi-sensei eventually received the attunement for Master-Teacher in 1925 and set out to begin his own Reiki healing practice, setting up a clinic in Tokyo. He is attributed with establishing an organized framework for Reiki, including the specific hand positions and levels of attunement that are still used today.

In 1935, a Japanese-American woman, Hawayo Takata,⁵ was visiting Japan from Hawaii to break the news of her sister’s death to her parents who happened to be in Japan for a year visit (their first trip back since their immigration to the United States some 40 years before). Suffering from a variety of illnesses and chronic conditions, and in need of an operation, Mrs. Takata checked herself into a hospital; as she was being readied for the procedure, a voice not of this world rang out to her “The operation is not necessary.” (Haberly, 19) Heeding this voice, she asked the surgeon if there were any alternative treatments she could pursue. He directed her to Hayashi’s clinic where she was treated and ultimately healed.

Takata lived at the clinic and was completely healed in body, mind and spirit in four months. She asked to be trained in Reiki but at first was refused, not because she was a woman but because she was a foreigner. Hayashi did not want the practice of Reiki healing to leave Japan at that time. Eventually, he relented because of the intervention of the surgeon [who referred her initially]. Hawayo Takata received Reiki I training in spring, 1936. She joined the teams of healers that worked at the clinic, and in 1937 Takata received Reiki II and returned to Hawaii. She had lived in Japan for two years. (Stein, 13)

In 1938, Hayashi-sensei visited Takata in Hawaii, where they lectured about Reiki around the Hawaiian Islands. On February 22, 1938, before departing for Japan, Hayashi-sensei announced that he had attuned Takata to Reiki Level III-a and b, as “Master-Teacher”. (Haberly, 31)

As mentioned earlier, in the beginning, Dr. Usui was discouraged when he offered Reiki to beggars in the slums of Kyoto. He had hoped that by giving them the gift of Reiki, they would go out and make an honest living, bettering their lives in the process. After giving attunements and classes free for some time, he noticed a pattern which emerged where soon the beggars were back on the streets begging. He realized then that without some type of exchange, people would not invest the necessary effort into their own healing or condition. The easiest and most practical way to make sure that people followed it was to charge for it. When people invested in their own healing, they were more apt to continue it.

Hayashi-sensei felt the same, and when Takata-sensei asked if she could teach Reiki for free to those who helped her establish her Reiki Center in Kapaa, Hawaii, he admonished her, saying: “Never teach a Reiki class free. For then, it has no value. The people will not value it enough to use it. You can return your gratitude to them by treating them when they

³This is the justification today for some Reiki Master-Teachers charging a tremendous amount of money to attune practitioners to the Level of “Master-Teacher.”

⁴To view Hayashi-sensei’s photo, see Figure 3.

⁵ To view Takata-sensei’s photo, see Figure 4.

need a treatment.” (Brown, 64) Takata-sensei followed his advice and in order to make sure students were completely dedicated to teaching Reiki, she charged each \$10,000 to become attuned to Level III-b, Master-Teacher.

Figure 3.



Chujiro Hayashi

Today, opinion is divided on this point. A number of Reiki Master-Teachers follow the tradition of charging for attunements—some a token amount, others the \$10,000 fee. There are other Reiki Masters who charge nothing, maintaining that Reiki, as a universal energy source, should not have a price and should be available to all and anyone who wants to use it and teach it. Purists believe that giving away Reiki for free detracts from the original intention of having the therapy done by only those who are completely committed, maintaining a degree of semblance in how it is taught.⁶

This triumvirate set of personages in early Reiki—Dr. Mikao Usui, Chujiro Hayashi, and Hawayo Takata—were quite influential, but in different ways. Usui rediscovered the energy therapy, named it, and built up a discipleship of adherents, which included Chujiro Hayashi; Hayashi eventually organized it into a codified therapy, relying on his military background to standardize aspects of the healing technique (like specific hand positions, the various levels of attainment, and the idea of having Reiki given as treatments in a clinical setting); and Takata was largely responsible for keeping Reiki alive during World War II, and in promulgating it into the worldwide phenomenon it is today.

⁶ Diane Stein, a Reiki Master-Teacher, caused a huge furor among the Reiki community when she published a book, *Essential Reiki*, wherein she revealed the attunement process and secret symbols used to attune practitioners. In the foreword to her book, Ms. Stein says: “In this time of change and crisis for people and the planet, healing is too desperately needed for it to be kept secret or exclusive any longer. Always have respect for the sacredness of the information that follows... (Stein, 1994)

Figure 4.



Hawayo Takata

An Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what religious influence, if any, is present in a Reiki practitioner's healing work; and if there is a direct link, or relationship, between Reiki as an alternative healing therapy and the practitioner's spirituality or belief system. As delineated earlier, Reiki is not a religion, strictly speaking, as it has no real creed, code of ethics, or dogma; but, it is spiritually-based because its adherents and practitioners often use prayerful intentions before beginning a treatment and all possess a belief in a higher power which they call upon to access and use the Reiki energy source.

In addition, the study endeavored to learn the religious and/or spiritual backgrounds of the participants of this study, their attitudes toward religion and spiritual-based beliefs, and what role, if any, these play in their Reiki healing work with regards to the actual Reiki treatment when given to a client. A further intention of this study was also to qualify the process and ritual involved in preparing and executing a Reiki treatment.

A number of questions were set forth in a questionnaire⁷ to postulate these hypotheses. For instance, is a personal ritual (that is spiritual in nature) performed to ready the practitioner, space, or client before the actual treatment? Is the client consulted about the ritual or Reiki treatment before it is given? Is some type of religious or spiritually-based prayer, intention, devotion, and/or invocation rendered before beginning the Reiki treatment? Are other therapies or techniques used to complement the Reiki treatment or is it strictly Reiki that is given without the aid of other tools? How long does a typical treatment last? And how often are self-treatments given, as well as to others?

The results of the study, which are described in the following sections, provide a contemporary overview of how a modern Reiki practitioner's religious upbringing and

⁷ See Appendix A.

spiritual beliefs affect his/her attitude toward Reiki healing. As well, it details the manners and procedures of how Reiki practitioners' beliefs and spirituality play a role in giving treatments to clients.

Descriptive Analysis of the Participants' Demographic Data

The study was conducted using Reiki practitioners who either have been attuned to Reiki I, II, III-a and/or III-b. The only criterion was that the participants had to be attuned to some form of Reiki to be eligible to participate in this study. Interestingly, all the subjects (100%) were attuned by a Reiki Master who specialized in the *Usui Shiki Ryoho* System of Reiki Natural Healing (sometimes referred to as *Usui Shiki Ryoho* School of Reiki),⁸ and the overwhelming majority was attuned to Reiki III-b, making them Reiki Master-Teachers (82%). A majority of the subjects were selected through referral, meaning that once a core group of Reiki practitioners was selected through personal contacts, these people then forwarded the questionnaire on to Reiki practitioners that they knew. This type of research data collection is referred to as "snowball sampling."

In snowball sampling researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested. These people are then used as informants to identify, or put researchers in touch with, others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others—hence the term snowball sampling. This method is useful for sampling a population where access is difficult, maybe because it is a sensitive topic or where communication networks are underdeveloped. The task for the researcher is to establish who are the critical or key informants with whom initial contact must be made. (Cohen, *et al*, 104)

The entire questionnaire was conducted via the Internet.

A decision was made early on to keep the study small in order to extrapolate data in a manageable manner. Although the primary instrument (fieldwork questionnaire) utilized a Likert scale (e.g. "please mark accordingly—strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree") to some extent, the majority of the questionnaire involved open-ended questions, generating a large amount of research data that needed to be collated and interpreted.

In retrospect, perhaps a survey that encompassed only a rating method (e.g. a checklist—please check the items that pertain to you; or Likert scale) for gathering research might have made it easier to collocate and analyze the data generated, but ultimately it was decided to combine both configurations in the question design in order not to limit the subjects in their responses. Also, I could not assume to know all the possible responses that subjects might be able to provide—which certainly was the case, as many of the respondents mentioned areas and activities I would never have thought to include in a checklist or Likert format. The responses, in general, were thoughtful, lengthy, and rich with detail.

⁸ In addition to the *Usui Shiki Ryoho* School of Reiki, a number of subjects also listed other energy therapies they used in cooperation with the traditional form of Reiki: *Karuna Reiki*, *Kundalini Reiki*, *Lightarian Reiki*, *Siddheartha Reiki*, *Reiki Jin Kei Do*, etc. Purists who subscribe to the traditional form of *Usui*-based Reiki view "other" Reiki traditions, which were primarily created using the *Usui* Method of Reiki Healing as a prototype, as less effective. Adherents to these alternative Reiki therapies insist that the energy channeled using these other methods is as powerful and effective (and sometimes more so) than the traditional *Usui* Method of Reiki.

The survey was actually divided into four different sections. The first section dealt with demographic data; the second section focused on the subjects' religious and/or spiritual backgrounds; the third section concentrated on the Reiki treatments; and the fourth section allowed the respondents to write freely about any aspect they wished to comment upon that perhaps was not covered specifically within the perimeters of the survey.

Statistics on the Sex and Age of the Participants

The age of the participants ranged from 37 to 63; the mean was 52. Their sex was predominately female (66%) with a smaller percentage being male (34%). Within the female group, the youngest subject was 37 and the oldest was 63 (with a mean of 51.5 years-of-age). Within the male group, the youngest subject was 45 and the oldest was 57 (with a mean of 52.5 years-of-age).

The data is especially telling in that the majority of the subjects were women. This is most likely quite representative of the entire Reiki practitioner population, even though this data is generated from a small, but somewhat random sampling. Generally, women tend to be more attracted to this type of healing technique because of the subtleness of the energy involved. Of course, this type of healing work requires a person to be attuned to the Universal Life Force Energy source, but it also requires one to be comfortable in accessing both male and female based energy, which women seem to be less apprehensive in doing.

Historically, Reiki was predominately administered by men when first introduced by Dr. Usui, with the "Master-Teacher" attunement given to men. Women eventually did break this sex-barrier, but it was still reserved for "Japanese-only." (Brown, 26; Haberly, 24) Although Mrs. Takata was ethnically Japanese, she was an American citizen, legally, socially and culturally. Initially, she was viewed suspiciously as an outsider—even though she looked Japanese and spoke the language fluently.⁹ Through the help of a medical surgeon who wrote a personal appeal on her behalf to Hayashi-sensei, Takata-sensei broke this nationality barrier when she convinced him to attune her to the Reiki energy. He was so impressed with her dedication that he eventually attuned her to all three Reiki levels.

In 1938, Hayashi-sensei attuned Takata-sensei with the Master-Teacher attunement; he encouraged her to continue her healing work with Reiki. (Borang, 33; Brown, 39; Haberly, 31) Later, this would have a profound affect on Reiki as a movement. Before Hayashi-sensei went into transition (which he consciously caused by psychically shutting down various major organs of his body) shortly before he was to be re-commissioned as a naval officer to serve in the Pacific War with the United States, he selected Takata-sensei to be the "Grand Master,"¹⁰ allowing her to carry on the movement with his blessing. As a former military officer, he knew that Japan was going down a road that would have grave consequences. (Haberly, 41) He instructed Takata-sensei to return to Hawaii and told her where she should go to be safe. (Brown, 59) During and after the war, she was

⁹ When Mrs. Takata first asked if she could learn Reiki, she was told: "Reiki is a closely guarded Japanese treasure. It is for Japanese people only and you are an American. I think it is quite out of the question." (Brown, 26) Being American, she was relentless in her pursuit and finally was afforded the opportunity to study Reiki.

¹⁰ In recent research conducted by Frank Arjava Petter, no records in Japan can be found to suggest there was originally a custom of having a "Grand Master" who carried on the Reiki ideals as a de facto leader. This might have been something that Hayashi created, perhaps along with Takata, in order to keep some type of control or regulatory oversight on the rapidly expanding Reiki movement. (Petter [b], 40)

instrumental in spreading Reiki to the West, attuning 22 people (the majority women)¹¹ to the level of Reiki Master-Teacher before passing into transition on December 12, 1980.

The statistics generated in the research for this study show that women still play a key, if not integral role, in utilizing Reiki by giving treatments and in attuning other women to the Reiki energy.

The average age of the participants was higher than anticipated. One prior assumption was that this type of alternative therapy most likely would be embraced by younger people who are seeking spiritual fulfillment through a method that does not involve mainstream or organized religion. The participants all were well into middle age, which suggests that the desire to be a healer in the service of others attracts people of all ages, making Reiki especially attractive to middle-aged people. Also, this may have something to do with the fact that many Reiki Master-Teachers who follow the traditional Usui System of Natural Healing often charge a sizeable amount of money to be attuned to each level, with the final attunement for Master-Teacher costing up to \$10,000. Older, more well-established people have more disposable income to invest into this type of pursuit.

As will be delineated later, also, many of the participants had jumped from a variety of religious traditions, seeking a spiritual purpose. Perhaps this, too, is a reason why the participants tended to be older because they had more opportunity to experience mainstream medicine and other spiritual outlets, before deciding to embark upon Reiki as a way to heal and be “spiritual.” Although Reiki is not a belief system, has no dogma, per se, and is not a religion, it does offer practitioners an avenue to explore their own spirituality and beliefs in a higher power or force, whether that is God, or another Supreme Being.

Research Data on the Religious and Spiritual Backgrounds of the Participants

Responses to the survey statement which read, “I consider myself to be a religious person,” elicited varied, but interesting, results. Only 17% of the respondents indicated the response “strongly agree,” where 58% marked the item “somewhat agree.” Only 8% checked “somewhat disagree” and the remainder of the subjects (17%) indicated that they “strongly disagree” with the statement.

The definition of “religious” was explained in the survey instructions as: “Religious meaning you regularly attend a mainstream church and/or subscribe and follow a set dogma affiliated with an organized religion.” *Respondent A* (female, age 57) noted in her response: “I consider myself [to be] very religious, but I am not religious by your definition.” This attitude indicates a flaw in the design of the question itself, perhaps, as one’s definition of religion is often a personal one, making it difficult to define categorically something as intimate and abstract as religion.

This is an example of how an open-ended question may have elicited more concrete results. It would have been interesting, in hindsight, to research how each person individually defined religion and how this personal definition related to their attitude of regarding themselves as being “religious” or not.

The next survey statement the subjects were asked to indicate (using the same answer criteria as the previous statement) was: “I consider myself to be more spiritual than religious.” Overwhelmingly, the respondents indicated “strongly agree” to this statement (75%), with the remainder of the subjects indicating “somewhat agree” (25%).

¹¹ Mrs. Takata attuned 22 people to the level of “Master-Teacher”: George Araki, Dorothy Baba, Ursula Baylow, Rick Bockner, Patricia Bowling, Barbara Brown, Fran Brown, Phyllis Furumoto [Takata’s granddaughter and next Grand Master after Takata], Beth Gray, John Gray, Iris Ishikuro, Haru Kuboi, Ethel Lombardi, Barabara Mc Cullough, Mary McFadyen, Paul Mitchell, Bethel Phaigh, Shinobu Saito, Virginia Samdahl, Wanja Twan, Barbara Weber Ray, and Kay Yamashita (Brown, 99)

When comparing the results which required the subjects to differentiate between being “religious” and being “spiritual,” the participants were much more agreeable to the notion of being “spiritual” as opposed to being “religious.” This was not surprising, considering the subjects are involved in the practice of a healing therapy that is not based on any religion, has no set dogma,¹² or organized church. Seemingly, all the respondents (100%), when combining the two categories indicated they are more inclined to regard themselves in the “spiritual” rather than “religious” category when obliged to make a choice.

This attitude, however, is in direct contrast to the next statement, which basically canceled out the previous statement’s results. It read: “I consider myself to be a spiritual person, but not religious.” Fifty percent (50%) of the participants marked “somewhat disagree” to this statement, with only 33% indicating they “strongly agree,” and 17% characterized their answer as “somewhat agree.”

It is important to note that the more abstract statement: “I consider myself to be more spiritual than religious” was interpreted by a higher (and in a more favorable manner) percentage of the surveyed subjects. When the statement was altered slightly to include the phrasing “to be a spiritual person, but not religious” as opposed to the phrasing “...to be more spiritual than religious,” the respondents were not as comfortable in labeling themselves as a “spiritual person” but perhaps related more positively to being a “religious person.”

This differentiation was deliberate on my part in the design of the survey statements. I wanted to see how the respondents viewed being “spiritual” in the abstract in contrast to a more concrete description. Generally speaking, these results suggest that there tends to be a type of discriminatory attitude against the label of “a spiritual person.” This is possibly a throwback, considering the higher age average of the participants, to the time period of the 1970s when a clear differentiation between being spiritual and religious was brought to the forefront of the New Age movement when it first began to gain widespread attention among ordinary people. New Age adherents often stridently and vociferously opposed organized religion, preferring to follow a more inclusive and open-style of spiritually-based beliefs that were drawn from a variety of religious traditions and belief systems. Hence, the “religious” connotation was viewed negatively. Many of these New Age people chose to embrace a more inclusive spirituality, clearly differentiating them from being categorized as “religious” (because religion was often viewed as being inflexible, narrow, and not accepting of those with alternative beliefs). Being “spiritual” meant being able to practice any prescribed belief system or religious tradition in an all encompassing way, choosing and combining opposing aspects which mainstream religion frowned upon doing.

Mainstream religions tend to look upon the New Age movement suspiciously, negating many aspects of the movement because they do not conform to the strict definition of religious dogma or doctrine espoused by organized religions. This type of prejudice by mainstream and organized religions toward alternative spiritual movements could be a factor in why the subjects responded the way they did concerning labeling themselves concretely.

Perhaps due to religious indoctrination and practice throughout their childhoods and into their adult lives, when faced with identifying themselves with a specific label, the respondents preferred not to categorize themselves as being a “spiritual person.” The first statement presented bears this out in that a combined percentage of the subjects (75%) marked either “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” to the statement: “I consider myself a

¹² Strictly speaking, perhaps, the *Reiki Principles* written by Mikao Usui, which head this paper under the main title, could be categorized as “dogma.” However, generally a dogma is defined as a more extensive set of beliefs or doctrine that incorporates a body of material into a specific belief system. The *Reiki Principles* are basically a guide to right living, which is based more on common sense than on a belief system.

religious person.” According to the data gathered for this study, the subjects—through either experience or habit—seem to prefer the label “religious person” instead of “spiritual person.”

This result was indeed surprising, considering the participants’ backgrounds as Reiki practitioners. It was assumed initially that the subjects, because of their work in an alternative healing therapy that requires belief in a higher-power and a Universal Life-Force Energy source (that is not religiously-based or part of a mainstream religion), would be more comfortable being referred to as a “spiritual person” rather than as a “religious person.” The fact that they clearly differentiated between the two in the three statements that were designed to reveal whether labeling made a difference, is insightful and revealing. It must be noted, however, that the results may be skewed due to a misinterpretation of “religious” because (as mentioned with regard to the first statement) the subjects’ personal definitions of the word may vary a great deal. In a future study, a clear delineation and interpretation of the terms “religion,” “religious,” “spiritual” and “spirituality” may make the results more revealing.

In order to procure a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ attitudes and backgrounds of religion and spirituality, an open-ended statement was presented to them: “I would describe my religious upbringing and/or spiritual life until now as....” To clarify to the subjects what type of information was desired, an example answer was given to them: “e.g. I was raised Methodist, attending church regularly, but converted to Catholicism in college. Later, I went through a phase of being agnostic, but had a personal awakening when I was 25 and currently adhere to a more all encompassing type of spirituality that is in line more with a New Age belief system than an organized religion-based one.”

The reason for giving a sample answer was to direct moderately the focus of the respondents to comment specifically on their religious upbringings and spiritual lives with precise references to religious and spiritual experiences. Without an attempt to focus the attention of the subjects, it was felt that the participants might misinterpret the statement and give widely varied personal accounts relating to their religion and spirituality that would be more allegorical in nature, rather than specific examples of religion and belief systems they ultimately pursued (and were involved in) throughout their childhoods and adult lives.

This proved to be a most fascinating aspect of this study, with the respondents relating their religious upbringings and spiritual lives in great detail. Some examples are as follows:

Subject A, Female (age 57)—American

I was raised Southern Baptist in a home with parents who were missionaries. I left that belief at the end of university. About 10 years later, I came back to a relationship with God due to the writings of Catherine Ponder,¹³ and I have attended New Thought¹⁴ churches when I

¹³ “Catherine Ponder is considered one of America's foremost inspirational authors. She has written more than a dozen books, which include such bestsellers as her *Millionaires of the Bible* series. She is a minister of the non- denominational Unity faith—long known as the "pioneer of positive thinking"—and has been described by some as ‘the Norman Vincent Peale among lady ministers.’ She has served in Unity Churches since 1956, and heads a global ministry in Palm Desert, California.” (<http://catherineponder.wwwhubs.com>, retrieved February 2, 2007)

¹⁴ *New Thought* churches teach that “thought” is central to one’s place in the universe; through meditation, prayer, affirmations, positive intentions and thinking, adherents can create their own destinies through conscious thought because it is constantly evolving and unfolding. Unity Churches are a part of this movement.

have found them. ...My spiritual life is very active and fulfilling. New Thought, particularly the teachings of Catherine Ponder, remains at the core of my belief. I regularly ask for prayer support from Silent Unity,¹⁵ a New Thought organization. Also, I often take classes taught by teachers of the Spirit Unfold Network.¹⁶ They have contributed enormously to my spiritual development.

Subject B, Female (age 38)—Japanese

My family's religion is Buddhism. But in my childhood there was no religious person around me. My family visited graves once a year [a Buddhist practice is to attend to ancestors' graves], and have visited a shrine or temple at the beginning of the New Year. When I was in my 20s, I began to practice Yoga, and my master told me about Sai Baba.¹⁷ Since then, I have looked to spirituality and think about GOD.

Subject C, Female (age 37)—British

Brought up Church of England by a lapsed Catholic mother (!)¹⁸ and never really went to church apart from functions (e.g. weddings, etc). Always believed in God until I became a Buddhist in 2002...now a practicing Buddhism in the Tibetan Mahayana¹⁹ tradition.

Subject D, Male (age 57)—American (Native American and European ancestry)

I was raised Methodist (by a Methodist mother). My father was Baptist. I studied most religions and spiritual practices to some extent. I found the sources/founders had value and the institutions that followed them moved away from that value. I dubbed that process the "battle of the budget." At the moment, I find the teachings of Gangaji, Papaji, and Sri Ramana²⁰ the

¹⁵ *Silent Unity* is affiliated with the Unity of Churches network. It consists of a 24-hour, 7-day a week prayer request line.

¹⁶ The *Spirit Unfold Network* offers classes that promote the idea of self-enrichment and help through positive thinking and intention, similar to the Unity Church teachings.

¹⁷ *Bhagavan Sri Sathya "Sai Baba"* a guru from southern India, heads an ashram where devotees go by the millions to see him perform miracles and to listen to his messages. He is well-known for materializing vibhuti, sacred ash, from the palms of his hands which adherents use for healing purposes.

¹⁸ The (!) was the subject's emphasis, not mine.

¹⁹ The Tibetan Mahayana tradition is one of two major Buddhist Schools which evolved after Buddha's death; the other being Theravada.

²⁰ "Gangaji, born Merle Antoinette ('Toni') Roberson in Texas in 1942, is an American teacher or guru who regularly gives Satsangs [sitting in the company an enlightened guru to receive knowledge through lectures, meditation, and discussion] around the globe. She is said to have attained self-realization in 1990 after an encounter with Poonjaji, a disciple of [Sri] Ramana Maharshi, who sent her back to the West to teach. In 1990, her second husband, Eli Jaxon-Bear, traveled to Lucknow, India to meet Sri H.W.L. Poonja, or "Papaji," on the advice of a friend. Six weeks later, after receiving a letter from her husband, Toni left to join him and meet with Papaji. In this encounter, she says, the fulfillment she had sought was revealed to her. Papaji gave her the name "Gangaji," after the river Ganga (Ganges), and sent her back to America to teach. Gangaji has described contracting an illness and high fever while in India, which preceded her experience of realization.' (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangaji>, retrieved February 3, 2007)

“answer” I’ve been seeking. I have had many experiences with grace. I now recognize those as the gifts they were.

Subject E, Female (age 56)—American (Hispanic ancestry)

I was raised Pentecostal and went to church (at times) 3 times a week. After acquiring a divorce, I was not accepted as a MEMBER of the church. I was told I could not participate as a member to vote, etc. Yet, they did want my tithes. At that time, I stopped going to that church.

Subject F, Male (age 56)—British

I was brought up in an atheist family, but have always been interested in spiritual healing since the age of 17.

Subject G, Female (age 53)—American

I was raised Catholic. I attended church service every Sunday and other days that were required to attend. Later, after I moved out of the house, I attended services when I felt like it. I do not believe you have to go to church in order to BELIEVE that there is a GOD or Infinite Intelligence or Great Spirit.

Subject H, Female (age 58)—American

I was raised Catholic, attending church services regularly. When I married, I married a man who had previously been married and could not marry in [the Catholic] church. I studied my husband’s religion and converted to Lutheran, however, I did not attend church services regularly. I have since been attending and following the Spiritual beliefs regularly. I find spirituality fits my beliefs and needs. I believe that this is in line with the New Age belief system. I love it!

Subject I, Female (age 63)—Mexican

I was raised Catholic, and I do Reiki, which is not a religion, but Reiki fulfills my spiritual needs allowing me to connect to the Divine. I believe strongly in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and pray to him for strength and guidance.

Subject J, Female (age 50)—Australian

I attended a Methodist Sunday school as a child, and then dropped out of church attendance from age 16, or so, once the family moved and I went away to another city for university [study] and work. I started attending Christmas services in Tokyo for a few years as an adult, and have enjoyed about 20 years (on-and-off) of meditation with Orin and Daben’s [sic] work,²¹ as well as a stint of Vipassana²² and some Buddhist meditation. Now, back in Australia, I am a member of an Anglican church and we attend services about once a month and help with some charity work, and I teach in a Christian school. I have been influenced by

²¹ Orin and DaBen are entities channeled by Duane Packer. The book *Opening to Channel* details messages received through Duane Packer from Orin and DaBen, who offer guidance and advice about channeling spirit.

²² Vipassana, which means to see things as they really are, is an ancient meditation technique from India which is more than 2,500 years old. (<http://www.dhamma.org>, retrieved on February 3, 2007)

profound experiences of connection with Oneness/the Divine, mainly through meditation and the Reiki attunement process, rather than the Church.

Subject K, Male (age 45)—American

Raised Protestant, converted to Catholicism in university. I practiced this for a number of years before becoming disenchanted with religion in general. I followed New Age spirituality for a time before finding Spiritualism,²³ which is what I now consider to be my religion.

Subject L, Male (age 52)—American

I was raised Catholic. Very interested in learning more, always felt a spiritual longing/interest but not satisfied/convinced with conventional religions. Equally interested in philosophy and science, studied meditation, spirituality New Age, and many, many things, and similar, to verify to myself. I had an out of body experience.²⁴

A majority of the respondents indicated some type of affiliation with—either being raised in or converting to as an adult—Catholicism. This is interesting because of the ritual that is associated with the Catholic mass, which may be one reason these people were eventually attracted to Reiki. There is a certain amount of ritual involved in not only the healing aspects of the therapy in preparing to give a treatment (and the systematic manner—*i.e.* hand positions—in which a treatment is given), but also in the attunement process itself.

In nearly all the cases, the subjects seem to have done a fair amount of “religion hopping,” a term I coined to describe the tendency of the subjects to go from one religion or spiritual tradition to another in search of a religion or belief system that fulfilled their spiritual needs.

Since Reiki has its roots in ancient Buddhist teachings and practice, and since Buddhism comes from Hindu traditions and beliefs, it is interesting to note that a number of respondents indicated their affinity for and/or belief in Buddhist or Hindu teachings. Again, Reiki perhaps resonates with these people because of the familiarity and complementary way in which Reiki can be combined with their own religious belief systems or spiritual practices.

In an attempt to discern the subjects’ views on religion and spiritual beliefs, a transition question was included on the survey to ascertain what role their spiritual belief systems or religious backgrounds play in giving Reiki treatments (either to themselves or to clients). The question asked: “Do your religious/spiritual beliefs and/or background play a part in your Reiki treatments? Please explain in detail.”

This question was designed to move from the religious/spirituality-based portion of the survey into how these affect, if at all, the Reiki treatment the practitioner offers. Again, the respondents’ answers were enlightening, explaining more clearly how their religion or spiritual beliefs affect or enhance their ability to heal through Reiki.

Subject A

²³ Spiritualism is an American-made religion that is centered on mediums that make contact with those who have passed over to the other side. The main focus of Spiritualism is the demonstration of the continuity of the spirit after the physical death through messages given in church services, in private readings, and in séances.

²⁴ An “out of body” experience is an “awareness of the astral body detaching from the physical body, either voluntarily or involuntarily, awake or dreaming.” (Jack, 145)

Only as they play a part in the rest of my life. I believe strongly that we are to help one another. I teach Usui and Kundalini Reiki free to people who are interested, and I make the arrangements for a twice-a-month Reiki Share²⁵ at which people give and receive Reiki and at which I teach Reiki to anyone who is new and who wants it. This is my way of helping others. Yet I do other things to help others. Thus, my spiritual beliefs have led to what I do in Reiki—but also what I do with other kinds of energy work and other areas of my life.

Subject D

My understandings are foundational to my sharing of Reiki. I prefer to teach/attune others and let them do their own healing. I believe that I cannot heal anyone but myself. Others do not understand this statement. They believe the healing comes from Reiki or me. I believe I only hold the space of healing and provide access to the energy. Once the other understands, then I am not “needed.” But I never was!

Subject E

Yes, because I do believe in God. As God assisted in the healing, I know we can, as well, make a difference in the world.

Subject F

From the age of 17, I was astounded at the accuracy of things told to me by spiritual leaders. Things that only could be known by me. And I was also told of future events that eventually came true. This gave me knowledge that there was healing energy that could be harnessed for use in helping people. So, I always had confidence in knowing that spiritual guides would be on hand to help.

Subject G

YES, I believe that I am just the hollow bone for the Great Spirit to use to help all those in need. Prayer is so important in the healing of others. I call upon Spirit to be with me and surround the person I am trying to help. My intention is to see that person healthy and whole.

Subject H

Definitely. Prayer and meditation, lots of talking with God assist me to be a clear channel to do God’s healing.

Subject I

Yes. I pray before Reiki asking Jesus Christ to assist me in my Reiki healing. I also ask the Virgin Mary to assist in the healing.

Subject J

Yes, I silently ask, “God make me a channel for your love and healing,” and I feel that Source energy is being called upon to bring the person

²⁵ A *Reiki Share* is the practice of exchanging Reiki energy with other practitioners; each person receives a Reiki treatment, as well as assists in giving treatments. Often, several tables will be set up and each person receives a 15-20 minute treatment. Many practitioners may be working on one person at a time.

back into balance, and for them to summon their own divinity within to balance themselves.

Subject K

Absolutely. Belief in a Supreme Being, angels, guides, and the Universal Life Force Energy that pervades all is the outcome of all my religious experience while growing up and as an adult.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents indicated that, indeed, their religious backgrounds and/or spiritual beliefs do influence their Reiki practice as they invoke some sort of religious or spiritual conviction into their Reiki treatments. This is not surprising because the idea of an unseen energy force is basic to the therapy. When Reiki students first begin to learn about the healing technique, they are influenced by their mentor, or Master-Teacher, who in turn was influenced by his/her Reiki teacher.

From the beginning, Reiki has been based on the belief that a Higher Source is responsible for the healing, and in order for a healing to take place, this source of energy must be accessed. The general belief in a Supreme Being as the source of the energy that is all pervasive is an accepted belief, which was proven in this study by analyzing the responses of the subjects. An atheist, or even an agnostic, would obviously not be the least bit interested in pursuing Reiki because it is necessary to believe in a Higher Power that is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Research Data on the Reiki Treatment

Before beginning any Reiki treatment, whether it is a self-treatment or a treatment for someone else, often practitioners will create a "healing space." This often involves clearing their minds through meditation or prayer, as well as clearing the room where the treatment will take place. The personal ritual involved in preparing to do a Reiki treatment for each practitioner varies slightly, but usually involves some type of meditation, prayer to the Creator, and/or an intention to the Universe asking that a healing take place during the treatment.

A number of the subjects indicated that they incorporate a combination of all of these: Meditating before the start of the treatment to put oneself in a frame of mind more conducive to healing; a prayer offered with purity of motive to help the practitioner to center and concentrate on the purpose of offering Reiki to oneself or to another; and an intention to make it clear to the Universe what it is intended to be done with regards to the treatment.

For instance, *Subject B* meditates for a bit to focus and to center herself, while *Subject C* offers a prayer for protection, using the Reiki symbols, as well as bringing in Reiki guides to assist in the healing. *Subject E* has a more involved ritual she performs before giving a treatment; specifically, she cleanses the space and Reiki table energetically, lights a white candle, decides which essential oils she wants to include, as well as using incense at the entry of the room. *Subject J* related: "I clear and clean the healing space and myself both physically and energetically, so that I can be the clearest channel possible.

Subject K detailed his personal ritual in great detail:

I believe strongly in "setting the space." Before I give a treatment to myself or another, I always make sure that the room has been cleared of any negative energy that may be lurking about. This can be done in any number of ways, but the easiest way is to raise the vibratory energy of the room through sound. I sometimes use a bell, gong, Tibetan cymbals, a

Tibetan singing bowl, or drum; these are all vibration-rising tools to carry off any stagnate energy that may be stuck. This can also be achieved by playing a soothing CD that resonates positively within you and the client—something that is relaxing, putting both at ease.

Another option is to smudge the area with sage where the treatment will be done. Sage, or something similar, has been used since time immemorial by indigenous peoples all over the world in shamanic rituals to clear negative energy during ceremonies, treatments, and in their daily lives. The aromatic smoke of the sage plant traps negative energy and carries it off and away from where the treatment will take place. However, if this is not a viable option, then regular incense can be used to achieve the same results. If I am treating a client, I first ask if the person is sensitive to sage and incense before using these items. If so, then I do it well in advance of the person's arrival so the odor will have dissipated before the treatment begins. The end result, whether done immediately before the treatment or several hours before, are the same.

As well, fresh flowers offer vibrancy and positive energy to any room where a treatment is done. Basically, any preparation that is made to enhance the Reiki treatment, which is positive and beneficial to the healing process, will aid in offering yourself or the client a treatment that is fulfilling and healing.

Interestingly, only one respondent, *Subject A*, said that she did not do any type of preparation or personal ritual to ready her or the space before giving a Reiki treatment:

Reiki is so much a part of me that I just intend to use it (or use a Reiki symbol) and it starts working. It's not a formal procedure. I'm as comfortable with it as I am in slipping on a comfortable, old pair of shoes—and I give about as much thought and preparation to using it as I would in slipping on the shoes (*i.e.* almost none).

The question which asked: "Do you consult your Reiki client about the treatment he/she will receive?" the majority of the respondents indicated that they do not; but, many did add that if a client is new or has any questions, then they will consult the client. Perhaps Reiki is becoming so well-known that people who seek out a Reiki practitioner for treatment needs no explanation or consultation because they are quite familiar with the energy and treatment involved.

Subject J appears to be quite professional in her Reiki practice as she requires her clients to sign a type of release form before receiving a treatment. She was the only practitioner to indicate this type of condition before beginning a treatment:

Yes, they are required to fill in a form giving details of their condition and disclaimer for my own legal protection (*e.g.* that Reiki does not replace medical treatment, that medication should not be adjusted without consultation with their doctor, and so on), which I check and go through first. I discuss with them why they have come and what their expectations are, then I discuss the procedure and what they might expect during the treatment. Afterwards, I talk with them about possible aftereffects and post and follow-up care.

A few respondents indicated they sometimes ask their clients if they have any “special requests,” or will consult with them if the client is “interested in spirituality.” *Subject C* wrote: “I don’t have clients...I just practice on friends.” This answer is in stark contrast to *Subject J* who is very thorough and conscientious about client protocol and the legality of offering a healing therapy to people. *Subject E* pointed out that a consultation is usually necessary because “not every Reiki session is the same.”

Several of the participants mentioned that they explain to the client what to expect during the treatment, but do not consult the client specifically, allowing the client to naturally broach the topic in a way and at a time which is comfortable for them. This is an important point, because a person’s health condition can be very personal, and by not pressuring the client to consult about a specific health concern before a treatment, allows the client to offer information as they feel inclined. Also, Reiki practitioners are not physicians, and do not (or should not) diagnose, prescribe, or make any type of health-related suggestions to their clients. *Subject J* certainly understands this and takes great effort to inform her clients through the disclaimer that they are not to substitute traditional medical treatment for Reiki sessions without first consulting a medical doctor.

The responses were varied, encompassing many additional methods, when asked whether practitioners strictly offered Reiki in its purist form, or if they combined Reiki with other tools or techniques. A number of the respondents indicated using crystal therapy in conjunction with their Reiki energy. Others professed to using essential oils during treatments, while some of the respondents mentioned aligning the clients’ chakras, smoothing their auras, and dowsing the clients before beginning a treatment. Only one participant, *Subject K*, indicated he only used Reiki energy during his treatments.

When asked: “How long is a typical treatment?” the majority of the respondents indicated that Reiki sessions usually last an hour; the next most common time was 20 - 30 minutes. Several practitioners suggested they allow intuition to decide the length of a treatment, which depends upon the person’s condition, and how much energy is being channeled during the treatment. *Subject D* rather matter-of-factly revealed: “I get bored after 5 minutes. So treatments are that long....”

Most practitioners are taught the hand positions in a systematic manner which, if done completely to the front and the back of the body, takes around 45 minutes to an hour to complete. The results seem to indicate that this is common practice, as most treatments seem to fall within this time frame. Indeed, it is important for the practitioner to feel energetically how much Reiki is being pulled through his/her hands, and this will often determine how long a treatment takes, depending upon how much energy is being drawn.

The final item in the section relating to Reiki was designed to reintroduce the idea of religion and spirituality of the participants as it related to their Reiki work. It read: “Please explain what role your religion/spirituality/belief system plays in your capacity as a Reiki practitioner and adherent of Reiki energy as a healing technique.”

Overwhelmingly (95%), the respondents remarked that their Reiki work was fueled by a desire to serve others.

Subject A

I believe strongly that we are to help one another. One way I can help others is by teaching Usui and Kundalini Reiki free to people who are interested and by making the arrangements for the twice-a-month Reiki Share at which people give and receive Reiki and at which I teach Reiki to anyone who is new and who wants it. Yet I do other things to help others, too. Thus, my spiritual beliefs have led to what I do in Reiki—but

also what I do with other kinds of energy work and in other areas of my life.

Subject C

I believe that helping others is the most important area to progress as a human and since we are all interconnected and dependent on each other then this is selfish wisdom (*i.e.* helping self through helping others).

Subject D

We are each a part of the universal consciousness. "There is only one of us." The belief in separateness is a function of mind (thought). Healing energy is freely available to anyone who chooses to receive. This energy is part of Life. It is free.

Subject E

To me, it is all about the intent and willingness to assist.

Subject G

I believe that the Great Spirit uses me to help others. I know it is not me who is doing the healing. I am just the hollow bone. I believe prayer and positive thinking will increase one's chances of a healthy life. I AM SO BLESSED TO BE GIFTED WITH THIS GIFT TO HELP OTHERS IN THIS FASHION.

Subject H

I truly believe that it is my dedication to serving in God's name to serve someone that truly assists me while doing Reiki. It is the love I have to serve others that helps me to be a clear channel for the energy to flow through.

Subject I

I am Catholic and I strongly believe in God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. I think it has a lot to do with my healing work. I believe in the power of God, his omnipotence and omnipresence. I have experienced miracles in my Reiki work. To me, I think when we receive the attunements, we receive the Holy Spirit, that God-energy, and it is our duty to use this in a way to help others.

