

The Sociological Background of Andrew Greeley's Religious-Theological Writings¹

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The remote background of this study lies in an interest in the religious-theological writings of Andrew Greeley which I developed a number of years ago. Two incidents concretize my recollection of the awakening of that interest.

In a small town parish on the prairies of South Dakota, I attempted to develop a program of religious reflection for a group of about a dozen women. For no particular reason – other than the fact that it was relatively new and quite different from anything I had read before – I suggested to these women that we begin by reading Greeley's *The Great Mysteries*.² There was a bit of chagrin at the suggestion, as Greeley was recognized to be somewhat of a controversial figure in American Catholicism; nonetheless, we proceeded. And the personal reflection and sharing of faith which was occasioned over the next several weeks was rather unlike anything I had previously experienced. Though a bit of the chagrin remained at the inevitable *obiter dicta* which spiced the text, the reaction – week after week – remained quite constant: “How does he know me so well?” As I listened to and took part in the ongoing conversation, it became evident that, although Greeley was presenting religious faith and reflection in a manner in which these women had never consciously thought of religion, they were nonetheless sensing a real “connection” between his approach and their religion as it had actually been lived.

The second experience occurred a few years later. Working with a number of married couples, I was attempting to develop a program for couples experiencing serious marital difficulty and who felt some need for spiritual/religious resources as well as psychological resources in struggling through relational crises. In one of our first sessions, a couple who had helped develop the program was sharing about their divorce from each other and subsequent reconciliation. In talking about a very difficult, painful time, the wife described the breakthroughs which had been necessary in her life. As she talked about her fears upon reentering the relationship, a key point was the felt need for ongoing reassurance which she came to experience in a rather transformed sexual relationship. While talking about this she read a passage from Greeley's *The Cardinal Sins*, which spoke about the possibility of sexual intercourse for expressing profound human reconciliation.³ She was aware of having experienced something new and powerful in her marriage subsequent to reconciliation. But, captive to the lingering effects of a

1 This essay was originally prepared for the course Theology and the Social Sciences (SMT 5804F), taught by Professor Gregory Baum, Fall Semester, 1985, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto.

2 *The Great Mysteries* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

3 *The Cardinal Sins* (New York: Warner Books, 1981).

rather repressive, puritanical childhood, it had never dawned on her to consider the religious meaning of her marital experience, and, specifically, the sexual experience within it. Reading this text, she said, opened doors to very new possibilities of meaning.

Personally, I became more and more convinced that Greeley's approach to religious-theological questions could be extremely fruitful. It was also clear, however, that his approach was more properly sociological than theological, and further that the fruitfulness stemmed precisely from the insights made possible by a sociological perspective. The problem was that I had only the haziest notion of what "a sociological perspective" was. My effort in this study is to move behind Greeley's theological reflections and fiction, to try to understand some of the broad lines of his sociological assumptions and methods which ground and contextualize his subsequent reflections.

1.2 The Project

These questions were brought to mind specifically with the appearance of *How to Save the Catholic Church*⁴ (written with Mary Durkin) and *American Catholics Since the Council: An Unauthorized Report*.⁵ In these volumes, Greeley follows general reflections on the present condition of Catholicism with policy recommendations of moderate specificity. My questions concern the sociological understanding of religion which serves to ground these recommendations and contextualize/limit them. In other words, what is the understanding of the nature and function of religion which gives rise to the fruitful insights which Greeley offers? But also, how might that very understanding limit the possibilities of insight into the present situation and into possible movement beyond that situation?

Obviously, no extensive treatment of such broad questions is possible in a limited study such as this. My intention, rather, is to attempt to uncover some of the fundamental assumptions which are presented in those volumes in which Greeley specifically sets forth his sociology of religion. A concluding section will seek to make initial connections between these sociological perspectives and his recent policy recommendations; the central effort, however, is to gain some initial understanding of the sociological perspectives themselves. Given the voluminous character of Greeley's writings, this in itself calls for considerable limitation.

I have consulted five works in which Greeley writes specifically on the sociology of religion: *Religion in the Year 2000*,⁶ *Unsecular Man*,⁷ *The Denominational Society*,⁸ *The Religious Imagination*,⁹ and

4 *How to Save the Catholic Church* (New York: Viking, 1984).

5 *American Catholics Since the Council: An Unauthorized Report* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1985).

6 *Religion in the Year 2000* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969).

7 *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

8 *The Denominational Society* (Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1972).

9 *The Religious Imagination* (New York: William H. Sadlier, 1981).

Religion: A Secular Theory.¹⁰ In reading these works it seemed evident that, despite considerable continuity, there was also a notable development from the period of the first three works (1969-1972) to that of the last two (1981-1982). Questions were thus raised as to the intervening reflections, which led to reading three works from that period: *Sexual Intimacy*,¹¹ *The Mary Myth*,¹² and *No Bigger Than Necessary*.¹³

The primary focus of what follows is on the basic sociological positions stated in the “first phase” delineated above. There follow briefer considerations of trends/directions which seem evident in the “intervening works,” and then of the expression of these directions in the “second phase” works dealing more explicitly again with the sociology of religion.

2. PHASE ONE: UNSECLAR MAN IN THE DENOMINATIONAL SOCIETY

2.1 A Clarification by Contrast

A central concern of Greeley in his earlier works on the sociology of religion is what he terms “the theory of secularization.” His approach in these works, especially *Unsecular Man*, is largely framed by an opposition to common presentations of this theory. Thus, his own understanding of religion is clarified by contrast to the secularization hypothesis.

2.1.1 The Secularization Hypothesis

He acknowledges that secularization is clearly rooted in the insights of major nineteenth century thinkers in the sociological tradition. Greeley notes that sociology as a discipline began in the attempt to understand the changes in social patterns of living which were seen to have accompanied modernity. Using the by now classic terminology of Tönnies, he distinguishes between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* patterns.

Characteristic of *Gemeinschaft*¹⁴ are relationships which encompass human beings as full personalities, the central example of this being kinship/family. In such relationships, the claims of the social unit upon individuals tends to be nearly total. The sense of collective identity is deeply rooted and persistent, thus enabling an extremely strong sense of social cohesion. One’s fundamental loyalties are those of group solidarity, issuing in a deeply internalized sense of “we,” in which the individual is characterized by commitment to the “social self” of the community. By contrast, *Gesellschaft*¹⁵

10 *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1982).

11 *Sexual Intimacy* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1973).

12 *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

13 *No Bigger Than Necessary* (New York: New American Library, 1977).

14 *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972). P. 29. [Hereafter referred to as *UM*.]

15 *UM*, p. 30.

relationships engage the individual in a much more narrow range of aspects of personality. Individuals are linked in a more tenuous, loose fashion by means of deliberative agreement for specific purposes and interests. This is the realm of “association,” where the bonds between individuals are much less powerful and where loyalty to social interest is much less determining.

Greeley acknowledges the great usefulness of this typology as an “analytic tool,”¹⁶ which is extremely helpful in analyzing the important social changes which have occurred in the Western world in recent centuries. His contention, however, is that influential trends in social science have made more of these categories than simply analytic tools. The central element of the trends to which he objects is the introduction of the category of “evolutionary necessity,” which posits the eventual disappearance of *Gemeinschaft* and its replacement by an utterly *Gesellschaft* society. The significance of this for a sociologist of religion is immense, because a common corollary of such theorizing is the eventual disappearance of religion. If religion was a radical social necessity in earlier times, secularization theorists argue, it was precisely because of the need to maintain the dense interconnectedness of the given social order; the evolution of society beyond *Gemeinschaft* to more purely rational forms progressively eliminates this function of religion.

This “conventional wisdom,” against which Greeley polemically aligns himself, emphasizes the increasing significance of modern science, which enables individuals to develop rational understandings of their existence; consequently, religion declines as an explanatory, motivating factor. This results in a progressive drift of vast numbers of persons away from religious commitment, as religion has less and less influence on social institutions and is eventually relegated to the purely private sphere of human life.¹⁷ The essential notion held in common by widely ranging theorists of secularization is simply that “religion is becoming less important to Americans.”¹⁸

A wide range of contemporary authors¹⁹ are cited as presenting some variant of this basic argument. Greeley’s contention in response is that the paradigm of evolutionary progress toward greater rationalization and *Gesellschaft* social organization has become so dominant in the contemporary scientific community that it has obscured the reality of “strong countervailing forces”²⁰ which are evident in contemporary American society. At the center of the prevailing paradigm, he sees

16 Greeley refers to Reinhold Bendix’s presentation of Weber’s notion of “ideal types.” These are not “concepts which relate to “existing social facts,” but rather mental constructions which enable one to grasp certain “regularities” occurring within a society that would otherwise be unnoticed and unarticulated.

17 *Religion in the Year 2000* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969). P. 21. [Hereafter referred to as R2.]

18 *The Denominational Society* (Glenview IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1972). p. 127. [Hereafter referred to as DS.]

19 Among others, Greeley mentions Peter Berger, Huston Smith, Harvey Cox, Martin Marty, Eugene Fontinell, John Cogley, Ramon Echarren.

20 *UM*, p. 14.

two assumptions: (1) that the evolution of societies is “organic,” and (2) that *Gesellschaft* is progressively replacing *Gemeinschaft*.²¹

In presenting his objection to the first of these assumptions, viz., the “organic” nature of social evolution, he relies heavily on the theoretical work of Robert Nisbet,²² whose central insistence is that “fixity is far more characteristic of the human condition than change.”²³ A key operative assumption in Greeley’s sociological perspective now becomes clear. Social change, it is argued, is not continuous; and social situations do not emerge genetically from previous situations. Such change is neither constant, continuous, nor directional. Rather, the assumed tendency is that of relative social stasis, i.e., the persistence of forms of behavior and social organization. These forms do come to be changed, but basic changes in such structures occur rarely, and when they do occur they are not the product of evolutionary trends or forces; rather, they are caused by events. Greeley states the assumption straightforwardly: “Events – discreet, sometimes random, generally unpredictable – create the warp and woof of human history, not organic evolution.”²⁴ Accordingly, whereas the “conventional paradigm” presumes extensive social change and attempts to account for it by such historical trends as “secularization” and “rationalization,” Greeley will presume fundamental social continuity and, *a priori*, is committed to seeking explanation for what changes there may be in more-or-less isolated historical events.

If the theoretic assumption of “organic evolution,” however, is countered by presenting an alternative theoretic perspective, in considering the assumed disappearance of *Gemeinschaft*, Greeley turns to the central preoccupation of his sociological method: the marshalling of empirical data. Indeed, concerning his own method as reflected in *Religion in the Year 2000*, he writes: “A great deal is probably revealed about my own sociological biases by the fact that I present a chapter on data before a chapter on theory.”²⁵

2.1.2 The Data

He refers to a number of research projects, which his interpretation relates to each other in that they all indicate the persistence of informal, non-deliberative, ‘non-rational’ human relationships which are powerfully bonding and which exercise considerable influence on human behavior. A study in the 1940s, e.g., indicated the decisive importance of informal friendship groups in the highly rationalized, formalized environment of the factory.²⁶ Other studies indicated the centrality of personal loyalties in

21 *UM*, p. 18.

22 *UM*, p. 18.

23 Greeley cites two works by Nisbet to which he refers as “two of the most important books in contemporary social science” (*UM*, p. 20): *The Social Bond* (New York: Knopf, 1970) and *Social Change in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

24 *UM*, p. 25.

25 *UM*, p. 25.

26 *UM*, p. 37. He mentions “the Hawthorne experiments of Elton Mayo.”

the organization of military combat squads,²⁷ the influence of intimate primary groups on voting decisions,²⁸ the relationship of ethnic background with occupational choices, styles of cooperation, and selection of marriage partners,²⁹ and the persisting tendency of urban Americans to live in neighborhoods largely organized around the pre-rational ties of ethno-religious and kinship relationships.³⁰ In fact, Greeley's masters thesis at the University of Chicago concluded that in a suburban Chicago country club, Catholics chose other Catholics as golfing partners by a ratio of seven to one, with Protestants choosing other Protestants by a similar ratio.³¹

In addition to scientific research of this nature, he also considers further data, making reference to the "quest for community"³² perceived to be manifest in American society in the 1970s. There was a burgeoning development of "communes," and a growing emphasis on the importance of interpersonal intimacy in marriage and significant friendships.³³ Greeley insists that *Gemeinschaft* relationships continue to exercise an importance in contemporary life that simply cannot be accounted for by the "conventional wisdom" of secularization theorists.

Further, if the secularization hypothesis of the progressive dominance of *Gesellschaft* presupposed the concomitant diminishment of the significance of religion, empirical data might bring that corollary into question as well. Precisely to this end, Greeley presents extensive research to demonstrate the persistence of religious practice and belief in the United States. Amidst a plethora of data, two central studies recur in each presentation of his argument. In the first, a longitudinal study of the religious practices and beliefs of Americans between 1952 and 1963, Greeley notes a basic continuity in both doctrinal orthodoxy and religious affiliation and practice during that period.³⁴ And in a National Opinion Research Center study of American graduate students throughout the turbulent decade of the 1960s, similar dynamics were found. A relatively minor decline in religious practice among Protestants was found, but not among either Catholics or Jews; nor was there any significant diminishment of

27 *UM*, p. 37. The research cited is that of Samuel Stouffer in *The American Soldier*, and also a "study of the Wehrmacht by Morris Janowitz and Edward Shils."

28 *UM*, p. 37. The research cited is that of Paul Lazarsfeld.

29 *UM*, pp. 37-38. The researches mentioned are Mary Jo Shreves, Elihu Katz, and James Q. Wilson.

30 *UM*, p. 38. Related data is presented to indicate that ethnicity is related to response to pain in hospital settings, to the administrative 'styles' of police officers, and to the forms which political behavior tends to assume.

31 John Kotre, *The Best of Times, The Words of Times: Andrew Greeley and American Catholicism, 1950-1975* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1978), p. 158.

32 *UM*, pp. 144-145. Greeley indicates a number of possible meanings which can be embraced by the phrase "quest for community:" (1) the search for intimacy within predominantly *Gesellschaft* arrangements; (2) the attempt to harmonize the demands of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relationships; and (3) the emergence of categories with which to talk about intimacy which renders the desire for it a more conscious fact.

33 *UM*, p. 125.

34 *R2*, pp. 35-38; *UM*, pp. 11-12; *DS*, pp. 137-141.

concurrence with basic doctrinal statements.³⁵ Greeley's argument centers on the fact that if there were truly a diminishment of 'religiousness' due to progressive rationalization/ secularization, one would naturally expect to find it more evident among young intellectuals; the data, he suggests, lead to the certain conclusion that no such decline has occurred. He insists that "the secularization hypothesis is simply not substantiated by the empirical data available to us."³⁶ Accordingly, he argues, a new explanatory model is needed.

2.1.3 An Alternative Model

Greeley acknowledges that significant changes have occurred. It is evident, as Thomas Luckmann has argued,³⁷ that social institutions are not as "overtly" and obviously religious as they once were. Further, it is granted that a wide range of natural phenomena and human experiences that once received a specifically religious interpretation can now be explained by rational science. Also, religious affiliation is now a much more individual choice that it has been in the past; individual persons are faced with a much more deliberative choice concerning their religious practice and belief.

