

Identity Theory - An Exploration of the Powers
and Limitations of a General Social Scientific
Theory of Religion



by
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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University.

September, 1980

copyright

Master of Arts (1980)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

Title: Identity Theory - An Exploration of the Powers and
Limitations of a General Social Scientific Theory
of Religion

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Number of Pages: vii, 359

ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a critical analysis and constructive development of Dr. Hans Mol's 'identity theory of religion', with an eye to more broadly exploring the complex methodological problems besetting the social scientific study of religion in general. The identity theory of religion is examined in three distinct, yet overlapping and developmentally related, analytical contexts. In the first place the theory is seen as an outgrowth of the basic tensions present in the community of scholars concerned with the 'scientific' study of religion. Arguing that the field of religious studies as a whole is unnecessarily burdened by an outmoded understanding of 'scientific' endeavor, an alternative methodological approach to the theory of religion is advanced based upon the work of the culture theorist Clifford Geertz and the philosopher of science Karl Popper. The value of the identity theory of religion is judged to be appreciable to the extent that it demonstrates accord with the new methodological realism outlined. Secondly, the content and implications of the identity theory are surveyed, turning in particular to a comparative analysis with Peter Berger's popular sociological theory of religion. In the third and final analytical context an argument is made for the presence of a 'conservative bias' in the identity theory of religion as presently formulated which unnecessarily restricts its proper methodological development. This state of affairs comes

to light most clearly with regard to Mol's treatment of the central analytical category of identity itself. To counteract this situation it is argued that a proper operationalization of the identity theory of religion must be effected through the elaboration of the systems theory-like qualities of Dr. Mol's approach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Hans Mol, for both the insight and patience which he consistently demonstrated during the writing of this thesis. His willingness to spend many long hours discussing and debating many aspects of the thesis has contributed markedly to whatever merits it may possess. Moreover, the general example of the dedication he shows to his work sets a standard that I know I would do well to emulate.

I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Louis Greenspan and Dr. Ralph Matthews for their diligent attention to this thesis, in spite of rather trying limitations of time. Their comments were both enlightening and to the point.

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INTRODUCTION

Few fields of academic endeavor are burdened with as ambiguous a claim to the lauded status of "science" as that of the social scientific theory of religion. But then few subjects of study so persistently press home the need to modify our accustomed ways of thinking of the scientific study of socio-cultural phenomena.

The student of the theory of religion is faced with a challenge of daunting proportions. He strives to fabricate a web of universal significances with which to bring order to the remarkably diverse and diffuse array of man's religious expressions. To this end he must work to synthesize and take full advantage of the empirical and theoretical insights offered by the more established social sciences. But he must do so always with an eye to respecting the jealously guarded particularity of each religious tradition. Out of sensitivity to the unique character and subtlety of his subject, the religious theorist must exercise a special care not to unduly violate the letter or the spirit of the things which men through the ages have held to their hearts as sacred. To attain to a universal understanding without reverting to overly distorting simplifications calls for the employment of special powers of invention. Yet to assure the advancement of our knowledge, enhancing our appreciation of the finely wrought workings of

man's religions, the creative reach of the student of the theory of religion must be anchored in a patience of procedure. In the comparative infancy of this "science", however, few theorists have been able to attain to the kind of harmonic tension that must be established between these methodological needs.

As a result of this state of affairs some students of religion have been led to fundamentally question the value of attempting to develop overall theories of religion. Others, though, have remained convinced of the feasibility and hence the value of theorizing on a rather grand scale. But it is recognized that certain basic methodological adjustments must be made as part and parcel of the theorizing enterprise if any appreciable progress is to be achieved.

This thesis will concern itself with the critical and constructive analysis of one particular theory which has grown out of such a recognition--the identity theory of religion as formulated by Professor Hans Mol. With an eye to the methodological problems besetting social scientific theorizing in general, and religious theorizing in particular, it will be argued that while Mol's theoretical orientation is seriously flawed it nevertheless represents a courageous and productive step further in the direction of creating a true "science of religion".

In his book Identity and the Sacred (1976) Mol has presented a "sketch for a general, social-scientific, theory of religion" which integrates elements of the "anthropological,

historical, psychological, and sociological" approaches to the study of religion (Mol, 1976, p. ix). In undertaking such a task Dr. Mol is applying himself to a very real need. For the advancement of our critical understanding of religious phenomena in general resides in our ability to interrelate data and ideas and to isolate all possible congruences. Yet at the present time the student of religion is confronted with an almost useless overproduction of knowledge which is scattered throughout a multitude of sources and spoken in a thousand competitive voices. Mol admirably seeks to bring order to this relative chaos and through an appealingly forceful presentation of his own theoretical perspective he has managed to explain and interrelate a comprehensive range of issues, authors, and topics. His criticism of the existing theoretical systems and his offer of an alternative of some originality has drawn attention to many very real but neglected problems and produced innovative interpretations of puzzling situations.

Nevertheless, as is suggested by the long history of unsuccessful attempts at such grand syntheses in the social sciences, the task of formulating a "new" and "adequate" general theory of religion is formidable. From the beginning, however, Mol himself acknowledges the tenuous nature of his endeavor, as witnessed by his choice of epigraphs for Identity and the Sacred:

'Schijnt me, of 't raadselvolle leven droevig
lacht met elk systeem.'
(It seems to me that life's mystery sadly smiles
at each system.)

De Genestet (1860)

So I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it; and in my mouth it did taste sweet as honey; but when I swallowed it my stomach turned sour.

Revelations 10:10

Even more directly in the Introduction (1976, p. ix) he draws attention to this state of affairs by saying: This book "is a sketch in the sense that it is incomplete and needs further filling in and rubbing out. Yet it is also a sketch in the sense that it provides tentative, plausible, coherence."

Taking these words in a rather literal sense, this study will begin the process of "filling in and rubbing out" aspects of Mol's theory of religion. Mol's views as they stand are plausible and coherent, and they possess the potential to be productive of rewarding new insights into the nature and functioning of religious beliefs and practices. But in order for the theory to become less tentative, allowing for a fuller actualization of this potential, it is necessary that certain fundamental revisions be introduced. In the work he has completed since the writing of Identity and the Sacred (see the bibliography) Mol has himself, in some measure, responded to this need. Relative to what is intended here, however, his attention has been more broadly focused on spreading an understanding of his position by demonstrating its fit with other theoretical perspectives and elaborating on some of its possible empirical applications. This work is obviously valuable and aspects of it will be duly considered in the discussions to follow. But it is the contention of this assessment that for

these endeavors to bear truly significant results a certain amount of further clarification of basic concepts and categories is called for. This most notably applies to Mol's central category of "identity", and it is to this concept that our attention will finally be dedicated.

Accordingly, the line of analysis pursued in this scrutiny of the identity theory of religion will be essentially restricted to logical and theoretical concerns. Throughout an effort will be made to balance critical comments with a positive appreciation of the problems Mol is addressing and the relative merits of his resolutions over those of many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Ultimately, the object is to enhance the utility of Mol's approach to the study of man's religious life through the refinement of some of his basic ideas, and to concretely illustrate some aspects of the kind of theorizing now called for in what might be called the "humanistic sciences".

To this end a considerable amount of attention will be initially dedicated to an overview of many of the existing methodological tensions in the field of religious studies. Particular attention will be paid to Mol's field of specialization: the sub-discipline of the sociology of religion. For a proper appreciation of both the assets and liabilities, so to speak, of Mol's identity theory of religion depends upon understanding his work in the context of the pressures that have been mounting for a sweeping revision of the methodological orientation of religious theorizing.

Following the lines of Robert Bellah's somewhat simplistic yet effective discussion of the situation (Bellah, 1970, pp. 3-9), it might be said that these pressures have stemmed from a growing dissatisfaction with the almost traditional dichotomization of the study of religion into what Bellah has labelled the "rationalist" (Enlightenment philosophes, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Sir Edward Tylor, Sir James Frazer, and to a lesser extent Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud) and "nonrationalist" (Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Rudolph Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, and Mircea Eliade) schools of thought. Cognizant of the intrinsic limitations attendant on each of these dominant lines of intellectual development a few scholars, like Bellah, have sought to straddle the gap between the rationalist and non-rationalist (or phenomenological) traditions. Building on the foundations of Talcott Parsons' human action theory, Bellah has suggested that a resolution to this polarity of thought might be found in the development of a cybernetic model of religion. Mol's identity theory of religion, we will argue, is best seen as an extension of a similar basic theoretical orientation. Though in Mol's case the connection appears to be more implicit than explicit. But with a bit of clarification it can become apparent that one of the most valuable aspects of the identity theory approach is that it lays the grounds for the utilization of the insights of systems theory in the study of religion.

Long before developing the connections between systems theory and identity theory, however, our attention will dwell on an even more fundamental methodological concern: the need to complement all approaches to the study of religion with an awareness of developments in the philosophy of science on the nature of truly "scientific" theorizing. To date religious studies, unlike its sister discipline of anthropology, has been noticeably and regrettably remiss in failing to take full advantage of the more sophisticated and flexible understanding of the scientific endeavor emerging from the philosophy of science. By working with a rather outmoded and excessively restrictive understanding of science, students of religion have tended to unrealistically stress the tension or disjunction between the subject matter of religious studies and scientific patterns of inquiry. In contrast, anthropological culture theory has benefitted substantially from a greater cognizance of the foundations being laid by the philosophers of science for the "scientific" study of such similarly elusive phenomena as culture and religion (as illustrated by David Kaplan's and Robert A. Manner's excellent little book Culture Theory, see the bibliography). In following their lead students of religion can move closer to the ideal of a theoretical perspective on religion which is in harmony with the stated self-understanding of the religious practitioner and which yet can be justifiably called "scientific."