Subject K

Being a child of God, it is my obligation as a spiritual person to assist my brothers and sisters on their journey. Reiki allows me to accomplish this by offering healing energy to those who are in need. The Sai Baba says, "love all, serve all" which I believe to be good words to live by. The Golden Rule, or a rendition of it, is found in every religious tradition from the monotheistic and polytheistic religions, to obscure African tribal religions. This is what religion and spirituality is—helping others and treating them as you would want to be treated.

The heartfelt sincerity evident in the respondents' answers in wanting to make a difference in peoples' lives through service and help is most impressive. The idea of being of service to others is seemingly central to why they decided to learn and practice Reiki.

The influence of religion upon them as they grew up is apparent in their answers. In part, their experience in Christianity (since nearly all the subjects were exposed to Christianity as children) indeed seems to play some role in their later beliefs and spiritual practices. Certainly, the idea of “serving others” is a fundamental or key doctrine taught by Jesus in the New Testament, which at some level, has influenced the subjects to a certain degree in their current belief system. In addition, the concept of “laying of hands” to heal the sick is another aspect of Christianity that may have influenced the subjects’ decision to embrace Reiki as practitioners.

Conclusion

In point of fact, there were a number of surprising conclusions that came out of this research study. Prior assumptions regarding the age and sex of the participants were contrary to the reality of current trends in the Reiki practitioner community. It was found that women have enjoyed an important role—historically and currently—with regard to not only giving Reiki treatments, but in promoting and teaching the therapy to other women. Although it is gaining in popularity among men as well, women Reiki practitioners are still more numerous than men.

The candidness and honesty of the respondents’ answers was refreshing and very much appreciated by this researcher. The rich details of the subjects’ beliefs and practices related to religion, spirituality and Reiki offered unprecedented insight into the modern Reiki movement and how one’s upbringing does in fact influence one’s current belief system and spiritual practices, either positively or negatively. In the majority of the cases, the participants indicated they did a fair amount of “religion hopping” until they found a belief system which suited their needs; however, they still associated their beliefs with a traditional view of “religion” or sense of being “religious,” being more comfortable labeling themselves as such.

This was an interesting outcome of this study—how the participants chose to label their spirituality. Most felt comfortable to indicate readily that they considered themselves to be “spiritual,” but then contradicted this assertion when asked to select more definitively between the terms “spiritual” and “religious.”

It is quite evident, as well, that purity of motive factors into a Reiki practitioner’s decision to pursue Reiki as a student; then to offer it as a practitioner to clients; and then to offer it as a teacher to other aspiring Reiki practitioners. Most significantly, as a practitioner of Reiki, the majority of the subjects indicated that their motivation was based upon the need to assist or serve their fellow human beings. This data was extrapolated from the open-ended portion of the survey where the respondents made these assertions without any prompting or selection of appropriate responses.

The attitude of “service to others” is espoused in all organized religions and spiritual traditions, but is rarely realized to the extent it is within the Reiki community. Offering Reiki healing to others is a tangible and clear way to gauge such altruism. It is not known, however, how many of the participants actually charged a fee for their Reiki treatments, which would certainly cancel out any purely altruistic tendencies since there would be an element of “self-gain” involved in these instances. Reiki practitioners, however, are quick to point out and make it abundantly clear that the client who receives a treatment is not offering a donation, paying a fee, or making some other type of monetary exchange for the “healing,” per se, but only for the time of the practitioner who is offering it.

In this sense, just like medical doctors, therapists, or any other healthcare professional who charges for their services, Reiki practitioners do have an investment of time in giving a treatment, which makes it reasonable to expect some type of compensation, whether that be cash, a gift, or a bartering of goods. From the beginning of Reiki, as outlined in this paper, it

is an inherent conviction that some type of exchange is needed between the Reiki practitioner and client to ensure that the client will be personally invested—and in the end, responsible—for his/her own healing. In today's society, an exchange of currency is the most common and easy way to achieve this.

The study did have a variety of limitations. Perhaps a larger sampling of subjects would have been preferable in order to get a more concrete idea of how religion and spirituality affects a practitioner's attitude and practice of Reiki. Also, clearer definitions of the terms "religion," "religious," "spirituality," and "spiritual" might have proven more useful in ascertaining more definitively how the respondents (as individuals) define these somewhat abstract and potentially confusing notions. It would have been interesting to know, as well, how many of the Reiki practitioners charged for their treatments; and how much was charged per treatment; and how many practitioners simply offered Reiki healing with no expectation of an "exchange" of goods or money.

In the end, however, this study offers new research and data about modern Reiki and its practitioners which have not been sought prior to the writing of this paper. It is hoped that future researchers will be able to uncover more in-depth data through research studies on Reiki practitioners themselves; the religious and spiritual attitudes, practices and beliefs of Reiki healers; and how these are utilized in conjunction with their work with the Reiki energy in healing clients.

Even though the research for this study showed that today the majority of Reiki practitioners may follow a less rigid belief system than that which they may have experienced as children and young adults, it is clear that the high level of spirituality present in their belief and practice of Reiki is indisputable. Hence, repeatedly it was emphasized that one's spirituality is not necessarily rooted in what one says, but is better gauged by what one does. Actions do speak louder than words.

Biographical Note

Todd Jay Leonard is a professor at Hirosaki Gakuin University, Japan, where he teaches history, comparative culture, and cross-cultural studies. He is the author of 15 books—on topics ranging from American religious history, cross-cultural understanding, English as a Foreign Language, and spirituality.

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Appendix A

Dear Reiki Practitioner:

I am conducting a study on the relationship between "spirituality" of Reiki practitioners and how it relates to the Reiki treatments given to clients. Thank you for your assistance with this study and survey. By completing this anonymous survey, you are granting me permission to analyze and present your answers and comments in an academic paper and lecture to be published and given in March 2007 at the annual conference for the *Association for the Scientific Study of Religion (ASSR)* in Dallas, Texas. Thank you for your time and assistance with this survey.

Todd Jay Leonard, PhD
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**Demographic Data:**

Sex: Male \_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_ Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please mark all that apply:*

Reiki Training: Level 1 \_\_\_\_ Level 2 \_\_\_\_  
Level 3a (pre-Master) \_\_\_\_ Level 3b (Master Attunement) \_\_\_\_

Were you attuned by a Reiki Master? Yes No  
If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been practicing Reiki? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of Reiki do you practice? [e.g. *Usui Shiki Ryoho* School of Reiki, *Karuna Reiki*, etc.]  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Religious/Spiritual Background\***

[\*"Religious" meaning you regularly attend a mainstream church and/or subscribe and follow a set dogma affiliated with an organized religion.]

Please circle (or Check) the most appropriate response to the following statements.

*-I consider myself to be a religious person.*

Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Somewhat Disagree    Strongly Disagree

*-I consider myself to be more spiritual than religious.*

Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Somewhat Disagree    Strongly Disagree –

*I consider myself to be a spiritual person, but not religious.*

Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Somewhat Disagree    Strongly Disagree

*"I would describe my religious upbringing and/or spiritual life until now as..." :*  
[e.g. "I was raised Methodist, attending church regularly, but converted to Catholicism in college. Later, I went through a phase of being agnostic, but had a personal awakening when I was 25 and currently adhere to a more all encompassing type of spirituality that is in line more with a New Age belief system than an organized religion-based one.]

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*Do your religious/spiritual beliefs and/or background play a part in your Reiki treatments? Please explain in detail.*

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### **Reiki Treatment**

Before offering a client a Reiki Treatment...

1. *Do you have a personal ritual you perform regularly? Please explain.*  
[e.g. setting/clearing the space energetically, placing Reiki symbols, meditation, aura cleansing, charka alignment, bringing in your Reiki Guides or other notable Reiki personages, etc.]

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2. *Do you consult with your Reiki client about the treatment he/she will receive? Please explain.*

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3. *Do you offer a prayer/intention/devotion/invocation, etc before beginning the treatment? Please explain.*

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4. *In your Reiki treatments, do you solely offer the client Reiki energy or do you supplement the treatment with other techniques or tools? Please explain.*  
[e.g. crystals, dowsing, color therapies, chakra alignment, etc.]

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*How long is a typical treatment?*

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*How often do you give treatments to clients in a month?*

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*How frequently do you give yourself a Reiki treatment?*

*daily \_\_\_\_\_ weekly \_\_\_\_\_ monthly \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_ other*

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*Please explain what role your religion/spirituality/belief system plays in your capacity as a Reiki practitioner and adherent of Reiki energy as a healing technique:*

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*Please feel free to offer any additional comments in the space below:*

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Thank you for your time and assistance with this survey.

Please mail to the address above, or email to: [tleonard@infoamori.ne.jp](mailto:tleonard@infoamori.ne.jp)



## Cioran and the Worship of Apocalypse

Jon K. Loessin  
Wharton County Junior College

“Everything is in decline and always has been.”<sup>1</sup>  
--Emile Cioran

### Introduction

Emile Cioran<sup>2</sup> (1911-1995) once proclaimed that “Dürer<sup>3</sup> is my prophet.”<sup>4</sup> The more I observe the procession of the centuries, the more I am convinced that the one image capable of revealing its meaning is his *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

Referring to Dürer as his “prophet” is in itself a compelling statement as, to Cioran, a “prophet” is someone who not only professes great insight and the ability to envision the future, but one who speaks for God by divine inspiration like Moses or Jesus. (Such an association may have been fueled by the fact that Dürer actually did physically resemble the traditional Western image of Jesus).

Almost counter to the ideal of Christian love and charity however, his very next thought after expressing his admiration of Dürer is, “The ages advance only by treading the hordes underfoot; the weak will die no less than the strong, and even these riders, save one. It is for him...that the ages have suffered and groaned.”

The emergence of tyranny with its accompaniments is the finality of natural law, evolutionary processes, and even spirituality. There is no “humanity” or “civility” in existence. As Cioran states, “Humanitarianism is but self-delusion, and pacifism is sheer intellectual masturbation...”<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, to even read Cioran’s mention of the word “advance” (or “progress” for that matter) requires some qualification, coming from a self-proclaimed philosopher of despair. Once when an interviewer stated to Cioran that he seemed to have been against everything since 1920, Cioran had replied, “No—since Adam.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, to Cioran, evolution of any kind is nothing more than decay or decline. The inevitability of progress is destruction. The goal of anything is its demise. When humans “aspire” to “accomplish” something and “work toward” “progress,” what really is being achieved is nothing more than acceleration toward apocalypse. Applying such a philosophical stance to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” does raise some interesting possible answers. Perhaps the reason people are born (and thus, live) is but to

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<sup>1</sup> Cioran, Emile. *Anathemas and Admirations*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Quartet Books, 1986. p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Emile Cioran (1911-1995) was a Romanian-born (and later French) philosopher and essayist with nihilistic, existentialist, and deconstructionist views.

<sup>3</sup> Albrecht Dürer (äl'brekht dūr'ur) (1471–1528) was a German painter and mathematician, and, with Rembrandt and Goya, the greatest creator of old master prints. He was born (and died) in Nuremberg, Germany and is best known for his prints, including the *Apocalypse* (1498) and his two series on the passion of Christ, His most iconic images are his woodcuts of the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1497-98) and his numerous self-portraits.

<sup>4</sup> Cioran, Emile. *History and Utopia*. Trans. Richard Howard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Patreu, Marta. *An Infamous Past: E. M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania*. Trans. Ivan R. Dee. Chicago: Ivan Dee Publisher, 2005. p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Leon, Alberto Pinzon. “Cioran a la Postmodernidad.” <<http://www.antroposmoderno.com/textos/Cioran.shtml>> [accessed in 2006 but no longer available online].

die—nothing more, nothing less.<sup>7</sup> Everything at every moment is moving toward elimination or extinction.

The Bible had provided the inspiration for Dürer and his visions of apocalypse. In Revelation 6:1-8 the riders of the white, red, black, and pale horses set into motion the beginning of the end of the world toward rapture, tribulation, judgment, and the new Heaven, earth and eternal paradise. Most Christians during the Middle Ages (Dürer's contemporaries) believed that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was going to occur tomorrow, if not later today, and lived their spiritual lives accordingly. During this age, life and reward on earth was not important as the goal was eternity in Heaven. The conclusion of earthly existence was not only anticipated at any moment, but prayer and hope for the inevitable was a constant feature of life in this age. Cioran spares the details of what amounts to much the same belief. For him, let the process begin—the sooner the better. Apocalypse is to be revered—it is inevitable, it terminates the misery and despair that accompanies earthly existence, and it is the path to eternal life.

For such a view to be systematic and demonstrate validity, it must address additional questions with some semblance of consistency. For example, why did God create the universe in the first place? Why did God create man? If God is good, why did he allow evil to permeate the world? Why do things evolve toward seeming betterment but are, in reality, actually evolving toward ultimate destruction? Why is earthly existence finite?

Cioran has answers to all these questions, but often answers that must be carefully extracted and interpreted from his voluminous texts. In each case the single word “apocalypse” is the ultimate answer.

Cioran comes very close to equating the terms “God” and “Apocalypse” as if the two were one and the same. The “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” are no more than agents of God himself to bring about the eventual conclusion of material existence and separate the righteous from the damned. Perhaps these “horde-destroyers” should actually be referred to as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (*read, of God*).

Philosophers who view life on earth as infinitely perfectible will only incur Cioran's wrath. He is more on par with Nietzsche<sup>8</sup> (who he read as a youth), Shestov<sup>9</sup> (in his formative and insomniac years), Pareto<sup>10</sup> (and his elitist theories), and Spengler<sup>11</sup> (who he considered his intellectual icon), whose perspective of cyclical historical inevitability has been described by one prominent scholar as that of “apocalyptic pessimism.”<sup>12</sup> Cioran's response to that characterization would be, “No—realism.”

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Pope (1688-1744), 18<sup>th</sup> century British writer (and staunch Catholic) regarded by many as the greatest English poet, wrote in his *Essay on Man* (1734) that man was “Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err.”

<sup>8</sup> Friederich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German-born philosopher and philologist.

<sup>9</sup> Lev Isaakovich Shestov (1866-1938) was a Russian-born Jewish existential philosopher who immigrated to France in 1921 and deeply influenced Cioran's perspectives on despair as faith.

<sup>10</sup> Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto (1848-1923) was an Italian sociologist, economist, and philosopher who subscribed to the idea of perpetual elitism and whose ideas have been influential in many academic fields from classical economy to Freudian psychology.

<sup>11</sup> Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880-1936) was a German historian and philosopher whose interests also included mathematics, science, and art. He is best known for his book *The Decline of the West* (two volumes, 1918-1923) in which he posits a cyclical theory of the rise and decline of civilizations.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Sugrue (currently Behrman Fellow in the Council on the Humanities at Princeton University) in an e-mail to the author in 1986.

### The Goal of Creation (or, From Paradise to Now)

If the universe was created from a void by the process of intelligent design or divine inspiration, the question of “Why?” still remains. Was creation designed to be a “fall from universal paradise” (from God’s ideal spiritual realm) that was later mirrored by the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden and man’s “fall from grace” and the evolution of civilizations and their ultimate “rises and falls,” and the lives of individuals who also “rise and fall” through the cyclical process of birth, life, and death? For Cioran, creation is necessary only for the created’s eventual destruction. In fact, the cyclical process of all things universal is what it is as well as its opposite. For instance, in order to have peace, it must be known what war is, and vice versa. In order to know light, darkness must exist. In order to recognize good, evil must also be present. Both good and evil are necessary (each must exist) to bring about the creation and eventual destruction of the other.<sup>13</sup> In the spirit of complete reversal from Creation (and the proverbial “Big Bang”), Cioran writes:

“At that moment when all faith and resignation are lost...let ideals be declared void...beliefs, trifles; art, a lie; and philosophy, a joke. Let everything be climax and anticlimax...And in those final moments, let all that humanity has felt until now, hope, regret, love, despair, and hatred, explode with such force that nothing is left behind.”<sup>14</sup>

As Cioran states, “each of our ideas recreates the world, and each of our thoughts destroys it. Our everyday lives are alternatively influenced by cosmogony and apocalypse...apart from the creation and destruction of the world, all else is worthless.<sup>15</sup> [When] I am in a good mood, God is good; I am sullen, God is wicked...; A thousand arguments sustain Him, and a thousand destroy...”<sup>16</sup> In short, the universe was created as it exists by God for divine purposes, or the universe was never created and God does not exist.

### Why Evolution and Religion? (or, The Cycle from Creation to Apocalypse)

Auguste Comte<sup>17</sup> (perhaps adapted from Vico<sup>18</sup> before him) stated in his Law of Human Progress that all knowledge has evolved through three distinct stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive (or scientific). The development of theology

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<sup>13</sup> See Emile Durkheim’s (1858-1917) works on functional society and the functions of deviance. Durkheim was a prominent French sociologist and anthropologist.

<sup>14</sup> Cioran, Emile. “Apocalypse.” *On the Heights of Despair*. Trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> Cioran, Emile. “An Essay on Decomposition.” *Kultura*. Skopje, 1996. p.97.

<sup>16</sup> Cioran, Emile. *A Short History of Decay*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1975. pp. 137-38.

<sup>17</sup> Isidore Marie Auguste François Xavier Comte (1798-1857) French scholar and philosopher who is remembered for being the first to apply the scientific method to the social world and is known as the founder of sociology.

<sup>18</sup> Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is best known for his *verum factum* principle, first formulated in 1710 as part of his *De Italorum Sapientia*. The principle states that truth is verified through creation or invention. This criterion for truth would later shape the history of civilization in Vico’s opus, the *Scienza Nuova* (*The New Science*, 1725). Vico argues in the *Scienza Nuova* that civilization develops in a recurring cycle (*ricorso*) of three ages: the divine, the heroic, and the human. Each age exhibits distinct political and social features and can be characterized by master tropes or figures of language. The theory may be the earliest in constructivist philology.

itself had been a three stage process, with early explanations of phenomena being attributed to fetishistic supernaturalism (magic, objects, idols, physical objects with special powers, etc.), then polytheism, and finally, monotheism. This evolution of what was to be called "religion" began with multiple attributions to explain observable phenomena, became refined to fervors linked to multiple gods, and eventually culminated in unity under the banner of one God as the ultimate attribution and explanation of phenomena, resulting in the development of the concept of "faith" in a singular deity. It would not be long before the next epistemological stage (metaphysics) seeking earthly causes of phenomena would begin, followed by the "new religion" of science—a dialectical progression<sup>19</sup>, but one bent on destruction, not perpetuation.

Cioran, commenting on the evolution of religion, stated, "In the eyes of the ancients, the more gods you recognize, the better you serve divinity...under the regime of several gods, fervor is shared. When it is addressed to one god alone, it is concentrated, exacerbated, and ends by turning into aggression, into *faith*."<sup>20</sup>

Attributing all actions (those perceived as both good and evil) to one deity merged the natural oppositional forces in the universe into one being who became responsible for all outcomes, whether favorable or unfavorable. This strain and burden of one entity as all-powerful, to be feared, to be revered, and held responsible for every vestige of creation, evolution, and action in the universe, naturally evolves toward the formation of yet another oppositional force—in this case, a new force that will rise to oppose a monotheistic (and, in Western Civilization, Christian) God. It should be noted that the rise of modern science does not occur until after the establishment of monotheistic faith. In essence, the evolution, refinement, and "modernization" of religion (and its accompanying conceptions of God) results in the eventual displacement of religion as the primary attribution of explaining earthly (or even universal) existence. That which evolves, evolves itself to finality—to destruction, extinction, or to its own apocalypse—including God himself. In a rather cryptic passage from Cioran's *A Short History of Decay*, he states, "This race is rusty, and You are even rustier. Turning toward your Enemy, I await the day when he will pilfer Your sun to hang it in another universe."<sup>21</sup>

Who is this "Enemy" [note the capitalization Cioran uses] of God? It is not likely the traditional rival of God (Satan) nor is it likely science. Given his cyclical leanings and penchant for apocalypse, he is likely referring to a new (or transformed) God in the next universe. This seemingly unorthodox theological position of "other universes" and "alternative gods" is actually not far removed from the body of thought today known as "quantum mechanics," (especially M-Theory)<sup>22</sup> complete with its parallel universes, strings, waves, eleven dimensions, and the constant evolution of the multiverse through a process of creation that appears to be less random, chaotic, and serendipitous, and more likely the result of intelligent design (whether by God, gods, or angels).<sup>23</sup> This connective avenue

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<sup>19</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and *dialectics*. Hegel (1770-1831) was a German philosopher who, among his many concepts, introduced the idea of *sublation* (*Aufhebung*), the lifting up of two contradictory moments to a higher unity.

<sup>20</sup> Cioran, Emile. *The New Gods*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: New York Times Books. pp. 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, p.142.

<sup>22</sup> The M-Theory vision, although not yet complete, is of the whole observable universe being one of many super expanded four dimensional branes (or membranes) of an eleven dimensional existence. While branes of alternative universes exist "near us" their formulation of physical laws may differ from our own, as their number of dimensions. It is currently believed that a collision of "universe branes" somehow compacted enough energy to form what established physicists called the Big Bang.

<sup>23</sup> Chown, Marcus. "Did Angels Create the Universe?" *The Independent* (London) 15 March 2002. <[http://news.independent.co.uk/world/science\\_technology/article192531.ece](http://news.independent.co.uk/world/science_technology/article192531.ece)>.

between religion, philosophy, history, society, and quantum theory has been explored quite brilliantly by contemporary French philosopher Jean Baudrillard<sup>24</sup> in his recent work, *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact*, where he writes:

“...life itself can become a kind of parallel universe, something strange that happens to us while we are doing other things...and the ego, freed from its identity, can strike out along the parallel paths of becoming...Whereas the ego of identity is content to pursue its history inside this lifeline, the play of destiny implies the crossing of this ‘existential divide’. Such are the two parallel dimensions of any existence, that of its history and its visible unfolding...We do lots of wondering about the time after our death, but paradoxically, none about the time before our birth...Ultimately the Big Bang and the Big Crunch are born at the same time, the one does not come at the end of the other (any more than death comes at the end of life)...They occur simultaneously and unfold in parallel...The hypothesis of parallel events and lifeline throws into question the conception of linear, progressive history...When nothing happens to interrupt the thread of history [read “*string of history*”], then it can be regarded as dead...Utopia relates to an imaginary future...Uchronia plays on the same standpoint, but with regard to the past: ‘What might have happened if...?’...Today utopia is at an end and uchronia with it...At the same time it gave rise to a utopian dimension, modernity gave rise to the opposite dimension of objective—technological, scientific, economic—reality which relentlessly proceeds on its course to the exclusion of any imaginary order. The possible itself is no longer possible. What happens, happens, and that’s all there is to it. It is the end of history, then...All that remains is the blatant self-evidence of actuality, of the actual performance, which, by that fact, becomes once again a total fiction and hallucination.”<sup>25</sup>

### The Goal of History (or Arriving at Post-History)

Likewise, Cioran proclaims:

“Man makes history; in its turn history unmakes man. He is its author and its object, its agent and its victim...How to assign it a goal? If it had one, history would reach it only when it had reached its term.”<sup>26</sup> Just as theologians rightly speak of ours as a post-Christian age, someday we shall hear of the splendors and miseries of living in a post-historical epoch.”<sup>27</sup>

Cioran speaks of a veritable paradise in which existence will “become what it was before turning into historical time.”<sup>28</sup> History is nothing but the chronicle of events leading to apocalypse. It has no meaning until the chronicle is complete, and it is not complete until

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Baudrillard (1929- ) is a cultural theorist, philosopher, political commentator, sociologist and photographer. His work is frequently associated with postmodernism and post-structuralism.

<sup>25</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact*. Trans. Chris Turner. New York: Berg, 2005. pp. 197-205.

<sup>26</sup> Cioran, Emile. *Drawn and Quartered*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1983. p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

historical time has stopped. Cioran does not accept the assessment of George Santayana's<sup>29</sup> proclamation that, "Those who cannot learn from history are condemned to repeat it," but rather the view of Spengler that one *cannot* learn from history and *is* condemned to repeat it. Decline and decay have never been prevented from claiming civilizations and the same will be true for earthly existence (and our universe, and everything else for that matter). He proclaims that "a maleficent genius presides over history's destinies" and since history has no goal—only a fatality—confers upon the future a "special providence" which "causes civilizations whose progress it governs always to depart from their original direction in order to gain the contrary of their goals, in order to decline with an obstinacy and a method which clearly betray the maneuvers of a dark and ironic power."<sup>30</sup> In any civilization, no apogee is ever attained, only notable points in its decline and collapse. Just as an hourglass seeps sand until all is gone, so is the nature of all civilizations. Catastrophe and apocalypse is the only recourse or solution for civilization and Cioran questioned whether humanity would be better off eliminating itself now rather than "fading and foundering in expectation, exposing itself to an era of agony," perhaps even foolishly learning to futilely attempt resistance toward its apocalyptic inevitability. Man is destined to fall into "ignominy and bondage...His conquests are a doing of a traitor to life and to himself." Cioran's terrifying vision begins, "In the beginning...

Creation rested in sacred stupor in an admirable and inaudible moan...[but] he has rendered it unrecognizable and forever compromised its peace...today's Babylon the Great deserves to fall...The new whore contaminates space, corrupts beings and landscapes alike, drives out purity and meditation...The more power man acquires, the more vulnerable he becomes. What he must fear most is the moment when, creation entirely fleeced, he will celebrate his triumph, that fatal apotheosis, the victory he will not survive... Plants and creatures bear upon themselves the marks of salvation, as man those of perdition...tyranny on a large scale...no more frontiers, no more *elsewheres*...no more freedom, no more illusions. It is significant that the Book of the End was conceived at a moment when men, and the gods themselves, had to bow before Rome's caprice...terror...the oppressed have but the hope of being...delivered from it by a cosmic dimension...In the empire to come, the disinherited...will not detest the new Nero...they will make him into an abhorred ideal...[n]o new Heaven, no new earth, and no new angel to open the "pit of the abyss"... The abyss is in ourselves and outside of ourselves, it is yesterday's presentiment, today's question, and tomorrow's certainty.<sup>31</sup>

#### Cioran's Conclusion (or So the End is the Goal)

Cioran warns us of things to come, but why—if the result of every action is just another step toward destruction? That is precisely his point. He would query why we strive for success, work hard, have children, live a healthy life, and so forth, when we know that one day our end will come as will that of our children. There is something divine about the process, and to Cioran, everything human is an action dedicated toward finality. We *live* precisely because we must die. The better we live, the more we destroy our domain, and we strive to live better with each passing day—one step closer to the apocalypse.

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<sup>29</sup> George Santayana (1863-1952) was a Spanish philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist.

<sup>30</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, pp. 51-53.

But how does apocalypse “save” anything? The answer may be that renewal is a part of decline; that denial is a part of acceptance; that fear is a part of courage; that cosmic understanding is a part of human ignorance; that a little suffering is good for the soul. It may be why Cioran chose to live a life of despair and misery, through which he found faith and hope, if not in this world, certainly for the next—a perspective not too far removed from the acts of self-flagellation and acts of self-denial among many of the deeply devout of the past. Such acts were said to facilitate the triumph of spirit over matter, the soul over the body, and the eternal over the temporal—a sacrifice of life and material earth for a greater gift. As Cioran proclaimed, “...life is a vice—the greatest one of all.”<sup>32</sup> It is easy to discern his solution.

When culture becomes decadent, Cioran dreamed of an “apocalypse” that would “shatter all forms, revealing their emptiness and pointlessness.” All that would remain would be a state of “barbarism”—“the first symptom indicating the dawn of a culture.” Whether occurring in the natural cycles of culture or at the end of history, only a “barbarian sense of life and culture,” a descent into chaos, was likely to offer the promise of redemption.<sup>33</sup>

Cioran proclaims, “there is “[n]othing more glamorous than a splendid ending, if this world is real; if it is not, it is pure foolishness to go into ecstasies over any denouement whatever. To deign to have a ‘destiny,’ to be blinded or only tempted by ‘the extraordinary,’ proves that we remain opaque to any higher truth...”<sup>34</sup>

The “future empire,” according to Cioran, will take place during a time of great turmoil but without “precedent in the past.” It is impossible to retreat from our apocalyptic end. We are “predestined to engulfment” and “represent, in the drama of creation, the most pitiable episode of all.”<sup>35</sup>

In a final cryptic statement, one that seems to refer to any forms of life other than humanity, Cioran directly calls for apocalypse: “Since in us has awakened the evil that slumbered in the remaining of the living, it remains for us to destroy ourselves so that they might be saved.”<sup>36</sup>

In the Christian tradition, Jesus sacrificed himself for the salvation of mankind. Cioran now calls on mankind to sacrifice itself for the salvation of creation. It is the only option—a fitting end to the cycle of existence—humanity standing down—creation allowed to continue *its* progress—beginning anew—a resurrection allowed by apocalypse, and to Cioran, certainly an apocalypse worthy of his worship.

### Biographical Note

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<sup>32</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, p. 141.

<sup>33</sup> Petreu, *op cit.* pp. 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Cioran, *The New Gods*, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, pp. 53-54.

**The Quest for God's Will:  
Ministry Student Perceptions and Practices**

*Dennis J. Horton  
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**Abstract**

This paper presents the findings and implications of a survey concerning ministry student perceptions and practices related to the discernment of God's will. The survey was designed to measure student understanding of God's involvement in their lives, the amount of freedom they have to make choices, and the practices they use to make decisions that are "in accordance with God's will." The survey also contained a section of short-answer questions to enable the students to provide their own clarification and elaboration on this topic. The demographic information gathered in the survey provided a mechanism for relating student perceptions and practices to their classification, gender, ethnicity, denominational affiliation, and family background. The primary pool of survey participants consisted of Baylor undergraduate students who have expressed an interest in Christian vocational ministry. Two secondary groups were surveyed to provide some comparative analysis: a group of "typical" Baylor students and a group of Baylor students affiliated with the Reformed tradition.

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## **Why the Power of the Blood in Religious Culture— From the Existential Point of View**

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### ***The observation that blood = life and the emergence of its phenomenal properties***

One of the most universal and essential elements to religious thought and structure is that of blood.

That it is ubiquitous is evident in the widespread practice of blood-brotherhood where these rites can be traced from Africa to Asia to Australia.<sup>37</sup> The use of ochre as real substitution for blood is also ancient and widespread.<sup>38</sup> The reason blood is bound up with religious assumption is its concomitance with death, which is the psychological doorway to religious notion.

The phenomenal properties of blood emerge from what is not known and what is rationally assumed. As to its phenomenal qualities, Evans-Pritchard relates this about the African Nuer of the Sudan:

Human blood has for the Nuer a peculiar psychical value. When kinsmen and neighbors fight they use clubs instead of spears...It may be that behind it is the notion that not the same responsibility is felt if the life-blood does not flow as it would from a fatal spear wound—that in a sense the man has not taken the life, that the death happened of itself, as Nuer put it. That the Nuer have some such idea is shown by the fact that a ghoulish may be killed with impunity, but only if he is beaten to death with clubs and his blood not shed. The blood of a man slain with the spear is moreover thought to enter in some way into the slayer and he must therefore at once have his arm cut by a leopard-skin priest to let it out. This must mean that blood is thought to have some vitality of its own.<sup>39</sup>

The idea of the empowering attribute of blood comes from the observation that blood, when it leaves a body, causes that body to die. Therefore, blood = life.

As Levy-Bruhl confirms about the Ubuah and their use of blood to transfer power to a newly made canoe,

Here is an incident reported from British New Guinea. "With respect to the Ubuah people, the trouble with them started last January when nine of them went up the Siribi river to make a canoe. When the canoe was completed, they looked around for a victim to 'blood' or christen it, which is their custom. They came across an unfortunate native of the Siribi river, whom they killed.

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<sup>37</sup> Trumbull authoritatively traces the rites of blood-brotherhood to the Mideast and Europe as well. H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant* (Kirkwood, Missouri: Impact Books, 1975), 4-45; Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), 461.

<sup>38</sup> Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 464; Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives and the Supernatural* (New York: Haskell House, 1935), 268-269.

<sup>39</sup> (E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, London: Oxford University Press (1956), v-ix, 213.)



After painting their canoe with the blood of their victim, they placed the body in the canoe, and returned in triumph to their village.” Incidents of this kind are innumerable, and there is no doubt as to the aim pursued. Since the blood is the life, to besmear a new object with blood is to endow it with life and power.<sup>40</sup>

In the Hebrew text in Leviticus 17:10-11, the Israelites are commanded to not eat blood because “the life of the creature is in the blood.” They are also commanded to bury the blood of animals allowed to be eaten “because the life of every creature is its blood” (Leviticus 17:13-14). This same theme that blood = life is repeated in Deuteronomy 12:23-25.

Life, since it overcomes death, is all powerful, thus blood, since it equals life, is also powerful and has in it the attributes of life, that is, the kind of life that overcomes and exists after death. And since life and death themselves are phenomenal, the blood which is the life of the body is phenomenally essential.

The power of blood, its paramount symbolic importance, its supreme place in pivotal rituals<sup>41</sup> and its reproduction all convey the essential need for control and protection in the existential situation, which is accomplished through magical transference. All of this comes from what is observed about blood: that it is key to life.

This first and essential observation has had extensive ramification for religious thought, religious institutions, and even cultural stratification.

### ***The super-powers of blood***

Next to spirit and life, one of the most powerful elements in religious thought is that of blood. If there were a scale that could weigh consideration, the indication is primary people think blood is as powerful if not more powerful even than spirit.

While life is animated with the idea it is full of spirit, spirit is phenomenal because it is the counterweight against death.

But different from spirit, blood is an evident thing: it can be applied, it does something different on its own, unlike water which evaporates, it coagulates (which has some important implications itself)...and it can be consumed. So, while comparable in power, blood has the sentient attraction of utility. That, combined with its own ability to do some very powerful things, makes blood a very powerful and universal tool indeed. Again, the power of blood comes because it is the key to life.

Assuming the basis to life is spirit and spirit is supernatural, when it is observed as soon as blood leaves a body it dies, the only assumption that can be made is blood is essential to life and spirit. It is, therefore, on par, if not key, to spirit; therefore, it is most powerful.

The power of blood has been a universal assumption for humankind over time and region. From the ancient practice of using ochre to ensure life or protection to the use of blood to placate evil spirits among the Aborigines, blood has had a significant place in religious ritual and thought.

The evidence that primary peoples saw blood as a powerful thing which transfers its power onto others is ample in the ethnographic record. Only a few examples are submitted:

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<sup>40</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 271. For more about the power of blood from *Primitives* see pages 265, 267, 273, 305, 311-316.

<sup>41</sup> That great care is taken in some rituals (for example, the Altaic horse sacrifice ritual) that no blood is spilt only indicates its supreme attribute, because its effects are never neutral: they are either extremely deleterious or extremely beneficial.

In Australia, vitality was transferred from the young to the old by the youth giving older members their blood to drink.

Of the Arunta, the ceremony of the cat totem causes a young man to open his veins in his arm so four older men can drink and are sprinkled with the blood, "the idea being to strengthen the older men at the expense of the younger ones."<sup>42</sup>

Along with the Arunta, among the Ilpirra tribes, blood is given to old men by drawing blood from the arm, the back of the hand, or in rare cases by deeply puncturing the fingertips.

Among the same tribes, when a party is gathered for a revenge sortie or *Atringa*, before the expected engagement, every one drinks some blood and has it spilled over their bodies to make them "*uchuilima* , lithe and active."<sup>43</sup>

In the Ainu Bear sacrifice, to drink the blood of the bear after it has been killed will impart to the imbibers the bear's prowess.<sup>44</sup>

One of the many Pawnee rituals obeys a demand from the creator of humanity, Morning Star, to sacrifice a female captive, who is tied to a stake and shot with arrows. The body is later cut into pieces which are placed in baskets and are taken to a cornfield where the blood was squeezed on the new grains of corn to "vitalize" them.<sup>45</sup>

In the oriental rite of Attis, which Rome adopted at the close of Hannibal's campaign against them, when Attis is ritually depicted as having died, the high priest pierces his arms to let blood flow and other frenzied sub-ranking clergy do the same with potsherds and knives, for the apparent reason to "give Attis strength for the resurrection."<sup>46</sup>

The belief that blood magically ensures life to carry on, like the coming of spring, is reflected in the same spring festival of Cybele and Attis, where on the twenty-second day of March a pine tree is wrapped in woolen bands and is adorned with wreaths of violets because "violets were said to have sprung from the blood of Attis, as roses and anemones from the blood of Adonis."<sup>47</sup>

### ***The use and meaning of red ochre as real substitution of blood***

That blood is closely linked to the idea of life after death and that it is key to the continuation of life and since there was widespread use of red ochre in ancient burial customs, one has to wonder at the connection.

Belief in the afterlife, of course, dates early. Among the Neanderthal in the lower Paleolithic period in a cave in Northern Iraq, early people caringly buried one of their loved ones under a pile of rocks on a bed of flower petals.<sup>48</sup> With this early date of concept, in many instances, part of the burial custom was to cover the burial area with red ochre.<sup>49</sup>

This common custom and the connection of it with death leads one to the assumption ochre was representative of blood with all its supernatural powers and was thus used to help propel the diseased into the afterlife.

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<sup>42</sup> Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 381-382.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>44</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings From Around the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1967), 210.

<sup>45</sup> Glenn Welker, *Pawnee Literature*, <http://www.indians.org/welker/pawnee.htm>

<sup>46</sup> James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1922), 405; Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, *Dictionary of Roman Religion* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 197. 22-23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 405

<sup>48</sup> *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 24.

<sup>49</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, volume 1 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 9.

That ochre is synonymous with blood and is used as a real substitute for it is apparent among many cultures.

The symbolic, perceptually effectual, and associative proximity of ochre to blood is seen in the initiation ceremonies of the Arunta and Luritcha of Australia, where before the blood-letting portion of the ritual, the bodies of the performers were first rubbed with ochre.<sup>50</sup>

In many cases, when an individual is sick, the first thing to be done for a cure is to rub ochre over the body. This process, Spencer and Gillan say, could be regarded as a substitution for blood "just as sometimes a ceremonial object may be rubbed over with red ochre instead of blood."<sup>51</sup>

That blood and ochre are seen as synonymous in meaning and effect is revealed in the story about the origin of an ochre pit near Stuart's Hole on the Finke River in Australia which was caused from two "kangaroo" women from Ilpilla who menstruated large quantities of blood there.<sup>52</sup>

When natives smear ochre on their bodies before a ceremony, it is not, as Levy-Bruhl says, to don a costume, but to renew their vital powers, "enduing them with the same mystic virtue as blood would do."<sup>53</sup>

When the Carib Indians used the plant achiote mixed with grease and were referred to by the Europeans as "Red Caribs," it can be assumed the Caribs did it for the same reasons already mentioned, because of the like association of a red substance to the phenomenal qualities of blood. Red is still an important color among some Central American Garifuna.<sup>54</sup>

Among the Powhatan Indians of Virginia, the favorite color for body paint was a mulberry red made from pulverized roots mixed with bear grease or nut oil. Any such mixture was recorded by the English to be "puccon." But puccon specific (from the plant *Lithospermum caroliniense*) was rare (growing in the pine barrens south of the James River in Virginia) and was sent as tribute to the Powhatan and was favored for its beauty.<sup>55</sup>

The sap of the Bloodroot was also used by many North American Indians as a red dye for clothing and as body paint.

The association of the phenomenal life-giving quality of blood to red is also confirmed when Crazy Horse of the Latoka tribe was noted to have said, "If anything happens to me, paint my body red and put me in water and my life will return."<sup>56</sup>

In the burial chamber of the Mayan king Pacal (615-683 AD), the stone lid on his sarcophagus shows the king in an apparent state of resurrection. Curiously, the lid and the king's body were doused in cinnabar. Knowing the affinity of the Aztecs' copious use of blood to obviate chaos and ensure the continuation of life, this red pigment, in fact, could be representative of blood and was used with or instead of blood because of its fixative qualities. The connection with resurrection and the use of a red substance as an equal and magical substitution for blood is here again indicated.

