PART ONE

DIAGNOSIS AND ASSESSMENT

A provisional review of the current state of religion in Western and Middle-Eastern spheres, drawing specific attention to the individual characteristics of collective religious behaviors; both fruitful and destructive; functional and dysfunctional; and an overview of the effects of religious institutions' operational polices on their officers and members

CHAPTER ONE

A SOCIAL PATHOLOGY

*A frank and uncompromising appraisal of some of the more disturbing
aspects of institutionalized religion in our world today*

Everyone is affected by religion. Whether believer, *agnostic,** *atheist* [†] or undecided, or whether simply living in sweet oblivion of the whole religious debate, one cannot live in the world today and not be affected by the peaks and swells of religious opinion. No different to primeval times when religious superstitions and beliefs shaped the social and economic policies of ancient civilizations, modern cultures and politics are equally permeated by religion in many shapes and forms.

Increasingly however, many forms of modern religious expression are seen as being a blight on civilization rather than a blessing. Surely no one will dispute the curse of radical fundamentalism; the hubristic exploitations of authoritarian clergy; or the disempowering ignorance that accompanies so many of our longstanding, superstition-based orthodoxies? But despite many theoretical and political attempts to do so, humankind has yet to successfully and substantially separate the religious and the political world. Indeed, religion's perennial durability in relation to the historical rise and fall of civilizations adds considerable weight to the contrary argument; that separation from the political world is *not* the solution to any perceived 'religious problem' but rather, that a fruitful symbiotic union between religion and politics based upon universal ethical and moral principles is the choice of wisdom that will best serve humanity in the long run. Implied in this argument of course, is the clear understanding that it is the *best* of both

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* Agnostic; ('a'-without / 'gnösis'-knowledge) – one who accepts the *possibility* that God exists, but believes there can be no formal proof thereof

[†] Atheist; ('a'-without / 'theos'-of God) – one who denies the existence of God(s)

worlds that should be combined. In such a union the various faith traditions would bring their accumulated human resources and social wisdom to bear, with such stridently proclaimed principles as the universal 'Golden Rule' (loving one's neighbor) forming the moral backbone of social ethics and corporate enterprise. Political science meanwhile, would provide the pragmatic structural foundations, thus grounding both religion and politics in a true and 'Godly' humanitarianism. Political enthusiasm would provide the drive, and religious virtue would supply the guidance. In other words, it would be (a) the moral fortitude and social wisdom, and (b) the noble ambitions and scientific structure of both religion and politics respectively that would be partnered in any such productive merger.

However, and speaking frankly and uncompromisingly; in viewing the recent spate of atrocities committed in the name of religious beliefs or under religious sanction or protection; anyone could justifiably conclude that popular religion is losing its virtue – if not its very reason. Despite the fact that acts of prejudice, immorality, and criminal violence have all-too-often been sanctioned by duplicitous clerics lurking insidiously in the alcoves of history, surely the current Pandora's box of sexual depravity, corporate corruption, and maniacal religious zeal that infests modern religious institutions is cause for special concern? From acts of mindless terror carried out by suicidal zealots upon unsuspecting civilians; to the plague of chronic sexual abuse perpetrated upon innocent children by trusted clerics; or even to the slick displays of overt religious piety that mask the reprehensible complacency of self-involved religious groups – any general psychological assessment of the current state of institutionalized religion must surely include a *diagnosis* [*] of at least partial gross dysfunction and compromised morality; if not downright madness. Whatever the final clinical diagnosis, the fact that institutionalized religion is suffering an unparalleled *pathogenesis* [†] is surely beyond question.

Immorality or Insanity?

Sadly, the issue of rescuing the religious world's suffocating morality comes second to the task of restoring its sanity. For without the foundation of reason, any brave efforts to restore a functioning morality are doomed to founder in the emotive confusion common to the uneducated religious mindset – a mindset historically vulnerable to prevailing superstitions and the manipulations of the wicked. Certainly, as long as religionists claim the

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[*] Diagnosis; assessment; evaluation; critical analysis of the nature of something
[†] Pathogenesis; the development of a diseased or morbid condition

authority to designate as 'truth' that which escapes logical or scientific scrutiny, incidences of unscrupulous or delusional-based exploitation of the less well-educated are likely to continue. Indeed, it is only through appealing to reason that we may begin to separate the sheep from the wolves so-to-speak, identifying the innocent and the poorly-informed from those that would perpetrate, and seek to profit immorally from deliberate and calculated manipulations.

As we are painfully discovering today, social diseases such as the aforementioned scourges of maniacal terrorism, clerical sexual abuse, and other devious orchestrations that have arisen from the perversion of religious ideals are far from being either harmless or isolated phenomena. Selective ignorance, fear of others, suppression of 'outside' learning, guilt and superstition, and 'absolute' religious convictions; each are aberrations of the spiritual quest which, sociologically and historically speaking at least, appear designed to exploit the trusting masses.

