AN EXAMINATION OF ALIENATING TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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by

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Sociology of religion, as defined by Peter Berger, suggests that alienation is an ongoing, one-sided dialectic where individuals internalize but fail to externalize religious life. Religious alienation occurs when individuals perceive the historical development of religious life as being 'divinely-given' and fail to see the human constructedness of institutions, rituals and dogma.

This thesis demonstrates that alienating trends have developed and have been legitimated across religious traditions by the selective use of metaphors and symbols. Criticisms, concerning alienating trends in religious life, have been articulated in the modern period and are found in the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Habermas, yet for the most part are not
incorporated into many modern presentations of religious life, especially into religious education.

Attempts to understand religious judgement development and faith development through social scientific approaches are reviewed and these approaches suggest that individuals experience religious life differently throughout the life cycle and that some individuals express religious judgement and religious faith in less alienating ways than others.

In order, to address alienating trends and begin to articulate a non-alienating approach to religious life, the thesis follows the research of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and his understanding of the development of the history of religion. Smith argues that religious life is an ongoing human expression of faith through a tradition in a community.

The thesis concludes by suggesting that education about religious life needs to include but broaden the approach to religious life suggested by Smith, and also include spirituality and any ‘considered way of life’. As well, the thesis argues that the teaching of religious life needs to develop an holistic approach to curriculum, and as well incorporate insights from learning theory that demonstrate that individuals perceive and process information in different ways.
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Introduction

Across cultures and throughout human history religion has had a role to play in providing a framework for social life and a support for the lives of individuals. At times, religion has promoted the best qualities of human life including generosity, compassion, care and love. At other times religion has promoted lesser human qualities and religion has been used to legitimate oppression, war, bigotry and hatred. As Gregory Baum suggests, there is an ambiguity to religion. It can promote the best and, as well, the worst within the lives of individuals. This thesis is a study about religious life and how, at times, when presented in one-sided or alienating ways religious life does not promote the best within the lives of human beings, and does not fully enhance human life.

The thesis begins by arguing that society, and indeed, all aspects of social life, including religious traditions and religious knowledge, are human constructions. Religious life is a human construction and to forget that fact, may lead to a feeling of alienation. However, it is possible to create a religious environment

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that does exclude less and alienates fewer individuals. The keys are
to gain a wider perspective of religious life and understand the
construction of social reality.

Chapter two examines alienating trends within religious
traditions. As a tradition develops, the experience of the sacred is
increasingly mediated by a professional leadership. In addition,
there is usually a devaluation of the material world in order to
promote spiritual development. Furthermore, traditions are often
interpreted primarily intellectually and tend to alienate individuals
who are not trained religious thinkers. Lastly, traditions often
discriminate against women.

The third chapter examines major theories which attempt to
expose and explain some alienating trends in religious life as
articulated by Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Habermas. These
authors claim that religion at times devalues the world and fosters
unequal relationships [Hegel], legitimates inequalities and numbs
people to social injustices [Marx], discourages individuality and the
fulfilling of potential [Nietzsche], promotes infantilism and
illusions [Freud], and presents plausibility structures in non-
rational terms [Habermas]. These scholars reject religion for many
different reasons, but the underlying theme is that at times religion
alienates individuals from human experience in its multiformity and
Another way to examine alienation is to understand the process of change within the religious life of individuals. Several research projects which focus on religious development are reviewed within chapter four. The thesis examines the research of Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder on religious judgement and James Fowler on faith development. The research indicates that religious thinking and faith are not static qualities; they develop and change throughout life. Particularly useful from Fowler's research is the understanding of faith articulated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith which suggests that religious thinking and faith development need not be alienating.

Chapter five explores W. C. Smith's understanding of 'religion' as a way to interpret religious life in a non-alienating manner. Smith argues that many of the problems associated with alienating trends in religious life arise from not understanding the history of religious life; that the history of religious life is a single history expressed in different forms; that the western philosophical tradition, namely 'Philosophia' is one of the religious traditions of humanity; that there is no such thing as 'religion' rather individuals express faith through a tradition in a community; that when religion is framed in alienating terms faith is reduced to belief, tradition
develops into idolatry, and community becomes a cult.

Accepting that religious life is an ongoing human construction of faith expressed through a tradition in a community, it becomes possible for religious life to be passed on from generation to generation without falling into further alienating understandings. Chapter six begins with the suggestion that education about religious life should be expanded in order to incorporate philosophia, as well, any ‘spiritual’ or ‘considered way of life’, next research into holistic education is discussed, and finally a discussion into learning theory, especially the perceiving and processing of information, is presented.

Educators, whether in a religious institution or an academic setting, need to understand the criticisms raised about religious life and confront the alienating trends so that religious life may be continually constructed in more plausible ways to address the needs of individuals in the world today. Thus, individuals involved in education about religious life, whether in a school or a religious institution, whether communicating through a lesson, a sermon, or a counselling session, need to understand the process of alienation and alienating trends in order to move toward a non-alienating interpretation, understanding and presentation of religious life.
Chapter One

A Definition of Alienation within Religious Life

A. The Human Constructedness of Religious Life

Peter Berger has argued that human existence is a construction\(^1\). The constructedness of human life arises due to the unfinished environment into which a human being is thrust at birth. Due to the unfinished environment of the world, humans construct a social world in order for life to be interpreted as meaningful. Social life, according to Berger, is an inter-related, three-step dialectic of externalization, objectification and internalization\(^2\). Externalization is the activity by which humans produce a livable world and complete social reality. Objectification is the realization by an individual that the world is a separate reality, indeed an objective fact. Internalization is the process by which the objective world influences the subjective working of an individual, and the individual incorporates this reality personally. Society, then, is both a given and an ongoing human construction: an ongoing

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dialectical process between objective fact and subjective meaning. The more an individual internalizes a particular worldview, the more the individual has been socialized into a humanly constructed reality.

Berger also argues that the humanly constructed social world is precarious and subject to dissolution. Explanations and legitimations to maintain social reality come from many sides. Historically, religious traditions have been the legitimating force in society, and according to Berger the power of religious legitimation comes from its claim to provide answers and explanations in 'ultimate' terms. Religion functions as a 'sacred canopy', a sacred framework of beliefs, ideas and institutions which maintains the present order or 'nomos' of society. Religion does this by placing the 'nomos', or social order, in relation to the 'cosmos', or ultimate order. As Berger notes: “Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established.” Berger calls the process of interpreting the world through religious categories ‘cosmization’. In the modern period, Berger suggests, religious life is only one of many possible ways of interpreting the world. However, in

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earlier historical periods almost all worldviews were religious:

... in modern times there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization, among which modern science is by far the most important. It is safe to say, however, that originally all cosmization had a sacred character. This remained true through most of human history and not only through the millennia of human existence on earth preceding what we now call civilization. Viewed historically most of man's worlds have been sacred worlds. Indeed, it appears likely that only by way of the sacred was it possible for man to conceive of a cosmos in the first place.\(^6\)

B. Religion and Anomy

Berger argues that religion has been an important way for humans to make the world and cosmos meaningful; religion is an important tool in worldview construction. Religion serves to interpret marginal experiences such as suffering and death, which threaten the social order, and places these marginal experiences into a meaningful sacred order\(^7\). One of the main features of religion is to create and maintain a meaningful social order and in so doing, protect the individual from 'anomy'. To experience anomy is to be 'worldless' or 'rootless'. It is a "radical separation from the social

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 27.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 44.
order.” To counter anomy, religious traditions develop plausible explanations for life-denying events and marginalizing situations. The process of developing plausible explanations for suffering, inequality and death, and their incorporation into a religious worldview is called ‘theodicy’. A plausible theodicy permits the individual to integrate the anomic experiences of existence and relate them to the wider social world. Thus, theodicy is the process of religious legitimation and the acceptance of a plausible theodicy occurs when a person is socialized into a religious tradition. Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue that for socialization to occur the following conditions must be met:

... the establishment of a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality ... Maximal success in socialization is likely to occur in societies with very simple division of labor and minimal distribution of knowledge. Socialization under such conditions produces identities that are socially predefined and profiled to a high degree. Since every individual is confronted with essentially the same institutional program for his life in the society, the total force of the institutional order is brought to bear with more or less equal weight on each individual, producing a compelling massivity

8 Ibid., p. 22.
9 Ibid., p. 53.
for the objective reality to be internalized.\textsuperscript{10}

C. Religion and Alienation

In his theory of religious life in society, Berger differentiates between anomy and alienation. Anomy results when an individual experiences a feeling of rootlessness and feels unable to participate meaningfully in the social world. Alienation occurs when the dialectic between the individual and the world is lost and an individual understands himself only in society's terms. Alienation occurs when an individual identifies entirely with his social self, and thus, the individual becomes alienated from his true self and from his human nature\textsuperscript{11}.

The world for the alienated individual seems concrete and unchangeable. However, ironically, even the worldview of the alienated individual is a function of a dialectic: a one-sided objectification of the world. The alienated individual does not externalize social reality. The alienated individual 'reifies' or, in other words, perceives as concrete the humanly constructed social


\textsuperscript{11} Berger, p. 85.
world\textsuperscript{12}. The result of this ongoing one-sided dialectic is that the humanly constructed social order is maintained and the individual neither perceives the ongoing construction nor participates in the re-construction of the social world.

Berger argues that religion contributes to alienation by legitimating as sacred and eternal the humanly constructed world\textsuperscript{13}. Religion both promotes alienation and wards off anomy by ‘giving’ set structures and by ‘legitimating’ as sacred, the present social construction. For Berger, alienation has a positive component; alienation forces an individual to seek comfort through the nomos of society\textsuperscript{14}.

D. The Modern Situation: Anomy and Alienation

Since Berger wrote this sociology of religion, the unfolding of religious life in society has changed. Some individuals continue to accept the plausibility structures of the nomos/cosmos connection which traditional religions present and continue to have a need for religious life. However, for most individuals in western society

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 85.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 95.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 87.
regular involvement with a religious tradition is minimal\textsuperscript{15}. Still, many continue to have religious beliefs and are interested in spirituality\textsuperscript{16}, yet feel alienated from existing religious structures and institutions. In other words, the nomos/cosmos plausibility structure presented by religious traditions is not meaningful for the majority of individuals. As well, the alienation or the feeling of being unable to humanize or positively change a tradition may seem overwhelming. Unlike Berger's sociology of religion which generally talks about either anomy or alienation, many people today experience both anomy and alienation with respect to most traditional forms of religious life.

This thesis argues that educators either within a religious tradition or an academic institution need to understand and address alienating trends. In particular, educators need to understand ways in which a one-sided dialectic unfolds in religious life and allow religious life to be externalized by individuals in a meaningful way. A non-alienating understanding of religious life is always a dialectical process. Alienation is overcome when traditions are open to ongoing constructions and when individuals are allowed to


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 134-135.
participate in the process. Once this openness is in place and individuals are allowed into the process, then religious life may begin to become more meaningful and plausible: a modern way of linking the cosmos and nomos. Meaningful religious traditions can be constructed which will enhance the lives of individuals if alienating trends are addressed. How religious traditions evolve and alienating trends develop are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Two

Alienation within Religious Life:
The Development of Religious Traditions and Alienation

A. Religious Life as Experience of the Sacred

Mircea Eliade, the distinguished historian of religion, argues that each of the religious traditions of the world has, at its core, an experience of the sacred\(^1\). However, each religious tradition defines the sacred in different ways. Some, like the western religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, view the sacred 'theistically', believing that the sacred cares for and relates to people at a personal level. On the other hand, persons within the eastern religious tradition of Buddhism experience the sacred non-theistically and define the sacred without reference to 'God'. Eliade argues that, regardless of the definition of the sacred, each religious tradition claims that the experience of sacred orientates one's life to a 'deeper' sense of fulfilment and connects the faithful to that which is 'really' important; the feeling of chaos is removed\(^2\).


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 29.
and life takes on meaning and significance.\(^3\)

This understanding of the sacred may seem somewhat at odds with what most people in western society consider religious life. Often people associated with western religious traditions interpret religious life in terms of believing certain religious ideas and leading a moral life. For example, at the popular level in North America, a follower of the Christian faith might be understood as a person who believes in God and follows such precepts as the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. However, as it will be argued the process of intellectualizing about the sacred and the development of morality can be viewed as alienating.

The first part of this chapter presents a brief and generalized schema of the development of religious traditions while the argument focuses on alienating trends in their development: specifically how religious leaders have legitimated concepts, codes of behaviour and activities that have alienated many people from full participation in religious life. The argument suggests that there has been a drift from an experience of the sacred, especially the primary or defining religious experiences of the first followers of a religious tradition, to a participation in religious life as spectator, observing the practices and following the ideas of the

B. Stages of Development in Religious Traditions

Robert Ellwood has argued that religious traditions generally can be categorized into one of two groups: those which have developed through the idealization of aspects of ancient empires or cultures and those which have developed through the religious vision of a founder. In the first category, the Hindu religious tradition can be interpreted as a long evolving process in the sub-continent of India related to the development of Aryan culture. In the same way, the religious traditions of China tended to develop as pragmatic worldviews both supporting and criticizing various Chinese dynasties and giving legitimation to many aspects of life.

In the second category, some religious traditions have been based on the religious vision of a founder. According to Ellwood, these traditions pass through the following stages of development. First there is the founder of a religious tradition and a close, ‘apostolic’ circle of followers: for example Jesus and the twelve apostles, as well as the Buddha with his five ascetic comrades in

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5 Ibid., pp. 25-53.
the deer park at Isipatana. During this first stage, the life of the founder is viewed and interpreted in terms of an ideal story which represents the hopes and dreams of the followers. Furthermore, this is a time of both missionary advancement and enthusiasm, but also perhaps a time of conflict as followers try to gain consensus as to the direction of the faith after the death of the founder.

Ellwood argues that at the second stage of development, often the religious tradition either has been accepted into the socio-cultural environment or has made accommodation with the cultural tradition. Examples are Constantine's embracing of Christianity and consequently the preferred religious status afforded it, as well as, Ashoka's acceptance of Buddhism in India.

Reaction and devotion characterize Ellwood's third stage. Often some religious followers react against the close accommodation that some members of the tradition have made with secular powers, and thus attempt to regain through a deepening of

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10 Ibid., p. 48.
devotion that which they feel has been lost. In the Christian tradition, the Reformation led by Martin Luther and John Calvin moved in this direction, and in the Hindu tradition Chaitanya developed the Bhakti or devotional movement\textsuperscript{11}.

The final stage within Ellwood's schema is termed the modern. This stage differs from the preceding ones in that its unfolding is due not so much to dynamics within the tradition as to world developments, particularly science and technology\textsuperscript{12}. Yet, even within a religious tradition there are many ways of dealing with modern developments. In the Christian tradition there is the rejection of the modern world [the Amish], the rejection of explanations of the modern world [Fundamentalist], and various forms of adaptations to the modern world from conservative to liberal.

This brief schema presents a generalized theory of the development of a religious tradition. However, what Ellwood ignores in his discussion is the way in which religious life has often changed from an informal, broadly based experience of the sacred to an institutional, often hierarchical tradition which legitimates the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 49.
religious worldview of a few. Rarely, as a religious tradition developed was consideration given to the worldview of the entire membership of the tradition. More often, symbols were developed by members of the religious leadership which tended to legitimate their position of power during the second stage as consolidation occurred. Furthermore, even the third stage of reform and renewed devotion would often lead to a new institutionalism and consequently the consolidation of a new stage two.

By studying in more detail the development of religious traditions certain alienating trends can be uncovered, such as the formation of a religious hierarchy, monasticism and the devaluation of the natural world, theological and philosophical speculation, and patriarchy resulting in the subordination and oppression of women. Uncovering these alienating trends is a first step in developing a non-alienating understanding of religious life.

C. The Development of Religious Institutions and Alienation: Hierarchy, Monasticism, Theological Speculation, and Patriarchy

Hierarchy

Characteristically, as a religious tradition develops, two trends unfold. First, a professional leadership becomes established which increasingly mediates the relationship between members of a religious tradition and the sacred. Second, the religious group itself, becomes more distinctly organized into an 'official' religious institution\(^\text{14}\). Both of these trends can be seen within the Christian tradition. By the end of the second century many forms of the Christian faith claimed to be the true expression. The, soon to be victorious, ‘orthodox church’ developed objective criteria for recognition of a ‘true’ Christian. The church leadership established that an ‘orthodox’ Christian must submit to the following: confess the creed, undergo the ritual of baptism, participate in worship, and obey the clergy\(^\text{15}\). Thus, by the second century of the Christian tradition, the beginnings of a religious hierarchy were in place, with the priests established in a position of religious authority. By the first years of the third century Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, took an even more definitive step. He identified only the ordained ecclesiastical elite as ‘the Church’, thereby alienating most followers of the Christian tradition because they lacked the position

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 67.

and status of the clergy. Increasingly, as the Christian tradition developed, members of the clergy were set apart, due to the belief that the Spirit of God was more focused in some people, namely the clerics, than others.

The belief that some members in a religious tradition are 'closer' to the sacred than others is not unique to the Christian tradition. Within both the Buddhist and the Hindu traditions there is the understanding that the sacred is 'closer' or 'more at hand' within some members of a religious tradition than others. For example, the arhant, literally 'the worthy one' in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, could be a monk, a nun or a lay devotee. However, in actual practice, whenever a lay person achieved a 'higher' state of 'Enlightenment', the person should enter the Buddhist religious order that same day, because the spiritual growth of countless previous re-incarnations has merited the person this 'higher', separate position. Similarly, within the Hindu tradition, to be born into the Brahmin caste, which is the elite socio-religious class in the Hindu tradition, means that a person's 'atman', or essential self, through

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16 Cooke, p. 69.

17 Ibid., p. 54.

countless generations has accumulated merit for a high caste incarnation\textsuperscript{19}. This translates into higher status and greater privileges in the social system than a lower caste person. Thus, in the examples cited, the religiously constructed nomos, the ideas and practices of religious leaders, legitimated the position of a few and linked their position to a higher level than those who were 'non-professional' members of a religious tradition. Cosmization placed some people hierarchically over others and legitimated their position as 'closer' to the sacred.