But despite these changes, he argues, the data on the persistence of community and or religion argue for significantly more continuity in the midst of change than conventional secularization theorizing is able to account for. Though situated in different social contexts and affecting individuals in undeniably different ways, Greeley insists that the basic functions which religion plays in human life have remained essentially the same. He identifies five such functions:³⁸

1. Religion provides persons with a "meaning system" which enables them to cope with ultimate questions.
2. Religion provides persons with a belonging to a community which shares and thereby supports the religious meaning system.
3. Religion strives to integrate the profound forces of human sexuality with the rest of human life.
4. Religion offers a channel for coming into contact with transhistorical Realities which are experienced as "really Real."
5. Religion provides certain leaders who comfort and challenge persons and communities in their dealing with ultimate questions.

"These needs," he concludes, "are inherent in the human condition and there is no reason to believe that they are any less widespread or less powerful today."³⁹ An analytical model is needed which can

35 R2, pp. 40-47; UM, pp. 12-13; DS, pp. 143-149.

36 DS, p. 150.

37 R2, pp. 84-85; UM, pp. 133-135; DS, pp. 58-63.

38 UM, pp. 15-16.

39 UM, p. 16.

account both for the acknowledged changes and for the data which indicate the persistence of religion and its basic functions.

In search of such a model, Greeley considers the developmental perspective of Talcott Parsons, who writes of a process of “differentiation” rather than of “secularization.”⁴⁰ Parsons contends that when societies were more simple, explicitly religious belief and behavior were fused together with other aspects of life in undifferentiated structures.

As society becomes more and more complex, and as religion itself also becomes more complex and diversified, the religious components both of society and of the individual personality become more and more differentiated from the rest of society.⁴¹

Especially notable in the Western world from the time of the Reformation, the individual has become a more and more “religiously autonomous entity” who is responsible for his own religious choices and decisions. Concurrently, religion surrenders those activities and functions which are not explicitly religious, and these are taken up by newly differentiated secular institutions. Parsons maintains, however, that insofar as these secular institutions have their origin within a more explicitly religious society, they continue to be influenced – albeit indirectly – by those religious values which stood at their origin. He further argues that such differentiation can actually be understood as heightening the importance of religion, rather than diminishing it, precisely in that it makes religion a matter of individual choice. Similarly, he argues that since religion has been stripped of its “accidental functions,” it is possible for it to focus its energies on the specifically religious tasks of providing meaning. Given this function, religion also exercised indirect influence on social institutions insofar as it provides a system of meaning which significantly affects the decisions and actions of individuals.

Greeley embraces three central contributions from this Parsonian perspective: (1) the impact of religious ideas on human action; (2) the location of religion’s essential function in the provision of a meaning system; and (3) the fact that religion’s impact on society will tend to be more indirect than direct.⁴²

He refers also to the related perspective of Thomas Luckmann, who concurs in positing a developmental separation of religious and secular institutions, but who is far less sanguine about the possibility of significant impact of the religious on the secular. His contention is that secular social institutions have developed, not out of residual religious values, but out of purely rationalist values necessary for the functioning of the society. These institutions come to serve as meaning-systems in themselves, in ‘competition’ with religious schemes of meaning. The meanings embraced by such secular institutions emphasize themes of individual autonomy, self-realization, mobility, etc., thus tending to promote the isolation of individuals from society; this isolation is reinforced by the withdrawal of religion from significant contact with social institutions. He nonetheless grants that the cultural

40 R2, pp. 80-84; DS, pp. 50-54.

41 R2, p. 81.

42 DS, p. 54.

meaning systems (including religion) which are internalized during early childhood socialization exert an extremely significant influence in the ongoing development of a person's "world view." He would argue, accordingly, that religion's social impact will be felt solely through the agency of individuals who have internalized its scheme of meaning; the continuing effectiveness of that very scheme, however, is ever endangered by the presence of a veritable 'marketplace' of meaning systems.⁴³

Greeley sees several areas of convergence⁴⁴ in these two perspectives which could contribute to the alternative analytical model he requires:

1. Religion has no, or at most very little direct influence on the nonreligious corporate structures of contemporary society;
2. Given the relationship between religion and socialization, there is a significant link between religion and people's most intimate relationships;
3. As a meaning system, traditional religion must 'compete' with other schemes of meaning;
4. Within the range of socially available alternatives, the individual has considerable freedom in his/her choice of meaning systems; but
5. Despite this, organized religion continues to make a major contribution to the formation of the meaning systems of many people.

Having accepted these factors, Greeley suggests his alternate model for analyzing those social changes which have occurred. What he sees having happened is a tremendous "complexification" of society. Vast, differentiated corporate structures have emerged; far from eliminating primordial *Gemeinschaft* relationships, however, these form the very substratum upon which the corporate structures depend. Basic ties of family, friendship, faith, and ethnic identity persist, he argues, as much as they ever have. They are the very stuff out of which society is made, and without which society would collapse. They have, to be sure, been significantly affected by the emergence of differentiated social institutions, but they most assuredly have not been eliminated. Within such relationships there continue to arise fundamental questions of meaning which require the interpretive power of religion. And also within such relationships there occur the most significant processes of socialization, in which religious meaning is communicated and internalized.⁴⁵

There has been significant social change, some of which has been enriching and some destructive. But in the midst of that change, Greeley argues, there persist primordial ties of human Intersubjectivity and powerful systems of religious meaning which continue to have a profound impact on the lives of individuals, and through them on the structures of society. What significant changes have occurred, he insists, have not been necessary, continuous, genetically induced, or uni-directional. They have made vast new kinds of relationships possible, but have not abrogated more fundamental relationships. They offer wider options of meaning frameworks out of which individuals can live; but

43 R2, pp. 84-87.

44 R2, pp. 89-90.

45 UM, p. 35.

they have neither abrogated the need for some system of meaning, nor eliminated the power of traditional religious symbols.

2.2 The Influence of Clifford Geertz

In the anthropological work of Clifford Geertz, Greeley finds a definition of religion which can function within his model. From his anthropological perspective, Geertz argues that human beings are radically 'incomplete animals' who complete themselves through highly particular forms of culture.

Between what our body tells us and what we have to know in order to function, there is a vacuum we must fill ourselves, and we fill it with the information (or misinformation) provided by our culture. . . . Between the basic ground plans for our life that our genes lay down – the capacity to speak or to smile – and the precise behavior we in fact execute – speaking English in a certain tone of voice, smiling enigmatically in a delicate social situation – lies a complex set of significant symbols under whose direction we transform the first into the second, the ground plans into the activity.⁴⁶

It is especially true, he argues, that we need to be able to interpret the disorganized and chaotic phenomena that impinge on our consciousness. Cultural meaning systems provide preconscious mental charts (or "templates") through which raw experience is organized as it enters conscious awareness. Geertz identifies five such systems of meaning: common sense, science, art, ideology, and religion. By providing symbols which are internalized, these meaning systems structure our psychological processes such as perception, curiosity, understanding, and judgment, as well as our social activity. Experiences or encounters with realities which cannot be interpreted from within an internalized meaning system are especially threatening; these are experiences which Geertz terms "bafflement." Religion is characterized as being a meaning system which is especially concerned-with and capable-of the interpretation of "ultimate realities" which transcend the ability especially of common sense and science to interpret. It is more specifically characterized by an attitude of acceptance of both the encountered realities and of nonhypothetical truths proposed as authoritative by the tradition.

Geertz proceeds to define religion as

a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.⁴⁷

As such, the function of religion is to provide an overarching symbolic interpretation of "the whole" within which less comprehensive systems of meaning function in their more limited spheres. Religion deals with ultimate questions whose very nature occasion experiences of bafflement: the very givenness

46 Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 50.

47 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 90. Quoted by Greeley in each of the three books here under consideration: *R2*, p. 10; *DS*, p. 54; and *UM*, p. 61.

of existence, suffering, moral evil, death, sexuality, etc. Given the fact that religion thus assures the interpretability of reality, it also is seen in such definition as supporting given social values by framing them as part of the “general order of existence.” Geertz does insist, however, that religious meaning systems are also able to embrace forces which oppose a social order. It is possible, i.e., for an experienced social arrangement to be in conflict with the religious conception of reality, whose fundamental “moods and motivations” would lead to strongly felt internal demands for an arrangement which would be in harmony with the “conception” of the way things “really are.” Ritual is posited as a privileged locus of human encounter with the “really real;” subsequent to the ritual experience there proceeds “a viewing of ordinary experience in light of what that (ritual) encounter has revealed.”⁴⁸ There is, thus, a movement back and forth between the meaning systems of religion and common sense, in which the religious meanings may be either supportive or transformative of the operative common sense.

Religion and community, Greeley has argued, have persisted in the midst of extraordinary development in the meaning systems of science and common sense. He is prepared to argue that both have persisted precisely because of the radical human need for ultimate meaning and for the bonds of belonging.

2.3 The ‘Meaning’ and ‘Belonging’ Functions of Religion

Particularly in *The Denominational Society* he contends that the classic authors of the sociological tradition can be differentiated into two tendencies or emphases, which he sees as being extremely pertinent to his argument for the persistence of religion and community. The first, which Greeley traces through the perspective of Durkheim, stresses the intense bondedness of social reality and the consequent human need for “belonging.” The second, traced by Greeley through Weber, insists on the need for all human behavior to be directed by “meaning.” Religion will persist precisely insofar as it functions to provide both a community to belong to and symbolic resources which render human behavior meaningful. Indeed, Greeley will eventually argue that religion persists in contemporary American society because of the strength of communities which provide meanings, the sharing of which reinforce the sense of belonging to the communities.

2.3.1 “Belonging”

Durkheim’s analysis of both traditional and modern societies led him to posit the existence of intensely powerful forces of social cohesion. The internalization of a shared symbol system creates a strong social bond between individuals even after the authoritarian values and symbols had given way to modernity. Thus, the creation of the individual’s consciousness was largely through the symbols available in the society. It is precisely in this way that he came to understand religion.

He was keenly interested in the function of religion; he held it to be the “cement that held society together.”⁴⁹ It is the system of symbols and ideas through which people represent to themselves the society of which they are members. Religion, in other words, is the symbolic representation of the

⁴⁸ Geertz, *ibid.*, p. 121.

constitutive vision and values of a society. This vision becomes internalized, and thus comes to serve as the determining factor in individual's behavior and also the foundation of the experienced sense of "belonging" to the community. Durkheim proceeds further to argue that religion is simply "society worshipping itself in order that it may focus its energies toward the idealization of itself."⁵⁰ His key insight was into the profound significance of symbolism in both the formation of individual consciousness and the bonding of society. He realized that a society is not comprised simply by the rational, utilitarian contracting of the individuals who are its members; rather, at a most fundamental level it consists in the symbolic, collective representations by means of which those individuals are bonded, and in which they "ratify, celebrate, and reinforce their unity."⁵¹ The recollection and celebration of these symbols both solidify the sense of belonging, and recall for individual members the pristine image of what their community is to be.

Greeley places the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski within "the Durkheimian school." His investigations among the Trobriand Islanders operated with a notion of religion as the "set of common convictions, commitments, and rituals around which a society could organize itself. . . and without which societal unity was not possible."⁵² He came to be especially concerned with situations which threatened social integration, the central of which was death. He noted that 'survivors' were placed in an emotional and mental state which could easily lead to personal and eventually social disintegration. Malinowski interpreted the religious rituals surrounding death as functioning to hold the society together in the face of the strains occasioned by death. By assuring 'survivors' of continued union with the recently dead, the intensity of sorrow is assuaged, and the continuity of the society is protected.

And though operating in a markedly different context, Will Herberg's analysis of contemporary American religion is seen by Greeley as being within the same "stream." Herberg saw two kinds of 'religion' in the United States. Besides the apparent denominational religion, there is the "overarching religion of Americanism" which provides the values and symbols that cement American society. This is the religion of "the American Way of Life," a social consensus of fundamental meanings and values within which the denominations function.⁵³ Accordingly, although there is a pluralism of denominations, there is a more fundamental unity; and it is precisely the cohesion thus provided that enables varieties of religious expression to coexist without threatening the social bond. But there is a significant price to be paid for this overarching sense of unity amidst diversity.

Religion in America seems to possess little capacity for rising above the relativities and ambiguities of the national consciousness and bringing to bear the judgment of God upon the

49 R2, p. 77. For Greeley's general interpretation of Durkheim, cf.: R2, pp. 76-77; UM, pp. 126-129; DS, pp. 32-34.

50 DS, p. 34.

51 UM, p. 127.

52 R2, p. 77. For Greeley's general interpretation of Malinowski, cf.: UM, pp. 128-129; DS, pp. 34-37.

53 For Greeley's presentation of Herberg's thought in terms of present concerns, cf.: R2, pp. 77-78; UM, pp. 129-132; DS, pp. 110-116.

nation and its ways. The identification of religion with the national purpose is almost inevitable in a situation in which religion is so frequently felt to be a way of American 'belonging.'⁵⁴

With mixed results, Herberg contends, religion is essentially a society-building apparatus, with "Americanism" securing the integration of the whole society, and "denominationalism" providing the means of personal insertion into that society.

Greeley's consideration of these three thinkers is obviously much more extensive than the extremely brief treatment possible here. My concern is simply to cite a central focus of that consideration: the function of religion as a force of social cohesion. He argues that religion – whether of Durkheim's France, Herberg's America, or Malinowski's Trobriands – provides individuals with a community to belong to. And despite real dangers in that which may call for vigilant attention, he insists that wherever religious symbols enter into the consciousness-formation of the individuals of a society, religion will function as an agent of social cohesion.

2.3.2 "Meaning"

Greeley relates the second dimension of his sociological perspective to Max Weber's focus on the centrality of "meaning" for human behavior, and on religion as primarily a phenomenon of meaning. In constant dialogue with the thought of Marx, Weber had insisted that economics was not nearly as all-determinative as Marx had maintained. Rather, he posited a complex system of "pluralistic interaction" among various social forces; this involved accepting the obvious fact that the economy exercised great causal influence on the shape of a culture, but also allowed him to hold that the influence was not uni-directional. In other words, cultural realities (e.g., religion) also affect the economy as well as other cultural institutions. In this sense, Greeley argues that Weber "stubbornly held to a liberal conviction that ideas do have consequences."⁵⁵

This position is readily apparent in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Greeley understands the following question to have guided the inquiry in that work: "What was the background of ideas which would account for the sort of activity apparently directed toward profit alone as a calling to which the individual feels himself to have an ethical obligation?"⁵⁶ Finding notably different levels of industrialization in Protestant and Catholic areas, he came to hypothesize that there is something in Protestant belief which inclines individuals and groups toward the kind of activity necessary for capitalistic success. Greeley insists that Weber's position does not involve any assertion that Protestantism caused capitalism; it asserts, rather, that the background of a particular belief system having been internalized is predispositive toward forms of action that are also influenced by numerous other factors, including specifically economic factors. Given the Calvinist notion of predestination, the individual tends to develop an innerworldly asceticism which demands a meticulous attention to the affairs of everyday life precisely in order to demonstrate one's place among the 'elect.' This served to

⁵⁴ UM, p. 131.

⁵⁵ DS, p. 40.

