

***Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology.* Gregory Baum.
New York: Paulist Press, 1975.**

Chapter ONE: Religion as Source of Alienation – The Young Hegel

Frankfort manuscripts = Early Theological Writings

Reflection objectifies life, thus becoming estranged from it: life is to be lived, not thought.

Hegel considers the Old Testament as typical of alienating religion; the New Testament as religion that recreates humanity in love.

Key source of alienation = conceptualization of the divine.

Reflection aimed at resolving the coexistence/interrelation of infinite and finite has led to objectification of the divine.

“Bad infinity” – an infinite being extrinsic-to and apart-from human life and history.

This objectification of God as stranger and object gives rise to manifold human alienations.

Hegel, however, posited a “good infinity”: an infinity in-and-through the finite world, grounding it, energizing it, orienting its unfolding.

Mediation between finite and infinite was not possible in reflection, but only in love, action – overcoming the contradictions in human existence.

Jesus broke through to this kind of non-alienating life and religion.

For all this, Hegel was no pantheist: the mode of God’s immanence is not identity, but transcendence.

“God is the never objectifiable mystery implicit in human love and commitment.”

‘Inherited religion’ results in threefold alienation: (1) from nature; (2) from self; (3) from fellow man

Hegel’s use of “Judaism” for alienating religion was symbolic; interesting to note that he did not recognize the radically alienating character of this usage.

Alienation from NATURE: When God is objectified/conceived as separated from the world, we must turn away from our environment in order to find him.

Infinity is to be found utterly outside the natural world, not in-and-through it.

Nature = an object of fear and source of danger.

“Instead of searching for the proportions in nature that are congenial to human life and exercising creativity in nature inspired by confidence, people begin to oscillate between the fear of nature and the desire to dominate it.”

If non-alienating religion leads to creativity, alienating religion causes a search for power.

Nature becomes purely an object foreign to man; the more man is separated from nature, the more it appears as enemy and the more man is obsessed with the quest for survival.

When man sees himself surrounded by enemies, he invokes the stranger-God as protector who promotes his wars, dominations, conquests..... man inscribes in God the image of all his hatreds.

Alienation from SELF: People become estranged from their own depth, expecting no 'light' from within to give meaning to their existence, but only from a foreign source.

Man comes to look upon himself as empty; freedom is lost, and man becomes essentially dependent/enslaved.

His personal inclinations are perceived as running counter to God's extrinsic demands, thus creating profound guilt and intensifying rejection of self.

The quest for redemption thus intensifies the alienation from self.

In "bad religion," man projects the worst of himself – his self-rejection – unto the cosmos.

Note the contrast with Feuerbach whose atheism contended that 'God' was merely the projection of the noblest human dreams/desires.

For Hegel, as later for Marx, projections were always inversions – turning right order upside down.

God becomes the symbol of all men hate and at the same time the lord to which they desire to submit.

Alienation from FELLOWS: men are unable to seek the mystery of life, operative in and through each other – they are unable to seek the divine mystery in other persons.

God is perceived as related to persons only as aloof master: God is master – man is servant. The structure of human life becomes one of domination.

Thus, in "bad religion," domination rather than communion is the key to human unity. People define their relations to one another in terms of master/slave.

The three alienations are profoundly related; they are all due to the refusal to love and the objectification of the divine as a stranger above history.

"Alienation" refers to the structures of separation which prevent people from enjoying their powers, from living up to their destiny, and from participating in the unitive forces of love and truth operative in their midst.

Hegel was open to radical critique of religion, without fearing the destruction of authentic religion.

"If people listen to the divine call and act in keeping with divine impulse, they will discern the harmony between themselves and nature and thus create a garden in this world; they will get in

touch with their own depth and be reconciled to the sources of their vitality; and finally they will learn to overcome the divisions of mankind and be reconciled to others through the common sharing of truth and love, marvelously operative in mankind.”

Questionable to some in Hegel's analysis is the degree to which he asserted that religion caused alienation; they would assert that ‘bad religion’ confirms the alienation generated by society.

However, Hegel's idealism concurs with the sociological observation that human experience of the world is mediated through the symbolic structure of the imagination.

Sociologists use dialectical language to deal with this: (a) the common mind-set is a given into which children are born and socialized; but (b) sufficient freedom remains in persons to acquire a new self-understanding and, in conjunction with others who have undergone the same conversion, to transform society and eventually even modify the common mind-set.

Thus, Hegel's idea that religion as a form of consciousness can affect the social structure makes him a forerunner of the sociological tradition – recognizing the powerful role that institutions play in embodying collective self-consciousness and mediating it to the next generation.

Chapter TWO: Religion as Product of Alienation – The Young Marx

Marx's key insight: society produces human consciousness.

He thus opposed the intellectual trend of his ‘young Hegelian’ contemporaries.

Marx was preoccupied with economic/political structures, virtually to the exclusion of cultural/symbolic factors.

Feuerbach had contended that religion represented the projection of the highest human aspirations; the task of enlightenment was the realization that these aspirations characterized the real potentialities of man, not of God.

Marx critiqued Feuerbach for having given inadequate attention to the social reasons for this projection: unmasking the illusory character of religion is inadequate unless accompanied by changes in those social factors which cause man to engage in projection.

Marx unmasked Feuerbach's idealistic illusion that intelligence alone could change the human reality.

Marx sees religion as the product of social alienation: the discrepancies in social institutions inflict burdens on them, diminish their humanity, distort their self-understanding as human beings, and eventually create false consciousness – in which the present social order becomes the measure of reality.

Religion persuades people that the present ordering of society is acceptable, and it directs their yearning for happiness away from the human to the divine world.

Religion is both the product and protector of alienation.

Marx analyzes labor (external labor as opposed to creative work) as the source of man's multiple self-alienation.

He analyzed the factory system, denouncing the fact that men – destined by nature to creative work – are convicted to dehumanizing labor; concurrently the exploitation of workers is the source of wealth for the owners. Marx thus defines property as “alienated labor.”

Marx has the profound conviction that alienation is not natural to human life, that it is imposed by the institutions in which people live, and that human life is destined to be free and express itself in creative activity.

Marx's analysis includes the threefold alienation from: nature / personal life / human fellowship.

Factory work alienates people from nature; their body becomes for them simply an instrument for work. His imagination is deadened, his intelligence obscured, and ultimately the body comes to resemble a mechanical instrument.

Work is not a fulfillment of desires; rather, one works to survive. Thus, the worker is not at home in his place of work. And his capacity for enjoyment/imagination is so deadened that he is unable to feel at home in the rest of life; real human actions (e.g., sexual intercourse) deteriorate into frantic animal functions – intensifying his alienation from nature.

The worker is alienated from himself because the product of his hands is removed from him and made the source of wealth and power for the owners.

The work is “external” to the worker because it does not flow from his own creativity and because it does not humanize the environment to which he belongs.

External work estranges the worker from his deepest self.

Marx based his critique on a humanistic (theological?) *a priori* understanding of man's social existence and on the conviction that human fulfillment and happiness were in fact the destiny of humankind.

Eventually, the laborer loses his personhood altogether – becoming a commodity, like the things he makes. Fellow workers similarly come to be regarded as objects.

Friendship/community break down as one's relationship to others comes to be completely determined by their place in the industrial process.

Owners come to define themselves as ‘masters,’ rather than persons; their self-understanding/life-style is thus linked to that of the slave.

The personal relationships of the owning class also become reified; they are estranged from their own depth, becoming devoured by their acquisitive preoccupations.

For Marx, “money” is the symbol of the total reification of human life. All values/dreams are assigned a price; money becomes the visible sign and seal of the manifold alienation due to external labor.

Money as stored-up, depersonalized, alienated labor is the agent of universal alienation.

As the alienation becomes deepened, it is felt less.

Stages: (1) body hurts; laborer is frustrated; (2) laborer may be numb and unresponsive; (3) false consciousness; alienated man may be cheerful (especially middle class).

There is a positive dimension to this; alienation may make people aware of the injustices of society, which is why prophecy is possible only among the alienated.

Alienation prevents people from being totally identified with their society; they are thus able to transcend the given social order and overcome the false consciousness the society induces in its members.

False consciousness is likely to be more total among the comfortable classes.

Marx asserted that people who are unable to find themselves and their happiness in the world to which they belong tend to create another world for themselves in which their true destiny appears.

Religion tells the story of man's injustice to man in such fashion that it legitimates the present order, and creates a hope for justice that remains forever illusory.

In the Marxian view, people can free themselves from alienation only through radical change; human consciousness is changed by changing social conditions.

Needed is a social revolution to democratize economic/industrial life so that (1) workers would be able to participate in management, and (2) their work would contribute not to the profit of the few but to the well-being of the entire community.

Labor will assume a more human character when industry is run not to maximize production to increase owner's profits, but to provide goods and services necessary for the well-being of the community; it then would express the workers' care for the people as a whole.

Marx held that religion (indeed, all culture) is ideological; i.e., it is a symbol system which distorts truth for the sake of social interest, legitimating the power/privileges of dominant groups.

Sociologists have modified the Marxist notion of ideology:

1. Recognizing ideological trends stemming from factors other than the economic system;
2. Recognizing ideology as a universal phenomenon, affecting even the exploited classes.

This has an impact on theology: It is the task of theology to discover in the actual, concrete proclamation/celebration of the Christian message the ideological trends that distort the truth for the sake of strengthening the church against its competitors, legitimating the dominant social/economic values of society, and promoting obedience to secular/ecclesiastical authorities.

An example of the need for ideological critique is the presence of anti-Jewish bias throughout Christian history, a critique attempted only since the extermination of European Jewry.

Marx himself never confronted this anti-Jewish ideology.

The religion Marx encountered in his day was almost totally identified with the social/political order, protecting the *ancien regime*.

Later, Max Weber demonstrated that historically there had been periods in which religious trends were a source of social criticism; religion contains critical/creative elements.

Thus it is impossible to come to quick generalizations about the social function of religion.

Marx failed to make the careful study needed in each particular case.

Marx was gripped by a profound faith in the destiny of man; he even admitted that in religion is preserved the conviction that human life is meant to be different from its actual oppressed condition.

Neither the young Hegel nor Marx regarded alienation as an anthropological necessity; alienation was seen as the product of disabling factors, and it was man's destiny to free himself from these oppressive forces.

Chapter THREE: Alienation in Industrial Society – Ferdinand Tonnies

With the democratic and industrial revolutions, the dream emerged among the champions of the new society that through science, technology and democratization, man would eventually gain control over the world, solve the problems that inflict misery on people, and create a realm of freedom and happiness on earth.