Monasticism

Generally speaking religious traditions have tended to devalue the material world, or in more traditional language, there has often been a greater emphasis placed on spiritual life than on physical life. Within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, all aspects of the material world, including the human body, participate in the realm of illusion, called Samsara, with 'reality' only identified with the immaterial, spiritual realm\textsuperscript{20}. Similarly, in the Christian tradition there was often a distinct separation of spiritual life and physical life, with the spiritual life being associated with images of light,


\textsuperscript{20} Conze, pp. 11-15.
purity, truth, love, and goodness and the physical life being represented as dirty, evil, carnal, and lower\textsuperscript{21}.

To remove the temptations of physical life members of a religious tradition often distanced themselves apart from society in order to mark themselves off as separate and distinct, as the religious elite or as religious virtuosos\textsuperscript{22}. The monastic movement within the Buddhist and Christian traditions and, the forest dweller stage in the Hindu tradition suggest that there are special places, separate and distinct from ordinary social life, where persons will be closer to or in more immediate contact with the sacred. Thus, whether in the forests of India or the deserts of Egypt, monasticism represents an attempt by 'elite' members of a religious tradition to flee from ordinary, social life into often isolated environments in order to establish a 'closer' relationship to the sacred and remove the 'temptations and distractions' of life\textsuperscript{23}.

The movement from regular community to a special, 'religious' community provides another example of religious alienation since a two-tiered approach to religious life develops. This suggests that

\textsuperscript{21}Galatians 5: 16-23.


\textsuperscript{23}Cooke, p. 65.
some members of a religious community are closer to the sacred and concomitantly that 'true' religious life cannot be found in a secular community\textsuperscript{24}. As well, this results in a devaluation of the material world implying that the material world is merely preparation for the next and that the unfolding of events in the world are unimportant. What becomes important, then, is to try to withdraw, as much as possible, from the material world. Religious experience and spiritual fulfilment are not to be found in the world, but rather by withdrawing from it. A disciplined, penitential life under sometimes austere conditions becomes the way for spiritual fulfilment\textsuperscript{25}. Ironically, the monastic pathway of austere living, depriving the body and denying the senses carried to its logical extreme resulted in martyrdom, the ultimate way to become united with the sacred: a truly 'elite' way of religious life!

Theological Speculation

With increasing clerical/priest or 'professional' domination of a religious tradition, religious life tends to become more conceptual and idea centred. This tendency towards intellectual discourse both in western and eastern religious traditions has additionally

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 127.
alienated some people from experiences of the sacred. Augustine in the Christian tradition, Nagarjuna in the Buddhist tradition, and Shankara in the Hindu tradition interpreted their respective religious system primarily intellectually, with intellectual contemplation unfolding as the way to experience the sacred.\(^{26}\)

Augustine, for example, was attracted to the material world, yet understood the world as a temptation, “a seductive invitation to neglect the ‘things of the spirit’”.\(^{27}\) After Augustine in the Christian tradition, the pathway to the sacred became increasingly linked with reason and the contemplative life. As Bernard Cooke writes:

Beneath this quest for contemplative union with the divine lies the philosophical view of humans as essentially spirit, able to participate increasingly in the spiritual existence proper to God, yet radically distanced by their own temporal mutability from the eternal and immutable God.\(^{28}\)

Again within the Christian tradition, the primacy given to intellectual discourse can be seen with respect to the various

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\(^{27}\) Cooke, p. 193.

discussions concerning the nature of the Trinity\(^{29}\). At best, these discussions were understood by a few; but more to the point, discussions about the person of Jesus as founder of a religious movement shifted to a discussion about Jesus as the heavenly Christ. The human person who was the original focus of faith increasingly became viewed in supernatural terms.

Within Buddhism, a similar change occurs with the historical figure of Siddhartha Gautama who, within the Theravada tradition, is interpreted as a human being. Yet over the years and in dialogue with cultures outside of India, the historical person known as Siddhartha became increasingly viewed as a supernatural being, re-incarnating as a Boddhisattva bringing Enlightenment to all who suffer throughout the ages\(^{30}\). Both the Christian and Buddhist examples show how the historical founder of a religious tradition can be lifted out of history by intellectual speculation and distanced from historical settings by religious leaders.

Thus, often, theological developments have the tendency to alienate or divide the common people from the trained clergy due to the supposition that by reason one could be united with the sacred. The ability to think theologically ranked people hierarchically in

\(^{29}\) Pagels, pp. 61-63.

\(^{30}\) Conze, pp. 125-130.
their ability to relate to the sacred, with clergy and monks at a higher level than members of the laity.  

It can be seen that, with the advance of religious speculative thinking within religious traditions, not only did most people become distanced or alienated from 'theological' ideas, but also a common understanding of religious life was replaced by an elitist; when excessively intellectual explanations dominate a religious tradition, there develops an increasingly one-sided understanding of what religious faith 'means'. 'Faith' becomes understood as belief, as an intellectual assent to dogma. Faith is reduced to correct thinking and believing rather than a response of one's entire being. The perception, then, is that people who have an intellectual understanding of a religious tradition have a 'better and greater' faith. As Cooke points out: "... there was increased dependence upon language and concepts drawn from philosophy, and greater separation between theologically educated and noneducated."  

This understanding of faith as belief alienates people whose

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31 Cooke, p. 94.


33 Cooke, p. 72.
orientation to life is not primarily intellectual\textsuperscript{34} and alienates people who express faith in other ways: for example by acts of charity, by feelings of devotion, or through meditative insight.

Thus, an increasingly intellectual approach meant that the religious experts, the priests, ministers, and monks became the true interpreters of tradition and texts. Consequently, a common or simple meaning of a text would be replaced by a deeper, allegorical, or 'spiritual' interpretation of the text as put forward by educated members of the religious tradition. Cooke argues that this understanding suggests that ordinary human experience and ordinary human understanding are incapable of relating to the sacred\textsuperscript{35}.

In terms of religious life, this alienating of the sacred through speculative theology has all too often acted as a barrier to people who desire direct participation in religious life. Often common people are reduced to religious spectators, with the religious leaders teaching dogma and performing rituals. Thus, many religious pathways appear blocked and the religious life of the common person often is reduced to following religious codes of moral behaviour; increasingly, to be devout meant that one was a 'good' person\textsuperscript{36} who

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 42.\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 45.\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 109.
was obedient to secular and ecclesiastical structures and behaved morally. The experience of the sacred appears as a goal of educated priests, monks, and other 'spiritual athletes'\textsuperscript{37} and religious life for the laity is reduced to merely fulfilling moral religious commandments. Following the moral law which the clergy prescribe and performing acts of charity and good-will often became the normative understanding of religious life for people alienated within a religious tradition\textsuperscript{38}.

Patriarchy
The distancing or alienating of women in religious life has had a long history and is across traditions\textsuperscript{39}. From the eastern tradition of Jainism, the Digambaras claim: “The greatest temptation in the world are women”\textsuperscript{40}, and women “cannot win salvation until they are born as men. That is their only hope”\textsuperscript{41}. Within the Buddhist tradition, nuns were reluctantly accepted as part of the monastic

\textsuperscript{37} Collins, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 93.


\textsuperscript{40} J. B. Noss, Man's Religions (London: Collier-Macmillian Ltd., 1969), p. 120.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 120.
movement but were subordinated to the monks and as a religious order were always relatively weak. This is not surprising since the Buddha himself is to have said:

If, Ananda, women had not received permission to enter the Order, the pure religion would have lasted, the good law would have stood fast a thousand years. But since they have received permission, it will now stand fast for only five hundred years.42

Within the Hindu tradition, there is the same tendency to treat women in a second class way and as the property of males. Women were forced to undergo child marriages, female infanticide, polygamy, and suttee, were banned from remarriage, lacked both education and property rights, were secluded and were victims of violence43. From the Hindu scripture The Code of Manu there is the following principle: “In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her Lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.”44 This alienating trend can also be seen as well in the concept of ‘Dharma’, or the moral law of the universe which prescribed a woman’s role as wife and mother. If a

42 Ibid., p. 132.


44 Ibid., p. 193.
woman failed to fulfill these roles, she would be considered as "out of place".45

Other eastern religious traditions also carried a strong patriarchy. Within Confucianism, the doctrine of filial piety stressed the importance of boys and the unimportance of girls. Families viewed daughters as commodities, while husbands saw wives as the instruments to carry on the family line.46 From Japan, where both Shinto and Buddhism have a long tradition, Nancy Barnes notes:

Traditional Shinto belief insists that women are polluted and impure - a view reinforced in common Japanese thinking by the Buddhist notion that women carry greater karmic hindrances than men do, and are therefore at a lower stage of spiritual development.47

However, it appears that the subordination of women within a religious traditions was not always so. Earliest archeological evidence seems to suggest that female understandings of the sacred began in the paleolithic and neolithic cultures and that

45 Falk, p. 807.
representations of the sacred through female characteristics can be found in worship artifacts in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Crete. The archeological evidence suggests that early symbolic representations of the sacred with female characteristics revolved around associations of women with the mysteries of fertility, childbirth and life. As Mircea Eliade writes:

One of the salient features in all agricultural societies is the solidarity they see between the fertility of the land and that of their women. For a long time the Greeks and the Romans identified the soil with the womb, and agricultural labour with the act of generation. We find this same identification elsewhere in a great many civilizations, and it gave rise to a large number of beliefs and rites.

Thus, research into the history of religious life suggests that many forms of religious life were matriarchal, the ancient civilization of Sumer being an example. However, as civilizations and empires developed, patriarchal forms of religious life gained

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dominance and control\textsuperscript{51}. This dominance of religious traditions by men has had a long and, at times, violent consequence for women. Within the Jewish tradition the patriarchal 'slam' against women can be seen in the first few chapters of the Bible where the 'blame' for the fall of humanity is based upon the woman's weakness and her succumbing to temptation\textsuperscript{52}.

In the development of the Christian tradition, the outlook toward women changed very little, especially as Greek philosophy became the explanatory underpinning for theology and as Greek values were incorporated into the Christian church. The church tended to identify maleness with spirit and reason, and femaleness with matter and emotion\textsuperscript{53}. In the early Christian church, the \textit{imago Dei}, or the image of God, was male and derived from Greek philosophical ideals\textsuperscript{54} and consequently women were not made in the image of God. Beginning with this early theological articulation and continuing for centuries, the Christian tradition understood that the

\textsuperscript{51} Ellwood, pp. 41-43.

\textsuperscript{52} Genesis 2:15-3:24.


\textsuperscript{54} Cooke, p. 40.
task of women was to "assimilate themselves to men."\textsuperscript{55} As R. M. Gross points out:

The developments of biblical theology seem to involve not only monotheism replacing polytheism, and history replacing nature as the realm of divine activity, but also the male deity replacing the female.\textsuperscript{56}

It can be seen then that the development of religious organizations by men, intellectual reflection stressing male values and images, and the development of moral and social codes by men have all acted as factors in alienating or distancing most women from religious life.

D. Summary

There have been at least four alienating trends in the development of religious traditions. First, there is the distancing of the sacred from the majority of people due to the mediatorial role of religious leaders. Second, the development of the monastic movement suggests that living in special places, separate and apart from common life, leads to a higher and better form of religious life where one is closer to the sacred; consequently, there is a devaluation of the material world. Third, there is the distancing of

\textsuperscript{55} Pagels, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{56} Gross, p. 255.
the sacred from ordinary experience due to an over reliance on speculative, intellectual concepts as the bridge to the sacred; the majority of people has religious life reduced to fulfilling the moral requirements which clerics dictate\textsuperscript{57}. And fourth, religious traditions have been developed, maintained, and legitimated almost entirely by men; religious life, from the establishment and inhabiting of religious institutions to the articulation of the sacred life, has developed almost without exception under the control of men.

Alienating trends have been sensed by some people throughout centuries but have only been explicitly articulated in the past few generations as the plausibility structures of the religious traditions have increasingly been viewed as suspect. As a result, many people presently either feel alienated from religious traditions because of the way that they are constructed and legitimated, or experience anomie as traditional religious worldviews do not seem plausible, and thus people choose not to participate. As Nancy Barnes writes:

There is a need, in the West as well as in the East, for a religiously, personally, and communally practical model that accounts for differences - male-female, divine-mundane, subject-object, active-passive, and so forth - without placing them in opposition.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Cooke, pp. 122-123.

\textsuperscript{58} Barnes, p. 168.
These discussions of alienating trends within the development of religious traditions lead to the modern period when Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers have articulated alienating trends in religious traditions and have highlighted the social constructedness of religious life.
Chapter Three

Hermeneutics and Alienation within Religious Life:

Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Habermas

A. Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion centres on alienating trends within religious life as articulated by some of the most influential thinkers of modern intellectual history. This discussion forms an essential element of the argument of the thesis: specifically that education about religious life needs to understand the criticisms and work through the alienating trends. Furthermore, individuals involved in education about religious life, whether in a school or a religious institution should take account of these criticisms in order to move toward a non-alienating interpretation and presentation of religious life. Granted, some of the criticisms presented in this chapter misrepresent religious traditions in terms of unrealistic stereotypes [Hegel], present one-sided views [Marx], and use dubious sources to construct religious theories [Nietzsche], deal with only psychological reality [Freud], interpret religious life only through rational, philosophical categories [Habermas]. However, the criticisms do show alienating trends in human religious life and, once again, alienating trends need to be understood and addressed by
religious educators.

B. Georg F. W. Hegel

'Good' and 'Bad' Religion

One of the first individuals in the modern period to write about alienating trends in religious life was the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. In the book *Early Theological Writings*¹ Hegel argued that alienating, indeed dehumanizing trends, constituted some forms of religious life. In particular, he believed that the faith of Abraham, as expressed in the Old Testament, differed considerably from the faith of Jesus as expressed in the New Testament. Specifically, Hegel argued that Abraham, the patriarch and architect of the Jewish tradition, developed three alienating religious concepts.

First, Abraham understood God as the creator who remained an 'object' and 'stranger' to the world. The world was "sustained by the God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was under his mastery."² Consequently, because God cannot be found in the world, Abraham turned from the world to find God. Hegel charged that Abraham regarded the whole

world as God's opposite and that Abraham and his descendants came into relation with the world only through God\(^3\). Thus, Abraham's understanding of God was rooted in Abraham's own contempt for the world\(^4\). God was "outside them, unseen and unfelt."\(^5\) Patrick Masterson writes:

... for Hegel, the Jew is a slave who has alienated, handed over to God, his freedom, his autonomy, his authentic creativity and subjectivity. More precisely, he has not yet achieved a conscious realization of his kinship and unity as spirit with the absolute, and of the exigencies of this spirituality which must be satisfied in any allegedly authentic religious relationship. Because of his impoverished conception of human life he submits to an absolute dichotomy between man and God and locates the source of any meaning and value which must adorn human existence in the inscrutable providence of an utterly transcendent Lord.\(^6\)

This dichotomy or dualistic understanding developed a view that the world was both a foreign realm and a source of danger. To cope with this harsh environment, the Jews projected onto God a

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 187.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 188.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 193.
harsh image: God was a stern guardian who would provide protection from nature. However, if God is interpreted as object and stranger, then humans can neither experience God within themselves nor have inner harmony. Furthermore, if God cannot be found in the world, then the fulfilment of humanity cannot be found in the world. Rather, it is to be found in heaven with God. Thus, the religious ideas of Abraham also alienated humanity from the depths of human existence.

This, then, results in a third form of alienation. Abraham's religious views resulted in humans becoming alienated from other humans. Since Abraham removes the concept of God from human life by defining God as object and stranger, Abraham becomes alienated from his own depths, and furthermore, Abraham will be unable to bridge the gulf that separates him from another person. Hegel reasoned that if God is not to be found in the world, and if true human nature likewise is not to be experienced in the world, the consequence is that human relations are devalued. Masterson writes about Hegel's understanding of alienation:

... an alienated form of religious belief, which fails to convey that man's freedom is something essentially self-possessed as an intrinsic moment of the divine life rather than something set over against and dominated by a transcendent divine Will, must inevitably engender multiform alienation throughout the whole range of
Hegel criticized the Jewish faith because he believed that it idealized and spiritualized relationships. This resulted in a situation where humans could no longer relate to each other in terms of their humanity. Humans feel cut off from God, their own depths, each other and consequently feel alone. These three alienating features of Abraham’s faith Hegel called ‘bad’ religion: a religion of law. Hegel contrasted ‘bad’ religion with ‘good’ religion. ‘Good’ religion for Hegel was the faith of Jesus: a religion of love, a religion where the divine could be seen operating in the world, in one’s personal depth and in one’s relation to others. Hegel claimed that Abraham was a person who did not learn to love and who wanted to be free by not loving.

Thus, Hegel believed that the Old Testament scriptures were the writings of a people who were not able to accept the divine within life. The Jews denied the best within themselves and projected this quality as ‘God’ who is ‘Lord’ outside of and over the earth. The ‘Lord above’ represented a universe of law and retribution, and the only way humanity could fulfill the divine law

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7 Ibid., p. 56.
8 Baum, pp. 9-15.
9 Hegel, Early Theological Writings, p. 185.
was by submitting to the divine law of domination. The rationale for this type of theology was a refusal to love.

In *Early Theological Writings*, Hegel used the Jewish religious tradition as a means to demonstrate everything that he believed was ‘wrong’ or alienating within religious life. Gregory Baum suggests that there is a two-fold reason for Hegel’s use of the Jewish tradition. On the one hand, Hegel wrote from an anti-semitic perspective which has been latent within the Christian tradition and western culture for thousands of years; the Jews are often viewed by the predominately Christian culture as ‘hardened of heart’, ‘legalistic’, ‘blind to spiritual realities’, and deserving of their fate since they killed the ‘messiah’\(^{10}\). Thus, on the one hand there is an anti-semitic ideology within the writings of Hegel. Yet, on the other hand, Hegel also used the Jewish tradition as a literary device, by which to explore ‘typologically’ both alienated and de-alienated faith traditions\(^{11}\).