⁵⁶ DS, p. 40.

promote the advancement of such individuals in an economic situation where making money comes to be seen as a social virtue and sign of proficiency. Such a “fit” between religious meaning and social/economic activity was developed even further by the Puritan rejection of all forms of pleasure and enjoyment in favor of dedicated work. Such religious developments did not cause the progressive rationalization of economic life involved in capitalism; they did, however, significantly foster the ability of groups of individuals to succeed in precisely such a rationalized economy.⁵⁷

Further, brief attention is given to Weber’s puzzling over the question as to why capitalism developed in Western society and not in the East, even though the technological developments necessary for it were available. His eventual conclusion was related to the fact that Eastern religions tend to view the world and human nature as fundamentally good; needed for ‘salvation’ (to the extent that this is even a relevant category) is education and enlightenment, not an asceticism by means of which one is to dominate the world. Whereas Calvinism had fostered the repression of natural impulse for the sake of rationally willed activity, in the East there was no such emphasis which would ‘fit’ with the needs of capitalism as an economic system. Greeley comments:

For the Puritan the world is an evil place to be remade, for the Confucian it is a good place to be adjusted to and enjoyed.⁵⁸

The significant point is that Weber held a highly nuanced theory as to the complex interrelationship among social forces. There is no denial of the impact of material, economic factors on religion and, indeed, on all of culture. But given this, he insisted that such influence was reciprocal. The behavior of human beings can only be understood in terms of the “meaning” assigned to that behavior. Any effective social analysis, accordingly, must have a hermeneutical dimension which inquires into the meaning of human action. A significant source of such meaning is to be found in religion, and thus a significant function of religion in a society lies in its ability to provide meaning for human behavior.

Related to this in Greeley’s understanding of Weber is the role of religious leadership;⁵⁹ he argues that the primary role of such leadership is “interpretive.” Greeley’s actual enumeration of the differentiation of roles in religious leadership is taken from Joachim Wach,⁶⁰ not Weber; however, his underlying understanding of the basic function and task of leadership in all of these differentiated roles relates directly to the Weberian focus on meaning.

The prototype of all religious leaders is the “founder,” who tends to possess considerable “charisma,” i.e., the unique personal power to exercise authority over others. Such charismatic leadership is “uncanny,” and self-validating. Greeley contends that the founder is able to exercise leadership, i.e., to command authority, precisely by providing meaning for human life and behavior that

⁵⁷ DS, pp. 41-44.

⁵⁸ DS, p. 47.

⁵⁹ UM, pp. 222-225.

⁶⁰ Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

is simply otherwise not available.⁶¹ The founder conveys to others a 'message' of salvation and perfection, which has been 'revealed' in some foundational experience.

There follows what Weber termed the routinization of the charisma in the institutionalization of the message/movement. In this process arise the other leadership roles to which Wach refers: reformer, prophet, seer, magician, diviner, saint, priest, and religiosus.⁶² However different these roles are, Greeley insists that all nine of them involve "interpretive functions."

The founder and the reformer explicate the ultimate nature of reality in terms of their own religious experience and collect followers around them precisely because their religious experience seems to be a normative interpretation of the ultimate. The seer, the prophet, and the diviner are explicitly concerned with interpretation; and the priest must interpret the cultic lore, which is merely an elaboration of the ultimate meaning system of his people. The saint and the religiosus interpret reality for us by serving as exemplars of the "good life" which is the "ethos" side of one's ultimate world view. . . The religious leader is, in the final analysis, the man who understands the meaning system better than others.⁶³

Indeed, part of the crisis which Weber saw in the progressive rationalization of Western society into the "iron cage," Greeley contends, relates to the tendency for truly interpretive authority to be replaced by the strictly rational authority of competence in modern bureaucracy. Such leadership cannot effectively provide the dimension of meaning which human beings need. And modern authority is in severe crisis precisely because the vast, bureaucratized authority which Weber saw evolving cannot give meaning to human life as it faces significant personal crises and social problems.

Rationality, efficiency, and technology as the basis for the legitimacy of authority are no longer persuasive for an increasingly large number of human beings, in part because pure rationality and pure efficiency seem to end up with monstrous irrationality and demonic inefficiency.⁶⁴

Needed, he argues, is "humanly meaningful authority," which exercised leadership out of a fundamental recognition of the fact that "each man is born, lives among others, and dies."⁶⁵ Each of these universal facts touches upon a fundamental mystery for which individuals need meaningful interpretation:

1. The mystery of becoming a unique self;
2. The mystery of being a self living-among and sharing-with others in society; and
3. The mystery of sharing with all humanity the condition of being mortal.

61 *UM*, pp. 216-217.

62 *UM*, pp. 216-222.

63 *UM*, p. 222.

64 *UM*, p. 226.

65 *UM*, p. 229. In his analysis of authority, Greeley relies heavily on John Schaar, "Reflections on Authority," *New American Review* 8 (1970), pp. 66-78.

Humanly meaningful leadership is that which will help people live meaningfully in the face of these mysteries, by communicating a vision of the whole of life which makes possible insight into each person's unique experience.

Greeley suggests that "religious authority" is uniquely situated to serve in such capacity precisely because religion is characterized by possessing a vision of the whole, i.e., of "a general order of existence." Despite Weber's pessimism as to the probability of religion's survival in the progressively rationalized and bureaucratized society of the West, it is possible to see in his identification of the fundamental nature of the human need for meaning a significant reason to expect greater persistence in religion that he had tended to see.

2.3.3 Belonging and Meaning in American Religion

The central thesis in each of Greeley's works of this period is his insistence that religion persists in the present as it has throughout human history. It is stated in characteristic fashion on the opening page of *Unsecular Man*: "The basic human religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed very notably since the late Ice Age."⁶⁶ And the two central needs which he posits, following the differentiated strains of the sociological tradition, are those for belonging and meaning; the basic functions of religion are to serve those needs.

That 'things have changed' he readily acknowledges, while insisting that the changes have not altered these basic needs and functions. The way in which religion functions to meet the needs, however, has changed. At least three such changes⁶⁷ are acknowledged. First, given the development of scientific understanding, religious symbols need to be "interpreted." Myths, in Ricoeur's expression, have been "broken," and their power to give meaning to human life depends on the exercise of a hermeneutic recovery of meaning; but religious myth, he insists, remains essential. Secondly, with the differentiation of 'religious' and 'secular' institutions, there are now alternative systems of meaning confronting individuals; one must now choose. And the choice is usually not simply a matter of accepting – in both conscious and unconscious ways – various elements from different schemes of meaning. And thirdly, this choosing is done much more by the individual him-/herself than has traditionally been true. There remain very real social, ethnic, familial influences; nonetheless, persons today make choices concerning the meaning which is to interpret and direct their behavior much more than had been possible for their predecessors in most ages of human history.

In contemporary religion, then, religious symbol systems must be interpreted. The religious agent is free to choose among a wide variety of possible meaning systems, and he exercises this terrible freedom to some considerable extent by himself.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *UM*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ *UM*, pp. 69-72.

⁶⁸ *UM*, p. 74.

The question, thus, becomes that of how the basic religious functions are exercised in this new situation. It is here that Greeley locates the reason for the higher levels of religious practice, affiliation, and belief in the United States⁶⁹ than is characteristic of Western Europe. That reason is found in the emergence of "a unique and new social form of religion:"⁷⁰ the denomination.

Before considering the nature of this specific form of religious organization, he analyzes the more general fact of the institutionalization of religious life. Weber had spoken of the founder's charisma being routinized in institutions; there appeared an inevitability that some sort of structure emerges to maintain continuity of later generations with the original religious insight. Weber was convinced that this inevitability involved loss of vigor in the tradition; this paralleled his conviction that the progressive rationalization and bureaucratization of all social life in Western society was meeting a similar fate. This seemed evident, given the disruption occasioned by the economic, social, and cultural shift from the feudal to the modern world that he witnessed and analyzed. However, Greeley insists, as previously noted, that *Gemeinschaft* has survived that transition in ways that Weber had not considered probable. And given the persistence of *Gemeinschaft*-type relationships in modernity, he argues that the organization and institutionalization of life need not be inevitably dehumanizing. To the extent that it would advert to the persistence and radical importance of networks of primordial relationships, bureaucracy can be humane and efficient. He has no romantic illusions about how well institutions have made this advertence, but contends that such a state of affairs is not necessary.

The problem is not that modern life is being institutionalized but that, to the extent that institutions are depriving humans of freedom, dignity, and control of their own destinies, modern society is being unintelligently and inefficiently institutionalized.⁷¹

The organization of religion is posited as inevitable. This may lead to a diminishment of the tradition's power to provide both meaning and belonging; this, however, is not an inevitability. This is especially true, he argues, because despite tendencies in religion to be ritualistic and inauthentic, there also seem to be common tendencies for renewal and revitalization. The reformer and the prophet are two manifestations of the recurrent power of a tradition to resist religious entropy. Greeley's perspective on the history of Christianity sees it precisely as a "long series of confrontations between the religious enthusiast and the bureaucrat."⁷² Institutions can obviously diminish vitality and spontaneity; but they also tend to embody – sometimes unknowingly – "countervailing powers" which work against the harmful effects of institutionalization.

One common way of understanding religious organization has been the distinction between "church" and "sect" developed by Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, with the further differentiation of

69 Greeley's later research will include Canada, but at this point his data is restricted to the United States.

70 DS, p. 71.

71 DS, p. 81.

72 DS, p. 82.

“denomination” developed by Richard Niebuhr as a middle ground between the original two types.⁷³ Greeley briefly sketches the analytical work which has been carried out on the basis of this typology with the eventual addition of “cult” to the typology. Further and finer distinctions have been made as “the jungle of types and definitions becomes more complex.”⁷⁴ So complex, he suspects, that little further insight is to be gained from the basic typology. Thus, whereas the conventional model posits a development of religious organization from cult to sect to denomination to church and the analysis seeks to understand the ‘place’ of a given religious group in that trajectory, Greeley wants to analyze religious organization in American without the conventional typology. He continues to use the term “denomination,” given its widespread use in ordinary language, but does not understand it as a halfway house between exclusive, world-denying sects and inclusive, secularized churches. Rather, he describes denomination simply as

A religious organization which emerges in a society that has no established church (official or unofficial) but permits and encourages the practice of religion by the various organized religious communities.⁷⁵

Understood in this sense, the denomination is a uniquely North American development.

The reason for this is what Greeley terms the “ethnic phenomenon.” In the new conditions of American life, immigrants confronted a problem they had never faced before, that of self-identification. Entering a situation that was largely hostile to their presence, immigrants needed to be able to locate themselves within the wider society. What occurred was that they found themselves drawn together largely on the basis of the language which enabled them to communicate with each other; in fact, this linguistic commonality gave rise to the names of the various ethnic groups. This identification was largely a product of the American experience. People who had identified themselves with a village in the ‘old country,’ vis-à-vis members of neighboring villages, now identified themselves as members of the same community with immigrants from those other villages. Having left behind one self-definition, there was need for new communities to belong to. And this, Greeley insists, is the essential point in understanding the immigrant experience in the United States: the emergence of the ethnic group was in response to the losses that immigrants experienced in leaving behind *Gemeinschaft* society.⁷⁶ Faced with the impersonality of the industrial American cities, what Weber termed “consciousness of kind” and a sense of common origin because the basis of new communities, which compensated for those intimate relationships which seemed to have been lost when the peasant village was left behind. A key element in understanding religious denominations is that they made available a sense of fellowship which functioned precisely to meet this need for ‘a community to belong to.’

⁷³ DS, p. 73.

⁷⁴ DS, p. 75.

⁷⁵ DS, p. 79.

⁷⁶ DS, p. 112.

Exactly why religious denominations were able to play this role is a complex question. One very important factor was that, in the absence of an 'established church,' religious pluralism was virtually the original condition in America. Without the old world arrangement of established church which rendered other sects less acceptable, a new arrangement developed. The denomination came into existence, in Herberg's words, as "a stable, steeled church, enjoying a legitimate and recognized place in the larger aggregate of churches, each recognizing the proper status of the others."⁷⁷ The acceptability of this religious pluralism gave newly arrived immigrants the availability of communities with which to identify. As such, the denominations played a quasi-ethnic role. Precisely because of the experienced deprivation of intimate community as a result of having left the *Gemeinschaft* village and the absence of an established church, the religious denomination became the single most important means of self-identification within American society. Among the reasons for the persistence of religion, Greeley argues, is the success with which American religion has functioned to meet the need for belonging.⁷⁸

But he insists, as well, that

Obviously, the meaning and belonging functions of religion cannot be separated. We learn a particular system of religious meaning from the society to which we belong, and the set of convictions which enables us to interpret the general order of existence also facilitates our participation in the society with others who hold the same broad conceptions.⁷⁹

The social cohesion of a community results largely, as Durkheim had insisted, from common internalization of a symbolic world. Denominations are distinguished not simply by consciousness of origin; centrally there is a further "consciousness of kind" resultant from shared symbolic meanings. Indeed, Greeley argues that in American society the meaning function of religion takes greater significance precisely because of the strong belonging function fulfilled by American religion: to really belong to a community means to share that community's scheme of meaning.⁸⁰ Throughout these writings, the process of socialization is related to both functions of religion. Typically, an American Catholic, Protestant or Jew is socialized not simply into the uniqueness of the denominational tradition but into the broader context of cultural values (Herberg's 'American Way of Life'). A central element of this is the value of "loyalty" to one's religio-ethnic denomination. The young American learns that s/he is one of the "we" who stand over against "them." Also learned is the fact that there are many kinds of "we's" and "they's." Thus, tolerance for the diversity of communities within the society is a value internalized at the same time as the value of loyalty to one's own community and the symbolic vision which constitutes it as a community.

77 Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 85. Quoted in Greeley, *DS*, p. 115.

78 *DS*, p. 117.

79 *DS*, p. 80.

80 *DS*, p. 248.

Thus, loyalty to the religious tradition, particularly to those doctrinal, ethical, and cultic elements which are of major symbolic importance will be extremely important to the young American for his becoming himself and becoming an American.⁸¹

Catholicism in the United States can only be understood when it is recognized that it began there as a religion of immigrants, which provided them with a profound sense of belonging to a community and simultaneously provided a rich symbolic tradition which rendered life meaningful. The immigrant era, however, is ending. To understand the present situation of American Catholicism, and to plan for its future, demands consideration of the continually changing ways that it is possible to meet the unchanging human needs for meaning and belonging. For that kind of analysis, Greeley considers developing trends within various “dimensions” of religion.

2.4 Dimensions of Religion

In carrying his analysis to the present condition of American religion, Greeley characteristically presents a wealth of empirical data.⁸² But he also moves beyond this to develop typologies by means of which to consider various “dimensions” of religion, especially in terms of the meaning and belonging functions. Four of these will be briefly considered here.

As elsewhere, Greeley tries to be quite strict in his use of “ideal types,” recognizing the distinctions which he makes to be useful for analytic purposes but not as possessing any conceptual correlation with concrete social facts. As sociologist, he claims to be looking for certain “regularities” that can be found in study of human behavior; from recognition of these regularities, it is possible to construct the “types” which guide analysis. He insists, however, that one must keep in mind the fact that such typologies abstract from the data and simplify its complexity. In fact, one of his central arguments against popular expressions of the “secularization theory” is that they reify the constructs of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. That differentiation is helpful for understanding certain historical developments, but the terms do not refer to ‘already-out-there’ realities. In his consideration of paired ideal types in the dimensions of religion, he urges similar analytic caution.

2.4.1 Theology

The theological strain is between (a) orthodoxy, the desire to maintain religious revelation/doctrine in its original pristine state, and (b) liberalism, the desire to present that doctrine in such fashion as to be meaningful for human life in the contemporary situation. The need for real provision of effective meaning necessitates real dialogue with contemporary experience; yet, the security of belonging leads to demands for preservation of forms of belief/practice that are traditional. Between the two tendencies there is a “dialectic,” manifest in the Barthian reaction to nineteenth century Protestant liberalism, and the subsequent existential efforts of Tillich. And given the fact that the dialectic had been rather effectively restrained in Catholicism over recent centuries, Greeley suggests that it would be natural to expect quite intense polarities in the present situation. But he further

⁸¹ DS, p. 232.