Whether these aberrations are, (i) the products of the sincere but distorted beliefs of religionists; (ii) whether they stem from psychological disorders; or (iii), are deliberate deceptions orchestrated for evil purposes; religion thus manifested infects society with the gravest forms of social cancer. Whilst admittedly not exclusive to religious institutions, there can be no doubt that the more insidious forms of social corruption are those fashioned under the guise of holiness. The active promotion of separatist ideologies in our churches, schools, temples, and mosques only serves to fuel deep mutual suspicions – leading inevitably to increased human misery through the agencies of bigotry, prejudice, elitism and fanaticism. Like dark clouds gathering on the horizon, these ominous signs of social decay can no longer be ignored. Nor can they be treated in seclusion. Increasingly manifested on a global scale these problems cry out for urgent attention and resolution. The question is…. who is up to the task?

Well first of all, not institutionalized religion as we know it today. Because these and similar problems are now so *endemic** to, and prevalent within the field of religion that they effectively preclude religion's ability to cure itself. In the case of *paedophile*† clerics for example, the hubristic manipulations and deceptions of senior clergy who covered up these appalling crimes bears pejorative testament to the chronic preeminence of selfish personal, political and economic issues over matters of morality, ethics, or true spirituality in the higher echelons of authority in the world's

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* Endemic; prevalent in a particular location, place, or people
† Paedophile; an adult who is sexually attracted to children

largest Christian Church.[*] Despite frantic attempts to minimize public exposure, one can be assured that the policy choices made by Bishops and Cardinals were not simple nor innocent "errors of judgment" in any way, shape or form, but were calculated decisions designed to protect the prestige of the institutionalized Church and her officers at the direct expense of their trusting victims. This included the unspoken policy of ostracizing and isolating the immediate victims of sexual abuse at the very time they most needed spiritual and emotional support. Indeed, October 2006 saw the BBC TV's exposure of a longstanding 'top secret' Vatican document known as *Crimen Sollicitationis* designed to all intents and purposes to protect the institutionalized church and her officers – paedophiles or not – at the expense of whomever or whatever challenged it. This included the obstruction of any civil authorities that tried to bring criminal priests to justice. Even more disturbing perhaps is the fact that it was the current Pope, in his role as Cardinal Ratzinger, who enforced this immoral policy for over twenty years.

So too the laity as a whole, who for decades were deliberately kept ignorant of the criminal nature of so many priests. Quoting psychiatrist M. Scott Peck's clinical definition of evil, we read; "…the use of power to destroy the spiritual growth of others for the purpose of defending and preserving the integrity of our own sick selves."[1] Even today, efforts continue within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church to undermine disclosure and accountability measures. How indeed does any church defend the use of such morally-evasive and psychologically-destructive policies against the victims of her corrupt officers? Does 'corporate survival' ever justify such actions in any organization – let alone in an institution that claims moral authority over millions? Indeed, how many founding principles can be debased, and how much decay and corruption can exist before vital integrity is lost and a religion is declared morally bankrupt? Must a religious institution that claims to be founded upon the highest moral principles and beliefs descend into utter evil before we begin to take note?

The awful phenomenon of the State-and-Church run Industrial Schools system springs to mind as yet another of the more blatant examples of clerical conspiracy and child abuse on a massive scale. Similar institutions operated in Australia and Canada for decades, but it was in Ireland – arguably *the* most integrated State-Church political system in mid twentieth century Europe – where the greatest horrors took place. Whether

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[*] The lay-Catholic website "*Survivors First*" reports that two-thirds of U.S. Bishops have been implicated either participating in, or illegally covering up cases of clerical sexual abuse

or not virtuous officers of the system could operate in such an environment without being aware of what was going on remains debatable. But it is now clear that the most awful physical and emotional abuses were visited upon the less-fortunates of society; orphans, the poor, unmarried mothers and the mentally handicapped all suffered terribly at the hands of a brutal and inhumane system. Once again, trusted individuals; priests, nuns, police, judges and politicians – the very pillars of the community – either actively colluded in suppression of these crimes or, chose 'not to have known anything.' Although publicly displayed as models of charity and social conscience, those running these awful institutions showed little compassion or mercy to their charges, and even less remorse when confronted with their crimes. Like so many of those unnamed children's graves lying still-unclaimed amongst the ruins, dark and disturbing secrets stayed buried for decades – and continue to do so. Whatever the original intention, it was never true religion or morals that fueled these institutions. Rather inhumane exploitations and shameless profiteering on a massive scale.