In terms of Berger’s understanding of religious development outlined earlier, Hegel believed that the God of the Jews was an ‘objective fact’ and God could not be internalized. Hegel understood

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\(^{11}\) Baum, p.10.
the concept of God within the Jewish tradition as a given objective fact acting heteronomously toward humans. However, this is actually a caricature of the Jewish faith as a law-based religious tradition containing elements of heteronomy and alienation. Hegel correctly identified alienating trends of religious life, but not necessarily of the Jewish tradition. Rather, he identified alienating trends within the stereotypical Christian interpretation of the Jewish faith.

Master-Slave Relationship

There is another form of alienation articulated within Hegel's writings, and this form is called the master-slave relationship. According to Hegel the master-slave relationship unfolds in the following manner:

Self-consciousness is, to begin with, simple being-for-self, self equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else. For it, its essence and absolute object is "I"; and in this immediacy, or in this [mere] being, of its being-for-self, it is an individual ... The presentation of itself, however, as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common to existence as such,
that is not attached to life.\textsuperscript{12}

The master is a "consciousness existing for itself which is mediated with itself through other consciousness..."\textsuperscript{13}, and the master "achieves his recognition through another consciousness."\textsuperscript{14} In other words, the identity of the master lies in the slave, whom the master subordinates and makes to fulfill his will. However, the more the master demands of the master-slave relationship to fulfill his life, the more the self-consciousness of the master is developed, and the basis for the development of self-consciousness of 'master' resides with the slave. The master, then, upon being self-conscious of the 'other' called the slave, realizes that the slave is a potential threat to his identity and development. According to Hegel, to counter this threat, the master must eliminate the slave as a subject\textsuperscript{15}. The master accomplishes the elimination of the slave's subjectivity by possessing what the slave produces. By possessing what the slave has produced the master attempts to deny the slave's


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 116.

subjectivity. Consequently, the master appears unique. The master destroys similarity by possessing the slave’s production, and also by demanding homage and allegiance. Thus, the master constructs and maintains his uniqueness, freedom, and independence by subordinating the slave by all means available\textsuperscript{16}.

This is, however, an ironic situation. The basis for the uniqueness, freedom and independence of the master rests upon someone else. The independence of the master depends upon the slave\textsuperscript{17}. Since a ‘master’ means that there must be a ‘slave’, the role of the master depends on the role of the slave and the subjectivity of the master as ‘unique’ depends on the subjectivity of the slave. Therefore, the master-slave relationship is unstable because the seeds of independence for the slave lie within the relationship. Over time, by producing for the master the slave develops skills and abilities, and through these skills becomes aware of the dependence of the master to the slave; the production of the slave enhances the subjectivity of the slave:

\textit{But just as Lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself and be}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 231.
transformed into a truly independent consciousness.\textsuperscript{18}

Since the master lacks the skill of the slave, the master becomes dependent on the slave's skills. Therefore, each depends albeit unconsciously upon the other and each has power over the other. Yet, the power in each case is different. For the slave, the power of the master lies in the master's life and death control of the slave and the slave is afraid of the master due to the threat that he poses. On the other hand, the slave produces for the master, and the master realizes that he, as master, is dependent and consequently grows in anxiety, knowing that he needs the labour and production of the slave\textsuperscript{19}.

The role of the slave changes psychologically when the slave develops the awareness of his potential as an independent self. The slave, although controlled in almost all areas of life, can have freedom of thought. Hegel writes:

\begin{quote}
In thinking, I \textit{am free}, because I am not in an \textit{other}, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the \textit{essential} being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{19} Allen, p. 232.
within myself.\textsuperscript{20}

However, since the slave is only free in thought and not free from the master's dominance the slave adopts a Stoic attitude to life:

... Stoicism is the freedom which always comes directly out of bondage, but also a time of universal culture which had raised itself to a level of thought.\textsuperscript{21}

The attempt of the slave to overcome the opposition of existence in the master-slave relationship is fraught with problems. The slave has freedom of thought, but does not have freedom in other areas of his life. Thus, to overcome this new problem, the Stoic slave becomes the Sceptic slave, doubting the significance of the external world, doubting all\textsuperscript{22}. The independence of the slave's identity is gained by 'losing the world' denying the significance of the world\textsuperscript{23}. Hegel writes:

What Scepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it, in which the "other" is held to be objective and is firmly established as such, and hence, too, its perceiving, along with firmly securing what it is in danger of

\textsuperscript{20} Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid.}, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{22} Allen, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ibid.}, p. 232.
losing, viz. *sophistry*, and the truth it has itself determined and established.\textsuperscript{24}

In addition, in terms of Berger's dialectical understanding of religious life, the slave understands the social situation and its construction, yet does not act out or externalize his internal thoughts. The master, on the other hand, works to maintain the status quo, works to maintain symbols and structures which maintain the objective fact of the socially constructed world, and attempts to legitimate the objective, seemingly unchangeable, nature of the world.

Diogenes Allen, a philosopher and theologian, comments on Hegel’s analysis of the master-slave relationship and its significance:

*The master-slave relation, for example, greatly illumines features in every relation of subordination and dominance. It can guide one in assessing which relations are destructive and which are not, and also why. The dynamics he presents can be used to study the marriage relation, the relation of teacher to pupil, parent to child, employer and employee, pastor and parishioner, counselor and client, as well as the relationship between Jesus and his disciples and the relationship of God to us.*\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{25} Allen, p. 233.
Much of the significance of the master-slave relationship for education about religious life has been outlined in the first part of the thesis: hierarchy, clerical elitism and patriarchy. These perspectives tend to reinforce the position of the master, usually male religious leaders, educators, priests and theologians and keep the slave, or in other words, religious followers and especially women, in subordinate religious roles.

C. Karl Marx

Although the writings of Karl Marx focused mainly on economic concerns, he wrote extensively about religious life and particularly about the way in which religious traditions supported existing social structures. Marx’s understanding of religious life developed through two sources: the writings of Hegel and of Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx incorporated Hegel’s dialectic process in order to invert Hegel’s understanding of religious life\textsuperscript{26} and as well moved beyond it. As a first step, Marx rejected Hegel’s view that the mind was in touch with reality. His second step was the negation of religious life by offering a practical humanism. In the third step or synthesis Marx argued that his new synthesis was more than an idea. It was

the actual construction of a social organization through communism. Thus, Marx believed that Hegel did not go far enough in his discussion of religious life: everything still remained as a system of thought. The real goal was social change.

Feuerbach also influenced Marx's understanding of religion. Feuerbach argued that religion was a form of self-alienation and that the religious world was an illusory, imaginative world. Humanity created God by projecting God into the heavens and as well projected the greatest abilities and aspirations of humanity on to God. These insights of Feuerbach provided a second source for Marx's understanding of religion. However, Marx criticized Feuerbach for leaving his criticism of religion incomplete: "... he had not inverted the status quo, but only reversed it." Thus, Marx expanded Feuerbach's analysis because he believed that the real goal was to change behaviour not beliefs. Marx writes:

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations ... Feuerbach, consequently does not see that the "religious

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27 Ibid., p. 29.

28 Ibid., p. 17.

sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyzes belongs in reality to a particular form of society.30

According to Marx, religious life had social causes; the various exploitations of one human being by another results in religion31. The basis for religious life lies in the oppression found in both social relationships and economic conditions; it develops as a response to the economic and social inequalities of life. Alienated or estranged from the product of their labour people developed religion.

Marx believed that religion was a particular example of ideological mystification which rationalized feelings of estrangement and economic inequalities. Religion acts as a drug or as a narcotic, and it does so in two ways. First, it masks the pain of the poor and the powerless, and second it acts as a painkiller to soothe the conscience of the rich32. As Merold Westphal notes, "religion and opium are painkillers that are not only addictive but

31 Masterson, p. 28.
32 Westphal, p. 138.
even worse, since they treat symptoms rather than diseases."³³

Remove the contradictions in social life, remove economic
inequalities and there would not be a need for religion. Alienation
would cease and the product of alienation, namely religion, would
disappear. As Masterson says:

For Marx the critique of religion enjoys
privileged position in a general critique of
ideological mystification, not because it is
its most fundamental source, but because it
is its crowning and most palliative
manifestation. ³⁴

Marx himself wrote:

The task of history, therefore once the world
beyond the truth has disappeared, is to
establish the truth of this world. The
immediate task of philosophy, which is at
the service of history, once the saintly form
of human self-alienation has been unmasked,
is to unmask self-alienation in its unholy
forms. Thus, the criticism of heaven turns
into the criticism of the earth, the criticism
of religion into the criticism of the right
and the criticism of theology into the
criticism of politics.³⁵

Marx argued that the burden of social life distorts human


consciousness. Humans themselves construct the ideas of religion in order to deal with the inequalities of life\textsuperscript{36}. People perceive the social order as a given, and consequently assumptions go unchallenged. The irony of the situation is, then, that humans produce and construct the ideological system which subsequently enslaves and alienates them. Men and women are not made by religious life. Men and women make religious life as a way of dealing with suffering, privations and inequalities in the world\textsuperscript{37}. Marx, writing in \textit{German Ideology} with Friedrick Engels, describes the human constructedness of social life:

The producers of men's ideas, notions, etc., are men, but real active men as determined by a definite development of their productive forces and the intercourse corresponding to those productive forces up to the remotest form ... Thus, morals, religion, metaphysics, and other forms of ideology and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them no longer retain their apparent independence. They have no history, they have no development, but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, with this, their reality, their thinking and the products of their thinking also change. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life determines

\textsuperscript{36} Masterson, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{37} Newell, p. 32.
Gregory Baum suggests that the result of this assumption about the social order is that people, ... generate ideas that protect the falsification of perception. First, among these ideas is religion. Religion persuades people that the present ordering of society is the acceptable order.39

Or as Marx writes:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has not either found himself or has already lost himself again.40

Furthermore, Marx writing in Capital argues that:

... the religious world is but a reflex of the real world. And for a society based on the production of commodities, in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values, whereby they reduce their individual private labour to the standard of homogeneous human labour - for such a society, Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c., is the most fitting form of


39 Baum, p. 24.

40 Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", p. 41.
Unlike Hegel, who differentiated between 'bad' and 'good', or in other words, 'alienating' and 'non-alienating' religion, Marx believed that all forms of religious life expressed estrangement and alienation. Religion blocks one's perception of the injustices in society and alienates humanity from the task of building a more humane world order. All religious understandings define human life essentially in terms other than human. This non-human expression means a loss of human autonomy. Masterson writes:

The contention involved in this critique, namely that an affirmation of God as a being distinct from and superior to man is intrinsically alienating, rests on the assumption that reality admits of and requires an exclusively immanent accomplishment of human autonomy and human fulfilment.42

Marx attempted to oppose and expose any ideology which tended to enslave or alienate human life. Thus, he reacted with ferocity to such movements as 'Christian Socialism'. He argued, with Engels, that such systems were a hindrance to the establishment of a just world:

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not


42 Masterson, p. 89.
Christianity decried against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat ... 43

Two points emerge from Marx's understanding of religious life. First, Marx criticized religion, because in his view, the social and economic conditions of humanity gave rise to religious sentiments as a way to escape the cruelties of life. Marx criticized the narcotic effect of religion which numbed people to the concrete struggle to establish a just world, and his atheism develops out of a moral concern for a more just world 44. Second, Marx believed that his criticism of religion would lead to a positive theory of human action which would eliminate the need for God, due to the overcoming of all forms of human alienation. Marx hoped for a world where there would be "quite simply a non-problematic absence of God in the minds and hearts of men". 45 As Marx writes:

Religious distress is at the same time the


44 Westphal, p. 142.

45 Masterson, pp. 85-86.
expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about its conditions is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion, is therefore, in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion46

Relating this discussion to Berger's sociology of religious life, Marx understood the constructedness of social life and that religious traditions tend to reinforce the status quo, declare that the present social order is god-given and provide symbols which legitimate it. These criticisms of religious life raised by Marx are important but can also be challenged. At times throughout human history, some religious groups have played important roles in social change. Some religious groups have been active in the abolition of slavery, at the forefront of the civil rights movement, active in the dismantling of apartheid, and leading resistance to neo-colonialism in Latin America47. As well, Ernst Bloch has argued that there is an element of ‘true’ consciousness in the ‘false’ consciousness of religion. If a

46 Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, pp. 41-42.

47 Westphal, p. 168.
false, alienated world created the desire for another world, then the false consciousness of a false world is not nothing. Jürgen Habermas explains:

Within the ideological shell Bloch discovers the Utopian core, within the as yet false consciousness the true consciousness. Certainly, the transparency of a better world is refracted by hidden interests, even in those aspects which point beyond the existing state; but still, the hopes which it awakens, the longings which it satisfies, contains energies that at the same time, once instructed about themselves, become critical impulses.

E. Friedrich Nietzsche

Religious Life as 'Ressentiment'

A third person who uncovered alienating trends within religious life was Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's philosophy spans a host of topics, but one way to approach his criticism of religious life is through his use of the French word 'ressentiment'. Nietzsche used this word in a particular sense and the meaning of

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48 Baum, p. 282.


the word goes beyond the English word 'resentment'. Nietzsche understood ressentiment culturally, as an aspect or as the feeling of an entire people. Nietzsche believed that the Christian religion produced feelings of ressentiment in western culture\textsuperscript{51}.

Nietzsche's argument concerning ressentiment unfolds in the following manner. Humanity is the product of a long and violent oppression\textsuperscript{52}, and this oppression derives from a bad sense of guilt by which society encloses individuals\textsuperscript{53}. A vicious cycle develops\textsuperscript{54} and the cycle revolves like this. People undergo forced socialization and the process of socialization tells people who they are. In the process of internalizing forced socialization, people sense a loss of who they could be as individuals. Realizing this loss of individuality results in an inward turning anger. Anger develops into 'ressentiment' and dissatisfaction arises with respect to the way things are. This, in turn, generates both more guilt and feelings of inadequacy because society presents the given social values and social structures as 'good'. In the end, feelings of guilt and

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 176.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{54} Nietzsche, p. 45.
inadequacy change into a feeling of fear\textsuperscript{55}. This means that people accept the status quo, in effect re-enforcing the entire socialization process again, insuring even more socialization\textsuperscript{56}. Thus, people receive both social values and social structures imposed from the outside and without individual choice. According to Nietzsche, these imposed social values act as an outer asceticism, which demand internalization as an inner asceticism\textsuperscript{57}.

Throughout his writings Nietzsche used philology and etymology to support his arguments. In \textit{The Genealogy of Morals}, Nietzsche traced the transformations of two word pairs: ‘good/bad’ and ‘good/evil’\textsuperscript{58}. According to Nietzsche’s analysis ‘good’, of the word pair ‘good/bad’, originally referred to a self-affirmation of the noble class; nobles understood and designated themselves as ‘good’, ‘wealthy’, ‘wise’ and ‘strong’. This, Nietzsche suggests, was not a moral use of the word ‘good’. Rather, it functioned as a description. Concomitantly, ‘bad’ referred to people not of the noble class; ‘bad’ referred to people who were ‘weak’ and ‘deficient’\textsuperscript{59}.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp. 94ff.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., pp. 6ff.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 19.
As society developed, a class of priests arose and the priests had a peculiar characteristic. The priests were failed nobles. They had been kicked out of the noble class because of weakness. Furthermore, Nietzsche suggests that priests, besides being weak, were also jealous of the remaining members of the nobility and attempted to seek revenge on the nobility through cunning\textsuperscript{60}. According to Nietzsche, the cunning attempt of revenge developed through morals\textsuperscript{61}. Members of the priestly class re-evaluated and reversed the values of the nobles. Thus, strength became ‘bad’ and weakness became ‘good’. The effect of this reversal resulted in an antagonistic struggle throughout history between two classes of people: the heroic and the anti-heroic. The weak and anti-heroic resent the strong and heroic, and thus exert revenge upon them\textsuperscript{62}. As Newell writes:

\begin{quote}
In Nietzsche’s eyes, it is the very concept of good and evil that has ruined people. Virtue is so often either the fear of desire or the fact that no opportunity arises for its pursuit.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

Nietzsche argued that culture developed due to the rise of a

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp. 14-15.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., pp. 16.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{63} Newell, p. 140.
priestly class and the glorification of weakness\textsuperscript{64}. Weakness and humility have become the ideal. Therefore, for Nietzsche, culture and the modern person are not to be praised because both the true nature of humanity and the strength of humanity have been lost. The priestly class, and as well the religious ideas and traditions which they generate, control and indeed inhibit the development of human potentialities\textsuperscript{65}. Individuals are controlled by the 'herd'. For Nietzsche, the 'herd' was the value-system of the many which acted as a restraint\textsuperscript{66}. Nietzsche explains:

\begin{quote}
My teaching is this, that the herd seeks to maintain and preserve one type of man, and that it defends itself on two sides - that is to say, against those who are decadents from its ranks (criminals, etc.), and against those who rise superior to its dead level.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Thus, Nietzsche understands religious life as a masterful rationalization by the weak. Religion functions as a grand form of compensation. Priests designed religion as a large, cultural scheme in order to limit the power and exact revenge on the nobles, the

\textsuperscript{64} Nietzsche, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 77.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., pp. 146-147.

strong and the heroic. William Hubben points out the irony which Nietzsche sees in the Christian tradition:

In the Christian hereafter the healthy and the strong are punished, while inhibited, slavish ones receive the ample fulfilment of bliss because they have repressed their best natural impulses in life. They have lived in fear of life, anxious to attain heaven.68

Nietzsche argued that the most important ploy that the priestly class developed to curtail the nobles was the development of the concept of the 'soul'69. Warriors acted. They did not reflect, pause and contemplate. They acted. The priestly class, however, both introduced the concept of 'soul' and elevated it to the most important aspect of a human being70. As a result, now the priests say: 'I could be strong, but I choose to be weak for the sake of my soul'. With the nobles the result is the opposite. They say: 'I am strong, but I choose to be weak in order to develop my soul'71. Thus, there is a denial of noble strength on the part of the strong, and a rationalization on the part of the weak as to why they lack strength.