⁸² This data is presented in five tables in chapter four of DS.

suggests that one resource for increasing the probability of the dialectic being fruitful is significant conversation between theology and the social sciences. Many of the questions with which theology must deal if it is to promote the effectiveness of Christian meaning deal with those very ideas which have been introduced into common consciousness by social science: personhood, relationship, the self-determination of peoples.

Greeley suggests three foci for such interdisciplinary reflections: personhood/personality, sexuality, and death. The social sciences have provided a wealth of data on these areas which could considerably enrich theological reflection, and theology as a conversation partner could help liberate social science from reductionist trends. Further, contemporary interest in methods of hermeneutics have broadened our understanding of the meaning of cultural (and thus “religious”) traditions; to the extent that such reflection is guided in being “traditional” in a truly critical sense, the possibilities for serving the human religious need to belong would be enhanced as well as our need for truly effective meaning.⁸³

2.4.2 Liturgy

His analysis of liturgy is a bit more complex, making use of two typologies: (1) ‘Simple’ and ‘High’ church, and (2) ‘Dionysian’ and ‘Apollonian.’ The first dialectic is between simple, informal, casual liturgy involving a small group, and highly stylized ritual often occurring in elaborate church buildings and involving larger groups of people. In the second dialectic, Apollonian liturgy stems from positing rationality as the essence of being human; it is sober, moderate, and has but the barest hint of emotion. On the other hand, Dionysian liturgy emphasizes the nonrational and the ecstatic through which it is possible to transcend ‘everyday life’ and come into contact with transhistorical Reality.

From this typology, it is possible to differentiate the following types:

1. Simple Church and Dionysian;
2. Simple Church and Apollonian;
3. High Church and Dionysian; and
4. High Church and Apollonian.

The rather complex analysis which could stem from this is not of central concern here. What is important is that these differentiations provide further tools for analysis. They raise questions as to why trends toward certain of the differentiations occur at certain times. Thus, Greeley is of the opinion that both Catholic and Protestant Churches have experienced tendencies toward the nonrational and emotive. For him the questions naturally focus on what that says about human needs for belonging and meaning in a given situation at a given time.

83 R2, pp. 105-118; DS, p. 22. In his address to the 1977 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Greeley reflects on the need for theology to engage in hermeneutical reflection on society. He adds: “If theology intends to reflect upon the situation in which contemporary humankind finds itself, then the same sort of scholarly discipline is required to determine what the present condition is as is required for reflection on it.” Cf. “Sociology and Theology: Some Methodological Reflections.” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 32 (1977), pp. 31-54.

In *Religion in the Year 2000*, he pays considerable attention to what was then (1960) referred to in common parlance as the subculture of “psychedelia.”⁸⁴ His analysis of the phenomenon posited a quasi-mystical effort to transcend the “hyper rationality” of contemporary life.

Psychedelia enables rational industrial man and his children to pull out of themselves, to back away from and stand over against ordinary experience and judge it in the quality of new insight or from the perspective of new unity. . . it seeks to put aside the hang-ups of organized society and its conventions in order to get in touch with the profound underlying natural forces in which we are all immersed.⁸⁵

The most pervasive manifestation of the phenomenon is to be found in ‘rock’ music which, he contends, provides immersion especially in two qualities of behavior which are utterly dysfunctional in “bureaucratized, formalized, computerized life:” sensuality and enthusiasm.

A further characteristic of the psychedelic subculture was that it tended to be highly “communitarian,” emphasizing relationships founded, not on utilitarian rationalism, but on primarily affective intersubjective ties; this, of course, also rendered psychedelia highly “sexual.”

Greeley’s sympathy for the “psychedelic experiment” is obvious. And while a critique of “computerized rationality” seems perhaps a bit strange coming from one whose endeavors have progressively led him more and more to try to “eff the ineffable” through the computerization of “beta coefficients,” it is nonetheless presented as a very real critique. His contention is that if primordial ties of Intersubjectivity and the numinous experience of ‘the Sacred’ are ignored and/or repressed in society, they will reappear in often unpredictable ways. The psychedelic phenomenon points to unmet human needs reasserting themselves through the texture of rationalization in society.

His argument is that this points to possibilities for development in liturgy, predicting a resurgence of the Dionysian in liturgy (a) to provide a meaningful context in which primordial forces can be encountered and interpreted, and (b) to enrich and reinforce community ties. Developments in liturgy in other words, are seen precisely in terms of the present form which the perennial needs for meaning and belonging have taken.

2.4.3 Organization

His analysis⁸⁶ of dialectic between (a) the human tendency to make religion universal/comprehensive and thus highly structured (‘church’), and (b) the tendency to keep religion as faithful to the original charisma as possible, and thus relatively small (‘sect’), follows the model of analysis considered previously.⁸⁷ He repeats his insistence that institutionalization does not inevitably lead to

84 R2, pp. 126-133.

85 R2, 127.

86 R2, pp. 154-162; DS, pp. 24-25.

87 Cf. pp. 15-19 above.

decline of spontaneity and intimacy; rather, large institutions can sustain small intimate groups within themselves; in fact, the presence and maintenance of such small groups is an essential condition for the vitality of the institution. Thus, the ability of a religious organization to promote diverse, pluralistic communitarian groups within itself is a sign of vitality. Greeley is of the opinion that the establishment of small groupings within ecclesiastical structures results from the need of contemporary persons to experience belonging in a way that is not possible either in other social contexts or in the large organization of the churches itself.⁸⁸

He is convinced that “denominationalism” will continue to be the significant form of American religion, in part because of the implicit value it posits in pluralism. The denomination continues to provide self-identification and self-location *vis-à-vis* the larger society and to provide the symbols which give meaning to human behavior, but there is need for smaller, less structured communities in which those symbols become internalized with far greater affective ‘charge.’

2.4.4 Minister

Greeley also analyzes dialectics in piety (‘incarnational’ / ‘eschatological’), ethics (‘systematic’ / ‘situational’), and world-view (‘pessimist’ / ‘optimist’), but the final one to be considered here is that of ministry. He sees a continuum between emphasis on the humanity/ordinariness of the minister (“MAN of God”) on the one hand, and emphasis on the separateness and unique holiness of the minister (“Man of GOD”) on the other hand. In either form, the exercise of leadership is fundamentally interpretive⁸⁹ and community-building. The tendency which he sees toward emphasis on the humanity of the minister is indicative both (a) of the need for a truly human community to belong to, and (b) of the fact that it is precisely the areas of personhood and relationship that stand in acute need of religious interpretation.⁹⁰

He suggests that people experience the need for healing in their ordinary human relationships and want religious ministers to be at the heart of that healing, by bringing the symbolic resources of the tradition to those relationships; further, ministers are expected to play a reassuring, affective, and loving role, which is to say that they are expected to build primordial Intersubjective bonds. From this analysis, it follows that “expressive personalities” would be highly desirable in roles of religious ministry; and these would seem to be precisely the style of personality at odds with a highly rationalized, technological society.

Whether in theology, liturgy, religious organization, or ministry, Greeley argues that the same fundamental pair of religious needs can be useful for understanding both (a) present tendencies in religious communities/organizations, and (b) directions which ecclesiastical policy-makers should consider.

2.5 Summary

⁸⁸ DS, p. 25.

⁸⁹ Cf. pp. 14-15 above.

⁹⁰ R2, pp. 139-150; DS, pp. 25-26.

Obviously, there are many other areas of concern to Greeley that have not been treated here. Central among them are the nature and significance of manifestations of the sacred, the centrality of myth in religious expression, and the relationship between religion and ethics.⁹¹ These analyses, however, are made within the broad lines of areas which have been considered.

At the core of Greeley's sociological perspective is the assumption of fundamental social continuity. This leads him to have serious doubts about theories which posit basic discontinuities in social process. Specifically, he rejects theories which hold that religion is becoming less and less significant in human life because of secularizing, rationalizing trends. The data, he insists, do not verify such hypotheses. Rather, what has happened is a process of marked complexification in which religion has become differentiated both within the broader social system and within the individual personality. Religion remains terribly important in human life, though its forms may have changed and its influence on major social institutions has become less direct. Its central influence is in the lives of men and women as they experience various kinds of 'bafflement,' which raise ultimate questions.

The central human needs to which religion responds in such experiences are the needs for belonging and for meaning. These needs were highlighted in different strains of the sociological tradition; they are, however, not really separate needs as much as they are different dimensions of the same human need. Our lives have meaning only through the communities to which we belong, and we belong to real communities through the sharing of meaning. A key reason for the relative vitality of organized religion in the United States is the development of a social form of religion which could adaptively respond to this dual need: the denomination. Within the denomination, there continue to be many areas in which development is occurring (e.g., theology, liturgy, organization, ministry), but the development is precisely in terms of the dual function of providing a community to belong to and symbols by means of which to interpret human existence.

The general hypothesis is this:

In American society the meaning function of religion takes on added importance – at least in terms of propositional orthodoxy – precisely because of the strong belonging function that a denominational society makes possible for religion.⁹²

From this perspective, he proffers research-guiding hypotheses regarding both predicted continuities and relatively significant changes. The predicted continuities⁹³ posit continued high levels of religious affiliation, the persistence of experiences of the sacred, the centrality of religious symbols in the meaning most people attach to their behavior, continued importance of ritual, the continued strength of

91 The fullest presentation of Greeley's argument for the "persistence of the Sacred" is in *UM*, pp. 151-170; his central treatment of "myth" is in *UM*, pp. 84-125; and he treats the relationship of religion and ethics in *UM*, pp. 200-212.

92 *DS*, p. 249.

93 *R2*, pp. 168-170; *DS*, pp. 249-251.

denominations as an organizational form, greater diversification among local congregations which may become smaller, and continued high levels of doctrinal orthodoxy.

He also, however, acknowledges the probability of a number of rather dramatic changes.⁹⁴ Central among these are increased dialogue between religion/theology and the social sciences, greater explicit religious concern about the interpretability of human life and the human condition, more religious emphasis on the importance of personality development and sexuality, trends toward the formation of small, intimate communities, more sympathetic dialogue between religious traditions, trends toward more affective and nonrational ritual, and more acceptance of the individual as the ultimate religious and ethical agent.

Many of these predictions form the basis for the research and reflection that engaged Greeley for the next decade.

3. FURTHER REFLECTION

3.1 Intervening Years

In the five years (1973-1977) following the appearance of *The Denominational Society* and *Unsecular Man*, Greeley wrote two books on sex, one on the devil, two on mysticism, one of suggested policy (counter)reforms for the Democratic party, two on ethnicity, a catechism, a book on Mary, one on general theology, two on the socio-economic conditions of American Catholics, a book on death, one on Catholic schools, one on neighborhoods, one on Catholic social theory, a volume of photographic meditations on an Irish prayer, a book about anti-Catholic prejudice, and a children's story about a dog named Sebastian!⁹⁵

The breadth of subject matter reflected in this enumeration is reflective of both continuity of thought and development. There remain evident his insistence on the centrality of empirical data, on

94 R2, pp. 171-173.

95 *The New Agenda* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1973). *Sexual Intimacy* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1973). *Building Coalitions* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974). *The Devil, You Say!* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, Doubleday, 1974). *Ecstasy: A Way of Knowing* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974). *Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1974). *Love and Play* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1975). *May the Wind Be at Your Back* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church* [with William McCready and Kathleen McCourt] (Mission KS: Sheed and Ward, 1976). *The Communal Catholic* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976). *Death and Beyond* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1976). *Ethnicity, Denomination, Inequality* (Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1976). *The Great Mysteries* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1976). *Nora Maeve and Sebi* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976). *The Ultimate Values of the American Population* [with William McCready] (Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1976). *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). *Neighborhood* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). *No Bigger Than Necessary* (New York: New American Library, 1977). *An Ugly Little Secret* (Mission KS: Sheed, Andrews, and McMeel, 1977).

the interpretive power of traditional religious symbols for contemporary experiences of human bafflement, on the persistence of the sacred, and on the human need for community.

Given the present impossibility of reading such a vast array of material, some criterion of selection was necessary. The three works chosen for brief consideration here deal with subjects which came to be of central importance in the 'second phase' delineated previously. The topics are: sexuality, the femininity of God, and social theory.

3.1.1 Sex: 'Baffling' and 'Bonding'

John Kotre refers to *Unsecular Man* as having been "the hub of a constellation of other Greeley volumes."⁹⁶ The fact that *Sexual Intimacy* was the first of those "other volumes" to appear is reflected in the marked continuity of interest and style.

The work opens with a brief statement of Greeley's "model of man" which holds that "what distinguished the human from other animals is his capacity for language."⁹⁷ From the outset he is placing his reflections on sexuality in the framework of his previous analyses of Weber and Geertz. Human beings need to be able to give meaning and interpretation to their behavior; these meanings are elaborated into complex cultural systems and social structures. The internalization of these symbolic meanings compensates for the non-specificity of human instinct. Thus, the human being is both a culture-producing and culture-produced creature. Humanly created meanings are internalized in such fashion as to shed light on the complexities and confusions faced in human existence. Sexuality is one key area of such complexity/confusion, in which people need the guidance of some kind of meaning; one locus of such meaning can be found within the overarching symbol system of the Christian religion. Thus, Greeley writes:

It is the intent of this book to deal with human sexuality both in the context of the human propensity to seek meaning in behavior and from the viewpoint of a particular religious meaning system – that of a schismatic Jewish sect founded by an obscure Galilean preacher named Jesus.⁹⁸

The first key assertion is that sexuality can be an experience of 'bafflement;' neither the meaning systems of common sense nor of science provide sufficient interpretation. Recognition of this, Greeley insists, involves reversal of some common assumptions – both popular and scientific – to the effect that 'contemporary man' is enlightened about sex whereas our primitive ancestors were not. He argues that 'primitive' man's religion had insight into sexuality that is lost in both popular culture (*Playboy*) and reductionist science (Masters and Johnson) today.

The most fundamental insight that primitive man had about sexuality is one that we frequently overlook or forget: that it is a raw, primal, basic power over which we have only very limited control. Primitive man invariably viewed sexuality as sacred, because for him the "sacred" was

⁹⁶ John Kotre, *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1978), pp. 114-115.

⁹⁷ *Sexual Intimacy* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1973), p. 9. [Hereafter referred to as *SI*.]