It is not our intention, in a study of this scope, to become embroiled in a discussion of the fine points of the is-

sues raised by philosophers of science. Rather we will seek to streamline our analysis by concentrating on the basic views of the philosopher Karl Popper and the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz has dedicated considerable thought to the subject of how best to undertake the social scientific study of both culture and religion. An overview of his position on these matters is recommended by the fact that his investigations have lead him to adopt a position which is suggestive of systems theory and which closely parallels the methodological frame of mind of philosophers of science like Popper. Supplementing Geertz's comments, ideas will eventually be introduced from such other theorists as Arthur Koestler and Gregory Bateson. Both of these thinkers offer materials that may be used to draw out the explicit framework of a primitive systems theory approach to the study of religion from Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion.

The thoughts of Bellah, Popper, Geertz, Koestler, Bateson, and others will be used, then, to frame and direct our assessment of Mol's work. At some point in his recent writings Mol either acknowledges a debt to, or declares a marked sympathy with, much of the thought of each of these writers. And the value of his theorizing lies precisely in the degree to which it accurately reflects and implements the principles and spirit of the new methodological orientation which is arising from their mutual interest in the interplay of the philosophy of science, systems theory, and social scientific theorizing.

Mol's work, though, is far from perfect in this regard and in certain crucial respects his thinking deviates from the pattern of thought which we are proposing for the "scientific" study of religion. But much can be learned from the scrutiny of the reasons for Mol's deviations for, interesting enough, many of his problems stem from his tendency to not live up to the analytical standards and speculative potential of his own initial methodological framework. In many instances his reasoning reflects a position which we think is unnecessarily conservative in the light of his own overall theoretical orientation. As things stand, then, Mol's identity theory of religion provides a convenient and highly instructive forum for the further exploration of some of the prominent and less conspicuous methodological woes of religious studies. For Mol's approach represents a unique conjunction of new methodological insights and old theoretical handicaps.

The critical analysis and constructive development of Dr. Mol's work will roughly entail the examination of his theory in three distinct, yet overlapping and developmentally related, analytic contexts: seeing the theory as an outgrowth of the basic tensions in the community of scholars concerned with the "scientific" study of religion; surveying the content and implications of the identity theory of religion, turning in particular to a comparative analysis with Peter Berger's popular sociological theory of religion; and lastly, zeroing in on the pivotal defect of the identity theory--the vagueness

of the central category of identity--with the intention of demonstrating how a development of this concept in light of ideas drawn from systems theory is imperative to the proper operationalization of the identity theory of religion.

Before proceeding to an elaboration of the first of these analytical contexts it should be noted that a reading of this text cannot be substituted for a first-hand familiarity with Mol's writings. Every effort will be made to be as comprehensive as possible and the substance of Mol's arguments will be explained in some detail. But the complexity and diversity or, one might even say, the eclecticism of his thought is such that the exercise of a critical selectivity is necessitated in our approach to his work. And in point of fact many questions will be raised by our analysis which we ourselves will not be able to pursue to a resolution.

Moreover, in seeking to communicate an adequate sense of the pattern of his thinking it will often be necessary to rely on developing the full significance of a number of subtle and indirect indicators. In part, this state of affairs simply reflects the veracity of Mol's own observation that while the critical thrust of his argument is "sometimes articulated", for the most part it is "only inferred", as he believes "that the burden of proof lies not in denigration but in construction" (Mol, 1976, p. ix). But this situation is also reflective of the fact that the clarity of Mol's reasoning is often disrupted by the subtle intrusion of certain funda-

mental ambiguities in his position. Stated positively, it could be said that at points Mol surpasses himself in his understanding; less positively, it could be said that his judgement and insight are not always consistent. In addition it must be noted that in some instances this indirect approach is necessitated by the presence of certain stylistic difficulties in Mol's written English, a problem which more than likely stems from the fact that Dutch is his native language.

CHAPTER I.
THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF IDENTITY THEORY
- THE ROOTS OF TENSION IN THE "SCIENTIFIC"
STUDY OF RELIGION.

To properly understand what Mol has said and why he has said it one has to take careful note of the fairly conspicuous theoretical tensions present in the field of religious studies in general, and in particular Mol's own sub-discipline of the sociology of religion. The immediate impetus for Mol's work can be found in the challenge presented by the need to supersede these tensions. As might be expected, however, most of these tensions have persisted in spite of the best efforts of Mol and many others. This is not surprising, for as will become increasingly apparent, these tensions have their roots in an epistemological problem which far transcends the scope of the sociology of religion proper. Nevertheless, undertakings like Mol's have rendered an important service in at least two regards. In the first place, they have stressed the need to imaginatively generate new categories for our thought about religion, and to more thoroughly seek to integrate that thought with convergent developments in other fields of endeavor such as socio-biology, ecology, and the hard physical sciences themselves. Secondly, in altering the forms of our thought they have helped to constructively adjust our

intellectual attitudes to these tensions, realizing that the questions involved are not the result of some grosse aberration in our intellectual or perceptual abilities, or the structure of reality. Rather the tensions are but an accurate reflection of the need to free ourselves from the constraints of worn-out patterns of theory construction. The objective is the redirection of our thought towards the fullness of reality by accepting, for the moment, a fuller measure of flexibility and even daring in our formulation of analytic categories.

In his work Mol ~~never~~ explicitly identifies himself with this orientation, but his basic sympathy with some such line of development is clearly indicated when he gives voice to comments like the following:

Various theories have attempted to account for religious behavior and phenomena, but all of them fall short of comprehending the admittedly heterogeneous field. Of course, by attempting to be more comprehensive there is the constant danger that one's organizing principle becomes fuzzy and elusive. This disadvantage may, however, be balanced by the potential for theoretical reconstruction and interpretive innovation . . . (Mol, 1976, p. 65)

As this passage suggests, the key to a constructive critical analysis of Mol's views lies in a delineation and examination of the substance of this supposed balance. Under normal conditions a theoretical and logical analysis to this end would have as its first concern a preoccupation with the

exactness of category definitions, and for the most part this study will not differ in this regard. But, in the last analysis, a certain critical leeway will be maintained in order to allow for our equal concern to detect signs of at least a reasonable "potential" for an increased understanding of religious phenomena.

The reasons for extending this critical leeway are rooted in the controversy which exists amongst scholars as to the very character of the discipline of religious studies or, as some would have it, the "science of religion". An examination of Mol's arguments in the light of this controversy can be suggestive of ways in which this controversy can be reduced. To the extent that this is true, the discovery of certain technical deficiencies in his arguments should not be allowed to detract from the positive contribution made on a broader level by his overall approach.

In the simplest of terms, there is substantial disagreement in the field of religious studies over the very question of whether a "science of religion" is possible or desirable. The key factor being the epithet "scientific", meaning here simply the attempt to emulate the inquiry procedures of the natural sciences, with their attendant faith in the foundation of knowledge in empiricism and the value-neutrality or "objectivity" of the investigator. Curiously enough, this issue has persisted despite the apparently healthy state of the "discipline", and its now quite venerable

age (departments have existed in numerous universities since the last quarter of the nineteenth century). In order to understand the very important and perhaps unavoidable reasons for this state of affairs it is necessary to keep in mind an overview of the alternative approaches to the study of religious phenomena that have been allowed to coexist under one academic heading of "religious studies". In attempting to gain a sense of the pattern of development by which these alternatives came into being, if only within a greatly simplified format, it can be seen that at every juncture the attempt to devise a satisfactory theoretical understanding of man's religious life has been plagued by the necessity of charting a delicate course between the Scylla and Charybdis of theological particularism, on the one hand, and social-scientific reductionism, on the other hand.

Moreover, as will be seen, in recent years the problems raised by this situation have penetrated to the heart of the sub-discipline of the sociology of religion. In such a manner that it can no longer be automatically assumed that there is a firm consensus amongst sociologists of religion as to the "scientific" character of their work; at least not in terms of the traditional understanding of science.

Yet for some students of religion the effort to work out these doubts has led to a renewed appreciation of certain of the basic methodological insights formulated long ago by men like Max Weber. If only in this way they have been stimu-

lated to entertain a more sophisticated understanding of the social scientific enterprise in general, and in practice to bring their thought more in line with views found in the philosophy of science. Few if any students of religion, though, seem to be completely aware of this latter parallel.

The Methodological Difficulties of Religious Studies

The first thing to keep in mind in seeking to assess the "state of the art", so to speak, of religious studies is to remember that in the West this discipline has always been closely associated with theology, and to a large extent scholars of religion have come from a theological background. Seeking to embody the academic ideals of impartiality and objectivity, however, these scholars have sought to differentiate their activities from those of theologians proper. To this end labels like the "science of religion" have been coined and, as Donald Wiebe states in his article "Is a science of religion possible?":

all reference to the 'science of religion' is primarily a way of referring to a definite (and absolute?) break on the part of the early academic (professional) students of religion from a narrowly (sectarian) theological perspective in the study of religious phenomena. (Wiebe, 1978, p. 9)

It is important to distinguish the study of religion from theology. Theology is an attempt to apply rational categories and explanations to faith in God and what is alleged to

have been revealed by God about Himself. As such, theology is either natural or supernatural, in the sense that it is either an attempt to prove God's existence by natural and unaided reason or an attempt to come to a systematic understanding of what is believed on faith, as inspired by God and His revelation, which are beyond mere human nature and above nature in general. The theologian speaks from within one tradition and from the aspect of the truth of that religious tradition, to which he is personally committed.