And what about religious extremism, especially in its more militant forms such as we witness almost daily in atrocities supposedly committed 'in the name of God', or of Allah? In the case of religious fanaticism expressed in acts of mass murder and terrorism, who is going to argue that such devastation can ever be tolerated as acceptable or justified 'expressions of religious belief?' Whatever the source of the destructive energies that motivate this bloodthirsty insanity, surely no one will deny that if such atrocities are ever to be defined in a religious context, then most certainly, it is "religion gone mad!"

In our third opening example of what I term 'gross religious dysfunction' we noted the far more subtle but equally, if not more destructive phenomenon of pseudo, or pretentious religion. This refers to those *insalubrious* [*] forms of popular religion that are either so vacuous, or self-involved, that at best they are little more than cliquey social clubs – and at worst, breeding grounds for prejudice and bigotry. Using dramatic speakers or high-tech multimedia shows to captivate the spellbound audience, and replete with all the trappings and affectations of piety, high-impact religious presentations collude to stimulate the emotions, often, whilst suffocating the soul – and in the process, prevent so many from experiencing their own and each other's humanity at a profound (or should we say 'truly religious') level. In an insidious pretense that amounts to little more than religious commercialism, all the signs, symbols, and sacred

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[*] Insalubrious; unwholesome; unsavory; unhealthy

rituals of genuine piety are proffered for a price – a price that also buys an untroubled conscience for another week or two. Despite their often very public religious affectations, these are the very ones who constitute Karl Menninger's "common enemy"[2] who, in the words of Norman Cousins are;

> …those whose only concern in life is that it stay in one piece during his own lifetime… up to his hips in success… (who) not only believes in his own helplessness, but actually worships it (assuming) that there are mammoth forces at work which the individual cannot comprehend much less alter or direct. [3]

In surrounding ourselves with enough like-minded others, we thus collude to sanctify the cult of 'me' by making it a cult of 'we'. Now safely nested amongst those 'chosen' others, we indulge our sanctimonious complacency in the knowledge that there is at least some safety (or public credibility) in numbers.

Token membership of the collective thus nullifies the sense of personal responsibility and, having surrendered my conscience to the group I can now luxuriate in the conviction that I, at least, am 'saved'. It is due to such apathy, ignorance, and denial of social conscience that much that is wrong with the world prevails. No different to the man in the street who conveniently "sees nothing" and does nothing when a crime is committed, pseudo-religion thus defined offers a neatly packaged, conscience-numbing narcotic in lieu of the disquieting but ultimately rewarding genuine religious experience. Wanting the image and benefits of respectability without earning them honestly with a sincere commitment to truth, religion thus packaged is the answer to the moral coward's prayers.

Fundamentalism
Equally problematic of course are those intense forms of popular religion usually labeled 'fundamentalist', 'literalist', or 'exclusivist' and which differ from the aforementioned suicidal fanatics only inasmuch as their dogmatic beliefs haven't quite carried them into the arena of militant extremism yet. Indeed, it is just one short conceptual step from dogmatic fundamentalism to militant extremism. The social environment in the United States today for instance – (incidentally the birthplace of modern Protestant fundamentalism) – has like most Western societies, sufficient economic, political, and intellectual breadth to accommodate a broad variety of religious and political opinions *without* any particular group feeling the need to forcefully

impose its position upon others. But in societies with limited 'breadth' (as here defined) such as authoritarian cultures or in economically-depressed regions for example, strict religious devotion is often identified by the masses as the panacea for all their socio-political problems. But whether in so-called 'enlightened' or still-developing societies, the fundamentalist ideology rooted in absolutism, elitism, and sectarianism remains the same. The cycle of fear, superstition, ignorance, and finally aggression seems constant throughout, and not even the so-called civilized world is safe from its effects. For even as the threat of Islamic terrorism takes root in the minds and hearts of Middle Americans, apocalyptic ministers pander enthusiastically to their fears. Blending home-grown religious beliefs with a naïve but passionate patriotism, melodramatic 'Reverends' generate increasingly radical forms of Christian fundamentalism that may, one day become the very fulfillment of their own apocalyptic projections.

These socially-acceptable forms of religious narrow-mindedness subtly depress an individual's self esteem to the point of fostering total dependence upon 'the Church,' her officers, and/or her sacraments and symbols – in direct opposition to promoting a truly universal, or united spirituality for instance. Carrying all the hallmarks of ritualized addiction, the associated obsessive behaviors are rarely seen as dysfunctional, having been repeatedly sanctified as admirable and even 'holy' within the group paradigm. Whether ritually formalized or simply implied through the repetition of unremitting religious teachings, the constant reaffirmation either of sectarian elitism, or of the individual's worthlessness when separated from specific denominational 'grace' is not only a manipulatively-selective and misleading interpretation of holy scripture, but is often conveniently and insidiously skewed by leadership to effect maximum psychological control over a trusting or (relatively) ignorant membership.