⁹⁸ *SI*, pp 12-13.

the “powerful,” and sexuality was one of the fundamental forces that kept the universe going. We have “prettied up” sexuality. . . and rationalized it by the use of glib psychotherapeutic terminology, hence deceiving ourselves into thinking calm, cool, casual discussion is a meaningful and effective way of coping with our sexual drives. Ancient man knew better.”⁹⁹

The effect of this can be that we tend to neglect the need for symbolic interpretation. Having done so does not necessarily mean that no such interpretation is held; it may well mean that destructive or dysfunctional symbols are hiddenly operative which, because of our neglect, are largely unnoticed. Further complicating this is the ‘Manichaeian’ strain in Christianity which has minimized the possible impact of its rich symbolic meanings on human sexual behavior beyond a code of permissions and prohibitions. Greeley is arguing for an attempted retrieval of the interpretative significance of the central Christian symbols for the baffling experience of human sexuality and intimacy. The “really pertinent question,” he contends, “is to ask what light does the Christian symbol system throw on the anxieties, the fears, and the ambiguities involved in human intimacy?”¹⁰⁰

Involved in this method of reflection is a fundamental theological insistence on what would classically be called “the hidden presence of grace in human life.”¹⁰¹ Experience of the profound and tempestuous power of sexuality manifests a yearning for transcendence of one’s own limitations, a yearning for some form of very fundamental union. This “spark of the divine,” however, can evoke a wide range of human response; it is, very properly speaking, a *mysterium tremendum* as well as *fascinans*. One common such response is a profound feeling of inadequacy, which Greeley terms “shame.” This response may give rise to extremely prudish behavior, or possibly highly promiscuous behavior; both reflect a common interpretation of the impossibility of truly achieving the primordial union toward which sexual desire seems to stir. That very desire is, in theological terms, ‘an inner Word’ of the divine self-communication. But the experience of shame indicates the inadequacy of the purely ‘inner’ speech. Revelation is, thus, understood as the ‘outer Word’ which makes possible a transformation of symbolic interpretation so that one is enabled to respond to the primordial desire which is, in itself, the stirring of grace. A person’s most fundamental envisionment of the nature of reality, therefore, deeply affects his/her very experience of basic powers in that reality; this is a matter first of the symbolic (preconscious) interpretation, which enters into the experience itself, and then of the response which is possible for him/her to make in action. Symbols are thus transformative of that human action which creates the human world.¹⁰²

Specifically, they are transformative of the relational world between persons constituted precisely by their symbolically directed action. The fundamental question, Greeley therefore argues, is one of “belief:” the way in which my experience of reality is meaningfully shaped by my preconscious symbols which interpret the nature of that reality will profoundly shape my active response. The

99 *SI*, p. 37.

100 *SI*, p. 27.

101 Gregory Baum, “Foreword,” in Andrew Greeley, *The New Agenda* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1973), p. 23.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

ultimate contention is that there are resources in the basic Christian symbols which interpret reality in ways that could transform a shame- and fear-filled experience-of and response-to sexuality.

In his analysis of research into female¹⁰³ and male sexuality, Greeley acknowledges the fruitfulness of psychological and physiological research, even when insisting that many of the reductionist and behaviorist presuppositions of such research must be recognized and taken into account. He cites research on “the insatiable female” which indicates that “uninhibited by cultural and psychological barriers, a woman’s sexuality appears to be both more intense and more demanding than that of a man.”¹⁰⁴ Serious difficulties arise, however, precisely because of such cultural and psychological factors. Many women, he argues, are caught in repressive cultural norms, and the after-effects of exploitative sexual experiences which inhibit their sexuality in various degrees. Greeley insists on the importance of ecclesiastical leaders coming to recognize the role that their religious traditions have played in this; there is real need for ‘suspicion’ of ethical traditions which have been shaped by a fear and hatred of women. But he also insists that a ‘retrieval’ of forgotten meanings is possible in those very same religious traditions.

The situation is different, though similar, for men. A key element in his analysis of “the uncertain male”¹⁰⁵ is that the fear of failure is a significant part of the sexuality of a large number of American men. Early socialization typically prepares men for behavioral skills associated with more *Gesellschaft* spheres of life:

One proves his virility in one way in the world in which he works and in a quite different way in the marriage bed and at the dinner table.¹⁰⁶

Commonly, although men deeply desire real interpersonal intimacy with a woman, they also fear it deeply. The risks are threatening and it is ‘safer’ to maintain relationships at levels which are comparable to the “associations” of business and work. The desire, however, to transcend this state of affairs remains.

Greeley analyzes ‘shame’ and ‘fear’ as being typically characteristic, respectively, of female and male sexuality; he also emphatically states, however, that these experiences do not belong in any exclusive way to one sex or the other. Rather, the analytical purpose was to isolate elements within relationships which tend to minimize possibilities for real human (and religious) depth in those relationships. The kind of sexual action engendered by a preconscious ‘rear’ of sexuality reinforces the similarly preconscious ‘shame’ of one’s partner, which gives rise to action that further reinforces the initial ‘rear.’ The question, then, is whether there are religious resources for transforming the foundational attitudes and images which ground destructive action.

103 *SI*, pp. 103-13.

104 *SI*, p. 104.

105 *SI*, pp. 115-127.

106 *SI*, p. 118.

The contention, of course, is that there are. For Greeley, the passionate fidelity of Yahweh is a profoundly important symbol. Intimacy is ambiguous: extremely desirable, yet extremely difficult. In every relationship, there are possible turning points at which the entire ambiance can be transformed.¹⁰⁷ At such points, the basic imagination which underlies the chosen actions will exercise a profoundly important role. If one carried a symbolically encoded experience of Yahweh's passionate and faithful love, one's chosen action will be deeply affected by it. This impact, Greeley argues, is not primarily prohibitive of ethical. Rather, the image of faithfulness is one of persistent, implacable commitment to creative love. Willingness to challenge when appropriate, commitment to maintaining one's physical 'sexiness,' gentleness, and constant sensitivity to the possible need for healing: this is the essence of faithfulness, when considered, not simply as an ethical prohibition, but as a religious possibility. Its realization is obviously always flawed. But faithfulness is the symbolically grounded attitude of persistence in trying. Greeley's argument is that persons who are able to truly "believe" in the fundamental graciousness¹⁰⁸ of existence through the symbolic mediation of "a passionately faithful God," will be far more likely to transform 'shame' and 'fear' into the progressive development of 'joyfulness' and 'trust' which are essential to truly intimate sexuality.

In similar fashion, other such traditional religious symbols are considered, centrally the cross and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰⁹ In the light of this symbol, it becomes possible to consider faith to be the conviction that – despite discouragement, failure, and tragedy – the power of life triumphs and it is possible to continue one's efforts to love and be loved. Experiences of conflict, misunderstanding, and betrayal can be transformed by the symbolic confidence that the growth of human intimacy comes not through the romanticized genetic unfolding of overly optimistic 'human potential' theorists, but through death and rebirth. It is far more possible for us to take risks, if we are confident in ultimate triumph despite the proximate possibility of real failure and even real death.

'Putting on' the symbols of the cross and resurrection of Jesus ought to make a man and woman far more sexy than putting on mint green underwear (though there's nothing wrong with that either). If the cross and resurrection do not make us more sexually attractive, that is not Jesus' fault. It's ours.¹¹⁰

3.1.2 The Femininity of God

It may be a telling fact that *The Mary Myth* is dedicated to David Tracy and John Shea, whom Greeley terms his "two theology 'professors'."¹¹¹ In them, he finds a theological method and style which

¹⁰⁷ *SI*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁸ *SI*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁹ *SI*, pp. 191-199. Other Jewish-Christian symbols of central importance for Greeley's interpretation of sexuality involve participation in the work of creation, the garden/paradise motif of *The Song of Songs*, and the "surprising" character of God's revelation.

¹¹⁰ *SI*, p. 199.

¹¹¹ *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). [Hereafter referred to as *MM*.]

'fit' his own methodology. Tracy's "revisionist" method of "correlation,"¹¹² and Shea's insistence on the centrality of narrative,¹¹³ are highly congruent with his insistence on the need for human experience to be guided by (correlated with) symbols, which are often expressed in a mythic (narrative) mode.

The book itself is presented as "not about Mary, [but] about God revealed to us through Mary."¹¹⁴ It is "an exercise in the margins between theology and sociology,"¹¹⁵ beginning with the sociological recognition of a quite simply historical fact: the symbol of Mary has exerted great influence in Western culture, as is evident in many classics of painting, architecture, and poetry. This simple recognition raises the question as to 'why' this particular symbol has held such perennial power. A model is adopted for the sake of isolating various dimensions of the symbolism which may help with this analysis. Greeley is again careful, however, to note that, like all models, this is an abstraction which can at best hope to explain only some aspects of the phenomenon.¹¹⁶ No claim is made for any kind of exhaustive interpretation.

The dialogue with Tracy has given Greeley the category of "limit-experience,"¹¹⁷ which is understood as encounters with the 'edges' of life. In such experience, one "brushes up against the stone wall that creates the boundary lines of our existence."¹¹⁸ Whether of tragedy or ecstasy, these experiences commonly raise questions as to the ultimate nature and purpose of human life. They are, in other words, moments of profound 'bafflement' in which we experience a felt need for meaning. A wide variety of human experiences are capable of stirring up such 'wonder,'¹¹⁹ but here the focus is on what Greeley terms "sexual differentiation." The very fact of existence as man *vis-à-vis* woman, or as woman *vis-à-vis* man, can be a powerful experience of our own limitation and yet at the same time of the

112 David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975). Tracy speaks of a "critical correlation" in which (a) the "Christian fact" and (b) "common human experience" are brought to bear in a bi-directional process of interpretation.

113 Shea's works which had been published by this time were *What A Modern Catholic Believes About Sin* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1971); *What A Modern Catholic Believes About Heaven and Hell* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1972); and *The Challenge of Jesus* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1975).

114 MM, p. 18.

115 MM, p. 21.

116 MM, p. 19.

117 Tracy analyzes "limit situations in the world of the everyday" in *Blessed Rage for Order*, pp. 105-109. Significantly whereas Tracy analyzes both experiences of boundary (sickness, suffering, tragedy, death) and ecstasy (love, joy, creativity) with equal depth, Greeley's analysis focuses primarily on what Tracy calls "ecstatic experiences."

118 MM, p. 25.

119 Greeley frequently cites an example given by Geertz ("Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 101-102) in which the Javanese he was observing found the presence of a larger-than-normal toadstool to be very strange-odd-uncanny, and in need of religious interpretation. In MM, p. 35, Greeley presents a list of common 'triggers' of religious experience that he takes from Eliade: sky, sun, moon, water, stones, trees, the rebirth of nature in spring, sexual differentiation, and fertility.

possibility of transcending those very limits. Like any experience of limit, this can be transformative of consciousness, shattering old perceptions and making a new configuration of perception possible. Such new configuration takes symbolic form. The thing/event/person which has 'triggered' the initial experience enters the underlying material of one's consciousness through which subsequent experience and action is 'filtered.' Such symbolization is thus action-producing: restructured perception leads to restructured living.¹²⁰ The content of the symbol, then, is of key importance to the possibilities for action which are opened up. And the range of possible symbolic content is presented and limited by one's culture and biography. Accordingly, the experience of sexual differentiation is capable of being symbolized in an enormous variety of ways. The 'Mary myth' is one possible symbolization of that experience, or better, a complex constellation of different symbolizations of that experience.

Again, Greeley insists that there are profound insights in 'primitive' religion that can and should be retrieved. In much ancient mythology there is an organizing conviction of the primordial unity of reality; the creation which we experience is a fragmentation¹²¹ of the unity which existed *in illo tempore*, and into which we are reintegrated in the performance of ritual.

All attributes of reality, then, and especially those experienced as being most 'powerful' exist as One in the divine sphere. Feminine goddesses express the presence of 'femininity' in the deity. And though the data concerning primitive religion is acknowledged as being complex and obscure, he observes that a central representation of this conviction is found, e.g., in the Paleolithic sculptures of the 'Great Mother,' the pregnant goddess of fertility.¹²² These were, Greeley theorizes, a symbolic representation of the creative, protecting, and nourishing dimensions of existence which were experienced so powerfully that they were posited as pertaining to the realm of divinity. Woman as the locus of fertility 'triggered' experiences of both wonder and fear; such experiences do not seem to ended with the Paleolithic Age.

Fertility was the great mystery, and no sophisticated modern looking at a newborn child in his mother's arms can escape completely a sense of fascination and mystery at the awesome phenomenon of reproduction and continuation.¹²³

The 'wondrous' character of sexual differentiation continues to be experienced as a limit which discloses powerful realities which transcend our 'everyday' existence; a key element of this for both men

120 MM, p. 34.

121 In UM, pp. 94-98, Greeley analyzes possible religious symbolizations of the meaning of this fragmentation, drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur and Alan Watts.

122 Greeley refers here to the work of Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* ().

123 MM, p. 58. It is important to remember at this point that Greeley claims to be analyzing only one aspect of the reality; he is making no claim that maternity is the 'essence' of femininity. Rather, it is one dimension among many, but one that has occasioned rich religious experience and expression. And while he does not here specifically refer to the potentially tragic character of pregnancy and childbirth, it would seem possible to argue to the "limit-character" of such experience as well, though requiring more attention to Tracy's notion of "boundary-experience" than Greeley has given.

and women, though in quite different ways, is the feminine fact of pregnancy and childbirth. "The primary element of sexual differentiation, then, is that women bear children and men do not."¹²⁴

Greeley's argument is that the emergence of Mary as an object of devotion in Christianity results, at least in part, from precisely this kind of experience. The need was felt for symbolic integration of the perceptions on human existence as man-and-woman made possible in the breakthrough of Christian revelation. As was not uncommon in the early Christian centuries, elements perceived as disclosive of truth in the surrounding culture were used in the fashioning of the symbolic and intellectual meaning systems of Christianity; in this way, "the feminine goddesses were integrated, rehabilitated, and transformed into Mary."¹²⁵ At the same time, the patristic typological interpretation of scripture came to see Mary as "the new Eve," the mother of all humanity. She became an available symbol for new perceptions of the meaning of sexual differentiation; she became, in essence, a symbol of 'the femininity of God.'

Whereas Marian devotion in the fourth century had emphasized Mary as Virgin, in the fifth century the image of the Madonna emerged into prominence. Geoffrey Ashe¹²⁶ understands this development as a response of Christian faith to the terrifying threat of pagan invasion: seeking protection and security in the arms of a mother. Whatever the roots of its historical development, this image of Mary as mother has resonated with the experience of both believers and non-believers throughout the Western world for centuries. For, in different ways, all of us experience maternity: (1) each person has had a mother, and for most of us her image is permanently implanted on our personality; (2) many persons obviously have been and are mothers, or are married to women who are; and (3) we have the experience of encountering maternity in the converse of everyday life.¹²⁷ Such experiences have the capability of releasing strong emotional currents, because we sense that at the heart of "mothering" is a passionately protective tenderness; this tends to recall our own experience of having been "mothered." And whether our experience has truly been that of being 'passionately protected' or not, there seems to be a virtually universal sense that, at least, that is how things 'ought' to be. The tender love of a mother for her child is sensed as a very fundamental power.

This is most evident in the childbirth experience, which has been intimately related to religion in most all cultures.¹²⁸ There is a sense of being in contact with the numinous forces which create throughout the universe. In the interpretation of Christian faith, of course, these powers are those of the Creator-God. One's encounter with those powers in motherhood/childbirth can both trigger a felt experience of those powers and provide the symbolism through which that experience is interpreted

124 MM, p. 109.

125 MM, p. 82.

126 MM, p. 95. Greeley is citing Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

127 MM, pp. 107-108.

128 Childbirth had been considered by Greeley in *UM*, pp. 174-176, in a lengthy quotation from Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 317-319.

and maintained in consciousness. “Mary” is an available symbol which, combined in complex fashion with images of other mothers whom one has experienced, becomes the preconscious filter through which life is experienced and enacted.

The transformation made possible by such symbolization is that of hope. In the Christmas story, readers/hearers know that the child will die; the question becomes that of whether the ultimate realities of creativity and life are thus defeated by those of destruction and death. But in the encounter with the experience of woman as mother, one may become aware of the radical power of life, perceived as a gift – an utterly gratuitous reality. It is an experience of graciousness which tends to raise the question:

Might there possibly be a Giver, a Giver of whom fertility, maternity, even the lovely-eyed Madonna are but a pale reflection? Can it be so? Might it be so? Is it so? Is there passionate, life-giving tenderness out there beyond the horizon of our life?¹²⁹

Such questions receive an affectively charged response in the symbolism of Mary as Mother of God: passionate tenderness is the heart of reality.