In contrast, the scholar of religion is interested in and hopefully completely open to the beliefs and practices of all religious traditions as his concern is their "meaning" for the members of these traditions and not their ultimate "truth" or "falsehood". Religious studies, unlike theology or the philosophy of religion, must bracket questions of truth in an attempt to unveil meanings, in the doctrines of man's religions and the "human phenomenological environments" of these doctrines (i.e., the social, psychological, historical, and even literary or mythological contexts of these religions). As Ninian Smart suggests in his brief but very thoughtful book, The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge, the distinction might be simply remembered by speaking of "doing theology" and "studying religion"; the former being concerned with the truth of religion and the latter with the truth about religion. With the procedure of bracketing questions of ultimate truth in mind, Smart also

makes the further helpful suggestion that "in order to get over the cumbrous inelegancies that we are likely to run into in trying to maintain this methodological posture, [we might] distinguish between objects that are real and objects which exist. In this usage, God is real for Christians whether or not he exists." (Smart, 1973, p. 54) The student of religion examines the particulars of this "reality".

It should be appreciated, however, that this dichotomy of positions is not absolute in any practical sense. For example, it is necessary to be cognizant of the fact that the theological approach to the study of other religions is not uniform. At least three different theological positions can be distinguished which have markedly different consequences for a Christian understanding of the beliefs of other men: neo-Orthodox Protestantism, liberal Protestantism, and Catholic. A true dialogue of religions is perhaps most impaired by the neo-Orthodox stance and most enhanced by the Catholic.

The handicapping feature of the neo-Orthodox Protestantism of Karl Barth and its formulation vis-à-vis the world religions by H. Kraemer is its basic insistence on the radical differentiation of religion and Christian revelation and theology. The former in all its manifestations represents man's approach to God (a sinful and Pelagian effort to achieve one's own salvation); the latter represents the proper explication of God's approach to man by grace and through faith.

When one's thought is guided by such a ~~stricture~~ true dialogue often ceases, as it is denied the full basis in respect for the other's position that it requires, and it is replaced by an understanding of the situation as an occasion for argument and conversion.

Traditional Catholic Christianity has always had a more nuanced position, being committed not only to salvation by grace through faith but as well to man's free involvement in that salvation. Moreover, a wider perspective was made possible for the Catholic by his heritage of understanding Christianity as the continuation of the universal, true religion, whereby God's grace was not limited to Catholicism or Christianity. Nevertheless, as the decrees of Vatican II proclaim, the elements of truth in the world religions find their confirmation, apex, and completion in Christianity.

Like Catholicism, liberal Protestantism is much more open to a true dialogue of the world religions. However, unlike Catholicism it suffers from the tendency to all too exclusively interpret religion in general from the perspective of personal piety; the subjective component of religious life is over-emphasized because it plays such an all-important role in the Protestant experience of the West. Furthermore, such a perspective is frequently combined by liberal Protestants with a too simplistic "essential nature" thesis whereby all of man's religions are thought to fundamentally share in a single Religion which closely reflects the traits of liberal Protestantism.

It is on the other side of the dichotomy, that of the so-called "science of religion", however, that the student of religion is confronted with a truly confusing array of complex and conflicting approaches to religious phenomena. Here, amongst Bellah's "rationalists", the extreme diversity of man's religious expressions is well represented, if only in the form of dozens of fragmentary theoretical exposés. Ideally, of course, the diverse positions are united by the effort to maintain an attitude of value neutrality: all conform to the "naturalistic approach" to religion. In other words, like the other social sciences, the object is to understand behavior in terms of natural causes and effects. In itself this is not an anti-religious ideological position, since even causes beyond nature, if they act upon men, must act through men and the nature of men. But for various reasons, the adoption of such a "methodological atheism" has led many scholars to succumb to the problem of sociological and/or psychological "reductionism". Which is a problem which may well introduce a much more dangerous element of distortion into the field of religious studies than was ever threatened by the problem of theological particularism.

In instances of reductionism not only is the question of the truth content of religious statements bracketed but that of a "transcendent reference" for religious phenomena is effectively bracketed as well. The result is theories of religion which are couched entirely in terms of the accepted social.

sciences, which purport to be comprehensive. Two ready examples of reductionistic analyses of religion are provided by the respective works of the eminent sociologist Emile Durkheim, and the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Durkheim interpreted religion almost entirely in terms of the need and mechanisms for social organization and solidarity. While Freud argued that religion was a projection into adult life of the child's dependent relationship with its parents, born of the individual's incapacity to face the full demands of reality. In either case an "essentialist" argument was advanced whereby all religious phenomena could be explained in terms of a limited set of scientifically explorable principles. Over the years, however, social scientists have posited almost as many such explanatory essences of man's myriad religious beliefs and practices as there are "isms" and "ologies" encompassed in the domains of the social sciences.

Nevertheless, the initial cogency of such theories has always made them extremely attractive, and most continue to exert a strong influence. But the attempts made by students of religion to meticulously apply these theories to living religious traditions has almost universally convinced scholars that they are far from comprehensive. At best many of them contain startling and valuable insights into one or another aspect of man's religious life. But all of them have been rejected by thoughtful believers who simply and adamantly insist that these theories have failed to make real contact

with the cognitive and affective heart of religious experience.

In anticipation and/or response to these shortcomings of social scientific theory of religion, many students of religion (Bellah's "nonrationalists") have adopted various forms of what has come to be known as the "phenomenological" approach to the study of religion. These scholars took their lead from the philosophical school of descriptive phenomenology associated with Edmund Husserl. However, their objectives and methods were much more humble in scope and nature. They worked from the basic premise that the student of religion should cultivate a way of thinking which allowed data to "speak for themselves". That is, they argued that it was essential to trust data to make their own meaning apparent by the very configuration of their existence. Seeking thus to attain to an attitude very reminiscent of Max Weber's verstehen, they strove to enter empathetically into the religious worldview of the peoples they studied while remaining technically outsiders to their traditions. On the whole, therefore, their goals were more limited than their more social scientifically oriented colleagues. They were content with isolating and developing fairly broad classifications for similar religious phenomena around the world: concentrating instead on giving effective voice in the contemporary world to the manifest logic and emotional power of the beliefs and practices of nomo religiosus.

In the process of doing this they discovered that the religious meaning of various experiences for the participant

is never exhausted by simply investigating the historical context of a religious tradition or the social-psychological processes of its formation and functioning. An ultimacy, a mystery, an open-endedness, a "sacredness" are integral parts of the religious meaning. In other words, it was learned that the integrity of religious phenomena must be respected as they rest upon interactions of the subjective and objective constituents of the human environment which cannot be "reduced" to the other elements of human life. In agreement with the practitioners of religion, then, the phenomenologists argued that in some difficult to specify but nevertheless inescapable sense religious phenomena must be understood as being sui generis.

Alternatively, and more recently, other writers on religion have attempted to counteract and circumvent the reductionistic consequences of most social scientific accounts of religion by advocating the possibility and benefits of a "critical theological perspective". Donald Wiebe gives voice to this line of thought:

My point, then, is simply this: the study of religion, if it is to be characterized as "scientific" must proceed without the assumption of the intellectual, or perhaps better, cognitive superiority of the worldview of either the "outsider social scientist" or of the "uncritical inner participant". Whereas the former excludes any possibility of the truth of the "supernatural explanations" of religion (i.e., religion's interpretation of itself by means of reference to transempirical realities), the latter rejects all possibility of the correctness or truth of the "reductionistic explanations" of the social sciences. Critical

study here rather sees the "possibility" of the truth of both the reductionistic accounts and of the supernaturalistic accounts of religion and religious experience. Such a position, I suggest, is adopted by the "critical inner participant" which constitutes, as much as does the participant observation of the outsider (the phenomenologist's position), the proper study of religious phenomena. (Wiebe, 1978, p. 16)

The argument is simply that a critical theology would be the intellectual equal of a critical "secular" study of religion, but it would have in addition the distinct advantage of being attuned to the kind of intuitive logic and nuances of the life of homo religiosus. (See Charles Davis' article, The Reconvergence of Theology and Religious Studies, Studies in Religion, 4/3 1974/75.)

Overlooking, for the moment, any discussion of the relative merits and deficiencies of each of these approaches, the point to be grasped here is simply that the field of religious studies is characterized by an extreme diversity of reasonable and yet conflicting methodological options. To some extent this state of affairs simply reflects the problems faced by all of the social sciences. Many social scientists have long been irritated, in our present academic and intellectual climate, by the apparent lack of "objective" standards with which to gage the truthfulness or accuracy of judgements passed on complex social and psychological phenomena. Whether or not the comparison is ultimately warranted, relative to the natural sciences with their more explicit and quantifiable subject matter, the social sciences often appear to suffer

from a lamentable imprecision. In part, this situation stems from but a lack of scholarly consensus on the question of serviceable criteria. But clearly many scholars have sensed, and some have firmly argued, that the failure to arrive at any kind of meaningful consensus is rooted in more than historical developments. Rather, it would appear that the nature of the subject matter itself, its extremely complex and largely "qualitative" nature, presents some very basic difficulties of an epistemological kind. Problems severe enough to cause one to seriously doubt whether the accomplishments of the natural sciences could ever be duplicated in the social sciences. But also, more importantly, to doubt whether the social sciences should be modeled on the example set by the natural sciences.

Students of religion have long been sensitive to these doubts. But if anything their awareness of the problems involved has been more acute as in their endeavors these problems are uniquely aggravated. For no subject matter is more personal and subjective than that of man's religious experiences, sentiments, ideas and practices. The application of the scientific method is hindered by the largely secret and idiosyncratic nature of religious meaning. Accordingly, scholars of religion have sought to adjust their methods in a special manner to their subject matter. But, as the reconvergence of theology and religious studies suggests, the net result has been the reversal of the most basic principles upon which the

"science of religion" was originally founded, and the near-institutionalization of a fundamentally ambiguous attitude to methodological questions.