68 William Hubben, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Kafka: Four Prophets of Our Destiny (New York: Collier Books, 1979), p. 120.
69 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 136.
70 Ibid., p. 141.
71 Ibid., p. 148.
According to Nietzsche, the leaders of religious institutions resent individuals who rise above the social norm\textsuperscript{72}. Thus, social pressure, through institutions like the church, acts to inhibit individuals and limit their influence. Inhibition usually takes the form of social isolation, but as well, theological condemnation. Both social isolation and theological condemnation tend to produce the feeling of guilt within the renegade individual. Nietzsche hoped for a different future:

Perhaps the most solemn concepts which have occasioned the most strife and suffering, the concepts ‘God’ and ‘sin’, will one day seem to us of no more importance than a child’s toy and a child’s troubles seem to an old man - and perhaps ‘old man’ will then have need of another toy and troubles - still enough of a child, an eternal child!\textsuperscript{73}

The Ascetic Ideal

Nietzsche, although raised in a family of clerics, considered the Christian faith to be “a continuous suicide of reason.”\textsuperscript{74} Yet, it was more than just the suicide of reason that motivated Nietzsche’s writings. Nietzsche understood that European Christianity,

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 147.


\textsuperscript{74} Macquarrie, p. 55.
especially Protestantism, presented an abhorrent human ideal of inner asceticism and an accompanying virtue of compassion which sapped vitality and led to weakness. Nietzsche writes:

The Christian faith is from the beginning sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit, at the same time enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation.\textsuperscript{75}

For Nietzsche, religious and moral systems confine humanity due to metaphysical and theological definitions which limit full, creative human potential. The ascetic ideal springs from a protective instinct within life yet also attacks the vitality and creativity of life\textsuperscript{76}. The role of the priest was to look for error in the same areas where the instincts posited truth. The ascetic ideal weakens the strong and advocates a sedate and sombre approach to life. Thus, Nietzsche believed that the priest was the protector of the sick of the herd. However, ironically, and to use a medical analogy, the priest inflicts the wound, offers healing for the wound, but in the process of healing continues to infect the wound\textsuperscript{77}.

Nietzsche believed that the Christian tradition was a world denying religion which refused to accept the chaos, flux and

\textsuperscript{75} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{76} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 133.
suffering within life. Rather than accepting these facts, the Christian faith promoted hope in an extra-human reality where suffering will be removed. Ironically, again, this occurs with death! Nietzsche states:

We can no longer conceal from ourselves what exactly it is that this whole process of willing, inspired by the ascetic ideal, signifies - this hatred of humanity, of animality, of inert matter; this loathing of the senses, of reason even; this fear of beauty and happiness; this longing to escape from illusion, change, becoming, death, and from longing itself. It signifies, let us have the courage to face it, a will to nothingness, a revulsion from life, a rebellion against the principal conditions of living.78

Nietzsche did acknowledge that the ascetic ideal has a positive feature; it gives meaning to the existence of humans:

... the ascetic ideal arose to give it [human existence] meaning - its only meaning, so far. But any meaning is better than none and, in fact, the ascetic ideal has been the best stopgap that ever existed. Suffering has been interpreted, the door to all suicidal nihilism slammed shut. No doubt that interpretation brought new suffering in its wake, deeper, more inward, more poisonous suffering: it placed all suffering under the perspective of guilt. 79


79 Ibid., p. 298.
It may appear that Nietzsche simply desired the destruction of the existing values of European culture. However, the nihilism within Nietzsche’s writings did not constitute an end in itself. The new values, unlike the old values, had a different source. The outside, or in other words ‘society’, did not impose the new values. Rather, they developed as innate abilities nurtured within oneself. Nietzsche confidently suggested that an anti-inner ascetic society is possible. World affirmation could replace world denial, and world affirmation could unfold through the unification of passion and reason.

The Übermensch and the Will to Power

Nietzsche called for a new form of human existence, a new way of life. The destruction of old values, he hoped, would give way to new values and a new way of life based in potentiality and creativity. However, unlike Marxists who understood that ‘one is what one makes’, Nietzsche argued that creativity must be applied to the task of existence. Systems of thought, ideologies, and even language all have the potential to reify existence.

80 Barrett, p. 204.

81 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 127.
The new humanity, about which Nietzsche wrote, focused on the Übermensch - the superman or overcoming man who realizes the open and unfinished character of human life, and who does not feel dependent upon God. Rather, the Übermensch realizes that the unfinished nature of human life means possibility and an open future. This means leaving the gods behind. It means growing up and facing the world without the benefit of religious belief or the consolation of the gods. The religious atmosphere of emasculation and suffocation would come to an end in the Übermensch; the person overcomes cultural limitations and fulfills human potential. The goal of Nietzsche’s Übermensch was to transcend mediocrity or, in other words, “Christianity stopped the talented, the noble, and the great from being so.” The Übermensch would move beyond both the symbols of existence and the metaphors of language to existence itself, to ‘will existence’, to promote full human life. The Übermensch is heroic both in overcoming fate and rising above mediocrity.

For Nietzsche, the potential for a new form of human existence

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82 Ibid., p. 463.
83 Ibid., p. 404.
84 Newell, p. 146.
resided in the 'will to power'\textsuperscript{85}, and the will to power is the power of the human spirit. It is not the power of the will to dominate. Rather, it is the will or power to be resilient and survive any setback. Thus, both the Übermensch and the will to power are both part of Nietzsche's 'ethical' concern toward the new transvaluation of values\textsuperscript{86}. In particular, Nietzsche wanted a new understanding of values beyond the old values of good/evil and heroic/anti-heroic, and beyond the ascetic ideal.

God is Dead

Perhaps Nietzsche's most lasting criticism of religious life is his phrase "God is dead."\textsuperscript{87} This phrase holds several meanings. The phrase 'God is dead' is, for Nietzsche, a lament, a tragedy. The present God is dead. Yet, in addition, 'God is dead' means liberation; humanity is liberated from tutelage, from servitude, from self-sacrifice, from denial. However, this freedom has another aspect: the aspect of nihilism. The old laws have been seen for what they really were: human constructions. The world is empty.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 353.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., pp. 400-403.

Philosophically, 'God is dead' is an attack against the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and as such the phrase is a statement of anti-transcendalism\(^8\). It is a statement which opposes the Kantian direction of looking beyond the world for values by which to live. For Nietzsche, the death of God ushers in the 'post-Christian age', an age where the horizon is the human being. Yet, this horizon is not so much a future orientation in terms of progress as it is the inward development into a 'higher' or better human being. However, this means neither higher nor better in the moral sense, but higher and better referring to reaching one’s true potential. God is dead, meaning that humans are alive and need to be self-creating. A person’s essence is existence. The unfolding of a human life is neither determined by God nor by an absolute moral code. Rather, men and women determine their own future\(^9\). Now there is a new horizon, and the horizon is human\(^9\).

In terms of Berger’s social construction of reality, Nietzsche understood or intuited the power of socialization. He sensed that when socialization was forced upon individuals there was a lack of


\(^9\) Newell, p. 182.

individual development and there was a lack of externalization. This compromised the fulfilling of one's human nature and human potential. Thus, the social control of society, especially by religious institutions, had to be exposed in order that members of humanity could become individuals and attain all that they could be. Thus, Nietzsche correctly discerned the alienating trends within religious traditions which tended both to limit individual development and promote an ideal of humanity which was one sided, other worldly and devalued human potential.

F. Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud's criticism of religious life involved a source different from the philosophical concerns of Hegel and Nietzsche or the economic concerns of Marx. Freud understood that religious ideas were the foundation of religious life. Yet the origin of religious ideas is neither God nor a special revelation. The origin of religious ideas lies within the psyche⁹¹. Freud argued that people developed religious ideas to fulfill a specific need and that need Freud termed 'theodicy'. Broadly speaking, theodicy is the religious rationalization which humanity has developed to remove the fear and

anxiety associated with suffering and death\textsuperscript{92}. Freud believed that life was difficult and that it was prone to privation and suffering\textsuperscript{93}. Freud argued that due to the feeling of helplessness and the continuing psychological need for protection people developed psychological constructions which were actually theological projections. The psychological constructions served to fulfill the following three-fold task:

... they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them.\textsuperscript{94}

The process of theodicy, Freud maintained, began when people believed that the impersonal forces of nature were gods. Freud argued that people, in order to feel secure, personified the natural order to both understand and attempt to control the unpredictable forces of the cosmos. As religious thought developed through the ages, the idea of God, as the personification of the forces of nature, gradually shifted to the concentration of religious attributes upon the idea of a divine father. The consequence of this, according to Freud, was the following: “Now that God was a single person, man’s

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., pp. 198-199.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 195.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 197.
relations to him could recover the intimacy and intensity of the child's relation to his father."

According to Freud, the motivation for the development of religious ideas is a psychological repetition of the solution for terrors and mysteries found at an earlier a stage of life. During childhood, the narcissistic needs of the child drive it in search of a source which will satisfy its needs. The helplessness of childhood drives the individual in search of protection. Such a source, at first, is the mother of the child. This source is replaced over time by the stronger figure of the father of the child. During the years of childhood the father was an ambiguous character: both a source of fear and a source of protection. Thus, seeking protection even after childhood a person psychologically projects fatherly powers to the heavenly, divine father, a god which the person creates:

When the growing individual finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, that he can never do without protection against strange superior powers, he lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of his father; he creates for himself the gods whom he dreads, whom he seeks too propitiate, and whom he nevertheless entrusts with his own protection.96

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Thus, the idea of God develops due to the feeling of helplessness and anxiety on the part of adults. The question which Freud posed was this: "... how does he [the individual] defend himself against the superior powers of nature, of Fate, which threaten him as they threaten all the rest?"\(^{97}\) To this question, Freud argued that society itself provided a consolation, a means of removing the terror of life and an answer to the mysteries of existence:\(^{98}\)

... religious ideas have arisen from the same need as have all the other achievements of civilization: from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushingly superior force of nature ... [and] the urge to rectify the shortcomings of civilization which made themselves painfully felt.\(^{99}\)

Freud argued that religious ideas developed due to the wishes and desires of humanity. These wishes and desires he called illusions. By illusions, Freud meant that they are the "fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind ... the secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes."\(^{100}\) Yet as Freud wrote:

An illusion is not the same thing as an error;


nor is it necessarily an error ... What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes... Thus we call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in so doing we disregard its relation to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store on verification.\textsuperscript{101}

An illusion may be false, but it may not be false. For example, a person may have the illusion that he will win a large sum of money in a lottery. This is a human wish, but it is possible to win a large sum of money in a lottery. The odds, however, are remote. Or as Freud pointed out: “That the Messiah will come and found a golden age is much less likely.”\textsuperscript{102}

We shall tell ourselves that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent Providence, and if there were a moral order in the universe and an after-life; but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be. And it would be more remarkable still if our wretched, ignorant and down-trodden ancestors had succeeded in solving all these difficult riddles of the universe.\textsuperscript{103}

Freud believed that there were three types of illusion: first,
the illusion of Providence, which ameliorates humanity’s fear and provides consolation of divine aid: second, the desire for world peace and justice, and the belief in a supernatural agent who will implement it: third, the belief in eternal life giving humanity a time and a place to enjoy the desires of their hearts. Again though, illusions are not errors in the sense of being true or false. Rather, illusions are not capable of realization therefore they contradict reality.

Anticipating later understandings of the sociology of knowledge, Freud realized that one of the problems associated with ‘divinely’ inspired religious ideas is that these ideas, which religious authorities argue are the most important for humanity, are so poorly authenticated. Religious ideas developed over time in such a way that the modern person finds them already constructed as part of a divinely inspired religious tradition. Although presented as ‘revelation’, Freud recognized the historical development of religious ideas, and with respect to religious doctrines, Freud argued that they were all closed to verification. In fact, some were so at odds with the plausibility structures of existence that they

104 Newell, p. 105.
105 Ibid., p. 105.
were closer to the psychological category of delusions\textsuperscript{106}. Freud’s purpose, in highlighting the illusory nature of religious beliefs, was to uncover the motives underlying religious life and how religious beliefs functioned as consolation\textsuperscript{107}. Freud knew both that the mass of people were unaware of the sources of modern life and that people experienced life “naïvely, as it were, without being able to form an estimate of its contents.”\textsuperscript{108} Still, he believed that religious beliefs needed to be exposed as illusions because over thousands of years they have neither given the world happiness nor established morality in the world\textsuperscript{109}.

Freud believed that his exposition and criticisms of religious ideas were not unique. However, what he did provide was a new psychological foundation to the criticisms. Freud as well knew that if the illusions of religious ideas were exposed, then many people would be robbed of support and psychological consolation. Yet Freud felt that this was needed since “…religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis … and that mankind will surmount this neurotic phase, just as so many children grow out of their similar

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 213.
\textsuperscript{107} Westphal, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 183.
\textsuperscript{109} Newell, p. 107.
neurosis."\textsuperscript{110} Thus, the goal of Freud's writings on religion was not to do away with religious ideas as much as to surmount infantilism:

> Men cannot remain children for ever; they must in the end go out into 'hostile life'. We may call this 'education to reality' ... By withdrawing expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, they will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone.\textsuperscript{111}

There are several one-sided understandings within Freud's work. Philosophically speaking, he lived out of a 'medical materialism' which focused on explaining the actions of humanity chemically and deterministically\textsuperscript{112}. Furthermore, Freud's hostility to religious beliefs centres on his understanding that life is always in a state of permanent conflict, whereas religion assumes "a fixed point at which conflict is resolved.\textsuperscript{113}" Still, in spite of these criticisms, Freud's insights remain valuable for he was promoting a programme of emotional growth based on rational truth\textsuperscript{114}, oriented

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 237.

\textsuperscript{111} Freud, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{112} Newell, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{113} Westphal, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{114} Newell, p. 107.
toward educating people to reality\textsuperscript{115}.

For educators, Freud challenges everyone to understand what is a plausible view of life. He questions forms of legitimation which keep individuals at an infantile level. And finally, he suggests that religious ideas should do more than construct a theodicy; they should educate individuals into reality.

G. Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas is recognized as both a philosopher and the leading representative of the school of social philosophy known as ‘Critical Theory’. The philosophy of Habermas draws insights and understandings from Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Habermas uses these sources, along with others, to determine whether or not there are forces, either conscious or unconscious, that tend to dominate or manipulate people in society. Habermas has written about many aspect of modern life; however, one aspect of the critical theory of society developed by Habermas relates to religious life and alienation. It is derived from Max Weber’s book \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism}.

Habermas outlines five points associated with Weber's

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 109.
‘Protestant Ethic’ thesis. First, Weber suggested that within the development of Protestantism there was a movement away from ‘magical’ aspects of religion. An example of the removal of magical practices within Protestantism was the devaluation of the sacraments as a means of salvation. The overall effect of the removal of magical elements within religion Weber calls ‘disenchantment’. Second, Weber suggested that, compared to the Roman Catholic church, the believer in the Protestant community is forced into isolation; since Protestantism, especially in its Calvinistic forms, denies identification of the church membership with the elect, individuals develop a privatized, isolated understanding of religious life. Third, Weber suggested that, due to Luther and Calvin’s belief in the religious significance of all work, believers fulfill part of their religious obligations through daily labour. Fourth, the long tradition of asceticism in Christianity is transformed by Protestantism into an inner-worldly asceticism of labour in the world. Fifth, inner-worldly asceticism translates into a methodical, disciplined approach to all aspects of life; work, and in point of fact, all activities become increasingly organized and

Habermas draws two main conclusions from his analysis of Weber's thesis. First, he suggests that the form of rationality that acts as the basis for western society is an instrumental form of rationality and that its goal is "the mastery of the world in the service of human interests." The mark that delineates the degree of rationality in a system of thought is the extent that magical thinking is overcome. As a result of rational systems of thought, the world becomes 'disenchanted' and a disenchanted world is a devalued world that now becomes open to instrumental pursuits. Ethical meaning is removed. Second, Habermas believes that the rationalism and disenchantment emphasis inherent within Protestantism has served to undermine the universality of the Christian worldview. All worldviews attempt to provide answers both to the existential questions of life and to the problem of meaning. However, the privatization of beliefs within Protestantism has led to the development of a number of differing and competing worldviews each claiming 'ultimate' value.

117 Ibid. pp. 164-165.
118 Ibid., p. xvii.
119 Ibid., p. 212.
120 Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.
Habermas shows that, in the development of present worldviews, cognitive rationality is the dominant feature which underlies their change and progression.\footnote{Ibid., p. 59.}

Habermas contrasts modern assumptions of rationality with mythical worldviews. Mythical worldviews gave an all-embracing view of reality. Myths gave 'knowledge' about the natural world, the cosmos, how to obtain food, and how to please the gods. Myths gave a map which informed humans as to what was desired of them. In fact, in the past, identity was closely connected to the knowledge given in rituals and myths.\footnote{Ibid., p. 48.}

As Habermas writes:

Mythical worldviews are not understood by members as interpretative systems that are attached to cultural traditions, constituted by internal interrelations of meaning, symbolically related to reality, and connected to validity claims - and thus exposed to criticism and open to revision.\footnote{Ibid., p. 53.}

Increasingly, the Christian myth has been replaced in western civilization by various forms of rationalism. The consequence of demythologizing, according to Habermas, is the "desocialization of
nature and the denaturalization of society."\textsuperscript{124} Prior to demythologizing, the unifying power of myth and ritual impeded any objectifying of the world. Demythologizing “apparently leads to a basic conceptual \textit{differentiation between object domains} of culture and nature.”\textsuperscript{125} As a result, demythologizing causes the retreat of religious life to the subjective level and all competing religious worldviews become subjectively based. A conclusion drawn by Habermas with respect to the demise of religious worldviews and the rise of rationality is the following:

> The credibility of religious and metaphysical worlds falls prey to a process of rationalization to which they owed their development; in this respect, the Enlightenment critique of theology and ontology is rational, that is understandable on internal grounds, and irreversible.\textsuperscript{126}

Thus, in the past, alienated worldviews were protected by religious traditions and plausibility structures remained largely unexamined. As Habermas suggests, in the modern period with the rise of rationality the problem is that the mythical worldviews of the religious tradition often seem implausible, and hence rejection of the mythical worldview is perceived as a loss of faith. In

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 48.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 48.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 350.
addition, since these criticisms are rational, it is not possible to return to either the alienating worldviews or the unexamined plausibility structures. Thus, due to the rise of rationality, for many people religious life seems like an immature stage of intellectual development that needs to be moved beyond.