The copious use of ochre or other red substances may have come about for several reasons:

Because of the belief in the magical effect of blood via ochre, the greater use of it might spell a more certain effect. Since blood, especially human blood, could not be used as

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<sup>50</sup> Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 464.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 463-464.

<sup>53</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 269.

<sup>54</sup> Nancie L. Gonzalez, "The Garifuna of Central America", *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, edited by Samuel M. Wilson (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997), 202.

<sup>55</sup> Helen C. Roundtree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 132-133, 56, 76.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph M. Marshall III, *The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 266.

conveniently and copiously as ochre and since ochre became a real substitute with real effect, its generous use may have been considered more effective.

Conversely, if the transference of effect was not considered equal to blood, the supplemental copious use of ochre may have occurred to make up for the loss of effect.

Lastly, in any case, the supplemental use of ochre with the real effects of blood emerged as an added layer of psychological protection and certainty against a dangerous and uncertain world. No doubt blood and ochre gave comfort and confidence to the sick, but more than just comfort, they did super important supernatural things for individuals and their tribe.

### ***The life-giving and death-dealing qualities to blood***

Since blood = life, and life is what is wanted, this is a positive thing. And since blood is the key to life, it is not only a positive but a powerful thing. This thinking is born out from the positive ways it is used.

Because it is a flexible tool, it can do many things. It can protect property; it can ensure life; it can give life; it can impart energy; it can cure disease; it can placate evil spirits; it also imparts power and accuracy to weapons. As an important element to many sacrifices, it helps ensure fertility, obviates chaos, and thwarts extinction.

Levy-Bruhl, in his discussion about blood, divided its effects into magical virtues and sinister qualities. The “sinister” is not certain, because it was the extreme phenomenal nature and power of blood which demanded specific and careful handling as with anything powerful, whether it was fire or poison or something stronger, like blood. Therefore, the fact that blood was handled with the utmost care and, when not, the results were lethal, only added to the supreme phenomenal nature of it. For the most part, the deleterious effects of blood came about only if the prescriptions for its handling were not followed.

Others have also seen in blood a “purifying” attribute as though it were something that would take away guilt or sin. Willoughby demonstrates the misconstruing of the empowering as opposed to purifying attributes of it with this statement:

Claridge says: “A sacrifice is offered to take away guilt. It is literally offered in place of the guilty. The blood is the propitiation . . . Campbell speaks in the same strain: “The Bantu people are very strong in their views about blood sanctification, and I have seen this carried out on many occasions. I remember being present at the inheriting and coronation of Msidi’s elder brother. The throats of several goats were cut, and the blood as it spurted warm was caught on a switch of animal tails, and everything animate and inanimate was sprinkled. Not only guns, furniture, stock, etc., but all slaves and wives were duly sanctified by the sprinkling of blood.” This use of blood comes home to these writers because it consorts with their peculiar theology; but, as a matter of fact, the fat, gall, and chyme of the victim are credited with like mystic virtue, and hence are sprinkled over people and things whose interests are to be subserved by the sacrifice.<sup>57</sup>

That blood protects life is indicated by the Wonkonguru of Central Australia, who, by painting blood on their shields in two transverse bands, guarantee the one using it cannot be hurt.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu: A Sympathetic Study of the Magico-Religious Practices and Beliefs of the Bantu Tribes of Africa* (New York: J & J Harper, 1969), 360.

<sup>58</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 271.

That blood ensures life is evidenced when Guama Indians see their children are ill. They take a piece of sharp bone and impale their tongue with it and then spread the bubbly mess over the body of the child from head to foot. This painful process is continued every day until the child either gets better or dies.<sup>59</sup>

That the blood of an animal may atone for a life is indicated from Tylor's account: "In South Africa a Zulu will redeem a lost child from the find by a bullock, or a Kimbunda will expiate the blood of a slave by the offering of an ox, whose blood will wash away the other."<sup>60</sup>

That blood fortifies or strengthens is demonstrated by the Dayaks.

As Willoughby pointed out, where some in the past may have erroneously referred to the "purifying" effect of blood, Levi-Bruhl, in reference to the Dayaks, alludes to its "fortifying" effect.

Among the Dayaks, to *manjaki* a thing is to smear it with blood. The thing or person thus anointed is either purified or strengthened.

After every feast and sacrifice, those who have taken part must be smeared with blood, in this case, to "purify" them.

The Dayaks *manjaki* newly built houses and newly married couples to protect them and in this way fortify them, because blood nullifies the pernicious intent of evil spirits.

They *manjaki* sick people to make them well, and before planting their rice fields, they sprinkle blood to guarantee a plentiful harvest.

As a preventive measure the Dayaks also *manjaki* their children monthly to make them grow strong.

Similarly, the Landaks and Tajans also smear blood on the body to "increase the vital principal and strengthen a feeble soul."<sup>61</sup>

That blood preserves life is revealed when, through the applying of a bull's blood, the Israelite community, in expiation, was preserved if they unintentionally committed a trespass. The blood was to be sprinkled in front of the inner curtain, applied to the horns of the alter, then poured at the base of the alter-of-burnt offering (Leviticus 4:13-21).

That blood must be carefully and prescriptively handled and, when this is not done, serious consequences transpire, is reflected among the Didinga of the Sudan.

If a man has contacted blood that was shed through violence, before entering a village, he must sacrifice a goat at the entrance and scatter its intestinal dung throughout. If he carelessly enters without doing this, the whole village is liable to misfortune. If someone dies in the village, even years later, he must pay compensation for murder.

Similarly, if a man enters the men's club outside the village enclosure and has "unpurified" blood on him and he eats with the others, he is seriously flogged and made to sacrifice. And if anyone who was present dies in the next few years, the perpetrator is liable for murder compensation.<sup>62</sup>

Among the Xosa Kafirs any drop of blood carries with it serious consequences. Even a drop of blood from the nose must be covered with soil so as to avoid contact and contamination.<sup>63</sup>

These are just a few examples of the extreme consequences experienced when blood is dealt with in a careless or unprescribed way. The reason for the extreme measures to make right the violation and the reason for the extreme punishment when blood is not handled

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>60</sup> Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 489.

<sup>61</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 272-273.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

correctly is the belief the consequences for careless handling are so dramatic they can even lead to death.

That the handling of blood is specifically prescribed and the consequences for violation are so extreme only attests to the power and phenomenal nature of blood.

### ***The logic about blood***

It is perfectly understood that when blood leaves a body, the body dies; therefore, blood is key to life and therein lays its supreme powers.

Another close connection between blood and life, which only strengthens the phenomenal properties of blood, comes from the observation that blood coagulates. Since, when a woman becomes pregnant her menstrual flow stops and since blood gathers to itself and hardens, the birth of the person is the result of the gathering of blood inside the woman. This is another substantiation that blood = life.

Accordingly, the following observation is made about the Palembang Koeboes of Sumatra:

They say that during the first three months of pregnancy, the fetus is “nothing but water.” At the end of the third month, it “becomes blood” and this goes on until the fifth month. At that time they imagine the fetus to be a clot of blood, or sanguinary mass as large as the head of the thigh-bone. . . . The limbs now begin to be formed, and this goes on until the seventh month, and it is only after this that the fetus begins a life of its own, however tiny its body be.<sup>64</sup>

According to a Zulu story, a barren woman desiring to give birth asked pigeons for advice. They told her to draw blood from herself, to let it clot, then she was to take the clot and put it in a pot and it would become child.<sup>65</sup>

Two stories originating out of North American Indian folklore from the Southeast region reflect similar associative thinking: In one account, when it was raining, a woman took a clot of blood out of the water; she carefully laid it aside and covered it up. Sometime later when she removed the cover, a baby boy lay in place of the clot. The woman raised the child and, when he was old enough to speak, he called her his godmother.

In another story an old woman who lived alone was out walking along a path and when she went to step over a log she noticed a clot of blood in her path. She carefully gathered the clot of blood, along with the dirt around it and carried it home. There she put the clot and dirt into a jar. She noticed sometime later the clot was growing and after several months she noticed it was beginning to look like a human being. In ten months it developed into a boy and she took him out of the jar and dressed him.<sup>66</sup>

Considering what is not known about the biology of blood and reproduction, the fact that the Papuans of New Guinea and the Eskimos, two distant peoples, also think a fetus is the result of thickened blood, only corroborates the ubiquity of this perfectly rational thinking that human life comes from gathered blood.<sup>67</sup>

Further, since the human body comes from thickened blood, the flesh and bones are also blood and, since blood has phenomenal properties, the flesh will also. As Levy-Bruhl observes,

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

When eating their flesh, those who eat are really drawing in their blood, but as we have already seen the primitive is above all conscious of the mystic properties of the blood. It is the magic essence of life, and it is in this sense that we must understand the saying: "this clot of blood is a living being." A piece of flesh is blood, hence it is life.<sup>68</sup>

That flesh and blood are associatively approximate (if it is not synonymous) may shed some light on the important ubiquitous rite of the communal eating of the sacrificial victim.

Since blood has powerful phenomenal properties and since flesh is coagulated blood, the flesh will have the same phenomenal properties as blood. Therefore, the shared portion that comes from the sacrificial victim, when eaten, imparts its powers to the imbibers. In other words, the fact the sacrificial victim is already phenomenal due to its central place within the sacrificial rite and that blood is phenomenal by itself and since flesh is coagulated blood, the flesh of the sacrificial victim will be phenomenal indeed.

### ***The social-stratifying effect of blood: Its separating and reconciling attributes***

For a primary person one of the greatest things to be feared was the menstruation of a woman. To have contact with the menstrual flow or to be in its proximity was considered extremely dangerous. According to Valeri, the Hawaiians thought

the most impure bodily process is menstruation. The term used for menstrual blood, *pe'a*, is synonymous with impurity in general. Along with menstrual blood, all shed blood is impure to different degrees. Thus all who lose blood or come into contact with shed blood are impure.<sup>69</sup>

According to Mead, although the taboo concerning menstruating women in Samoa had lessened, "In more rigorous days a girl could not make Kava until she menstruated."<sup>70</sup> But, at the time of her visit, Mead observed, during menstruation, "She cannot make *tafolo*, a breadfruit pudding usually made by the young men in any case, nor make the kava..."<sup>71</sup> But, "In many parts of Polynesia all women and especially menstruating women, are considered contaminating and dangerous."<sup>72</sup>

In Africa among the Ba-ila in Zambia, diseases can be caused by dirt, certain animals, a fetus, and menstruating women.<sup>73</sup>

This belief only attests to the prevailing attitude about the phenomenal nature of blood--the basis of assumption which comes from the association about the death of life from the loss of blood, a thing magical in itself. The fact there is residual effect which extends beyond the physical substance itself, and that this effect is extreme, again reflects the opinion about the complete power and phenomenal nature of blood.

For example, to catch a disease from a menstruating woman, one does not need to come in contact with her or the blood; it can be caught in an almost atomistic radiating way.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>69</sup> Valerio Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 85.

<sup>70</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1928), 101.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> Smith and Dale, *Ila-Speaking Peoples*, Vol. 1, 244.

In Nanzela a Ba-ila doctor--among other directives for good luck--warns a young hunter to not allow a menstruating woman to enter the hut where the gun is because it would render it useless.<sup>74</sup>

In Australia, during their period women are forbidden to touch anything men use; neither are they to walk on a path which may later be taken by men. There is a story of one native who killed his wife for lying on his blanket during her period; he later died from the terror of thinking--not about his--but about the consequences of her action.<sup>75</sup>

In Uganda a pot touched by a menstruating woman must be destroyed. Spears and shields, if so touched, are not destroyed, but purified.<sup>76</sup>

With the phenomenal power and residual effect of blood assumed, it is apparent where a prescribed loss is beneficial, the accidental loss of blood, even if slight, is horrific. As Smith and Dale mention about the Ba-ila, "And moreover, there is something uncanny about spilling blood; it is *tonda*, it is *malweza*, in certain cases, if not in all; something which sets the mysterious world-forces against you."<sup>77</sup>

Since, when blood leaves a body, the body can die, that a woman bleeds periodically, with no overall physical detriment to her, is a suspicious thing.

If the menstruation is prescribed, this can only be a directive from the gods since it happens and cannot be prevented, and is, besides, essential to birth. That alone is reason for caution. If it is not prescribed but is somehow configured or associated with what is accidental, this too warrants concern.

The added deduction that the fetus, if it dies, is a powerful problem-causing being which results from the menstrual flow, only corroborates the necessity for caution. Levy-Bruhl relates similar logic among the Maori:

In other words, the menstrual discharge, before it leaves the woman's body, is an embryo human being, which is alive and which, were it not expelled would assume a human form. Once it has left the body, this possibility no longer exists, but what terrifies the Maoris is that it nevertheless continues to live, but as the dead live, as a spirit. Such spirits are peculiarly maleficent and redoubtable—like those of the fetus discharged in abortions and miscarriages, and those of stillborn children.<sup>78</sup>

The aborted, miscarried, or stillborn are ubiquitously considered dangerous because it is thought they are angry as a result of having been cheated out of the pleasures of life and are vindictive toward humans, thus are the source of much mischief. That they cause problems for humans itself implies a revenge motive. According to Kreemer, the Loeboes of Sumatra

...are convinced of the malignity of the spirits of stillborn children, and as demons that cause illness they have a dread of them. As a rule, these Loeboes are of opinion that the spirits of the dead who have not enjoyed the pleasures of life, or but for a short time only, are ill-disposed toward human beings . . . they are jealous, and inclined to anger and revenge.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>75</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 241.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>77</sup> Smith and Dale, *Ila-Speaking Peoples*, Vol. 1, 414.

<sup>78</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 313.

<sup>79</sup> The source here for Kreemer's quote is Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 314.



Among the Maori the spirit of a stillborn child is so powerful it can be utilized by a woman as a war chief. Their spirits, in general, are used to harass and destroy one's enemies.

The Loeboes of Sumatra, with the assistance of priests, use the spirits of stillborn children as a cruel form of witchcraft.

The Bantu in Africa seclude a woman who has miscarried and she is given but little to eat, while her husband is confined to the courtyard of his house. Both are kept in this condition until the new moon, at which time they have to be ritually purified and cleansed in the river before being allowed back into communal activity.

Miscarriage is much feared among South Africans because of the great loss of blood that accompanies it. A miscarriage that has been concealed will cause rain to cease "because it fears that spot." In times of drought the rite of *mbelele* is performed; the graves of prematurely born children are searched and their contents are dug up and thrown into the mud by the river.<sup>80</sup>

According to Smith and Dale,

Should a woman who has aborted, and before she is cleansed from her impurity, enter a person's house or eat out of a person's dish who is not relation, she *ipso facto* becomes that person's slave; or if more than one person has been offended they sell her, and divide the proceeds. She has rendered them liable to contract that horrible disease, *kafungo*.<sup>81</sup>

A medicine man and rainmaker of the Ba-Pedi tribe is quoted as saying the following about a miscarriage that has been concealed:

When a woman has had a miscarriage, when she has allowed her blood to flow, and has hidden the child, it is enough to cause the burning winds to blow...the rain no longer falls, for the country is no longer in order. When the rain approaches the place where the blood is, it will not dare to approach. . . . That woman has committed a great fault. She has spoiled the country of the chief, for she has hidden blood which had not yet been well congealed to fashion a man. . . . Then they go and arrest the women. They say to her, "Show us where you have hidden it." They go and dig at the spot with a decoction of two sorts of roots prepared in a special pot. They take a little of the earth of this grave, they throw it into the river, then they bring back water from the river and sprinkle it where she shed her blood. She herself must wash every day with the medicine. Then the country will be moistened again.<sup>82</sup>

One has to wonder at the psychological connection to feelings of guilt over abortion, stillbirths, or miscarriages being the basis of belief for the extreme consequences of the action and the malevolent power attributed to them. But their connection to blood only enhances its phenomenal nature, while the connection of woman to blood only confirms her as the object of suspicion and fear.

Originally, because of the physical prowess of men to women, the roles of hunting and protection may have fallen naturally to the men and may have been considered more essential by them. Thus the assumption of privilege and importance was appropriated and maintained along with the advantage of rule perpetuated by the segregation of duty and

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<sup>80</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 313-317.

<sup>81</sup> Smith and Dale, *The Ila-Speaking People*, Vol. 1, 403.

<sup>82</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 243.

control. If the almost universal reaction by men in primary societies to menstruation did not directly contribute as a primary cause to a segregating effect in society, it definitely did not obstruct it. Thus blood became an added cause or reason for maintaining specific social delineation between men and women.

The very reason for a woman's connection to blood, which itself is a powerful and utilizable tool, may have been why they, in general, and when menstruating, considered themselves taboo. In other words, the delineation of taboo may have resulted because of the fear men had about an encroachment, through the use of blood, on their own power and means of control.

But ingeniously, though the place of importance was established by men with exclusive rights to certain socially essential responsibilities, other dynamic roles were exclusively assumed by women, even sometimes claimed by the weakest members of all, older women. Therefore, their place of importance was also maintained with a degree of affect for themselves.

The segregation of women during menstruation is evident among the Iowans of North America in the story of a shaman who, in a state of pre-existence, searched the earth and different people, considering who he might want to live with in human form. "He declined the Winnebago because they smelled fishy, and so he circled around until he discovered the Iowas. They suited him because they were clean, kept their camps swept up, and sent their women a long way off to menstruate."<sup>83</sup>

Among the Mandja and Banda of Africa, the segregation and relegation process for women begins at first menstruation. Unlike the boys' rite of initiation, which segregates the boys as a group, the segregation and relegation of the girls is more poignant because they are isolated individually. They are made to stay in a dark corner of the house or in a special cabin in the bush where they must remain in a particular and uncomfortable position. There they are to stay in darkness, wear an identifying dress, and are to eat only raw foods.<sup>84</sup>

Among the De'ne' and most other American tribes, hardly anything equaled the dread of something more than a menstruating woman. When those signs were first apparent in a young woman, she was put away in a small hut away from the sight of other villagers. She was not to touch any meat. If she did, this would result in the meat being polluted and the game, thus offended, would become angry and cause the hunters to fail. Her diet consisted of dried fish and cold water taken through a straw. The very sight of her was a danger to society, so a bonnet was made for her with the fringes falling over her face to hide her from public view.<sup>85</sup>

Among the Tlingit Indians of British Columbia, when a girl reached puberty, she is also secluded to a small hut where she is made to stay for months in a state of darkness. There she has to drink from a straw and be fed because touching anything makes it unclean. This time she wears a broad-brimmed hat so she cannot look up at the sky and make it unclean too.<sup>86</sup>

The ubiquity of the link between blood and segregation is evident . . . the cause of which can be attributed to the absolute phenomenality of blood.

That blood is so phenomenal (its effects seem to radiate atomistically and are alive and can be used) and that women have a close connection to it creates a circumstance of fear,

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<sup>83</sup> Ake Hultkrantz, *Soul and Native Americans* (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1997), 164.

<sup>84</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego, California: Harcourt, Inc., 1957), 192-193.

<sup>85</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 241-243.

<sup>86</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 304.

suspicion, and a concern about control--a reaction which is expanded and in turn affects the whole structure of society.

The segregation through taboo that begins with menstruation is therefore extended to other areas as well and puts the female, when it comes to the issue of control and rule, at a disadvantage.

Thus she is excluded from the practice of sacrifice and rulership. Valeri states,

On the whole, the evidence indicates that women play a marginal role in the sacrificial system... this is confirmed by the fact that goddesses are few in comparison with the gods and are not as hier-archized as the latter. As Kepelino makes clear...the exclusion of women from most sacrifices is explained by the belief in female impurity.<sup>87</sup>

The only exception to this would be high-ranking women recognized because of a high-ranking father or husband. In Hawaii, apparently, the chiefess Keakealaniwahine was allowed to enter state temples--normally taboo to women--and consecrate sacrifices, but she was not allowed to eat of the sacrificial flesh which was consecrated for priests and men only.<sup>88</sup> In Hawaii there was an extensive list of consecrated foods forbidden to women.<sup>89</sup> This list alone would help guarantee the exclusive right to the practice of sacrifice by men.

Activities considered essential, such as fishing, hunting, herding, and war, were also taboo to women.<sup>90</sup>

But even though social stratification begins with blood and seemed to favor men, women, in ingenious ways, garnered essential social affects of their own.

Besides a modicum of self-importance through matrilineal descent with females sometimes inheriting chief positions or cementing alliances through marriage, as in Taino society in the Caribbean<sup>91</sup>, being the recipient of courtship and bride-price for marriage<sup>92</sup>, when crafting household items<sup>93</sup>, or when gardening (which was sometimes also the rite of men)<sup>94</sup>, women also exerted effect in more pronounced ways.

Among the Melanesians, where there were men's societies, there were women's as well, with all the ritual procedure for inclusion and graduation in rank.<sup>95</sup>

In Powhatan society,

Women produced corn, which was recognized by everyone as a form of wealth. That alone would have raised their status in society. Controlling wealth—by custom, not just by individual force of character—would raise their status further, and there is evidence of such control. In the early seventeenth

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<sup>87</sup> Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice*, 113.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-120.

<sup>90</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 297-300.

<sup>91</sup> William F. Keegan, "No Man (Or Woman) Is An Island": Elements of Taino Social Organization," *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, edited by Samuel M. Wilson (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997), 113, 116.

<sup>92</sup> Roundtree, *The Powhatan*, 90; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of Nilotic People* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 20.

<sup>93</sup> Roundtree, *Powhatan Indians*, 88.

<sup>94</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984), 61-62.

<sup>95</sup> R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folklore* (New Haven, Connecticut: Hraf Press, 1957), 69-100, 102, 110.

century Powhatan women received, processed, and served all foodstuffs. Later in the century, when the Indians had come to use currency, it was observed that “the women . . . keep all the money.” The Powhatans apparently saw an analogy between food as wealth and currency as wealth and applied an old custom to new economic conditions.<sup>96</sup>

Besides the important practice of concocting, prescribing, and administering medicine,<sup>97</sup> women also often played an essential role in ceremony and festival affairs. As Malinowski says about the Trobriand Islanders, “Women also enjoy a very independent position, and are exceedingly well treated, and in tribal and festive affairs they play a prominent part.”<sup>98</sup>

Among the Cebuan (as Pigafetta relates on his journey with Magellan) two old women play the chief part in the killing and consecration of a pig for a feast of hospitality toward Magellan and his party. In the ritual no men are allowed to take part and the pig cannot be eaten until the ceremony is performed.<sup>99</sup>

Lastly, besides obtaining the affective position of seer, prophetess, or oracle, or sometimes leveraging effect as concubine, geisha, or court courtesan, one of the most influential ways women could have effect on the social order was through the use of magic. According to a Father Schulien about the Atxuabo in East Africa, the women’s use of witchcraft was much feared by men and was believed by them to come directly from the menstrual flow. “The manifestation of this mystic force in women and that which allows them to exercise it is the catamenial flow...Menstrual blood is a charm which women very often employ, either to defend themselves, or to injure men in many different ways.”<sup>100</sup>

According to Malinowski, the women of the Trobriand Islands wielded much influence through the use of magical powers where even some classes of sorcery were their monopoly.<sup>101</sup>

Because of its power and their close connection to it, it is not surprising women would find specific ways to use blood as magic and, because of this association and the perception of them as dangerous, this may have opened the door for a wider use of magic by women as well. Thus, while blood endowed women with a latent power, at the same time and for the same reason of the phenominality of it and the woman’s connection to it, there was concern about control. Therefore, women were segregated and kept from the essential social elements of sacrifice, ruler-ship, and the conduct of war.

Thus the segregating precedent which started with menstruation emanated to other social aspects as well.

Thus far the life-giving and deleterious aspects of blood as a powerful and utilizable implement have been discussed.

And the social stratifying effect of blood has been illustrated.

But its attributes reconcile as well.

Often blood plays an important part in the rite of sacrifice, which is the communal vehicle of hope for success against the existential situation. Because of its central role in the successful exercise of sacrifice, blood is therefore an important facet to the social order. In this sense blood reconciles the worry of a community to a transformed certainty for a

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<sup>96</sup> Roundtree, *Powhatan Indians*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Laurence Bergreen, *Over the Edge of the World* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 161-162.

<sup>100</sup> Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives*, 310.

<sup>101</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts*, 37, 54, 59.

positive outcome in addition to the social cohesive benefit of shared participation and vision of purpose.

Also, the power of blood to heal, to protect, to halt chaos, and to assist the dead in reaching the afterlife are attributes of a nature which are comforting individually and are collectively congruous. That blood may be the cause of stratification or segregation may itself, to a degree, have a reconciling effect to the extent the individuals within each group cohere because of shared identification, definition, and purpose.

But specifically, ubiquitously, across time and region, blood has served the purpose of politically uniting individuals or groups, disparate or not, in common cause.

With the Ba-ila in Africa, temporary covenants are entered into for the exchange of wives, medicine, or food, but the blood covenant or *mulongo wa maninga* represents a permanent binding agreement. Two men cut an arm and suck the other's blood, thus binding them to the covenant they will not refuse any request one has for the other. The agreement is binding for life, and if one breaks the vow, he will die *kambo ka buloa*, "on account of the blood."<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, as Frazer reveals, the Australians, the Tana of the New Hebrides, New Guinea natives, and the Romans carefully dispose of or break (as the Romans did with eggshells or snails) leftover foods to avoid or cancel the effect of another person using them as charms to curse with:

This is the idea which...lends sanctity to the bond produced by eating together . . . each guarantees the other that he will devise no mischief against him, since, being physically united with him by the common food in their stomachs, any harm he might do to his fellow would recoil on his own head with precisely the same force with which it fell on the head of the victim. In strict logic, however, the sympathetic bond lasts only so long as the food is in the stomach of each of the parties. Hence the covenant formed by eating together is less solemn and durable than the covenant formed by transfusing the blood of the covenanting parties in each other's veins, for this transfusion seems to knit them together for life.<sup>103</sup>

Other than its obligating influence between individuals, the power of blood to reconcile parties in disagreement is demonstrated in Australia. If, for example, an avenging party from Alice Springs wanted to raid a group from the Burt country and they had with them a person from that locale, he would be forced to drink blood with them and would thus be bound to give no aid to his people. It is also known when two groups who are on bad terms, but who have not yet come to altercation, want to reconcile, the offended group sends a message to the offending group to come and have a "friendly fight." This form of meeting is called *Umbirna ilirima*, which means "seeing and settling." The commencement of the meeting begins with each party drinking the blood of its own members. A sham fight takes place with boomerangs where no one is hurt, and reconciliation is achieved.<sup>104</sup>

That blood seals and unites in common-cause is illustrated when Magellan on his journey of circumnavigation met with the Filipino ruler Rajah Kolambu. Wanting good relations with the king, Magellan requested to be *casicasi*, or blood brothers, with him. Apparently not unfamiliar with similar ritual in his own country, the king acceded and they both cut their chests. The blood was poured into a vessel, mixed with wine, and each consumed half the

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<sup>102</sup> Edwin W. Smith and Andrew Murray Dale, *The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1968), Vol. 1, 308.

<sup>103</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 233-234.

<sup>104</sup> Spencer and Gillan, *Native Tribes*, 461-462.

mixture. In another instance, the survivors of the expedition, seeking food and rest on their way home, met with the local ruler of Mindanao, Calanoa. Eager to make peace, the king cut his left hand and with the blood anointed his body, face, and the tip of his tongue as a token of close friendship. The expedition's survivors did the same. Distant from Mindanao, a similar ritual was performed with the king of Palawan.<sup>105</sup>

To get at the answer as to the phenomenality of blood and its atomistic effect requires explanation on different levels.

The phenomenality of blood begins with the observation that when it leaves a body the body dies, therefore blood = life; this understanding, which emerges under the condition of what is not known, makes blood a mysterious and powerful thing.

Its atomistic effect begins with the rational extrapolation from direct effect with such activities as tool making, shelter building, hunting, and so forth. When the existential situation asserts the beyond-control problems of death and disaster, because blood is phenomenal and can have effect beyond itself, when applied, imbibed, or mixed, it thus provides an added dimension of control.

Therefore, this rational extrapolation reveals a subconscious association about what is within control and the desire to carry that over to what is beyond control. Blood thus becomes the perfect tool in answer to the limits and uncertainties in the existential situation.

### Biographical Note

**Patrick Scott Smith** is a business owner, writer, and independent scholar. He has been working on the facets of psychology in religion from an anthropological/existential point of view and have been presenting material for the AAR and ASSR for the Central, Southwest, and Southeast regions. He also presents research on the Herod's Harbor project for the ASOR in the same regions. At present he is working on a book relevant to his religious interests.

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<sup>105</sup> Bergreen, *Over the Edge*, 316; *The Voyage of Magellan: The Journal of Antonio Pigafetta*, translated by Paula Spurlin Paige (Edgewood Cliffs, New Jersey: William L. Clements Library, 1969), 53, 83, 87.

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## What Is Religion?

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### Abstract

What religion “is” has left many writers vexed and left many others completely untroubled as they venture into a realm of belief that is difficult or seemingly impossible to capture. After reviewing several categories of definitions, the merits of Geertz’ extended definition of religion are discussed. Through a consideration of the shifting patterns of ‘moods’ and ‘motivations’ as well as the ‘models of’ and ‘models for’ reality, Geertz is able to construct a definition of religion that serves as an important guidepost for thinking about religion.

In his attempt to understand the essence and meaning of ‘religion,’ Peter Berger employed a delightful comparison to the story of the sorcerer’s apprentice, in which:

The mighty buckets, magically called out of nothing by human fiat, are set in motion. From that point they go about drawing water in accordance with an inherent logic of their own being that, at the very least, is less than completely controlled by their creator (Berger, 1969:9-10).

Berger’s depiction is apt. Somehow, religion just ‘appears,’ and having appeared, as if by magic (could religion appear as a result of magic?) begins to take on a force of its own, external to its creator, and acting back on its creator, becomes real. No force, indeed, could be more ‘magical’ than this. Religion is, in Durkheim’s sense, the transformation of the sacred out of the profane, and beliefs about the sacred become the ‘collective representations’ of the rituals that define our very social nature. Only somewhat less poetically than Berger, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss much earlier articulated this perspective in 1903: “...*the classification of things reproduces the classification of men*” (in Emirbayer: 2003:90).

In even the most profound discourses about the nature of religion, there is even another magical act performed—this time, a disappearing act. Even though religion itself is so pervasive—almost creating itself and appearing everywhere in different forms—the definition of religion itself has vanished entirely. What is left is often a discussion turning about (to extend Berger’s metaphor just one more time) a magical center that everyone involved assumes exists, but no one is quite willing to acknowledge. For example, Hudson’s *Religions in America* (1965), which is a classic text in the sociology of religion, provides thorough explanations of denominations, church trends and ‘shifting configurations’ of religious forms, and finally concludes with a discussion of ‘unity and diversity in American religious life.’ There is, however, no definition of religion. Homan’s extensive bibliographic survey, *The Sociology of Religion* (1986), which summarizes 1.013 titles, demonstrates how many religious ‘typologies’ and religious ‘trends’ have been identified and discussed. Even the numbers of members in what have been designated as religions are counted. But if one were to count the definitions of religion in all of these, one would find them to be nearly nonexistent. Even Karen Armstrong’s highly influential works (Armstrong, 2000; 2006) on the nature and types of religion do not directly define religion.

But many times, this lack of definition seems quite reasonable. Armstrong’s works, for example, have to do with the major established religions—their origins, growth and change. Books on physics or chemistry do not often define science, nor is this particularly necessary—at some point, this would become an irritating distraction from the subject at hand. With established religions, it would seem that the reader would know that Judaism is



a religion, and that the analysis of Judaism as a religion is fully the intent of the writer. Definition would merely constitute a digression here, and the subsequent analysis by the author does not beg the question: What is religion?

There are two cases, however, when a definition of religion *is* necessary. The first is when religion itself is the subject of investigation. The definition determines the subsequent trajectory of the investigation, and often unwittingly reveals the intent of the author. With careful deliberation, Dennett (2006:7) begins by stating that “It doesn’t matter *just* [italics in original] how I define it, since I plan to examine and discuss the neighboring phenomena that (probably) aren’t religious.” As opposed to an element or a clearly designated species, he refers to religion as a ‘loose family’ of social phenomena that have some semblance. Dennett concludes his prelude to a definition by stating that: “Legal protection, honor, prestige, and a *traditional exemption from certain sorts of analysis and criticism* [italics in original] –a great deal hinges on how we define religion.” His ‘working definition’ is thus: “Social systems whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought” (Dennett:2006:9).

In the language of Foucault, it is the ‘silences’ in this definition that are most revealing. Compare Dennett’s contemporary, well-considered and cautious definition with Durkheim’s ‘classic’ definition of 1912, almost a century ago in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim, quote in Emirbayer, 2003:90). Durkheim’s definition has been both hailed as a way of understanding the emergence of civil religion and its importance in modern societies (Schaffeleers and Meijers, 1978), and criticized for basing the definition on inadequate or inaccurate understanding of the religious life he was attempting to interpret (Mol, 1979). Specifically, the distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ in Durkheim’s definition is limited to religions that are dualistic in nature. Identifying what is ‘sacred’ and what is ‘profane’ in Native American religions, or animistic religions, or pantheistic religions, would be difficult in many cases and perhaps impossible in most cases. Durkheim’s definition is obviously incorrect in identifying a ‘Church’ as the center for moral community. Much of what is justifiably included in the notion of religion is missing from Durkheim’s account.

Yet, there is some obvious overlap between Dennett’s definition and that of Durkheim. The sense of religion existing as a ‘social system’ is retained, but Durkheim’s important observation that religion invests the social system with a sense of moral force and identity is missing. Dennett is writing in a post-modern world; Durkheim was concerned with premodern religion and how the religions of modernity developed from them. The social aspect of Dennett is assumed; yet how this social unit seeks the ‘approval of a supernatural agent or agents’ is mystifying, particularly with respect to postmodern religions. As religions increasingly move from what Wuthnow (1998) terms ‘dwelling’ toward ‘seeking,’ religion becomes more a search for the nature of the supernatural than existing as a means to secure its approval. Awareness is more of a central concern than obedience. Moreover, even in some traditional religions, receiving of ‘approval’ is not always a central concern. In Judaism, for example, “...human beings have a special role. Because they are created in God’s image, they have the ability to reason, to will, to speak, to create, and to care...” (Molloy, 2002:300). The very meaning of *Israel* comes from the Hebrew Bible’s account in the Book of Genesis of a mortal (Jacob) who struggles with God.

Thus, to define religion as a category of belief or behavior that distinguishes it from other forms of belief or behavior seems to present an author with a dilemma: define and face almost certain criticism, or neglect defining religion entirely and hope that no one either cares or notices. Weber (1904-1905;1958) contended that it was only at the *conclusion* of an investigation of relevant social factors that defining a concept of this magnitude could be

attempted (Weber studied religion exhaustively, but apparently never was able to reach the conclusions he needed to define religion). Recently, Johnstone (2001), McGuire (2002), Roberts (2006) and several others have made penetrating attempts to capture the defining characteristics of religion. Each of them proceeds, by first determining the possible categories of definitions, and engaging in a sort of meta analysis of definitions—then returning to the matter of definition itself, addressing it in more concrete terms.

Two broad categories of definitions are recognized: 'functional' definitions refer to what religion *does*—what purposes it serves within both the macro and micro social orders, and how these purposes are shaped and change over time. Thus, a functional definition might follow the 'rational choice' model, suggesting that religions and religious beliefs are chosen by individuals in order to explain suffering and death, providing for values that translate into moral codes. Further, religion acts as a force that unifies groups around a shared set of social norms, thus potentially bestowing upon each individual in the group a profound sense of belonging. Definitions of this type tend to be highly inclusive, and the sense of what is set apart from the strictly 'sacred' tends to receive more attention than what are bestowed by 'substantive' definitions. Substantive definitions are centered more around a concern with what religion *is*. This is at once a much more ambitious and restrictive approach. The definitions that are substantive are concerned with the elements that are unique to a sphere of activity that can, presumably, be separated from other spheres in some meaningful way. Thus, just as in Durkheim's dichotomy between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' there is the implicit assumption of a distinction between the 'religious' and the 'nonreligious.' Berger (1969:26) defined religion as "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established." In the same manner, Spiro (1966:96) provides a clear substantive definition of religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings."

The advantages of this type of definition are readily seen here: The sphere of religion is clearly marked. The 'sacred' is set apart. Spiro's definition includes the notion that all religions have "superhuman beings." Such substantive definitions lend themselves more readily to historical empirical investigations than the somewhat more amorphous functional definitions. Secondly, as McGuire (2002:10) states: "Substantive definitions are appropriate for studying religion in relatively stable societies, which present few problems with issues of social change and cross-cultural applicability." There are clear instances in which a substantive definition has demonstrated its explanatory force. For example, Stark's (2001) comparative study entitled "Gods, Rituals, and the Moral Order," lays out an explicit description of the effects of various linkages between god(s), morality, and increasing complexity in over 400 societies. His summary statement regarding 'God and Morality in India' is quite succinct and empirically well-founded, enabling him to provide crisp insights, positing, for example that "in India, God matters even if ritual participation does not" (Stark, 2001:631). For all of their clarity, however, substantive definitions may represent a classical example of misplaced precision: in the case of Spiro's definition, for example, it is too facile to characterize religion as being 'culturally patterned,' and begs the question of what constitutes a 'superhuman being.' McGuire correctly states that: "Substantive definitions are sometimes deceptively neat. Without specifying the functions of superhuman beings, for example, it is impossible to distinguish the gods from ghosts, Santa Claus, or the tooth fairy" (McGuire, 2002:10). Classical Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and, it might be argued, pantheistic and even animistic forms of belief would be excluded as religions.

The debate regarding 'what religion is' thus must include a consideration of the merits of inclusiveness versus exclusiveness. Chalfant, Beckley, and Palmer (1994) remark that functional definitions are useful, but may be so inclusive as to 'define the term out of existence' (Chalfant et al., 1994:26). In fact, Swatos (1990) contends that a functional definitions harbor the implicit assumption that religion, classically conceived, is dying, to be

replaced at some future point by 'functional alternatives' (Swatos, 1990). Conversely, the exclusiveness of substantive definitions may be so restrictive that there is something of a "Type 1" reasoning error; rejecting the existence of a genuine religion when it should be included within the religious realm. Hargrove (1979:5) has asserted that:

To limit the study of the sociology of religion to the observation of behavior in organized groups labeled as religious and generalized categories of faith, denomination, geographical, area, or social class, is to deal with so small a segment of the meaning of religion as to be almost useless.

It thus appears from these observations that the act of defining religion may in itself be something akin to a descent into a hopeless morass. An eastern sage was once asked: "Is there really a hell?" His response: "Where do you think you are?" That response might have some resonance for those who have attempted to define religion.

Perhaps the central issue lies not in the question whether to define or not to define, or which type of definition one chooses if one were to define. The principle concern may lie in the *questions* one has regarding religion. Whatever the questions are, they very likely to take an approach that requires more than just thinking in dualistic terms. The majority of definitions presuppose this sort of thinking—either an object is 'sacred' or 'profane;' a definition is either 'substantive' or 'functional;' we are 'seeking' or 'dwelling.' Wittgenstein observed that: When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them, and draw the queerest conclusions from it" (Wittgenstein, 1997:79).

Moreover, religion in complex societies is often dynamic, both reflecting and reacting not only to developments in society, but globally. Armstrong (2000), for example, deftly explicates the changes engendered in fundamentalism in each of the three major Western religions as each perceives and reacts to changes in the fundamentalism(s) of the other two religions. If this is correct, then the study of Islamic fundamentalism cannot be completed without a concomitant investigation of Christian and Judaic fundamentalism (and one might add Hindu fundamentalism to more completely meet the task). As the study of religion grows more complex, however, the definition of religion itself must also reflect that complexity.