The unshakable sense of doubt felt by many students of religion with regard to the very nature and legitimacy of their undertaking has grown out of a renewed sensitivity to the possibly antithetical natures of religious and scientific thought. In a brief aside in an unpublished manuscript entitled Meaning and Place, Mol expresses some of his own tentative thoughts on this matter:

. . . religious scholarship is a contradiction in terms . . . in so far as scholarship is a standing aside from whatever it studies, it adopts a stance which competes with the religious view of the world. As religion, more than almost any other object of study, is bound up with a particular interpretation of existence it tends to clash with the sacred assumption of scholarship that objectivity and neutrality are primary. (Mol, 1978d, p. 48)

Such comments are in line with a long standing and widespread suspicion that the "scientific" way of knowing intrinsically entails an insensitivity to the nature and value of the religious way of knowing.

Methodological Limitations and the Sociology of Religion

All of the founding fathers of modern sociology, Comte, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, were in some measure aware of the intrinsic opposition of scientific and religious perspectives. Though for the first two thinkers the resolution of the prob-

lem was easy: a scientific sociology would simply replace religion as the major cultural control agency in human societies, as religion in its essence was viewed as being little more than an inferior form of science. By the time Durkheim and Weber came to write about religion, however, the intellectual climate had changed and such a blithe positivism was unacceptable. Both authors recognized the need to place the study of religion at the very heart of their analyses of socio-cultural life. For both men realized that modern Western society is very much the product of a special religious heritage and the continuing legacy of this past is not to be discounted or underestimated. But even more importantly, both thinkers drew attention to the substantive and functional uniqueness of the role played by religion in motivating men and structuring social realities. Nevertheless, for Durkheim in particular, the question of the competition of religious and scientific Weltanschauungen remained poignant, for as Roland Robertson comments:

Durkheim, having supported and elaborated in detail the proposition that it was through religious practice and belief that man first came to think about society--to be cognitively reflexive--had also to confront the problem that it was sociological culture which was becoming the major locus of societal reflexivity in modern societies. (Robertson, 1974, p. 44)

This observation draws another factor into the discussion, namely, the question of the secularization of modern society. Since the inception of sociology as a discipline

there has been a significant appreciation of the complexity of the relationship between religion and sociology. Early on it was recognized that the study of society in general cannot be undertaken without the development of an understanding of the sociological functioning of religion. But with the firm association of a decline in the prominence and occurrence of traditional forms of religious expression with the special character of modernity, the crucial relevance of this connection was paradoxically magnified. If modern man was to come to grips with the special problems of his own age he must understand religion, if only in the sense of investigating why traditional religions appear to be no longer relevant to large segments of Western society. But to this end it is necessary to translate religious phenomena into sociological language and this act of interpretation itself epitomizes modernity, as sociological language is "scientifically" founded. Such being the case, this approach might actually debar one from a full and proper comprehension of premodern realities like religion, and hence indirectly from a full comprehension of the social nature of modernity as well.

Until recently, the need for sociologists of religion to personally and imaginatively grapple with this conundrum has, for the most part, remained dormant. At an empirical level sociologists could continue to successfully operate while ignoring this methodological loophole because there was much to be accomplished that was only tangentially, or distantly,

related to the precise issues at stake. The situation is directly analogous to the development of the natural sciences over the last two centuries in the face of the doubts raised by David Hume's refutation of the law of induction. As long as certain relatively indisputable practical gains could be made there was no pressure to definitely work out the fine detail of theory. In the natural sciences this state of affairs dramatically changed with the rise of inescapable problems in the field of sub-atomic particle theory in the first quarter of this century. Less dramatically, in sociological circles, interest has grown in the methodological problems posed by religion with the rise in importance and relevance of work done in the sociology of knowledge. More particularly, in the realm of sociology of religion widespread interest was precipitated with the introduction of the work of such authors as Thomas Luckmann (e.g., The Invisible Religion (1967)) and Peter L. Berger (e.g., The Sacred Canopy (1967), A Rumour of Angels (1969)). Luckmann and Berger approached the sociology of religion from the vantage point of a rejuvenated and recast sociology of knowledge (see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (1966)).

That the sociology of knowledge should have been the medium through which an heightened interest in theoretical and methodological concerns was revived was quite natural. For as Roland Robertson points out:

Traditionally, the sociology of knowledge has been bound up with the central issue of the relationship

between social-scientific knowledge and other kinds of knowledge--between the ways in which beliefs, values, and so on, are generated and sustained in the phenomenal world, on the one hand, and the generation of sociological concepts, and propositions and paradigms, on the other. (Robertson, 1974, p. 43)

This was certainly the orientation of Karl Mannheim's classic studies.

In contrast, however, the approach of Luckmann and Berger confronted these issues less directly as they shifted the orientation of the sociology of knowledge to an examination of the elementary processes of so-called reality construction (i.e., the manner in which man imposes order and hence meaning upon the vast landscape of awareness in which he lives). Yet in doing so they actually clarified and broadened the fundamental importance of the questions under consideration, initiating a sweeping preoccupation with matters previously confined to a narrow range of scholars.

Berger and Luckmann based their respective theories of religion on a common philosophical anthropology. They began their arguments from the simple premise that the most vital thing to know about man is that he is born in an "unfinished" condition. Unlike other animals man comes into life with deficient instinctual programming--the order of his life (and hence his nature) is not genetically given. Therefore, man must "finish" his own nature by creating a stable environment through the development of culture. Religion, they argued, played a crucial role in this "finishing" process by providing

a stable meaning for the structure of social interaction. Like Durkheim before them, then, they emphatically stressed that throughout the greater part of man's history religion has been the backbone of man's social life. But through their sojourn into philosophical anthropology they laid the foundations of religion at an even deeper level of human consciousness. In the light of this orientation, the process of secularization in the modern world took on an additional significance. The process of secularization obviously spoke of a crisis in the religious community. But if the influence of religion had truly been so pivotal to the successful regulation of man's behavior in the past could not secularization, coupled with the obvious social and political vicissitudes of the contemporary world, be indicative of some more basic and disturbing social crisis--a disintegration of the fabric of society itself?

The consensus in a broad cross-section of the Western intellectual community in the early seventies seemed to support the view that some such crisis did exist or was clearly in the offing. In which case it became increasingly apparent to an ever wider circle of scholars that the questions raised by the sociological analysis of religion warranted a greater degree of respect and attention. Curiously, however, amongst sociologists of religion the convergence of this sense of urgency about the fate of Western society with a heightened sensitivity to the methodological shortcomings of the more

established social-scientific approaches to the study religion has bred a varied configuration of responses. In the words of Roland Robertson:

At the present moment we are witnessing some sociologists retreating from their sociological commitments because they feel that such commitments undermine what they believe (sometimes on sociological grounds!) to constitute the very pivot of personal and collective life. Others believe that sociology can help to shore up certain key elements of the religiosity which they discern to be pivotal and essential. Still others--"extended kin" of that group--believe . . . that sociology can assist in the development of new religious options. A less visible group believe that religion ought to be subjected to some kind of sociological critique, which does not necessarily mean attack. (Robertson, 1974, p. 45)

All of the sociologists in question sense the need to reassert the importance of religion or religion-like phenomena in the smooth and sound functioning of society. But the singular dilemma persists that their preferred "method" of study seems to automatically and artificially diminish and distort the full magnitude and subtlety of the "object" of study. With the implication that no matter how much methodological refinement is introduced, analytical certainty can only be purchased at the price of a certain crucial measure of dishonesty or tactical blindness in the face of religious realities. Some aspect or other of man's dynamic religious life (or lives) always seems to remain beyond the pale of a "scientific" understanding. Yet the personal and social need to make a clear statement about religion's perhaps indispensable social function is deeply felt by most of these men.

The net result, Robertson goes on to say in his own perceptive analysis of these developments (Robertson, 1974, pp. 41-60), is that (in functional-definitional terms) sociologists of religion have become increasingly "religious about religion." (Robertson, 1974, p. 46) In other words, a certain almost apologetic orientation has slipped into the supposedly scientific enterprise of sociology of religion. This development can be detected in at least two forms. Most explicitly, some students of religion, like Peter Berger, have argued for the reversal of the academic elevation of the sociological enterprise over the religious. More implicitly, others, like Mol, have served the same end by "grounding their analyses on deeply held views about the raison d'être of human life." (Robertson, 1974, p. 45) Thus even in the "scientifically" oriented sub-discipline of the sociology of religion there has been a pronounced tendency to duplicate the movement of the broader field of religious studies to a reconvergence of religious theological interests and the social scientifically founded goals of the sub-discipline.

Out of the four responses to the dual and convergent crises of religious methodology and the secularization of our society, cited above, then, Berger and Mol both fall into the second category: those that believe that sociology can help to shore up certain key elements of the religiosity which they discern to be pivotal and essential to personal and collective life. In the brief comparative analysis of these two

authors' work which we will undertake below it will be seen that it is this factor that binds them together in spite of all the real differences between their positions. Though, as has been indicated, Mol's orientation in this regard is far less explicit and less personally motivated. Moreover, it is this common concern with stressing the importance of "being" religious over "studying about" religion in our modern secular age that leads to certain methodological distortions in both Berger's and Mol's theories of religion, though again, to differing degrees.

Of course, at this juncture, it is necessary to extend the caution, once again, that these matters are being presented within a simplified format. The actual movement of thought within the community of students of religion has been characterized by a much greater complexity, and has displayed a less uniform development than has been implied here. To some extent what has been portrayed as a fairly linear development actually transpired in the form of multiple parallel yet implicitly converging theoretical discussions on a number of issues. But for reasons of space and time we will have to be satisfied with the limited insights that can be culled from this attenuated analysis of the situation. What matters is that across the board a renewed interest has been sparked in formulating a methodology for religious studies which does full justice to the inherent ambiguity of religious phenomena. Attention has been focused on the overriding question facing

the "science of religion": Can flexible yet precise analytical categories be devised for the scrutiny of man's religious beliefs and practices in all their existential uniqueness and cultural particularity? Yet as we will next delineate, most efforts to respond to this question have floundered because they have failed to appreciate what it truly means to be scientific in such a difficult field of endeavor.