In terms of Berger's sociology of knowledge, Habermas reinforces the point that if a worldview is not plausible it will not be accepted. The nomos/cosmos connection will be severed and anomy or lack of meaningfulness will result. However, the precipitating cause lies in the membership of religious worldviews who hold on to mythic structures for identity consolidation. For many individuals alienated worldviews and the lack of a meaningful dialectic precipitate anomy and increasingly, feelings of irrelevance.

G. Summary

This chapter has outlined important criticisms of religious life by some of the most influential thinkers of the modern period. Although there are some limitations which can be placed on the criticisms, overall they remain valuable. They provide insights into alienating trends within the development of religious traditions and as well the religious development of individuals. At times,
religious traditions devalue the world and foster unequal relationships [Hegel], numb individuals to social injustices [Marx], present a norm for human life that limits creative potentiality [Nietzsche], present illusory theological constructions to console humanity [Freud], and provide worldviews which promote identity construction at odds with rational plausibility structures [Habermas]. However, concerning all of these criticisms an objections can be raised. Each of these thinkers seems to present a view of religious life that 'really explains' or 'explains away' religious life. Each of these criticisms attempts to function as a meta-theory, attempts to provide an over-arching viewpoint that reduces religious life to unequal relationships, economic inequalities, forced socialization, immaturity or lack of rationality.

For Hegel, philosophy becomes the meta-theory for religious life, for Marx the meta-theory is economics, for Nietzsche the meta-theory is a combination of linguistics and philosophy, for Freud the meta-theory is psychology and for Habermas the meta-theory is a combination of social theory and philosophy. However, none of these reductionistic interpretations either fully explains or explains away religious life. However, they do provide valuable criticisms concerning how religious traditions have been constructed and legitimated. Furthermore, for religious life to be meaningful for
more individuals, these alienating trends need to be articulated and addressed by educators. The development of religious life needs to be viewed as a process, in dynamic terms, rather than in static terms and understood as eternally given. Most importantly, religious traditions need to be open to development and change which will present religious life as meaningful and non-alienating. The next chapter discusses aspects of change and development within religious life as a first step in promoting understanding as well as developing non-alienating trends.
Chapter Four

Stages of Religious Judgement and Stages of Faith Development: Empirical Research, Theological Legitimation, and Alienation

A. Introduction

The thesis has argued that religious life is a human construction and, at times, the way that religious life has been constructed has not always promoted qualities that advance human life. Instead, at times religious traditions have supported the status quo, legitimated various forms of oppression, presented one-sided views of religious life and limited individual expression. With the advance of the social sciences, researchers and educators have applied various social scientific approaches in order to understand and analyze various aspects of religious life, especially how individuals change in their religious understanding throughout various points of the life cycle. In this chapter two research projects will be discussed. First, Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder have studied the development of religious thinking and second James Fowler has studied faith development. These projects have attempted to identity how understandings and experiences of religion develop and change at certain stages in life. As well, these
projects have attempted to give empirical information about aspects of religious life. These projects are useful for religious educators because they show that individuals can change in their approach to religious thinking and faith. To realize that there are aspects of development to both religious thinking and faith, this information, then, may be of assistance to religious educators as they develop, promote and encourage involvement in an understanding and presentation of religious life that is less alienating.

B. Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder

Stages of Religious Judgement Development

In their book *Religious Judgement: A Developmental Approach* Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder suggest that people exist at different levels of religious judgement development. Their theory is built in part on the research and assumptions of both Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Following the path of genetic structuralism, Oser and Gmünder argue that there are four defining characteristics of religious development: 1) each stage exhibits qualitative differentiation, 2) stage sequence is irreversible 3) each stage demonstrates structural wholeness, and 4) hierarchical movement
involves differentiation and (re)integration.

Like their structuralist predecessors, Oser and Gmünder differentiate between structure and content. They argue that each stage of religious development exhibits a definable structure and that there is a clear set of characteristics which defines and separates each stage or pattern. However, the content varies from one religious system to another. They argue that Buddhists and Christians pass through the same stages and develop the same type of thinking patterns, yet the content of the pattern varies with the worldview of the religious tradition.

Again, drawing upon the research of Piaget, Oser and Gmünder base the foundation of their theory upon a concept called the religious 'mother-structure'. The religious mother-structure is an innate psychological predisposition within persons which consists of such qualities as meaning-making, hope, and freedom. They maintain that the religious mother-structure is a universal, comprehensive depth-dimension which cannot be further reduced to

2 Ibid., p. 60.
3 Ibid., p. 52.
another category or process\textsuperscript{4}. The specific religious quality of the mother-structure stems from the fact that it elicits qualities which enhance life with respect to the future and provides answers concerning the mysteries of life\textsuperscript{5}. Oser and Gmünder argue that the concept of mother-structure is irreducible and is resistant to both "enlightenment and secularization."\textsuperscript{6} The mother-structure provides the foundation upon which higher stages of religious judgement are built.

Oser and Gmünder developed their stage theory by presenting persons with a dilemma, then recorded and analyzed the replies of the respondents. One of the commonly used dilemmas is called the 'Paul Dilemma':

Paul is a young physician who has just passed his medical exams. He and his girlfriend are about to be married. Before the wedding, his parents give him a graduation gift of a trip to England. Paul goes on the trip.

Shortly after take-off, there are problems with both of the aircraft's engines. The pilot announces that the plane is losing altitude and emergency procedures are taken: oxygen masks drop down and life preservers are handed out. At first, the passengers react with panic, then there is silence. The plane

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 52.
falls from the sky at great speed.

Paul fears that his life will end. He begins to pray. He promises God that, if he was somehow saved, he would work as a doctor in an underprivileged part of the world willing to do without social status and a high income, and if his girlfriend would not accompany him in this situation, he would cancel the marriage plans.

The plane crashes. Paul survives! Upon returning home, Paul receives a letter saying that because of his qualifications he has been selected over ninety other applicants for a position at a private clinic. However, Paul remembers that he has made a promise to God, and now, does not know what to do. 7

Some of the standard questions asked concerning this dilemma are: 1) Should Paul keep his promise? 2) What is your response to this statement: “It is God’s will that he should go to the Third World.” 3) What is more significant in this world: God or human beings?

The researchers categorized and scored the answers given to this dilemma and found that there were five different groupings which were strongly correlated with age. For example, they found that younger people tended to exhibit cognitive patterns of a ‘lower’ stage of development than older people who usually demonstrated ‘higher’ forms of religious judgement. Oser and Gmünder define a

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7 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
stage of religious judgement as:

... a person's pattern of religious cognition is operationalized in different situations and that a certain group of persons exhibits a structurally isomorphous pattern, even if the members experience and evaluate the contents in various ways. Put differently: Across highly different contents, persons maintain the same religious judgement.²

The following summary outlines the five stages:

**Stage One:** Absolute Heteronomy Orientation (Deus Ex Machina):
The Ultimate, regardless of formulation, influences life directly by giving health or illness, joy or despair, protection or abandonment. Relationship with the Ultimate is established by performing the will of the Ultimate. Oser and Gmünder cite the following example of stage one. An eight year old prayed for everything, even such things as “good weather for school trips”.

**Stage Two:** “Do Ut Des” Orientation:
Prayer, sacrifice, and obedience to religious rules influence the will of the Ultimate. The Ultimate gives love, care, health, happiness, and success when a person follows the will of the Ultimate.

**Stage Three:** Absolute Autonomy Orientation (Deism):
Individuals assume responsibility for their lives and the world. Freedom, meaning and hope become the categories for human decisions. The Ultimate exists outside of

human reality. The Ultimate defines freedom, meaning and hope differently than humans. The Ultimate exists outside of human life, however, the Ultimate still orders human life.

**Stage Four:** Mediated Autonomy and Salvation-Plan Orientation:
Individuals understand that they themselves are responsible for their own actions. Yet, individuals also understand that life has conditions and contingencies which are framed by the Ultimate, and that freedom, meaning and hope can only come into being through the Ultimate’s ‘Divine Plan’, i.e. “God acts in the world through us.”

**Stage Five:** Intersubjective Religious Orientation
The Ultimate permeates all aspects of interpersonal relationships while still transcending them. History and revelation reveal the Ultimate in moments of human understanding, cooperation and solidarity. Symbols like ‘The Kingdom of God’ unite individuals to work on behalf of others.\(^9\)

For Oser and Gmünder, the development of religious judgement occurs in stages and each stage is distinct from the previous one, and also abrupt in the sense that it provides a discontinuity from the previous stage\(^10\). Oser and Gmünder write:

> The religious development of persons does not happen slowly and steadily, but in steps. The passage from one step to the next is


complicated and constitutes, in any case, a discontinuity. This sort of movement is usually designated as phases or stages. The formal qualities which describe the individual stages are: qualitative differentiation, sequentiality, holism, and the incorporation of lower stages into higher ones.\footnote{Ibid., p. 63.}

The authors argue that growth upward and into a "...'higher' form of religiosity means a reflective widening and deepening of one's relationship to the Ultimate."\footnote{Ibid., p. 14.} One approaches the Ultimate "by a means of a repeated process of distancing oneself from it and then reappropriating it in an existentially new way."\footnote{Ibid., p. 15.} This involves, on the one hand, the removal of superstition, and, on the other hand, the development of an increasingly rational view of religious life. However, they maintain that this does not imply that rationality will finally supersede religious life. Indeed, they argue that "higher stages...feature a different mix or balance of religiosity and rationality and that the former cannot be dissolved into the latter."\footnote{Ibid., p. 14.} For Oser and Gmünder rationality, ...

... does not only mean the unfettered cognitive mastery of one's lifeworld by
means of a free construction of one's experienced reality. Rationality does not only mean critical and detached reflection on human realities. Rather, rationality refers to those processes demanded by grounding oneself and one's interpretation in an ultimate reality...

Again the focus of the research should be emphasized. Oser and Gmünder claim that their research stresses the subjective aspect of religion: "... persons' actual ways of reconstruing and interpreting concrete situations in their lives in a religious fashion." Their research does not deal with religious rituals, religious rites, religious dogma and religious ideas. Furthermore, it would also be a mistake to equate the development of religious judgement with an increase in religious 'knowledge': knowing more religious concepts and developing increased religious conviction is not what Oser and Gmünder mean by the development of religious judgement. According to the authors, a 'higher' stage of development differs from a 'lower' stage due to changes in cognition or 'thinking about' the relationship between oneself, the Ultimate, and other people.

To summarize, Oser and Gmünder argue that children, adolescents, and adults describe religious events differently and


16 Ibid., p. 16.
value religious experiences differently. The authors suggest that the different responses given by children, adolescents and adults mean that they represent different stages of religious development. To pass from one stage of religious development to another means change: change to patterns of interpretation, change to the nature and meaning of symbols, and change to a more comprehensive, rational, and integrated worldview. For the authors, change is both positive and hierarchical because change refers to the ways that crises and marginal experiences are explained and taken-up into a higher understanding of religious life\textsuperscript{17}.

Empirical Research, Metaphors of Ultimacy and Alienation

The research of Oser and Gmünder provides a useful tool which can assist educators in religious and spiritual education. Understanding religious life in more rational and less superstitious terms is an important goal of every educator. As well, understanding religious and spiritual life in terms of participation, co-operation and action in the world is another important objective of education. Rationality and action in the world are also meaningful and by definition less alienating.

However, several criticisms can also be raised, for example,

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.
the linkage of development and age is simplistic; as are the twin beliefs that development proceeds hierarchically and moves along an invariant line without regression; as are the Christian assumptions about the Ultimate which underpin their research and which are projected as universal.

There is an additional criticism which can be made concerning the research of Oser and Gmünder, and it relates to an alienating trend with respect to the use of metaphors. Specifically, Oser and Gmünder continue the long trend common to religious traditions of using metaphors of ultimacy¹⁸ for legitimation. First, though, an explanation of legitimation by metaphors of ultimacy.

Metaphors construct religious worldviews, and some of the earliest religious metaphors linked God to the working of the cosmos. For example, people believed that ‘God was angry’ with humanity when there were violent storms, but when ‘God was pleased’ with humanity God providentially gave rain and sunshine. The elemental forces of nature became personifications of God’s nature through metaphor¹⁹. Thus, uncritically, people thought that metaphors gave ‘real’ information about God. Throughout the history


of religious life the power of religious metaphors rested in their ability to present a view of a uni-verse: a single comprehensive view of life. Metaphors about God became the cluster of words which constructed a religious worldview. Metaphors were the tools of cosmization and the symbols that linked the cosmos and the nomos.

As religious life developed, increasingly it became directed away from the natural workings of the cosmos and toward stories about the activities of the gods. Narratives and myths gave 'information' both about the gods as well as the relation of the gods' activities toward humanity. These narratives and myths which, over time, were categorized and organized into scriptures, gave an ordered pattern to the cosmos; metaphors in the scriptures named 'God' as the power that changed a person's worldview from a chaotic cosmos to an ordered nomos.

There are many examples of the metaphoric 'power' of scripture. As an example consider Moses, a central figure in the Jewish tradition because of his leadership in the story of the Exodus. Yet, the Exodus is primarily a literary event. There is little historical or archeological evidence that supports the historical
event of the Exodus apart from the stories of scripture\textsuperscript{20}.

In the story of Moses, metaphors are used to construct a view of Moses as a victorious leader who was a specially called prophet of God. As well, the stories tell how Moses was victorious over both human and natural forces, due to the ‘fact’ that God was with him. The following categorizes metaphors and suggests how they were used to legitimate the story of Moses:

1) Moses is called by God (Exodus 3): a vocation metaphor legitimating the call and role of Moses.

2) Moses leads the Hebrew people and defeats Egypt, the most powerful nation of the near eastern world (Exodus 14): power and success metaphors legitimating Moses’ vocation and God’s presence.

3) Moses supernaturally controls the waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14): power and salvation metaphors using water as a symbol of chaos and death.

4) Moses climbs Mt. Sinai to meet God (Exodus 19): a geographical metaphor of greatness, of climbing the highest heights.

5) Moses speaks to God (Exodus 19-34): intimacy metaphor.

6) Moses receives the 10 commandments of God (Exodus 20): intimacy and ethical superiority metaphors.\textsuperscript{21}


To many people who hear or read the story of Moses, surely God must have been with Moses, and this 'God' must be the 'true' God because of the miraculous works which Moses accomplished. What has happened, though, is that the metaphoric nature of the narrative is forgotten. The human constructedness of the religious text retreats behind the claim that these writings are scripture.

In a similar manner, the Christian tradition also used metaphors to construct a religious worldview in order to convince people that Jesus was the Messiah. However, something interesting happens with the Christian tradition. Because the Christian tradition began as a religious movement within Judaism, Christian writers had to show the superiority of their new understanding of God as seen through Jesus the Messiah compared to the Hebrew way. Again Christian writers undertook this task by using metaphors and particularly by using special metaphors: metaphors of ultimacy. To legitimate Jesus as the 'Messiah', who establishes a new and better covenant than the Jewish covenant, Christian theologians constructed their scriptural narrative using metaphors of ultimacy to convince people that Jesus really was the Son of God. For example, Jesus is referred to as:


2) Lord of Lords (Revelation 17:14): deserving the ultimate in allegiance.
3) The only begotten Son of God (John 3:18): ultimate of uniqueness.


5) The Lamb of God for the sins of the world (John 1:29): ultimate sacrifice.


7) First Born from the Dead (Colossians 1:18): ultimacy of birth.


9) Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7): ultimate in intimacy.

In literature, the power of a metaphor lies in the poetic connection between the ‘is’ and the ‘is-not’. There is a difference between ‘is’ and ‘is-not’, though the difference is both bridged and equated. Thus, the metaphor gives an alternative vision of the world. As Sallie McFague writes: “... in metaphor old views of reality are traded for new ones.”

Religious metaphors attempt to give another vision of life, another worldview, and as it was pointed out, the ‘power’ of religious metaphors is due to the new sense of vision and meaning to life which they give to some people. However, more importantly, the

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22 McFague, p. 40.
really convincing religious metaphors do not appear metaphoric.\(^{23}\) These metaphors seem convincing and their ability to legitimate complete. They seem 'true' and are often accepted uncritically by the believer as the way things really are.

This discussion of metaphors, how metaphors help construct a certain worldview, and especially the role of metaphors of ultimacy in the construction of the Christian worldviews leads to a criticism of Oser and Gmündner, and also shows another alienating trend in religious life. Wayne Booth suggests that there should be an ethics of metaphors.\(^{24}\) He argues that the truthfulness and the appropriateness of certain metaphors need to be judged, especially in the case of religious metaphors because they have historically been the primary means of worldview legitimation.\(^{25}\) More to the point, an ethics of religious metaphors needs to focus on their claim to ultimacy. In other words, inflated metaphors of ultimacy in religious traditions need to be deflated and understood for what they really are.

There are several reasons for this. First, even a cursory glance at the religious history of humanity shows the violence that

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\(^{23}\) ibid., p. 17.

\(^{24}\) Booth, p. 300.