The nineteenth century was characterized by an optimism which supposed that further application of utilitarian reason to the processes of production and political organization would improve the conditions of life and lead along the road of unlimited progress.

However, a group of thinkers (later termed "sociologists") devised concepts for analyzing social action by comparing/contrasting the new and traditional societies.

A malaise with the new industrial society led these thinkers to begin analyzing the effect of institutions on human life and made them sensitive to the dehumanizing trend implicit in the conditions of the new urban centers.

These thinkers rejected the prevailing rationalistic view of life and its attempt to construct a society based on scientific principles; they recognized the need for values, dreams and symbols, without which society will disintegrate.

Auguste Comte proposed a rationalist evolutionism ("Positivism") in which society moved away from religion and the new rational aspects of life to the rational and demonstrable.

Stages: religious / philosophical / scientific.

But apart from his positivist scientism, Comte realized that society needs symbols to assure its cohesion and strengthen its will to live; a stable society presupposes a symbolic language in which people celebrate their common values/dreams.

This led Comte to create a new religion, 'the worship of future humanity.'

Most of the other thinkers of this group, beginning with Alexis de Tocqueville, severely criticized the prevailing rationalism/scientism/utilitarianism; they were sensitive to the forces in the new society that impoverished human existence.

They agreed that the new mobility of life was undermining the cohesiveness of the social order and destroying the authoritative traditions of the past.

Ferdinand Tönnies developed a model for comparing the old order and the new society, coining terms still used: *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society).

Gemeinschaft: the human community where people grow up and live in reliance on one another, more aware of their common bond than of their individuality.

There is a bond of common values, vision, and religion. People live out of a spiritual/intellectual tradition held in common; handed on by mutual interaction, and protected by a common vigilance.

Gesellschaft: Individuals precede the group.

Persons, after deliberation and free choice, form an artificial group/society, and decide what laws should rule their interaction and what function the society is to fulfill.

It is a rational construction.

The bond between persons is purely legal/contractual, and competition/envy is inevitable..... an "associative bond."

Severed from the richness of an ancient tradition, people become increasingly preoccupied with pragmatic purposes.

Tönnies constructed a social psychology which showed the effect of the institutions in which people live on their own self-understanding.

Tönnies's idyllic picture of *Gemeinschaft* fostered conservative sentiment in some readers; he himself was a socialist who hoped that a new form of social life – fraternal, communal, liberating – would be created from the seeds of *Gemeinschaft* surviving in modern society.

It is important to remember that Tönnies was constructing social 'models' for the sake of analyzing the essential nature of two contrasting types of society; he was not presenting historical description of two actually existing communities.

Neither *Gemeinschaft* nor *Gesellschaft* exist in pure form.

Tönnies contended that the two social forms corresponded to two distinct anthropological principles:

Gemeinschaft: “natural will”

Formation of community follows the organic model of nature. Participation in custom, common memories, and religion creates feelings/inclinations that become second nature; these give rise to spontaneous actions that are in harmony with their own personal nature as well as the well-being of the community.

Gesellschaft: “rational will”

Actions are based on deliberation; they are freely chosen because they seem useful toward an elected end.

Quality tends to be translated into quantity, and values into measurable entities that can be easily evaluated/judged.

Defining this personal identity is critical, pragmatic reason – stripped of feelings and spontaneous reactions.

The relationship between people becomes quantified, each person calculatedly striving for that which is to his own advantage.

A ‘war of all against all’ is restrained by marked conventions and contractual agreements and towed into a system of general competition.

The population is eventually divided into ‘masters’ and ‘servants,’ with the state becoming an instrument protecting the ‘masters.’

“As a man’s personal life is brought under the domination of a separated, critical ego that is incapable of identifying itself with personal life and making decision that spring from life itself, so would the human community be eventually ruled by a separated power, foreign to the innate forces of social life, imposing decisions that did not emerge from the common life but were derived from interests inevitably at odds with the life of the whole.”

For Toennies, religion was the celebration of the common values and sacred laws that constitute the community; it represents the original unity/equality of a whole people as a family.

He contends that the alienating factors operative in *Gesellschaft* undermines religion.

In *Gesellschaft*, people are united simply by “public opinion,” which emerges from science and pragmatic reason; this becomes transformed into a set of rules/conventions that protect the market, private property, and the power of those in charge of industry/commerce.

“Public opinion” remains external to people, further separates people from their life energies, weakens the bonds of friendship/love, and undermines the hold of religion.

Again, it must be recalled that certain elements of *Gemeinschaft* remain operative in societies dominated by *Gesellschaft* trends.

However, he had little trust in the innovative power of religion.

Toennies also saw a positive element in the state of human interiority produced by *Gesellschaft*. Whereas the “conscience” produced by *Gemeinschaft* involved profound identification with the values of a tradition, the “consciousness” engendered by *Gesellschaft* enabled a distance from nature/self/others which enabled one to submit all of these to critique.

Toennies’s own self-critical analysis of the culture to which he belonged was a product of this very consciousness.

Thus, a certain degree of alienation enables self-criticism.

Max Weber essentially followed Toennies’s evaluation of the modern world; his analysis concentrated on the effects of the ever-growing bureaucracy. He contended that the drift toward rational authority would lead to the extension of bureaucracy to all areas of social/political life, creating institutions in which very few independent decisions are made – except at the very top – with the result being that organizational patterns would become increasingly more rigid and depersonalizing.

The secularization theories of Toennies and Weber are quite different from those of Comte and Marx.

Whereas Comte saw the scientific age as the fulfillment of man’s hopes, Toennies feared that the spirit of the modern world estrange man from his happiness and destroy his inherited culture.

Marx looked upon history as directed toward man’s liberation, while Toennies tried to be a value-free sociologist who studied the development of societies without invoking any overall purposes/trends in world history.

Toennies also analyzed cultural factors beyond the economic; he also repudiated class struggle as a tactic of reform.

He held that the class struggle was ultimately based on *Gesellschaft* ideals and that it would generate a mind-set not of brotherhood but of domination.

Toennies’s main concern was the decline of culture and the alienation of human life, on all levels of society, from its essential sources.

In common, however, these German thinkers shared a consistent negation of modernity.

The German people tended to react conservatively to the rationalist Enlightenment. This produced a creative new consciousness with a dynamic understanding of history, of reason, and of human community.

German thinkers in the late nineteenth century reacted against the scientific positivism which had been influential in Germany earlier in the century – and against Anglo-Saxon empiricism/utilitarianism.

In some German circles, this served the ideological purpose of protecting the old order, by means of which the dominant groups in Germany fought the entry of democratic forms into social life and resisted the advance of the rising classes.

Chapter FOUR: The Ambiguity of Religion – A Biblical Account

The Bible paints a highly ambivalent picture of religion; especially the prophets give description of corrupting religious trends.

Christian theologians have tended to minimize, however, the need for ecclesial self-criticism.

Corrupting trends:

1. Prophetic warnings against idolatrous religion were aimed not simply at idol-worship but included repudiation of world views incompatible with faith in the true God (cf. 1 Mc 1.43).

Paul (cf. Rom 1.18-32) regarded as idolatrous the tendency to forget the Creator revealed in creation, while worshipping a part of the created order.

To believe that Jesus is Lord meant that nothing in the created order, neither people nor ideas, can ever lay claim to unconditional loyalty (cf. Mt 6.24; Col 3.5; Eph 5.5; Rv 13.8; Ti 3.3).

The Church's institutional self-interest has led to neglect of critical attention to this danger within ecclesial life. The Church is tempted by idolatry when it wants to multiply the absolutes and regard its teaching/hierarchy as the ultimate norms for judging all forms of Christian life/faith.

Vatican II's clear distinction between Church and Kingdom encourages criticism of idolatrous elements within the church.

2. Denunciation of superstitions which distort true faith.

Superstition is inspired by fear of the unknown and the suspicion that the universe is hostile/malevolent; as such, it represents a breakdown of truth/faith.

[Cf. Jer 10.2; Is 47.13; 1 Sm 28.7-25; Ez 21.21-23; Zech 10.2; Ex 22.18; Lv 20.6,27; Dt 18.10; Gn 35.4; Jgs 8.24; Is 3.20; 2 Mc 12.40; AA 13.6-10; AA 19.13-19; Gal 5.20; Rv 21.27]

But the ambiguity of religion is such that celebration of the sacred is never wholly free from superstitious trends; those very gestures/rituals intended to serve the holy and set it off from the profane tend to become themselves objects of veneration.

Religion will always remain ambiguous and in need of ongoing critique.

Criteria are needed for distinguishing authentic faith from wishful thinking.

But radical efforts to uproot all superstition tend to end up in such a rational/critical approach that religion itself declines.

3. The prophets and Jesus denounced hypocrisy (Cf. Is 29.13; Ec 1.29-30; Ec 32.15; Ec 36.18-19; Mt 6.2,5,16; Mt 23.5-12).

Believers are hypocritical to the extent that their religious words/gestures do not correspond to their hearts; hypocrisy is a manipulative attempt to use religion to advance one's position in life.

Jesus stressed that hypocritical behavior protects the power of the dominant groups and enhances the respect in which ordinary people hold them.

Again, ongoing critique is necessary.

Religious leaders need to serve the faith of the community by their public observance/action, even at times of personal doubt/hesitation. But the intention behind this can easily move from serving the community to enhancing authority.

4. The scriptures carefully and critically analyze legalistic religion.

Legalism is the religion's attitude that makes observance the end of religion, substituting for holiness. (Cf. Am 4.4-5; Is 1.11-16; Lk 18.9-14; Mt 20.1-11; Lk 15/25-30; Rm 2.17-24).

Laws/rites become ultimate norms, forgetting that they are meant to be symbols mediating inward transformation.

The legalist can easily become unaware of his real feelings, his own brokenness, and his own need for redemption; he has little appreciation for God's gratuitous presence to human life. He also tends to despise persons not as observant as he.

The Churches have not made the struggle against legalism nearly as central as it was for the prophets.

The polemical caricature of the Pharisees by the early Church (evident in the Gospels) had two unfortunate effects:

1. Tragic consequences for the image of Judaism in Christian tradition;
 2. Led the Christian church to falsely believe that Jesus' preaching against hypocrisy was not addressed to the community bearing his name but was rather a denunciation of the Jewish religion.
5. Falsification of people's self-understanding is designated by the biblical terms: "blindness," "deafness," "hardening of hearts." (Cf. Is 6.9-10; Mt 13.14-15).