An acceptable definition of religion, one that permits a broad-based perspective of religion and religious change must be inclusive of a wide spectrum of shifting patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviors. An underlying sociological assumption is that 'religion' is culturally determined. Thus, in a dynamic culture those patterns are constantly being altered, reformulated, abandoned, and recreated in ways that have eclipsed the utility of capturing those changes. One extensive definition crafted by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, possesses the necessary flexibility capable of apprehending all that religion has become. Religion is:

(1) a *system of symbols* which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting *moods and motivations*...by (3) formulating conceptions of a *general order of existence* and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an *aura of factuality* that (5) the moods and motivations *seem uniquely realistic* (Geertz, 1966:4).

To demonstrate the utility of this definition, one need only to return to the beliefs espoused the members of a group who identify themselves with a specific religion. Geertz understands a 'symbol' to be "any object, act, event, quality, or relation that serves as a vehicle for establishing conceptions about meaning" (Geertz, 1966:5). A defining characteristic of traditional religiosity is the isomorphism of the sacred and the symbol. Relics of the saints—a tooth, a piece of cloth, or even bread and wine that have undergone transubstantiation—belong to a different realm that inspires awe and perhaps the *mysterium*

*tremendum* and *numinous awe* that Rudolf Otto (1963) posited as existing in true religious belief. One significant implication is that if these qualities gradually fade or become lost, then the symbols themselves no longer can be said to exist. In the study of religion, this dynamic feature of symbols is central. Not only are symbols both internalized and externalized (in the sense of being given public expression and acceptance); they can also become lost, thus representing mere artifacts of religious beliefs than have expired.

Further, these symbols can be transformed entirely as their meanings change over time. Not all meaning is withdrawn or slowly lost, but can be transformed by cultural change. For example, in Hinduism the god Indra once was symbolic of the most powerful forces in the world, able to rain down 'unbearable wrath' upon the peoples who dared oppose his adherents. His presence symbolized the most powerful forces in the world, and could command obeisance, even from the other gods. Over the millennia, through conquest and the gradual transition to a less warlike society that has become a widely diverse amalgam of megacities and small villages, Indra now has become a far weaker god—a rural god, having some influence over rain and thunder. However, it is also possible than an act by a powerful figure may create new symbols may to function alongside those that have been long accepted. The addition (by Pope John Paul II) to the Catholic rosary of five new meditations related to several aspects of Jesus' ministry—beginning with the baptism in the Jordan River and ending with the Last Supper—are the first additions to the rosary since it was standardized in 1569 by Pius V. With a single declaration, and with no official doctrine changed as a result, the symbolic significance and meanings of the rosary were instantly transformed for millions of Catholics. The creation of a new set of symbolic meanings in this manner is somewhat exceptional, however.

The sense of awe and mystery of which Otto spoke as being essential to religion can just as equally be engendered by events within the culture that invest objects with new, wholly transformed meaning. The World Trade Center, for example, was once seen by some as symbolic of economic dominance, and by others as a symbolizing bad architecture. Now, of course, its memory has become celebrated as a symbol of sacrifice—even the ground on which the building once stood now has become sacrosanct—an example of the dynamic quality of civil religion. Clearly, these are symbols that invoke 'powerful and pervasive moods and motivations,' as Geertz suggests they are to be a part of religion. These symbols, by their very nature, are not subtle, but are readily visible to the religion's adherents. Their meanings are also intersubjective. Thus "...the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture" (Geertz: 1966:5).

But note that Geertz' definition includes the further qualification that the symbols do not exist in isolation. They must form or become a part of a *system*, if the phenomena can truly be designated as a religion. A system thus conceived is more than merely a series of symbols that have, in various ways, become integrated. Geertz likens symbolic systems to 'models' that pattern the meanings and behaviors of everyday life. The analytic focus of conceptualizing symbolic systems in this way is further sharpened by drawing a distinction between two models: models **of** and models **for** some aspect of social behavior. The former designates any symbolic system that would be created to accord with a preexisting nonsymbolic system. A simple example might be of a topographic map, which captures the features of the land—it is a 'model,' to use Geertz' terminology, *of* what is perceived 'out there' and as concretely real. In the study of religion, however, it is the latter analytic distinction that is most helpful, at least at the outset. Models '*for*' are those in which the symbolic systems come first, and on which physical structures—and perceptions about the meanings of those physical structures—are based. The construction of a religious building, for example, tells much about the symbolic forces that led to its taking on of a specific form.

For example, in Islam the face of Allah could (and should) never be apprehended; however, the power and majesty of it can be represented symbolically, in terms of geometric shapes. Similarly, the three ornate spires that have come to characterize Jain temples represent the 'three jewels' so basic to this religion. As Geertz (1966:7) states: "Here, the theory is a model under whose guidance physical relationships are organized: it is a model *for* 'reality.' For psychological and social systems, and for cultural models that we [would refer to] as 'doctrines' or 'rites,' the case is no different."

It must be remembered that this distinction is merely analytical. What in fact occurs—and what so clearly demonstrates the 'powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting motivations' that Geertz asserts is a defining characteristic of religion—is the interplay (Geertz uses the term 'inter-transposability') of these models as they are actually acted out over time. It is important to keep constantly in the forefront of the analysis that both symbols and reality are intertwined and constantly reconstructed. These transformations often take place at the most fundamental levels—even the perceptions regarding the shape of the earth and its place in the cosmos, for example, can be an outcome of this interplay.

Two essential dimensions are added here. First, there is the notion that religion and its influence cannot be studied as anything other than as *process*: the everyday rituals, the liturgy, and the formal structures only *appear* to have a sense of permanence, and this illusion may very well be reinforced by the religion's official doctrines. However, the underlying reality is always that religions are dynamic institutions in the sociological sense that they exist as changing patterns or relationships. Religions both are embedded and interacting within an institutional web which is also changing, sometimes in reaction to and sometimes in harmony with the changes in religion. The 'symbolic systems' that Geertz posits are themselves fully alive, culturally potent entities.

Secondly, there is the implicit assumption in Geertz' reasoning that religions are not ephemeral. The symbols may change and meanings may be created, recreated, or lost, but the *system* of symbols may be quite lasting. The 'lasting moods and motivations' that religion can produce in individuals are indicative of this. Moods are the 'sentiments' that predispose one to taking a course of action in the future. "They [of themselves] go nowhere" (Geertz, 1966:11). Geertz' notion is here very close to Durkheim's 'collective sentiments,' although operating at a lower level of abstraction. In fact, it might be posited that, when the collective religious sentiment is high, these moods are highly salient, and maintained over long periods of time. Conversely, if the collective sentiment were to shift in favor of a different sentiment (this is one of Weber's essential points in the classic work related to the 'disenchantment' of religion in The Protestant Ethic), then the 'moods' of which Geertz speaks would not be nearly as salient--although they might, as Weber so poetically described, 'prowl about in our lives as the ghost of dead religious beliefs.' As a result, their *motivations* would rise from other sources. Motivations refer to action or the predisposition to act, rather than existing as more or less fixed mindsets, as are moods. Moods form the template, in a sense, for motivations. The critical difference between moods and motivations, for Geertz, is that "...motivations are 'made meaningful' with reference to the conditions they are conceived to spring (Geertz, 1966:12). Motivations 'look ahead' to action; moods are preformed and less consciously realized. Once again, reciprocity is evident: motivations produce results, which in turn alter the general religious climate and possibly the symbolic systems themselves.

A qualification must be added to Geertz' depiction of religious moods: the symbolic systems are often generated or altered by conditions or beliefs existing externally or even in opposition to them. Religious meanings can be generated or strengthened, not only in response to a constant to a constant dialogue from within, or in reaction to the developments in secular institutions, but from conflict with other religions (cf. Armstrong, 2000).

These “moods and motivations” generated by symbolic systems that become increasingly woven with some degree of permanence into the tapestry of the culture are very often qualitatively distinct from the moods and motivations that find their source in other spheres of social life. The fundamental human quest for order and understanding, Geertz maintains, must alter course as it approaches the limits of analytic capacity or moral insight. At least since the Enlightenment, reason alone was believed capable of making tremendous gains in achieving order and understanding. However, reason alone can only carry the quest so far—at some point, the search is cast into a new realm; that of religion. At that point, Geertz maintains that it is only the symbols and beliefs of religion that are capable of saving us from the insanity of chaos and unreason, accompanied by the sense that the world has no meaning. In the deepest wells of existential despair (here Geertz quotes de Madariaga) it is only religion that can provide us with the ‘relatively modest dogma that God is not mad.’ Einstein himself, staring into the apparent chaos of quantum physics, struggled mightily against it, employing the shibboleth that in effect determined the trajectory of his entire late-life career: ‘God does not play dice with the universe.’ Religion, in whatever form, has always evoked powerful symbolic systems to explain the workings of reality; thus, the ‘models for’ this reality are firmly created and held, and the moods and motivations clearly have lasting effects, both in social life and the private lives of individuals.

Defining religion is important. Definition provides us with the guideposts we require to understand not only what religion ‘is,’ but what religion is becoming. Geertz’ definition does not presuppose that traditional religions are ‘dying,’ as has been suggested. On the contrary, new religions are constantly being born, existing alongside established religions. Seen historically, this is certainly not a new pattern. The notion of syncretism, the fusion of different religions, can expand to explain contemporary developments. Thus, the line between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ has become more fluid or has even vanished completely. In the future, it will be definitions of religions that capture this fluidity and diversity which can be productive in our thinking through questions regarding religion and religious change.

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## The Social Gospel in America, 1865-1914

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Since antiquity, religion has moved men and women to work for the betterment of their common lot. "Betterment" has been variously interpreted: sometimes it has required simply charity towards the poor; at other times it has involved a sharply critical view of political and economic conditions (Carter 1954: 2).

While the social application of Christianity has a long history, the *social gospel* as a discernible movement in America emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, reaching its peak early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has been defined as the application of the teachings of Jesus and the total message of Christianity to society, the economic life, and social institutions (Hopkins 1940: 3).

The rapidly developing complexity of social and industrial life with its glaring injustices began to disturb greatly certain leaders among the Protestant churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the inception of a movement directed toward the application of religion to the social and industrial problems of the time.

After the Civil War came a vigorous capitalism known as the "Gilded Age," with widespread corruption, unemployment and desperate poverty. There was stock manipulation, speculation, railway exploitation, fraudulent manufacturing, the adulteration of food, and other problems that aroused concern. Many believed that an exaggerated individualism rode roughshod over human rights. John D. Rockefeller said that God gave him his fortune, and a prominent businessman said arbitrary and dictatorial policies were all rights since the wealth of nations had been given into the keeping of Christian businessmen (Gonce 1996; Hopkins 1940: 34; Wilson 1978: 218).

Much industrial strife was marked by many labor disturbances, riots, and strikes with their revelation of social injustices. In 1886 alone there were more than 1500 labor disputes involving at least 600,000 men and causing an estimated loss of more than \$30 million. Out of this background came an increasing emphasis upon the social teachings of Jesus among the churches in America (Hopkins 1940: 25ff).

The Congregationalist Washington Gladden disagreed that economic questions should be outside the realm of morals. He complained that many church members practiced injustices and cruelty on the assumption that the Christian rule of life had no application to business. He pointed out that the real wages of labor were no higher in 1876 than they had been in 1860, whereas national wealth had increased from \$16 to \$43 billion (Hopkins 140: 26, 37). (Gladden wrote the hymn, "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee.")

While Methodists had stressed individual salvation, many came to see that there needed to be a change in the concept of salvation. To bring about needed reforms in the social and industrial world, they argued, something more must be done about the sins of society. Poverty, extortion, irresponsible use of wealth, unhealthful and indecent conditions of life, despair, cruelty, and untruthfulness were social evils which must concern the church. (Would conversion cure all ills? What about the slave owners who professed conversion?) From the 1890s these themes were prominent in Methodist publications. Young ministers began to study social and economic problems along with theology in seminaries (Hopkins 1940: ; Stackhouse 2005).

A prominent Methodist, Frank Mason North, was very well known in social gospel circles, establishing what he called *The Christian City*, but he is even better known for a hymn that became something of a rallying cry for the movement. Still sung today, it begins:

"Where cross the crowded ways of life,



where sound the cries of race and clan,  
above the noise of selfish strife  
we hear your voice, o Son of man" (Hopkins 1940: 249-250).

The social gospel meant a positive righteousness in all the earth, and to preach the gospel meant to attack every wrong institution. Some saw the Kingdom of God, a unique reign of justice and love, as realizable on earth. From the Christian recognition of the spiritual worth of the individual came a criticism of war, vice, tenements, unsafe factories, child labor, and children in slums (Hopkins 1940: 228-29).

Rev. Joseph Cook, a Congregationalist from Lynn, Massachusetts, was a fluent orator and born reformer. He spoke of revelations of immoral conditions in the shoe factory of Lynn. His speech on the welfare of the laboring man aroused such excitement that a thousand people were turned away from the lecture hall. The largest auditorium in Boston was too small for his audiences (Hopkins 1940: 39-42).

The most enthusiastic advocate of the social gospel in the 1880s was Professor Richard T. Ely. He believed that Christian ethics contain the principles which should animate the entire labor movement. He felt we should go out to the laboring man, hear his complaint, and shape policy to his needs. Ely thought salvation meant positive righteousness in all the earth, and preaching the gospel involved an attack on every wrong institution, until the earth became a new earth (Hopkins 1940: 109).

One of the most aggressive advocates of social Christianity was Rev. Josiah Strong, a Congregationalist, who called three conferences in the 1880s attended by from 12,000 to 15,000 people. Issues such as problems of the city, the family, labor-capital, immigration, and the misuse of wealth were discussed. Strong said, "Whatever is essentially unjust or selfish is anti-Christian. Strong's optimistic book, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, sold more copies than any other book (save the Bible) since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Marty, 1984: 338; Hopkins 1940: 184f; 258-253).

Rev. W. D. P. Bliss, a Congregationalist who became an Episcopalian, began a Society for Christian Socialists. He demanded a cooperative social order where distribution and production would benefit everyone. In 1898 Bliss filled San Francisco's largest auditorium every night for two weeks. He preached in one of the most wealthy Episcopalian churches and was denounced by the press (Hopkins 1940: 173-183).

Popular books on this subject began to appear. *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* by Charles Sheldon, was the most successful. The book told sentimental stories based on the appeal of religious idealism. By 1933 it had sold 23 million copies and was translated into 21 languages (Hopkins 1940: 140). A British journalist wrote a tract called *If Christ Came to Chicago*, a plea for the union of all who love in the service of all who suffer. It was an instantaneous sensation. Viciously denounced by the press, it mysteriously disappeared from Chicago stores, but sold several hundred thousand copies in this country and in England (Hopkins 1940: 146).

The social gospel arose at about the same time as sociology, and many sociologists had close ties to the social gospel movement. Early issues of *The American Journal of Sociology* are filled with articles by proponents of the social gospel. There was great interest in sociology and social science in seminaries and in the programs of many church conferences (Newman 1974: 5-6).

The most dramatic chronicle in American social gospel history was that of George Davis Herron. He combined a crusading zeal with religious insight and a fervid advocacy for the reign of God. His classes at Grinnel College were so popular they had to be held in the college chapel. He established *The Kingdom*, a journal for his ideas. Wherever he went he was the center of tremendous and controversial interest. In Boston he lectured to audiences of 500 and filled 14 other speaking engagements in a week (Hopkins 1940: 184-200).

Herron called the church to reconstruct society according to the ethics of Christ. He was opposed to capitalism and demanded social justice. He traced the widespread poverty and discontent of the times to the centralization of wealth and control of business. To be a Christian, he claimed, is to make righteousness the chief pursuit of life. Religion becomes superstition and tyranny unless it is translated into social values and manifested in social justice (Hopkins 1940: 298-300).

(In 1901 Herron was divorced and deposed from the ministry by the Congregationalists. He remarried and accepted an important diplomatic mission by President Wilson to Versailles.)

The height of the development of the social gospel was 1900 to 1915, involving a surge of reforms, including the federal reserve system, the income-tax amendment, and public ownership of forests. There was a formal recognition of social Christianity by Protestant denominations and the Federal Council of Churches. National mission efforts included a recognition of the social gospel (Hopkins 1940: 203ff.; Wilson 1978: 218-19).

In 1907 the Methodist Federation for Social Service was organized, the first organization of its kind among the American churches. Its leaders included Harry F. Ward and Harris Franklin Rall. Through this medium Methodism has exerted extensive influence upon other churches (Hopkins 1940: 289-292). The Congregationalists and Episcopalians had established committees on labor issues even before that (Wilson 1978: 218).

The Methodist General Conference of 1908 formed a declaration on social questions which, with slight modifications, was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches as the social creed of the churches. It included concerns for equal rights and justice for all men in all stations of life; conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions; the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery and occupational diseases; the abolition of child labor; the reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all; a living wage in every industry; and an equitable division of the products of industry (Marty 1984: 352; Stackhouse 2005). At every General Conference since then other courageous declarations and appeals have been issued.

Some thought the church had departed from its rightful function. Others opposed it because they themselves were engaged in business enterprises where labor was exploited. Others considered it a capitulation to radicals. Actually, the background of the social gospel exponents had been progressive, pragmatic, and originally quite moderate in character. Very few had been members of the Socialist party before World War I.

Religious forces were enlisted in organizing the work for peace. Peace committees, composed of leading ministers, were formed in many cities. The American Peace Society, formed by some Quakers in 1828, became more active. In 1890 the third Sunday in December became recognized as Peace Sunday. Many churches worked for the organization of the League of Nations and later, the United Nations.

The classic statement of American social Christianity is that of Walter Rauschenbusch, whose works undoubtedly influenced the religious life of his time more deeply than any other individual. His books, translated into eight languages, provided Protestantism with a vital, stimulating, and unsurpassed formulation of the Christian sociology it had so long sought (Hopkins 1940: 215-16; Marty 1984: 338).

Rauschenbusch said that the Kingdom of God was the ideal, the hope, and the power by which the social order can be Christianized in history. For him, the Kingdom of God was "humanity organized according to the will of God" (Marty 1984: 349). He explained that an unchristian social order can make good people do bad things: it tempts, defeats, drains, and degrades, and leaves people stunted and shamed. The church exists, he said, to create the Christian life in individuals and the Kingdom of God in human society. We are called not only to be better men and women, but to leave behind a better world.

Stackhouse shows that Rauschenbusch drew from elements in American Puritanism, German theology, British Fabian social thought, emerging schools of economic theory (including Henry George and Karl Marx), and reform movements of the previous generation (Stackhouse 2005).

Although he had been a prolific writer and speaker, he attracted little attention beyond the Baptist fold until the publication of *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which established him at once as the recognized leader of the social gospel movement. He now traveled the country in response to requests for lectures before churches, student groups, theological schools, summer conferences, and forums of every kind (Hopkins 1940: 216).

His prominence rested as much on his personality as his ideas. Deeply and sincerely religious, he had popular appeal and a sense of humor. A poet, mystic, seer, and teacher, Rauschenbusch kept close to humanity while reaching heights of idealism (Hopkins 1940: 217).

Harry F. Ward, a Methodist active in the social gospel movement, wrote about Rauschenbusch, "no one had a larger part in shaping the course of organized Christianity than he" (Minus 1988: 194). Martin Luther King claimed that reading one of Rauschenbusch's books "left an indelible imprint on my thinking" (Minus 1988: x).

Reinhold Niebuhr said of Rauschenbusch, "He was not only the real founder of social Christianity in this country but also its most brilliant and generally satisfying exponent to the present day." A. W. Beaven, former president of the Federal Council of Churches, wrote, "It is clear, it seems to me, that the greatest single personal influence on the life and thought of the American church in the last 50 years was exerted by Walter Rauschenbusch" (Hopkins 1940: ).

While Niebuhr is widely believed to have been responsible for the decline of the social gospel, he actually returned to many issues stressed by Rauschenbusch. Later ethicists have granted that Rauschenbusch's understanding of sin and his theory of social institutions was basically realistic (Jackson 1964).

Social gospel thinkers have often been criticized for claiming that God's Kingdom was realizable here on earth. While a few thinkers seemed to suggest that, the key leaders stopped short of such claims. Rauschenbusch, for example, expressly said that a perfect society was a transcendent reality (Jackson 1964; Stackhouse 2005). He thought the Kingdom is always but coming (Minus 1988: 164). "We plant and water, but unless God's sun shines upon it, our work is nothing."

Two World Wars and a Great Depression set back the explicit goals of the social gospel, but its vision was kept alive by such people as Martin Luther King, Jr., whose famous "I Have a Dream" speech is filled with social gospel allusions, and more recent concerns to alleviate poverty and establish a world with peace and justice.

In looking at the social gospel, the striking thing is the comparison of its vision with those on the Christian right today. A mission that opposes homosexuality and abortion and seeks to keep religious symbols in public life falls woefully short of the best in the social gospel tradition. Many believe that poverty is the most "political" issue in the Bible (Wallis 2005: xxi). Fortunately, there are religious leaders such as Ron Sider and Jim Wallis who capture the essence of the social gospel without its naïve optimism.

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## **Pedagogy in Ethics: Insights from Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II)**

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The overwhelming display of public affection for Pope John Paul II at his death was nothing short of amazing. Anyone who was remotely paying attention to the news media at the time could not help but realize the outstanding significance of this great human being. All of the major television networks aired specials on his life and accomplishments. This was unique. However it is not the aim of this paper to offer tribute, but to recapture the substance and something of the methodology of the ethical thought of Karol Wojtyla. The focus of this paper therefore will be on the academic work and thought of the man who later in 1978 became the great Pope John Paul II.

Many people are familiar with the life of Wojtyla.<sup>1</sup> He was a man of many talents. At the same time, he was a person whose life was marked by great suffering. He lost his mother at the age of five and his brother, his only sibling, at the age of twelve. By the age of eighteen with the passing of his father, he had lost all the people whom he loved. At that tender age he managed to reconcile this great loss with tremendous faith in the love of God and a great love for his fellow man. We are told that his one great passion at the time was for the theatre where his talent for drama began to flourish and his keen ability to enter into the character of another blossomed. While this talent would serve him well as the Roman Pontiff, especially in his many papal journeys and World Youth Day celebrations, it seems that this talent also sprang from another source, a hidden spring of passion for the plight of the individual human person and a great love for the spoken word, for language itself.

In his poems written during the early years of the Second World War, we find an uncanny ability to connect with human beings at all levels of life. We get a glimpse into the soul of the young Wojtyla who already looks at the world with the great questions and ethical concerns that would later mark his philosophy. They are questions concerning the individual and community, questions about human work and social justice, and most especially questions posed by the riddle of human existence and the necessity of God. The series of poems titled "The Quarry" bring into focus the plight of workers and the great forces of time and eternity that chisel and mold each human person. This poem was written shortly after September 1939 when the University of Karkow was shut down during the Nazi occupation of Poland.

And a thought grows in me day after day:  
The greatness of work is inside man.

Hard and cracked  
his hand is differently charged  
by the hammer  
and thought differently unravels in stone  
as human energy splits from the strength of stone  
cutting the bloodstream, an artery  
in the right place.

Look, how love feeds

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<sup>1</sup> Of the many biographies written on the life of Karol Wojtyla / Pope John Paul II, we especially recommend George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999).

on this well grounded anger  
which flows into people's breath  
as a river bent by the wind,  
and which is never spoken, but just breaks high vocal cords.

Passers-by scuttle off into doorways,  
someone whispers: "Yet here is a great force."

Fear not. Man's daily needs have a wide span,  
A straight river bed can't imprison them long.  
Fear not. For centuries they all stand in Him,  
and you look at Him now  
through the even knocking of hammers.<sup>2</sup>

"The greatness of work is inside of man." The poem captures the solitude of the worker whose life daily passes before his eyes as his hands wrestle with the material objects external to himself. He does not live in and through these objects; he lives apart, inwardly removed from physical objects which measure his strength and fortitude. In this way the worker wrestles with the great questions of human existence. At the same time there is a love that arises from a gentle inner place, a soul which fuels passion, the anger that is necessary to remain firm in the face of adversity. This love arises from the human heart and overflows into human breath; like a great river it distinctly characterizes human life.

One of Wojtyla's great insights is that the human person cannot live without love. The presence or absence of love is the defining quality of human existence but it can only be measured against eternity. The river ultimately flows into the transcendent or spiritual realm. This is where the human person really lives. The inner being of the human person is spiritual; it cannot be contained or imprisoned in a straight river bed, in the material world. The one who dwells in the inner heart of man is Lord of the transcendent realm. Thus the river of human breath is a metaphor for the human desire to reach eternity.

The work of man is inside himself. As physical labors of flesh and blood are brought to bear on rock and stone, as raw nature yields to the human intellect and will, as human endeavor seeks to overcome every obstacle that lies before it, the interior landscape is the one that must be conquered. The inner struggle is what is most human. It is here that the mettle of each person is tested and tried; the knocking of hammers and all the forces of time and eternity exert tremendous pressure to shape and mold the interior of the person. It is this interior depth of the human person that suggests the unrepeatable mystery that is associated with the life of each person in the thought of Karol Wojtyla. Wojtyla's thought early on was characterized by an overwhelming sense of universality as well as the great importance of each particular person. For him, there is no tension between these two poles.

### **Ethical Theory Developed at Lublin**

Wojtyla sought to ground his ethics in the awesome mystery of the human person. "He saw the human being as a remarkable psycho-physical unity, each person unique person, never again to be repeated in the entire universe."<sup>3</sup> His was a decidedly personalist approach to the principles governing social ethics. Ethical norms governing human relations

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<sup>2</sup> Karol Wojtyla, "The Quarry" from *Easter Vigil and Other Poems*. Translated by Jerzy Peterkiewicz. (New York: Random House, 1979), 25-33.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Swiezawski, Introduction to *Person and Community – Selected Essays*. Translated by Theresa Sandok, OSM. *Catholic Thought from Lublin*, vol. 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) xiii.

can only be established for him upon the foundations of “personalist” philosophy and the “I-Thou” experience of interpersonal communion. He combined these profound modern views with the principles of natural law understood in a traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic framework. This approach allowed him to articulate and examine deeper dimensions of interpersonal communion rooted in an objective realist understanding of creation and the natural order. His phenomenological approach to philosophical anthropology gives rise to many insights that nicely complement the truths known through natural law as well as ethical norms introduced through divine law. Basing his philosophical anthropology on the unique dignity of the human person, a dignity greater than any other creature, he discovers in every human person one whose existence is a reflection of Divine Personhood. Each human person is purposefully created by God whose love constantly overflows into the created order. Far from blind chance, God’s creative work deliberately communicates something of Himself to human persons, whose freedom is a capacity to live in truth with others. God communicates freedom and intellect, a longing for love and for truth and beauty. The human person has a profound vocation to fulfill his freedom by directing it in accord with the moral order. The right use of freedom entails the priority of love and communion with others. The intersubjectivity of persons gives rise to interpersonal communion which for Wojtyla is the single most marvelous aspect of our humanity. It is here that the fullness of the *imago Dei* in the human person can be found.<sup>4</sup>

In his *Theology of the Body*, which Wojtyla was already working on for publication before he was elected to the See of Peter, Wojtyla celebrates the great beauty and also the mystery of interpersonal communion. Here he speaks in the language of gift, a language that is peculiarly modern in philosophy, but really is as old as creation itself. He writes,

The reality of the gift and the act of giving, outlines in the first chapter of Genesis as the content constituting the mystery of creation, confirms that the radiation of love is an integral part of this same mystery. Only love creates the good. Love alone can, in a word, be perceived in all its dimensions and its aspects in created things and especially in man. Its presence is almost the final result of that interpretation of the gift, which we are carrying out here. Original happiness, the beatifying beginning of man whom God created “male and female” (Gen. 1:27), the nuptial significance of the body in its original nakedness – all this expresses its radiation in love... Happiness is being rooted in love.<sup>5</sup>

Wojtyla is now quite famous for bringing together new currents of modern philosophical thought, especially phenomenological realism, with traditional Thomistic anthropology. This was still very new in the 1950’s when he began his work at the University of Lublin. Stefan Swiezawski was one of Karol’s colleagues at the University of Lublin and the man who was responsible for encouraging Wojtyla to “devote his abilities and his passion for truth to the Catholic University of Lublin and to assume the position of Chair of Ethics in the Philosophy Department.”<sup>6</sup> He saw the work that they were doing in Poland

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* (General Audience, Nov. 14, 1979). “Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, right ‘from the beginning’ not only an image in which there is reflected the solitude of a Person who rules the world, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons. In this way, the second narrative could also be a preparation for the understanding of the Trinitarian concept of the “image of God,” even if the latter only appears in the first narrative... in fact it even constitutes, perhaps, the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man.”

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* (General Audience, Jan. 30, 1980) (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Swiezawski, Introduction to *Person and Community – Selected Essays*, xiii.

after the Second World War as having monumental significance for the whole of Europe and humanity. Swiezawski recalls,

In the works and discussion of our group of at first four and then six philosophers at the Catholic University of Lublin, we were deeply convinced that our efforts to “discover” the true Saint Thomas and to continue the line of development of European metaphysics and philosophy extending from medieval to contemporary times had crucial significance not just for our university, for Poland and for Europe, but for the whole world.<sup>7</sup>

Lublin Thomism contains within it something of unique importance. In his lectures Wojtyla considers the possibility of dealing with the problem of personalism in the categories of Saint Thomas’ philosophy and theology. He notes that “personalism is not primarily a theory of the person or a theoretical science of the person. Its meaning is largely practical and ethical: it is concerned with the person as a subject and object of activity, the subject of rights, etc.”<sup>8</sup> He further explains that even the evangelical counsel to love one’s neighbor is a thoroughly personalist principle because only persons are capable of being subjects of love. Human love when directed to other persons, finds in them an object of love that is commensurate with one’s own self. Therefore human society is only possible because human beings are first of all persons who are capable of entering into relationships with each other in a way that is mutually enriching and not exploitive.

The etymological meaning of the Latin word *societas*, from which the English word is derived, literally means partnership or companionship, a nuance which is sometimes lost in contemporary English use. Human society exists because the human person is a being who seeks companionship. The human being is only able to fulfill himself by virtue of acting and existing along with others. Wojtyla refers to the desire for companionship as the first meaning of participation.<sup>9</sup> It is one of the key aspects of his understanding of community. In several of his Lublin lectures he links this principle and also the principle of self-determination, with a key text from the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* # 24, “the human person cannot fully find himself except through a disinterested gift of himself/herself.”<sup>10</sup> Wojtyla was engaged in teaching in Lublin and preparing these lectures during the years of the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965. He attended all four sessions of the Council. At the Council the Catholic Church was engaged in a “turn to the person.” One finds in the conciliar documents this same emphasis on the dignity of the human person and vocation of the person to love and to give oneself. Wojtyla sees the ‘law of gift’ as an essential aspect of human freedom. In his lecture on “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination” Wojtyla writes, “It is precisely when one becomes a gift for others that one most fully becomes oneself. This ‘law of the gift,’ if it may be so designated, is inscribed deep within the dynamic structure of the human person.”<sup>11</sup>

The ‘law of the gift’ has the potential to transform the entire fabric of society. Human relations would thus be sustained beyond self-interest and the business of getting practical

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<sup>7</sup> See Introduction to English edition of *Person and Community – Selected Essays from Lublin*, xiii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, “Thomistic Personalism” 165.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, “The Person: Subject and Community” 237.

<sup>10</sup> The entire text reads, “Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, ‘that all may be one. . . as we are one’ (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination” 194.



needs met. The main obstacle to realization of a society characterized by 'law of gift' is the 'law of use' or an ethics of utility. Real companionship cannot exist where personal relations are reduced to 'use' of others. Persons always demand a level of respect from one another which must not be violated. Wojtyla explains in *Love and Responsibility* that "anyone who treats a person as a means to an end does violence to the very essence of the other, to what constitutes its natural right."<sup>12</sup> He develops this insight into his own personalist principle, which at first glance, seems to be identical to Kant's personalist principle, however as Wojtyla points out, there is a fundamental distinction. While Kant meant the words "we must not treat others *merely* as the means to an end" to signify that the person as the possessor of his own nature can without harming itself, assume the role, or even inadvertently perform the role of "means to an end," on the condition that the end is a lawful one,<sup>13</sup> Wojtyla holds that "nobody can use a person as a means towards an end, no human being, *nor yet God the Creator*."<sup>14</sup> In Wojtyla's version we see that that human personhood is of such dignity that it must never become an object for use under any circumstances. This is so because the inviolable dignity that inheres and flows from the essence of the person precludes the reduction of the person to a mere means. Human persons all have a transcendent end to which their free actions and interactions with other must always be directed.

In his essay on "Thomistic Personalism," Wojtyla echoes St. Thomas' understanding of the complex relationship between the individual and human society. He offers additional insights. Because the individual human being is always a person, and the society is a collection of persons who have an innate tendency to form interpersonal relationships as well as families and communities, the social fabric always involves an element of consciousness and freedom on the part of individuals. Since their relations must always be ordered to the good of each person as well as the common good, it is sub-ordered to morality. Society must seek to "create a system of relations between the individual and itself that result in the fullest possible correlation between the person's true good and the common good that society naturally seeks."<sup>15</sup> Maintaining the proper balance between the individual and society requires great virtue. When individual persons place their own good above the common good, they attempt to subordinate the good of the whole to themselves. This results in disorders such as an individualism which gives rise to greed in economics or a distorted notion of civil liberties, to name but a few of the ensuing problems. On the other hand, when the state attempts to achieve the good of the whole by attempting to subordinate persons to itself, the ultimate or transcendent end of persons is limited or excluded. Such a society can not allow individual persons to fully exercise genuine freedoms and thus assumes a position of totalitarian control over citizens that inhibits authentic human development and diminishes the possibility for true happiness. In Wojtyla's view, the common good of society and the true good of the person are harmonious, even though considerable sacrifice may be demanded of individual members. The true good of society can never threaten the good of the person; the true good of the person can never threaten the common good.

Wojtyla is profoundly aware that something more is needed on the part of society in order for this true human flourishing to exist. He calls this the "eternity of the person" or human transcendence which arises from the spirituality of the rational nature in which the human person subsists. Persons must appropriate their transcendence in order to avoid

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<sup>12</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, Inc., 1981) 27. Originally published in Polish as *Milosc i Odpowiedzialnosc*, (Krokow, Wydawnictwo, Znak, 1960).

<sup>13</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, footnote 6, page 291.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community*, "Thomistic Personalism" p. 174.

harmful attachment to or the material universe. Doing so gives rise to a new set of values that “are by nature trans-temporal, and even atemporal. Such values include truth, goodness, and beauty, as well as justice and love, and in general all the values by which the person as such continually lives.”<sup>16</sup> In the end, Wojtyla sees that “the very content of the person’s life points to the eternity of the person. These values demand a more complete realization than they find in temporal life within the confines of the person’s bodily existence.”<sup>17</sup> Wojtyla is referring here to the ‘restless heart’ that beats in the breast of all human persons, stirring within them a longing for Him who is already searching for them. Human society must promote and respect human transcendence and the need for authentic spirituality in the culture. This fundamental need of the person for spiritual nurture gives rise to the responsibility of society to promote and respect true religion and religious festivals that are rooted in ancient tradition and especially in revealed faith.

In the essay “On the Dignity of the Human Person,” Wojtyla notes that the highest confirmation of the dignity of the human person is to be found in divine revelation and especially in the Incarnation. In this context we reflect upon the God who seeks society with man. The very fact of the Incarnation confirms the tremendous dignity of the human person.<sup>18</sup>

By entering into the drama of human existence, God permeates the human being as well as human communities with divine grace. The fact of the Incarnation awakens in the human person the recognition of his profound depth and the mystery of God’s plan in which God initiates a dialogue with man. In the words of the Psalmist, “deep calls out to deep.”<sup>19</sup> This dialogue ensures that man will never walk alone on life’s journey and it confirms the fact that the journey is a journey to the Father. For just as Christ had come from the Father and returns to the Father, the being of each person begins in the mind of God, and is fulfilled through the personal knowledge of God, or a return to God by way of knowledge and love/communion.<sup>20</sup> Every person must come to know their true identity, hidden in God and in His divine plan. Personhood therefore is also constituted by relationship and mission. Wojtyla’s reflection upon the mystery of Divine Paternity and the participation of human paternity in the Fatherhood of God is beautifully developed in his play, “The Radiation of Fatherhood.” Wojtyla does not see the possibility of human personhood attaining its fullest development apart from a fruitful interior life. He views human freedom as a gift by which the human person is made capable of participating in the greatest possible love and relationship with his Creator. This aspect of human self-determination gives rise to the highest possible “I-Thou” relationship. In this context Wojtyla elucidates what he means by “participation.”

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, “Person and Community” p. 175.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 175. Wojtyla adds here, “An analysis of the spiritual life of the human person from the perspective of the values that appear in it and that determine its whole character indicates that, for the full attainment of that spiritual life, the person must exist beyond the bodily conditions of human existence – in the dimensions of God.”

<sup>18</sup> “The dignity of the human person finds its full confirmation in the very fact of revelation, for this fact signifies the establishment of contact between God and the human being. To the human being, created in “the image and likeness of God,” God communicates God’s own thoughts and plans. But this is not all. God also “becomes a human being;” God enters into the drama of human existence through the redemption and permeates the human being with divine grace” *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 42:8.

<sup>20</sup> Note: These remarks, based upon John 13:1 and John 17:3: “Eternal life is this, to know you the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” are not found directly in Wojtyla’s thought but are added here to show the complete harmony between Scriptural teaching and the profound truths which Wojtyla treats based upon his philosophical personalism or “Lublin Thomism.”

The concept of *participation* is a property of the person that expresses itself in the ability of human beings to endow their own existence and activity with a personal dimension when they exist and act together. To “participate” in the humanity of another simply means to be related to the other as a particular human being. Because of the reality of participation, human beings are only capable of fulfilling themselves in activity with others.<sup>21</sup> The opposite experience of participation is *alienation*. Both arise from the interrelatedness and intersubjectivity of the human person. Persons always exist and act together as a multiplicity of subjects, but they also enter into community as personal subjects. The concept of community has both a real and an ideal meaning. It signifies a certain reality as well as an idea or principle. Community is essential for human existence and cooperation. People fulfill themselves in and through communion with others. The fulfillment of the person cannot be reduced to a function of the community however. Wojtyla asks how persons fulfill themselves in communities and in answer to this question, he looks at interpersonal relations through *I-Thou* and *We* relations.

The “I” is in a sense constituted by the “thou” of the other. This “thou” is also another “I” different from my own “I.” “Thou” expresses not only the separation or difference of the other from myself; it also expresses an important connection, the inter-connectedness of all persons. The “I-Thou” relationship is potentially directed away from me toward all other human beings, but in actuality it always connects me with at least one other person. If it connects me with many persons, then it no longer has a relation to a “thou” but to a “we.” The connection to a “we” is the experience of community. Human beings experience these relations even before they are conscious of them. The first experience of community is in the human family. These relations are so vital and necessary to human existence that persons live without them. In his first encyclical letter, Pope John Paul II echoes this profound truth in his first encyclical letter:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.<sup>22</sup>

Wojtyla notes that there is a reflexive quality to all inter-personal relationships. When the relation directed from my “I” to a “Thou” returns to the “I” from which it proceeded, the reflexivity of this relation contains the element of constituting my “I” in a particular aspect of its being. The “Thou” assists the “I” in more fully discovering and affirming the self. The “Thou” of the other therefore contributes to one’s own self-affirmation. The subjectivity of one’s “I” is in a sense constituted by or grounded in the affirmation of another. This reflexive quality gives rise to participation if one’s “I” finds authentic affirmation of itself, or leads to alienation if one’s self is not valued, not affirmed. Wojtyla notes that when the relationship is reciprocal, “we can say that it is participation and not something else that forms the essential constituent of a community having an interhuman, interpersonal character.”<sup>23</sup> True participation therefore is essential for genuine human community.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This truth does not of course detract from the value of the contemplative life wherein fulfillment occurs precisely because of the privileged relationship that one enjoys with Christ by virtue of consecration and the evangelical counsels.

<sup>22</sup> *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, “The Person: Subject and Community” 243.

<sup>24</sup> A further study might explore the connection between participation and the virtue of solidarity. Both are essential for a society in which all persons are valued and offered equal opportunities.