\(^{25}\) Berger, p. 27.
members of religious traditions have acted out on other people due to the feeling of self-righteousness and 'God appointedness' found in religious metaphors; metaphors of ultimacy can promote both the triumphalistic conquest of non-believers and the suppression, sometimes violently, of dissent. Second, theologians often criticize the 'false' religious worlds of other religious traditions by resorting to their own myths and metaphors of ultimacy, yet all the while failing to apply metaphoric criticism to their own tradition. Often they fail to acknowledge that their own tradition is a construction, fail to see that a religious worldview, even if historically based, is a work of fiction. Thus, theologians, as insiders, often uncritically accept their own metaphors and their own myth-story-narrative as true, while other myth-story-narratives which present another worldview are perceived as false because they use different metaphors; the other metaphoric structure does not 'reinforce the fixed norms'26.

Booth argues that there is a need for an ethics of metaphor in order to screen religious metaphors so that they promote human values and human well-being, and not serve to enforce the opinions of a religious elite, suppress dissent, legitimate the status quo or promote alienation.

26 Booth, p. 338.
Religious Judgement, Empirical Investigation, Metaphors of Ultimacy and Alienation

Oser and Gmünder, too, live in a metaphoric world and their metaphoric world is constructed around the twin disciplines, or metaphoric systems,\(^{27}\) of theology and social science. The effect of this combination yields a certain, so-called, scientific view and Oser and Gmünder attempt to legitimate their understanding of stages of religious judgement by providing substantiating research. However, unlike legitimation attempts in the past, it seems that they are attempting neither to legitimate their theory of religious judgement development by referring to scripture nor to use philosophy as the means of legitimation. Oser and Gmünder attempt to legitimate their theory of religious judgement development by resorting to metaphors derived from science\(^{28}\):

1) "the clinical interview": metaphor of professionalism

2) "the utilization of this method in the domain of developmental psychology goes back mainly to Piaget": metaphors of methodological certainty and authority

3) "the qualitative clinical method appears preferable over against quantitative meaning and standardized tests": metaphor of reasoned consideration

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 335.

\(^{28}\) Oser and Gmünder, pp. 97-97.
4) "this decision is supported by the unique problem domain of the religious judgement as well as the assumption of the paradigm of developmental psychology": metaphors of discipline certainty and paradigm analysis.

Oser and Gmünder attempt to explain the process of change in religious thinking and they claim to have conceptualized into five stages lived religious experience, whether religious life is eastern or western, profound or trivial, subtle or literalistic. Yet, their work is metaphoric. There are no stages of religious judgement; they are heuristic devices substantiated by metaphors derived from social scientific research. Metaphors have been reified to appear as actual realities: as if metaphors describing religious judgement development take on added significance or power or reality when cloaked in scientific nomenclature.

Thus, it seems that Oser and Gmünder are using social science to support and, if possible, verify both their theological agenda and their religious worldview. Three points suggest this. First, metaphors relating God and the working of nature, as well as metaphors relating God and wisdom, military power and royal majesty have been challenged, as Paul Ricoeur notes, by the hermeneutic of suspicion; as well, these metaphors have lost their power due the rise of science. These metaphors no longer construct

29 Booth, p. 301.
a plausible nomos. Thus, the authors have presented a ‘scientific’ argument to support their claims.

Second, it seems that Oser and Gmünder have not tried to consciously use scientific metaphors to establish this goal. Indeed, they do not seem to see that the metaphors which they have derived from social science are metaphors, as ways of linking the ‘is’ and the ‘is-not’. It seems that for Oser and Gmünder their metaphors are understood as propositions; their metaphors seem reified, as if the metaphors are actual descriptions of the way things are. The reification of a human product into a thing, independent of conscious human action, is the objectification step in the social construction of reality.

Third, it appears that Oser and Gmünder have tried to re-establish a religious uni-verse by attempting to undercut the modern religious trends of pluralism and relativism by using metaphors from science. They have attempted through ‘social science verified research’ to prove that their theory of religious judgement development is hierarchical and universal, with the highest example of the development found in the person who has values associated with the ‘Kingdom of God’. Thus, by using social science Oser and Gmünder introduce metaphors of ultimacy to provide support for their liberal, Christian worldview. They equate
the highest stage of religious development with western assumptions of autonomy. These assumptions were articulated recently in the political theology of the German theologian Helmut Peukert\(^30\).

As it was said, inflated metaphors, the metaphors of ultimacy, need to be deflated. The alienating trends resulting from the use of metaphors to remove anomy need to be continually uncovered. Thus, there always needs to be an ethics of religious metaphors: an ongoing criticism of the metaphors used to construct religious worldviews in order that the metaphors fully promote human living for everyone and are not alienating.

C. James Fowler

In the book *Stages of Faith* James Fowler argues that faith can be the object of research. He argues that his research demonstrates that faith is not a static entity, that upon analysis faith can be divided into certain stages and that individuals pass through sequential, hierarchical and universal stages in faith development\(^31\). Employing extensive interview research and drawing on the psycho-

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\(^{30}\) Oser and Gmünder, p. 36.

social theory of Erik Erikson, research in cognitive development by Jean Piaget, and studies in moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg, as well as the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, Fowler presents a theory of faith development\textsuperscript{32}.

Stages of Faith

Fowler argues that his research demonstrates that there are six stages of faith\textsuperscript{33}. He terms the first stage 'Intuitive-Projective Faith' [Fowler suggests that there is a pre-Stage One faith, called Undifferentiated Faith which occurs during infancy and which provides the beginning for the emotions and the personality. This stage is characterized by love, trust and hope, and is the foundation for further faith development]. According to Fowler, Stage One occurs between ages two and seven and is characterized by cognitive egocentrism\textsuperscript{34}. A main feature of this stage is that faith has a magical quality devoid of logical thinking, where the imagination has centre stage\textsuperscript{35}. Children at this age lack the ability to

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 119ff.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 123.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 123.
differentiate between fantasy and reality\textsuperscript{36}, although it is probably more accurate to understand fantasy thinking as an act of the imagination filling in the knowledge gaps until there is a more complex understanding of reality\textsuperscript{37}. Overcoming egocentricity and growing into an understanding of what characterizes social reality determines whether the child moves into the next stage of faith development\textsuperscript{38}.

The second stage of faith development Fowler calls ‘Mythic-Literal Faith’\textsuperscript{39}. During this stage Fowler argues that the person, not necessarily a child, has a literal understanding of religious life. Rules are to be followed, and the narrative of scripture is understood as being literally true. As Fowler writes: “For this stage the meaning is both carried and ‘trapped’ in the narrative”\textsuperscript{40}. Contradictions within a religious tradition are usually ignored. As a result moral and theological issues are viewed in distinct, ‘black-and white’ categories\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 129.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 132.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 135.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 149.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 150.
Fowler believes that when a person begins to grapple with contradictions or differing viewpoints, for example creationism versus evolutionism, this leads into a third stage of faith termed 'Synthetic-Conventional Faith'. Characteristics of this stage include the incorporation of the “expectations and judgments of others,” and consolidation of the individual’s identity. Values associated with this stage remain unexamined.

When beliefs and values, especially those established by others, begin to be seen as humanly constructed, and thus relative in nature, there is the potential for movement into the next stage of faith. Fowler’s research suggests that this stage, called ‘Individuative-Reflective Faith,’ often unfolds with the beginnings of adulthood, when there is social pressure to accept responsibility for one’s actions and thoughts. At this stage, the person begins to construct faith in terms of reflection and ‘demythologizing.’ However, often this stage is characterized by excessive reflection, indeed even a narcissistic attitude which tends to over-value reason.

42 Ibid., p. 151.
43 Ibid., p. 172.
44 Ibid., p. 173.
46 Ibid., p. 182.
and rejects outright religious life\textsuperscript{47}.

At the fifth level of faith, which Fowler calls 'Conjunctive Faith', there is a new sense of integration within the person. Fowler argues that a 'second naivete' occurs, and that there is a linking of symbolic power and conceptual thinking\textsuperscript{48}. Thus, at this stage a re-thinking of events and experiences of one's past occurs, and the re-interpretation leads to a new sense of faith\textsuperscript{49}. Paradox is a quality of this faith level: being committed to one's own faith, yet seeing it as relative and being sympathetic towards other faith expressions\textsuperscript{50}. The pitfall, according to Fowler of remaining at Stage Five "Conjunctive Faith", is that paradox may overwhelm and lull the individual into passivity, inaction or cynicism\textsuperscript{51}.

Fowler calls his sixth stage of faith, 'Universalizing Faith'\textsuperscript{52}. He believes that it is rarely found yet when lived is contagious\textsuperscript{53}, for when life is lived at this faith level "zones of liberation from

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pp. 182-183.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 197.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 197.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 199.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 200.
the social, political, economic and ideological shackles we place and endure on human futurity"\textsuperscript{54} are created. People living at this faith level tend to be viewed as subversive, yet exhibit a special sense of grace\textsuperscript{55}. Examples of this faith experience, Fowler suggests, are Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Thomas Merton\textsuperscript{56}.

Fowler's Definition of Faith

From his research into faith development, Fowler constructs a definition of faith. Following the lead of W. C. Smith, he argues that faith is a way of responding to transcendent value that is deeper and more personal than religion\textsuperscript{57} yet is meant to be religious\textsuperscript{58}:

\[\text{[Faith] is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.}\textsuperscript{59}\]

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., pp. 200-201.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 11.
Following the lead of the Christian theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, Fowler suggests that faith is a growth of trust, and a commitment to the shared vision and values that provide an “overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and meaning.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 5.} Fowler also draws upon the understanding of faith as ‘Ultimate Concern’ found in the writings of Paul Tillich: “Faith forms a way of seeing our everyday life in relation to holistic images of what we may call our ultimate environment.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 24.} As well, drawing upon survey and interview research, Fowler suggests that faith is a response “to action and being that precedes and transcends us and our kind.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 33.} Faith, then, according to Fowler is, first, an imaginative act which relates centers of value and power to an ultimate environment\footnote{Ibid., p. 24.}, and second, is relational: “I trust in and I am loyal to ...”\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.}

Research Methods

The method which Fowler employed in conducting his research
was the extended personal interview. Fowler's theory [at the time of publication of his book] rests on the data collected from 359 interviews. Interestingly, from all of this accumulated data Fowler presents only one interview example to support his thesis: the interview of a woman named Mary. Fowler chose the Mary interview because, "...I found it to be a troublingly compelling interview."\(^{65}\) It is a compelling interview\(^{66}\).

Mary, at the time of the interview, was 28 years old. During the course of the interview, Mary re-constructs her past and especially focuses on a religious conversion experience which occurred at age 22. This conversion experience became the central point in Mary's life. Mary outlines her life as a movement up to this event and as an unfolding after the event. The conversion experience was preceded by a somewhat difficult home life: a troubled relationship with her mother and thoughts of suicide. Mary attended a number of schools during her childhood and often felt unhappy. When offered the opportunity for early admission to college, Mary accepted. However, in the next few years, she dropped out of college, had a broken relationship, wrecked her car, began using drugs, and was charged with shop-lifting. It was following these

\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 239.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., pp. 218-239.
experiences that Mary’s brother returned home for Christmas and told her of his Christian faith. Due to her brother’s ‘witness’, Mary decided to become a member of the Christian tradition.

From age 22-27 Mary desperately wanted to live a ‘God-centered life’\(^\text{67}\). However, things did not go smoothly. On several occasions Mary joined small sectarian house-churches which imposed a rigid disciplinary code of behaviour and on each occasion Mary was asked to leave either because she was unsubmitive to the elders or because she was a discipline problem.

It was during one of these periods of church exile that Mary met and married a man who previously had been a member of one of these sectarian house-churches. Soon after the wedding Mary gave birth to her first child, but by then the marriage was in trouble. Her husband returned to drug use. He also had an affair. Mary separated from her husband but later allowed him to return. Mary became pregnant again and gave birth to her second child. After an incident of spousal abuse, the marriage finally ended. To become settled and to provide a home for her children, Mary returned to her parents. They warmly received her. Interestingly, in spite of all of her hardships, in spite of all of her troubles, Mary claimed that the Lord was looking out for her, and that just when she needed help, help

\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 226.
was always there.

Fowler suggests that this is an interesting interview; and it is! He has included the story of an intelligent woman who repeatedly involved herself in patterns of self-destructive behaviour. Fowler believes that the importance of the Mary interview centres on Mary’s story of conversion and the questions which it raises concerning what changes in her faith and what does not change in a conversion experience:

Mary’s story, as recounted in the interview, had been full of moves, changes of community and several major crises and disappointments. In the years after her conversion, however, one central theme, one dominant theme or image, tended to provide assurance and sustaining meaning in the good times and the bad ... She says: “... At the same time I can see that the Lord was really working in my life to draw me to himself before that happened”. 68

However is this really what the story of Mary suggests? In the first section of the thesis it was argued that there is a dialectical character to both the social construction of religious life and knowledge in general. Berger argued that, when society is taken for granted, the nomos or meaningful order placed by humans

68 Ibid., p. 246.
on experience is equated with the cosmos\textsuperscript{69}. The social order is a construction which is consequently interpreted as being divinely given. If the biases and assumptions of the worldview are not questioned, then social reality is maintained. Thus, Berger's understanding of the social construction of religious life may also be applied to an understanding of the faith experience. If the dialectic is lost, then faith, like any other social construction, may become alienated from human experience and understood in non-human terms. Although there are important things to understand in the story of Mary relating to religious conversion experiences and the development of faith, Mary's story also needs to be understood in terms of alienation and alienating faith. To be more explicit, long term alienation seems to be as dominant a feature in Mary's life as religious conversion. Both before and after her conversion experience Mary was a highly alienated individual seemingly unable to be involved in world construction. To use the more technical language of Berger, Mary's conversion removed the meaninglessness or 'anomy' from her life, yet she still lived in an alienated world\textsuperscript{70}. She developed a theodicy which could rationalize and legitimate the pain in her life. However, Mary remained after conversion, as she

\textsuperscript{69} Berger, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 85.
had been before her conversion, essentially an alienated person.

Near the end of the story of Mary, Fowler summarizes some of the features which he hopes the reader has grasped. He hopes that the reader has begun to grasp the 'structural' and 'stage' aspect of his theory:

To the degree that we reached these goals, you were able to begin to see how the structuring of self, others and ultimate environment mutually interpenetrate in the structuring activity that is faith. Perhaps you also begin to see how, in this perspective, faith and action - one's ways of seeing and one's way of being - interpenetrate. 71

Fowler provides valuable information for educators of religious and spiritual life. He shows how 'seeing' and 'being' develops at a mythic level and as a literal approach, how this can develop throughout life to see that values are human constructions and how faith can be understood in universal terms. However, in the case of Mary her 'seeing' and her 'being' interpenetrate through an alienated faith72. Mary accepted as 'God-given' the institutional order imposed upon her by her significant others. For Mary there was no role to play in the creative construction of the house church.

71 Fowler, pp. 257-258.
72 Berger, p. 95.
Her position was that of a disciple who must accept totally the authority of the church. Social reality was a given reality that was legitimated through her quest for the God-centered-life. In spite of her faith, Mary continued to be alienated from her natural self [Hegel’s master-slave], her faith legitimized an inauthentic, alienated social self [part of Nietzsche’s herd], and her concept of God consisted of a view that God took care of her when she could not take care of herself [Freud’s infantilism]. Mary’s faith was faith in a God who could glue her fragmented life back together, but the faith could neither remove the alienation nor empower Mary to create a new direction for her life. Fowler provides much valued research into faith development but does not address the inherent, destructive and alienating trends in Mary’s faith.

In addition, the Christian tradition influences much of Fowler’s research. For example, Fowler describes the sixth and highest faith stage in terms of radical monotheism and the symbol of the coming Kingdom of God73. According to Fowler, the value of these symbols lies in the image that they present of the world as always being in a provisional state with respect to the ‘wholly other’ transcendent God. As well, the coming of God’s future is anticipated in the symbol of the Kingdom of God. Fowler argues that

73 Ibid., pp. 204-205.
these symbols free humanity from the past and provide hope for the future. The activity or movement at this stage is to “lean into God’s promised future for us and all being.”

Fowler’s concepts of ‘radical monotheism’ and ‘the Kingdom of God’ spring from the neo-orthodox theology of H. Richard Niebuhr. Clyde Holbrook has summarized the theology of Niebuhr in the following manner:

As a matter of personal conviction and thought, the sovereignty of God stands to the foreground. The God who is unapproachable in his awesome power, authority and justice approaches man in Jesus Christ with a mercy which is powerful and a love which is just. Nothing escapes this One’s searching eye ...

In terms of the history of theology, the writings of H. Richard Niebuhr were important for their criticism of liberal theology during the first half of the twentieth century. However, in light of interfaith dialogue, the stage of faith which Fowler presents as the highest to which humans are able to aspire probably should not be Niebuhr’s neo-orthodox theology, with its emphasis on the absoluteness of the Christian message.

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Fowler claims to use Niebuhr’s theology to construct a concept of universalizing faith and argues that the symbols of radical monotheism and the Kingdom of God cannot be dismissed as representations of the most developed forms of faith merely because they are theological. However, one must question the nature, role and function of symbols and whether Fowler’s use of the symbols is appropriate. As it was argued above, all aspects of human life, including symbols, are constructions. Tillich, whom Fowler uses to support his argument, suggests that symbols are not given from somewhere outside of human experience. They are human constructions\textsuperscript{77}. They are particular to a socio-cultural context\textsuperscript{78}. Thus, even if Fowler believes that the symbols of radical monotheism and the Kingdom of God are appropriate ways of expressing mature faith for people, these same symbols will be alienating for others. They will not necessarily be alienating because they are poor symbols. Rather, they will be alienating because they have been selected by Fowler. In fact, Fowler’s choice of symbols provides the ‘basic recipe’ for reification, namely that he has argued and projected an ontological status, independent of human activity, upon these symbols. As Berger and Luckmann have


\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp. 41-43.
described this phenomenon of reification...

Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products - such as facts of nature, results of cosmic law, of manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his product is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a de-humanized world.79

As it was argued in the first part of the thesis, there have been alienating trends in the development of religious traditions, and since the Enlightenment, critics have sought to expose alienating trends in religious life. The critical thought of Hegel, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Habermas was directed, in part, towards addressing alienating trends in religion80. Yet these critical insights have for the most part been either ignored or dismissed in most discussions of education about religious life. However, it seems clear that for many people the neo-orthodox foundation of faith development is alienating to modern lived experience. It is

79 Berger and Luckmann, p. 89.
80 Baum, pp. 7-61.
alienating and also meaningless; it is both alienating and promotes anomy. However, religious life does not need to be alienating. Faith does not need to be alienating to be meaningful. For a non-alienating understanding of faith symbols to genuinely unfold, then, Fowler must let meaningful symbols of faith arise from individuals themselves.

D. Summary

The research programmes of Oser and Gmünder and Fowler have attempted to provide empirical research into aspects of development in religious life. These types of research projects provide valuable information for educators of religious life. The research of Oser and Gmünder shows that some understandings of religious life are more rational and more human enhancing than others; it is possible to understand the sacred as being revealed within the depths of human relationships rather than as a supernatural being whose will must be followed. Their research shows that some individuals have developed a religious understanding that promotes human growth and development; thinking about the sacred does not mean thinking outside of the categories of human life. Similarly, Fowler's research shows how faith can broaden and deepen. Faith can develop beyond a mythic and
literal formulation to a universalizing faith enhancing life at the personal, community and global levels.

However, there are problems in both of these studies. Both are trapped within their particular theological frameworks and seem to use research, at times, to legitimate their theological positions. Both have normative theological assumptions and use metaphors uncritically to support their research. Oser and Gmünder tend to use metaphors of ultimacy, the types of metaphors which in the past have been used to legitimate triumphalism and eliminate dissent. Fowler tends to use metaphors which he claims are universal, yet are not because they have been selected by Fowler. Both of these research projects are, therefore, narrow and regional at the theoretical level when they could be much deeper and richer. Both understand that there are developmental aspects to religious life, yet fail to articulate the human constructedness of the activity. Both need to be appreciated by religious educators for their positive frameworks for advancing understanding of aspects of individual change, yet they also need to be criticized for their static theological formulations.

In part, Fowler began to articulate an understanding of faith and religious life that was not in static terms. These non-static and dynamic terms were found within the discussions about Wilfred
Cantwell Smith. In the next chapter, Smith’s understanding of religious life will be discussed in more detail in order to both further understand the dynamics and constructedness of human life and as well uncover additional alienating trends.
Chapter Five

Towards a Non-alienating Understanding of Religious Life:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the Study of 'Religion'

A. Introduction

This thesis has argued that religious life is an ongoing human construction. In order for religious life to be meaningful, individuals need to participate in the ongoing threefold dialectic of social world construction. To be socialized into a tradition and accept the plausibility structures that religious traditions give results in the connecting of the cosmos and nomos. However, to accept the cosmos/nomos connection uncritically, or to believe that it is divinely given, or to fail to see that the cosmos/nomos connection is a human construction creates the conditions that result in alienation.

Thus far, various alienating trends in religious life have been uncovered across religious traditions. As well, modern criticisms have articulated some alienating trends within religious life, such as the insight of Hegel into 'good' and 'bad' religion and the master slave relationship; the understanding of Marx that religious life at times numbs individuals to social realities, especially social
injustices; the understanding of Nietzsche that religious life sometimes calls for a sacrifice of human qualities and potentialities; the realization of Freud that often religious ideas function as illusions and keep individuals distanced from the harshness of reality and consequently at a stage of infantilism; and the articulation of Habermas that since many of the criticisms raised through the Protestant reformation have influenced the development of rational thought, and since these ways of thinking are rational, thus, irreversible, individuals can never return to a pre-critical, mythical or supernatural understanding of religious life.

Recent attempts to understand aspects of development in religious life have been made by Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder's studies on stages of religious judgement and by James Fowler’s investigation into faith. However, while these research projects are enormously helpful to educators, both projects contain alienating constructs because their theological biases limit their arguments.

In this chapter, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's understanding of faith and religious life will be discussed for two reasons. First, Smith understands the criticisms arising out of the western philosophical tradition in an important and insightful way, relevant to this thesis; and second, Smith articulates a theory of religious
life that is dynamic, open to change and development.

B. Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s Understanding of Religious Life: Philosophia as One of the Religious Traditions of Humankind.

In chapter three, an examination of some of the important philosophers of the western tradition provided criticisms and uncovered alienating trends in religious life. Because these criticisms are rational and irreversible [Habermas], they appear to be complete explanations for religious life: that is, they function as meta-theories to explain and explain away religious life. However, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has argued that the Graeco-Roman, the western Classical Tradition, or in other words philosophia should be understood as one of the religious traditions of humanity¹. Smith argues that the Graeco-Roman tradition, which is rational-idealist-humanist in orientation, has provided one of the spiritual traditions of the West and should be recognized along side the Judeo-Christian tradition².

Smith bases his claim that philosophia is one of the religious traditions of humanity upon his years of study in the comparative

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² Ibid., p. 254.
history of religious life. Granted, compared to other religious traditions *philosophia* appears to be very different. Yet according to Smith, this is one of the distinguishing marks of a religious tradition. It is, on the hand, always unique, while on the other hand, it shares a great deal with the other traditions of the world. From the Judeo-Christian perspective, *philosophia* does not look like a religious tradition but Smith argues that to understand religious diversity solely from the standpoint of western 'religion' is to neglect a great deal of humanity's religious life. Smith argues that what makes something 'religious' is the way it affects a person\(^3\), and he argues that *philosophia* has been one of the ways that the human spirit has been moved, inspired and nurtured to express faith\(^4\). *Philosophia* has operated in western culture as providing,

... persons and society with a complex of patterns in terms of which they have been able to organize their lives, and to find them meaningful; to find coherence in the universe, to attain coherence with themselves, and to coordinate these two; to dedicate themselves to goals discerned as worth striving for, with courage and loyalty and discipline strong enough to overcome both external and internal


pressures of lesser worth.  

Smith understands the word *philosophia* in a fuller sense than the modern word ‘philosophy’. *Philosophia* is more than an academic discipline. He suggests that it is better understood by the Latin word ‘rationality’. *Philosophia* has within it the components of humanism, metaphysics, idealism and rationality. Humanism is the vision that human beings are the final mystery and final truth of life: an almost ‘religious’ understanding of ‘the human as the measure of all things’. Idealism is a strand of thought which sees life as being oriented toward such ideals as beauty, justice and truth. However, as Smith understands it, rationality or Reason defines *philosophia*. Smith writes:

I use the word *philosophia* rather than its modern derivative ‘philosophy’ in order to suggest that what is under consideration here is that animating and commanding love of wisdom of which, historically, specific philosophic systems or patterns of ideas have been crystallized expression, as it were: the intellectual deposit; and I specifically wish to include also the idealist and humanist and rationalist dimension of the Greek tradition. In fact, if I had to use an English term rather than the Greek original, for what I have in mind, it would be not ‘philosophy’, but the Latin-derived ‘rationality’; perhaps,

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humanistic rationality. 6

Reason is the transcendent order in which humans participate and that to which followers subordinate themselves 7. Reason both integrates individuals in society and orders individuals to the rational truth of the universe. This integration of life with coherence and order Smith calls faith, at least faith in one of its forms, 8 and argues that *philosophia* functions as one of the major faith traditions of history 9.

Using Smith's argument, then, the ideas of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Habermas that were reviewed in Chapter Three are not necessarily meta-theories which really explain religious life. Rather, these critics of religious life also participate in a tradition and a faith, namely, *philosophia*. Their concerns for freedom, justice, autonomy, and equality are transcendent ideals within *philosophia*. They actually need to be understood more in terms of dialogue partners. Their understandings of alienation are crucial for a meaningful, non-alienating understanding of religious life, but they are not meta-theories which supersede religious life.

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6 Ibid., p. 267.
7 Ibid., p. 271.
8 Ibid., p. 271.
9 Ibid., p. 271.
C. The Concept of ‘Religion’ as Alienation:

There is a second aspect in the writings of W. C. Smith which has direct bearing upon the discussion of alienation and this relates to his definition of ‘religion’. Smith, especially in his early writings, declares that there is no such ‘thing’ as religion. From Smith’s perspective, the religions of the world are actually the activity of people who have faith and who are in contact with a tradition.

Smith constructs his argument from the standpoint of the history of religious life and demonstrates firstly that the modern idea of ‘religion’ is quite recent, only about 200 years old in western Europe, and secondly that the term ‘religion’ or its equivalent is not to be found in Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Greek or Chinese scriptures. Protestant orthodoxy with its disputes about theological doctrine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seemed to have established the idea in western minds that religion was a set of doctrines believed by a distinct community.

Sociologists of knowledge argue that the way the world is

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11 Ibid., p. 159.

12 Ibid., pp. 19-49.
interpreted and understood is profoundly affected by what concepts are selected and how experience is grouped and is organized. Smith argues that the western world should discard the glasses by which religious life has been viewed for the past 200 years. Specifically, he wants westerners to discard the perception that humans are divided into theological complexes called Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, or Buddhism which are thought to be mutually exclusive groups defined by beliefs. In order to understand the history and development of religious life Smith argues that the term ‘religion’ should no longer be used and instead that the twin concepts of faith and cumulative tradition be substituted\textsuperscript{13}.

Smith argues that we must de-reify our experience and remember that ‘religion’ is not a thing\textsuperscript{14}. Rather, it is a human activity, a social construction, an activity of persons. Religious life has been constructed and is continually being re-constructed. Humans have produced and continue to produce dogma, rituals and beliefs. According to Smith, the concept of ‘religion’ is not meaningless. However, it is liable to distort what it is actually trying to present\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 114.
By way of example then, Hinduism does not refer to an entity. It is the name that westerners have given a set of beliefs and activities in India. Hinduism is an idea in an outsider's mind: an abstraction which is, in fact, inadequate and an over-simplification of religious life in India. Hinduism is not a thing. It is a religious tradition, rich in diversity: a tradition that continues but also changes from century to century, generation to generation, country to country, culture to culture, indeed even from individual to individual. 'Religion' is not a static entity. It is an activity of human beings which develops and flourishes. Sometimes religious life regresses and atrophies; sometimes religious life is good and sometimes evil. Thus, Hinduism is not what a person has. Rather, Hinduism is a living movement, always in process, with a varied history which has been constructed by persons. Hindus do not have Hinduism. They participate in the ongoing development of the Hindu tradition.

Alienated Faith as Belief

In his book, The Meaning and End of Religion Smith argues that


17 Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 11.
what is commonly understood as 'religion' can be better understood in terms of the two concepts of faith and tradition. Faith is the subjective side, while tradition is the objective side of religious life. However, Smith argues that what is commonly understood by the word 'faith' misrepresents the subjective side of religious life. According to Smith, a disastrous misunderstanding has occurred, and this is due to the equating of the modern word 'belief' with the word faith.

Smith argues that faith is personal\(^\text{18}\). It is a characteristic quality or potentiality of human life\(^\text{19}\). It is an engagement\(^\text{20}\) and a human quality which changes, grows, and develops. Faith is not the same today as it was yesterday, and it will differ tomorrow\(^\text{21}\). Faith is not belief. At one time, belief and faith were once synonymous. However, the English language has evolved and the two words have drifted apart. Presently, belief carries the connotation of intellectually considering and accepting that certain ideas are true\(^\text{22}\). According to Smith, the modern concept of belief is alien to

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 167.

\(^{19}\) Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 3.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 11.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 12.
religious life. When belief, as intellectual assent to propositional statements, is substituted for faith, it reduces faith to manageable concepts which can be intellectually digested. Fundamentally, faith understood as belief reifies a human quality into an intellectual proposition which persons have the option of accepting or not accepting in terms of their own worldview. Faith, as Smith points out, is more nuanced and richer than an idea. It is the personal quality of being loyal and setting one's heart upon. Ironically, though, the modern understanding of belief has been a category to de-sacralize the cosmos: “Surely, you can’t believe that?”

Alienated Tradition as Idolatry:

Another way that static rather than dynamic categories have influenced the interpretation of religious life can be seen in the study of ‘idolatry’. According to Smith, idolatry is a misused word. People of other faiths do not worship images of wood or stone. Rather, they are moved to faith through what the stone or wood represents. Outsiders see wood or stone, while the person within the tradition sees images that direct one toward that which

23 Ibid., p. 12.

is transcendent. Thus, it is the outsider who is blind to 'spiritual realities' and not the so-called 'heathen' 25 for the outsider exhausts the image as it 'appears to the eye'. When wood and stone are seen simply as wood and stone, then one has failed to grasp the deeper signification. As Smith says: "Indeed, the error was a failure to recognize that anything at all was going on spiritually." 26

This, of course, is not merely a recent phenomenon. It was part and parcel of the Biblical tradition. The Jewish tradition interpreted other traditions as idolatrous; Canaanite and Phoenician religious systems which worshipped the gods of nature by means of fertility rites were systematically declared idolatrous because of the threat they posed to ‘Yahwehism’. Similarly, the early Christian community branded Gentiles who rejected Jesus as the Messiah as superstitious idol worshippers 27 while the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah were called legalists or "hardened of heart." 28 As Smith says: “The inherently pejorative quality of our concept of ‘idol’ is built into the Christian inheritance from the Jews, and from

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25 Ibid., p. 53.
26 Ibid., p. 53.
27 Romans 1: 20-25.
Christian (and Jewish) failure to understand, let alone appreciate, what is going on in the spiritual life of communities served by images, is integral to the Bible, and to our tradition. Indeed, the error was a failure to recognize that anything was going on spiritually. As a result, the concepts developed have signified the material objects involved but have omitted the transcendent dimension that was their primary significance.  

According to Smith, the names that we have for the ‘religions’ of the world were given by outsiders who perceived these traditions as idol worship. Thus, there is the peculiar situation where it is the observer who conceptualizes a ‘religion’ as existing. However, there is a difference between the observer and the participant. The observer is interested about ‘religion’ while the participant is concerned about God or transcendence.

Idolatry, then, can be understood as a second form of alienation. Alienation occurs when a religious tradition is reduced by an outsider to a thing. Outsiders either exhaust the religious symbol at the literal level or totally misrepresent the image. Thus,

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29 Ibid., p. 54.

30 Ibid., p. 54.

the authenticity of ‘other’ religious traditions is rejected and given the inappropriate conceptual label that denies their claims of transcendent reference\(^{32}\).

**Alienated Community as Cult**

There is a second aspect to idolatry and a third sense of alienation. An idol does not necessarily have to be made out of something like wood or stone. An idol can be anything that humans have constructed and believe to be true but have forgotten the construction. For example, to claim that a theological doctrine is ‘true’, according to Smith, is idolatrous:

For Christians to think that Christianity is true, or final, or salvific, is a form of idolatry. For Christians to imagine that God has constructed Christianity, or the church, or the like, rather than He/She/It has inspired us to construct it as He/She/It has inspired Muslims to construct what the world knows as Islam, or Hindus what is miscalled Hinduism, or inspired Bach to write the B Minor Mass or Ramanuja to write his theological commentaries, or Pancapana (if it was indeed he) to build Borobudur - that is idolatry. \(^{33}\)

This misunderstanding of the humanness of religious

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\(^{32}\) Smith, "Idolatry: In Comparative Perspective", p. 58

traditions is a peculiar feature of some faith communities who assume that they alone speak as 'true believers' and possess 'religious truth'. This misunderstanding has led Smith to the realization that community is not part of tradition. Indeed, there is a difference between 'community' and 'tradition'. As Smith writes:

Twenty years ago I wrote the Meaning and End of Religion, of which the thesis in a nutshell was that, seen in world-history perspective, what has been called the religions of the world are indeed parts of this world, are temporal, contingent, mundane, while their primary significance lies in their roles as mundane intermediaries between humankind and God. Their two component elements, which I dubbed cumulative tradition and faith, play a role in this supremely significant matter. I might now speak rather of three component elements, counting community as in significant ways distinct from tradition, rather than assumed under it, with participation in community as a major element. 34

Thus, a second sense of idolatry and a third sense of alienation occurs when a religious community understands the symbols of its faith literally as being true. The community 'believes' that the religious 'symbol' [which they have forgotten they have constructed] accurately represents the sacred. However, Smith argues that all perceptions of the sacred are conditioned, partial and

34 Ibid., p. 59.
in the last respect, human constructions.

Thus, whenever the constructedness is forgotten and doctrine, liturgy, ritual, dogma, scripture or sacrament are thought to be divinely given then there is alienation. The conceptual images of God, that is, ritual, belief, and dogma become idols when perceived as uniquely and divinely given. In addition, Smith argues that the community which understands itself as being the unique and correct interpreter of these conceptual images of God becomes a 'cult'\textsuperscript{35}.

Now, the use of the word 'cult' does not refer to the popular and sensational image of cult as a new religious movement which uses various and perhaps deceptive means by which to entice adherents. The word 'cult' means that there is a closed set of rituals and beliefs which defines and reinforces membership. The members appropriate rituals and beliefs uncritically and perceive them as being divinely given. Within this type of tradition, members who question or dispute dogma are excluded or invited to leave. Thus, on the one hand, the cult forgets that conceptual images of the sacred are human constructions, and on the other hand, the cult protects the humanly produced conceptual images of the sacred by sociological exclusion. For Smith, this follows a standard, gradual pattern:

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 59.

According to Smith, the last two steps of the alienation process have occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries37 and these last two steps transform community into cult. Although recently, within the Christian tradition, some more liberal communities have tried to approach the human constructedness of dogma and ritual in terms of 'mystery'38, Smith points out that there are problems with such an approach:

Christians have tended to speak of ... “mystery”, which is of course neither unreasonable nor helpful; yet such a phrasing is in danger of falling victim to and perpetuating the modern-Western propensity to perceive the spiritual as separate from the rest of our life, even a bit odd. One might find it more reasonable and more helpful to rejoin most of the human race in seeing transcendence as closely interwoven with, for human beings a fundamental and standard part of, the everyday ... Roman Catholics speak of Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Personally, I would be more inclined to speak of the real presence of God in the lives of those with faith participating

36 Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 64.