The self-interest of groups and persons can be accompanied by so much self-delusion that they remain wholly unaware of the purposes, the motives, and even the actions that determine their (collective) existence.

Marx: "false consciousness."

We can become blinded to the games of power and the structures of domination at work in the community.

A contemporary question: how to express faith in the Spirit's guidance of the community without engendering the false consciousness of exaggerated belief in divine guidance.

"Conversion" is the biblical word for faithful response to these corrupting trends. (Cf. Ez 18.31-32).

The prophetic call to conversion was to make Israel aware of the corrupting trends in their religious life and enable them to return to the authentic religion revealed by God.

John the Baptist and Jesus called upon people, personally and collectively, to recognize the truth about themselves, which their self-delusion had hidden from them, and to open themselves to the imminent coming of God's kingdom.

By defining conversion as original acceptance of gospel faith, the church tended to forget that the call to conversion was addressed to its own members.

The church has tended to look upon itself as the redeemed community, as the holy church in which the messianic promises have been fulfilled, as the very plenitude and embodiment of Christ extended through space and time.

With such an understanding, how much self-criticism is possible?

For ideological reasons the Church did not integrate the biblical critique of corrupting religious trends into its preaching. In fact, it created a special myth – the repudiation of the Jews – that protected it from confronting Jesus' critical preaching.

The early Christian Church projected Jesus' critical denunciation of hypocrisy, legalism, and collective blindness unto "the Jews" (scribes, Pharisees, temple priests).

Mt 23 is a brilliant analysis of ideological religion, and verses 8-11 make clear its pertinence to the Christian community; by framing it entirely in address to the Pharisees, however, the Church deprived itself of those principles of self-criticism and left itself protected against the ambiguity of religion.

It was for purely polemical purposes that the biblical critique of legalism was projected onto the Jewish religion, especially by Paul (cf. Gal 3-4).

John's Gospel (especially chapters 5 and 8) and the patristic *Adversus Judaeos* literature expand this polemic.

The Church's preaching split apart the antitheses of salvation – darkness/light, falsehood/truth, blindness/seeing, carnal/spiritual, damnation/redemption, reprobation/adoption – and applied the negative side to the Jewish people and the positive side to the Christian church (cf. R. Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*).

In the medieval and baroque eras, there occurred in the church a symbolic demonization of the Jews. It was the impact of this 'demonization' on cultures that helped Hitler make the Jews into a scapegoat.

Thus, the Holocaust spells out a judgment on the spiritual tradition of the West; it is a never-to-be-overlooked revelation of the radical ambiguity of religion.

Auschwitz brings to light the dreadful consequences of the destructive trends in religion. Christians are called to confront the structures of oppression and the symbols legitimating injustice in the Christian tradition (e.g., anti-feminist trends).

Chapter FIVE: The Ambiguity of Religion -- A Social Science Account

Many social thinkers subsequent to Marx and Toennies have made use of them to study the phenomenon of religion, distinguishing in it divergent trends: trends that alienate people from their human resources, and other trends that reconcile them with, and confirm in them, their full human potential.

Emile Durkheim and Max Weber made a clearly defined, ideal-typical distinction between religion and magic.

Durkheim argued that religion was the primary reality, from which society began; he saw religion as the symbolic celebration of the values/ideals/hopes that bound a society together. Thus, in religion society encounters the ideal on which it is based.

Religion is created by the community as the symbolic self-manifestation of its own depth; in turn religion creates the community – confirming members in the common values, initiating new generations into the living tradition, and confronting the entire community with the highest ideals in its history and thus acting as an impetus for social change/renewal.

Against Frazer who had argued for the priority of magic and religion's derivation from it, Durkheim insisted that religion was primary and that magical rites were expressions of its decline/decay.

Durkheim emphasized that religion is inevitably associated with a community, nourishing in people the power to love others and to surrender themselves to the social reality that embraces and transcends them.

Magic is decadent and creates no communal bonds; it does not facilitate surrender to the transcendent but seeks power over the gods to make them serve personal interest.

Weber's evolutionary perspective viewed religion as emerging from magic, but he also held that the transition to religion had an important social meaning.

Magic is concerned with particular, localized problems; religion expresses itself in ordered worship and surrender to the gods, creating a believing community.

The magician speaks in his own name and is a man of great personal power.

The priest as guardian of religion speaks in the name of the community.

The religious breakthrough is part of a movement ("rationalization") that creates a more complex, ordered, differentiated society which demands the transcendence of private wishes and family interests for the sake of a wider common good.

Religion generates a selfless, sacrificial, communal way of life.

A third type of religious leader – the prophet – is a man invested with extraordinary power who has a special message or recalls a forgotten teaching. His message has meaning for the entire community, but he speaks at a distance from the religious institution and traditional society.

The prophet embodies an application of "reason" to religion.

Thus: magical trends alienate people from the religious community and the development of their full human stature; religion integrates people into social life and brings them in touch with the sources of creativity.

"Functionalism" tends to minimize this distinction, arguing that magic has latent social functions; e.g., dispelling fear among some persons, making them more peaceful workers. This school looks upon society as the ongoing equilibrium of social forces.

Erich Fromm (transforming Freud) distinguishes between authoritarian and humanistic religion.

Freud exposed religion as projection in two central critiques:

1. Religion as compulsively extended infantilism: paternal/maternal figures are projected onto the cosmos, providing longer-for warmth and security and enabling persons to remain passive.

Such a projected parental figure becomes a dangerous obstacle to growth and freedom; people become dependant/passive/uncritical.

People kept immature by a successful religious projecting feel safe only in social/political/ecclesiastical institutions where few decisions are demanded of them, where they are led by strong authority figures, and where they can fit themselves into a rigid structure of law and order.

Conferring the Oedipal complex, authoritarian religion also evokes strange/unaccountable feelings of anger; this explains the extraordinary cruelty which authoritarian religion has produced in history – especially toward outsiders and non-conformists.

2. Religion as a projection induces by guilt-feelings: Modern industrial society makes such demands on people that they feel guilty about their dreams of happiness, self-expression, and satisfaction of instincts. Parents communicate society's demands – internalized as super-ego – and create feelings of guilt. These overwhelming guilt-feelings may give rise to a religious projection of a divine law-giver.

People are thus imprisoned in guilt, they punish themselves for occasional experiences of release, mistrust their own deep wishes, and lose confidence in their own powers.

But religion also provided significant moments of relief/forgiveness. Freud held that in a scientific age which undermined religion, people are deprived of even this occasional release. Thus, unrelieved guilt is the typical illness of the modern age.

With an 'Oedipal charge,' there also comes to be strong feelings of resentment against the projected divinity.

Fromm accepted this two-fold critique, yet does not believe that it exhausts the reality of religion. Thus, Freud's critique revealed the alienating nature of authoritarian religion but left room for another kind of religious orientation, one that promotes human self-discovery and self-expression.

Fromm understands religion as any style of thought and action, shared by a group, which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.

Authoritarian religion conceives the divine in terms of power and domination.

Humanistic religion conceives the divine in terms of participation and communion.

Such religion enables movement toward freedom, development, and transformation of life.

But Fromm's understanding of 'humanistic religion' remains rather vague.

Fromm's concept of humanistic religion can be related to contemporary theological developments which interpret God not as a supreme being over and above the world but as the mystery of life in and through human existence, delivering man from his brokenness and orienting him toward a redeemed future.

In Jesus, the mystery operative in hidden fashion in the deepest dimensions of human history is made manifest.

The effort of contemporary theologians has been to proclaim the Christian creed as the revelation of God's presence in the humanization and liberation of mankind.

It remains necessary to submit the teaching and practice of the Christian church to an ongoing critique.

Following Karl Mannheim, it is possible to distinguish between ideological and utopian religion.

Weber concluded that an easy generalization of the relation between class and religion is not possible; in every case, the concrete historical situation must be studied.

He did not deny the phenomenon of ideological religion, but affirmed the reality of prophetic/critical religion.

Mannheim insisted that all groups, in virtue of their concrete place in society, look upon reality from a certain angle and entertain certain political aspirations; they consequently acquire a

definite mindset or mental horizon which defines the framework of their thought, cultural life, and religion.

Ideas are grounded in social reality and, accordingly, the development of ideas/art/religion cannot be understood apart from the mind-set to which they belong and the socio-political changes taking place in their social carrier.

Hermeneutics has led to the realization that the meaning of a religious statement is dependent not only on the social context in which it was first uttered but also on the presuppositions brought to it by the interpreter, which in turn depend on the historical experience of the community to which the interpreter belongs.

Mannheim examined "the utopian mind-set" and related it to the study of religion.

Religion is ideological if it legitimates the existing social order, defends the dominant values, enhances the authority of the dominant class, and creates an imagination suggesting that society is stable and perdures.

Religion is utopian if it reveals the ills of the present social order, inverts the dominant values, undermines the authority of the ruling groups, and makes people expect the downfall of the present system.

The disappearance of utopias leads to a static society and the reification of human life.

Historical religion can be both ideological and utopian, depending on the historical age, the political situation, and the form of people's religious experience.

Religious symbols are, thus, inevitably a hidden political language (though they cannot simply be reduced to this).

For example, an other-worldly spirituality can serve as a subtle legitimization of worldly powers.

Jewish apocalypticism is an example of a religious literature which revealed that God's judgment was upon the present order, that the seats of power were about to be overthrown, and that the victorious Lord would create a new society where his faithful people would live in justice and peace.

Such apocalyptic consciousness regarded society as evil, and in need of being destroyed; it held that a new society – free from the injustices of the old – was about to be created and that this would be God's work, for which reason no one knew exactly what it would be like -- it can thus be spoken of only in the symbolic language of justice and peace.

Such biblical apocalypticism is the source of the Western revolutionary tradition.

Religion can be both the creator of ideologies and the bearer of utopias.

Peter Berger sees all social life as essentially precarious, with little/no trust in the inner coherence of societal forces. Needed, therefore, to make the social reality stable are symbols that make us believe that society has to be the way it is (“world maintenance”). Religion serves as a world-maintaining myth (a “sacred canopy”).

In this perspective, alienation – as the illusion that societal processes are fixed/unchangeable realities – is anthropologically necessary for the protection of society.

Religion is the most efficient alienating force, casting a spell of sacredness on the structures of society and making us forget they are man-made conventions.

Berger does recognize the reality of “world-shaking religion” but contends that it leads inevitably to secularization and the waning of religion.