Some scholars are effectively working to counter this situation through the development of what we have chosen to call a new methodological orientation to the whole issue of religious theorizing. This new orientation does not represent a self-conscious and concerted effort on the part of a specific group of scholars so much as a natural dovetailing of diversely derived methodological perspectives.

CHAPTER II
THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF IDENTITY THEORY
- A "NEW REALISM" IN THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY
OF RELIGION

A New Methodological Orientation

Cognizant of the inflated ambitions of many of their predecessors (e.g., the evolutionary theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to a lesser extent such figures as Durkheim, Weber, and Freud), in recent years scholars interested in the theory of religion have almost universally adopted a more cautious and conservative attitude to their task. To borrow a stock phrase commonly used in other contexts, the objective has been a "new realism". The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz has been instrumental in the formulation and promotion of this perspective on matters. And his efforts to lay the foundations for a "scientific" theory of culture have been widely influential in the field of religious theory. In part, this influence stems from the fact that he has perceptively treated the subject of religion itself as a sub-category or phenomenon of his central concern: culture. But in a more telling way, his influence has stemmed from his treatment of culture itself, as the concept is closely analogous to that of religion and its study is burdened with similar methodological difficulties.

The touchstone of this "new realism" is the conviction so scathingly and colourfully expressed by Geertz in the following passage:

To set forth symmetrical crystals of significance, purified of the material complexity in which they are located, and then attribute their existence to autogenous principles of order, universal properties of the human mind, or vast, a priori Weltanschauungen, is to pretend a science that does not exist and imagine a reality that cannot be found. Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape. (Geertz, 1973, p. 20)

The obvious butt of such disparaging comments is the effort to explain phenomena like culture or religion in terms of the systematic extension of one principle of interpretation. Most particularly, it would appear that Geertz has the "structuralism" of Claude Levi-Strauss preeminently in mind. But a discussion of the elements of structuralism and Geertz's specific reasons for objecting to what he calls Levi-Strauss' "cerebral savage" view of primitive culture would carry us beyond the scope of our immediate interests. Here it will have to suffice to know that Geertz and many others with him prefer to keep their theoretical formulations hovering close to concrete realities, avoiding the flights of pure abstraction which they believe are all too characteristic of such grand systems as structural analyses. In general, Geertz thinks that theories which claim to be comprehensive, or to have isolated the essential "logic" of such complex

phenomena as culture and religion, suffer from one of three common theoretical failings: they "reify" culture or religion as an autonomous superorganic reality; they "reduce" them to the brute pattern of behavioral events; or they fall prey to the psychological tendency to "privatize" culture or religion by locating it in the minds and hearts of men and conceiving it as consisting of simply mental phenomena.

Borrowing a term coined by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Geertz argues that the way to avoid indulging in these erroneous views lies in understanding the anthropologist's or student of religion's task as an exercise in "thick description". Briefly summarized, thick description is the phrase that Geertz thinks most accurately communicates a sense of what social anthropologists, and by direct implication scholars of religion, really do when they attempt to explain the meaning of some cultural or religious phenomenon. For in the study of religion or culture (because Geertz has defined religion as a "cultural" phenomenon; see chapter four of his book The Interpretation of Cultures for his now classic definition of religion), Geertz convincingly argues, "the line between mode of representation and substantive content is as undrawable . . . as it is in painting." (Geertz, 1973, p. 16) Recognition of this fact threatens the normal conception of the objective status of anthropological knowledge, and hence of judgements passed on religious phenomena as well. As in the simplest of terms it means that in the analysis of human

phenomena in general, "facts", in the sense of uninterpreted sensory data, do not exist. Actually, everything exists within an interpretative framework, if only at the level of unconscious and/or inborn expectations. "And the best that can be said of the social scientist is that he gives or formulates an interpretation of an interpretation (i.e., a thickened description). But this is all the more true when dealing with cultural phenomena, like religion, where the object of the social scientist's efforts is to make sense of the "meaning" that some belief, practice, or event has for some other person(s), of a different culture or whatever. For, then, the data one is working with are an "interpretation of reality" of an already quite derivative nature. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to assume that the end of spreading true understanding would best be served by an approach that does not wander too far away from the given (by the religious practitioner) interpretation of the subject under scrutiny and its Sitz im Leben ("setting in life").

Another anthropologist-philosopher, Gregory Bateson, communicates a sense of the interpretational nature of all human knowledge even more graphically. Utilizing the philosopher Alfred Korzybski's phrase, "the map is not the territory", Bateson observes:

We say the map is different from the territory. But what is the territory? Operationally, somebody went out with a retina or a measuring stick and made representations which were then put upon paper. What

is on the paper map is a representation of what was in the retinal representation of the man who made the map; and as you push the question back, what you find is an infinite regress, an infinite series of maps. The territory never gets in at all. The territory is Ding an sich and you can't do anything with it. Always the process of representation will filter it out so that the mental world is only maps of maps of maps, ad infinitum. All "phenomena" are literally "appearances." (Bateson, 1972, p. 454)

Obviously in thinking of the nature and functioning of theorizing in general Kant cannot be ignored.

Intellectually, and morally, it could be argued, it is imperative that one's theoretical pronouncements demonstrate some kind of clear regard for the stated views and experiences of the person(s) one is studying. This is not to say that these views are to be accepted uncritically, or as manifest truth. But it does involve recognizing, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has stressed, that "to perceive persons as entities, contributing to more rarified theories, is inherently to misunderstand those persons--and therefore, to produce bad theories." (Smith, 1975, p. 11)

This limitation must also be stipulated because the anthropologist or student of religion can never fully overcome the distorting effect of his own inevitable existential commitment to the symbolic system of meaning of his native culture, or even more limitedly, of his social background within that culture. To do so would require the virtual dissolution and reconstruction of his personality.

Acknowledgement of the veracity of this assessment of

matters does not invalidate the enterprise of a social-scientific study of religion. But clearly it does point to what Ninian Smart has called the "rather soft and rather chaotic" nature of a "science of religion". (Smart, p. 141) It is this fact, of course, that has allowed for the revival of a more "religious" attitude to religion, as noted by Robertson.

To say all of this, however, is not to go so far as Wilfred Cantwell Smith who has rather controversially asserted:

methodology is the massive red herring of modern scholarship, the most significant obstacle to intellectual progress, and the chief distraction from rational understanding of the world. (Smith, 1975, p. 2)

Smith would argue that there is only academic method in general and not specific methods for specific subjects. As far as religious studies is concerned one need only modify this flat assertion by noting that an effort should be made to imbue one's scholarship with the sense of a "face-to-face" contact with the people one is studying. But, of course, in so specifying that technical methodological concerns should be "rigorously subordinated to primarily personalist considerations" (Smith, 1975, p. 9), Smith is himself advocating a very specific, though admittedly minimal, methodological preference. A preference which must be supported with a rationale and filled out with procedural guidelines.

Smith's very reasonable and pertinent concern to promote "humane knowing"--an orientation ever sensitive to reality's

transcendence of our capacity to know, and method's tendency to degenerate into techniques of domination--points if anything to a need for increased, rather than decreased, methodological self-consciousness in the study of religion. The crux of the matter is that if one is going to adopt a more "personalistic" stance, and hence essentially a more open-ended method (as is implied by the critical theological option as well), then it becomes all the more imperative to devise and as meticulously as possible specify in advance the standards by which it may be determined that the "critical" (i.e., self-critical) edge of such a method has been maintained. Geertz has demonstrated a keen awareness of this need and has most creatively responded to it. But as he has stressed, the quest for any hard and fast systems of verification, or even falsification, in the investigation of cultural phenomena (like religion) is futile. In general most students of religion have been severely misguided in seeking after such systems for in truth they do not even securely exist within the natural sciences. But with regard to such a "soft" science, Geertz suggests that it would be more reasonable to simply speak of a method of "appraisal" whereby one could tell a better account from a worse one. (Geertz, 1973, p. 16)

In saying this Geertz brings his own thought on culture theory in line with some of the most recent and widely accepted views of philosophers of science on theory in general--foremost, Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos. But as he at no time makes any direct reference to the thought of either man it is

to be assumed that he has arrived at such conclusions relatively independently. Before proceeding to a closer look at Geertz's ideas, then, it might be wise to pause and briefly consider Popper's position. For an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses has been the guiding factor in shaping the understanding of the proper configuration of a "science of religion" that is being presented in this thesis.

A Critical Examination of Some of the Basic Premises of Karl Popper's Philosophy of Science

In the following discussion of the ideas of Karl Popper it should be born in mind that we have a double objective. In the first place we are out to simply demonstrate that most social scientists, and in particular scholars of religion, are working with an outdated and naive notion of science (i.e., the traditional "verificationist" model). Accordingly, their fears of a fundamental disjunction between the scientific method and their respective fields of study are uncalled for, or at least clearly exaggerated. But secondly, to this end we must demonstrate that Popper's own tendency to exaggerate the differences, at a theoretical level, between the natural sciences and the social sciences does not necessarily follow logically from his own statement of the criteria of scientific knowledge.

As Thomas Kuhn has noted in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, according to the textbooks of science used in our

universities the hallmark of science is the "inductive" method. The great fathers of science successfully pressed home the fact that true knowledge of the world lay in inductively reasoning from particular observations of the ways of nature to general descriptive laws of reality. The Scholastics had erred in their excessive reliance on the deductive development of the positions of the ancient authorities. As became apparent with the so-called Scientific Revolution, the cause of advancing man's understanding of his environment was served better by the scientific method of empirical testing than by the speculations of metaphysicians.