The human being is not only an existing subject but also an acting subject. In this acting, the “thou” becomes an “object” for the “I” of the self.<sup>25</sup> The “I” also becomes an object for itself in actions that are objectively directed toward a “Thou.” Thus the subject experiences the relation to a “Thou” in activity that has the “Thou” as its object and *vice versa*. Through this activity the subject “I” not only experiences itself in relation to the “Thou” of the other, but also experiences its own subjectivity in a new way. These insights offer a new possibility to describe the deeper dimensions of interpersonal community, the metaphysical as well as a normative or ethical meaning which leads one to experience the “Thou” of the other as another self in a kind of empathy of subjectivity. We can begin to see here a partial answer to some of the questions that were asked earlier. Another way to ask the question is, whether the law of love for neighbor, the new commandment of the Gospel, can be fully known by reason and applied to social ethics rooted in reason rather than revelation, so that binding norms can be established? If we see that respect for the dignity of the other also demands openness to the “thou” of the other, love is the only proper response that one can give to persons whose dignity is so great. Wojtyla couples this truth with the fact that human persons are always from God and for God, and hence deserving of profound respect. He shows this by focusing on the empathy that is always present between persons, an “I” and a “thou” who see their own self reflected in the person of the other.

The “thou” that stands before oneself is a true and complete “other self,” which is also characterized, like one’s own self, by self-determination as well as self-possession and self-governance. This whole structure of personal subjectivity is mutually revealed through the community proper to the “I-Thou” relationship. In this way, the “I-Thou” relationship has its own transcendence and becomes an authentic subjective community. This community calls for the mutual self-revelation of the partners in their personal human subjectivity. A normative element arises among the two subjects since in their relations there always *ought to be* mutual self-revelation characterized by complete transparency and openness. The more profound or intense the bond between the “I” and the “Thou,” the more it takes on the character of trust and demands a deeper giving of oneself. With this deepening of trust comes the demand for greater fidelity and self-giving until there arises a special kind of belonging and a need for greater mutual acceptance and affirmation by the “Thou.” The highest level of this belonging is found once again in marriage and the human family, as well as in religious communities, but should be present to some degree in all interpersonal interaction. Here there is no division between sacred and profane. The ground of being of all persons is deserving of the highest honor and respect.

In and through interpersonal communion, human persons become aware of their mutual responsibility for one another so that authentic community develops only as the “I” and “Thou” abide in mutual affirmation of the transcendent value of their own personhood. This value must be confirmed by them as that which motivates and tolerates only virtuous human action. While it is possible for two or more persons to band together for unlawful or unvirtuous acts, such actions exclude the proper form of participation because there is some disorder introduced into the action such as the wrong use of another or an injustice against another person or their property. The act can also be directed against the common good which makes it even more seriously wrong. When proper respect is present among persons and their actions are ordered to their own good as well as the good of the community, “only such a relationship deserves the name *communio personarum*.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Here the word “object” does not mean a ‘thing’ but rather as its etymological derivation from Latin implies, one who is ‘thrown before’ the self so as to constitute a reality that confirms the reality of the self in a fundamental way.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

From these insights, one can readily see that the quality of transactions that arise from a sense of interpersonal subjectivity understood through “I-Thou” relations must be markedly different from those that are primarily characterized by pragmatic self-interest or utility. It can be readily seen that the level of personal responsibility and fulfillment as well as the motivation necessary to value and strive after virtue, rises dramatically when such relations are in place. Only these kinds of relations call forth the heroic openness to truth that is necessary to seek the good and to foster the beauty in every day life that can transform and greatly enhance human community. Such relations undoubtedly contribute to the fostering of a “civilization of love.”

## **Conclusion**

While it is true that some of the ideas expressed in Wojtyla’s philosophical ethics may seem dated, rooted as they in the intellectual ferment of the 1960’s, one can look beyond that which on the surface seems temporal, to discover eternal truth and a richness that can greatly aid the study of ethics. Wojtyla’s genius was to integrate modern thought with its emphasis on human subjectivity and human dignity, and develop it further in his own way, coming as he did from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective in which the natural law and virtue ethics figured so prominently. It may seem to some that these are ideas which have seen their day due to the transient nature of cultural trends, especially in the academy. It is our contention however that they represent a pure stream of ethical thought that rises from the sapiential nature of philosophic investigation. It may be that much of contemporary philosophy has forgotten the language of truth and beauty. This language has always grown out of a strong sense of wonder at being itself. Wojtyla’s use of poetic imagination is another approach to answering life’s great questions. Teachers of philosophy might do well to encourage students to grapple with the great questions of human existence through poetry as well as prose. This may be especially appropriate to the teaching of ethics. It is true that human greatness has always been celebrated in terms of the heroic archetype. Heroes inspire greatness. The ability of Wojtyla to connect to all human persons on such a profound level was borne out of his deep insight into the universality of human aspiration and the complexities of the human heart, and at the same time his appreciation for each person’s unique history and identity. This might explain the tremendous outpouring of love and devotion by such a vast number of people of different faiths, nationalities and walks of life at his death. In a man like this, there is an undeniable intuition that God has come close to us, and divine wisdom has been made visible on the stage of human history once again.

## **Biographical Note**

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## **Christian Identity Theology: Diversity, Dissension, and the Quest for a White Centered Universe**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the issue of Christian Identity (CI) Theology within the contemporary American separatist movement. There is dissension among certain groups as to the importance of religion to broader movement objectives. Some activists within the separatist movement firmly believe that whites are the chosen people of God and the United States is the Promised Land. There is also disagreement among Christian Identity adherents as to how to best define their belief system. I have done a qualitative analysis of Stormfront, an online discussion forum for white nationalists and I interviewed several white racial activists about religion and their belief system. I also attended two Klan rallies, one of which was a Klan group with strong CI ties. Findings indicate that the contemporary separatist movement lacks central organization and one strong leader to pull the various factions together. However, its publications, online presence, and adherents' belief in white superiority have resulted in a synthesis of racial ideology I term meta-racism which includes Christian Identity, paganism, and eugenics.

### **Introduction**

Christian Identity, a millenarian vision, has roots in British-Israelism which claimed that the English were the chosen people of God. The actual British-Israelite movement began in England around 1840 with the writings of Irishman John Wilson (Barkun 1994). Identity theory in its updated version teaches that the United States is God's Promised Land and the state of Israel is a hoax (Ridgeway 1990). Non-whites and Jews are deemed inferior to whites and thus labeled the 'scourge' of God or 'mud races.' When the Apocalypse comes, Identity believers say that Aryans will finally rule the world alongside a white Anglo-Saxon God.

Early American Identity theologians added the two-seed theory which teaches that non-whites are pre-Adamic. In other words, they were exiled from the Garden of Eden before God created Adam and Eve. When Eve broke God's first commandment and allowed Satan to seduce her, she was implanted with two seeds. From Adam's seed came Abel and the white race, all of whom were created in God's image. From Satan's seed came Cain who killed Abel and was expelled from the Kingdom of God for his sin. Unholy races that sprang directly from Cain include Asians, indigenous tribes, Arabs, Africans, Hispanics, and Jews (Ridgeway 1990).

Identity theology has gone through several incarnations since it was first conceived by Howard Rand and William Cameron in early twentieth century America. There are conflicts with traditional Christianity which teaches believers to love their enemies and forgive those who sin. Even though there are some links between Christian Identity and Fundamentalist Christianity, disagreements over definitions of salvation and patriotism divide the two belief systems substantially (White 1989).

Christian Identity poses challenges on many different levels. First of all, it restates basic Christian tenets of love and forgiveness. Adherents believe that since whites are the chosen people of God salvation is attainable by whites only. Other races are condemned to eternal damnation. Believers revel in the promise of a militant second coming of Christ where whites will be victors in the final battle. They discount the idea of the 'rapture' that is

embraced by Fundamentalist Christians. These beliefs have resulted in tensions within the broader separatist movement of which Christian Identity is a part (Dobratz 2001). Discussants on Stormfront threads could not seem to find a common ground regarding Christian Identity beliefs. Several racial activists who were interviewed for this paper also find elements of Christian Identity dogma troubling.

Over the past twenty years research has indicated that Christian Identity is the thread that holds contemporary extremist groups together (Barkun 1989, 1994; White 1989; Aho 1990; Ridgeway 1990; Kaplan 1993; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997; Dobratz 2001). Although important as an indicator of the millennialism outlook promulgated by early proponents of British-Israelism, the separatist movement is driven by more than one racial doctrine. I propose that Christian Identity, eugenics, and paganism are three inextricably intertwined movements that culminate in meta-racism, the belief system of the contemporary racist right.

### **A Brief History of White Racial Ideology**

The origins of meta-racism appear to have emerged sometime during the seventeenth century. Further development of the belief system occurred with the work of John Wilson and Edward Hine who were proponents of British-Israelism ideology. In 1865 another racial movement was forming when Francis Galton published his initial ideas about what was to eventually become known as eugenics. His goal was to investigate the origins of man's 'natural ability.' In 1881, Arthur Gobineau wrote a two volume set, Essay on the Inequality of Human Races, which reinforced Richard Wagner's creation of Siegfried, Hitler's model Aryan. In order to understand the evolution of the belief system of the racist right, it is essential to explore the history of the key doctrines that comprise it.

#### British-Israelism

In seventeenth century England, the anticipation of an imminent millennium was strong, buttressed by the belief that the British were lineal descendents of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel (Barkun 1994). By 1665 there were sightings of the lost tribes who were described as a vast army of Jews out to conquer the Turks along with other anti-Semitic nations such as England. Millenarians were attracted to these reports because they believed the prophecy of the second coming was close and Jews would collectively accept Christ as their savior upon safe arrival to Palestine. In 1791, Richard Brothers, a retired British naval officer, had a vision that he was chosen to lead the Jews to the Promised Land.

By 1840, an Irishman named John Wilson claimed that he could prove that the lost tribes had migrated from the Near East to northern Europe. He deduced that the British and other Teutonic peoples such as the Germans were the true Israelites of old. By the 1870s, British-Israel associations began forming in London. A disciple of Wilson's, Edward Hine had plans for a full-fledged social movement. Hine eventually abandoned Wilson's pro-Teutonic stance and focused exclusively on the British as God's chosen people. He began his efforts to consolidate the movement in England and North America in earnest.

In 1879, Joseph Wild, pastor of the Union Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York published what is thought to be the first Anglo-Israel pamphlet claiming status of the Manasseh tribe (the thirteenth lost tribe of Israel) for the United States (Barkun 1994). Although unacquainted with Hine, Wild was introduced to John Wilson's writings in 1850 and actively promoted the idea that Anglo-Saxons were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. In 1883 a more prominent American with loose ties to Yale University, Lt. C. A. L. Totten published a book titled The Order of History which came to the attention of Hine. Impressed

by Totten's writing, Hine contacted him, sailed to America, and began a collaboration to collectivize British-Israelism in North America.

#### Eugenics: Striving for a Super Race

During the mid-Victorian era of Francis Galton, it was well known in the scientific community that with careful selection farmers and gardeners could obtain permanent animal and plant breeds of superior and hearty stock (Kevles 1985). Erasmus Darwin, grand-father of Charles and father-in-law to Galton was a naturalist and physician who encouraged Galton's ideas about how the 'race of man' could be improved through selective breeding. Galton's first published ideas were eventually expanded into a book, Hereditary Genius, in 1869. His investigations concerned the intellectual capabilities of eminent men of the previous two centuries. Findings indicated that a large percentage of his sample were blood relatives leading to Galton's hypothesis that heredity not only governs physical features but talent and character as well. He concluded that families of reputation were more likely to produce superior offspring (Kevles 1985).

It must be noted that far from a random sample, Galton's research did not include women nor did it include people of color. His sample was taken from the Dictionary of Men of the Time and other European biographical encyclopedias. Profiles included white male jurists, military commanders, scientists, poets, painters, and musicians (Kevles 1985). As with British-Israelism, eugenics went through many transformations. Even though eugenics inspired miscegenation laws in the United States, the movement was eventually discredited by prominent American scientists such as Herman J. Muller. By the mid-1930s, eugenics was generally regarded as pseudoscience by reputable members of the scientific community in both Europe and the United States.

#### Paganism and the Nazi Mindset

During the 1840s when John Wilson was writing about British-Israelism in England, Richard Wagner was beginning his diatribe against the French and Jews, accusing them of excessive greed and a lust for gold (Viereck 1961). In 1867, Wagner further separates undesirables from the spirit of the German people with his concept of "volk organism" which would not be healthy until all alien elements were successfully purged from its midst. A significant alien element, for Hitler at least, was German Jews.

No fan of traditional Christianity, Wagner aligned himself with Hitler's 'positive Christianity' which is manifested by Nordic warriors with hearts of steel who battle for race and nation. For all of Wagner's proselytizing, Arthur Gobineau's work (1853/1881) served as a landmark for the telling of Aryan history (Hofstadter 1992). A principle advocate of northern European racial supremacy, Gobineau believed that blond, light skinned people were the only ones who could revitalize dying and decadent populations comprised of less desirable races. During this same time Englishman Charles Kingsley extolled the virtues of the English branch of the Teutonic race and its role in world history (Horsman 1981: 75). He blended Anglo-Saxon racial theory into his defense of Christianity. With a strange pagan twist, Kingsley stated that Odin ruled the Norse-Saxon race and Teutonic nations such as England were infused with the purest Aryan blood.

Hitler's resident Nazi scholar, Alfred Rosenberg took paganism to a new level with his racial interpretation of history titled Der Mythus des 20 (Viereck 1961). Rosenberg's claimed that Germany represented the political expression of race or "volkishness." The German quest for racial supremacy began in mythical Atlantis. Here the blond "master race," directly descended from the gods, migrated across Europe enslaving dark skinned people along the way. Enslavement led to interbreeding which, according to Rosenberg, led to the downfall of many great empires. The exception was the ancestors of the German



Teutonic race who were more selective with whom they mated resulting in a pure bloodline. Rosenberg's Mythus conveniently traced Jesus Christ's lineage to the Aryan "master race" as well.

### Convergence of White Supremacist Racial Ideology

Christian Identity in its present configuration retains the sense of millenarian imminence inherited from British-Israelism (Barkun 1994: 112). Just as Hine de-emphasized Germanic Teutonism in favor of a purely British vision of God's chosen people, American Identity proponents emphasize the centrality and importance of America in the millenarian vision. Pyramidology has also been discounted to avoid the embarrassment of incorrect predictions. Traditional British-Israelism was not particularly anti-Semitic which provided another reason for American Christian Identity theologians to distance themselves from it. The belief that the origin of the Jews is satanic and their bloodline irreparably tainted resulted in the dualistic character of contemporary Christian Identity theology and the justification for demonization of the Jews.

Even though eugenics was declared unreliable during the 1930s, a new eugenics movement has resurged in the United States and Canada. In 1995, David Lykken, a psychology professor at the University of Minnesota wrote a book titled The Antisocial Personalities. He takes a hereditarian view of criminal behavior and theorizes that people who are genetically pre-disposed to obey the law and submit to authority are likely to grow up as law abiding citizens no matter how dysfunctional their parents may be. Sociopaths can go either way depending upon their parents and psychopathic personalities, with a few exceptions, become anti-social. According to Lykken, genes set the direction of behavior while environment facilitates outcome. His ideas are further indicators for the racist right that intermarriage will do nothing but undermine the gene pool of the white race.

Another prominent racial scholar, J. Philippe Rushton, (1995) hypothesizes that race is a biological concept with Asians and Africans aggregating at the opposite ends (Asians at the top of the hierarchy and Africans at the bottom). His ideas first came to the attention of the scientific community at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement in Science in 1989. Mehler (1989) reported that Rushton draws heavily on the work of Arthur Jensen, Hans Eysenck, Daniel Vining, R. T. Osborne, and Richard Lynn who are all contributors to contemporary eugenics-inspired books and publications. Despite the controversy, Rushton continues to obtain funding for his research and argue that the r/K selection theory explains differences in evolutionary development between species, including humans.

Paganism causes some disturbances in the separatist movement especially among Christian Identity adherents and others who consider themselves more traditional Christians. In 2006 the Imperial Klans of America opened their membership to neo-Pagans. This resulted in the defection of at least one leader and organizer in West Texas (email communication, Participant 3, August 15, 2006). This move also prompted comments from an itinerant Christian Identity minister in Louisiana (Participant 4):

"There is no place for people who do not worship God in the Klan. The Klan always has been and always will be a Christian organization."

Dobratz (2001) states that religious doctrine within the movement is not limited to the separatist brand of Christianity and Christian Identity. She identified Wotanism and Odinism as two alternatives and inter-related forms of neo-Paganism that appear to be popular with many of the younger activists in the movement.

In his work with Klansmen and neo-Nazis, Raphael Ezekiel (1995) found that the people he interviewed believe that whites are the true children of God. Skinheads were also drawn to the idea of Aryan descent from the gods as elaborated by Alfred Rosenberg in Der Mythus des 20. They believed in the racial superiority of whites as did Klansmen who participated in his study. One of the recurrent themes Ezekiel found in his research was that God gathered Aryans in the United States and Canada to fulfill their destiny in preparation for the second coming of Christ. The final battle will be won by 'Aryan warriors' and the 'mud races' destroyed forever.

A group represented by Participant 2 in this study, the Anglo-Saxon Christian Patriots, does not consider itself pagan; however, some beliefs appear to be a hybrid of Christian Identity and paganism. Adherents content that the new world order is powered by Jews in an attempt to establish Satan's kingdom. The United States is in the final stages of being taken over by the anti-Christ who the Anglo-Saxon Christian Patriots identify collectively as Jews. It is up to God's chosen people (whites) to deliver the U.S. from this supreme evil. One of the ways this group suggests accomplishing the task is to keep the white race pure in the true spirit of the Aryans of the great historical migrations outlined by Rosenberg in Der Mythus des 20.

As difficult as the supremacist brand of Christianity is to understand, not to mention Christian Identity and paganism, the evolution of meta-racism may have to be explained in terms of social aspects of religion. Religion is highly personal and a person's belief about God can change over time. Christianity has been many things to many different believers and with the Aryanization of Jesus it is not surprising that white racialists (people who love the white race) appear to be gravitating toward a Proto-Nordic savior. With the new eugenics movement and its focus on racial evolution, contemporary white supremacists may find it easier to justify their beliefs that ancient Israelites, including Jesus, were Caucasian.

## **Data and Methods**

There were three sources of data used in this study: interviews, observations, and analysis of discussion posts on Stormfront. Six interviews with activists in various separatist groups were conducted beginning in August 2006 and are ongoing. Observations were conducted at two separate rallies of the Ku Klux Klan: September 2, 2006 and November 11, 2006. Analysis of Stormfront discussion threads began in September 2006 and ended on January 1, 2007.

### Recruitment of Interview Participants

A snowball sampling technique was used to reach interview participants in this study. Three participants were known to the researcher from prior work on the separatist movement. The three most recent participants were associates of Participants 2 and 3. Interviews were conducted by email, telephone, and face-to-face.

### Observations

The researcher was invited by Participant 2 to attend a Klan rally in September 2006. He acted as escort and gatekeeper. This particular Klan group has strong Christian identity ties. Participant 4 was formally introduced to the researcher at this rally. He agreed to answer questions about Christian Identity in preparation for this paper. Participant 3, an organizer for the Klan rally in November 2006, also extended a personal invitation to the researcher. He escorted the researcher to the rally and introduced Participants 5 and 6 who

agreed to be part of this study. The second Klan group does not have strong Christian Identity ties, even though some of its members adhere to Christian Identity beliefs.

### Content Analysis of Stormfront

Stormfront is a discussion forum for 'white nationalists.' Founded in 1995 by Don Black, it has grown into an online community of over 90,000 members worldwide. Stormfront threads are open to members and registered guests. The Web site has a sophisticated archiving system for storing old threads in addition to current, real time discussions. This analysis contains discussions from archived threads in Ideology and Philosophy as well as current discussions on the topic of Christianity, Christian Identity, eugenics, and paganism. This analysis contains twelve online discussion threads dealing with the four topics listed above.

Even though Stormfront represents an online community of like-minded people, there is still a risk of dishonest and/or exaggerated responses. It is also often difficult to identify infiltrators or 'trolls' who start problem threads and instigate arguments within the online community. It was important, therefore, to pay particular attention to the essence of the message as well as to the intent of the person posting the message. Since Stormfront has an 11 year history online and a good system for tracing posts by frequent, long term users, suspicious posts could easily be eliminated.

Each discussion forum was scrutinized for manifest and latent content as suggested by Babbie (1992). Discussion posts were coded for consistency between manifest and latent content. For example, just because a discussant uses the word "Christian" in a post does not mean that s/he is a traditional or fundamentalist Christian. The post may reflect Identity, traditional, fundamentalist, or even pagan views. Additional examination of the communication is necessary before conclusions can be made regarding the use of a specific word or phrase within the context of the post. No sentence or group of sentences in which key terms such as 'Christian Identity' or 'racially exclusive religion' was counted as relevant until both manifest and latent content was confirmed. When it became evident that the content was adequate to answer research questions applicable to the Stormfront analysis, the discussion post was considered valid. Stormfront data was corroborated by secondary data that included books, journal articles about Christian Identity, eugenics, paganism, and interview data. This approach helped validate research findings.

Discussion threads were converted to rich text format and downloaded to a flash drive for analysis using Nvivo, a computer software package designed to aid users in handling non-numerical and unstructured data. Nvivo is the updated version of NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data\*Indexing Searching and Theorizing). Nvivo looks for key words and text that pertains to specific research questions. After searching for a key word, Nvivo generates a node report. This report lists the documents in which the key word appears. Relevant text was coded in each document and then printed in report format for comparison with coded interview text.

### **Findings**

Findings will be separated into three sections: observations, interviews, and analysis of Stormfront data:

#### Observations

The first Klan rally I attended was a Labor Day rally in a field near Smackover, Arkansas on September 2, 2006. There were approximately 60 participants, 22 of whom

were women and children. The remaining 38 were males. There were 2 armed guards who patrolled the site during the day. The states represented by Klan groups were Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. A contingent of Klansmen from Oklahoma did not attend because of high gas prices. I overheard comments throughout the day about "what a shame it was that the brothers from Oklahoma could not attend because the federal government cannot seem to get its priorities straight." This particular Klan group is regarded as Christian Identity (CI) even though not all members adhere to CI beliefs. After talking to several leaders of the group I was told that most of their membership church affiliation is either Church of Christ or Baptist and the 3 men in top leadership positions are Church of Christ ministers and CI theologians.

The average participant age appeared to be around 45 years and socioeconomic status working to middle class. Two of the leaders told me that their membership work affiliation is primarily small industry, customer service, trucking, and the military. The vehicles were all American made and late model. There were a total of 20 vehicles; 17 were trucks. The women, with the exception of a young woman collecting money for a raffle, were in the background. They kept to themselves and did not appear open to talking with me or even acknowledging my presence.

I asked several men about the role of women in their group. I was told that men are the leaders and decision-makers. Gender roles are traditional and seem to be upheld by both men and women. During the course of the day, the women sat in chairs and looked after the children. The men barbecued and served the women their food. Whenever I tried to move my chair or get a bottle of water, a man was there to accommodate. Participant 2 (my escort) made it a point to tell the people he introduced me to that I am a teacher. Apparently teaching is an occupation that is acceptable for a woman.

The men took turns preaching from the podium. Gospel music also played throughout the day along with rebel yells and the occasional Lynyrd Skynyrd song. The primary message of the impromptu sermons was the moral decline of American society. The most often cited problem was intermarriage or race-mixing followed by the Jewish controlled media and government. Several men spoke about the evils of homosexuality. The Imperial Wizard (a Church of Christ minister) spoke about feminism and its threat to traditional family values. He also preached about how white men are at risk of losing their jobs to illegal immigrants and that "niggers" and whites must remain separate. Every speaker used the word "nigger" when referring to black people.

The cross was the focal point of the entire day. No women were involved in preparation of the cross for the evening lighting ritual. The men felled a large tree, covered it with burlap, and shaped it into a cross with baling wire. They doused it with coal oil throughout the day. Prior to the lighting ceremony the men hoisted the cross into standing position with the help of a four wheeler that was driven by a teen age boy. Three women participated in the cross lighting ceremony. Donning of the Klan robes and hoods was a very important part of the ritual. It took at least 30 minutes before everyone was satisfied with how they looked.

Each participant was given a bamboo pole wrapped in burlap and doused with flammable liquid. The leader of the ceremony lit each pole and the ceremony began with participants circling the cross and repeating verses which were spoken by the leader. The ceremony lasted about 20 minutes and ended with each bamboo pole being placed at the foot of the cross which went up in flames. All the participants held hands until the cross burned out (about 15 minutes). Afterwards, everyone removed their robes, gathered their belongings, and left the site. Several men thanked me for coming.

The second Klan rally I attended was in a 'holler' outside of Tupelo, Mississippi on November 11, 2006. This particular Klan is not considered to be Christian Identity, although some of its members are CI adherents. An assessment of the 10 vehicles that were parked

on the road revealed 8 trucks, late model, all American made and 2 late model sedans. There were no armed guards for this rally and there were only about 35 people in attendance. There were 2 pre-teen children and a baby. All others were adults. I counted 20 males and 12 females. The weather was cold and rainy, possibly a contributing factor to the small turnout. The women at this rally were more active and did not stay in the background. When I got to the rally site men and women were preparing the cross. There was no preaching and no music. There was Klan representation from Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. I recognized several people from the Smackover rally.

I was immediately approached by a woman who appeared to be in her early thirties. She was there with her husband and two children. She is an officer in the group and has been a member for 6 years. She welcomed me and wanted to know what I do and why I was interested in the Klan. We chatted for a few minutes and then she excused herself to prepare for the ceremony. She volunteered to answer some questions about her work with the Klan for my study.

The cross was smaller than the cross at the Smackover rally. Apparently donning the robes is a very important part of Klan ritual. This group also spent at least 30 minutes getting their robes and hoods adjusted. They were conscientious about not letting the robes touch the ground and each person adjusted sashes and ties carefully. Before the lighting of the cross, the Imperial Wizard opened the podium to anyone who wanted to make a short speech.

About 10 people, 9 men and 1 woman, took advantage of the opportunity to speak. Most everyone mentioned the importance of recruitment to keep the group going. Several men spoke about honoring veterans even though they each remarked that they do not support the war. It should be noted that November 11 is our Veteran's Day observance and the day of the rally. One speaker talked about the death of Byron De La Beckwith and that Klan groups in Mississippi are taking up collections for his widow. The female speaker talked about the importance of protecting children from sexual predators. The final speaker was one of the CI leaders from the first Klan rally I attended. He reminded attendees that "niggers" are negatively affecting educational standards for white students. He also repeatedly said that "niggers" are sub-human and that the Klan must maintain zero tolerance for race-mixing. Until he took the podium I had not heard the word "nigger" at this rally.

After the speakers were finished, the Imperial Wizard conducted the cross lighting ceremony. The ritual was similar to the Smackover rally with the exception of a distinct military flare. The only woman who did not participate in the ceremony was the mother of the baby. The participants each received a bamboo pole that was doused with flammable liquid. Following the lead of the Imperial Wizard, they circled the cross, repeated verses, and after about 15 minutes they dropped their poles at the foot of the cross which went up in flames. The participants stood hand-in-hand in a circle while the cross burned (about 10 minutes). Afterwards, the participants shouted "White Power" and it was over.

At the first Klan rally there appeared to be at least 3 strong leaders who kept dialogue (through preaching) going during the day. Each of these men, Church of Christ ministers, adhered to Christian Identity beliefs. Although they support other Klan groups, they confine their leadership to this particular group. At the second Klan rally, leadership appeared to be dispersed. There is even a woman working her way up the ranks. The Imperial Wizard was former military and conducted the cross lighting and the day's events similar to a military officer. There was no preaching, no music, and the ritual was very regimented and orderly. Again, the leadership supports other Klan groups but does not attempt to interfere in other Klan business or organize outside their own group. This is further indication that groups tend to operate independently, at least in terms of sharing leadership.

## Interviews

When questioned about his religious beliefs Participant 1 had the following to say:

“I am not Christian Identity, I am a born again Christian. I believe in racial difference and separation of the races. That’s what the Bible says and I try to follow the Bible’s law. I also believe that the Jews crucified Jesus and broke the Covenant. I don’t think we as Christians can ignore that.”

Participant 2 attended the first rally in Smackover. He adheres to Christian Identity beliefs and when questioned has stated repeatedly that people of color are sub-human.

“I refer to blacks as livestock. My grandmother taught me that. They don’t have souls so they will never go to heaven.”

When asked pressed further about his beliefs particularly with reference to Jesus, Participant 2 had this to say:

“Jesus was not a Jew. He was a Hebrew from Galilee, that’s different from a Jew.”

I remarked that the Bible states that Jesus was king of the Jews. Does that not mean that he was a Jew? His reply:

“Just because I’m king of the niggers doesn’t make me a nigger.”

Participant 4 lost his position as minister in a church in Louisiana because of his Christian Identity beliefs. The elders of the church met with him and told him his views were too controversial. Rather than alter his sermons, he stepped down and now conducts prayer services for small donations in Louisiana and Arkansas. His views regarding race and religion are very clear:

“Whites are God’s chosen people, directly descended from Adam. We are descendants of the dispersed Israelites so we are Israelites, not the Jews. Race-mixing is what corrupted the white race. It brings in heathen religions, sex perversions, drugs. Now we’re a nation of mixed-bloods. The prophets said that some day Israel will be separated from all the heathen races. That’s when we’ll have the second coming.”

On the drive back to Tupelo I discussed the differences between the 2 rallies with Participants 3 and 6. Both men are members of the second Klan group and do not adhere to CI beliefs. Participant 3 was raised Mormon but now attends a Baptist church. Participant 6 is Methodist. Even though both Klan groups work together, there are some distinct differences. Each group stages separate rallies and the rituals are not exactly alike. Christian Identity Klan groups appear to take a more traditional view of women’s roles, with the exception of Thomas Robb’s group in Harrisonville, Arkansas. Participant 3 is not

entirely supportive of women in leadership positions but does value their membership in his Klan group:

“I am starting to come around but it has not been all that easy. I am of the old school. Our Imperial Wizard is sort of liberated I guess.”

Participant 6 was not particularly pleased with the tone of the final speech made by the CI minister from Arkansas.

“I don’t know why those CI people say blacks are not human. They feel that way but I have to work with black people and some of them are my friends. I don’t use the ‘n’ word. It’s not right.”

When Participant 5 was questioned about the Christian Identity belief that blacks are sub-human and are no better than animals, she had this to say:

“Those people are stupid. Not everyone in the Klan feels that way. Christian Identity has nothing to do with Christianity.”

### Stormfront Analysis

Content from 12 different discussion threads is contained in this analysis of Stormfront. Discussions were taken from threads in the following sections: 1) Theology, 2) Traditional Christianity, 3) Christian Identity, and 4) Pre-Christian Indo-European Religions. A discussion thread dealing with Eugenics is also included. This thread came from the General discussion section.

One of the ongoing issues that people in the separatist movement deal with is whether Jesus Christ was Jewish. The consensus among the people interviewed for this study is that Jesus was not a Jew. This also appears to be the opinion of discussants on Stormfront.

Stormfront.org. “Jesus was only half jewish (at the most)” 17 December 2006  
<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=348484>.

If Jesus was born as a consequence of the union between God and Mary how could he be fully jewish? God himself has no ‘race’ so I assume that melding with his genetic qualities would not produce a pure-bred jew...half jewish at the most ...whenever I criticize Israel, or the jewish power structure I sometimes get a counter-arugment (sic) that “Well Jesus was a jew”....not really an argument, but it’s amazing how common this line of thinking is. [Post 1]

Yes, many people out there have arrived at this conclusion. I think that they base this idea off of the false assumption that Christ was just “some guy” or “a great prophet.” Most people who hold this opinion have probably not read a real book relating to Christianity in their entire lives. They are just

uneducated people who buy whatever they are told about Jesus from Newsweek or CNN. [Post 2]

Jewish is a religion. Jesus was an Israelite and did not practice the Jewish religion. He was of the tribe of Judah, which was of the nation Israel. The scribes and Pharisees were Jewish. Jesus always said, woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, Hippocrates. He ate with sinners, he healed the sick and lame, he overturned the money changers, all of which the Jewish (sic) religion could or would not do. He did not practice the Jewish religion...Jesus did away with the Jewish religion, because He was not a Jew. [Post 8]

There appears to be some confusion on Stormfront about Christian Identity and its meaning. Posts in this section revealed that some discussants have had negative interactions with CI adherents. The person who started the thread was asking for an explanation about the beliefs that comprise Christian Identity ideology. Answers to the initial question were often sketchy and incoherent. The following responses are illustrative of the discussion posts on this thread.

Stormfront.org. "could someone explain" 29 December 2006 <<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=351180>>.

Could someone explain what CI believe, and why, short and sweet, with minimal quoting? Thank you. I try to see the good side to ever Racialist doctrine and group, and since CI have gotten a bad name among some wn (white nationalists), I want to hear you guys explain to an outsider what you stand for and what you are. [Post 1]

Short and simple as asked, Ci believe that they are of the House of Israel, and that most of Europe is also. God Bless and Peace be with you <>< [Post 3]

Here's what CI is to me: After the tribes were taken to captivity, they migrated up through the Caucasian mountains, black sea area, etc. They ended up in Europe. They were known as Scythian's (sic), and other names. So if you establish that the Scythians were Israelites you're all set. We know where they ended up. On to the Jews: I believe they are mixed Judean and Esau/Edomites. And since a mongrel cannot enter the congregation of the Lord, they are not true Israel. And finally it must be said. *CI is the belief of certain historical facts.* It doesn't entail any other beliefs necessarily. And of course, Jesus was not of mixed descent, and not a "Jew." He was always known as a Galilean. (He was a descendent of the tribe of Judah see Matthew 1:2, which is why some would like to call him a Jew) [Post 5]

Occasionally members of the Stormfront community conduct polls. Although not scientific, ensuing discussions and results often give additional clues as to how the racial



belief system continues to evolve. One of the primary concerns voiced by people in the movement is maintaining a pure white bloodline. The following discussions are part of a poll dealing with race-mixing in the Theology section.

Stormfront.org. "White Or Not?" 22 August 2006

<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=320836>>

As a CI I believe that one drop of mud in your blood then you're a dud. You cease being White as soon as even a snippet of non-white DNA appears in your lineage. I have always assumed that all CI think that way, so this poll is to show our brethren, and all who may read this thread, just exactly where we stand. Our God is racist. Amen. P.S. This poll is public and your screen name will be displayed. God knows where we stand and so should everybody else. [Post 1]

I think the origin of the races is extremely important. I have not yet come to the conclusion of how the races came about, whether it be dual seedline, or some other explanation. However I strongly believe that the Bible teaches that the white race is a pure race, and all the other races are impure. The Bible is not for them. I think the origin of races is the most important thing for people to understand. They have been brainwashed to believe that Noah had a white, a black, and an oriental son. That's why the Jews can get away with teaching race-mixing because the common line spouted off is that we're all descendents of Noah. [Post 2]

Everything God created stays within its own kind. There is no reason to think that humans are any different. A Gray Fox will breed only with another Gray Fox and not a Red Fox. A Largemouth Bass will not spawn with a Smallmouth Bass. Besides all of God's examples that surround us of his very first law of 'kind after kind' we have hundreds of Bible verses indicating and commanding the Israelite people not to intermarry. Anybody teaching anything other than that are either Judaized or already mixed and cannot discern God's laws. [Post 5]

Some people in the movement are not comfortable with traditional Christianity. They may opt for Christian Identity ideology depending on what group they align with. Paganism is another option for a segment of the separatist population.

Stormfront.org. "How Did You Come to Paganism?" 18 August 2006

<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=319656>>.

What is it exactly that attracted you to Paganism? How did you get onto your Pagan path? What religion were you raised in? [Post 1]

The two people who converted me to National Socialism also happened to be Pagan. That and I love history. [Post 2]

The mystery and allure behind it all is one aspect, there are many more that are just plain negative internal reactions to Christianity. I don't follow one particular path. I follow Wicca mostly but I like Stregheria (sic) also. The other paths interest me too but those are the main two. I was raised Roman Catholic/JudeoChristian (sic) (I hate the term Judeo Christian). I remember I nearly died when my religion teacher in the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> grade said we are Judeo/Christians, I nearly died. I thought to myself, I'm not a Jew, I'm Italian American and damn proud of it....[Post 3]

Best answer: I'm white. [Post 4]

I came to paganism because I found worshipping a gay schizophrenic communist jewboy (sic) who got himself killed for telling the truth about jews, just wasn't very fulfilling and the resurrection story is so full of horse manure. Check out cosmotheism.net that's a great pagan religion. [Post 8]

During the analysis of the previous discussion threads, several mentions were made about eugenics and race. Part of the problem with traditional Christianity for at least some of the discussants on Stormfront and several interview participants is that whites are not the only group that can be saved and go to heaven. People who declare as white racial activists believe that whites are superior to all other races. Several discussants who were involved in threads dealing with some aspect of religion pasted in discussion threads that dealt with eugenics and encouraged others to refer to them for additional information. The following discussion is from one of these threads.

Stormfront.org. "What do you think about eugenics?" 30 January 2006  
<<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=266495>>

If we can "manage" livestock, foodstocks (sic), plants & flowers, all various pedigress (sic) of pets, etc., I think we should put no less effort in the highest life form on this planet – humanity ;). What we could do is make a big matrix spreadsheet with the races across the columns and the listed cherished attributes on the vertical rows of the spreadsheet. Then, whichever race(s) account for the most of the listed cherished attributes, we should hope to see their numbers increase.:clink. The derelicts hopefully will experience sids in the crib. jk :p [Post 5]

We could just put bear traps and things infront (sic) of the crack houses in the ghettos and that would help manage the livestock in the inner cities :p. We could also legalize hunting in those areas and use the proceeds from the hunting licenses to finance graffiti removal and such. I think it would be a great business opportunity...it would be like a Safari without having

to actually go to Africa, and you could shoot and trap apes,  
and at the same time we are helping humanities gene pool.  
[Post 7]

## **Discussion**

Much has been written about Christian Identity and its place in the American separatist movement. Some researchers (Barkun 1989, 1995; White 1990; and Aho 1990) have stated that CI is what holds the separatist movement together. Dobratz (2001) found that even though religion is an important aspect of the movement, it can also be problematic because of its divisiveness. Another issue that impacts the overall movement is the lack of cohesive leadership and the emergence of at least one strong, charismatic leader who might possibly pull the different factions together. In view of the differences of opinion between activists in the movement, CI theologians, and discussants on Stormfront, it appears that Christian Identity is a single piece of a much larger puzzle. What appears to be happening (at least among some of the younger racial activists) is a convergence of CI, eugenics, and paganism into a type of hybridized meta-racism.

Each of the people interviewed agreed that intermarriage is not acceptable. Two interview participants believe that blacks are sub-human and the remaining 4 stated that blacks are disadvantaged for many different reasons including genetics. The general tenor on Stormfront is that whites are superior, Christian Identity is misunderstood and sometimes confusing, and separation of the races is preferable to a multicultural, integrated society. The discussion thread dealing with paganism was revealing in that most of the discussants had been exposed to traditional Christian values. For some reason, the Judeo-Christian religious ethic has failed them and their search has led to a mythical Aryan god.

Wilmot Robertson was one of the first separatists to begin an intellectual argument about racial issues in modern American society. He stated that the first great problem of Christianity was a racial one: "Would it be a religion for Jews or Gentiles?" (1981:259). Robertson took the position that there was no proof that Jesus was a Jew. He also quoted Toynbee and Stewart Chamberlain to further his hypothesis that the Jews rejected Jesus and subsequently killed him. A speaker and orthodox Christian theologian, Father James Thornton, spoke to a group of racial separatists in 1996 about the state of Christianity in America. His premise was that Christianity is not a religion of earthly egalitarianism. He went on to say that findings related to genetically determined differences in intelligence and temperament among various races is acknowledged by the scientific community although Marxists, ignorant journalists, and cowardly politicians put up barriers to the truth. He ended his talk with a warning about the end of civilization due to the erosion of the position of 'European man'. Robertson (now deceased) and Thornton articulate concerns similar to those voiced on Stormfront, by participants in this study, and by the people I observed at the two Klan rallies. Although the movement has yet to fully integrate the various religious ideologies, the unifying factors appear to be that European descended whites are superior to other groups, there is not firm evidence that Jesus was a Jew, and the image of God is Aryan.