Significantly, in *The Mary Myth* these reflections are intertwined with classics of religious poetry and art which have been inspired by the Madonna image. Religion, Greeley is arguing, appears first in rich, dense, polyvalent images and stories; theological analysis must follow, but must also always be rooted in the images which it can never exhaust. Poetry – of word, painting, or sculpture – is a privileged form of the expression of real experiences of limit.

Such poetic images are the ‘stuff’ out of which our conscious lives emerge. Thus, they give form to the action in which we engage. Thus, to possible objections (a) that this analysis would promote a romantic withdrawal from engagement in the conflicts and problems of the social world, and (b) that it could be seen as promoting an image of women as passive, weak and diffident, Greeley argues that serious attention to the power of religious images does not turn the focus ‘away from’ action but rather focuses attention on the very wellsprings of action. One whose consciousness is truly shaped by the experience of life-giving power and passionate tenderness, which is preserved for consciousness in the symbol of the Madonna, has powerful resources for hope in the face of discouragement. Far from turning away from politics, planning, economics, one is possibly strengthened in one’s commitment to engage in them because they no longer have to carry the burden of being the source of one’s faith. Thus, when obstacles are encountered in the action of one’s life, it is possible to ‘know’ that the obstacles are not ultimate, and need not have the final answer. He argues that especially action in the environmental movement could be profoundly supported by the sense of awe for the life-giving powers of nature occasioned by one’s awe at the miracle at birth.¹³⁰ And whatever may have been the effect of decadent Mariology in past centuries on the lives of women, Greeley insists that the impact need not at all be negative; where it has been, the need for an attitude of suspicion is evident. But Mariology is also compatible with an image of woman which emphasizes the strength, independence, passion, and

129 *MM*, p. 121.

130 *MM*, pp. 121-123.

freedom of maternity. Indeed, if Mary reflects the femininity of God, then all femininity is to be considered absolutely equal to masculinity.¹³¹

The analysis continues through three further dimensions of the 'Mary myth:' Virgo, Sponsa, and Pieta. The method is similar, insisting on the priority of 'limit-experiences' which correlate with symbols which restructure perception and transform the possibilities for action. The experience is question is, throughout, that of the mystery encountered in women; this mystery is both 'revelatory' in itself, and yet ambiguous and so needing interpretation. The symbol of Mary provides a rich interpretation of the original experience, and makes possible a life in terms of the vision of life-giving power and passionate tenderness as fundamental forces in reality; it reveals, in other words, the femininity of God.

3.1.3 A 'Catholic' (Chicago Irish?) Social Theory

No Bigger Than Necessary begins with a by now familiar insistence that human beings approach society (as they approach all realities) with a system of images ("templates") in their preconscious minds which both organize and interpret the phenomena of experience and (b) give rise to more-or-less spontaneous action in response to situations. This is as true of social theorists as it is of anyone else; a key element of developing objectivity as a social thinker is, then, to become aware of the 'pictures' of reality which inhabit one's own preconscious. What Greeley seems to be 'up to' in this volume, more than anything else, is to thematize his own images of social reality, to contrast that imagination with other possibilities, and to consider what possibilities might arise for policy from his perspective that are not perceived, or at least not emphasized, in others.¹³²

His central argument is that the intellectual articulation of a Catholic social theory by such individuals as Chesterton, Maritain, Mounier, and Murray, and elaborated in the social encyclicals of the past century is a subsequent elaboration of an imaginative symbolic constellation that is rooted in the preconscious of many Catholics, having been internalized in the socialization process of their early childhood. The articulation is terribly important, but also important is the recognition of its powerful preconscious roots.

The theory itself, Greeley argues, has three fundamental principles:¹³³

1. *Personalism* insists that the goal of society is to develop and enrich the individual human person;
2. *Subsidiarity* insists that no organization should be bigger than necessary and that nothing should be done by a larger or higher social unity that can be done effectively by a smaller or lower unit; and

131 MM, pp. 123-125.

132 He stresses the personal nature of the effort more deeply in *Neighborhood* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 4-43.

133 *No Bigger Than Necessary* (New York: New American Library, 1977), p. 10. [Hereafter referred to as NBTN.]

3. *Pluralism* contends that a healthy society is characterized by a wide variety of intermediate groups freely flourishing between the individual and the state.

From these principles, the book's argument tends in two directions. On the one hand, it attempts to understand what the preconscious symbols might be which give rise to such theorization. On the other hand, it attempts to state some of the contributions¹³⁴ that might follow from such imagination and theory for action in the social order.

He presents a rather complex model for analysis of various perspectives with which it is possible to approach issues of social and political policy. The model hinges on two sets of assumptions, the combination of which, he argues, gives rise to the various perspectives. The first concern is with the assumptions being made about "the nature of human nature," and secondly those being made about "the nature of human society."¹³⁵ Precisely in these assumptions, he argues, there is a unique Catholic perspective that differs markedly from the perspectives which underlie the regnant ideologies of contemporary societies and which can make a significant contribution to the transformation of those societies.

Concerning human nature, a "semi-Pelagian" perspective¹³⁶ is isolated/analyzed; such thinkers share some variant of the conviction that human nature is fundamentally good and that present suffering/evil will be largely eliminated if oppressive social structures were reformed or remade. "Semi-Manichaeans,"¹³⁷ on the other hand, consider human nature to be fundamentally evil, and thus see individualism, egoism, aggression, and self-seeking behavior as the inescapable 'stuff' of the human condition. Thirdly, what Greeley rather ambiguously terms the "cultural mode;" (referring primarily to Geertz and Parsons) views human nature as "fundamentally social" and views human problems as stemming basically from the fact that human cultural capabilities do not keep pace with the rapid development of social institutions. Finally, Greeley's position ("the Catholic position") is presented as recognizing the precarious balance of basic goodness and wretchedness in the human person and in human society. Personally, we are "limited creatures with a hunger for the infinite;" socially, we "inherit

134 This reflects Greeley's stated concern in chapter eight of *The New Agenda* that Catholicism must move from focusing on its differences to its possible "contributions" to society of a unique perspective.

135 Assumptions with regard to the nature of human society are analyzed in terms of the theory of "modernization," which Greeley had previously termed secularization. An important new dimension of his argument here is reference to Christopher Lasch's contention that the nuclear family significantly antedated the industrial revolution and is thus not a proper argument for any movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. Lasch's articles appeared in the *New York Review of Books* 22, 13 November 1975, 27 November 1975, and 11 December 1975.

136 E.g., Noam Chomsky, Erich Fromm, Theodore Roszak, B.F. Skinner, *et al.* Greeley is careful to acknowledge the enormous differences between these thinkers; he is simply positing one particular, though quite significant, "family resemblance" which he perceives in their positions.

137 E.g., Robert Heilbroner, Loren Eiseley, Konrad Lorenz, Lionel Tiger, Reinhold Niebuhr, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, *et al.*

the negative impact of countless generations of fear, suspicion, and distrust.”¹³⁸ This is a specifically religious imagination which posits both real limitation and yet also the capacity for transcending limitation; the reality of Jesus/revelation/grace is affirmed as both (a) reinforcing/strengthening the creative, constructive possibilities of the human person (‘fundamental goodness’), and (b) assisting in the transcendence of the hateful heritage into which human persons are born (‘fundamental wretchedness’). The key religious element in this is positing the necessity of an act of faith in the possibilities of transcendence despite the reality of wretchedness, made possible by a symbolically thematized recognition of the ultimate graciousness of Reality. Greeley’s presentation of a Catholic imagination involves three central (though often not explicitly articulated) beliefs:¹³⁹

1. The universe in which we find ourselves is trustworthy;
2. The power which produced the universe and placed us in it is trustworthy; and
3. We can take the risk of trusting other human beings.

The key religious task, as he sees it, is to promote this underlying structure of imagination, from which attitudes and action follow.

Concerning assumptions as to “the nature of human society,” Greeley notes that many Catholic thinkers (e.g., Eric Gill, Ivan Illich, and the ‘Chesterbelloc’) have articulated a social theory explicitly in opposition to industrialization and urbanization. He sees the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, however, as asking what sort of structural changes a Catholic social theory would involve in the actual world in which modern science, transportation, and communication are givens. He posits a number of areas of imaginative agreement¹⁴⁰ between “classic capitalism and classic socialism” with which a Catholic theory would disagree. But centrally he posits two fundamentally unique characteristics.

First, a Catholic imagination tends to be much more skeptical than socialism about the possibility of remaking basic traits of the human personality; but it is also considerably more optimistic than capitalism about the nature of humanity in its human condition and its ability to transcend motivations of pure self-interest.

Secondly, and centrally to the argument:

The Catholic social theory has a profound respect, one might say reverence, for the informal, the particular, the local, the familial. It does not believe that this delicate and intricate web of primordial ties that bind human beings together in dense and close relationships should be ignored or eliminated. It does not believe that evolutionary progress is moving the human race from particularism to universalism.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ NBTN, p. 67.

¹³⁹ NBTN, p. 68.

¹⁴⁰ NBTN, pp. 80-88.

¹⁴¹ NBTN, p. 92.

Society is not primarily a matter of individuals bound together by means of rational agreement or by the power of the state; rather, it is a matter of dense interweaving networks of relationships,¹⁴² which Maritain termed the “organic heterogeneity” of overlapping commitments and loyalties. In Greeley’s perspective, this involves a deep respect for traditional forms of culture and social structure. Small, informal, traditional communities form a locus of belonging for the individual and are a counter-force to the progressive expansion of power and of the bureaucratic structures of the state and economy. Indeed, the principle of Subsidiarity (and more importantly the imagination which underlies it) seeks to keep things as small¹⁴³ as possible, primarily because things ‘work better that way,’ in terms of flexibility, communication, and the probability of innovation.

The ‘Catholic imagination’ sees cities in terms of neighborhoods, structures politics in terms of informal channels of communication, and tends to engage in networks of friendship. The virtue which Greeley posits as the cohesive force in all this is loyalty. Social planning, in his view, should encourage individuals’ loyalty to their families, neighborhoods, unions, and other communal forms of relationship. His contention is that cultural elites, persuaded by the modernization hypotheses, tend to shape policy with utter disregard for primordial networks of relationship – ethnic group, neighborhood, parish, even family – because they consider such traditional forms of relationship to be “conservative, reactionary, unprogressive, unenlightened, superstitious. . . narrow, parochial, and just plain wrong.”¹⁴⁴ To this, he argues that being bodily, a human person is always rooted in a particular place and involved in a particular network of relationships that will always tend to respond to the primal appeal of loyalty. This notion of human embodiment leads to what is termed an “organic” notion of society, in which society is viewed on the analogy of an organism; the strong Durkheimian strain of Greeley’s thought is thus evident. Because of this, he can argue that a ‘Catholic’ theory is more “relaxed” about the stability of human institutions than either a classic capitalist or socialist; viewing such stability as resultant from dense, interpersonal networks of strongly bonded communities, there is less need to insist on powerful overarching bureaucracies to assure unity. It also leads him to be

Deeply suspicious of those who deliberately set out to stir up conflict between classes – especially when this conflict seeks to make the opposing class the scapegoat, the enemy to be destroyed, the evil cause of all one’s trouble. Thus the Catholic theorist must reject in principle the current epidemic of romantic scapegoating of certain “oppressor” groups.¹⁴⁵

Since the ‘stuff’ of social existence is posited as a fundamental tendency toward Intersubjective ‘cooperation’ – which coexists with ‘competition,’ but predominates over it – social analysis and policy can only be held to be a matter of supporting and reinforcing the ‘cooperative’ tendencies.

142 Greeley refers with obvious approval to E.F. Schumacher’s “classic,” *Small Is Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

143 *Neighborhood* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 120-121.

144 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

145 *NBTN*, p. 98.

This point appears to be central in understanding Andrew Greeley. He very forthrightly insists that the choice between various perspectives on social reality and various methodologies of social analysis is a religious/theological choice, not really a sociological one. It is, in other words, a function of one's underlying imagination, whether that be unconsciously operative or explicitly thematized. The intractability of controversy over perspectives is held to be largely due to the fact that argument often proceeds as though it were purely 'rational,' with no attention being paid to underlying values and images. *No Bigger Than Necessary* is a statement of the implications of the author's values, commitments, and personal appropriation of a religious tradition. Disagreement, he insists, should begin at that level.

The work unfolds into a chapter of quite general recommendations for policy consideration in social planning, the specifics of which are not of central importance here. What is important is that they all focus on the significance of small, local communities which are threatened by both late capitalism and state socialism. At the heart of this is an insistence on the radical importance of family in human life, and thus of the need for economic, political, and ecclesiastical planning to be extremely concerned about the implications of policy for family. Similarly, for neighborhoods, which, he argues, "must be defended against the demands of metropolitanization."¹⁴⁶ There are other recommendations about tailoring "delivery services" to accommodate the local community, establishing boards of review to check the growth and power of bureaucracies, and application of subsidiarity to institutions in all sectors of social life. What is notable in reading these recommendations is that they read as a natural extension of what has preceded. Granted the assumptions about "the nature of human nature" and about "the nature of human society," such proposed policies are virtually evident. Whether Greeley has presented a Catholic imagination of such assumptions (especially regarding the nature of society) or a rather selective – because highly particular – envisionment of the Catholic tradition is a matter for pointed discussion. But that discussion is precisely where he indicates it ought to be: at the level of imagination, religion, and theology.

3.1.4 Summary

The original purpose in reading *Sexual Intimacy*, *The Mary Myth*, and *No Bigger Than Necessary* was to consider works from the years which intervene between two subtly different 'phases' of Andrew Greeley's reflection on the sociology of religion. These works demonstrate marked continuity with his previous reflection, and yet also indicate new directions in which that reflection turned.

Sexual Intimacy takes the previous general theorization on the symbolic nature of religion and moves it to an analysis of a specific religious symbolic interpretation (Christian) of a specific dimension of human experience (sexuality). Of key interest, here, is the definite assertion of the power of symbol to deeply affect human action. The concern is not simply with an understanding of human sexuality, but with actual engagement in intimate sexual relationships. Thus, Greeley insists that the symbolic imagination has far more profound power in the shaping of human action than do ethical codes (which is not, however, to deny the necessity of ethics). What is occurring is an exploration of the social scientific

¹⁴⁶ NBTN, p. 145.

discovery of the importance of symbol, and the relevance of this discovery for religion and theology. It is at the level of symbol that the roots of both understanding and action are to be found. Thus, Greeley argues in this volume, orthodoxy and orthopraxis have their foundation in the symbolic dimension of human consciousness; and those who are concerned with the interplay of believing/ thinking with acting must turn their attention to that dimension.

Further, given his previous postulation of the interdependence of “meaning” and “belonging,” it is a natural development to postulate that the most intimate human experience of belonging will have profound impact on the meaning which a person attaches to experience and action; thus, sexuality and religion are very deeply connected realities. It follows that it is important for religious leaders to be very concerned about the nature/quality of those intimate relationships. Also, it follows that religious symbols can powerfully assist in strengthening and transforming sexual relationships if they are explicitly interpreted in terms of such relationships.