Denominational enthusiasts often mistakenly refer to the growing popularity and prevalence of such partisan beliefs as proof of their truth and value – a belief inadvertently given support in the 1930s by psychoanalyst Carl Jung when he declared; "A creed is always the result and fruit of many minds and many centuries, purified from all the oddities, shortcomings and flaws of individual experience."[4]

Although Jung's statement was presented in specific support of his *hypothesis*[*] of a *universal, subliminal archetypal symbolism*,[†] it has often

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[*] Hypothesis; a tentative explanation; a theory; an assumption
[†] Hypothesis that suggests we are influenced by 'unknown' phenomena in the realm of the collective unconscious

been read to imply a scientific endorsement of the infallibility of certain religious creeds based purely upon their longevity and durability, and upon the mistaken presumption that more minds equals more objectivity – equals more truth; (inasmuch as such is the result of the collective vs. individual thought process). Many scholars have since rightly criticized this viewpoint for apparently sanctioning the scientific integrity of the highly-questionable creed-making process. This includes the distinguished psychoanalyst Erich Fromm who in the 1950s, refers specifically to Jung's remarks in his work on psychoanalysis and religion where, referring indirectly to Nazi fascism he says;

> Jung seems to mean that something *objective*[*] is more valid and true than something that is merely *subjective*[†]. His criterion for the difference between subjective and objective depends on whether an idea occurs only to one individual or is established by a society. But have we not been witness ourselves of a *"folie a millions,"* of the madness of whole groups in our own age? Have we not seen that millions of people, misguided by their irrational passions, can believe in ideas which are not less delusional and irrational than the products of a single individual?

Fromm goes on to add; "..it is a sociological relativism which makes social acceptance of an idea the criterion of its validity, truth, or 'objectivity'." When we consider the mass opinion-shaping effects of religious beliefs against the historical backdrop of institutionalized religion's belligerent resistance to concede to empirical facts, or, to reverse or amend erroneous doctrines in the face of undeniable truths, then Fromm's point is clearly made.[‡] That is; that mere popular acceptance of any given ideology will never suffice as proof of its universal integrity, at least not until the general collective wisdom and moral integrity of the populace has been assured. Otherwise, we are faced with the troubling prospect of conceding the inherent values of such institutions as the Inquisition, slavery, anti-Semitism, apartheid, or even Nazism; each of which was disturbingly popular in its day – endorsed and accepted by a predominantly church-going public.

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[*] Objective; (in this context) of the collective – [see glossary for full explanation]
[†] Subjective; (in this context) of the individual – [see glossary for full explanation]
[‡] In 1982 the Catholic Church finally acknowledged Galileo & Copernicus' findings about planetary rotation some 360 years after the Inquisition suppressed their 'heretical' findings

Against the damning historical evidence of the acceptance of these social aberrations in so-called 'civilized' Christian societies, perhaps it is a little less surprising to read Milton Rokeach's 1968 article on the *"Paradoxes of Religious Belief"* wherein he cites the research findings of sociologists Clifford Kirkpatrick and Gordon Allport in declaring:

> ..the devout tended to be slightly less humanitarian and had more punitive attitudes towards criminals, delinquents, prostitutes, homosexuals, and those who might seem in need of psychological counseling or psychiatric treatment.[5]

Rokeach adds:

> In my own research I have found that, on the average, those who identify themselves as belonging to a religious organization express more intolerance toward racial and ethnic groups (other than their own) than do non-believers – or even communists.[6]

Finally, from Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice (1970):* "On the average, church goers and professedly religious people have considerably more prejudice than do non-church goers and non-believers."[7]

Perhaps contemporary researchers have learnt since to couch their findings in somewhat more diplomatic language, but the naked facts remain for all to see: Religionists in general tend towards exclusive and prejudicial thinking; and although Rokeach did in fact suggest that more research was needed before forming firm conclusions, even in 1968 the data showed a direct correlation between religion and bigotry in society – and how much more virulent is it today?

Instead of being passionate truth-seekers, we have, in many cases become either apathetic conformists or obsessive, factional religious addicts. In the latter case, may have failed to recognize the remedial origins of religion and, no different to alcoholics or drug addicts, abuse their chosen spiritual 'medication' far beyond its healthy designs. This addictive mindset is not of course exclusive to religion, pervading modern society in many other narcissistic forms including individualism, commercialism, and tribalistic nationalism, but it is not to these other social forms that we turn for spiritual and moral guidance. It is established religion that consistently lays claim to a unique and exclusive expertise in matters concerning individual and social conscience.