Less forcefully, however, is the average university student made aware of the fundamental limitations placed on this traditional view of science by David Hume's almost contemporaneous delineation of "the problem of induction". Simply stated, the problem is that no number of observation statements can of themselves logically give rise to an unrestricted general statement about the true nature of things. If one observes that an event A is attended by an event B on one occasion, it does not logically follow that it will be attended by it on any other occasion. Nor would it follow from two such observations, nor from twenty, nor from two thousand. If it happens regularly enough, one may reasonably expect the next event A will be attended by an event B, but, in the last analysis, this is a fact of psychology, not of logic. While the existence of this problem has not practically hampered the

progress of science it has baffled philosophers to this date and has necessitated admitting and carefully remembering that science can make no absolute claim to certainty.

Karl Popper has attempted to obviate the doubts about science raised by this state of affairs by providing an alternative explanation of the nature and growth of scientific knowledge which disassociates science from the "logic of induction", which Popper views as an illusory and dispensable notion. Popper's alternative explanation of science rests upon two ideas: there is a logical asymmetry between "verification" and "falsification", and scientific knowledge grows not through the accumulation of observations but through the repeated refutation and replacement of theories.

The first proposition is succinctly summarized by Bryan Magee in his brief book on Popper as follows:

To express it in terms of logical statements: although no number of observation statements reporting observations of white swans allows us logically to derive the universal statement "All swans are white", one single observation statement, reporting one single observation of a black swan, allows us logically to derive the statement "Not all swans are white." In this important logical sense empirical generalizations, though not verifiable, are falsifiable. This means that scientific laws are testable in spite of being unprovable: they can be tested by systematic attempts to refute them. (Magee, 1973, p. 22-23)

In practical terms, Popper argues, it has always really been man's critical faculties, his attempts to falsify the views of others, that has led to the advancement of knowledge. For it would only be by accident that an attempt to accumulate con-

firming evidence for a theory would result in a recognition of the need to improve the theory in question.

Consideration of this fact leads directly into the second proposition which is that the growth of knowledge proceeds from problems and the attempts to solve them (i.e., theories) and not from raw observations or the aimless assimilation of data. If the history of science is examined, Popper is confident that it will be noted that scientific innovations grew more often out of the modification of already existing theories than through direct generalizing from experimental observations. Moreover, as has already been pointed out in our initial discussion of Geertz's position, observation as such cannot be prior to theory as such, since some theory is presupposed by any observation, if only at the level of unconscious and/or inborn expectations. There is no question of an infinite regress in the manner of the proverbial chicken and the egg.

Of course, the actual psychology of the practitioners of science may be quite different as they may not be conscious of the doctrine of falsification in any sense or the progress of science through the alternation of theoretical conjecture and refutation. But such is the actual "logic", so to speak, of the process of scientific creativity.

As all of this would suggest, for Popper, the most important development in the history of man and his knowledge (Popper's World 3), since the emergence of language, has been

the emergence of criticism, and later the acceptability of criticism. Popper associates this development with the pre-Socratics and later with the sixteenth and seventeenth century fathers of science. This criticism, however, operates of necessity within very clear parameters. For as Popper notes in his essay "Truth, Rationality, and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge":

People involved in a fruitful critical discussion of a problem often rely, if only unconsciously, upon two things: the acceptance by all parties of the common aim of getting at the truth, or at least nearer to the truth, and a considerable amount of common background knowledge. This does not mean that either of these two things is an indispensable basis of every discussion, or that these two things are themselves "a priori", and cannot be critically discussed in their turn. It only means that criticism never starts from nothing, even though every one of its starting points "may" be challenged, one at a time, in the course of the critical debate. (Popper, 1963, p. 238)

In other words, one may never "start from scratch" in the investigation of some subject for it is always necessary to hold certain ideas, at least temporarily, as being essentially unproblematic. One must inevitably begin with a certain amount of traditional knowledge, which Popper calls "background knowledge". This background knowledge can, at best, only be criticized in a piece-meal manner through a slow feedback process whereby new knowledge is constantly used to place old assumptions in doubt.

As is implicitly suggested in the passage cited above, however, Popper does not feel that this state of affairs need

lead one to despair about man's ability to arrive at the truth. For even though he subscribes to the opinion of the ancient Greek philosopher Xenophane, as given in the following verses, he nevertheless proposes that man possesses adequate means for determining the relative measure of truth or falsity in any given statement. Xenophane had said:

The gods did not reveal, from the beginning,
All things to us; but in the course of time,
Through seeking, men find that which is better.

But as for certain truth, no man has known it,
Nor will he know it; neither of the gods,
Nor yet of all the things of which I speak.
And if by chance he were to utter
The final truth, he would himself not know it;
For all is but a woven web of guesses.
(Popper, 1963, p. 26)

As all observations contain an element of theory and one is always forced to work with a certain amount of problematic background knowledge absolute truth is forever going to be beyond the grasp of man. But different theories can be tested for their degree of "versimilitude" (i.e., their nearness to the truth). That is, without knowing the explicit content of the truth of a situation, various hypotheses about its nature can be contrasted and one can be selected as being potentially more satisfactory, or more accurate (i.e., a better approximation of the situation).

A preferable theory should:

- (1) provide a solution to one's problem and explain facts explained by earlier and/or alternative theories;

- (ii) be compatible with all known observations;
- (iii) explain where other theories are inadequate or false and itself account for the falsifying evidence in question;
- (iv) give rise to new and essentially unexpected knowledge and/or problems and theoretical difficulties.

What all of this amounts to, of course, is that a new and better theory must have greater "content" than its rivals.

Recognition of this simple fact dispells the common misconception that scientists are seeking to make statements about the world that are "highly probably" (in the sense of the calculus of probability). This cannot be the case, however, for probability increases only with a decrease in content. Tautological statements have a high probability but the empirical value of their content is negligible. Ideally, what the scientist desires is a statement of high content and low probability. Such a statement has the added important advantage of being highly falsifiable, and it is that latter point which guarantees that the statement is "scientific".

As Popper puts it:

The criterion of potential satisfactoriness is . . . testability, or improbability: only a highly testable or improbable theory is worth testing, and is actually (and not merely potentially) satisfactory if it withstands severe tests . . . (Popper, 1963, p. 219)

Of course, the object is to obtain "interesting" and "relevant" truth and hence the conjectures that are to be sub-

jected to an attempted refutation must be "interesting" and "relevant" (to the problem at hand) as well. Bold conjectures, Popper stresses over and over again, are on the whole more productive but obviously knowledge is not likely to be advanced by simply putting forward a hopelessly improbable proposition. And in a slightly different vein, a partially false but relevant theory can be far more stimulating and helpful than a trivial truth, for only the former advances the horizon of man's knowledge, if only in the process of being proved inadequate. In the last analysis, however, the relevancy of a theory will only be established if it holds up under a scrutiny of its logicality and an empirical testing of its predictive powers (though in the soft sciences prediction per se is not really called for).

The first and in a certain respect the most important requirement Popper specifies for a new theory, however, is that it "should proceed from some 'simple, new, and powerful, unifying idea'." (Popper, 1963, p. 241) This is to assure that the theory is as clear-cut as possible and unambiguously exposed to the possibility of refutation. Popper imposed this requirement in order to counter the penchant, which he thought he could detect in many prominent thinkers, to escape the consequences of falsifying evidence by endlessly introducing ad hoc sub-theories to their systems of thought. In Popper's opinion, both Freud and Marx were guilty in this regard and their actions devalued science in general. For as

Magee again effectively summarizes, in Popper's eyes,

a scientific theory is not one which explains everything that can possibly happen: on the contrary, it rules out most of what could possibly happen, and is therefore itself ruled out if what it ruled out happens "Falsifiability is the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science." The central point is that if all possible states of affairs fit in with a theory then no actual state of affairs, no observations, no experimental results, can be claimed as supporting evidence for it. There is no observable difference between its being true and its being false. So it conveys no scientific information. Only if some imaginable observation would refute it is it testable. And only if it is testable is it scientific. (Magee, 1973, p. 43)

To avoid the unscientific fate of Freud's and Marx's ideas, Popper proposes as an article of method that no attempt be made to systematically evade refutation, by introducing ad hoc hypotheses, or ad hoc definitions, or by always refusing to accept the reliability of inconvenient experimental results.

At the level of common sense it is easy to initially consent to the wisdom of this article of method. But if the matter is pressed some very significant practical difficulties arise, as in point of fact these guidelines are extremely vague and, one might say, subjective. A hint of these difficulties is provided in Popper's own writings on the subject for "on the other hand he also says we should not abandon our theories lightly, for this would involve too uncritical an attitude towards tests, and would mean that the theories themselves were not tested as rigourously as they should be." (Magee, 1973, p. 23) How is one to sort out this tension of

resistance to falsification and willing acceptance of falsification?

Bryan Magee believes that Popper frees himself of the charge of being a "naive falsificationist" by simply acknowledging the existence of this tension. But does this actually make Popper a "critical falsificationist" at the level of practical methodology. Popper is critical of Freud, but in point of fact just what aspect of psychoanalytic theory has been undeniably refuted? The hypothesis of the unconscious or the phenomenon of repression? Or the focus on sexual concerns as the key to understanding the psychology of man? In a close inspection of every case would one not have to agree with the conclusion that, using the terminology and approach of Imre Lakatos, while many of the auxiliary concepts and theories of Freud's thought must be discarded, his core concepts, so to speak, still offer an effective programme for research? Detailed aspects of the theory of the Oedipus Complex, for example, may have to be abandoned or radically modified because they are either not testable in their present form or have been falsified by tests performed by others. But the basic insight that the child at this point is stricken with an identity crisis, based on the need to come to grips with the phenomenon of sexual differentiation as embodied in the roles and behaviour of his parents, continues to seem warranted. Is this basic insight to be abandoned when certain theoretical specifics are refuted? How many refutations and

of what type are required before this is done? According to the laws of verisimilitude, which Popper thinks are especially applicable to the social sciences, is it not likely that the truth content of Freud's propositions will match, if not even exceed, their false content? This truth content obviously has to be retained and simply placed within a new theoretical formulation with new additional content, and some one familiar with the vast body of Freud's writings could easily argue that this is precisely what Freud did. He at all times considered his work to be analogous to a living organism, capable and in need of constantly evolving and adapting to new information. And the resistance which Freud did give to criticism of his work could just as easily be interpreted as being, for the most part, in complete accord with Popper's wishes. For the grounds of the criticism he encountered were more often than not as empirically shaky, if not shakier, than the grounds of his own speculations. Moreover, Freud certainly met Popper's demand for "bold" theorizing!