37 Ibid., p. 64.

38 Smith, “Idolatry: In Comparative Perspective”, p. 63.
in the Eucharist, a presence mediated through that rite or in the interaction between the persons and the rite. 39

D. Summary

Two main points emerge from Smith’s understanding of religious life. First, the western philosophical tradition or humanistic tradition or philosophia should be understood as one of the religious traditions of humanity. Thus, the criticisms or religious life raised by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers within the western philosophical tradition should not be viewed as meta-theories explaining or explaining away religious life. Rather, philosophia and criticisms arising from within this tradition should be dialogue partners with other religious traditions, promoting and advancing the good of humanity.

Second, Smith writes to undermine alienating trends: the alienation which occurs when individuals forget the human constructedness of religious knowledge and life. Religious life has a history and the religious life of humanity has a history. Religious life has three components: faith, tradition, and community. Each component can become alienated from human experience, that is, given inappropriate ontological status and not seen as being humanly

39 Ibid., p. 63.
constructed: faith as belief, tradition as idolatry, and community as cult.

Religious traditions are social realities. Traditions are part of a culture. Yet all too often this is forgotten and human religious traditions, which are a product of human history, are perceived as being given, as it were, 'supernaturally'. The main point, then, that educators of religious life can learn from Smith's perspective is that there is no such 'thing' called Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity. Rather, as Smith writes, the task is to understand people and how they live their lives according to:

(1) the accumulated religious tradition that, in one or another particular limited form, each inherited;
(2) the particular personality - with its own potentialities and its own quirks - that each brought to it;
(3) the particular environment - new every morning - in which each happened to live (this and the first include the community in which each participated); and
(4) the transcendent reality to which the tradition pointed, and in relation to which the life was lived.  

The significance of the insight concerning the humanness of religious life has been understood for almost thirty years by some

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scholars in the area of religious studies. Now this insight needs to be known and articulated outside the narrow confines of the academic discipline, and especially incorporated wherever education about religious life tasks place. Discussions about education and religious life are presented more fully in the next chapter.
Chapter Six

Towards a Non-Alienating Approach
to Education about Religious Life

A. Introduction

Having demonstrated that religious life is a human construction and that it is often constructed in a way that alienates individuals from meaningful participation, this chapter discusses recent movements within education that endeavour to incorporate and foster a wider, more holistic and comprehensive approach to education. These approaches need to be incorporated into education about religious life in order to address alienating trends. Specifically, the chapter discusses three points: first, education about religious life needs to broaden and accept that faith can be expressed and nurtured through W. C. Smith's concept of *philosophia*, or more generally, through spirituality and any 'considered way of life'; second, that curriculum about religious education whether for a school or a religious institution should be holistic; and third, education about religious life should be presented in a way that is meaningful for all learning types.
B. "Philosophia, Spirituality and Way of Life Education"

W. C. Smith has argued that *philosophia* represents one of the religious traditions of humanity. The concepts of humanism, idealism, metaphysics and rationality have contributed to an ordered cosmos/nomos pattern. This is a form of faith, and thus, *philosophia* should be regarded as one of the religious traditions of humanity. Clive Beck accepts Smith's argument about *philosophia*¹ and suggests that education about religious life should also include 'spirituality'² and any 'considered way of life' which is "a full integration of inner and outer life."³ Thus, *philosophia* in a broad sense would be any considered, reflective way of life, not necessarily religious in the accustomed sense, but an expression of faith in terms of Smith's understanding: a way for individuals to direct their lives towards "goals discerned as worth striving for, with courage and loyalty and discipline strong enough to overcome both external and internal pressures of lesser worth."⁴

Beck also argues that the components of a considered way of

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³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴ Smith, "Philosophia", p. 268.
life are characterized by spiritual values: characterized by awareness, openness, breadth of outlook, a sense of integration, a sense of wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, detachment, acceptance, love, gentleness and a holistic outlook\(^5\). This spiritual or considered way of life is a way that many individuals express faith, and thus needs to be incorporated into education about religious life. A sense of spirituality, then, does not necessarily mean that an individual must have a sense of the sacred as defined by religious traditions. Yet, spirituality or *philosophia* for many individuals may remove anomy, and as well, provide the opportunity for individuals to reflect, create, and participate in a form of religious life that is non-alienating for them. Such a way to faith life, through *philosophia* or spirituality needs to be included in education about religious life.

C. The Holistic Curriculum

Beck’s discussion about spirituality, a considered way of life, and *philosophia* emphasizes the concepts of integration and holism. With these qualities being essential to religious life in the ‘broad sense’, this leads to the following question. How should education about religious life actually be organized in order that both

\(^{5}\) Beck, pp. 163-164.
information is appropriately presented and affective qualities are
developed? One attempt to answer this question is found within the
suggestions of John Miller concerning the Holistic Curriculum.

Miller argues that there have been three main approaches to
curriculum and instruction. He calls the first “transmission”\(^6\), and
he characterizes this approach to curriculum as a one way
movement of information from the teacher [or religious leader] to the student
[or religious follower]. This is the traditional approach to education
where the student receives information from the teacher who is the
expert. The transmission approach views the student as a passive
learner, receiving information from another.

The second approach to curriculum is “transaction”\(^7\). This
approach is based on a problem solving model and involves greater
interaction between teacher and student than the transmission
model. Dialogue between student and curriculum forms the basis of
the transaction curriculum, and Miller suggests that a prime
example of the transaction approach is the application of scientific
methodologies. One of the outcomes of the transactional model is
the developed ability for problem solving and rational planning\(^8\).


\(^7\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 5.
This second approach to curriculum is still problematic for Miller and he argues for a third approach which he names “transformation”⁹. This model incorporates a wider understanding of education and individual learning than just cognitive change. It is an approach to curriculum which focuses on “personal and social change”¹⁰. Miller believes that an important objective of the transformation model of curriculum should be movement towards holistic education¹¹. Miller defines holistic education:

The focus of holistic education is on relationships - the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationships between various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and the community, and the relationship between the self and the Self. In the holistic curriculum the student examines these relationships so that he/she gains both an awareness of them and the skills necessary to transform the relationships where it is appropriate.¹²

Miller argues that the holistic curriculum views education as more than a set of competencies to be ‘performed’, or an abstract set of mental processes. Instead, there is an acceptance of the

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.
¹² Ibid., p. 3.
richness and wholeness of human experience\textsuperscript{13}. Holistic education includes spiritual and religious education; it values thinking and feeling\textsuperscript{14}, meditation and action\textsuperscript{15}.

The holistic curriculum has three advantages for education about religious life. First, it corrects the traditional view that religious education is the transmission of information. Historically, there has been the view that there are set truths that must be taught and a tradition to be handed on. However, as it has been pointed out, this traditional approach often perceived the transmitted information as 'eternally true' and 'god-given', and not as a human construction. To the extent that the transmission model continues, alienating trends will tend to be reinforced and socialization into partial and alienating aspects of religious life will continue. Second, in chapter two, it was suggested that alienating trends have fostered a view of life which is dualistic: leaders/followers, sacred space/secular space, mind/body, male/female. Dualistic thinking patterns are developed and reinforced as new followers are socialized into a tradition. Thus, an holistic approach to curriculum and education has a crucial role to

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 93-94.
play not only in exposing alienating and less than holistic trends, but as well stressing the involvement of the student to internalize, integrate and externalize the information in a meaningful way. This demands a broader approach to education about religious life than transmission. Third, a non-alienating\textsuperscript{16} approach to teaching about religious life would support a curriculum that views religious life holistically, in dialogue with the physical sciences, the social sciences, history, literature and comparative study. It means developing a curriculum about religious life that focuses on individuals expressing faith in a variety of ways, in contact with a tradition, living in a community.

Miller understands the process of education as a broadening of vision and perspective\textsuperscript{17} where the student is challenged and changed. As well, concerning religious life Miller correctly notes that knowing about a religious tradition is not the same as being a practitioner within a religious system\textsuperscript{18}. Still, even knowing about a religious tradition can aid in the development of empathy, understanding, tolerance and acceptance. However, if possible the learning environment should attempt to give an experience and

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 2.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 7.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 129.
permit intuitive knowledge; something which usually cannot be duplicated by cognitive study.

D. Teaching to Learning Styles: 4MAT Learning

In this chapter it has been suggested that education about religious life needs to expand to include 'philosophia', as well as spirituality and any 'considered way of life'. John Miller has suggested that the curriculum concerning education about religious life needs to unfold in broader and more holistic ways than in the past. A third consideration arises with respect to the individuality of learning. For education about religious life to be non-alienating, promote involvement and ongoing meaningful construction, then educators should ensure that individual differences and preferences to perceiving and processing information are addressed. One approach which provides significant suggestions for a non-alienating approach for teaching and learning about religious life is found within Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT method.

McCarthy argues that individuals learn in different ways and these differences in learning are due to differences in how individuals perceive and process information\textsuperscript{19}. She suggests that

\textsuperscript{19} Bernice McCarthy, \textit{The 4MAT System: Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques} (Barrington: EXCEL, Inc., 1987), p. 3.
individuals learn in different ways due to "who we are, where we are, how we see ourselves, and what people ask of us."\textsuperscript{20}

McCarthy's research draws from several sources. First, she follows the research of David Kolb which suggests that there is one way of perceiving information and another way of processing information. Some individuals perceive information through their senses, others through their feelings or emotions, while still others perceive information through thinking and reflecting. Some individuals process information reflectively, while others do so actively; some individuals need to internalize, while some need to act\textsuperscript{21}. Kolb suggests that there is a continuum for sensing/feeling and another continuum for acting/watching. The range and the balance varies with the individual. However, there is a need to recognize, value and develop all modes of perceiving and processing information. Kolb suggests that the individual combination of perceiving and processing information results in a person's learning style. A person's learning style results from "our hereditary equipment, our particular past life experiences, and the demands of our present environment."\textsuperscript{22} McCarthy incorporates and translates

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 3. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 18. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 26.
\end{flushright}
Kolb's insights and others\textsuperscript{23} into four types of learners; the feeler student who is helpful, sensitive, expressive, creative and artistic; the thinker student who is organized, accurate, detailed, logical and time conscious; the sensor student is who organized, practical, likes to get things done and is productive; and the intuitor student who is interesting, inventive and looks for possibilities\textsuperscript{24}. The following chart summarizes the four learning types of McCarthy, which she calls 4MAT Learning:

Type One Learner
Seeks personal meaning. Judges things in relationship to values. Functions through social interaction. Wants to make the world a better place. Is cooperative and sociable. Respects authority, when it is earned.

Type Two Learner
Seeks intellectual competence. Judges things by factual verification. Functions by adapting to experts. Needs to know 'the important things,' and wants to add to the world's knowledge. Is patient and reflective. Prefers chain-of-command authority.

Type Three Learner
Seeks solutions to problems. Judges things by their usefulness. Functions through kinesthetic awareness. Wants to make things happen. Is practical and straightforward. Seeks authority as necessary, but will work

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 34-35.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 29.
around it if forced.

Type Four Learner
Seeks hidden possibilities. Judges things by gut reactions. Functions by synthesizing various parts. Enjoys challenging complacency. Is enthusiastic and adventure-some. Tends to disregard authority. 25

McCarthy’s approach to education is similar to Miller’s in that she desires a holism; specifically, she desires a teaching and learning environment that facilitates all learning styles. Since intuition, emotion, sensation and thinking are all ways to experience and understand life, she suggests that four questions must be asked when constructing a lesson: Why? What? How? and What If ...?26

The question “Why?” addresses personal meaning and speaks to the Type One learner. The question “What?” relates to the information and the facts of the lesson and speaks to the Type Two learner. The question “How?” relates to how something actually works; it is the application of facts and information, and speaks to the Type Three learner. And the question “What if ...? is about possibilities, inventing and trying things in a new and perhaps innovative way, and this speaks to the Type Four learner.

The 4MAT Learning approach of McCarthy consists of the


educator constructing a lesson plan around the four questions in order to facilitate the appropriate learning environment for all four learning styles. The individual moves through the four learning quadrants either in a lesson or a series of lessons: experience to reflection to conceptualization to experimentation. Yet, as McCarthy suggests, for wholeness to occur in the educational process, students need to develop abilities in all four styles of learning; those who are most comfortable watching need to refine their reflective abilities and as well attempt forms of experimenting, and those who enjoy experimenting need to refine this ability but also develop the patience for reflection. As McCarthy writes:

All four styles of learning are equally valuable. Each has its own strength and weaknesses. If you’re Type One, Two, Three, or Four, that is the most comfortable place for you to be. This is your best learning style. 28

McCarthy’s research suggests that schools validate primarily the learning experience of Type Two learners: the analytic thinkers who enjoy receiving information. Yet, as McCarthy’s research also suggests, about seventy percent of students are not Type Two

27 Ibid., p. 19.

28 Ibid., p. 45.
learners. She writes: “Schools do not value the sensing/feeling approach (except with very small children); therefore, it is neglected and sometimes downright discouraged.” Piaget suggested that as individuals move through stages of intellectual development there is an increased ability to perceive information abstractly. Yet as McCarthy notes: “But learning is not all cognitive. It is not all theoretical. There is more to growing up than increasing rationality.”

W. C. Smith has argued that when it comes to religious life it is the affective side which is the basis of faith: faith as trust, giving one’s heart to a purpose or cause, pledging allegiance. With the reduction of faith to belief and belief interpreted as assent to doctrine, often the concreteness of religious life is devalued. Thus, often education about religious life devalues human experience and action, and tends to focus on concepts and ideas, neglecting and forgetting other aspects of human life.

In the same way that W. C. Smith suggests individuals express faith in different ways, educators need to understand that

29 Ibid., p. 51.
30 Ibid., p. 7.
31 Ibid., p. 13.
32 Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 76.
individuals learn in different ways. Historically, transmission has been the dominant way to teach about religious life. However, when the goal is faith development, which W. C. Smith suggests is an affective quality33, then probably analytical thinking (Type Two) is the least effective and better approaches are intuition (Type One) and dynamic (Type Four).

Too often, education about religious life, either in a school or a religious setting, is reduced to teaching about religious ideas: the teaching about the 'nature of God' or the 'Ten Commandments' from the teacher (priest, minister, counsellor) to the student. Incorporating McCarthy's approach to education about religious life would be a way to prevent this one-sided approach, a way to limit an alienating trend. Such an approach as 4MAT learning when appropriately implemented would speak to individuals through their own learning style. McCarthy writes:

Students read, they write stories and essays and sometimes poems, they solve math problems, they paint and draw, they play music. They do skill things, they do workbooks... They just don't get enough opportunities to add their own egg. That's because people are afraid, especially administrators, that when children do things, they get noisy. I find that odd, because when I watch people really engrossed in doing things, they are usually very quiet. I find it

33 Ibid., p. 76.
especially odd because learning is interactive. It is the learner interacting with the learning that is the real growth.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, to recognize a variety of learning styles means that increasingly educators need to be more imaginative and to present religious life in ways that speak meaningfully to individuals of all learning styles: ways that are personally meaningful, with practical applications, and presenting opportunities so that individuals can add something of themselves that is innovative and inventive ... so that the cycle of learning can continue. This learning approach both promotes individual meaning and provides the opportunity for dialectical non-alienating involvement.

Learning is ongoing. Learning about religious life is an ongoing process influenced by new experiences, new understandings, new applications, and new possibilities. When education is appropriate to the learner, when education respects the variety of learning styles, when education promotes understanding and empathy rather than legitimating an ideology and presenting an implausible theodicy, then the learner will begin to have a non-alienating approach to religious education. Whether in a classroom, a church group, a discussion group or a counselling session the respecting of learning styles provides a way to present material in a more diverse

\textsuperscript{34} McCarthy, p. 17.
yet learning specific manner, sensitive to the criticisms raised during previous chapters, a non-alienating approach to education is in place.

E. Summary

This chapter has argued that education about religious life can unfold in less alienating and more meaningful ways. First, religious educators need to accept Clive Beck’s argument that religious education should broaden and include philosophia, spirituality and any considered way of life; these are dialogue partners in the single history of human religious life and they are contemporary ways for some individuals to establish meaning in the world.

Second, education about religious life should be holistic and should encourage a holistic vision such as the one which John Miller presents. Education about religious life is both a learning about and a process of self-discovery. It is information and integration. It is the learning of facts, but also learning a sense of appreciation. It is gaining in knowledge and developing affective qualities. Education about religious life needs a holistic approach: both teaching of facts and developing affective qualities such as a sense of empathy and of compassion.

Third, research suggests that individuals learn in different
ways. Thus, the process of understanding religious life should be presented through a variety of learning techniques: "the movement is from experience, to reflecting, to conceptualizing, to tinkering and problem solving, to integrating new learning into the self."  

McCarthy writes:

> We need to lecture and interact, to show them how and let them try it, to have them memorize and learn to question the experts, to give answers and ask better questions, to train their minds while valuing the responses from their hearts, to solve problems and find problems, to exercise the intellect and the imagination, to hold on to our best traditional techniques and to add new ones, to teach them the best that civilization offers and give them the courage to improve it.  

This discussion about alienating trends in religious education leads to the following conclusion. A five fold task awaits religious educators: to educate individuals in the religious and spirituality history of humanity; to articulate the historical development of religious and spiritual life, including the social construction and ongoing legitimation of doctrines, rituals and worldviews through symbols and metaphors; to understand criticisms raised in the modern period; to make individuals aware that traditions evolve,

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communities change and faith varies, and do so in a way that is holistic and speaks to all learning types; and most importantly, to show individuals that they have a role to play in the unfolding of religious and spiritual life, that what they internalize need not be alienating for it can be externalized in personally meaningful ways.


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