When we relate this fact to our previous conclusions concerning the general state of institutionalized religion today, we get a highly disturbing report that if applied to just one individual client, would surely give even the most stout-hearted psychologist the heebie-jeebies. Viewing the report from a social, political, and even a providential viewpoint, the list reads like a clinical definition of social depravity: Moral corruption; murderous fanaticism; public deception; piety for sale; corporate criminality; ritualized addiction; exclusive factionalism; exploitation and abuse of the masses; religion as moral cowardice; superstition, fear, and prejudice and bigotry. With religion thus defined as our moral guide the forecast for the future of society looks bleak indeed. But what then of psychology?

The Role of Psychology

Well, the obvious implication is that somehow all these factors amount to a collective *psychopathology*[*] that will benefit from the application of remedial, preventative, or developmental psychology. This is not only the opinion of this writer, but was also implied in Rokeach's comments in his 1960 book *The Open and Closed Mind* where, in contrast to the prevailing assertions of religious institutions "that religious people have greater peace of mind" he reported the following findings concerning the connections between "mental disturbances" and religion:

> ..that people with formal religious affiliation are more anxious. Believers, compared with non-believers, complain more often of working under great tension, sleeping fitfully, and similar symptoms. On a test designed to measure manifest anxiety, believers generally scored higher than non-believers.[8]

This anxiety is (in my opinion) undoubtedly linked to the authoritarian constructs – particularly of certain mainstream *monotheistic*[†] traditions, which continue to promote the concept of the individual's utter worthlessness. Disempowered and disfranchised by such morbid beliefs yet equally captivated and enthralled by them, religionists thus afflicted exist in a constant, albeit subliminal state of anxiety and addiction, which in turn fuels the development of debilitating *neuroses*.[‡] In short, they live in a state

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[*] Psychopathology; study of the origin and development of personality disorders
[†] Monotheistic; ('mono'-one, 'theos'-God); the doctrine or belief that there is only one God
[‡] Neurosis; any of various mental or emotional disorders arising from no apparent organic lesion, involving symptoms such as insecurity, anxiety, depression, and irrational fears

of fear, not love; and whether they are consciously aware of it or not, the 'god' that they mold from this fabric, being a product (or invention) of their fear, can do no other than continue to feed their neuroses.

Ritualizing those neuroses into acceptable social norms in the form of religious beliefs and practices may serve to temporarily contain the problem at the individual level. But in the long run, the individual neurosis can only suffer its own existence by coagulating into a socially-acceptable collective form (in this case the church) – thus providing the adherent with a perceived sense of safety and security, along with a false sense of mental and emotional well-being. Through the agency of authoritarian or exclusive religious beliefs the individual neurosis is thus fuelled, sanctified, justified, and ultimately transformed into a collective *psychosis*.* Dogmatic religious convictions soon replace healthy questions with false 'absolutes' and the world-at-large, now seen as being populated by hostile or heathen 'others' further justifies the continued cycle of neurosis-and-psychosis. American psychiatrist Thomas Szasz neatly summarizes the neurotic-psychotic dynamic as follows:

> Doubt is to certainty as neurosis is to psychosis. The neurotic is in doubt and has fears about persons and things; the psychotic has convictions and makes claims about them. In short, the neurotic has problems, the psychotic has solutions.[9]

Attached as we so often are to our fears and superstitions, what well-rounded neurotic would ever turn down the opportunity to be part of a larger collective; wherein one's fears are not only elevated to divine status, but where one is (conditionally) guaranteed the ultimate safety – a place in heaven!

In the case of obsessive religionists suffering from paranoia and/or delusions, the presence of 'holy' terminology and rituals surrounding their particular obsession or addiction not only allows the afflicted adherent to live in a state of denial of their condition, but what is far worse, actually gives them license (in their own minds) to play out their religious superiority complexes with devastating results on society. As recent events testify, attaching the word 'Allah' or 'Jesus' to an addictive delusion neither sanctifies, justifies, nor cures it. Instead, the cloak of ritual piety only serves

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* Psychosis; A severe mental disorder, characterized by derangement of personality, loss of contact with reality, and causing deterioration of normal social functioning

to mask a festering social condition whose results are anything but holy. In the resulting fog of pseudo-religiousness the borders between reality and delusion become increasingly blurred, and our world really does become a more fearful place. 'God' and 'Truth' are reduced to mere subjective justifications for all manner of social evils. Our ethical and moral responsibilities to each other are thus displaced, ironically and tragically, by unethical and immoral so-called 'religious beliefs'.

The same dangerous brew emerges when passionate political agendas are interpreted through misaligned religious beliefs. Indeed, a great many religious doctrines are clearly psychologically skewed to effect an addictive and obsessive response – often resulting in paranoid delusions and morbid fascinations – which in turn fuel suppressive authoritarianism, fundamentalism, and militant sectarianism; and as long as such conditions persist we can be quite sure that we have not yet reached a condition of good spiritual health – let alone good mental health.