Now having said this it still could be countered that the truth content of Freud's statements when isolated is essentially trivial and, therefore, in the reformulated versions of his theories the new content that is introduced is far more significant. This being the case, then the reformulated theory should no longer be considered "Freudian" in any regard. Whether or not it is true that the remaining truth content of Freud's thought is trivial (which is an issue too complex and

too extended to get into here), raising this question actually points to a problem in Popper's perspective. For does not Popper's demand that theories be focused on some "simple, new, and powerful, unifying idea" come into conflict with his demand that theories be oriented to high content? Would not such a focus run the risk of being "trivial"? The demand for a simple unifying idea is well founded for only then is the way open for the clear refutation of the idea by some empirical test. But as Popper has also convincingly argued, such simple (low content) notions, even if proved true by tests, are not very productive. A slightly false theory of higher content is likely to be far more productive of new knowledge. But as this phrasing suggests, it is far more difficult to conclusively ~~refute~~ a theory of high content--here the laws of verisimilitude very definitely hold, and the margin by which one theory is preferred over another may be extremely thin and tenuous. For Popper states that when forced to choose between two, equally reasonable, competing theories, one should select the theory with higher content or which provides more testable propositions. But this approach is rather circular as neither of these factors guarantees that the theory is more true (because the initial problem of conclusive refutation of high content statements remains, or, in fact has been compounded) but rather, only that it is "potentially" more productive (though possibly quite false). Of course, it can only turn out to be "actually" more productive if it can be conclusively subjected

to tests. But this begs the question as it was the very inability to do so, with high content statements, that caused a problem in the first place.

Given this state of affairs, then, where operationally "potential productivity" is really more important for the advancement of "knowledge" than "actual falsifiability", it is much more difficult to be critical of thinkers like Freud who sought to preserve their theories by constantly modifying and expanding them.

All this calls into question the confidence with which Popper promotes "falsifiability" as the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science, and as the safe-guard of science's superior worth. This confidence is ultimately rooted in his theory of "objective truth" and it is to an examination of this notion that we will now turn our attention.

Popper derives his belief in the idea of absolute or objective truth from the philosopher Alfred Tarski. Tarski's work allows one, Popper asserts, to take 'truth' as a synonym for 'correspondence with the facts', and then to 'intuitively' understand how correct or accurate this common place assumption that there are facts (an objective reality) is. By way of defining the idea of 'correspondence with the facts', Popper offers the following:

. . . consider the following two formulations, each of which states very simply (in a metalanguage) under what conditions a certain assertion (in an object language) corresponds with the facts.

(1) The statement, or the assertion, 'Snow is white' corresponds to the facts if, and only if, snow is indeed white.

(2) The statement, or assertion, 'Grass is red' corresponds to the facts if, and only if, snow is indeed red.

These formulations (in which the word 'indeed' is only inserted for ease, and may be omitted) sound, of course, quite trivial. But it was left to Tarski to discover that, in spite of their apparent triviality, they contained the solution of the problem of explaining correspondence with the facts and, with it, truth. . . . the problem of truth shared the fate of some others whose solutions were not easily seen because they were mistakenly supposed to lie on a very deep level, while actually they were fairly plain and, at first sight, unimpressive.
(Popper, 1963, p. 224)

Here it must be stressed that this solution to the problem of truth is, as Popper readily admits, highly intuitive. But Popper does not seem to be bothered by this fact in any way, though, as will be seen, there would appear to be cause to be perturbed over this state of affairs.

As Popper points out, scientific endeavor must be associated with a theory of objective truth for only then is falsification or testability possible.

Indeed, it is only with respect to this aim, the discovery of truth, that we can say that though we are fallible, we hope to learn from our mistakes. It is only the idea of truth which allows us to speak sensibly of mistakes and of rational criticism, and which makes rational discussion possible--that is to say, critical discussion in search of mistakes with the serious purpose of eliminating as many of these mistakes as we can, in order to get nearer to the truth. Thus the very idea of error--and of fallibility--involves the idea of an objective truth as the standard of which we may fall short. (It is in this sense that the idea of truth is a "regulative idea".)
(Popper, 1963, p. 229)

It is the idea of objective truth that makes falsification, and hence science, a meaningful concept, for though, as Xenophanes said, man possesses no general criterion by which he may recognize truth (i.e., 'verification' is impossible) the 'regulative principle' of truth gives him a rationale for striving to read order into the world and for tentatively discriminating between different theories of the world's order. In other words, the idea of objective truth is a 'semantic' and 'psychological' necessity for man--he cannot think otherwise on a practical level.

To intuit this much is not that difficult. Man has certainly built his cosmos and nomos around the notion of objective truth in some form. But it is equally possible to realize that whatever is held as true at any given moment by a group of people is actually subjective in nature. Popper's own writings have served to reinforce this realization for, as he says, all our knowledge comes from the questioning of one theory from the perspective of another theory and the content of both theories is derived from our background knowledge--all is but a part of the enormously complex and constant feedback process of piecemeal criticism of traditional perspectives. Of course, the body of background knowledge is theoretically growing as it is being infused with new 'raw' observations which have been made possible by observing the world from the perspective of a new theoretical model, and these raw observations give rise to yet newer theoretical models

and ideas, and so on and so on. But at every level the raw data of observation cannot possibly be separated out from subjective inputs, from man's background knowledge. Therefore, as Popper asserts, man can never know the 'objective truth', and the belief in the growth of man's 'true' knowledge is strictly hypothetical.

But if this is the case, then how does the principle of falsification give us any more reason to trust in the findings of science than the principle of verification (which is blocked by the problem of induction)? As has been seen, Popper's first reply is that falsification is logically and methodologically sounder and simpler than verification. But as it has also been demonstrated this reply is inadequate as in point of fact his procedure presents the student of science with some very formidable practical and theoretical difficulties (e.g., the preceding discussion of Freud). Secondly, in raising the whole issue of objective truth and severely critiquing the prevalent subjectivistic theories of truth (see p. 224-227 of Popper, 1963) he seems to be implicitly suggesting that tests run to refute a theory somehow reveal objective truth. But as all observations are 'interpretations' (involve theory) how is this possible? How can one know? Theoretically, disregarding the above methodological difficulties, falsification just allows one to be more 'accurate' (verisimilitude) in one's statements. But to meaningfully speak of 'accuracy' one must posit the ~~actual~~ existence of a certain objective truth

(though this truth, in content, may be evolving hand-in-hand with the world and man) and this can only be a philosophic or metaphysical proposition and not a scientific one. As Popper admits, the idea is intuitive and trivial (tautological as well?) and is therefore not open to falsification. But to say that is only to point out that Popper is inconsistent, and misguided in elevating science per se as a superior route to knowledge (whatever that is!), for the whole point is that falsification itself offers no greater guarantee of nearness to truth than any other intuitively founded principle or proposition.

It is possible to intuit, or actually to even reason, that man has shaped his understanding of reality in complete accordance with the idea that there is an objective truth. But it is not necessary to intuit, or reason, that thus there actually must be such a thing. Or at least an objective truth that would be 'scientifically' useful. For others have 'intuited' just as convincingly that the objectively true nature of the world is 'maya' (i.e., 'illusion--Advaita Vedanta) or 'sunyata' (i.e., 'nothingness'--Madhyamika Buddhism) and the principle of falsification could not work with such an intuitive basis. Science itself would be an exercise of greatly reduced significance as it implicitly rests on a materialistic philosophic conception of the world (at least at every level beyond sub-atomic particle physics).

In the last analysis, then, while Popper may have given

us a more accurate picture of how science, or knowledge gathering in general, actually proceeds, he has been no more successful than the verificationists in establishing the certainty of science or the ultimate superiority of science as a way of knowledge. Science will continue (just as it has in spite of the problem of induction) but it will be on a subjectivistic basis, in all but language and superficial manner (as truth will continue to be a regulative principle), and it will prosper because of subjectivistic reasons like pragmatism and instrumentality. But ultimately, religious and philosophical claims about life, while possibly impractical and technically 'falsifiable' through empirical tests, are just as possibly true as those statements which have been subjected to tests and not 'falsified'. For as Popper has correctly asserted, man has no criterion of the 'truth' (in an absolute and objective sense) and the principle of falsification, even if it were methodologically feasible, must not be allowed to slip into this gradually dawning vacuum in our knowledge and masquerade as a new found criterion.

Now it must be cautioned that in saying this we are not arguing that 'science' does not exist or that what is normally recognized as a 'scientific' approach to a problem is without any particular advantages. Rather we agree with Popper that the heart of practical science is to be found in the laws of verisimilitude (which he has worked out in much greater detail than has been indicated here) and the stipulation that theory

development "should proceed from some 'simple, new, and powerful, unifying idea'" (see p. 50 of this thesis). With both factors being underwritten with a basic faith in the use of empirical tests to gage the dimensions and applicability of one's theoretical insights relative to other theoretical perspectives. Such a view of matters, however, leaves the notion of 'science' very broad and blurs the line of demarcation between science and non-science. This is a state of affairs, thought, that we do not believe can be reasonably avoided.