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### **Biographical Note**

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## The Rock Star's Gift: Popular Music and the Pastoral Care of Youth

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### Abstract

In several recent articles (Carlin, 2005, forthcoming 2007; Capps and Carlin, forthcoming 2007a, 2007b, 2007c), I have written autobiographically, making use of the introspective method. I have done so to indicate my belief that the psychology of religion ought not to lose hold of its traditional emphasis on introspection (see Capps, 1997; cf. Pruyser, 1983, p. ix). I continue this practice in this paper, because my own personal experience of listening to an explicit rap song with my pastor led me to the arguments that I make here. I argue that popular music can be especially useful when caring for apathetic adolescents because it can lead to introspection, the sharing of feelings, and the enablement of realistic suffering. The precedent or rationale for such a move in the field of pastoral care and counseling, I also argue, follows from Donald Capps's *The Poet's Gift* (1993), which makes the case for the use of poetry in pastoral care because poetry can aid in introspection. And, finally, I argue that the church should not censor the musical tastes of these youth, because the songs that they listen to often function as transitional objects for them, and any mishandling of the objects would likely sabotage any chance for sharing. If youth listen to popular music by themselves and find that they cannot talk about it, be it out of shame, fear, lack of adults' interest, or condemnation by religious officials and religious individuals, such listening may well lead to negative consequences. But if they are permitted to talk about their interests with a caring adult, much good would likely come from it. And it is from my own experience that I know this is true, from that afternoon in the church parking lot when I listened to Bone Thugs-n-Harmony with my pastor. Keywords: Aggression - apocalyptic vs. eschatological selves - poetry - popular music - psychodynamics of music - transitional objects

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*[I]n recent decades something has gone awry, has changed or is changing still for those attempting to navigate their way from childhood to adulthood. The journey looms far more confusing and treacherous today for significant numbers of American youth, who embody a kind of suffering that, while differing greatly in its outward manifestations, collectively reflects a widespread loss of hope or faith in a meaningful future as well as a dislocation from any historical past.*

--From Robert Dykstra's *Counseling Troubled Youth*

### INTRODUCTION

In a recent article, Lewis Rambo (2005), editor of *Pastoral Psychology*, rightly stated that "Film, like all art, is, at its best, an intensification of our ordinary experiences and insights. Art can even be revelatory. By understanding art, we are capable of understanding our human predicament more fully. Hence, when a film like *The Passion of the Christ* becomes a cultural event we need to pay attention" (p. 281). And so Rambo dedicated an entire issue of *Pastoral Psychology* to a discussion of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. This article does not deal with film, but it deals with popular music, because I see popular music to be a "cultural event" of sorts for youth. Here I build on works by Donald

Capps, Paul Pruyser, and Robert Dykstra by viewing three of their books together, books written on different topics (poetry, imagination, and contemporary youth) and books that were not intended to be viewed together but yield, I believe, insight into our topic: popular music and the pastoral care of youth. And I do so to press pastoral counselors to pay attention to the musical tastes of, and the impact of popular music on, adolescents in their care. I begin with several of my own experiences as a religious adolescent not only because they introduce (and illustrate) my argument but also because I believe that the psychology of religion ought not to lose hold of its traditional emphasis on introspection (Capps, 1997).

### **Rap Music in High School, Rock Music in Scotland**

In my late high school and early college years, I was infatuated with a rap group by the name of Bone Thugs-n-Harmony. They had a unique sound in that they rapped really fast and used a lot of alliteration. They also had good beats. But I became infatuated with the group because they were religious even as they celebrated the common themes of explicit rap music (e.g., drug use and violence), though, curiously, they were not nearly as misogynistic as most other rap groups. Their breakthrough album was entitled *East 1999 Eternal*. In this album, two themes continually occur—namely, their roots in Cleveland, Ohio and the apocalypse. Hidden in the corners of the CD case are two secret messages: 1) “Believe in the Last Day” and 2) “Don’t Give Props to the Devil.” The group seemed to see themselves as literal and spiritual warriors, fighting against the Devil and the racist structures of society, particularly racist police officers.

Several experiences stand out in my memory when I reflect upon my interest in popular music. On my way to the junior prom, I had a cassette tape of Bone Thugs-n-Harmony playing in the car. My ex-girlfriend at the time, who was my date, asked me, “How can you listen to music like this with your values?” A good question, and one that I had been asked more than once. In my college dorm room, I remember, I had some pictures of Bone Thugs-n-Harmony hanging on my wall. One evening, a young woman from the Christian fellowship group on campus came over to my room, and she asked me basically the same question that my ex-girlfriend asked me. In the minds of many Christians, listening to explicit music is a sin, or, at least, it is not glorifying to God. And sometime during my second year of college, when I was nineteen or so, I finally agreed with my Christian friends: God doesn’t want us listening to songs with swear words and, much less, songs about murder (as a children’s hymn that I sang as a boy goes, “Be careful little ears what you hear”). So I gathered up all of my rap albums, probably thirty or so, and I smashed them in my driveway. I burned the accompanying paper. I asked my parents to be there for this ritual. I remember saying a prayer over the fire. But at some point later, after maybe a year or two had gone by, I no longer felt that listening to such music was a sin—and I wished (and still do wish) that I had the albums back, which would cost several hundred dollars to replace!

Another memory is from my third year in seminary, which I spent in Troon, Scotland, working as the assistant minister for Troon Old Parish Church. That year I learned a great deal about ministry, about myself, and about the world. I had the opportunity to travel quite a bit, and I mostly traveled alone. And I lived alone. In the mornings, I would make a pot of tea, read some of the Greek New Testament and *The Book of Confessions*, and listen to some of my music albums. I liked to listen to songs about traveling and songs about being alone, not because I would feel less alone, but because I felt that someone else understood my feelings. Four songs in particular were meaningful to me: “Listen Up,” “Rockin’ Chair,” and “Half the World Away” on Oasis’s *The Masterplan* (I listened to these three songs every morning), and Paul Simon’s “You Can Call Me Al.” Now none of these songs that I listened to on a regular basis in Scotland were explicit or aggressive, because, most of the time, I do not crave those songs. Bone Thugs-n-Harmony no longer speak to me. But I remember

when Bone Thugs-n-Harmony *did* speak to me. And I remember—and this is the upshot from my introspection—how important it was for me to listen to an explicit but religious rap song with my pastor in the parking lot of my home church, Mountville Presbyterian Church, in Portersville, Pennsylvania, some forty miles north of Pittsburgh. *Could it be*, as one of my teachers (Robert Dykstra) once wondered, *that when the church, both its members and its pastors, gives youth permission to be sexual, human, curious, interested, and embodied that then they will likely become more integrated as persons, who, of course, have sexual and aggressive impulses? It's not that their sexuality or aggression will go away, but could it be that when they are empathically accepted for who they are that their aggressive and sexual cravings will be put to better use and channeled to more productive ends?* I believe so. The purpose of this essay is to locate, and argue for the legitimacy of, this intuition in the literature of the pastoral arts and sciences. I think that this is what happened with my interest in explicit rap music—that is, I think my aggressive cravings were channeled to more productive ends. Now I am not saying, to be sure, that caring adults should tolerate the musical interests of youth *so that* the youth will give up their interest in such music. Quite the contrary, I still like to listen to Bone Thugs-n-Harmony today, and I can say with full confidence that this music had no negative effects on me.

## POPULAR MUSIC AND PASTORAL CARE

In the “Acknowledgements” of *The Poet's Gift*, Capps (1993) mentions that it was Joseph Sittler who inspired his book. Sittler was a senior member of University of Chicago Divinity School faculty when Capps was a junior member, and Sittler also sponsored Capps for ordination in the Lutheran Church in America. For Capps, Sittler was a living testimony that one could love poetry as a Christian. I suggest that the precedent or rationale for the pastoral use of popular music follows from Donald Capps's *The Poet's Gift*. While there is a large literature on music and secular counseling (cf. White, 1985), much of the discussion of music in Christian circles tends to revolve around questions regarding worship (one notable exception being the analysis of spirituals and their legacy). It is true that Christian writers who have an interest in popular music have appealed to poetry, especially biblical poetry, as a justification for using music as a tool for ministry—and I will highlight a recent example below—but I want to suggest that, in the literature of pastoral care, this move ought to be seen as the logical extension of Capps's *The Poet's Gift*. And as Capps draws on poetry that is not especially religious, so, too, I think that it is essential, for reasons that will become clear below, that pastors honor music that is not overtly religious. In other words, the sturdiest grounds for using secular music in ministry are to be derived from *The Poet's Gift*.

For the purposes of this essay, it is helpful to get a basic sense of what Capps (1993) is doing in his book on poetry and pastoral care. He begins the book by noting that the literature in pastoral care supporting a narrative approach is growing, mainly because “pastoral care typically involves the hearing and telling of personal stories” (p. 1). In his own work, Capps has been attracted to the parable, because this, of course, was how Jesus told stories. I think that we can also assume that Capps has been attracted to the parable because of its subversive nature (cf. Capps, 1997, p. 46). In any case, “When a parable is used to interpret our own lives,” Capps writes, “it usually opens up a surprising solution, an unexpected and unanticipated approach to the resolution of our dilemmas and difficulties” (1993, p. 1). Capps has advocated the parabolic approach to pastoral care elsewhere (Capps, 1981, 1984, 1990), but here he wants to focus on the contemporary parabolists (i.e., poets). The “modern poem,” Capps suggests, “is the most direct descendent of the parable,” and he notes that poems, like parables, are usually brief, concerned with one experience, offer few details, and do not explain themselves. Both are open-ended (1993, p. 2). Capps notes that he is not taking a literary approach, but he is instead interested in “the

obvious affinities between poetry and pastoral care . . . which have never been systematically explored” (p. 6).

In this article, I want to focus briefly on chapter one of *The Poet's Gift*, entitled “The Self We Bring to Our Vocation.” Here Capps was influenced by Gary Harbaugh’s *The Pastor as Person* (1984), and he begins this chapter by wanting “to build on Harbaugh’s insights . . . by focusing on one important implication of the fact that each pastor is a unique person, namely, that one’s pastoral care ministry is profoundly informed by one’s awareness of who he or she is” (p. 7). One lesson that Capps takes from Harbaugh is that we are “choosing” people, and that choices always entail risks. Harbaugh tells us that he gained this insight through self-reflection, and he notes that journaling is one way that we can listen to ourselves. Capps suggests that reading poetry is another way. Poets, Capps suggests, are especially talented at self-reflection because they often write autobiographically and therefore are required to continually self-reflect. If they didn’t, their poetry would grow repetitious. Capps writes,

Poets write about their childhoods, their parents and grandparents, their brothers and sisters, and their childhood friends and schoolmates, and they are often willing to disclose what their family life was like, even to the extent of revealing some very painful family secrets. They do this because they understand that these early experiences and the unfinished business reflected therein not only are of crucial importance to their adult lives in general, but also have bearing, specifically, on their vocations as poets. (p. 9)

Capps continues, “Thus, by reading poetry, we can observe how other individuals have struggled with the unfinished business of their childhood and youth, and how these early life experiences continue to have impact on their vocation today” (p. 9). To flesh out his case, Capps reads the poetry of William Stafford, a contemporary American poet, in light of Stafford’s own life experiences, and Capps shows why Stafford self-identified with the theme of “The Wanderer”: Stafford was dealing with his own unfinished business (p. 35).

The argument Capps makes in chapter one, put baldly, is that reading and writing poetry can help one deal with one’s own unfinished business. If Capps is using poetry to explore new avenues in pastoral care, why not use popular music? It may be true that much of popular music is simplistic, both from a lyrical and a musical perspective (cf. Bloom, 1987, pp.68-81), but, regarding the lyrics, this would likely serve the average young person well, because she will be able to understand and to relate to them more easily. Capps, after all, praises Stafford for writing in concrete ways and for not making all sorts of literary allusions that might be lost on the average reader, so why not praise popular music in this regard, too? I do not mean to imply that Stafford’s poems are simplistic. Quite the contrary, I am merely trying to suggest that there is something to be said for poetry and music that is understandable without formal training in either field. Capps also notes that “[s]ome readers may discover, in the course of these self-reflections, that they are able to find a self-designation . . . that enables them to recognize what makes them unique among others who have chosen—or been chosen for—the same calling” (p. 10). I think that it is probable that more teenagers and young adults listen to popular music more often than they read poetry, even if they could relate to, say, Stafford as “The Wanderer.” That has been the case for me, and many of my friends pick theme songs for themselves. One self-identification that I have had since high school is “Nate Dogg,” largely because of the song “Regulate” by Warren G, which functioned as my theme song. Even today young folks whom I meet for the first time often call me “Nate Dogg” upon learning that my name is Nathan. But all of this is to say, listening to popular music, like reading poetry, can lead one to dealing with unfinished business.



*I noted above that Christian writers who argue for the use of popular music in ministry sometimes appeal to poetry, which supports my claim that the precedent or rationale for the use of popular music in pastoral care follows from Donald Capps, because Capps was the first writer in the field of pastoral care to make a case for the use of poetry in the field. One recent example of a Christian writer arguing for the use of popular music in pastoral care on the grounds that music is like poetry is Aaron Anastasi (2005). Anastasi argues that God can use popular music to bring healing. He begins his article by noting that many adolescents suffer from a lack of love, a lack of acceptance, and a lack of connectedness, and, exacerbating these issues, many adolescents, especially boys, have few, if any, ways to express their pain. He introduces a number of thinkers in the opening paragraphs, but he especially draws upon the thought of Dorothee Soelle, a theologian and ethicist. Soelle identifies three phases of suffering: silence, lament, and change. Anastasi and others find many youth in the first phase, that is, in silence. Anastasi proposes that popular music, and Emo music in particular for adolescent boys, can function as a lament and it therefore can bring change. After presenting Soelle's three phases of suffering, Anastasi then comes back to phase two, the lament, for the rest of the essay. Since his essay is theological, he appropriately turns to the Book of Lamentations, which one might expect. Music, like poetry, aids in introspection (Rugenstein, 2000), because, as Anastasi points out,*

Music moves people. Anyone who has ever listened to good music understands that music has a way of bypassing the walls of the intellect and targeting the emotions, often demanding some type of response. Combined with poignant lyrics, music can manipulate emotions and evoke tears, regret, anger, happiness, [and] a sense of social responsibility. (p. 311)

Anastasi draws from the thought of D. W. Winnicott via Robert Kegan. I, too, draw from Winnicott, though not through Kegan, but through Paul Pruyser. In agreement with Anastasi that music can be healing, especially as it can move youth from silence, and also in agreement with Anastasi that music moves people, I now want to turn to Pruyser to give a psychodynamic explanation for *why* music moves people.

## **THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF MUSIC**

Paul Pruyser was a Presbyterian elder and clinical psychologist who contributed greatly to the field of psychology of religion. While he was influenced by Winnicott and object relations theory, he was a proponent of classical psychoanalytic drive theory. In this article, we are concerned with his insights on music as presented in *The Play of the Imagination*, where Pruyser (1983) "sought to reconstruct the childhood antecedents of the thought processes and skills that go into dealing with art, literature, science, religion, and music" (p. ix). Chapter nine of *The Play of the Imagination*, the last chapter dealing with illusion processing and an area of culture, is titled "Illusion Processing in Music." Strikingly, the previous chapter dealt with religion, intimating that music goes or is beyond religion. Pruyser's high regard for music even led him to suggest that, "Without music, man would not be man" (p. 181).

There are two insights that I'd like to take from Pruyser's analysis of music. The first is his view that music enlists "primitive modes of introjection and incorporation" because music is the first illusion given to infants and it therefore bears "dynamic traces of primitive image formation" (p. 201). Pruyser writes:

And like oral incorporations of other objects, aural incorporations must have occurred during experiences with the mother, in this case the singing mother. In addition to fragments of melody and rhythm, the timbre and register of this first singing voice, heard while being clasped to our mother's breast, are deeply engraved in our memory. (p. 201)

For Pruyser, music is psychodynamically related to mother.<sup>1</sup>

The other insight that I'd like to take from Pruyser is his location of music in what Winnicott called the "transitional sphere," that relational and dynamic space between the infant and the mother, where play occurs. The world of illusion is in this space, and music is particularly suited for the transitional sphere because it participates in several illusions: of time, of emotion, of action, and sometimes of reality (p. 185). In the world of illusion, where the imagination is nurtured, music is created and appreciated, somewhere between the inner and the outer world. Winnicott believed, and so too Pruyser, that we never truly give up our transitional objects; rather, we replace them with more sophisticated objects, like music (p. 193). For Winnicott, transitional objects are supposed to aid individuals in growing to become more independent; music, like all transitional objects, "serve the purpose of easing the child progressively into a separate and autonomous existence, away from the comfort (as well as the fetters) of the earlier symbiotic ties" (p. 192). So if the mother first sings to her baby at her breast, as Pruyser suggests, the child might later more easily tolerate being apart from her if she sings to him while he lies in the crib. Maybe later, too, he will be satisfied in listening to music on the radio, or humming to himself, or even playing an instrument while he is away at college (Pruyser, 1983, pp. 190-99).

Anastasi points out that music moves people, and this is so because music is psychodynamically related to mother, to the primitive vibrations of her heartbeat and to her lullabies.<sup>2</sup> This is also due to the fact, Pruyser argues, that, in music, certain meanings can be conveyed that cannot be conveyed either by language or the natural world (p. 197). The upshot, for pastors, is that they ought to be attentive to the musical tastes of adolescents in their care, without casting judgments, because I believe that music oftentimes functions for many youth as a transitional object. And if Winnicott is right that transitional objects aid individuals in becoming more independent, it is all the more crucial for pastors to honor the object-choices of adolescents. In any case, neither the mother nor the pastor can decide what transitional objects are to be valued by the adolescent. Because only he can know when it is time to give up the teddy bear or the rock song, the caring adult would do well not to wash the teddy bear or to moralize over the music that the young person enjoys.

Many Christians, as is well-known by anyone who has attended a contemporary Christian worship service, hold that God can be praised in any genre of music, so long as the lyrics are glorifying to God. It is commonly held these days that one can praise God with the electric guitar, so there is no problem, in other words, with singing "Jesus Loves Me" in the musical genre of death metal. But what I am making the case for is something a little different: I want to make the case that secular and indeed even aggressive music ought to

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<sup>1</sup> It might sound as though Pruyser is engaging in a kind of reductionism here, one that would suggest that music comes from mother. However, this is not the case. Some, Pruyser notes, have located the origins of music in birdsongs and in natural sounds in the environment, like waterfalls and thunderstorms. Others see music as an extension of human speech. But Pruyser objects: "All of these attempts at reconstructing music's origin end up reducing music to something else, which it is patently not. . . . Music comes from music, as language comes from language, as dance comes from dance. Music is a unique, original creation of the human mind" (p. 181).

<sup>2</sup> Another psychoanalytic explanation could be drawn from the recent work of Christopher Bollas, particularly from his notion of the transformational object (see especially Bollas, 1987 & 1992).

be accepted by the church on its own terms, pure and simple, so long as the youth is genuinely interested in it. If a young person is interested in, say, the disturbing and overtly anti-Christian music of Marilyn Manson, then she ought to be able to explore such interests openly with church leaders, without fear of condemnation. I am not suggesting that the music of Marilyn Manson be used in worship services, but listening to Marilyn Manson's music may be of use at certain times in a formal or informal pastoral care and counseling. Telling young people that they can listen to rap or death metal so long as it is *Christian* rap or *Christian* death metal is qualifying their curiosity and will oftentimes lead the young person to rebel, because, if the musical songs are understood as transitional objects, "cleaning up" the songs by making them Christian is like washing the teddy bear against the child's will: Both acts will surely cause protest. In Pruyser's or Winnicott's language, such qualifications on young people's musical choices are not allowing the young person to "play" freely. And this freedom to play that music offers is one reason that Pruyser valued it so highly. Indeed, in music, "a marvelous opportunity for double identification with self and other and thus for a continuous experience of the primitive combinations of self-and-other that antecede the process of separation-individuation" (Pruyser, 1983, p. 200). Such opportunities and others noted by Pruyser are lost for young people, to be sure, when music is moralized. But if young people are allowed to make their own choices, then it is likely that these choices will be able to be explored within the church, ultimately leading to more constructive ends, allowing church leaders and members to explore with the young person why they choose such objects (i.e., songs) and how these objects function in their lives. I will return to this point at the close of the essay.

### **GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS**

Before Marilyn Manson, one recent musical spokesperson of adolescents was Kurt Cobain, who committed suicide.<sup>3</sup> Cobain's suicide raises at least one critical issue for the use of popular music in pastoral care: *Might explicit music encourage a rise in aggressive feelings and also in destructive behavior?* One recent article suggests that this is so:

An accumulating body of scientific research spanning 4 decades supports the hypothesis that exposure to violent media is causally related to subsequent expression of aggression in both short- and long-term time frames. . . . Nonetheless, there remains among the general population and many practitioners a very strong belief in the age-old *catharsis hypothesis*—the belief that experiencing and expressing aggressive emotions and thoughts will decrease subsequent aggressive thoughts, feelings, and emotions. . . . This ancient Greek idea, later popularized by Breuer and Freud . . . and now usually labeled *venting*, states that aggressive impulses can be reduced by watching, reading, or singing about anger and aggression as well as by behaving in symbolically aggressive ways. Though the aggression catharsis hypothesis has been thoroughly explored and debunked in several entertainment media domains, there has been relatively little work on the effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggression-related variables such as aggressive thoughts and feelings. (Anderson & Carnagey, 2003, p. 960)

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Kurt Cobain from a perspective in the field of religion and psychology, see Bulkeley, 2005, pp. 101-2 & 133-41. Bulkeley notes Andy Rooney's comment: "When the spokesperson for his generation blows his head off, what is the generation supposed to think?"

And so these authors wanted to fill in the gap here, so to speak, on the issue of aggressive music. They conducted five experiments and found that

In the immediate situation, exposure to violent lyrics increases the accessibility of aggressive thoughts and affect. . . . In sum, listening to angry, violent music does not appear to provide the kind of cathartic release that the general public and some professional and pop psychologists believe. . . . Long-term effects operate in much the same manner, except that the proximate source of the high accessibility of aggressive cognitions and affects is the chronic state of the individual rather than a very recently heard violent song. Repeated exposure to violent lyrics may contribute to the development of an aggressive personality. (p. 969)

However, the authors note that “At present, research on the effects of violent lyrics is in its infancy” (p. 969). One wonders, though, if such research is in its “infancy,” have Freud and company been debunked forever?

If it is true that certain kinds of music cause rises in aggressive feelings, and if feelings of aggression are considered to be sinful, then it follows that many Christians would be uncomfortable with music that influences feelings in such a manner. Now the church, of course, historically has not viewed aggression, anger, or rage in a positive light, so it is no wonder that many Christians today think that listening to explicit rap music or otherwise aggressive music is sinful or not glorifying to God. These Christians no doubt would take the empirical evidence cited here as confirming their case. And so my presentation of the evidence above appears to be superfluous and perhaps even contradictory to my purposes. Indeed, when making the case for using secular music for Christian purposes, an initial objection or question will always go something like the following: *But won't this music be harmful to our youth, as it apparently was for Kurt Cobain?* The evidence seems to warrant such a concern, though any attempts to establish a casual connection between music and suicide, it seems to me, would be highly problematic. In any case, the fact that the empirical evidence cited here and in other more recent studies (Levitin, 2006) demonstrates the obvious point that music does affect emotion and therefore supports my view that music, like poetry, can aid in introspection, precisely because it is engaging the emotions. Such solid empirical research surely confirms Anastasi's claim that music “moves people.” *But moved*, one may ask, *in what direction?* On the surface, it appears that such music moves people to aggressive (and destructive?) behavior. But to gain a deeper understanding as to what direction music is moving youth, *one must understand where they are being moved from.* To gain such an understanding, I turn below to Robert Dykstra's *Counseling Troubled Youth* (1997). If violent lyrics are causing a rise in aggressive feelings, this, it seems to me, marks an advance from the apathy that is so widespread today, evidenced below in Dykstra's case of Stan.

### **The Case of Stan**

Stan is a white, nineteen-year-old, small but athletic-looking college freshman. He has a tattoo, wears an earring, and rides a motorcycle. Stan had previously used drugs regularly, everything from alcohol to cocaine. His girlfriend, whom he had dated for over three years, helped him stay sober, but she left him two months prior to the beginning of his counseling sessions. Shortly after the breakup, Stan began to have anxiety attacks. When Dykstra “pointed out the congruity in time of her leaving and the onset of the panic attacks, [Stan] was surprised to think that there may have been a connection” (p. 36). Curiously,

Stan said that “he experienced no emotion when she left him” (p. 36). This response was consistent with his other responses to traumatic experiences in his life, as when, for example, one of his friends died in a car accident near his house or when his father continually disbelieved in his academic abilities (pp. 35-7).

Dykstra met with Stan for over a year on a weekly basis. He learned that athletics seemed to be the only place where Stan could release aggressive emotions such as anger, and his relationship with his girlfriend seemed to be the only place where he could express love. He observed that Stan’s problems had a certain evolution to them: “From his earliest years, Stan often would become sick or panic in school until his mother would come in to comfort him. Strikingly, all these problems corrected themselves spontaneously as Stan entered junior high school, at the same time that the new problems of drug and alcohol dependencies emerged” (p. 43). Shortly thereafter, around the age of fourteen, Stan also became sexually active. It seems that Stan traded one set of problems for another, from panic for mother to panic for lover, with drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. As the counseling continued, Dykstra found Stan more capable of feeling and more capable of talking about his feelings. Looking back on his counseling sessions, Dykstra was able to conclude that

Once Stan’s primary defenses, first his drug use and then his relationship with Jennifer [his ex-girlfriend], were removed, the abandonment depression surfaced with fierce, apocalyptic force in cold sweats of panic by night and in severe facial tics and lost concentration by day. On the surface was numbing apathy, the young man who could see his dead friend in a wrecked car and feel nothing, and who believed that he himself would be dead by forty; but underneath was a volcano ready to blow, a self about to self-destruct. (p. 50)

Appropriately, Dykstra related Stan’s experiences as an experience of an “apocalypse.” I offer this portion of Stan’s story to point out that the situation is grave for many youth today, as also intimated in the epigraph of this essay. But I especially want to lift up the fact that many youth, like Stan, display a numbing apathy, and they, like Stan, may be like a volcano ready to blow. The appeal and success of Nirvana, I would suggest, had much to do with Kurt Cobain’s display of apathy, a display that resonated with many youth. Music can help the apathetic youth feel and express the volcano that is stirring within. And if the counselor is able to withstand this aggression, if the counselor can provide a safe place where aggression can be embraced and integrated into the youth’s larger self, and if the counselor is able to offer an empathic ear to these songs, then she might be able to help our troubled young person.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps in time the apocalypse will become an envisioned eschaton, and a happy one at that.<sup>5</sup>

### **A Happy Ending**

In chapter six of his *Counseling Troubled Youth*, titled “The Eschatological Self,” Dykstra suggests that “The purpose of clinical work becomes then not the elimination of all

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth Bright (1999), a music therapist, concurs: “The possibility of using obscenities informs the therapist and also helps the patient, because it allows the expression of anger that is otherwise socially hidden” (p. 487).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the difference between apocalyptic and eschatological attitudes, see Capps, 2001, p. 38. Capps draws from Pruyser. Also see Dykstra, 1997, pp. 10-19.

suffering but the enabling of realistic suffering, thereby countering the increasingly detrimental effects of defensive suffering” (1997, p. 83). He elaborates:

[T]he goal is to enable the troubled youth, by means of a corrective therapeutic relationship, to abide a level of suffering inherent in the human condition, in order to combat the suffering created by a prior refusal or developmental inability to sustain it. (p. 83)

The question, for Dykstra, is: *How are pastoral caregivers to help troubled youth become faithful stewards of pain?* In pursuing this question, Dykstra notes the fascinating and compelling empirical research from the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute on movies. Why do people so often cry at *happy* endings, whereas they often do *not* cry at the *sad* moments in movies? Because “[t]he happy ending allows the viewer . . . to experience the sadness fully, to exchange pent-up sorrow or tension for realistic suffering in a satisfying of joyful sadness” (p. 84). In other words, safety enables one to exchange defensive suffering for realistic suffering, because “[t]he happy ending provides enough hope to enable the emergence of previously suppressed pain” (p. 84). Since there is no need for repression and defensiveness, grief can be freely and safely experienced. Dykstra explains that the upshot for pastors is that they need to be able to assure those in their care of happy endings, that is, of safety. Pastors assure this safety by passing what Dykstra refers to as the “tests” that counselees give their counselors. The counselee, Dykstra emphasizes, cannot bring about this safety herself. The counselor must pass the test to provide this safe space (p. 85).

If youth were to find it safe to talk about what they are listening to with a minister, a counselor, or an interested adult, this will likely make all the difference in terms of whether such listening is used for increasing aggressiveness—but, even then, this is probably better than silence and numbing apathy, as in the case of Stan—or rather for a greater integration of one’s inevitable and essential aggression into the larger self. If youth listen to popular music by themselves and find that they cannot talk about it, be it out of shame, fear, lack of adults’ interest, or condemnation by religious officials and religious individuals, such listening may well lead to negative consequences. But if they are permitted to talk about their interests with a caring adult, much good would likely come from it. And it is from my own experience that I know this is true, from that afternoon in the church parking lot when I listened to Bone Thugs-n-Harmony with my pastor. His interest and test-passing allowed me to integrate the music into my larger self, much like a mother’s acceptance of her child’s transitional object allows that object to gradually become less important to, and more integrated into, the larger fabric of the child’s life. By tending to a young person’s musical tastes and interests, and by listening to the lyrics with her, a pastor can touch upon the deeper layers of the youth’s self, in part because of the psychodynamic roots of music. Such tending and listening is an exercise almost guaranteed to enhance the safety of youth with their counselor; it is an act of empathy almost guaranteed to allow youth to begin or to continue to deal with unfinished business; and it is a testimony almost guaranteed to nurture hope in the eschaton, a hope that puts to rest all of the fears of the flames of the apocalypse, because these CDs do not need to be smashed and burned. They can be listened to in church parking lots. And this is Good News for today’s youth, many of whom love bad news.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The title for this section, “Good News for People Who Love Bad News,” is taken from an album of the band Modest Mouse. Their album *Good News for People Who Love Bad News* is full of clever twists, and many of the songs emanate weariness and apathy. That is to say, these songs provide a window into the experience of contemporary youth. My use of it here, of course, is a play on the phrase “Good News,” or Gospel. But the spirit that I want to communicate here, following Pruyser, is

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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one of tolerance, acceptance, and playfulness (Pruyser, 1974). Many young people today find themselves between beliefs and unbeliefs, and in a state of doubt (Carlin, 2005). But wouldn't it be Good News if the elder members and leaders of churches could communicate a spirit of playfulness to their young people and also create an environment where their curiosity is honored and able to be explored, rather than denied? Even if apathetic youth are infatuated with "bad news," wouldn't it be great if, as Pruyser wrote, we could "come together to practice that greatest of all gifts: to play and make beliefs"? "Such mutual engagements in play," Pruyser concludes, "require a social contract in which tolerance is the highest virtue" (1974, p. 269).

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## **Religion, Politics, and Gender in Humor: When is it Okay to Laugh?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the linguistic variation in humor between men and women in relation to religion and cultural background. The authors randomly selected and surveyed undergraduate students from two universities, one Midwestern and one Southern U.S., about the appropriateness of a joke. The authors created three versions of the same joke using different stereotypes: one religious version (Jew, Muslim, and Baptist) and two non-religious versions based upon race/ethnicity (Englishman, Mexican, African American) and the popular “blond jokes” (blond, brunette, redhead). After reading one of the jokes, respondents were surveyed on the following topics: appropriateness of the joke, how humorous the respondent found the joke, and specific situations when the respondent felt the joke was appropriate to tell. Results of the surveys demonstrated that whether the characters in the joke were religious or non-religious affected how humorous respondents considered the joke as well as under which circumstances it is appropriate to tell or hear the joke. There was also an overall variation in how humorous a respondent felt the joke was based on sex of the respondent, especially with the religious joke. The respondent's religious affiliation, ethnicity, and political stance on the current war in Iraq were associated with response patterns. Respondent comments centered on stereotypes and their perceptions of who should fill the role as “the dumb one” in humor.

### Introduction

Jokes are an important part of our lives. Almost everyone hears or tells a joke each day – it is a part of communication in all languages (Palmer 1994). However, jokes provide us with more than humor. Joke-telling represents a calculated linguistic strategy that is utilized and perceived by individuals in a number of ways (Heise and Smith-Lovin 1981; Rubin and Greene 1991). Jokes are used to broach taboos or create perceptions of incongruity or superiority (Thomas 1997). Jokes are also used to create solidarity between groups (Jay 1980). Indeed, humor is one of the last characteristics found in humans that differentiate us from our great ape cousins (Palmer 1994).

What is funny and what social groups or stereotypes are given lead roles in jokes varies greatly across time and society. At times, many groups have been selected as targets for jokes, some kind and some very unkind. The ethnic groups and religious affiliations chosen for the sample jokes have all been targeted in different regions of the U.S. in the last century. The targets of jokes are a matter of social debate, and audiences sometimes argue over which characters should be in particular roles. In recent years the ‘classic’ jokes have begun to be recycled with new players, representing the changes in the social and political [and perhaps economic] climate of the country.

For example, Flynn (1976) asserted that insulting behavior and dirty jokes are found in all societies. The level of offense taken, and thus the types of statements used, are dependent on the culture. The typical male and female social roles as well as embedded social injustices for particular ethnic, occupational, or religious groups would set the standards for typical insulting jokes. According to Flynn, the ethnic joke is currently more offensive than the blonde joke, but this probably would not have been the case in the late

1970s or 1980s, when women's liberation was a major social issue yet ethnic jokes were more widely accepted. By contrast, Helgeson and Gollob (1991) suggest that social interactions are influenced by the sex of the actor and the recipient, and the kind of behavior that occurs during the interaction. The gender of the participants in a social interaction will have a powerful effect on the audience's judgments. For example, males feel more powerful than females in general and are more likely to tell jokes that put themselves in a dominant position or put others (even if they are not in the current audience) in a one-down position. By contrast, they find that females are more likely to engage in low-power behavior or equalizing social interactions, including self-deprecation. The study found that subjects perceived that those telling jokes and the audience feel better when they behave in ways consistent with gender role stereotypes.

Social groups that are in the process of negotiating a place of respectability in society, or those that are controversial, may also find themselves to be the targets of unkind humor. Jacobs-Huey (2006) documented an increase in jokes about Arabs and Muslims following the September 11, 2001 attacks and the Iraq war. In particular, Jacobs-Huey found that African American comedians reworked jokes formerly constructed with African Americans as the target into jokes reaffirming African American identity and value as true Americans while belittling and alienating "Arabs." The "Arab" category constructed lumped many different ethnic categories and Muslims into a new stereotypical character. How the subjects of such humor deal with offensive and stereotypical jabs was examined by Queen (2005) in her study of lesbian jokes. As being openly homosexual became more common, outward social acceptance was accompanied by an increase in openly-told jokes about sexual orientation and crude stereotypes. The subjects of these jokes faced discrimination through humor. The question remains whether such jokes are merely insulting and attempts to put their targets in a one-down social position or actually are attempts at healing wounds and working past negative perceptions as the comedians protest. The potential social pain and discriminatory impact of these jokes has made them unacceptable in many workplaces, adding a new level of danger if the teller offends or misjudges his or her audience.

These phenomena made the authors curious about how different versions of the same joke would be perceived and used in different social settings. This paper presents preliminary data exploring linguistic variation in humor between men and women in relation to religion and cultural background. Specifically, we are interested in differences in the 'appropriateness' of potentially offensive jokes. In addition to the overall question of the 'appropriateness' of the joke, we also present data on 1) changes in the appropriateness of the same joke when the sex, ethnicity or religion of the actors is changed, and 2) the opinions of survey respondents regarding the contexts in which the potentially offensive joke can be heard, or the context in which they could tell the joke. Major themes in respondents' decisions to tell a joke, their reactions to the jokes themselves, and their perception of appropriate social conditions for telling such jokes are also discussed.

### Materials and Methods

We present data on 74 individuals who attend either a University in the Midwest or one in the U.S. south. These individuals voluntarily completed a two-page questionnaire that contained a joke and questions related to the humor of the joke and its appropriateness in different venues. The interview forms were prepared in accordance with Human Subjects guidelines so that students' responses could be confidential and anonymous. The first page of the forms included an explanation of the interview task, a statement describing how the students' identities would be kept confidential, and a signature line for agreement to participate. A 3<sup>rd</sup> party removed the first page with the signature (used for consent and to give students bonus credit if the instructor had agreed to giving credit) and placed it in a separate box from the completed and now anonymous data forms. Each respondent's data

form was assigned a simple identity code. Other bonus credit opportunities were provided to prevent the students from feeling under pressure to complete the exercise.

The questionnaire contained one of three jokes. The jokes were identical except that the actors were changed (Appendix 1). One joke is written as an ethnic joke, where the actors are an African American, a Mexican and a German. The second joke is a blonde joke, where the actors are a blonde, a brunette and a redhead (female gender was used in the pronouns to ensure that it was sexist); and the third joke is a religious joke, where the actors are a Baptist, a Jew and a Muslim.

Participants were assigned which jokes they received. When the questionnaires were handed out, they were formatting in such a way that the jokes were distributed in the pattern ABCABC. This pattern was designed to retrieve the same amount of questionnaire responses for each joke without specifically targeting any particular group of people to receive one joke more often than another group.

After the participants read the joke on the questionnaire, they were asked a series of questions about the acceptability or offensiveness of the joke. The participants were asked if the joke was appropriate to hear in certain venues, then asked if the participant themselves would be comfortable telling the jokes in the same venues. Finally, the participants were asked basic demographics, including age, sex, ethnicity, religious preference and occupation.

The acceptability of the jokes were measured with a modified Lickert scale, with 1 being "Acceptable", 2 "Slightly Acceptable", 3 "Slightly Offensive", and 4 "Offensive". In the portion of the questionnaire asking about the venues in which a person would feel comfortable hearing or telling the joke, respondents answered "yes" or "no" to each hypothetical venue. After each question, the participant was requested to explain the rationale behind their response.

Respondent comments on the acceptability of the joke, its appropriateness in various social settings, and why they would or would not tell the joke themselves in those social settings were analyzed for themes.

### Results & Discussion

How funny the joke is to the teller, the social setting, the danger of offending others, and how well the audience is known were all important factors in deciding when to tell a joke. Hearing a joke was not as risky as telling a joke.

The most acceptable joke was the blonde joke, with the ethnic joke considered the least acceptable (see figure 1). For each type of joke, men felt the joke was more acceptable than did women. As a group, Baptists found the ethnic and religious joke more offensive than did all men or all women (all religions combined).