Erich Fromm addressed the role of psychoanalysis in respect to religious delusions when he said;

> To help man discern truth from falsehood in himself is the basic aim of psychoanalysis, a therapeutic method which is an empirical application of the statement, *'The Truth Shall make You Free'.*[10]

This may well be true, but the real question is; does the religious world truly want to engage in a truth-process that challenges dearly held beliefs? Longstanding religious beliefs do not often submit to logic or persuasion gracefully. Most faith traditions are generational, having been passed from parents to children as part of the family culture. Hence, inasmuch as religion has successfully fused with the local culture we may expect all manner of emotions and passions to be present in the religious debate. How for example do we begin to differentiate between the various nostalgic rememberings of family, faith and culture? How do we challenge the veracity of one aspect of our experience without implicating the others? Were all those happy Christmases just a cozy family tradition; a cultural tradition; or a religious tradition?… and should we ever conclude that the religious aspect is questionable in any way – will that not also raise other, very uncomfortable questions about family, culture, and personal identity?

In the patriotic defense of nostalgia, we have inadvertently given life and credibility to many emotive religious constructs whose only true reality lies amongst our fond rememberings and hopeful expectations. For

the most part modern religious beliefs are no more than the institutionalized products of our collective fears, tinged with nostalgia and romantic myth, and endorsed by longstanding traditions – generation after generation. Above all though (with a few notable exceptions), popular mainstream religion thrives on fear: Fear of God, of the devil and hell, of sin, of evil, and of all those suspicious 'others' who are not of our own persuasion. Ultimately, we are simply reflecting our own fear of ourselves, of a terrible and incomprehensible God, and of the mysterious universe that surrounds us. Religion conveniently provides the locus and the symbol-forms that justify these fears, which in turn fuel the collective neurosis and subsequent addictive psychosis known by some as 'religious elitism'. Hence the so-called "relationship of faith" towards an authoritarian, small-minded, fear-inspiring god has little if anything to do with any Ultimate Reality, Universal Truth, or a True Loving God. In reality, such neurotic dependency upon a projected delusion is not only mentally unsound, but in the ultimate irony, also constitutes technical idolatry – the breaking of the first commandment; "Thou shall not have other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3).

The 'false god' label has of course traditionally been reserved *by* mainstream religions for 'heathen' cultures; for secular vices such as the craving for power, prestige, and possessions; or addictions to alcohol, drugs, money or sex. But what most religionists fail to recognize is when their own religion becomes just such a sinful addiction, and when their prosthetic god becomes no more than a justification for their sickness. Passion for ritual and forms, and the strident defense of dogma and doctrine become increasingly more important than any personal adherence to the founding principles of justice, truth, and mercy – arguably the very heart of the Divine. 'Faith' becomes a rationalization for partisan perspectives that may or may not embrace a variety of delusions that, anywhere outside of a church or mosque would be considered downright silly, if not also somewhat sinister. Worst of all perhaps is the fact that true mystical spirituality stands little chance of expression in an environment so driven by neurotic egos and pseudo-spiritual mythologies. Faced with the disappointments and drudgery of ordinary lives, many religionists understandably find comfort and solace in their religious beliefs, escaping into their own private fantasyland complete with private angels, saints, and personal saviors, until sooner-or-later they elevate those particular beliefs above existential reality. The sincerity of such religionists is not under question – only their disturbing willingness to put religion before people, and beliefs before experience; by worshiping religious forms and mysteries

over religion's universal founding principles. *Orthodoxy*[*] before *orthopraxis*[†] in other words; religiousness before compassion.

I John 4:20 sums it up in these words; "If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar…" Or, in Hosea 6:6; "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Love trumps religiousness every time – even in God's book (so-to-speak). Consequently, those Christians who separate and elevate their religion above the interests of their neighbors – even the heathen ones – are in breach of core Bible teachings, as of course are all religious devotees who fail to grasp the humanistic principles at the heart of their respective scriptures. For without exception, all the major faiths including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism and Confucianism list the aforementioned 'Golden Rule' (love your neighbor) as a founding tenet.

So, although showing great religious enthusiasm for their own chosen tradition, the true spiritual piety of those who interpret their religion either in an elitist, discriminatory, or *preternatural* [‡] manner is seriously under question. One might even be forgiven for questioning their sanity, for in a primarily sensory world, if spirituality and religion do not ultimately relate back to the psychical and physical planes, then what indeed is it all about – and why indeed are we all here? If one's religion does not relate directly to one's daily interactions with one's neighbors (meaning all of humanity of course), then clearly it contradicts that most primary of instructions to 'love one's neighbor as oneself'. This is not to discredit genuine ascetic mysticism per se, where devotees spend years – perhaps even a lifetime – in meditative states (we will discuss this later), but where is the real humanity in the formula one might ask? Are we not told that we are beings of spirit, *and* mind, *and* body… and that the body is the supposed 'temple of the Holy Spirit?' Salvation in its various forms (redemption, restoration, renewal, rebirth, the way, or nirvana) happens through the understandings and resultant *actions* of men and women in their daily lives here on Earth. Latent 'graces' may or may not be a factor in different cases but even so, authentic spiritual guides have always encouraged a living, breathing morality that is played out upon this earthly stage where people battle their own personal 'false gods' daily in spirit, mind and body.