Baum disputes Berger’s view of alienation as anthropologically necessary by recalling Hegel’s distinction between the alienation (*Entfremdung*) which was inflicted on people and diminished their humanity, and the alienation (*Entausserung*) which was freely chosen, grounded in love, and made people more truly human.

This enables one to analyze social process from the viewpoint that freedom is man’s promised destiny.

Chapter SIX: The Discovery of the Symbolic: Freud and Durkheim

Freud and Durkheim transcended nineteenth scientific Positivism, with its emphasis on quantitative empirical knowledge and purely contractual/external social bonds, by the discovery that human culture/society could not be understood without paying attention to the symbolic dimension.

Social relationships were not purely contractual and behavior was not analyzable simply in quantitative terms; the symbolic structure of the mind affected the creation of society, and this in turn determined man’s own self-creation.

Freud’s discovery that dreams have meaning, and reveal in symbolic language aspects of personal life hidden from consciousness, was a turning point in the Western intellectual tradition.

Thus, the revelation of deepest psychic process takes place in symbolic language. Symbol is not merely an imprecise approximation of truth (as in positivism); rather, it is the proper mode of a person’s self-manifestation, and it is the encounter with this symbol that may lead to self-knowledge and eventual psychic transformation.

Symbols are not only the revelation of the unconscious; they also have the power to transform the unconscious.

Freud emphasized that content of the unconscious made up of material repressed from consciousness; he also recognized, however, the existence of primary psychic processes that never reach the conscious mind. He also admitted something like a collective memory in the unconscious, handed on in largely hidden ways, which affects the creativity of individuals and directs their imagination.

He recognized that symbols have power in the constitution of human life.

Theologians were struck by these notions for they made possible a better understanding of divine revelation. It becomes possible to affirm the divine mystery as the deepest dimension of human existence that reveals itself in symbols. These symbols in turn enable believers to encounter the divine operative in their lives and by doing so to enter into a significant transformation of their personal and social existence.

By meeting and believing in Jesus (the ultimate symbol in which the divine ground of the human and cosmic reality reveals itself), people come to know their own depth, their own humanity as well as the divine mystery out of which they come to be.

Each person inevitably tells his/her life-story under the guidance of some sort of symbol adopted for self-understanding. This symbol determines what is remembered/forgotten, and how the narrative is shaped.

The telling of my own story is always mediated by a particular self-symbolization.

Freud contended that if people learn to tell their story in dialogue with the Oedipal story (which is normative in the sense that it applies to all individuals), they will then remember many significant events previously forgotten, they will understand their dreams, they will acquire a realistic understanding of their own past and eventually experience a marvelous deliverance from the symptoms that made them suffer.

Freud based the universality of the Oedipal story on the biology of the family. What he overlooked was how much the structure of the family -- and hence the experience of infancy/childhood -- depended on cultural factors and the social order.

His theory reflects a turn of the century, middle class, European environment.

By investing this story with universal validity, Freudian psychoanalysis becomes an ideology that subjects people to a preconceived image and possibly imprisons them in a false imagination.

Freud's use of a 'normative story' is of interest to the theologian. For Christian believers try to see their lives and tell their own stories in dialogue with the normative story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and by doing so are enabled to discover the sinful and destructive trends threatening their lives from within and without, and discover -- with surprise -- the gracious power present in their lives, saving them from these trends and strengthening them to overcome the obstacles to love and surrender.

Following Freud, scientists studying human behavior could no longer take for granted that they stood on wholly neutral ground observing the human world with objectivity.

The claim to objectivity made by Positivist scholars disguises from them their own symbolic self-understanding and hence makes them blind to the ideological dimension of their research.

Durkheim lived/worked in a Positivistic intellectual climate. He was convinced that the scientific method could discover the values on which the structure of social reality was based, and thus define the moral ideals which people must embrace to assure the well-being and development of their society. It was in his own quest to understand the society to which he belonged that he made the discovery of the symbolic.

In an early work, Durkheim studied the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, especially the social bond operative in them.

He held that traditional society was comprised of largely independent, self-sustaining units, which are bonded by a common symbol system.

Modern society was comprised of interdependent units, characterized by a complex division of labor.

The social bond was not simply rational/contractual (*contra* Toennies), but based on the organic interdependence of all citizens in the creation of the social order. The social bond is very strong, grounded in the division of labor.

The social contract did not create the social bond, it presupposed it!

Durkheim held that modern society no longer needed a symbol system to ground its shared values, since the division of labor held it together. Religion, then, would disappear.

In 1895, Durkheim published his study of *Suicide*, distinguishing between egoistic and anomic suicides. He concluded that the rate of these suicides remained constant in a given area as long as the social order remained unchanged; thus, suicide was related to social conditions.

He could explain the constant rate in traditional society by the impact of the cultural symbol system, but was at a loss to explain its increased, but constant, rate in modern society.

He came to posit a symbol system in modern society with objective facticity, creating the consciousness of individual citizens – thus reversing his earlier position.

The individualistic and scientific mind-set, characteristic of modern life, is itself generated by a symbol system reflecting the social order which creates a common bond between people despite their greater personal freedom and their relative independence from traditional values.

Thus, the creation of consciousness and society could not be understood apart from the symbolic dimension.

He continued, however, to hold a positivistic view of science – thus failing to consider that if consciousness is created by symbols mediated through the social order, then this is also true of the mind-set of scientists.

He held that his discovery of the symbolic dimension enabled him to gain a better understanding of religion. He understands religion as the symbolic representation of the vision/values immanent in society.

Society constitutes the consciousness of the individual. We then experience within ourselves a reality which transcends us. This is the source of morality; people experience within themselves that they must serve society, thus overcoming egotism. This encounter with the transcendent in personal consciousness gives rise to devotion, worship, and religious experience.

Thus, religion is people's encounter with the depth and height of their society; it is the system of symbols by which society becomes conscious of itself.

Durkheim insists that religion celebrates the deepest values operative in the social order, commemorates the moments in the history of society when its nature found its highest expression, and draws a symbolic image of what the society is meant to be in the future.

His view of religion, accordingly, is not purely ideological, because it is able to generate a critique of the existing order and create strong impulses to change it.

He was convinced that culture and society were constituted by a process in which both the social infrastructure and the symbolic superstructure exercised a creative role (*contra* Marx).

Durkheim thus contended that every society eventually generates a form of religion. This has led to the contemporary controversy on civil religion in America, for which Robert Bellah finds evidence.

Bellah proposes a Durkheimian view according to which civil religion was the celebration of the greatest values/ideals of the nation and thus provided transcendent norms for criticizing its actual collective life and government practice. Thus, it is not devoid of utopian elements.

Will Herberg found little evidence for critical utopian trends in American religion. Despite differences in doctrine/ritual, Herberg posited an identical religious ethos preached in American churches and synagogues. Thus, there is a 'common religion' known familiarly as 'the American Way of Life.'

Herberg found a vast ideological system, subsuming the inherited biblical religion, that sacralizes the dreams/aspirations of the American middle class.

It is important to note that Herberg's study was done in the 1950s, an age of conformity characterized by an absence of public criticism. Also, Bellah's study was in the 1960s, an age when criticism abounded.

Darrol Bryant sees a threefold function for civil religion:

1. It serves as an intentional horizon projecting an image of the nation's destiny.
2. It serves as an integrating myth permitting all sections of the nation to be equally members of society even if they perpetrate diverse cultural traditions.
3. It serves as a public court protecting social values and keeping people critical of existing social conditions.

Civil religion can become ideological, but it can also be utopian. It is not always easy to tell the difference!

It is a principle of hermeneutical sociology that the analytical understanding of critical issues depends on the scholar's vision of the ideal society and represents, in some way or other, an active attempt to create this historical reality.

Chapter SEVEN: The Secularization Debate

Secularization theory = modern, industrial society will inevitably lead to the disappearance of religion.

Bryan Wilson (*Religion in Secular Society*) proposes three arguments for the theory of secularization.

Empirically, he demonstrates that the Church of England has lost power/influence over the last one hundred years; its hold over the imagination of the people is steadily declining.

On the basis of this, he tries to establish that the closer people are involved in industrial production, the less religious they become.

Andrew Greeley presents empirical data on religion in America as an argument against the theory of secularization.

Wilson counters that American religion seems superficial; Peter Berger agrees, arguing that American churches occupy a more central position only because they themselves have become secularized.

The reasoning of both Wilson and Berger appears faulty, introducing qualifications simply to 'save' their theory.

An indication of the 'superficiality' of American religion may be found (Wilson) in its identification with America's social/economic ethic (Herberg).

But sociologists who defend the theory of secularization do not make themselves sufficiently sensitive to the creative and critical aspects of religion.

Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting America in the 1830s, noticed changes in the Christian religion which he interpreted partly as creative responses to new social needs.

He observed that in the individualistic, egalitarian society of America, the role of religion was to curb people's selfish desires and to create communities in which people could find friendship and solidarity.

He also observed that American religion protected people's personal freedom and delivers them from the pressure of commonly held ideas/prejudices ("public opinion"), by linking them to a great wisdom tradition and grounding them in values that transcend the immediate needs and purposes of society.

Tocqueville thus recognized that there is a close relationship between the social institutions in which people live, the consciousness which is theirs, and the form which religion assumes in their minds.

Durkheim had eagerly looked for ways of overcoming the isolation/anguish produced by modern society in individual citizens. He advocated the creation of "intermediary societies" which would provide social matrices for the personal well-being of the participants.

Greeley proposes that religious communities can play this role in humanizing modern, industrial society.

If a "church" regards itself as exclusive bearer of the society's symbolic life, thus identifying itself with culture/nation, and if a "sect" regards itself as a marginal community rejecting the symbols of society and living in critical distance from the dominant culture, a religious body as "intermediary society" could transcend this distinction and play a new/original role in the making of a humane society.

Greeley contends that "denominational" religion communicates a sense of belonging to its followers – the Durkheimian perspective – and inspires them with a sense of meaning/purpose in life – the Weberian perspective.

Needed are quasi-*Gemeinschaft* institutions.

The denomination is a pluralistic, intermediary society that introduces people to social cohesion in a highly mobile/atomizing society.

Greeley thus argues that it is this original American development, and not the supposedly superficial or secularized character of American religion, that accounts for the differing pattern of church attendance/membership. Religion has flourished in America because it has played an important humanizing role in the lives of the people.

Such religion can be ideological. But by offering a self-definition in terms that transcend social roles through a shared vision of a wider community, it can also be the bearer of utopia.

Secondly, Wilson argues that pluralism in religion (mutual tolerance and recognition) inevitably weakens the hold of religion on people's minds; Berger has similarly argued that pluralism implies a certain relativism, thus undermining the unconditional surrender to truth at the heart of every religion.