Table 1 shows results of respondents' opinions on the acceptability of hearing the religious joke based on the venue in which it was told. Men are more likely than women in all venues to feel the joke was appropriate to hear. In general, respondents felt the joke was more acceptable to hear in more relaxed venues, such as happy hour or in a same sex group, such as a locker room situation. The joke was least acceptable to hear in more formal, work-related situations, such as at a conference or in an office break room. Interestingly, the carpool is considered more acceptable than work-related venues.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who feel the religious joke is acceptable to hear, based on venue

| Venue             | Overall | Men | Women | Baptist |
|-------------------|---------|-----|-------|---------|
| Happy Hour        | 73%     | 90% | 62.5% | 70%     |
| Office Break room | 38.5%   | 60% | 25%   | 40%     |

|                              |       |     |       |     |
|------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-----|
| Locker room (Same sex group) | 57.7% | 80% | 43.8% | 50% |
| Family reunion               | 73%   | 80% | 68.8% | 60% |
| Work-related conference      | 15.4% | 20% | 12.5% | 10% |
| Carpool                      | 69.2% | 70% | 68.8  | 50% |

Table 2 shows results of respondents' opinions on the acceptability of telling the religious joke based on the location of the venue. Overall, men are more likely than women to feel the joke was appropriate to tell, with the exception of a same sex group or a carpool. As in table 1, the joke was more acceptable in more relaxed venues, and less acceptable in more formal venues. For all venues, respondents felt it was less acceptable to tell the joke than to hear it. As in table 1, the carpool is considered more acceptable than work-related venues to tell the joke.

**Table 2: Percentage of respondents who feel the religious joke is acceptable to tell, based on venue**

| Venue                        | Overall | Men   | Women | Baptist |
|------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| Happy Hour                   | 34.6%   | 30.0% | 37.5% | 10.0%   |
| Office Break room            | 23.1%   | 30.0% | 18.8% | 10.0%   |
| Locker room (Same sex group) | 42.3%   | 40.0% | 43.8% | 20.0%   |
| Family reunion               | 38.5%   | 40.0% | 37.5% | 10.0%   |
| Work-related conference      | 15.4%   | 20.0% | 12.5% | 0.0%    |
| Carpool                      | 38.5%   | 30.0% | 43.8% | 10.0%   |

On the religious joke, there was no difference in the score between men and women (men felt joke more appropriate than women), but Baptists found the joke less appropriate. This is likely because the 'dumb' one in the religious joke was a Baptist.

Sex differences regarding the religious joke were present when asked about specific situations to hear the joke. Men were more likely to believe that the joke was appropriate to hear in all presented situations, though the differences between men and women disappeared when asked about the same situations and the appropriateness of telling the joke. This suggests that men and women are equally aware of the appropriateness of jokes, and know when a joke should or shouldn't be told. However, men are more permissive than women when hearing a joke. Perhaps they are less likely to be offended, or to react when presented with an inappropriate joke.

Regardless of the type of joke, men felt the joke was acceptable (1.8 religious, 1.5 blond, 1.86 ethnic), while there was more variation among women (2.1 religious, 1.57 blonde, 2.8 ethnic). This supports previous research that women are more likely to be offended by jokes. In particular, this may support previous research that women are less likely to like jokes that single out a particular group of people to make fun of (Haas 1979; Helgeson and Gollob 1991; Palmer 1994). This supports the hypothesis that females tell jokes to promote group solidarity and enhance existing relationships, while rarely participating in the exchange of insults (Jay 1980). What is interesting when comparing reactions to the three jokes used in the study is that women were not offended by the blonde joke. In fact, several women who received the ethnic or religious joke commented that they would have found the joke more acceptable if it had been reframed as a blonde joke. This is really interesting, and suggests that women do not find blonde jokes to be sexist or sexist to an extent that is offensive. Several women also commented on the survey that they were blonde and yet loved blonde jokes. They seemed confident, however, and perhaps even empowered by being able to take control of blonde jokes. A few did mention that they'd like to see more blond jokes with males.

Common themes for deciding on the offensiveness and appropriateness of the joke centered around social context. A common response to those that were offended was to state that the joke was “not funny!” To contrast, many who considered the jokes less offensive or not at all offensive defended the role of humor as a social lubricant. The theme of “harmless fun” was represented by comments such as “it’s just silly and fun”, “it’s just a joke”, “relax, it’s not meant to offend”, “it’s okay if it makes you laugh and relax”, and “it’s just humor – humor is good.” Sensitivity and offensiveness were considerations for many. The “stereotype” theme included a worry that stereotypes are inherently offensive. Interestingly, a few stated that the joke would be more offensive if the stereotypes were more accurate. A few students brought up the survey in class a few days after it was completed and commented that the jokes would have been much more offensive if they had been less generic. Several students joined in to express the sentiment that the joke had been generic –not poking fun at a particular group. They could tell this, they said, because you could put any set of characters into the joke. Several found a blonde joke version of the joke to be innocuous, but they united in suggesting that Aggie (Texas A&M), University of Texas, and perhaps Sam Houston State students would be good characters for the joke. They thought that the joke would be most truly offensive “if it were true” by including hurtful stereotypical characteristics that were widely accepted. It was even discussing religion or race – not the merits of the joke itself — that made the jokes dangerous and sensitive. Others simply thought that if the joke was really funny, there was an acceptable outlet for it, “because it’s funny.”

Danger and sensitivity to social context were the theme of the comments about different venues for telling the jokes. “I’m not the type of person who tells jokes like this” was associated with the ethnic version. Telling jokes in a professional or work setting was considered to be particularly dangerous. Comments included “you could be fired if you did it at work”, “it’s not professional”, and “you have to be careful about others’ opinions at work.” By contrast, the more familiar and personal the social setting, the safer respondents felt about telling risky jokes. Comments included “It’s okay when the reactions are predictable”, “it’s okay among people you’re close to”, “okay among friends and family”, and “if it’s your family, you’re all the same.” Inside a family, it was considered okay to joke about even your own religion, but outsiders’ mockery was not welcomed.

Despite the fact that we are in a very PC society where we know that ethnic jokes (and to a lesser degree religious jokes) are not acceptable, the men in this sample didn’t find much difference in how acceptable the joke was. So, even though they may feel constrained by when they could tell the joke, or know the places where the joke is acceptable to hear, they still find the joke acceptable knowing perhaps that the joke is inappropriate. Women tended to be more concerned with the possibility of hurting someone’s feelings as a motivation for being careful about telling jokes. Overall, religious jokes were not as offensive as ethnic jokes – the most delicate subject of all – but they were more dangerous socially than the “innocuous” blonde joke.

### Biographical Notes

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**Appendix 1.** Jokes and follow-up questions. There were three versions. Version A (shown here) used a Blond, Brunette, and Redhead, Version B: Jew, Baptist, and Muslim, with the Baptist as the comic character. Version C: German, Mexican, and African American, with the African American as comic character.

A Blond, a Brunette, and a Redhead were all headed to the firing range to be executed. When the Brunette was asked for her last words she screamed "TORNADO!!!!!" at the top of her lungs. Everyone ran for cover and she escaped.

Then the Redhead took her turn, and when she was asked for her last words she screamed "Oh my God, it's a METEOR!!!!!!". Everyone ran for cover, and she escaped, too.

The Blonde saw what the others had done, and she was ready. When she took her turn and was asked for her last words, she screamed, "FIRE!!"

|                           | <b>Acceptable</b> | <b>Slightly<br/>Acceptable</b> | <b>Slightly<br/>Offensive</b> | <b>Offensive</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>I found this joke:</b> | <b>1</b>          | <b>2</b>                       | <b>3</b>                      | <b>4</b>         |

Why ? Please explain:

Is this joke appropriate in the following contexts:

|                              |     |     |    | Why or why not? |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----------------|
| Happy hour                   | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Office break room            | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Locker room (same sex group) |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |
| Family reunion               |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |
| Work-related conference      | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Carpool                      |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |

Would *you* tell this joke in these contexts?

|                              |     |     |    | Why or why not? |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----------------|
| Happy hour                   | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Office break room            | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Locker room (same sex group) |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |
| Family reunion               |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |
| Work-related conference      | yes | no  |    | _____           |
| Carpool                      |     | yes | no |                 |
| <hr/>                        |     |     |    |                 |

What is your gender?            Female                            Male

What is your age?            \_\_\_\_\_ years

Occupation?                    \_\_\_\_\_

Religious affiliation?        \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic affiliation?            \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional comments?**

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## **Perceptions of Religions: Classification and Tolerance Among University Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines patterns of preference and perceptions of religions. The sample included undergraduate students from a mid-sized Southern university (n=39, 32 females, 7 males). Respondents were asked to free list the names of religions. For each religion they volunteered, they were asked to mark their personal preference of the religion (like, neutral, dislike) and explain their reason for this preference. They were then asked to mark their perception of that religion (good, neutral, bad) and explain the basis of their perception. Respondents were also asked to describe stereotypes or preconceptions about different religions and whether they consider any religions particularly warlike or peaceful. Results show that students were variable in both the number and kind of religions listed with a mean list size of 9.46 religions. Many listed separate Protestant Christian denominations as separate religions at the same level as non-Christian world religions. Most Protestant students separated "Christianity" and "Catholic" as separate categories at the same level as "Jewish" and "Buddhist" while Catholics considered all Christians to be in the same category. While Buddhism was considered especially peaceful by most students who had heard of it; many stated that Christianity was peaceful. Islam was described as warlike by many students and Atheism as aggressive.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper examines how a sample of undergraduate students from a mid-size Southern university perceived different religions. The goals of the data collection were to: 1) assess current student perspectives on religions, 2) gain an understanding of how the cultural domain including religions was structured in this population, and 3) to have students perform an exercise that brought to light their implicit beliefs about other people based on their religious affiliation. The project began as an exercise to assess the perspectives of students prior to beginning a unit on the anthropology of religion in an introductory Cultural Anthropology course.

Students had learned basic ethnographic interview methods in an earlier content unit of the course, and so were familiar with the concept of a cultural domain as well as the techniques of a free listing exercise. Cultural domains are groups, or lists, or things that go together (Bernard 2002). Cognitively, people from the same culture tend to have the same cultural domains, such as types of blue jeans, holidays, things that are good to eat, colors, and kin terms. Anthropologists can gain insight from cultural domain analysis because different people within a culture both have slightly different lists of things within a given category and arrange that knowledge differently (Bernard 2002, Borgatti 1994). Using a method such as free listing allows the researcher to gather lists from many individuals and compare them. The differences and similarities of the lists reveal patterns in how people perceive and classify items in a particular domain. In this project, I asked for related lists about the cultural domain of religion. Instead of a simple free list, in which students would simply list the names of the religions, I asked them to go back and answer questions about each of the items (i.e. religions) they listed. This is called a spoked free list (Chandler-Ezell



2003). Because I was interested in students' preference and perceptions, I asked the students to evaluate the religions and provide their reasons for their categorizations.

Preference and judgment are personal decisions, but ones that are influenced by enculturation and social context. In this case, all of the students in the sample were raised in American culture, and most of them identified themselves as a part of Southern or Texan American culture. As a result of the norms of these subcultures, they were most likely enculturated into Christian religious traditions from early childhood or birth. One objective for doing this research was to learn more about how tolerant and knowledgeable of other religions and other denominations of their own religion the students would be. The opening sections of the Cultural Anthropology course exposed students to the anthropological goals of cultural relativism and objective cross-cultural understanding. Students learned about the ways naïve realism and ethnocentrism cause people to prefer their own culture's beliefs and practices and often judge other cultures' beliefs as wrong and inherently inferior (Bohannon 1966). Would students give a very emic, ethnocentric perspective? Or would the students internalize the course concepts of the etic (objective, outsider) perspective and cultural relativism in their evaluations of other cultures?

The first objective of this paper is to present the religions listed by the students, describing how they classified religious categories cognitively and evaluated them. The second objective is to present the major themes in the students' feelings about religious affiliations. Finally, trends and patterns are discussed which may offer hope for increasing tolerance of others.

## **METHODS**

The sample included undergraduate students from a mid-sized Southern university in East Texas. Students from an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course were given the opportunity to complete a brief mixed-method interview form for a small amount of bonus credit (3 percentage points on an exam). The interview forms were prepared in accordance with Human Subjects guidelines so that students' responses could be confidential and anonymous. The first page of the forms included an explanation of the interview task, a statement describing how the students' identities would be kept confidential, and a signature line for agreement to participate. A 3<sup>rd</sup> party removed the first page with the signature (used to give students their bonus credit) and placed it in a separate box from the completed and now anonymous data forms. Each respondent's data form was assigned a simple identity code. Other bonus credit opportunities were provided to prevent the students from feeling under pressure to complete the exercise.

A total of 39 student respondents completed the forms in this sample (32 females, 7 males). All of the respondents identified themselves as either raised in a Christian tradition or currently active Christians. Two of the respondents were Latter Day Saints, or Mormons, and identified themselves as Christians. (\*Interestingly, both of them approached me later in the course and commented that they had discussed the subject with schoolmates and were surprised to discover that many of them did not consider Latter Day Saints to be Christians.)

For the first task, respondents were asked to free list the names of religions. For each religion they volunteered, they were asked to mark their personal preference of the religion (like, neutral, dislike) and given a blank to explain their reason for this preference. They were then asked to mark their perception of that religion (good, neutral, bad) and explain the basis of that perception. On a second page, respondents were given the open-ended questions:

*Do you feel that any of the religions (or the people who follow them) you listed on the previous page are particularly **warlike**? Which ones and why?*

*Do you feel that any of the religions are particularly **peaceful**? Which ones and why?*

*Do you have any preconceptions about or know of any basic stereotypes for any of the religions you listed?*

Finally, respondents were asked questions about their perception of the prevalence and importance of Christianity around the world.

*What is the most common religion in the world?*

*What percentage of the people in the world do you think are Christian?*

*What percentage of Americans do you think are Christian?*

*What percentage of Europeans do you think are Christian?*

After the data forms were collected, the data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. All of the freelists and the perceptions and preference data were entered onto a single spreadsheet for each respondent. Text analysis of the lists included the content, arrangement, and length of the lists within and among respondents. Items from the lists were sorted by salience and prevalence, and themes associated with each item were identified. The responses to the open-ended questions and the comments accompanying the freelists were searched for themes.

## **RESULTS**

### **List results:**

The overall sum of items on the religion free list was 369, with 48 discrete religious categories described. Of the 48 religions or religious categories were listed, 3 were not truly religions. Atheism and Agnosticism, not religions but rather religious views that are innately non-religious were included as types of religions by respondents. Christian or Christian-derived religious categories formed 22 categories, though at different taxonomic levels.

“Christianity” or “Christian” was listed as a separate category by many respondents. Interestingly, this genera-level descriptor was not provided by all respondents (only 15 listed Christianity, 7 listed the sub-generic level “Protestant Christianity”) despite the fact that most of the respondents self-identified as Christian, including the Latter Day Saint. Though most religious scholars consider Christian to be a genera-level term equal to other religious categories such as Hinduism or Islam, the salience of Christianity distorted this classification schema in the sample. Various denominations, branches, and offshoots of Christianity were listed at the same level as other major world religions. The category of Christian is so important to the respondents that many accept it as simply understood, revealing their implicit beliefs and deeply-embedded preference for Christianity.

Interestingly, Protestant Christians did not describe themselves as “Protestants”. Instead, they defined themselves as Christians and Catholics as a separate religion (usually less preferable). By contrast, Catholics considered themselves as Christians along with various Protestant denominations. An additional 23 other, non-Christian or Christian-

derived world religions were listed, though three were vague descriptors (animism, African traditional, and Chinese traditional).

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Religions</b>           | <b># times listed</b> |
|-------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1           | Islam                      | 39                    |
| 2           | Judaism                    | 36                    |
| 3           | Roman Catholic             | 34                    |
| 4           | Baptist                    | 31                    |
| 5           | Latter Day Saints / Mormon | 25                    |
| 6           | Methodist                  | 23                    |

The most common religion listed was Islam, though some respondents listed both “Islam” and “Muslim”. From their comments, these people did not realize that these were different descriptors for the same religion. The second most commonly listed religion was Judaism, with Roman Catholic a close third. Baptists were the fourth most common religion listed, which makes sense, as Baptist and then Catholic were the most common religious affiliations of the respondents. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints rounded out the top five, though most respondents identified them as “Mormons,” and Methodists were listed by 23 individuals.

The mean list size for females was 9.78, with a range of 5 to 15 items. Male lists were not significantly different, with a mean of 8.00 and a range of 4 to 14 items. The overall mean list length was 9.46. Given a larger sample, mean list length might differ among males and females, but differences were not significant with this sample.

**Perceptions and Preferences:**

(See Table 2 in the Appendix)

Reactions to Muslims and the religion of Islam were variable. Only 2 respondents said that they liked Islam, 13 were neutral in their preference, and 23 judged it to be a “bad” religion. No respondents stated that they liked Islam, though 23 were neutral in their opinion and 16 stated that they disliked the religion. Of those that were neutral, most did express either genuine tolerance or an attempt to be tolerant of this faith. Those who listed both Islam and Muslim as separate entities often found one neutral but associated with or entangled with the other, which was “bad,” usually with references to terrorism, aggression and attacks on the U.S., and abuse of women as evidence for their judgments.

Perceptions of and preferences for other major (non-Christian) religions was mixed. Buddhism was mostly liked or received a neutral response. Hinduism was not as well liked. In general, reaction to Asian-origin religions was mild. Judaism was vehemently disliked by a few, with comments such as “they killed Jesus”, “they don’t believe in Jesus,” and a strong “Christianity is truth, these are lies.” Overall, however, reactions to Judaism were balanced, with more neutral responses than positives or negatives. Students from larger cities (most likely Houston, Dallas, or Austin) were more tolerant of Jews than East Texans/those from more rural areas.) Makes sense given much larger Jewish community in Houston area. Students from larger cities knew more non-Christian religions.

Scientology was universally disliked, as were Satanism, Atheism, and Agnosticism. Scientology was criticized as being a cult, weird, and associated with celebrities. Wicca and Paganism were neutrally received by a few, though largely disliked. Satanism, Atheism, Agnosticism, Wicca, and Paganism were all accused of evil, aggression against Christian customs, and association with the devil.

Within Christianity, strife was evident between Catholics and Protestants. Many Protestants singled out Catholicism for criticism as “strayed from the path” and not being true Christians. Some commented on a belief that Catholics worshipped Mary (not Jesus), have too much ritual, had associated with Nazis in World War II, and relied too heavily on the Pope. The use of priests as an intermediary to communication with God was also offensive to a few Protestants. Catholics as well as other Protestants turned on a few Protestant groups. Lutherans were not well liked in this sample, nor were Jehovah’s Witness or Latter Day Saints.

Buddhism was the most commonly listed example of a peaceful religion. An emphasis on meditation, nature, and passivity was thought to explain the peaceful nature of Buddhists. Many stated that all religions were innately peaceful, but that extremists distorted or perverted religion and introduced violence. Christianity and Catholicism were described by many as peaceful, though an equal number described both as warlike. Typically, Protestants described Catholicism as warlike and aggressive, while Catholics described Protestant denominations of Christianity as warlike. Islam was described as warlike by many students, though many tempered their statements with a belief that only the extremists were violent. Atheism was described as aggressive without apology.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Though the exercise was administered before the content unit on religion, the course had influenced the students’ perceptions in some ways. In particular, the phrasing of their comments reflected the earlier course emphasis on emic and etic perspectives as well as the concepts of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Many of the students’ comments included a stated desire not to judge without more information. Students often stated that they did not know much about a particular tradition, with an accompanying neutral assessment. A few stated that a particular tradition was “not for me”, but that “people are free to believe what they choose.” This is an important and significant leap from naïve realism or ethnocentrism, in which it is incomprehensible, wrong, and/or illogical for people to believe differently than the observer. Many students did make very ethnocentric comments such as “the Bible is the truth, these are lies”, “weird”, “cult like”, and “evil,” but not all of them. The use of terminology and stances from the approach of cultural relativism shows that exposure to a relativistic, cross-cultural approach may increase tolerance if not acceptance. The inclusion of such classes in university curricula may benefit students with a predisposition to be more tolerant of others.

Source of information about a religion is very important. All of the respondents who cited media-based information expressed a negative or at least neutral perception of the religion. By contrast, first-hand information through interaction with a person who practiced that religion had mixed results. A few respondents expressed frustration with firsthand responses to unfamiliar customs as well as “pushy” attempts to convert them by other Christian denominations. Those who had first-hand experience with a person from a different culture and got to know them expressed more positive or comparatively more positive (neutral instead of bad or dislike) preferences and perceptions. This indicates that interaction in a positive social setting, especially with non-Christians, could increase tolerance and dispel negative perceptions based on ethnocentrism.

It was interesting to note that students who listed many Protestant denominations tended to list fewer non-Christian religions and had difficulty spelling the ones they did list. Difficulty even spelling a religion or malapropism (“Jewishism”, “Juche”, “Ladder Day Saints”, “Seventh Day Advangers”) shows a basic lack of familiarity and salience. If they have never seen the religion’s name in print, it indicates a lack of familiarity with it on multiple levels, not just spelling. Comments on these misspelled religions were usually either vague, describing

a lack of knowledge, or negative. Exposure to other religions that provides more information may be a useful way to increase tolerance and understanding.

Despite the fact that respondents disliked many other religions and even judged them to be “bad”, there is hope for at least tolerance of other religions with exposure to cultural relativism, cross-cultural comparisons of religions, and first-hand experiences with people of different faiths.

### Biographical Note

**Karol Chandler-Ezell** is an anthropologist whose research interests lie in cultural movements, culture change, ethnobiology, and the adaptive significance of perception and behavior. She is currently an assistant professor in the Anthropology Program, Dept. of Sociology, Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas.

### Appendix 1

Table 2. Perceptions by religion. Religions are listed alphabetically, with individual respondent's comments and evaluations. \* Marks where two names were given for a religion in the same list, with the individual evaluating them as separate religions.

|                                              | PREFERENCES |         |         | FEELINGS<br>why do you feel this way  | PERCEPTIONS |         |     | EVIDENCE<br>On what is this perception based?              |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              | like        | neutral | dislike |                                       | good        | neutral | bad |                                                            |
| <b>7th Day Adventist</b> (7th day advangers) |             |         | 1       | do not know about                     |             |         | 1   | never attended church on Sat. except for specials          |
| <b>African traditional</b>                   |             |         |         | 1 don't believe this way              |             |         | 1   | I believe in the bible                                     |
| <b>agnostic</b>                              |             |         |         | 1 don't agree                         |             |         | 1   | christian is truth, these are lies                         |
|                                              |             |         |         | 1 I believe there's an ultimate being |             |         | 1   | people think they're "devil worshipers" than non-believers |
| <b>animism</b>                               |             |         | 1       | had prayer removed from school        |             |         | 1   | belief in God                                              |
| <b>Apostolic</b>                             |             |         |         | 1 doctrine confused me                |             |         | 1   | did not quite understand teachings                         |
| <b>Assembly of god</b>                       | 1           |         |         | same beliefs                          |             |         | 1   |                                                            |
|                                              |             | 1       |         | don't know about                      |             |         | 1   | don't know about beliefs                                   |
|                                              |             |         | 1       | based more on emotion                 |             |         | 1   | personal experiences                                       |
|                                              | 1           | 1       | 1       |                                       | 1           | 1       | 1   |                                                            |
| <b>atheism</b>                               |             |         |         | 1 had prayer removed from school      |             |         | 1   | belief in God                                              |
|                                              |             |         |         | 1 they don't believe in christ        |             |         | 1   | the bible                                                  |
|                                              |             |         | 1       | I feel sorry for them                 |             |         | 1   | seem to want faith, but haven't been shown                 |
|                                              |             | 1       |         | not my position to judge              |             |         | 1   | not my position to judge                                   |
|                                              |             |         | 1       | don't agree with it                   |             |         | 1   | atheists seem foolish to me                                |
|                                              |             |         | 1       | don't agree                           |             |         | 1   | christian is truth, these are lies                         |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                 |    |    |    |                                                      |    |   |   |                                                            |
|-----------------|----|----|----|------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 |    |    | 1  | to not believe in a being<br>or purpose is ludicrous |    |   | 1 | research on beliefs and<br>history                         |
|                 |    |    | 1  | don't believe in god                                 |    |   | 1 | their beliefs                                              |
|                 |    |    | 1  | I do not agree with them                             |    |   | 1 | I do not agree with what<br>they say                       |
|                 |    |    | 1  | antichrist/don't like them                           |    |   | 1 | based on knowledge of<br>religion                          |
|                 |    |    | 1  | don't believe this way                               |    |   | 1 | I believe in the bible                                     |
|                 | 0  | 1  | 10 |                                                      |    | 0 | 2 | 9                                                          |
| <b>Bahai</b>    |    |    | 1  | don't believe this way                               |    |   | 1 | I believe in the bible                                     |
| <b>Baptist</b>  | 1  |    |    | their beliefs differ a little<br>from mine           | 1  |   |   |                                                            |
|                 |    | 1  |    | have attended, relatives<br>are ministers            |    | 1 |   | close relationships                                        |
|                 |    | 1  |    | doesn't affect me                                    | 1  |   |   | part of christianity                                       |
|                 |    | 1  |    | I don't always agree<br>with them                    |    | 1 |   | have different beliefs                                     |
|                 |    | 1  |    | don't know much about                                |    | 1 |   | obsessed with baptising,<br>pushy, converting              |
|                 | 1  |    |    | I'm baptist                                          | 1  |   |   | what I believe                                             |
|                 | 1  |    |    | similar to my religion                               | 1  |   |   | believes in almost same<br>things perceived as<br>American |
|                 |    | 1  | 1  | press beliefs upon<br>others                         |    |   | 1 | others preaching to me                                     |
|                 |    | 1  |    | not my position to judge                             |    | 1 |   | not my position to judge                                   |
|                 | 1  |    |    | this is my faith                                     | 1  |   |   | my religious faith                                         |
|                 |    | 1  |    | like sermons, hate<br>business meetings              |    | 1 |   |                                                            |
|                 | 1  |    |    | enjoyed church                                       | 1  |   |   | I like their beliefs                                       |
|                 | 1  |    |    | because I'm baptist                                  |    | 1 |   | my affiliation                                             |
|                 |    | 1  |    | always trying to convert<br>me                       |    | 1 |   | too overbearing, won't<br>accept no as answer              |
|                 |    | 1  |    | (same as above)                                      | 1  |   |   | friends and family                                         |
|                 |    | 1  |    | don't know enough<br>about                           |    | 1 |   | nothing                                                    |
|                 | 1  |    |    | agree with church and<br>interpretation              | 1  |   |   | many years in church                                       |
|                 |    | 1  |    | don't know much                                      | 1  |   |   | seems to be okay                                           |
|                 | 1  |    |    | my religion                                          | 1  |   |   | get baptized after you<br>learn faith                      |
|                 | 1  |    |    | I like what they're all<br>about                     | 1  |   |   | I like what they have to<br>say                            |
|                 |    | 1  |    | friends are baptist                                  | 1  |   |   | seem to have a<br>stereotypical pureness<br>to them        |
|                 |    | 1  | 1  | claims bible as guide<br>but strays away from it     |    |   | 1 | examination                                                |
|                 |    | 1  |    | gossip and hypocritical                              | 1  |   |   | stories I heard                                            |
|                 | 1  |    |    | my religious affiliation                             | 1  |   |   | how I was raised                                           |
|                 | 10 | 11 | 3  |                                                      | 14 | 8 | 2 |                                                            |
| <b>Buddhism</b> |    |    | 1  | practices are strange                                |    | 1 |   | my religious faith                                         |
|                 |    | 1  |    | the way I was raised                                 |    | 1 |   | belief in Christ                                           |
|                 |    | 1  |    | we are taught to not<br>serve images                 |    | 1 |   | worshipping golden<br>image                                |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|   |    |                                                                                                                   |   |    |                                                                                                          |
|---|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 |    | haven't experienced buddhism but seem nice and peaceful                                                           | 1 |    |                                                                                                          |
|   | 1  | doesn't affect me                                                                                                 |   | 1  | not sure                                                                                                 |
|   | 1  | don't understand it things they believe are different                                                             |   | 1  | have different beliefs                                                                                   |
|   | 1  | different                                                                                                         |   | 1  | the bible                                                                                                |
|   | 1  | seem more positive and happy than most others because I think they have good ethics really peaceful and spiritual |   | 1  | always happy, practices seem positive know a little and like what I know believed peaceful and spiritual |
| 1 |    | Madonna!                                                                                                          | 1 |    |                                                                                                          |
|   | 1  | don't know enough to judge                                                                                        |   | 1  | not my position to judge don't judge what I don't know                                                   |
| 1 |    | peaceful                                                                                                          | 1 |    |                                                                                                          |
|   | 1  | don't believe in god don't have reason to dislike                                                                 |   | 1  | I have a strong faith in god                                                                             |
|   | 1  |                                                                                                                   |   | 1  |                                                                                                          |
| 1 |    | think they're peaceful                                                                                            | 1 |    | dali llama seems kinda cool christian is truth, these are lies                                           |
|   | 1  | don't agree don't know enough about                                                                               |   | 1  | nothing                                                                                                  |
|   | 1  | don't believe jesus is god                                                                                        |   | 1  | research on beliefs and history                                                                          |
|   | 1  | not for me                                                                                                        |   | 1  | not for me                                                                                               |
|   | 1  | don't know a lot                                                                                                  |   | 1  | peaceful strive for true nature of life                                                                  |
|   | 1  | spiritual                                                                                                         |   | 1  |                                                                                                          |
|   | 1  | don't know anything about it                                                                                      |   | 1  | unfamiliar with it                                                                                       |
|   | 1  | don't believe this way                                                                                            |   | 1  | no gods before me I do not agree with what they say based on knowledge of religion                       |
|   | 1  | I do not agree with them                                                                                          |   | 1  |                                                                                                          |
|   | 1  | don't know about them I don't know much about it                                                                  |   | 1  | n/a                                                                                                      |
| 1 |    | peaceful way of life                                                                                              | 1 |    | most peaceful religion                                                                                   |
| 1 |    | never encountered anything I didn't like madonna and angelina jolie                                               | 1 |    | peaceful religion                                                                                        |
|   | 1  |                                                                                                                   |   | 1  | promotes adoption                                                                                        |
| 6 | 16 | 9                                                                                                                 | 6 | 16 | 8                                                                                                        |

**Catholicism**

|   |   |                                                                    |   |   |                                                                 |
|---|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|   | 1 | seems more cultish support of Hitler in WWII                       |   | 1 | I don't like a lot of what they do man cannot forgive your sins |
|   | 1 | never attended seen many friends hurt and cast aside by the church |   | 1 | taught that they talk to a priest, not god himself              |
|   | 1 | doesn't affect me                                                  | 1 |   | known people with poor experiences                              |
| 1 |   | it's how I was raised                                              | 1 |   | dominant religion it is my beliefs                              |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                            |   |    |   |                                                             |  |  |    |                                                                       |
|----------------------------|---|----|---|-------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            |   |    | 1 | most, at least in college, are hypocritical                 |  |  | 1  | found them to be hypocrits                                            |
|                            |   |    | 1 | appreciate their beliefs                                    |  |  | 1  | love their beliefs                                                    |
|                            |   | 1  |   | raised this way                                             |  |  | 1  | good things about it, most people catholic                            |
|                            |   |    | 1 | not my position to judge due to their form of dress         |  |  | 1  | not my position to judge                                              |
|                            |   |    | 1 | don't know enough to judge                                  |  |  | 1  | my religious faith don't judge what I don't know                      |
|                            |   |    | 1 | don't approve of their control                              |  |  | 1  |                                                                       |
|                            |   |    | 1 | don't know much about it                                    |  |  | 1  | don't know about beliefs                                              |
|                            |   |    | 1 | boyfriend is catholic                                       |  |  | 1  | boyfriend is catholic                                                 |
|                            |   | 1  |   | not overbearing, down to earth                              |  |  | 1  | friends are catholic                                                  |
|                            |   |    | 1 | some don't believe in jesus's resurrection                  |  |  | 1  | christian is truth, these are lies                                    |
|                            |   | 1  |   | grew up believing                                           |  |  | 1  | family, church                                                        |
|                            |   | 1  |   | grew up with believe work will get them to heaven           |  |  | 1  | past experiences many friends are catholic                            |
|                            |   |    | 1 | I'm in between                                              |  |  | 1  | gone to church with friend                                            |
|                            |   | 1  |   | my religion                                                 |  |  | 1  | good experiences                                                      |
|                            |   |    | 1 | have strange rituals                                        |  |  | 1  | good code to live by                                                  |
|                            |   |    | 1 | base salvation on works                                     |  |  | 1  | not sure if they teach the way of salvation                           |
|                            |   |    | 1 | contradicts christianity                                    |  |  | 1  | says person can earn their way to heaven I disagree with their theory |
|                            |   |    | 1 | I do not agree with them they worship mary instead of jesus |  |  | 1  | based on knowledge of religion strength of popes influence            |
|                            |   | 1  |   | its what I believe in has strayed from premise              |  |  | 1  | strayed too far away                                                  |
|                            |   |    | 1 | raised catholic but heard things on TV                      |  |  | 1  | corruption putting trust in one living person like a pope is weird    |
|                            |   |    | 1 | almost everyone you meet is catholic                        |  |  | 1  |                                                                       |
|                            |   | 1  |   | grown up with it                                            |  |  | 1  | I practice it                                                         |
|                            | 9 | 16 | 9 |                                                             |  |  | 11 | 12 11                                                                 |
| <b>Chinese-traditional</b> |   |    | 1 | don't believe this way things they believe are different    |  |  | 1  | I believe in the bible                                                |
|                            |   |    | 1 |                                                             |  |  | 1  | the bible                                                             |
|                            | 0 | 0  | 2 |                                                             |  |  | 0  | 0 2                                                                   |
| <b>Christianity</b>        | 1 |    |   | the way I was raised                                        |  |  | 1  | belief in Christ                                                      |
|                            | 1 |    |   | is my own belief                                            |  |  | 1  | brought up this way                                                   |
|                            | 1 |    |   | raised this way                                             |  |  | 1  | the bible                                                             |
|                            | 1 |    |   | I am a catholic christian                                   |  |  | 1  | being raised in the catholic church                                   |
|                            | 1 |    |   | agree with their beliefs                                    |  |  | 1  | they believe in god                                                   |



The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                                    |    |   |                                                  |    |   |   |                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|----|---|--------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | 1  |   | because I am christian                           |    |   |   | my own faith<br>my own experiences<br>and beliefs                   |
|                                    | 1  |   | my religion                                      | 1  |   |   | christian is truth                                                  |
|                                    | 1  |   | because it's the truth                           | 1  |   |   | family, church                                                      |
|                                    | 1  |   | grew up believing                                | 1  |   |   | I believe in the bible<br>christ died for us, I can<br>go to heaven |
|                                    | 1  |   | believe this, peaceful                           | 1  |   |   | I agree with this theory                                            |
|                                    | 1  |   | it's my religion                                 | 1  |   |   | how I was raised                                                    |
|                                    | 1  |   | I agree with their beliefs                       | 1  |   |   | morals of the religion<br>personal study and<br>comparison          |
|                                    | 1  |   | how I was raised                                 | 1  |   |   |                                                                     |
|                                    | 1  |   | my religion, I believe it                        | 1  |   |   |                                                                     |
|                                    | 1  |   | seems to be true                                 | 1  |   |   |                                                                     |
|                                    | 15 | 0 | 0                                                | 14 | 0 | 0 |                                                                     |
| <b>Church of Christ</b>            |    | 1 | attended shortly, no<br>music                    |    | 1 |   | all serve same purpose                                              |
|                                    |    | 1 | faith is very strong                             |    | 1 |   | my religious faith                                                  |
|                                    | 1  |   | have a friend                                    |    | 1 |   | nothing                                                             |
|                                    | 1  |   |                                                  | 1  |   |   | good standards and<br>believe in god                                |
|                                    |    | 1 | very judgemental                                 | 1  |   |   |                                                                     |
|                                    | 2  | 3 | 0                                                | 2  | 3 | 0 |                                                                     |
| <b>church of god</b>               |    | 1 | never attended                                   |    | 1 |   | all serve same purpose                                              |
| <b>church of god<br/>in christ</b> | 1  |   | believe in god, holy<br>spirit, and christ       | 1  |   |   | sound doctrine, affiliated<br>with truth                            |
| <b>Church of Jesus</b>             |    | 1 | don't know enough<br>about                       |    | 1 |   | nothing                                                             |
| <b>Confucianism</b>                |    | 1 | christian upbringing                             |    | 1 |   | bible                                                               |
|                                    | 1  |   | interesting beliefs                              |    | 1 |   | old and outdated                                                    |
|                                    | 1  | 1 | 0                                                | 0  | 2 | 0 |                                                                     |
| <b>druidism</b>                    |    | 1 |                                                  |    |   | 1 | belief in Christ                                                    |
| <b>Drus</b>                        |    |   | 1 don't believe savior is<br>Jesus               |    |   | 1 | on my current beliefs<br>and what I was taught                      |
| <b>Eastern Orthodox</b>            |    | 1 | a lot like catholicism                           |    | 1 |   | not in the media too<br>much                                        |
| <b>Episcopalian</b>                |    | 1 | don't know enough to<br>judge                    |    | 1 |   | don't judge what I don't<br>know                                    |
|                                    |    | 1 | similar to many other<br>protestants             |    | 1 |   | aunt is episcopal                                                   |
|                                    | 1  |   | closest protestant<br>religion to catholicism    |    | 1 |   | nothing                                                             |
|                                    | 1  | 2 | 0                                                | 0  | 3 | 0 |                                                                     |
| <b>evolutionism</b>                |    |   | 1 teaches we're here by<br>chance and no purpose |    |   | 1 | research on beliefs and<br>history                                  |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                        |   |                                          |   |                                                                    |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Greek Orthodox</b>  | 1 | don't know enough to judge               | 1 | don't judge what I don't know                                      |
| <b>Hinduism</b>        | 1 | the way I was raised                     | 1 | belief in Christ                                                   |
|                        | 1 | no experiences                           | 1 | don't know enough to make a perception                             |
|                        | 1 | things they believe are different        | 1 | the bible                                                          |
|                        | 1 | don't have any good or bad things to say | 1 | neutral                                                            |
|                        | 1 | practices are strange                    | 1 | my religious faith                                                 |
|                        | 1 | don't know enough to judge               | 1 | don't judge what I don't know                                      |
|                        | 1 | don't have reason to dislike             | 1 |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 |                                          |   |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 | don't know much about it                 | 1 | only know it's in India                                            |
|                        | 1 | don't agree                              | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies                                 |
|                        | 1 | don't know enough about                  | 1 | nothing                                                            |
|                        | 1 | don't believe in jesus                   | 1 |                                                                    |
| 1                      |   | believe in god                           | 1 | reincarnation                                                      |
|                        | 1 | don't believe this way                   | 1 | I believe in the bible                                             |
|                        | 1 | I don't know much about it               | 1 | n/a                                                                |
|                        | 1 |                                          | 1 | tend to be peaceful people                                         |
|                        | 1 | no problems with them                    | 1 |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 | 10                                       | 5 | 2 8 5                                                              |
| <b>Islam</b>           |   | 1                                        | 1 | don't believe savior is Jesus                                      |
|                        | 1 | no experiences                           | 1 | on my current beliefs and what I was taught                        |
|                        | 1 | don't know their beliefs                 | 1 | don't know enough to make a perception                             |
|                        | 1 | the things they believe are different    | 1 | have different beliefs                                             |
|                        | 1 | don't know much about                    | 1 | the bible                                                          |
|                        | 1 | believe in certain things                | 1 | don't know                                                         |
|                        | 1 | I don't like                             | 1 | because of terrorism, looked down upon                             |
|                        | 1 |                                          | 1 | I like because they're dedicated to it                             |
|                        | 1 | don't know enough to judge               | 1 | don't judge what I don't know                                      |
|                        | 1 | war-like people                          | 1 |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 |                                          |   |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 | don't hate it, but don't agree           | 1 | extremists are giving it a bad name                                |
|                        | 1 | don't agree                              | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies                                 |
|                        | 1 | don't know enough about                  | 1 | nothing                                                            |
|                        | 1 | similar beliefs                          | 1 | some bad experiences                                               |
|                        | 1 |                                          | 1 |                                                                    |
|                        | 1 | believe there is only one god            | 1 | their pillars are all good                                         |
|                        | 1 | completely against christian belief      | 1 | thrive on violence                                                 |
|                        | 1 |                                          | 1 | has radicals that attack others because that's what they're taught |
| <b>Islam, cont....</b> | 1 | contradicts my beliefs                   | 1 |                                                                    |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                             |   |                                                                                                 |   |                                                                |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|                             | 1 | I do not agree with them at war so I give mercy because there are two sides to the war          | 1 | I do not agree with what they say                              |
|                             | 1 | I don't know much about it                                                                      | 1 | based on knowledge of religion                                 |
|                             | 1 | 1 of 3 religions that started with Abraham                                                      | 1 | radicals are bad, but not all islam is bad                     |
|                             | 1 | leads people from what I think the truth is own lots of gas stations, some responsible for 9/11 | 1 | America has stigma due to 9/11 and Iraq                        |
|                             | 1 | don't believe this way                                                                          | 1 | personal study of texts                                        |
|                             | 1 | doesn't affect me                                                                               | 1 | the news                                                       |
|                             | 1 | practices are strange                                                                           | 1 | I believe in the bible                                         |
| <b>"Muslim - eastern"</b> * | 1 | some of their beliefs differ                                                                    | 1 | not sure                                                       |
| <b>"Muslim - western"</b> * | 1 | I do not agree                                                                                  | 1 | my religious faith                                             |
| <b>Islam*</b>               | 1 | the way I was raised good teachings, but many radicals                                          | 1 | have a close friend who explained this form                    |
|                             | 1 | have strong religion but involved in war                                                        | 1 | cannot worship this type of person                             |
|                             | 1 | don't agree with beliefs                                                                        | 1 | belief in Christ                                               |
|                             | 1 | don't know much about I do not know enough about this to pass judgement                         | 1 | same as muslim opinion                                         |
| <b>Muslim*</b>              | 1 | don't know enough about it associated with problems                                             | 1 | involved in war                                                |
|                             | 1 | don't agree with beliefs                                                                        | 1 | their beliefs people can believe what they want                |
|                             | 1 | not for me                                                                                      | 1 | lack of knowledge many Americans associate terrorism with them |