Secular culture has always been labeled the wellspring of such 'false gods' – particularly by religionists – but why indeed should religious culture

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[*] Orthodox; adhering to the accepted tradition
[†] Orthopraxis; the activity of putting ones faith into action
[‡] Preternatural; beyond nature; supernatural

be any different? Surely it is during any given agency's rise to popularity that temptations and vices develop and take root? As history testifies all too well, the more a religion panders to political or commercial forces the less able it is to lead morally. Expediency and integrity make very poor bedfellows. Thus, true virtue is often replaced by a surrogate spirituality that is mostly religious rites and rituals; is more preaching than practice; and more talk than truth-in-action; and before we know it, another generation of well-indoctrinated devotees set forth upon their passionate crusade to convert the world to their chosen collective psychosis. Sadly however, when devoid of the cardinal virtues of truth, love, and justice or, in the absence of a genuine spirituality, *esoteric*[*] religious beliefs are no more than evidence of a deep psychological need to escape existential reality.

In his recent book *When Religion Becomes Evil* Dr. Charles Kimball, a respected theologian and Middle-East expert bravely summarizes the five warning signs of corruption in religion as; *"(i) Absolute Truth Claims, (ii) Blind Obedience, (iii) Establishing the 'Ideal' Time, (iv) The End Justifies Any Means, and (v) Declaring Holy War."* With just a little introspection, all of these pernicious developments can be seen as they really are without their pious disguises. All are non-virtuous, arrogant and *portentous*[†] constructs, and as such have no place in the genuine spiritual quest or, in the practice of genuine religion. Individual neuroses, when banded together in fraternities of ignorance, will invariably produce false prophets and false principles. Indeed the bigger it gets, the more pressing the urge for the giant collective neurosis to spend itself on the subjugation or destruction of all 'others' whose view of the world may differ from 'ours'. The founding religious principles of love, truth, and humility are thus surreptitiously displaced by fear, dogmatism, and arrogance – all masquerading as religious piety of course – and yet we wonder why our societies seem ever less like heaven, and more like hell on earth.

Thus we may affirm a clinical correlation between certain common religious attitudes, beliefs and practices, and various mental disturbances and social illnesses; and between religion and a debilitating truth-discernment deficiency, which if nothing else provides the professional basis for psychology to offer its opinions and suggestions... for obviously, all of these collective trends and tendencies are fuelled by *individual* human thoughts and minds, and as we can clearly observe, not all of those minds are functioning productively. But casting judgments is the easy part...

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[*] Esoteric; intended for, or only understood by a particular group
[†] Portentous; ominous, threatening, foreboding, weighty; marked by a pretentious pomposity

Solutions and Cures

Refreshing though it might be to imagine a religious world stripped of all its perverse, destructive and illusory forms; the fact remains that we can no more 'cure' the religious world of its collective ignorance and neuroses through criticism and attack – than we can cure a private client suffering from similar psychological disabilities through castigation. As all good therapists know, the road to change is often slow and difficult, and requires a great deal of patience, wisdom and compassion on the part of the counselor. The client must first be coaxed into that place where the heart and the mind are open to trust and to learn respectively. Then and only then can the process of true education and healing begin. Compassionate understanding on the part of both healer and patient should always precede correction. In the case of the client-patient this compassion must of course also be directed towards themselves, which requires a mature and objective grasp of the problem(s). The very nature of the problem often being that of presumed religious ascendancy however; the afflicted religionist must first be reinvested with a core sense of humility and willingness to reform. Ironically, it is in the ethical application of these universal 'religious' principles of humility, spiritual rebirth, and true brotherly love that we stand the best chance of freeing the minds of society from the fear-generating indoctrinations of many contemporary religious groups.

Clearly, the time of institutionalized religion's supposed monopoly as guardians of spiritual and moral truth is drawing to a close. Sectarian doctrines ring ever-more hollow to the genuinely well-educated and the astute, and conservative clerical hierarchies are increasingly seen as spent and jaded, if not downright corrupt. The time has come for a new meritocracy of moral leadership, rooted in a truly global moral spirituality, and schooled in international ethics, sociology and psychology – to now step forwards and take the reins of moral leadership.