But while this argument may hold true for "churches" and "sects," there is no indication that it is true for denominational religion.

There is no reason to suppose that an absolute surrender to the divine mystery in one's own religion cannot go hand in hand with a willingness to recognize the validity of other religions.

Wilson revised this argument to contend – following Weber – that Protestantism leads people to a more worldly life, weakens the mystical/sacramental elements of the Christian tradition, directs people's attention to secular aims/purposes, and thus prepares its own disappearance.

Yet in America, Protestantism has remained strong precisely because it articulates the spirit that makes American democracy and economic system work, and for this reason vast numbers of Americans continue to find themselves in the symbolism of their Churches.

This is not to say that American Protestantism is necessarily ideological; it has also brought forth many forms of Christian socialism with its negative judgment on the capitalist system and its critique of the work ethic.

This argument has been philosophically broadened by others (e.g., Friedrich Gogarten, Harvey Cox, Peter Berger) to claim that Israel's faith made a radical break with the cosmic religions of the Ancient Near East, de-divinizing/secularizing the earth which is no longer seen as the locus of God's presence but simply as the place in which man is called to live, assuming responsibility for its transformation. Biblical religion, thus, inevitably moves toward secularization.

It seems, however, that this understanding of the Old Testament is based on peculiarly protestant assumptions and projects a problematic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries onto an ancient culture.

In both Old and New Testaments we are far away from a secular understanding of the world.

Wilson's third argument follows Toennies/Webber, and contends that the passage from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* undermines the traditional values, applies rational thinking to more and more social processes, and hence removes the religious elements from the various spheres of social life.

But Talcott Parsons contends that modernization is not so much a process of secularization as of differentiation: increasing specialization of the various functions exercised in society and increasing coordination between them.

Religion is thus differentiated as a distinct sphere; it remains related to society and yet is more separated/independent/personal.

This allows religion to reveal its true nature and power, which is to create personal commitment and, thorough this, to influence the choices and decision people make.

The point of religions insertion in social process is the human person.

Parsons's theory is a bit ideological, presupposing the American system as ideal, with biblical religion having as its task making this system operate efficiently.

Yet the opposite theories of secularization are also ideological; they defend a particular world-view.

Baum concludes that there are no fixed laws regulating modernization and religion.

Max Scheler was convinced that religion was a dimension of human life as inescapable as sexuality, love, wisdom, and morality.

He contended that the theory of secularization was a creation of bourgeois resentment, corresponding to the materialistic and pedestrian preoccupations of the middle class. He made resentment the source of hostility to religion; the theory of secularization was nothing but the disguise of the human poverty and spiritual emptiness of the middle class.

But this view seems based on an overly polemical view of the bourgeoisie and an inadequate analysis of the social role of traditional religion.

Chapter EIGHT: Creative Religion – Max Weber's Perspective

Weber's primary interest was in the forces that carried society forward and modified the conditions of culture.

His early empirical studies of Eastern Germany where German (Protestant) employers and Polish (Catholic) laborers were set over against one another led to his conclusion that Protestant worldly asceticism had something to do with the origin of the modern, hard-working, capitalistic world.

He contended that Calvinism represented an original, creative, religious breakthrough in which God's call was experienced as a secular calling. This new spirituality removed the religious obstacles to capitalistic expansion; it supplied strong religious motivation for the secular effort to build a society that would reflect the new freedoms of the burgher and allow for his free enterprise in industry commerce.

The new ethic becomes the inner logic of the system and continues to apply reason to the institutional processes of society.

"Rationalization" is the application of technical, quantified reason to society.

This leads inevitably to the ongoing specialization of institutions and is accompanied by a corresponding complexification of their interaction. It creates personal lives that are almost wholly dominated by the needs of this rational society.

He regards the ongoing application of technical reason as a tragic principle of social change that will eventually reduce the true dimensions of human life and transform society into an iron cage.

In *The Sociology of Religion*, Weber speaks of the application of religion in a different way: Application of reason to magic enables the breakthrough to religion, and again the breakthrough from priestly religion to prophecy.

But he is speaking of 'substantial' reason, concerned not so much with means as with the end; reason here changes the orientation of personal/communal life.

This notion of reason differs from the instrumental reason at work in the institutional changes of capitalist society.

Weber tried to detect in religion the moments of breakthrough; his primary interest (says Talcott Parsons) is in religion as a source of the dynamics of change.

He proposes, however, no theory of inevitable evolutionary progress.

Weber made “charism” the starting point for his study of religion as well as the key concept for this theory of social change.

“Charism”: a mysterious power attached to a person which attracts people to him and makes them obedient to the will/commands of that person.

Religion originates with a charismatic leader who creates a community and begins a movement of people who accept his word and submit to his authority. To make this charism available to people living at a distance or to hand it on to subsequent generations, the original charism is institutionalized in rites, symbols, or sacred writings and is ritually communicated to a group of chosen disciples and their successors.

This institutionalization of charism always implies a certain weakening/cooling of the original charism, and the fervor of the beginning is lost. But again and again there is an outburst of new charisms, as new leaders emerge who attract people and exercise power over them.

Thus, according to Weber, religion always begins in an innovative movement; it becomes tamed only through its routinization; but it continues to remain the locus of new charisms.

Weber analyzed three basic kinds of authority (= “power to make people obey”) that constitute social life:

1. Traditional authority is associated with the rules/customs of ancient cultural systems, which are so venerated that people obey without question.
But questions come to be asked in changed circumstances, when people desiring to make the social order more rational ask questions concerning the social usefulness of the laws.
2. In the legal authority of a reformed social order, people obey because the laws have been made on rational grounds by men who were legally appointed to legislate.
3. But even a rational society suppresses certain values and neglects important aspects of human life; accordingly, radical persons wielding charismatic authority are likely to emerge who break with the fundamental assumptions of the social order.
Such a countervailing movement may die out or be crushed; but it may also be strong enough to produce a radical cultural transformation and may even give rise to a new sacred tradition which exercises power in the name of traditional authority.
And so history goes on.

Charismatic authority is the dynamic element in the history of institutions.

The charismatic person is intuitively aware of what disturbs/wounds/exasperates people in their society; he has power over people because he touches them where they suffer. He articulates the hidden oppression which people suffer, the alienation of the community.

He proposes a new imagination by which this harm can be overcome: he summons people to greater self-knowledge, releases new energy in them, and inspires them to recreate society according to higher ideals of justice/equality.

Charism is the breakthrough that applies reason to social processes.

Ernst Bloch distinguishes between “abstract utopias” (unrealistic dreams) and “concrete utopias,” which are images of the future that are grounded in authentic intuitions of the ills/contradictions present in society, and that provide an imagination that actually influences people’s thoughts and actions.

If imagination of a concrete utopia is permitted to govern people’s hearts and minds, it will create a special sensitivity in them and make them look at reality from a certain, definite perspective; it will act as a symbol system that mediates people’s perception of the world and guides their response to it – and thus enters into the creation of the human reality to which they belong.

It is through the exercise of charism that the imagination of the future comes to play this governing role in people’s lives.

Weber felt that such a charismatic breakthrough of substantial reason in the modern/industrialized/bureaucratic world was not possible. We are in an “iron cage.”

In considering society/culture, Weber sees both a dominant trend (imposed by the major institutions), and countervailing trends (sparked by personalities with charismatic gifts).

He sees social unity as the work of dominant forces; yet, he also expected the existence of countervailing movements challenging the existing order. These countervailing forces are, in fact, summoned forth by the dominant social order they seek to change.

History is, thus, undefined/open; freedom is inserted in the historical process through charismatic persons and the countervailing movements created by them.

Robert Merton rejects Weber’s pessimism concerning the bureaucratic crushing of the possibility of charism. He contends that the movement toward increasingly controlled and rigid bureaucracies actually contains dysfunctional elements that will undermine the working of bureaucratic systems: the drift of bureaucracy toward greater rationality will eventually include self-correcting processes which raise questions not only in regard to means but also concerning ends.

Charisms are still possible; people can still, surprisingly and constructively, react against the alienation that the system inflicts on them. Thus countervailing movements making people transcend the alienation inflicted upon them by the system remain possible.

Weber’s theory of social change can also give an account of conflicts within the Christian church.

Vatican II, e.g., was prepared by countervailing trends of various kinds – liturgical, ecumenical, biblical, lay action, etc. – which had promoted, over a considerable period of time, aspects of the Christian life that had been neglected/suppressed by the official church.

Utopian religion can be reformist or radical. Weber (and theologians applying his principles) tended to neglect the radical from.

H. Richard Niebuhr presented a fivefold typology of possible responses by Christians to their culture:

1. Christ *against* culture (radical);
2. Christ *of* culture;
3. Christ *above* culture;
4. Christ *in paradox with* culture;
5. Christ, *transformer of* culture (reformist).

Niebuhr promoted the fifth option as the vision of faith, contending that the Johannine literature and Augustine were examples of it.

Actually, as a full-blown spirituality, this type exists only after the Enlightenment.

There is basis for this in the fact that over the last century and a half a significant change has taken place in Protestantism and Calvinism, according to which God is worshipped as the mystery, present in human life and revealed in Christ, which calls and strengthens people to wrestle against the powers of darkness and restructure human life on this globe toward greater justice and reconciliation.

The major churches have shifted to the theological position characterized by Niebuhr's type 5 (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, which asserts that in Christ is revealed a transformation that affects all aspects of human existence).

The 'transformist' gospel tries to overcome the dualistic separation of God and human life. God is affirmed and experienced as the transcendent mystery present in history and operative in the significant moments of human liberation – personal and social.

Life-in-the-world is a redeeming encounter with the divine in the call to a reconciled life and the action in which people try to realize it.

The proper spirituality for transformist faith is a contemplation of the divine mystery as source, orientation, and horizon of common action. This fosters a move away from individualism.

Two distinct factors must be considered in trying to understand the shift to a transformist understanding of the Gospel:

First: The emergence of a new consciousness in Western culture.

The Early Enlightenment found expression in the rational and individualistic structures of *Gesellschaft*; but there were also countervailing trends, resulting in the reactions against *Gesellschaft* culture by the Late Enlightenment.

The immediate effect of the Early Enlightenment was the spread of the scientific mind-set; the more remote effect was the creation of historical consciousness.

The shift in society/culture occasioned the awareness that the social and cultural world was made by men and thus could be remade to suit human needs.