In *The Mary Myth*, an interesting connection is made between the preconscious symbols which have been previously analyzed and the symbols of “high culture.” The importance of culturally available symbols is much more explicit here than previously. Also evident in the analysis of limit-experience is a broadening of the categories of “bafflement” and “the sacred.” Religion comes to be located even more centrally in “common human experience,”¹⁴⁷ here considered as the universal experience of sexual differentiation. The central importance of such experience in shaping its eventual symbolic embodiment comes more to the fore. Among other things, this reflects the ongoing dialogue with Tracy and Shea.¹⁴⁸

Also evident here is an explicit shift from analysis of symbols from the broad Christian tradition (e.g., *The Jesus Myth* and *The Sinai Myth*)¹⁴⁹ to one which reflects the specificity of the ‘Catholic heritage.’ This also enables him to reflect further on the need for a hermeneutics of retrieval within a heritage or tradition. Greeley observes that there has been a rather fundamental distortion of the Catholic imaging of God in its thoroughgoing masculinization, and he insists that authentic images of the femininity of God need to be retrieved both in order (a) to be faithful to the tradition and (b) to adequately symbolize common human experience. One of the reasons that this is extremely important is that images can be transformative of action. Thus, he does refer explicitly to the relationship between religious imagination and social action in this work. The connection is posited as being indirect, in that religion does not propose specific courses of action as much as it gives general directions and supplies underlying supportive attitudes, but the connection is affirmed.

That connection is specified in *No Bigger Than Necessary*, where Greeley relates his previous analysis of preconscious symbolism to social analysis. He emphasizes the priority of images/pictures/templates of social reality which need to be thematized and articulated. ‘Catholic’ social theory, he

147 Tracy analyzes “common human experience” in *Blessed Rage for Order*, pp. 64-71.

148 Greeley discusses the impact of his friendship and conversation with these two thinkers at some length in his memoir, *Confessions of a Parish Priest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 375 and *passim*.

149 *The Jesus Myth* (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971). *The Sinai Myth: A New Interpretation of the Ten Commandments* (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972).

argues, is grounded in such an imaginative structure. His own internalization of this imagination was within the specific context of Irish Catholic neighborhoods in Chicago and the Democratic ward/precinct politics which characterized that situation. Out of the experience of Catholicism within this setting emerged an imagination of society which 'sees things' in terms of personalism, localism, and pluralism.

Subsequent writing on the sociology of religion incorporated these particular developments.

3.2 Phase Two: An EMPIRICAL Sociology of Religion

In his earlier writings on the sociology of religion, the data presented had been restricted to fairly traditional analysis of religious practice (e.g., church attendance) and agreement with doctrinal propositions, even though the theory of religion itself gave much greater stress to mythic, symbolic, and affective dimensions of religion. The central difference to be found in *Religion: A Secular Theory* and *The Religious Imagination* results from empirical research into precisely those dimensions, guided by the kind of theorizing that had been occurring in the intervening years.

The broad lines of that effort are spelled out in Greeley's rather fascinating introduction to the new edition (1985) of his work in catechetics, *The Great Mysteries* (1976). There he mentions a number of efforts in which he had been engaged in the past years, the first of which was further catechetical work and the second was writing 'theological novels.' He then continues to describe the broad lines of his subsequent elaboration of a sociological perspective on religion:

My third effort was to elaborate a theory of the sociology of religion which would generate testable hypotheses of the religious imagination. Briefly, I've modeled religion as a four-step phenomenon: an experience which renews our hopes (either a spectacular mystical experience of the sort about which William James wrote or, more likely, an ordinary hope-renewing experience – sunset, a reconciliation after a quarrel, a touch of a friendly hand, a smile on the face of a child, etc.); an image retained in our memory recalling that experience and enjoying the potential to provide direction and purpose for our lives (and hence called a symbol or even a sacrament); a story by which we share our symbol and our experience with others by trying to activate in the imagination of our listeners residual traces of similar experiences they've had; and, finally, a story-telling community to which it is easy to tell our stories because the members of that community share the same repertory of privileged or overarching symbols that we do (a story-telling community might also be called a church). Experience, image, story, and community, or to put it in more theological terms, grace, sacrament, ritual, church.

An operational measure derived from this theory, seeking to ascertain a respondent's image of God (mother or father, friend or king, spouse or master, lover or judge) proved to be a more powerful predictor of social and political attitudes and behaviors and familial relationships than any of the regular measures of religious devotion. How we imagine God, in other words, is much more important to how we behave than doctrinal propositions about God to which we assent. Stories of God "correlate" with the stories we are "writing" of our own lives.¹⁵⁰

150 "Introduction to the New Edition," *The Great Mysteries* [second edition], (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1985), pp. viii-ix.

The emphasis on experience, image, narrative, and community are carried over from previous theorization and empirically tested with what Greeley acknowledges to be “tentative and exploratory, but nevertheless highly useful,” survey research.

The research tools take two central forms. First, use is made of William McCready’s investigation of world-views:¹⁵¹ religious optimist, hopeful, secular optimist, and pessimist. The differentiations were made on the basis of responses to a number of life situations presented in survey vignettes; these differentiated world-views were then correlated with various background factors and present attitudinal/behavioral tendencies such as income, education, religion, region, family relationships, and marital satisfaction.

Secondly, the specific research on which these two works are more directly based consisted in presenting respondents with various “images” of God, Jesus, Mary, and heaven; they were then asked to select one of four degrees of agreement with each of the images.

The images of God were: Judge, Protector, Redeemer, Lover, Master, Mother, Creator, and Father. Images of both Jesus and Mary were: Gentle, Warm, Distant, Demanding, Patient, Irrelevant, Challenging, and Comforting. Images of heaven were: a place of peace and tranquility, one of intense action, a life similar to this one, one in which many things were lacked, a shadowy life, a spiritual life, a place of paradise and delight, a life of intellectual communion, union with God, and reunion with loved ones. Respondents indicated a choice for each image from four possible degrees of likelihood to agree with that image: extremely likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, and not likely at all.¹⁵²

On the basis of each respondent’s selection of thirty-six responses from the total responses of 144, Greeley devises a number of scales by means of a statistical technique that he terms “factor analysis.” In this, respondents are differentiated on the basis of the relative “warmth” of their reported imagery. The further analysis proceeds to investigate (1) correlations of the differentiated scales with background experiences, and (2) correlations with present attitudes and behaviors.

Given Greeley’s previous insistence on the polyvalence, complexity, and richness of preconscious symbols, questions arise as to the adequacy of such prosaic and unrefined tools which he admits to be

151 This research is presented in *The Ultimate Values of the American Population* (Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1976). On page, 27, McCready gives the basic breakdown of the world-views among 1,467 respondents:

<u>World-view</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Religious optimist.....	22%
Hopeful.....	22%
Secular optimist.....	14%
Pessimist.....	24%
Diffuse.....	18%

152 The research tools are explained in *The Religious Imagination* (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1981), pp. 23-29. [Hereafter referred to as *RI*.] The mean scores of respondents to the various images is given in the table in *RI*, p. 26.

“crude.” Nonetheless, the fact that significant correlations do emerge seems to indicate that something is being touched upon, even if not capable of being fully explored in this research.

Among the correlations examined (which are far too numerous to mention here) are a number which touch directly upon previous concerns of this paper. The first is a strikingly high correlation between having had “religious experience(s)” and being high on the scales of “warm” religious imagery.¹⁵³ Those respondents who reported having had various forms of spiritual experience were far more likely than those who reported no such experience(s) to image God as Lover/Mother, Jesus and Mary as Gentle/Warm/Comforting, and heaven as a place of intense action and a paradise of delight. Further, the combination of having such experience and warm imagination correlated with a number of subsequent attitudes and behaviors: church attendance, reception of communion, daily prayer, having thought about a ‘religious vocation,’ social concern, and having a hopeful response to vignettes of life situations.

At the very least, such findings reinforce the previous theorization as to the centrality of “limit-experience” and the persistence of the sacred.” Some kind of relationship between the occurrence of such experience and the formation of one’s envisionment of religious Reality is also affirmed. Greeley’s contention is that there is a propensity in human beings to hope, which is reinforced by “gracious” limit-experience; and further, that this experience, having become symbolically encoded in consciousness, carries one’s validated hopefulness into his/her action.¹⁵⁴

Further significant correlations were found concerning marriage and sexual differentiation.¹⁵⁵ They key finding is the tendency for a progressive convergence of spouses’ religious imagination. After about five years of marriage, no other factor correlates as highly with an individual’s possession of ‘warm’ religious imagery than a spouse with precisely such imagery.¹⁵⁶ This is especially true for those couples who report a high level of “sexual fulfillment” in their marriage. Greeley remarks: “The spouse in a sexually fulfilling relationship is more than twice as influential in shaping the religious imagination as all the prior influences put together.”¹⁵⁷ One possible element of this is the possibility that sexual intimacy ‘triggers’ precisely those kinds of experience which are predispositive to the formation of ‘warm’ religious images.¹⁵⁸ The more likely, in other words, that one is to experience passion, gentleness, and intimacy in the marriage relationship the more likely one’s preconscious imagination is to be structured by symbols that predispose one to passionate, gentle, and intimate experience-of and

153 These findings are reported in *RI*, pp. 35-47, and are theoretically elaborated in the ten theses of chapter one of *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1982). [Hereafter referred to as *RST*.]

154 *RST*, pp. 15-18 (theses 2.1 and 2.2).

155 Cf. *RST*, pp. 151-155, in which theses 11.1-11.7 relate directly to the theorization presented in *The Mary Myth*.

156 *RI*, pp. 99-101.

157 *RI*, p. 101.

158 *RST*, p. 151.

response-to reality; and correlatively, the more one's imagination is so structured, the more likely one is to be passionate, gentle, and capable of intimacy in one's enacted relationships.

In terms of social concern,¹⁵⁹ a central finding is that those respondents most likely to image God as Mother are also most likely to respond affirmatively on survey items designed to measure "social concern" and political activity. Further, another correlation was found between having had religious experience(s) and social concern responses. The specific items measuring "social concern" were quite general and the correlations rather tenuous. Nevertheless, the fact that the two other images of God which correlated most highly with social concern were "Lover" and "Redeemer" gives somewhat further support to the underlying thesis of the importance of "warm" religious imagery in leading to action guided by social concern.

The basic position on society remains that articulated in earlier works. He insists that religion and society exercise mutual influence. The basic influence of religion on the shape of the social structure is through its impact on individual persons' view of the purpose/meaning of their lives. Religious experience and symbolization involves a sense of 'the way things ought to be' and can lead to social action. The influence, however, is reciprocal especially in that the institutions and relationships of society shape the symbols which an individual receives in his/her socialization and even the symbols which tend to be available for encoding religious experience.¹⁶⁰ Thus, data is presented which indicates that religion can and does lead to social concern and political activity; the very survey questions asked, however, indicate that the form of concern/activity envisioned was that of cautious reformism. It seems to be a rather telling point that no questions were asked that would have made possible any determination of the presence of more radical attitudes/activities.

In the two final aspects of these works to be considered here, one of the strengths of Greeley's empirical methodology can be seen in somewhat of a broadening of his perspective. Whereas the previous aspects provided empirical validation of the broad lines of his previous theorization, the concerns of "feminism" and "life cycle" hold a significance in these later works that was not previously present. Especially in these two areas, it seems that the data led to an expansion of perspective.

For research purposes, Greeley's operational definition of 'feminism' is simply the propensity to blur distinctions between 'male' and 'female' roles. In the surveys, this 'blurring' is operationalized in three variables:

1. The conviction that is important that women should be ordained;
2. The belief that a mother's working outside the home is not harmful to children; and
3. The propensity to see "having children" as a less important life goal.

Thirty-four percent of the female respondents scored 'high' on a 'feminism' scale comprised of these responses. The only background factors which correlated with 'feminist' responses were father's

159 *RI*, pp. 119-133. Greeley acknowledges Thomas Hoffman, SM, as the source of the material presented in the chapter (10) on "Spiritual Experience and Social Involvement."

160 *RST*, pp. 133-136.

education, close relationship with mother, and the woman's own education. But more significantly for this research, strong correlations were also found which indicated that 'feminist' attitudes among young Catholic women have a considerable negative effect on religious behavior. 'Feminist' respondents were lower in church attendance, prayer, felt closeness to church, felt closeness to God, lower in their evaluation of parish priests and of Sunday sermons, and higher in describing themselves as alienated from the church.¹⁶¹ But the introduction of one further factor makes a rather fascinating differentiation in the data. Among 'feminist' respondents who had found church leaders sympathetic, there was virtually no difference in their religious practice and 'alienation' than among 'non-feminist' respondents. However, among those who had found church leaders non-sympathetic, there was an enormous lowering of religious practice and increase of alienation.

It is, in other words, precisely the combination of low confidence in religious leadership and "feminist" attitudes which leads to devotional alienation.¹⁶²

Greeley further comments:

One is forced to conclude. . . the melancholy fact that learning of gender roles is a very considerable problem for the Church and its ministry, not only to women in their twenties but to all Catholic women born since 1930. And for the young and not-so-young, a lack of confidence in Church leaders seem to be a substantial part of the problem. . . it is the blurring of gender roles (for which the ordination of women is an excellent symbolic indicator) that a substantial proportion of women see as the real issue – and the lack of understanding of this issue by Church leadership as the real problem.¹⁶³

And finally, data emerged from the research which led to some tentative conclusions regarding the importance of the "life-cycle" phenomenon in contemporary American life; these conclusions relate directly to Greeley's concern with the human needs for meaning and belonging. Two types of patterns seemed to emerge.

The first regarded religious affiliation.¹⁶⁴ There seems to be a tendency toward a period of "religious disaffection" in the late teens and early twenties, which appears to be linked with a more generalized experience of disaffection toward other institutions of society.¹⁶⁵ NORC data reveals quite significant decline in both religious practice and affiliation in a large number of respondents between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight. However, there also emerged from the data a picture of a "rebound phenomenon" at about age thirty. This return to religious devotion and affiliation is accompanied by an increase in the 'warmth' of religious imagery and increased "marital satisfaction." For whatever reasons,

161 *RI*, pp. 168-169.

162 *RI*, p. 170.

163 *RI*, pp. 176-177. Also pertinent in this regard is the fact that the highest percentages of alienated respondents in a separate NORC survey were found among Catholics and Baptists; significantly, it was also precisely in those denominations that the lowest "confidence in Church leadership" was to be found.

164 Cf. *RI*, pp. 107-111; *RST*, pp. 146-147.

patterns of behavior seem characteristic of broad segments of the American population; these patterns can be typified in different theorizations of a "life-cycle" process. Here, Greeley is less concerned to argue for any particular such theorization than he is to point to the importance of the general phenomenon and the need for considerable further research. The one clue that he does offer as significant is that there is some type of close relationship between eventual resolution of religious disaffection and two related factors: (a) marital satisfaction, and (b) 'warm' religious imagery.

The second life-cycle phenomenon which he posits as evident in the data regards the marital relationship. In general, the phenomenon is seen as a "slump" in marital happiness between the second and eighth years of marriage, accompanied by a decline in the warmth of religious imagery.¹⁶⁶ A key issue becomes the attempt to differentiate between those who negotiate a rebound of marital satisfaction near the end of the first decade of marriage and those who are unable to do so. Again, the data is presented less as answering that question than as posing it as significant for further research. But, also again, there are "hints," the central of which is the simple fact that marital rebound seems to be related in some fashion to the character of the religious imagination. Perception of religious Reality as "Lover," Mother," "Gentle," "Warm," etc. seems to provide possibilities for feeling and action which are conducive to the resolution of marital crises. Such crises tend to reoccur throughout the marriage relationship, especially it seems, in the first half of the third decade of marriage; this is, or course, the period which tends to correspond with the completion of direct parenting responsibilities. Two correlations are presented as being of sufficient significance to warrant further research and consideration: (1) 'warm' religious imagery, and (2) sexual fulfillment. Greeley draws but one general conclusion:

The religious imagination is a powerful asset both for the individual and for the Church during life cycle crises. It draws young adults back to religious devotion. . . and it draws husbands and wives back to satisfactory levels of marital intimacy.¹⁶⁷

Throughout these analyses the concern remains fundamentally with the human need for meaning and belonging, and the function of religion in responding to those needs. The heart of that function has been affirmed, throughout the writings considered, at the level of the symbolic. In this latest research, this focus remains and is guided by previous reflections on the centrality of sexuality, 'religious' experience, tightly bonded communities, and the priority of image and story in religious expression. These concerns gave rise to the questions and hypotheses which guided research

165 Greeley relates this to the research of John Kotre, *View from the Border: A Social Psychological Study of Current Catholicism* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1971). Kotre hypothesizes a relationship between (a) assertion of independence from family of origin, and (b) disaffiliation from religious and other social institutions (e.g., political parties). For many, religious disaffection is, in other words, a means of asserting one's independence from family that is not terribly destructive of family. When one's location within a new family constellation is secure, religious affiliation tends to be resumed.