But to be fair, social scientists too will have their biases, prejudices, and leanings, not least amongst which is an excessive preoccupation with empirical classifications. This tendency to classify (a) reductively and (b) *phenomenologically**[*] is symptomatic of a failure or reluctance to think truly 'universally' inasmuch as it excludes certain non-empirical truth forms, and is therefore similar in many ways to the roots of sectarian thinking. Because science has traditionally been preoccupied with physical realities, fact-based categories and classification systems have emerged to identify those realities. But psychology on the other hand – (being a science of the mind) –

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[*] Phenomenology; a realism-based system of philosophy

must deal with less tangible constructs and processes and therefore struggles somewhat to use existing scientific terms to encompass its data. When coupled with an understandable concern that their work may be declared "pseudoscience" or "quackery" by the scientific establishment (as with the eminent psychiatrist Carl Jung for example), one begins to understand the political dynamics – and the challenges thereof – when psychologists broach new material. Ongoing debates contest the validity of new fields such as transpersonal psychology for instance, primarily because this particular discipline explores reported instances of mystical religious experiences, New Age beliefs, social myth and superstition and so on. Where indeed does genuine science end and religious speculations begin one might ask? Hopefully, our explorations in this work will help tackle this problematic area.

Meanwhile, whilst accepting the obvious necessity of categoric boundaries in the learning, research, and therapeutic processes, social scientists need to acknowledge the natural inclination towards safety and security within social and professional groups: A tendency which in turn can foster the reinforcing of personal egos and professional paradigms, thus tuning the mind to the Loreleic* whisperings of prejudicial discriminations. As a result, one's profession can become for the practitioner just another (only this time empirical) pseudo-religious denomination – with many of the attitudes and excesses of dogmatic orthodoxies: (i) a well-educated elite – usually male-dominated – in positions of high authority; (ii) a belief system (only this time scientific) with more-or-less 'absolute' parameters and guidelines; and (iii) a relatively poorly-informed client-base in positions of some dependence. The same basic dynamics are in place in both religious and academic institutions as we can see. As American writer Henry Canby noted in the 1930s concerning teachers and educators; "Arrogance, pedantry, and dogmatism …(are) the occupational diseases of those who spend their lives directing the intellects of the young".[11] The same might be said of the relationship between clergy and the needy, the naïve, and the trusting; surely a definition of the bulk of traditional churchgoers?

As for psychology, doctors and counselors too must resist the urge to control and dominate in a specialized culture where, just like religious hierarchies, professional elitism is ever present. On the other hand however, and regardless of our occupation, if our innermost aspirations lead us in the principled direction of truly being '*all* that we can be' then our professional inclinations will naturally lean towards an ethic of inclusive and

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* In Germanic legend, Lorelei was a seductive female siren who lured sailors to their deaths

humanitarian expansionism, rather than an insular reinforcing of our personal-or-collective, professional, political, religious, ethnic or national identities. Because as we shall soon see, such artificial divisions – when not serving the purposes of true education – ultimately only breed strife and unhappiness. The healthier viewpoint of course is to see one's profession as a mere fragment of a greater collective whole, and to understand one's own vocation in context thereof. Sadly, it is precisely the absence of such 'holistic' thinking particularly amongst certain contemporary religions that fosters what I call this "social pathology" – this communal disease – this shared psychopathology that is at the dark heart of religious dysfunction in society today. Comprising elitism, sectarianism, absolutism, dogmatism, and other forms of antisocial behavior couched in religious language and forms, it is my sincere belief that each individual so engrossed must first acknowledge the basic facts of their condition before any promise of a cure. Obviously, this being primarily a psychological problem, it should be psychologists who take the lead in establishing a cure.

If psychologists then are to take a traditional counseling approach to the matter of chronic religious dysfunction; the subject(s) and subject matter must first be examined in context with the surrounding environment in order to make an accurate diagnosis and determine the cause of the disturbance. Those who undertake this task will of necessity be possessed of a high level of theological understanding as well as having a thorough knowledge of the religious world's structures and relational dynamics, in addition to a background in therapeutic psychology. And although this may narrow the field of potential operatives somewhat, any less preparation would be insufficient to the task – for to find a solution, one must of course truly understand the problem. Once the cause of the problem is scientifically established, the next task is to determine the appropriate response which will always, in every case, involve the dynamics of wisdom, understanding and compassion. Once again and rather ironically, chiefly 'religious' virtues.

But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, we should first take a closer look at those commonly-accepted religious behaviors that undoubtedly qualify for clinical psychological assessment, during which process hoping to assess with some measure of accuracy the personalities, characters and motivations of those types of individuals to be found at the heart of these collective forms of mental disturbance.

Of course, the million-dollar question remains; are such persons mentally disturbed *because* they are religious… Or are they *religious* because they are mentally disturbed? Either way, there is certainly plenty of material here for the courageous psychologist to tackle.