Social reality came to be looked on no longer simply as a *given* to be understood and 'fitted into;' it is now looked upon as development, as an ongoing process which demands people's freedom/intelligence/dedication.

People eventually ceased to regard themselves as finished subjects looking at a world pitted as object over against them (the scientific consciousness); they began to realize that subject and object are inseparably interrelated, that they have been produced by a common history of interaction, and that men and women, unfinished as they are, constitute themselves as subject precisely by continuing to build the world as object.

Late Enlightenment thinkers overcame mechanist determinism, to discover how much people's freedom, their symbols/dreams, feelings/intentions enter into this action of world-building and self-transformation.

In this historical consciousness, Christians began to experience God, not as the voice from above that called them away from this world to a higher level, but as a transcendent mystery, present in life itself, which summoned people to greater self-knowledge, enabled them to assume responsibility for their world, and moved them forward into the future.

Second: The peculiar creativity of the gospel in the face of evil.

Christians believe that Jesus offers redemption from evil; but evil changes from age to age, because the forces that threaten human life depend on many cultural, political, and personal factors.

Breakthrough religion is always related to, and reacting against, the dehumanizing trends in the community.

In theological terms, this means that doctrinal development is never simply an adaptation to a new-cultural consciousness, but ought to be, at the same time, a creative response to the sinful world.

It is necessary to take into consideration the face of evil, characteristic of an age, to understand the creative process whereby the meaning of the gospel is renewed.

Whereas conservative theologians sometimes criticize reinterpretation of doctrine as capitulation to the spirit of an age, in fact by refusing to reinterpret the gospel to counter the evil of the day, such conservatives may actually show themselves willing to walk with their society, with its economic system and dominant cultural forms.

Transformist faith is the creative response of the gospel to the structures of domination in our history and the alienation inflicted on people by society.

Chapter NINE: Critical Theology

Theology is the reflection of Christians, in conversation with the entire believing community, on the world to which they belong and the religious tradition in which they participate.

“Critical” theology is the critical application of the various theories of alienation to the self-understanding in faith of the Christian Church. It is, thus, the task of critical theology to discern the structural consequences of religious practice, to evaluate them in the light of the church’s normative teaching, and to enable the church to restructure its concrete social presence so that its social consequences approach more closely its profession of faith.

It is, thus, a mode of theological reflection that is applicable to every area of theology.

It is the submission of the structural consequences of dogma to the revealed norm of the gospel.

One task of critical theology is the deprivitization of religion. The privatization of the gospel (i.e., the excessively individualistic interpretation of the Christian message) has legitimated/promoted the atomization of the social order and an economic system of each man for himself.

Thesis: The preaching of Jesus Christ had to do with repentance and the coming of God’s kingdom; it had both personal and social meaning.

To reduce the Christian message to a truth about personal salvation is to suppress a basic dimension of this message and to transform it into an ideology sanctioning individualism. Critical theology counters the privatizing of the gospel with an effort to regain its double dimension of personal and social.

“Sin” is exemplary of a theological category whose social dimension has largely been lost.

There is a twofold Scriptural language about sin: (a) there is sin knowingly and freely chosen, and (b) there is social sin accompanied by collective blindness.

“Social sin” is especially the topic of the prophetic preaching, which speaks of collective blindness, group egotism, and the pursuit of a national life that betrays the covenant and violates the divine command.

“Blindness:” this collective sin is accompanied by so much self-delusion and self-flattery that the people in it are not aware of their transgression.

The confessional practice of the Catholic church involved a largely private, legal, and act-oriented understanding of sin. This practice has created the imagination among Catholic peoples that sin is always a conscious and free decision to violate a divine commandment.

“Original sin” was also privatized.

Theologians now tend to relate “original sin” to what Scripture calls “the sin of the world” – i.e., the structure of evil, built into society, which wounds people, distorts their inclinations, and prompts them to do evil things.

In this light, the doctrine of original sin can correct the liberal misunderstanding that we are born into a neutral environment, in which the good is available to us if we so choose.

In modern *Gesellschaft*, infantile narcissism is reinforced by the individualism of the consumer society. Only as we enter a counter-culture, such as the ecclesia, are we able to move toward a less alienating and more reconciled experience of life.

What is proper to social sin is that its subject is a collectivity; social sin resides in a group/ community/ people. It is not produced by deliberation and free choice. Four levels of social sin can be recognized:

1. Social sin is made up of the injustices and dehumanizing trends built into the various institutions – social, political, economic, religious, etc. – which embody people’s collective life. These dehumanizing trends and negative effects may not be recognized for a long time.
2. Social sin is made up of the cultural and religious symbols, operative in the imagination and fostered by society, that legitimate/reinforce the unjust institutions and thus intensify the harm done to a growing number of people.
3. Social sin refers to the false consciousness created by these institutions and ideologies through which people involve themselves collectively in destructive action as if they were doing the right thing.
4. At this fourth level is social sin made up of the collective decisions, generated by the distorted consciousness, which increases the injustices in society and intensify the power of the dehumanizing trends.

Her personal sin clearly enters into the creation and expansion of social sin.

A dialectical relationship exists between personal and social sin. Personal sin can create alienating institutions, which modify the consciousness of people, who continue to act in institutions.

Human limitations and personal sins compounded have created social sins, and conversely social sins create an environment that promotes personal sins.

Thus, a twofold analysis is necessary – one that takes into account both the personal and social factors. Traditional moral theology focuses almost solely on the personal analysis.

The privatizing trend, overlooking the reciprocal relation between personal transgression and social contradiction, has a hidden political meaning; it makes people think that the dreadful

things that happen in the world are due to the evil deeds of single individuals and that there is no need to examine the social institutions to which they belong.

All Christian preaching on sin has a built-in image of society, and hence a political message:

1. It can consider as sinful the undermining of the values and authority of the dominant group; or
2. It can consider as sinful the uncritical surrender to the norms of society and the authority of the inherited institutions.

The privatization of sin in the Catholic Church eventually led to the denial that the church as church could be sinful. Since sin was private, it was unnecessary to engage in critical reflection on the church's corporate life.

Once we discover the inseparability of the personal-and-social in human action, and thus the need to deprivatize our religious tradition, we come to realize that a church's unwillingness to subject its corporate life to a systematic and principled critique is the great barrier that prevents it from proclaiming the gospel with power.

The personal-and-social meaning of conversion must also be regained. Included in conversion are the critical recognition of, and the turning away from, the social dimension of sin, present in the various collectivities to which a person belongs.

Exclusive stress on private conversion makes people blind to the structures of evil in society. Stress on Jesus as personal savior is linked to the defense of the political *status quo*.

The gospel does not announce Jesus as the savior of souls, but as the bringer of a new age and servant of God's kingdom. His accusation of sin and demand for conversion must be understood in terms of the inseparable dialectics of personal-and-social.

What the gospel promises is that God's presence to men in grace and their response to God in trust and obedience introduce them to a new life of conversion of holiness whose structures in some way, despite the ongoing need of redemption, the kingdom of love and peace promised for the last days. The new life of holiness then refers to the transforming power of God in history that changes people's hearts and leads them to structural changes.

Critical theology demands that the language about Jesus and his salvation reflect the two interrelated dimensions of personal-and-social.

Eucharist reflects this in Jesus' identifying himself with the believing community.

Christians are presently divided on whether they should regard it as their religious duty to shore up the inherited social consensus and the cultural values that are being questioned, or whether they should join the critical forces in society and work for the re-creation of social life in greater accord with the future promises. This division crosses denominational lives.

Ecumenical discussions too often focus on doctrinal controversies of the past, instead of listening jointly to the signs of the times in the present cultural crisis.

Struggling against the structures of domination, the Christian churches must transcend the controversies that seemed important to them in a previous age and more forward to a new consensus, in keeping with scripture and their history, that responds to the face of evil in our times.

In Latin America, critical reflection on praxis has led to the creation of "liberation theology," in which the raising of consciousness ("conscientization") holds a central place.

Because Latin American countries are basically divided into two classes – the rich and the dispossessed – and because the radical inequality between these two constitutes the overriding fact of their national existence, analysis of social sin in Latin America focuses almost exclusively on economic injustices which distort every expression of social/cultural life.

In this situation, class domination becomes the key for understanding the misery in which people live and the form which social sin has taken.

Liberation theologians want people to understand the oppression inflicted on them by a small upper class, protected by military and police power, which acts as an instrument of a vast economic system, the center of which lies outside their own continent.

But they also want to become more aware how this oppression has falsified their own perception of reality.

Liberation theology is the theoretic component of the church's identification with the dispossessed class and its active involvement in the movement of liberation. Thus, the praxis which is the object of reflection includes the dominant social processes in which the church as an element of culture participates and the new action flowing from faith and solidarity.

It is, accordingly, critical of academic theology and the university system of the successful nations, in which theology easily becomes a wisdom restricted to a privileged group, reflecting structures of domination.

Liberation theology often presents itself as the work of Christian communities rather than the achievement of professional theologians (who may become the spokesmen for these communities).

Latin American liberation theology cannot be applied as such to the Christians in North America and Western Europe.

For one thing, it presupposes Catholicism as a dominant cultural force throughout the continent, with Catholic symbols retaining a place of power in the imagination of all.

Also, in a Northern context, analysis of social ills cannot be restricted to class conflict and the economic factor.

American radicalism in the sixties focused on what Weber termed the "iron cage" as the source of exploitation. They were convinced that the institutional reform of society only increases the bureaucratic apparatus and makes the system more unbending and impersonal than before, and that the industrialization and growth of technology

increases the power of instrumental reason over the human imagination and makes people into conformist followers of short-range pragmatic and pedestrian goals.

Another radical analysis of American life was based on the suffering of marginalized people – the black movement for liberation providing a powerful model.

Black radicals gave new political meaning to the ancient Exodus language.

It is unrealistic to look for a single form of oppression in North America, to which all others are subordinated. What we have is a complex intermeshing of technocratic depersonalization and immobility, economic domination and exploitation, racial exclusion and inferiorization, and other forms including the subjugation of women.

The analysis of social sin will, accordingly, be complex; and Christian commitment to justice and human emancipation cannot be expressed by identification with a single movement.

The raising of consciousness in this complex situation means acknowledgment of the multiple forms of exploitation, and turning away from social sin implies an identification with the aims of the emancipator movements.

Critical reflection can only follow and flow from solidarity with communities seeking liberation.

Conversion to Christ precedes the mapping out of the converted life, solidarity with the least of Christ's brothers and sisters precedes the search for an adequate plan of joining them in their struggle.