0 23 16 2 13 23  
 \* (marks cases where "Islam" and "Muslim" were listed separately and perceived differently in same individual's list)

|                        |   |                        |   |                        |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|
| <b>Janism/ Moonies</b> | 1 | don't believe this way | 1 | I believe in the bible |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|

|                          |   |                                                                                                   |   |                            |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| <b>Jehovah's witness</b> | 1 | christian upbringing teachings contradict the bible                                               | 1 | bible                      |
|                          | 1 | want you to visit them, they won't visit you                                                      | 1 | relatives                  |
|                          | 1 | don't think it's a good one, brainwashing dislike that they don't celebrate holidays or birthdays | 1 | personal view              |
|                          | 1 | bothersome don't like how they go door to door                                                    | 1 | think they know everything |
|                          | 1 |                                                                                                   | 1 | my religious faith         |
|                          | 1 |                                                                                                   | 1 | personal experience        |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|       |   |   |                         |   |   |                                                                                 |
|-------|---|---|-------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|       |   | 1 | don't agree             |   | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies                                              |
|       | 1 |   | (same as above)         | 1 |   | my grandma                                                                      |
|       |   | 1 | don't know enough about |   | 1 | nothing                                                                         |
|       |   | 1 | bad experiences         |   | 1 | bad experinces door-to-door telling of their word bug people and invade privacy |
|       | 1 |   | christian-based         | 1 |   | used to be one when younger                                                     |
|       |   | 1 | too "cultish"           |   | 1 |                                                                                 |
|       | 1 |   | my aunt is one          |   | 1 |                                                                                 |
| <hr/> |   |   |                         |   |   |                                                                                 |
|       | 2 | 3 | 9                       |   | 2 | 4 7                                                                             |

**Jewish\* (listed separately from Judaism, same list)**  
**Judaism**

|  |   |   |                                                                                     |   |   |                                             |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------|
|  |   | 1 | practices are strange                                                               |   | 1 | my religious faith                          |
|  |   | 1 | don't believe this way                                                              |   | 1 | I believe in the bible                      |
|  |   | 1 | don't believe savior is Jesus                                                       |   | 1 | on my current beliefs and what I was taught |
|  |   | 1 | I do not know enough about this to pass judgement                                   |   | 1 | lack of knowledge                           |
|  | 1 |   | seem smart and fair in their faith                                                  | 1 |   | met with rabbis and seem very nice          |
|  |   | 1 | doesn't affect me                                                                   | 1 |   | have same biblical stories                  |
|  |   | 1 | differing beliefs                                                                   |   | 1 | have different beliefs                      |
|  | 1 |   | they have good, strong beliefs, but don't agree                                     |   | 1 | all jewish I have met seemed respectable    |
|  |   | 1 | no problem                                                                          |   | 1 | personal view                               |
|  |   | 1 | teach from testament                                                                |   | 1 | they do not believe in Jesus                |
|  |   | 1 | neutral, good and bad roots with catholicism but more strict                        |   | 1 | perceived as bad and good to people         |
|  |   | 1 | don't know enough to judge                                                          |   | 1 | WWII and TV                                 |
|  | 1 |   | peaceful people                                                                     | 1 | 1 | don't judge what I don't know               |
|  |   | 1 | because jesus is a jew                                                              |   | 1 |                                             |
|  | 1 |   | nice people                                                                         | 1 |   | keep to themselves                          |
|  |   | 1 | close to christian faith same as catholicism, don't believe in jesus's resurrection | 1 |   | seem very devoted                           |
|  |   | 1 | (same as above)                                                                     | 1 |   | christian is truth, these are lies          |
|  |   | 1 | don't know enough about                                                             |   | 1 | friends and family                          |
|  |   | 1 | jews are god's chosen nation                                                        |   | 1 | nothing                                     |
|  |   | 1 | don't know about religion                                                           |   | 1 | don't believe jesus is son of god           |
|  |   | 1 | similar beliefs                                                                     | 1 |   | don't know much                             |
|  |   | 1 |                                                                                     |   | 1 | good values                                 |
|  |   | 1 | don't do with god                                                                   |   | 1 | don't believe in god                        |
|  |   | 1 | don't believe jesus is son of god                                                   |   | 1 | don't think they're bad people              |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                                                    |   |    |   |                                                                                        |  |    |    |                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------|---|----|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|----|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                    |   |    | 1 | don't believe this way                                                                 |  |    | 1  | I believe in the bible<br>don't believe christ has<br>come yet        |
|                                                    |   |    | 1 | contradicts my beliefs<br>from readings of Bible,<br>they're as old as<br>christianity |  | 1  |    | based on knowledge of<br>religion                                     |
|                                                    | 1 |    |   | after all the persecution<br>against them they still<br>exist                          |  | 1  |    | believe in same god as<br>my religion, but son<br>hasn't come yet     |
|                                                    | 1 |    |   | such a constant religion<br>exclusive religion, they<br>are defensive                  |  | 1  |    | big impact on lots of<br>cultures                                     |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | n/a                                                                                    |  |    | 1  | religion for the jewish<br>people                                     |
| <b>Judaism*<br/>(listed with<br/>Jewish above)</b> |   |    | 1 | practices are strange                                                                  |  |    | 1  | my religious faith                                                    |
|                                                    | 7 | 21 | 8 |                                                                                        |  | 10 | 16 | 9                                                                     |
| <b>Kabalah</b>                                     |   | 1  |   | don't know much about<br>Brittany Spears!                                              |  |    | 1  | I don't respect Brittany<br>Spears in any religious<br>way<br>(media) |
|                                                    | 1 |    |   |                                                                                        |  |    | 1  |                                                                       |
|                                                    | 1 | 1  | 0 |                                                                                        |  | 0  | 2  | 0                                                                     |
| <b>Lutheran</b>                                    |   | 1  |   | doesn't affect me<br>haven't had much<br>experience                                    |  | 1  |    | part of christianity                                                  |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   |                                                                                        |  |    | 1  | I know someone                                                        |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   |                                                                                        |  |    | 1  | their religion                                                        |
|                                                    |   |    | 1 | practices are strange<br>don't know enough to<br>judge                                 |  |    | 1  | my religious faith<br>don't judge what I don't<br>know                |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | don't know much<br>don't know much about<br>it                                         |  |    | 1  |                                                                       |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   |                                                                                        |  |    | 1  | don't know about beliefs<br>had negative<br>experiences               |
|                                                    |   |    | 1 | confirmed, they think<br>don't know enough<br>about                                    |  |    | 1  | nothing                                                               |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | don't know enough<br>about                                                             |  |    | 1  | don't have a lot about<br>them                                        |
|                                                    | 0 | 8  | 2 |                                                                                        |  | 1  | 8  | 1                                                                     |
| <b>Methodist</b>                                   |   | 1  |   | attended once, too<br>much standing                                                    |  |    | 1  | never really attended<br>again                                        |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | doesn't affect me                                                                      |  | 1  |    | part of christianity                                                  |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | differing beliefs<br>I have always been<br>methodist                                   |  |    | 1  | have different beliefs                                                |
|                                                    | 1 |    |   | no problem                                                                             |  | 1  |    | I practice it                                                         |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | somewhat similar                                                                       |  | 1  |    | personal view<br>also perceived by<br>Americans as good               |
|                                                    | 1 |    |   | similar to my religion                                                                 |  | 1  |    | friends                                                               |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | not my position to judge                                                               |  |    | 1  | not my position to judge                                              |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | faith is very strong<br>don't know enough to<br>judge                                  |  |    | 1  | my religious faith<br>don't judge what I don't<br>know                |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | don't know much                                                                        |  |    | 1  |                                                                       |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   | never been to a church<br>never had reason to<br>dislike                               |  |    | 1  | don't know about beliefs                                              |
|                                                    |   | 1  |   |                                                                                        |  |    | 1  | no problem                                                            |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                                 |    |                                            |    |    |                                                           |
|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------|----|----|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                               |    | baptized, always had good experience       | 1  |    | grandmother always took me                                |
|                                 | 1  | know little                                | 1  |    | friends, boyfriend                                        |
|                                 | 1  | don't know enough about                    |    | 1  | nothing                                                   |
|                                 | 1  | believe in grace                           | 1  |    | agree with their views                                    |
| 1                               |    | went to churches with friends              | 1  |    | enjoyed service                                           |
| 1                               |    |                                            | 1  |    |                                                           |
| 1                               |    | this is how I was raised                   | 1  |    | I grew up this way                                        |
|                                 | 1  | structured church                          |    | 1  | don't have a lot about them                               |
|                                 |    | strayed and untrue to premise              |    |    | 1 personal study of texts                                 |
|                                 | 1  | good values                                |    | 1  |                                                           |
| <hr/>                           |    |                                            |    |    |                                                           |
| 8                               | 14 | 1                                          | 10 | 12 | 1                                                         |
| <b>Latter Day Saints/Mormon</b> |    | ride bikes in the summer                   | 1  |    | came to my house                                          |
|                                 | 1  | have very different beliefs                |    | 1  | I don't agree with them                                   |
|                                 | 1  | don't know much                            |    | 1  |                                                           |
|                                 | 1  | always trying to convert me                |    | 1  | (same as above)                                           |
|                                 | 1  | doesn't affect me                          | 1  |    | part of christianity                                      |
|                                 | 1  | don't know much about                      |    | 1  | always heard bad things not in agreement in way they live |
|                                 | 1  | don't like their beliefs                   |    | 1  |                                                           |
|                                 | 1  | believe it brainwashes people              |    | 1  | not very popular, lots don't know about it                |
|                                 | 1  | don't know many                            |    | 1  | heard they are strict                                     |
| 1                               |    | not my position to judge                   | 1  |    | not my position to judge                                  |
|                                 | 1  | practices are strange                      |    | 1  | my religious faith                                        |
|                                 | 1  | don't know enough to judge                 |    | 1  | don't judge what I don't know                             |
|                                 | 1  |                                            |    | 1  | what I've heard and learned about them                    |
|                                 | 1  | call themselves christian, but aren't      |    | 1  | makes no sense, like a cult                               |
|                                 | 1  | don't agree                                |    | 1  | christian is truth, these are lies                        |
|                                 | 1  | cult                                       |    | 1  | research on beliefs and history                           |
|                                 | 1  | don't know a lot                           | 1  |    | good values                                               |
|                                 | 1  |                                            |    | 1  |                                                           |
|                                 | 1  | different beliefs                          |    | 1  | too strict                                                |
|                                 | 1  | contradicts my beliefs                     |    | 1  | don't know enough about it                                |
|                                 | 1  | I do not agree with them                   |    | 1  | I do not agree with what they say                         |
|                                 | 1  | the belief of the higher being is ignorant |    | 1  | based on knowledge of religion                            |
|                                 | 1  | weird beliefs                              |    | 1  | to cult-like and strict                                   |
|                                 | 1  | seems unnecessary                          |    | 1  | personal study                                            |
|                                 | 1  | only nice when want to convert you         |    | 1  | poligamy                                                  |
| <hr/>                           |    |                                            |    |    |                                                           |
| 1                               | 9  | 15                                         | 4  | 6  | 15                                                        |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                                     |   |   |                                                   |   |   |                                                |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>non-denominational Christian</b> | 1 |   | too liberal in some cases                         | 1 |   | relative became minister                       |
| <b>paganism</b>                     | 1 |   | seems to be religion for pot smokers              | 1 |   | good that they're into nature                  |
|                                     |   | 1 | don't agree                                       |   | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies             |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't follow god but love nature                  | 1 |   | live in way that minimizes harm to environment |
|                                     | 0 | 2 | 1                                                 | 0 | 2 | 1                                              |
| <b>Pentecostal</b>                  | 1 |   | not my position to judge                          | 1 |   | not my position to judge                       |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't know enough to judge                        | 1 |   | don't judge what I don't know                  |
|                                     | 1 |   | what I am now                                     | 1 |   |                                                |
|                                     | 1 |   | relative denomination to my choice of worship     | 1 |   | sound doctrine                                 |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't know much about                             | 1 |   | don't know                                     |
|                                     | 1 |   | never bothered me                                 | 1 |   |                                                |
|                                     | 1 |   | never had reason to dislike                       | 1 |   | friend is pentecostal                          |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't know enough about                           | 1 |   | nothing                                        |
|                                     |   | 1 | don't believe you're saved by speaking in tongues | 1 |   | nothing against religion                       |
|                                     | 1 |   | not me                                            | 1 |   | been to church couple of times                 |
|                                     | 3 | 6 | 1                                                 | 3 | 7 | 0                                              |
| <b>Presbyterian</b>                 | 1 |   | don't know much                                   | 1 |   |                                                |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't know much about                             | 1 |   | don't know                                     |
|                                     | 1 |   | appreciate their beliefs                          | 1 |   | friends & family                               |
|                                     | 1 |   | my mother was this                                | 1 |   | not my position to judge                       |
|                                     | 1 |   | my parents' denomination                          | 1 |   | because of my parents                          |
|                                     | 1 |   | don't know enough about                           | 1 |   | nothing                                        |
|                                     | 1 |   | I do not know much about it                       | 1 |   | I do not understand their religion             |
|                                     | 2 | 5 | 0                                                 | 1 | 6 | 0                                              |
| <b>primal</b>                       |   |   | 1                                                 |   |   | 1                                              |
|                                     |   |   | don't believe this way                            |   |   | I believe in the bible                         |
| <b>protestant christianity</b>      | 1 |   | differing beliefs                                 | 1 |   | have different beliefs                         |
|                                     | 1 |   | branch of christianity                            | 1 |   | haven't learned much about it                  |
|                                     | 1 |   | close to my beliefs                               | 1 |   | good experiences                               |
|                                     | 1 |   | base beliefs on bible                             | 1 |   | the way I was raised                           |
|                                     | 1 |   | I grew up in this faith                           | 1 |   | my experiences in the church                   |
|                                     |   | 1 | don't know enough to judge                        |   | 1 | don't judge what I don't know                  |
|                                     |   | 1 | about the same as christianity                    |   | 1 | believe in one god                             |
|                                     | 3 | 4 | 0                                                 | 3 | 4 | 0                                              |

The Year 2007 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW

|                     |   |   |                                           |  |   |   |                                                                   |
|---------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------------|--|---|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Satanism</b>     |   | 1 | christian upbringing                      |  |   | 1 | bible                                                             |
|                     |   | 1 | against my beliefs                        |  |   | 1 | evil actions seen                                                 |
|                     | 0 | 0 | 2                                         |  | 0 | 0 | 2                                                                 |
| <b>Scientology</b>  |   | 1 | wrong                                     |  |   | 1 | celebrities give it a bad representation                          |
|                     |   | 1 | don't think it's a good one, brainwashing |  |   | 1 | frowned upon because it's different                               |
|                     |   | 1 | unusual                                   |  |   | 1 | celebrities very harsh views on things                            |
|                     |   | 1 | Tom Cruise!                               |  | 1 |   |                                                                   |
|                     |   | 1 | practices are strange                     |  |   | 1 | my religious faith on research and how media portrays it          |
|                     |   | 1 | it's more of a cult                       |  |   |   |                                                                   |
|                     |   | 1 | made up by science-fiction author         |  |   | 1 | south park had good episode exposing it                           |
|                     |   | 1 | (same as above)                           |  |   | 1 | against god                                                       |
|                     |   | 1 | I do not agree with them                  |  |   | 1 | I do not agree with what they say                                 |
|                     |   | 1 | too much of contemporary thought system   |  |   | 1 | Americans dislike because it changed Tom Cruise and John Travolta |
|                     |   | 1 | not a real religion                       |  |   | 1 | tom cruise                                                        |
|                     | 0 | 0 | 11                                        |  | 0 | 1 | 9                                                                 |
| <b>Shinto</b>       |   | 1 |                                           |  |   |   |                                                                   |
| <b>Sikhism</b>      |   | 1 | don't know anything about it              |  |   | 1 | don't know or hear anything about it                              |
|                     | 1 |   | worship god and have good qualities       |  | 1 |   | stresses doing good things                                        |
|                     |   | 1 | don't believe this way                    |  |   | 1 | I believe in the bible                                            |
|                     | 1 | 1 | 1                                         |  | 1 | 1 | 1                                                                 |
| <b>spiritism</b>    |   | 1 | don't believe this way                    |  |   | 1 | I believe in the bible                                            |
| <b>Taoism</b>       |   | 1 | don't know enough to judge                |  |   | 1 | don't judge what I don't know                                     |
| <b>Unitarianism</b> |   | 1 | don't really have set rules               |  | 1 |   | allows people to comprehend their life in their own way           |
| <b>Voodoo</b>       |   | 1 | fear of unknown                           |  |   | 1 | hollywood's definition                                            |
|                     |   | 1 | some relatives practiced both forms       |  |   | 1 | taught that this wasn't of god, witchcraft                        |
|                     |   | 1 | evil/hexing                               |  |   | 1 |                                                                   |
|                     | 0 | 1 | 2                                         |  | 0 | 0 | 3                                                                 |
| <b>Wicca</b>        |   | 1 | doesn't affect me                         |  |   | 1 | seems dark                                                        |
|                     |   | 1 | seems creepy                              |  |   | 1 | don't know                                                        |
|                     |   | 1 | very crazy acts                           |  |   | 1 | very crazy acts                                                   |
|                     |   | 1 | don't agree                               |  |   | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies                                |



|                   |   |   |   |                            |   |   |   |                                    |
|-------------------|---|---|---|----------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
|                   |   |   | 1 | opposition to christianity |   |   | 1 | research on beliefs and history    |
|                   | 0 | 2 | 3 |                            | 0 | 1 | 4 |                                    |
| <b>Zorastrian</b> |   |   | 1 | don't agree                |   |   | 1 | christian is truth, these are lies |

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## **The Latest Crusade: A Study of Recent American Media Depictions of Christian and Islamic Movements**

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### **Introduction**

Islam is a widespread and prevalent religion in today's society and throughout the world. It is reputed to be the fastest-growing religion in America (Magagnini). Its teachings have existed since the seventh century and battles between Christians and Muslims during the Middle Ages were common, especially for control of the Holy Land. It is in more recent times however that the faith has taken "center stage" in world events and its practices have caused much conflict and controversy, especially regarding the spread of radical Islam and terrorism.

Many scholars and the dominant political and academic cultures exert that Islam is a "religion of peace." The Qur'an itself states, "And God calls to the home of peace." Islam preaches on five elements to build a culture consisting of peace which can be found within nonviolence, freedom, pluralism, and consultation (Imam Muhammad Shirazi). Followers of Islam wish to build this peace culture on earth so that they are able to obtain peace in the eternal life. Critics of this view present an "oppositional reading" of Islam and disagree, saying there is nothing peaceful about Islam at all. The compassion, forgiveness, and respect for all that Islam teaches as a promotion for peace are not seen in the premeditated violent acts that Muslim groups perpetrate; even on fellow Islamics. This view presents the image of Islam as one of Jihad (holy war), subordination and subjugation of believers and those of inferior status (women, for instance), and of death, especially of infidels (non-Muslims). Violence, not peace, is viewed as righteous and necessary toward exerting the will of Allah (God).

In this essay, the dominant teachings of Islam will be examined, using the Qur'an, as being built on the foundation of a peaceful religion and compare this ideology with an oppositional reading utilizing the documentary film, *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West* that focuses on how the true nature of Islam can only be viewed as anything but peaceful, revealing the radical views present in a broad segment of Islamic culture. Additional passages from the Qur'an may also be interpreted to substantiate the violent nature of the faith. Also, preliminary findings of a comparative study of how recent American media sources have depicted both Islam and Christianity in the post-9/11 era will be revealed.

### **The Dominant and Oppositional Readings of Islam**

A dominant reading, according to Stuart Hall's ideology, suggests that "the reader fully shares the text's code and accepts and reproduces the *preferred reading* (a reading which may not have been the result of any conscious intention on the part of the author[s]) – in such a stance the code seems 'natural' and 'transparent'" (Chandler). Each element of peace, freedom, pluralism, and consultation presents a basis that iterates the dominant culture of Islam. Most followers of Islam believe their religion to be peaceful and desire it to be interpreted as such by others. The word "Islam," itself, can mean "Peace... establishing a peace between its Creator (Allah) and the believer, but also with the world at large." This preferred reading strives to project a peaceful deity that can be seen within the context of the Qur'an—the Islamic holy book of Allah. Muslims worship and follow the teachings of Allah who instructs his followers to be at peace and love all; even their enemies. Allah does

not condone killing, terrorism, or any violent acts that reject the moral righteousness of this peaceful culture. Instead, Allah promotes and commands non-violence from his believers and followers. The Qur'an distinctively states, "*the taking of one innocent life is like taking all of Mankind... and the saving of one life is like saving all of Mankind*" (Holy Qur'an, 5:33). Islam, along with non-violence, exalts freedom. In Islam, freedom of expression, beliefs, politics, intellectual thinking, economics, and religious tolerance, to name a few, prosper within this cultural ideology. Pluralism within political parties and consultative systems of leadership are other practices in Islamic faith that contribute to the dominant reading of this religion. Following the standards of pluralism and consultation within Islam, peace can be found within its teachings. Islam, as a peaceful culture, need only be read through interpretation of the Qur'an. This dominant reading is intended by the Creator, or Allah, and the meanings that arise from his teachings. It is a growing religion that is a culture, a practice, and an identity that is spreading throughout the nation and the world. With such dominance and esteem, who would not wish to identify this religion as anything but peaceful and good? As Hillary Rodham Clinton states in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Islam is the fastest-growing religion in America, a guide and pillar of stability for many of our people..."

While the dominant ideology professes Islam as peace, the oppositional reading is quite a contradiction to this cultural belief. An oppositional reading, taking from Stuart Hall's ideology, proposes that the reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's code and rejects this reading, bringing to bear an alternative frame of reference (radical, feminist etc.)" (Chandler).

The film *Obsession* offers a window into the oppositional reading of the Islamic faith. This documentary seeks to promote a different reality regarding Islam—that the preferred reading of the dominant culture that Islam is "religion of peace," is incorrect. The theme roundly critiques this view and as an alternative, reveals the violence and evil nature that Islam perpetrates and enforces. It presents "an 'insider's view' of the hatred Radicals are teaching [through their Mosques and madrassas (holy schools)], their incitement of global Jihad, and their goal of [Islamic] world domination" (Kopping and Shore). Islam is herein depicted as a culture expressed through acts of terrorism and war, and one which imposes this oppressive lifestyle among its prey. Radical Islam's value of life comes from the concept of Jihad. It is through Jihad that a Muslim pleases Allah and in perishing through this act of war, including martyrdom (e.g. as a suicide bomber), he or she receives Heavenly rewards. Quoting from the Qur'an, it is stated: "Let those fight in the cause of God who barter the life of this world for that which is to come; for whoever fights on God's path, whether he is killed or triumphs, we will give him a handsome reward." (Holy Qur'an, 4.74).

Other statements from the Qur'an seem to justify the views of those who do not consider Islam a religion of peace. With holy declarations such as "Kill those who join with other gods...wherever you may find them" (Holy Qur'an 9:5-6) and "I will instill terror into the hearts of the Infidels, strike off their heads then, and strike off from them every fingertip." (Holy Qur'an 8:12) Islam seems to promote terror and violence against non-believers. As the first World Trade Center bombing suspect Siddig Ibrahim Siddig Ali stated during his arrest interrogation in 1993, "...God said in the Qur'an that, in times like these, everything is lawful to the Muslim...infidels must be killed...a Muslim will never go to hell by killing an infidel" (Mitchell).

Likewise, author Robert Spencer in his new book, *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion*, offers substantial evidence that the charismatic Muhammad actually "designed" Islam as a personally-empowering faith from Jewish and Christian foundations and used threat and violence to win converts into what at its beginning, was nothing more than a heretical cult.

The oppositional reading of Islam as a religion of violence and mayhem rather than as a religion of peace seems to have a fair amount of justification. However, those who support the dominant view state that peaceful Muslims throughout the world are afraid to stand forth and speak out against the Jihadists fearing for their own safety. In the interim, the entire Islamic faith is in the process of being “hijacked” by a small minority of radicals numbering less than 15% of all otherwise peaceful Muslims (though there are approximately one billion Muslims worldwide, making the actual number of radical Islamics half the population of the United States). According to the makers of the film *Obsession*, “Daniel Pipes, of the Middle East Forum, points out that according to his estimate, only 10% of Muslims are radical. This is still a large figure, but we need to realize that the other 90% do not subscribe to a radical ideology of hate.”

Agency is defined as “the power to do something” (Nealon and Giroux). Each individual possesses “the power to do something.” Each person defines and creates history through our interpretations, actions, and responses. However, this power is often stifled and hindered by the dominant culture and its ideologies. The extent of which our agency is completed depends on the extent to which we wish to defy the norm and reject the dominant, using our own beliefs and interpretations as a response. Agency is possible through many conditions, as long as one is willing to question, learn, and act. Media culture uses individual agency to define, expose, question, and shape all situations and in doing so, it empowers others toward understanding competing realities and taking action to remedy unacceptable situations or toward embracing the status quo.

### **Recent Media Depictions**

Since the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11, how have American media depictions changed regarding not only Islam but Christianity? In order to examine any changes, a pilot study was developed with a very basic methodology. Should this media study be pursued in greater depth at a later time, a more specific and scientific methodology would need to be developed to evaluate the subject. As an initial pilot study however, the following method was utilized to address the research question.

#### Methodology

Using full-text American newspaper article searches in Academic Search Premier (EBSCO) utilizing the terms “Islam” and “Christianity”, searches were conducted by year, beginning with September 2001 (the month of the 9/11 attacks). The top returned articles from secular media sources (including editorials) were evaluated as being “negative toward,” “positive toward,” or “balanced” for each religious perspective. For the purpose of this study, the term “positive toward” was defined to mean “sympathetic,” “culturally relativistic,” or “displaying understanding.” “Negative toward” was defined to mean “against or anti-,” “condemning,” or “ethnocentric.” “Balanced” was defined as “not taking one side or the other,” “critically or fairly examined,” or “factual without opinion.”

Each sample consisted of the top twenty unique articles returned from the searches for each one year period observed (from September 2001 to August 2006). Each article utilized was pre-screened to insure that all twenty in the sample had a study-appropriate focus regarding the two faiths. (For example, articles written about a specific person [e.g. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar] of the Muslim faith were rejected if the article did not focus on the broad view of religious faith but some other aspect of their life [e.g. sportscasting and film appearances].

Findings

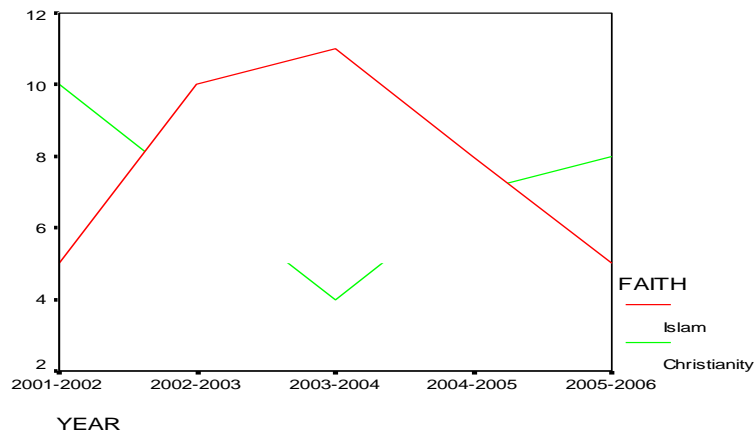
For the entire five year period observed, media stories and editorials about Christianity and Islam seemed to be fairly balanced, with a slight bias (though not significant) toward positive pieces covering Islam. However, a year to year analysis seems to tell a different story. Performing an analysis of the observed data (presented in the chart below in the section entitled "Data Presentation") revealed that current newsworthy events (also present in the media during the same observed periods) may have had an effect on the depictions of both Christianity and Islam in the secular news media. Details of these events follow in the presentation of data below.

Data Presentation

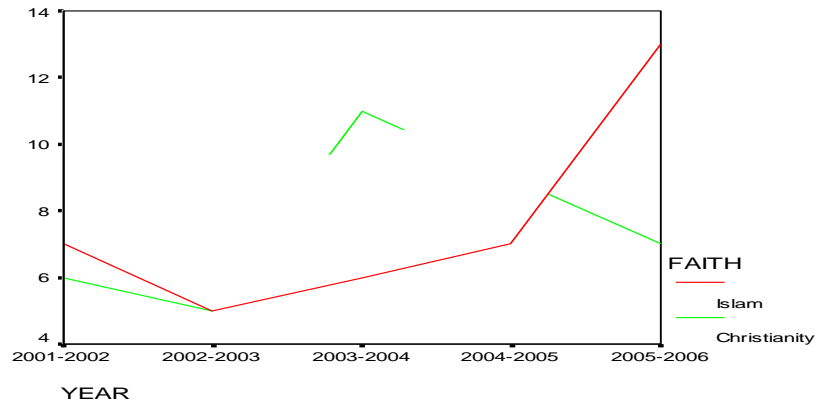
**Data Observed on Secular News Media Story and Editorial Biases  
Toward Islam and Christianity, September 2001 to August 2006**

| Articles About... ↓    | Bias → | Positive Toward | Negative Toward | Balanced | Total |
|------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|-------|
| Islam 2001-2002        |        | 5               | 7               | 8        | 20    |
| 2002-2003              |        | 10              | 5               | 5        | 20    |
| 2003-2004              |        | 11              | 6               | 3        | 20    |
| 2004-2005              |        | 8               | 7               | 5        | 20    |
| 2005-2006              |        | 5               | 13              | 2        | 20    |
| Total                  |        | 39              | 38              | 23       | 100   |
| <hr/>                  |        |                 |                 |          |       |
| Christianity 2001-2002 |        | 10              | 6               | 4        | 20    |
| 2002-2003              |        | 7               | 5               | 8        | 20    |
| 2003-2004              |        | 4               | 11              | 5        | 20    |
| 2004-2005              |        | 7               | 9               | 4        | 20    |
| 2005-2006              |        | 8               | 7               | 5        | 20    |
| Total                  |        | 36              | 38              | 26       | 100   |

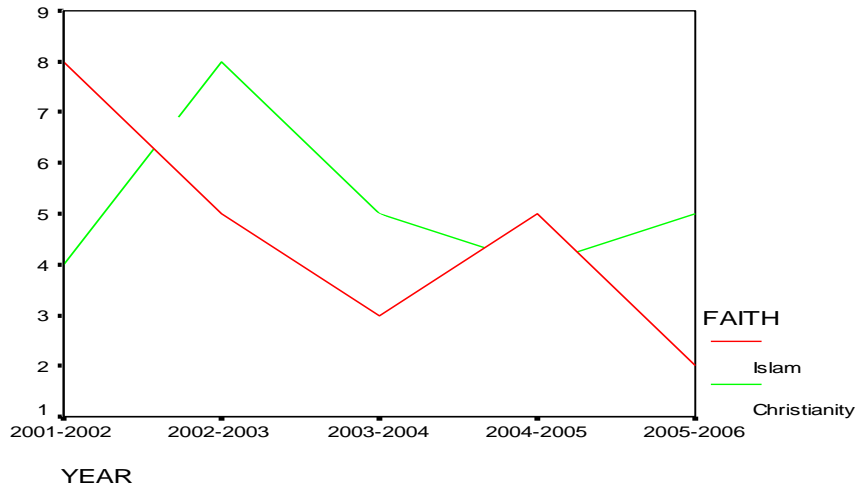
**Positive Media Depictions of Islam and Christianity,  
September 2001 to August 2006**



### Negative Media Depictions of Islam and Christianity, September 2001 to August 2006



### Balanced Media Depictions of Islam and Christianity, September 2001 to August 2006



### Conclusions and Observations

From the limited data observed in the course of this study, it appears that an almost inverse relationship exists as to how Islam and Christianity have been depicted in the secular media. When one faith is depicted more positively, the other is depicted almost equally negative, and vice versa.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it is understandable that Islam may have been depicted in a negative light, even in media circles. Likewise, nationalism in the United States was peaking following the attacks and as quite a few articles throughout American history have suggested, feelings of American nationalism and Christianity are inseparable in America (since America was founded as a Christian nation). If this observation is accurate, one would also expect a surge in positive stories and editorials professing a positive light on the Christian faith (and prayer) during a tragic time in history.

In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the media apparently relaxed their criticism of Islam, even to the degree of writing a series of very positive stories revealing that most Muslims are not radical in their faith and touting the notion that Islam was a “religion of peace”—a statement made repeatedly by the (at-the-time) popular President Bush and members of his administration. The increased incidences of so-called “hate offenses” and the emerging popular perception that the “war on terror” was a “holy war” pitting Muslims against Christians may have also contributed to the declining criticism of Islam as a whole, focusing most negative media on “radical Islamists” alone.

As often many of the most negative views about Islam were levied against it by the most devout of Christians (often depicted in the media as “fundamentalist Christians” who also make up a large segment of conservative voters [“the religious right”]), negative pieces directed at this segment of American Christians seemed to appear more frequently. As the shock of 9/11 dissipated, the call for religious tolerance swept across media circles, and any group defined as unwilling to practice this “new tolerance” in a post-9/11 era was open for media criticism.

By mid-2005 and thereafter, there appears to have been a media shift once again favoring Christian religious coverage and a corresponding negative bias toward Islam. Some significant reasons for these include the London terrorist bombings in July of 2005; the prolonged war in Iraq against radical Islamic elements; the apparent inability or unwillingness of so-called “moderate Muslims” to speak out against a violent insurgent minority of the same faith; the event in late 2005 when Islamic youths engaged in organized and violent rioting in France, leaving scores of police injured or dead and multi-millions of dollars in property losses; the violent Islamic reaction to the publication of cartoons in Denmark reflecting the prophet Muhammad in a negative light (prompting the call for organized Jihad against newspapers and cartoonists throughout the world—even though Islamic cartoons frequently depict Christians and Jews in the most negative manners possible, some simply plagiarizing the anti-Semitic cartoons from the Nazi era in Germany); and the release of the extremely popular pro-Christian film, *The Passion of the Christ*. These events stirred a measurable anti-Islamic backlash not only throughout the American (and in many cases, European) public but throughout media circles as well (as anything calling for the restriction of free speech and press usually does).

The data reflected in this study does not reflect additional events that have occurred since that are perhaps worthy of mention. In September 2006, just after the data for this study concluded) the Pope offended Muslims to the point of violent protest with a speech quoting a 14<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine emperor who said, “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” Throughout America, a few newspaper editorials were condemning of the pontiff’s insensitivity toward Muslims but many questioned the Muslim reaction to a quote made so long ago (which was simply stated as a fact of what had been said centuries before) and why a quote that labeled Islam as a violent faith “spread by the sword” should result in yet another organized Jihad calling for the beheading of the Pope and the takeover of Europe “by the sword” in the name of Allah.

In late 2006, a film entitled, *Obsession: Islam’s War Against the West* was released and shortly thereafter, a condensed version aired multiple times on the Fox News Network, reaching millions of viewers and alerting them to the dangers of radical Islam. Two recent books of growing popularity have done the same—Robert Spencer’s *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion* and Gregory Davis’ *Religion of Peace: Islam’s War Against the World*.

In November of 2006, six Imams were detained after boarding a U.S. Airways flight and behaving in similar ways as the 9/11 hijackers did prior to conducting the World Trade Center attacks. The purchase of one-way tickets, loud praying to Allah prior to and during

boarding, asking for seat-belt extenders (though none of the men were overweight), and assuming the same seating positions as the 9/11 hijackers was all too coincidental not to raise questions both in the minds of U.S. Air and later, the American public. The Imams (represented by CAIR {Council on American-Islamic Relations} are currently seeking permission from the U.S. Justice Department to sue U.S. Airways for violating their civil rights through racial profiling.

Nonie Darwish, Muslim Palestinian writer who now lives in the United States has revealed that "Terrorism coming out of the Muslim world did not happen by coincidence; it is the direct result of a culture that has been promoting hate, jihad and anti-Semitism for generations." She further adds that:

As a child, I was discouraged from questioning the teachings of hatred of Jews and other non-Muslims; to do that was an unforgivable sin. I quickly learned to keep my opinions and questions to myself. One has to hate the enemies of Islam to be a good Muslim. The indoctrination of Muslim children into hatred of a common enemy was also used as a tool for compliance. Jihad needs hatred of an enemy, and hatred comes out of fear, thus fear of Jews had to be promoted constantly by incredible tales and lies...Islam] relies on fear of a common enemy to bring about unity and cohesion among its citizens to form in a united front. This is necessary in an oppressive culture that discounts individual rights, privacy and promotes death for God's approval.

All of these incidents and revelations have likely further deteriorated the perceptions of Muslims in the American media and this trend is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

Alexis de Tocqueville, 19<sup>th</sup> century author of *Democracy in America* once stated that:

I have studied the Koran a great deal... I came away from that study with a conviction that by and large there have been few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Muhammad. As far as I can see, it is the principle cause of the decadence so visible today in the Muslim world...and its social and political tendencies are in my opinion infinitely more to be feared...rather than a form of progress [even relative] to paganism itself.

Gregory Davis takes a similar view in his recent work, *Religion of Peace: Islam's War Against the World*, when he editorializes the following:

...it seems that the secular West today is determined not to hear the bad news. It is hoping against hope that things are not as bad as they seem. It is hoping that the myriad of acts of violence around the world done in the name of Allah are somehow not indicative of "real" Islam...It is hoping that Islam—a religion founded by one of history's great warlords; a religion that waged wars of aggression and conquest for a thousand years, that slaughtered and enslaved untold millions and invented modern genocide, and that today is the only force in the world that produces terrorism, suicide bombings, hostage-taking, organized rape, and massacres on a global scale—that this strange, seething, violent mass is somehow "a religion of peace." Rejecting this fiction and standing up to be counted will determine whether or not we survive the twenty-first century (130-1).



Regardless of whether Davis' assessment of Islam is accurate, one thing is certain—modern media depictions of Islam and Christianity alike will dramatically influence how America and thus, the world reacts to these comparative faiths. All perceptions change with time, and perceptions of truth (not actuality) steer the course of history.

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