166 RI, pp. 111-114. Greeley refers to his more developed analysis of this phenomenon in *The Young Catholic Family: Religious Images and Marriage Fulfillment* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1980).

167 RI, p. 115.

attempting to probe the impact of the symbolic in these areas. Greeley's interpretation of the data has led to some broadening or perspective in particular areas, but in general has reaffirmed the broad lines of the sociology of religion he had previously presented and the religious reflection which had seemed from it.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 'Saving' the Catholic Church

Among the many criticisms which could be (and undoubtedly have been) directed toward Andrew Greeley, it is doubtful that one would find the criticism of being timid in offering his opinion. The title of his 1984 work, *How to Save the Catholic Church*,¹⁶⁸ reflects characteristic boldness. It also reflects, however, a serious attempt to move beyond both data collection/interpretation and sociological theorizing to the presentation of policy proposals by means of which, he argues, the Catholic Church would be enabled to more effectively respond to the religious needs of contemporary believers at the same time as retrieving significant elements of its own tradition.

Written with his sister, Mary Durkin, the work is presented in three parts. Two brief introductory chapters outline the basic model of religion which guides the remainder of the work. Four pivotal chapters outline the authors' understanding of the key elements of the "Catholic imagination." Finally, eight chapters are devoted to consideration of areas which demand the attention of policy makers in the Catholic Church and to which the authors have suggestions to make arising from their vision of Catholicism.

The 'model' of religion consists of the basic propositions offered in *Religion: A Secular Theory*. It posits the basic significance of (limit-) experiences which reinforce the human propensity to hope, and which are embodied in consciousness through symbols which mediate further experience and action. These symbols relate to the culture within which one's consciousness comes to be formed. Accordingly, that culture, or meaning system, is terribly important in shaping both the kinds of experience one is likely to have and the ways in which one will symbolize and communicate life experience.

The center of the work's theoretical argument is that the "Catholic heritage" is constituted by particular constellations of symbolic forms. It is acknowledged as a highly complex, polyvalent, and pluralistic tradition; nonetheless, Greeley and Durkin argue, certain fundamental elements are characteristic in the varying articulations of the basic heritage. Four such constants are posited.

First, it is argued, the Catholic heritage is "sacramental;" the sacred, that is, is expected to be experienced "in and through" concrete things/events/persons. Typically 'Catholic' poets, such as Hopkins, will perceive the world to be "charged with the grandeur of God." The importance of specifically sacramental rituals derives from this more fundamental imagination which perceives the

168 *How to Save the Catholic Church* [with Mary Durkin] (New York: Viking Press, 1984). [Hereafter referred to as *HSCC*.]

capacity of all reality to be a bearer of divine disclosure. The inner Word of grace is seen as uttered in truly “common” human experience.¹⁶⁹

Secondly, again demonstrating the influence of David Tracy who wrote the preface for this work, it is argued that Catholicism is characterized by an “analogical imagination.” The Greeley-Durkin presentations of Tracy’s insight is that whereas the Protestant “dialectical imagination” emphasizes the radical difference between God and world, the Catholic “analogical imagination” emphasizes the possibility of encountering and knowing God through objects, persons, events, and experiences in the natural world. It is argued that human relationships and even social orders can be experienced as reflective of God. And while there are admitted dangers of ‘idolatry’ in this, the greater danger posited by the authors is risking an absolute separating between “religious experience” and “common human experience.”¹⁷⁰

Thirdly, Catholicism is characterized by a profound confidence in the triumph of grace which is perceived throughout human life. This is termed the tendency toward “comic” narrative expression.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, the authors contend, the central ‘Catholic’ celebration in the lives of most Catholic believers is Christmas, which relates the confidence in God’s presence with very common human experience:

We’ve all been there and we all understand in some fashion that God is there, too: God is present in the new life of the baby, God is present in the love of the family for the baby, and God is present especially in the embrace of the Mother and the Child.¹⁷²

This is posited as a fundamental characteristic of imagination which leads, e.g., to the ability to maintain a sense of humor, even in the midst of discouragement, and to the tendency to be able to party even in the midst of organized gatherings of scholarly persons. The Catholic religious sensibility, in other words, is profoundly hopeful and celebratory of those realities and experiences which reinforce hope. Greeley and Durkin try to place this characteristic within a realistic awareness of the experience of tragedy, suffering, and evil. Goodness, they acknowledge, is “only marginally more durable than death;”¹⁷³ yet that conviction gives a distinctively Catholic tonality to experience and action in the world.

Finally, the ‘Catholic imagination’ involves an organic envisionment of community/society. Against the tendency of modernity to imagine society as a rational contract between otherwise disparate individuals, humans are seen as existing primarily only in tightly bonded and pre-rational communities. Such groups as family, neighborhood, parish, etc. are the primary loci of human social existence. The state, in such a vision, exists to be supportive of such communities. Involved in this is a readiness to

169 HSCC, pp. 33-50.

170 HSCC, pp. 51-73. Tracy’s work referred to here is *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981).

171 HSCC, pp. 74-87.

172 HSCC, p. 75.

173 HSCC, p. 82.

accept great diversity of such communal forms and an insistence that responsibility should be exercised in the smallest such forms possible. The Catholic imagination sees large organizations – whether ecclesiastical or civil – as communities formed out of communities, not out of isolated individuals.¹⁷⁴

All of this reflects the absolutely foundational insistence on the primacy of the symbolic in human consciousness. The meaning which Catholicism is able to give to human life, the authors argue, is primarily a way of experiencing, understanding, and acting that emerges through a symbolic imagination of reality. And belonging to the Catholic community, above all else, means sharing in that imagination. Meaning, belonging, and symbolic mediation: the constants of Greeley's sociology of religion remain constant.

On the basis of these considerations, proposals are made for institutional policy in the Catholic Church. The essential proposals can be summarily stated as follows:

1. The experience of human sexuality is potentially a powerful experience of 'the sacred,' but precisely because of this remains a highly ambiguous, baffling experience. A central institutional commitment of the Catholic Church should be toward the development of a positive theological understanding of sexuality and toward pastoral strategies which would seek to assist persons in becoming "more passionate lovers."¹⁷⁵
2. A major problem for Catholicism is the persistence of strong strains of bias against women. This violates the Catholic commitment to the absolute value of persons, inhibits possibilities for retrieving images of the femininity of God, has led to considerable alienation from the Church on the part of women, and blocks the possibility of attaining a more positive and meaningful understanding of sexuality. Consequently the Church must take strong stands against sex discrimination, affirm the variety of lifestyles open to women, retrieve feminine images of God, and remove barriers to women's full participation in the Church including ordained ministry.¹⁷⁶
3. Numerous social-cultural factors have emerged to significantly affect the experience of marriage and family. Among other things these factors have influenced the cyclical patterns of development which seem to characterize relational development. Given the Catholic imagination's perception of sexual intimacy as a prime locus of religious disclosure, there should be a strong institutional commitment to examine how the sexual, psychological, and religious dimensions of the human personality interact in the marriage relationship. From this follows the need for development of pastoral strategies of support for couples in 'negotiation' the critical turning points of relational development.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ HSCC, p. 88-102.

¹⁷⁵ HSCC, pp. 88-102.

¹⁷⁶ HSCC, pp. 130-151.

¹⁷⁷ HSCC, pp. 152-164.

4. Since the local church is the primary place of belonging to the Church and the community within which one's internalization of religious symbols is achieved and supported, localism is extremely important. To support this, parishes need to be places of social involvement where networks of relationships can flourish. They should also be encouraging of parishioners' contributions to the political and cultural life of the broader society. But what the parish needs to be, above all, is the place and community in which persons and families are reminded of the mysterious/religious dimension of their lives with each other; it is here that the symbolism of the Catholic imagination is brought to bear on the experiences of bafflement which require meaning.¹⁷⁸
5. The key factor in "correlating" the symbolic resources of the heritage and the experiences of life is worship. A privileged possibility for the occurrence of this is the homily; this necessitates that those who preach be sensitive to those life-experiences which open persons to a sense of the transcendent and which raise questions that need religious interpretation. Given research findings which indicate that Catholics rate the quality of weekly preaching quite low, the development of religious imagination in 'preachers' should be a matter of high priority. A related factor would be commitment to bringing artists – especially poets – into dialogue on further development of liturgical forms which explicitly seek to be "correlative" of life and faith.¹⁷⁹
6. Given the fact that the symbols which we internalize tend to be less verbal than ritual and pictorial, the role which the arts have traditionally played in Catholicism is understandable. Artists create images which have real power to shape the preconscious imagination. Given the pragmatic bent of American Catholicism, however, this has tended to be a rather low priority. If the power of the symbolic is to be taken seriously, it will be necessary to make a major commitment to the development of artistic forms – architectural, literary, musical, cinematic, sculptural, etc. – in which there is more or less conscious effort to give expression to the Catholic envisionment of reality.¹⁸⁰
7. Given both (a) Catholicism's traditional emphasis on the importance of organic communities, and (b) a contemporary resurgence of interest in "microstructures," it seems that traditional Catholic social theory has resources that must be rediscovered and reinterpreted in light of the contemporary situation. Greeley and Durkin's key insistence here is that social transformation is truly constructive and effective only when it makes a real effort to maintain cultural values and networks of relationships, while building on them. The criticism offered of both state socialism and liberal capitalism is that they 'wipe out' the microstructures of society; the criticism of revolutionary social movements is that they tend to destroy the existing structures rather than trying to build on them. The authors insist that the only effective way of reforming a society is gradual, organic development that respects that society's structures and culture. A major

178 *HSCC*, pp. 165-182.

179 *HSCC*, pp. 183-196.

180 *HSCC*, pp. 197-213.

institutional commitment should be made to support serious academic research as to the possible contributions which this type of Catholic social theory could make to contemporary policy formation and social action.¹⁸¹

The possibility and desirability of such proposals are, of course, highly arguable; and even if accepted in general terms, their relative lack of specificity could embrace widely divergent interpretations. The present concern has not been to engage in that conversation. The point, rather, is to indicate that the real level of argument, in all probability, lies well beneath specific policy proposals and indeed beneath specific research hypotheses. The proper location for convergence with or opposition to programs of research and suggestions for policy lies in deeply rooted assumptions about the nature of religion, about the nature of human consciousness, and about the nature of human social existence. The concern of this paper has been primarily expository, without extending to critical questions; that in itself has been a task of questionable manageability. But it has seemed to be a necessary prior task to understand the foundations of Greeley's thought precisely so that more authentically critical reading could be given to the proposals which he has made for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

4.2 Further Relevant Questions

This attempt to outline the background of sociological and religious thought which stands behind Andrew Greeley's recent writings centers on the question for understanding: What are the insights which he presents? The question for such understanding necessarily precedes that of judgment: Is he right? The central preoccupation of my reading of his works at this point has been to locate the foundational areas in which this question can be joined.

The question has surfaced in numerous contexts throughout this project. In concluding, therefore, my attempt is simply to raise those questions to articulation for the sake of further reflection without engaging in that reflection here.

First, behind/beneath the positing of meaning and belonging as the fundamental human "needs" to which religion functions as response is acceptance of the category of "need" as the determinant of all subsequent reflection. Is it not necessary to complement consideration of human "need" with consideration of human "possibility?" Does the exclusive focus on response to need betray an overly empirical focus, which is taken over from reductionist accounts of religion even as it is concerned to go beyond those accounts? Is it not possible for human beings to "desire" fundamentally more human lives – personally and socially – in a way which goes beyond the meeting of needs?

Secondly, does the focus on relative social stasis and the continuity of human religious needs give sufficiently serious attention to the predicament of our age? Greeley acknowledges approvingly Karl Jaspers' contention that an "axial" period occurred in the centuries immediately preceding the common era. He is utterly silent, however, about Jaspers' parallel assertion that we are presently living at a time when "scores of centuries are drawing to a close." Many thinkers posit contemporary developments

181 *HSCC*, pp. 214-230.

parallel in significance to the earlier axis which transformed all of human culture. Does not more attentiveness need to be given to this than Greeley tends to give?

Thirdly, epistemological questions are raised by his contention that knowing is basically a matter of “model-fitting.” Granted the inescapable centrality of the symbolic as the dimension through which all thinking rises and to which it must constantly return for revitalization, is there not a fundamental breakthrough in thought which goes beyond the symbolic (understood in terms of ‘pictures,’ ‘images,’ ‘templates’)? In fact, it seems that Greeley’s very practice of empirical social science demonstrates the foundational importance of images/models for the emergence of understanding, but also of the reality of understanding which does go beyond the images. Questions arise as to whether his articulation of what it means to know is adequate to this.

Fourthly, Greeley acknowledges the “tentative” character of his research into religious images through the analytic tools of survey research. But in drawing conclusions, is he sufficiently sensitive to the very ‘crudeness’ of the instruments which he has acknowledged from the beginning? Are not preconscious images of such complexity and potential hiddenness, that it is risky to conclude that one’s imagination is structured in a certain way just because of the selection of one adjective out of a list of adjectives? Even granting the fact that all research must begin somewhere and that such beginnings tend to lack later capabilities for complexity, is it not necessary to present the conclusions of such beginning research in a tentativeness that seems to not easily flow from Greeley’s temperament?

Fifthly, Does Greeley’s presentation of “the analogical imagination” take sufficient account of the necessary movement of dialectic, to which Tracy seems to give a considerably more nuanced account. Is it adequate, in other words, to insist *a priori* that social action must forswear dialectic analysis and strategies for action in order to ‘qualify’ as ‘Catholic’? Given Tracy’s articulation of a dialectic subsumed within the more fundamentally analogical character of imagination, would it not be possible to insist on the need for dialectic analysis/action precisely in order to enable the analogical possibilities of a social situation to emerge? Perhaps the analogical imagination is more fundamental than even Greeley presents; it may be able to ground even real dialectic.

Sixthly, related to this concern, I cannot help but be a bit uneasy with any attempt to present *the* Catholic imagination. What is paradigmatic or universal is, indeed, experienced and understood only in its highly particular realizations, but it is important to recognize that particularity. Are there elements of Greeley’s (and Durkin’s) internalization of Catholicism which represent more the particularities of ethnic Chicago than the necessary dimensions of any imagination which is to call itself Catholic? In Tracy’s terms, might not some elements of their presentation be “period pieces” rather than truly “classic” expressions?

These are proffered as questions, not as judgments. But they are posed as questions at the level where Greeley has consistently argued that issues must be joined: the level of assumptions and foundational images. Drawing attention to the need of reflection and conversation at that level has been one of the more fruitful insights and insistences of a quite remarkably consistent body of writings on the social nature of religion, and the religious nature of society.