The work of Rosemary Ruether is an example of an authentic North American liberation theology; Edward Schillebeeckx adopts a similar approach in Western Europe.

Both demand the church's identification with the emancipator movements in history; both think that Christians' solidarity with these movements provides the hermeneutical principles for understanding the gospel message and interpreting authentically the meaning of Christian dogma.

Critical theology cannot be produced if theologians seek a neutral place, apart from the conflictual trends in their society.

In the North, both a reformist and a radical option exist; these two groups need one another to spell out in a living conversation the anguish and hope that is given in Jesus Christ.

Critical theology in the United States will have to foster a new imagination linked to the symbols of American history – the revolution, the Declaration of Independence, the dream of justice and freedom for all, the ideal of democracy including the democratization of economic life, the new land free of the oppressive character of feudal society.

It is possible for these symbols to produce transcendent values that judge the oppressive elements of American society and generate a new vision of justice, freedom, and parity.

A new political imagination can only be successful in a people if it ties into the great moments of their history and in some way corresponds to their ancient dreams.

Chapter TEN: Deprivatizing Psychoanalysis – A Digression

The psychotherapeutic tradition is a theory and practice that tends to presuppose a highly private understanding of evil; personal sickness is seen as causing suffering and turmoil in social relations. This parallels the privatized understanding of religion which situates the source of evil the human heart.

A Freudian left, however, has tried to deal with the political implications of the psychotherapeutic process. They note, for example, how the social order produces the family constellation which Freud held to be the matrix of personal psychic evolution.

Six tendencies can be found in classical Freudian psychoanalysis that foster political passivity in patients and hence reinforce the existing social order:

One: It looks for the cause of the patient's predicament in his own disturbed psychic life.

E.g., a patient dealing with anger at a superior may be led to see this as projection of inner turmoil (resultant from unresolved infantile hatred), without investigating the possibility of a rational foundation for his anger regarding dehumanizing circumstances.

Leftist Freudians recognize the significance of the psychic, but also want to analyze the social situation.

Two: It all too easily turns people away from the present to the past.

This continual attention to the past could keep people from struggling to change the conditions of life in the present.

The Freudian Left insists that therapeutic attention to the past can enable people to be fully present in their social situation.

Three: Therapists are too ready to regard the social world to which the patient belongs as the reality to which he must learn to adjust.

Freud referred to "the *reality* principle" confronting people externally in the social order.

By applying the metaphysical word "reality" to the social world full of contradictions, Freud gave it a dignity it did not deserve and legitimated the existing institutions of society.

Leftist Freudians think it is possible to formulate the purpose of depth psychology and a person's healing encounter with his own unconscious, without making the social order the reality principle and without speaking of health as an adaptation to this reality.

Here one speaks not of adaptation, but of creativity which enables people to live their lives with greater power and engage in social action to change the structures of their world.

Four: Freudian psychoanalysis regards the instincts as biological drives in human life that must be tamed by the strictures of civilization.

Society necessarily represses personal instinct, for only out of such repressing does culture (art, morality, religion) arise.

Psychoanalysis thus tends to legitimate inherited institutions, even if they impose severe injustices on personal life.

But Freud also distinguishes between repression and sublimation.

Sublimation produces cultural activity based on a person's contact with his instinctual drives, thus mediating libidinal energy to the creation of culture and the humanization of life.

If we break with the false wishes created in us by society and get in touch with, and follow, the deeper wishes that reveal the orientation of the infancy libidinal energies, we may be led to a cultural creativity, art or religion that prolongs the libidinal bent is us to sublimate our instinctual energies in the creation of a humane society.

Needed to discover this sort of sublimation is not a more restrictive society, but personal freedom and a supportive community.

Five: Freudian psychoanalysis defends authoritarianism insofar as it views opposition to authority as an unresolved oedipal conflict.

Even the very practice of the therapist-patient relationship suggests that the way to personal and social well-being is found in submission to the right and benevolent authority.

In parallel fashion, authoritarian leadership of the priesthood easily becomes a symbolic legitimization of authoritarianism in society.

Left-wing therapists (and priests!) try to find a style of exercising authority which clearly reveals that they are as much in need of the truth they communicate as are others, and that together with others they constitute a community of mediation where all give and all receive.

Six: There is a strong anti-feminist trend in classical psychoanalysis.

Freud had stereotyped the roles of men and women in society according to the middle class ideals of his own age, and labeled all attempts of women to emancipate themselves from the exclusion from education and leadership as penis envy or repressed hatred of their own sex.

Left-wing Freudians acknowledge the accuracy of Freud's analysis as a description of the social situation contemporary to him; it reveals what Western bourgeois society has made of women.

But psychotherapy could help people to break the hold which the society-defined notions of men and women have over them and reach out for the greater freedom where each person can express herself in fidelity to her inner powers.

To the extent that social institutions are an expression of people's spontaneous inclinations, they too can be interpreted in psychoanalytic terms and seen as the locus of repressive and liberating forces.

Chapter ELEVEN: Symbol and Theology

Various concepts of symbol can be analyzed, interrelated, and applied to presentation of the Christian message:

One: Symbols are signs/images addressed to people's memories.

In this sense (s1), they make us remember important events of our personal and social histories and/or evoke the emotions associated with these events.

As having power over the emotions, this meaning of symbol (s1) is largely dependent on a person's subjective response – and thus are imprecise in meanings and unpredictable in effects.

Some people object to symbols of this kind because their emotion-laden and ambiguous nature can prevent cool/critical intelligence from laying hold of and solving a problem.

Symbols of this kind (s1) have played a considerable role in Catholic life, e.g., in creating a mood through church decoration.

Modernists – in their effort to free religion from excessive conceptualization – held dogma to be largely symbolic; but they elaborated only this inadequate meaning of symbol (s1), thus regarding religious truth not as an idea to be assimilated by intelligence, but only as a symbol evoking strong feelings leading to religious commitment.

Two: Symbols are stories/events of any kind that reveal the hidden depth, in the encounter with which we undergo significant transformation.

The symbol in this sense (s2) is not external to the people whose lives it transforms; thus, Freud discovered that dream-symbols reveal a person's unconscious conflicts/wishes and that really encountering them can lead to real change and healing.

Symbol (s2) mediates an encounter between a person and his/her unconscious life. It is the proper/unique mode in which the hidden structure of reality can be disclosed to the human mind, and thus can never be "replaced" by a concept or idea.

Contemporary Catholic theologians have used this concept of symbol (s2) to gain a better understanding of divine revelation.

Revelation (cf. chapter 6 supra) is the manifestation of God's hidden self-communication in human life and history. Jesus is the symbol which reveals the hidden divine structure

of human history; thus, in him the believer encounters the hidden truth about himself and his destiny.

Christian truth is symbolic (s2), then, in the sense that it reveals the hidden structure of human life and by so doing significantly transforms the self-understanding of those who receive it.

Jesus' message of the Kingdom is symbolic in that it reveals the truth about a reality partially present in human history and urging it forward as a principle of transformation.

Three: Symbols are the structures of the imagination that affect the way in which people perceive the given and respond to it.

Hegel, e.g., contended that certain symbols (s3) induced alienation into the lives of people and created an oppressive, exploitative society.

The *patterns* governing the imagination make people select what they regard as significant aspects of life, combine them into meaningful wholes of one sort or another, connect them with values, and relate them to a vision of the future.

The symbols governing imagination have a creative role in structuring experience.

These symbols then define the vision out of which people operate and thus orient their actions in a certain direction.

Experience is a symbolic-mediation of the past into the future.

This involves recognition that the human mind is historically constituted; different historical peoples have distinct mind-sets.

Such symbols (s3) can never become objects of the mind because they belong to the mind's structure. Symbols are not "that which" but "that through which" (Ricoeur).

This (s3) can be related to (s2). Assimilation of symbols (s2), which reveal the divine presence in the universe, in the imagination (s3) would make people follow the divine will and lead them on the way of salvation.

People have abiding faith if the symbol revealing the divine presence to them begins to dominate their imagination, order their experience, and create a new world for them.

Symbols do give rise to reflection and are therefore connected with rational content, but this noetic aspect of the symbol is subordinate.

Faith is the conversion of the imagination to the revealed symbols, but faith does not stop in the imagination.

Symbols lead to doctrine; but doctrine should also lead the believer back to the symbol or it may tempt the believer to objectify divine revelation and make God into an object of the human mind.

To have faith means that Jesus, in whom the kingdom has become visible, rules the imagination.

The entire creed is composed of symbols that are revealed in historical events (s2) and become patterns of the imagination (s3) that recreate human life and reconcile people to their divine origin and destiny.

Participation in the believing community is the way in which revealed symbols become assimilated into the imagination.

Symbols (s1) – the visible signs and images that are part of Catholic life and worship – enliven the imagination and overcome the mind's rational bent to transform religion into a conceptual system.

Further, these symbols (s1) have been created by artists who were immersed in the symbolic world (s3), and thus may themselves be manifestations of Christian faith appealing to men's imagination to assimilate the symbols of this faith (s2 and s3).

Four: Finally, symbol is the reflection of society in the mind.

Insofar as institutions create consciousness and society creates the mind-set out of which people understand their lives and act, the coordinates of the imagination are produced by society itself.

It is possible to regard the genesis of symbols from two different viewpoints – one as derived from sharing personal imagination and the other as produced by the social institutions into which people are socialized.

A Weberian studies the creation of new symbolic gestures revealing a hidden message and the gradual assimilation of these symbols in the imagination of more and more people until they succeed in recreating society according to the new vision.

A Marxian-Durkheimian studies the society and the symbolic mind-set it creates, and only then turns to the possible modifications of these symbols through the particular place people occupy in this society, through the action in which they engage, and eventually through the religious experiences they enjoy.

These two perspectives are dialectically related: if we begin with individual persons, then we must realize that their minds have been historically constituted by participation in their social history; if we begin with society we must realize that this society is not a given but has been produced by people acting in common.

Religious symbols must always be understood in the context of the society in which they are proclaimed/celebrated and hence they vary in meaning and power in accordance with this historical context.

Since the Christian gospel sets itself off from society and transcends it, it is impossible for Christian symbols to be wholly identified with symbols of the social order.

This consideration of symbols (s4) leads to an important ecclesiological principle: The organization, the power relations, and the social architecture of a religious community profoundly affect the religious symbols in which believers understand themselves and their common calling.

The church's institutional life generates a religious imagination that modifies in a significant way the perception of the divinely revealed symbols.

In a critical ecclesiology it would be important to examine whether the church's organization reflects the symbols proclaimed in the Christian message.

Talcott Parsons has called this "the symbolic adequacy" of church organizations.

Symbols find expression in stories and visible images; they reveal the structures of reality; they operate in the imagination, and they enter into the creation of the social reality.

Used in the evident sense, the symbol is part of the present historical reality and, in fact, transcends it.

The more rational the culture, the greater the need to translate symbols into conceptual terms and to relate them to knowledge of the world and its history, coming from scientific and philosophical investigations.

It is always important, however, that dogma/doctrine be eventually translated back into symbolic form and nourish the religion as a lived, personal and social reality.

Robert Bellah has warned against "the objectivist fallacy" in which religion is turned into a closed system of concepts which loses its power to illumine/transform human existence.

In stressing the incomprehensibility of God and the analogous nature of dogmatic propositions, the tradition has been aware of this.

A parallel twentieth century emphasis contends that doctrines are not cognitive statements offering information about another world but religious language that mediates access to the divine ground and orientation of human existence.

The symbolic understanding of revelation does not reject the validity of dogmas, but it understands them in the context of the symbolic.

The symbolic approach to Christian theology acknowledges that something marvelous and unaccountable really happened in history which, when accompanied by a new word, revealed to people the meaning of their lives and enabled them to recreate their social existence. And this happened through symbols.

Clifford Geertz defines religion as "a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-standing moods and motivation 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."

A difficulty with this definition is that it can lead to the conclusion that every person is religious, and thus the definition seems too wide. But the definition need not lead to this conclusion.

Baum asserts that there is no "religion" without some acknowledged "religious experience;" and it is possible to show that the encounter with the sacred is in fact related to religion defined as symbol system of world interpretation.

Symbols (s2) emerge in the overflowing manifestation of the hidden structure or reality; the encounter with this manifestation is religious experience.

The powerful ecstatic experiences of the founders of religion create the symbol systems out of which the various religious traditions define themselves.

For the ordinary followers of these religions, their religious experience is mediated by the inherited symbols and they usually confirm this religious faith and make them live more deeply out of their own symbolic tradition.

Thanks to new religious experiences, the traditional religious stories/rites bring forth new meaning that enables people, living in changing conditions, to wrestle with the problems confronting them and pass from death to life or from paralysis to vitality.

Because of the conflictual nature of sociology and the problematic unity of theology it is impossible to find a single theoretical formulation of the relationship between them.

One significant distinction is between "Objective" and "Hermeneutic" sociology:

Objective sociology demands that researchers abandon their personal preferences, assume an attitude of detachment, seek demonstrable and universally acceptable conclusions, and assimilate their research methods as much as possible to the natural sciences.

Hermeneutic sociology also demands that researchers abandon bias and seek demonstration that are universally valid; yet it insists that unless researchers clarify their historical relationship to the object they study and unless they become conscious of the ideal of society they carry in their minds, their conclusions, however objective in appearance, will inevitably be distorted.

"H" sociology relates science and commitment, and holds that search for sociological truth is at the same time an act of transforming society.

In North America, "O" sociology predominates at universities and research institutes.

"H" sociology exists as an important countervailing trend.

"O" sociology sees itself as value-free, and fails to sufficiently recognize the influence of personal presuppositions on sociological research and the impossibility of presuppositionless science.

Peter Berger, for example, contends that researchers must adopt an "ontological agnosticism," engaging in a sociological study of religion as if it did not matter whether or not religion was grounded in transcendent reality.

In this perspective, the theologian may use the sociological analysis once it is completed to better understand his religious tradition, but *qua* theologian he cannot join the strictly value-neutral and uncommitted conversation among sociologists.

The value of this consists in the sociologist's freedom from the imposition of theological dogma.

But in fact, sociologists disagree among themselves on basic issues; and on such fundamental issues, there is no clearly defined boundaries between sociology and theology.

"H" sociologists do not want to make the sociology of religion the reification and legitimation of the existing religion.

They situate this religion and its social impact in an understanding of what human life is meant to be and analyze religion along lines that enable them to distinguish between, and evaluate, its various trends.

The classical sociologists (from Tocqueville to Weber) were committed to human values and convinced that their own studies would promote the well-being of the human community.

From this perspective, the faith of sociologists that a religious tradition expresses something of the divine creates a special sensitivity to this religion, a greater awareness of its hidden meanings, and above all a sense of its forward movement.

From this perspective, sociology and theology move along the same lines and theology appears as the critical prolongation of sociological concepts.

Chapter TWELVE: Heaven as Revealed Utopia

The great critics of religion have looked upon belief in eternal life as a principle cause of human alienation; accordingly, critical theologians regard the Christian teaching on the last things as a topic of special challenge.

The first task of the critical theologian in this area is the deprivatization of the church's teaching.

Jesus' preaching of the "kingdom" was not of a realm parallel to earth; the kingdom, rather, was the divine reign that emerged in history as the longing of the cosmos and the fulfillment of people's hopes.

The New Testament promises affect individuals and society.

The patristic teaching on eternal life remained focused on the community: the church as God's people was the bearer of the divine promises, and it was this people that was to live eternally.

For the first thousand years the Christian people looked forward to the resurrection of the last day as the complete fulfillment of the divine promises and showed little interest in the state of the soul after the death of the body.

In the individualistic culture of the fourteenth century, the teaching shifted focus from the crowning of history in the new creation to the soul's eternal happiness after death.

In the modern period the church's teaching of eternal life was understood almost exclusively in terms of the fate that awaited the individual after his/her death.

Christians experienced themselves less as a people on pilgrimage, than on individuals on a personal journey from birth to death.

This privatizing trend in religion corresponds to the growing individualism of secular culture, which has made people focus on personal death as the great enemy which threatens the meaning of their lives in the present (cf. Heidegger), thus causing anxiety.

In Berger's sociology, this fear of death is the generating force that makes people seek a safe and stable world, and create sacred symbols that legitimate the present order and promise future security.

But it would seem that a truly sociological perspective would insist that the individual's attitude toward his/her own death depends on social environment.

Regarding anxiety over one's mortality as a primary principle of human behavior corresponds not to the nature of reality but to the privatizing trend of the social world.

The attitudes toward death depends on the imagination of the future, mediated throughout society by cultural or religious movements.

In societies where imagination projects the ongoing existence of the community, people felt themselves embedded in a living reality that would perdure in the future.

But in a consumerist society our imagination is taught to concentrate on the rising standard of living and the ever greater personal well-being; in such a context, death seems utterly frightful.

If we know that what we love is protected from misery and oblivion, however, we can die without anxiety (Marcuse).

Concerning Christian teaching, it seems that if we long for God's victory over evil and all the enemies of life and believe that in Christ this victory is assured, then what we love is protected and it should not be too difficult to die.

Thus, belief in resurrection (from a deprivatized perspective) can free Christians from anxiety about their own existence and direct their hope to the new creation.

The central Christian symbol of God's approaching kingdom summons people to forget themselves, to serve the kingdom of God coming into the lives of men and women, and to rejoice with the Christian community, gathered at worship, that in Christ God's final victory has been assured.

Christian theologians are regaining an understanding of eschatology which preserves the personal-and-social dialectic and gives Christian preaching a utopian or transformist thrust; dialogue with sociology is significant in this.

Ernst Bloch's study of radical religion in the sixteenth century preaching of Thomas Muenzer showed that political/economic analysis alone could not account for the revolutionary movements in Germany during that century.

Bloch contends that Muenzer's eschatological vision of the future was a genuine religious passion, and that the spreading of social unrest and the outbreak of the peasant revolt are unaccountable without taking into consideration this radical religion.

Muenzer remained mindful of social justice when he was most concerned with God's glory, and he remained religious when he gave vent to his hatred of the ruling class in church and society.

His was a truly utopian religion.

His entire preaching was formulated with a critical consciousness of its political implications, and was defined over against Catholic/Protestant preaching which unconsciously protected the powerful/rich.

He insisted that faith consists in conversion away from egotism, domination and the alliance with the ruling class, and in trusting identification with the poor, the exploited, the oppressed in whom God's reign will appear.

The center of his preaching was the impatient, eschatological hope that the Lord was near, and that God was about to manifest his victory in the liberation of his people from injustice.

Bloch retains in all his thinking the conviction that the new in history has its origin in the human imagination.

The future is never created according to fixed laws; it remains open, and is produced by a process that involves people's freedom and their imagination. He emphasizes the role of expectancy and hope in directing the creation of the new.

Bloch is a "materialist" insofar as he asserts the primacy of matter, but for him matter is pregnant – possessing its own potential, its own dynamics of self-transformation.

This carries over into his anthropology. Human beings are unfinished, yet alive and self-creating out of the thrust of their materiality.

"Hunger:" The human sense of unfulfillment makes a person reach out for new life and contemplate the many possibilities of as yet untried conditions of existence.

"Hunger" both (a) gives rise to a longing for the new, and (b) keeps this imagination in line with man's actual needs/possibilities.

The symbols of the future have power in the production of society.

Despite Bloch's atheism, his writings have a powerful religious quality: they witness an extraordinary faith in the inexhaustible fecundity of the matrix of human life, and several an imagination haunted by the dream of a future realm in which people shall live in justice and peace.

Bloch distinguished yearnings for objects that already exist in the world (envy, greed), and yearnings for objects that do not yet exist (hope).

He also contrasts "concrete" with "abstract" utopias. Concrete utopias are imaginations of future fulfillment which are sufficiently close to the possibilities of the present that they give rise to practical ideas of what to do and summon forth some form of action.

The church's teaching on eternal life can be viewed as a revealed utopia. The eschatological reign of God proposes a vision of a future in which people can live in justice and peace, conjoined in friendship and the common worship of the divine mystery. This 'reign' is partially present among us and yet still approaching in all its power.

This message makes Christians critical of present institutions and elicits in them a longing for a more just and more equal social order. This message gives girth to self-actualizing hope.

Christians, therefore, disagree with all views that regard history as determined. History remains open, depending on human freedom and the gracious moments of God's self-communication.

The Christian cross reveals the defeats created by human sin through which the process of redemption moves toward the newness of life.

Thus, eschatology is no doctrine of evolutionary progress; one wonders, e.g., if Teilhard sufficiently accepted the power of sin.

But the cross is definitely not a symbol of the meaninglessness of history.

The revealed utopia is not a prediction, but a promise out of which people are to live. The message of God's coming reign reveals the forward thrust of God's gracious presence in people's lives, directs their engagement in action, brings out the religious meaning of the struggle, and creates hope in the fulfillment of the divine promises.