Clifford Geertz's Position

Reiterating our earlier discussion, as Geertz points out, acknowledging the fact that no fail-safe methods exist for consistently testing the validity of theoretical propositions does not mean that we are left destitute of any methods or means of 'appraisal'.. Most important in this regard are Popper's criteria of verisimilitude which we somewhat crudely summarized in the above discussion (see p. 48). Along these lines Geertz goes further and supplies us with some more specific concerns relevant to the study of a cultural phenomenon like religion.

Summing up his own initial perspective on matters Geertz has commented:

I have never been impressed by the argument that, as complete objectivity is impossible in these matters (as, of course, it is) one might as well let one's

sentiments run loose. As Robert Solow has remarked, that is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer. Nor, on the other hand, have I been impressed with claims that structural linguistics, computer engineering, or some other advance form of thought is going to enable us to understand men without knowing them. (Geertz, 1973, p. 30)

It is this perspective which gives rise to the correlation of theory with 'thick description', and Geertz's first condition for cultural, and hence religious, theory:

it is not its own master. As it is unseverable from the immediacies thick description presents, its freedom to shape itself in terms of its internal logic is rather limited. What generally it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions. (Geertz, 1973, p. 25)

Close adherence to this condition of theory formulation leads to a natural appreciation of the second condition of cultural theory: "it is not, at least in the strict meaning of the term, predictive." The hard sciences are geared to prediction, but the 'science of culture or religion' is better understood as being 'diagnostic', in the clinical sense. That is, conceptualization is directed toward the task of generating interpretations of matters already at hand, not toward projecting outcomes of experimental manipulations or deducing future states of a determined system." Of course, this does not mean that the formulation of cultural or religious theory is an entirely post facto phenomenon for theories must be constructed with an eye to intellectually surviving realities to come. (Geertz, 1973, p. 26)

In other words,

the distinction, relative in any case, that appears in the experimental or observational sciences between "description" and "explanation" appears in an interpretative science as one, even more relative, between "inscription" ("thick description") and "specification" ("diagnosis")--between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social (or religious) life as such. Our double task is, to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the "said" of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior. (Geertz, 1973, p. 27)

In our efforts to isolate what is generic in man's acts, however, Geertz asks us to attempt to resist the attractions of an old and well-entrenched mode of conceptualization: what he calls, "so as to have a stick to beat it with," the "stratigraphic" approach to man's existence.

In this conception, man is a composite of "levels," each superimposed upon those beneath it and underpinning those above it. As one analyses man, one peels off layer after layer, each such layer being complete and irreducible in itself, revealing another, quite different sort of layer underneath. Strip off the motley forms of culture and one finds the structural and functional regularities of social organization. Peel off these in turn and one finds the underlying psychological factors--"basic needs" or what-have-you--that support and make them possible. Peel off psychological factors and one is left with the biological foundations--anatomical, physiological, neurological--of the whole edifice of human life. (Geertz, 1973, p. 37)

The problem with such an approach is that at a pragmatic level it encourages research programs geared to a hunt for universal empirical uniformities amidst the incredible diversity of man's cultural expressions around the world and over time. With an eye to correlating such universals, once found, to established constants in the fields of biology, psychology, and sociology. However, to date all efforts to fulfill such a research program have fallen short of satisfying three crucial demands:

(1) that the universals proposed be substantial ones and not empty categories; (2) that they be specifically grounded in particular biological, psychological, or sociological processes, not just vaguely associated with "underlying realities"; and (3) that they can convincingly be defended as core elements in a definition of humanity in comparison with which the much more numerous cultural particularities are of clearly secondary importance. (Geertz, 1973, p. 39)

Of course, at an even more fundamental level, as Geertz does not fail to point out, it is questionable whether the resultant "lowest-common-denominator" view of humanity generated by such an approach is desirable under any circumstances. As Geertz comments (1973, p. 44):

the notion that unless a cultural phenomenon is empirically universal it cannot reflect anything about the nature of man is about as logical as the notion that because sickle-cell anemia is, fortunately, not universal, it cannot tell us anything about human genetic processes.

In the place of the stratigraphic approach, Geertz

urges the adoption of a 'synthetic' conception of the relations between the various aspects of human existence: "one in which biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors can be treated as variables within unitary systems of analysis." Such an orientation, he points out, represents a more accurate emulation of the procedure followed in the natural sciences as it entails looking "for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not substantive identities among similar ones." But as those with a little background in the area will recognize it also amounts to an endorsement of the first step that must be taken in the direction of developing a systems theory approach to socio-cultural concerns; an approach which we will argue can be operationalized in the form of a unitary system of analysis based on a systems theory conception of identities.

Geertz cautions, however, that in the realm of the 'soft' sciences matters will not be easily resolved as there can be no direct reference to a common body of ideas like that provided by mathematics for the 'hard' sciences. As he observes:

The establishment of a common language in the social sciences is not a matter of mere coordination of terminologies or, worse yet, of coining artificial new ones: nor is it a matter of imposing a single set of categories upon the area as a whole. It is a matter of integrating different types of theories and concepts in such a way that one can formulate meaningful propositions embodying findings now sequestered in separate fields of study.
(Geertz, 1973, p. 44)

Geertz is obviously placing his finger on a fine distinction here but it is a very real one and will have to be kept closely in mind during the following assessment of Mol's work.

It should be noted as well that this discussion brings out a paradox of theory development that will become increasingly more prominent in the course of this study. Namely, the paradoxical fact that the advancement of knowledge, even in the fields of cultural and religious studies, necessarily depends on a certain vital measure of, what might be called, 'reductionism'--the reduction inherent to abstract thought itself. Systematic and theoretical thought necessarily entails successive levels of conceptual symbols that are in a pyramidal hierarchy of conceptual levels, rising above the plane of perceptual experiences, with each level successively abstracting and symbolically representing a whole class of characteristics from the levels below it. Therefore, the whole task of theorizing and yet keeping finely attuned to the real substance of one's subject matter, in all its existential ambiguity, represents an extremely formidable challenge. But a well developed respect for the severity of the difficulties involved safeguards against the ever-prevalent tendency for theories to become self-perpetuating entities feeding on the consumptive extension of only their own intrinsic logic.

It is Geertz's own very substantial appreciation of

this situation that has lead him to conceive of the functioning of the 'soft' sciences in a very Popperian manner. As is most distinctly revealed by three observations made by him in conclusion to his discussion of 'thick description' and its theoretical consequences.

In the first place, Geertz notes the peculiar way in which knowledge in the interpretative sciences grows: in spurts.

Rather than following a rising curve of cumulative findings, cultural analysis breaks up into a disconnected yet coherent sequence of bolder and bolder sorties. Studies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things. Every serious cultural analysis starts from a sheer beginning and ends where it manages to get before exhausting its intellectual impulse. (Geertz, 1973, p. 25)

Even more importantly, however, Geertz recognizes that all of the limitations which a social scientist might impute to his subject matter, in order to give his investigations structure, are essentially arbitrary in nature. For, as he asserts, by virtue of the complexity of its subject matter,

cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is.

Thus, accordingly, he finally observes that all assertions made by practitioners of the 'soft' sciences must be understood as being "essentially contestable". And progress in

these fields of endeavor is as likely to be marked by "a refinement of debate" as "a perfection of consensus."

(Geertz, 1973, p. 29)

In light of these observations, then, sociologists are quite justified in adopting what Robertson termed a more 'religious' attitude to religion as a topic of academic study. At least in as much as this entails the abandonment of the verificationist model of science. But this does not free their work from being logically 'appraised' from the perspective of the laws of verisimilitude and such theoretical insights as Geertz's distinction between stratigraphic and synthetic approaches to cultural and religious phenomena. Rather, as stated above, the "essentially contestable" nature of theoretical statements about religion actually increases the need for developing and harkening to such subtle critical standards.

Definitions of Religion and Religious Theory

At a practical level, in the field of religious studies, the principle means by which scholars have demonstrated at least an intuitive awareness of this state of affairs is in their careful formulation of definitions of religion. For whatever reasons, differences in methods have for the most part become conveniently encapsulated in quite explicitly set forth differences in definitions of the nature of religious phenomena. In most cases the scholars in question

maintain no illusions about the complete 'satisfactoriness' of their definitions, in and of themselves. But there would be a consensus of agreement with Geertz when he says that such definitions "provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought, such that an extended unpacking of them can be an effective way of developing and controlling a novel line of inquiry." (Geertz, 1973, p. 90)

A quick survey of the classical and contemporary literature on religion will reveal that there have been as many, widely divergent, definitions of religion proffered as there have been authors willing to pen them. Nevertheless, as things stand, order can actually be introduced into this menagerie with relative ease as much can be revealed (for our purposes) with the application of but two sets of distinctions. The first distinction is one commonly employed by logicians, who differentiate between two broad types of definitions: 'nominal' definitions and 'real' definitions. The second distinction, more common to the field of sociology than elsewhere, is that between 'substantive' definitions and 'functional' definitions. Through the cross-correlation of a definition of religion in terms of these distinctions it is possible to fairly completely stipulate the methodological underpinnings of the work based on the definition. But before it is possible to see that such is the case, it is necessary to have a firm grasp of the independent implications of each set of distinctions for the field of religious studies.

In developing a sense of the significance of the first distinction the influence of Robert D. Baird's work on category formation in the history of religions has been instrumental. Following Baird in his discussions, nominal definitions are those in which a certain word is stipulated to mean a certain thing, and the exact meaning of this word is defined in terms of some expression whose meaning is readily apparent or unambiguous. Whereas a real definition is a statement made about something that is believed to be quite simply true. In other words, while a nominal definition involves the arbitrary assignment of meaning to certain linguistic symbols, a real definition involves naively believing that there is a natural and straightforward connection between 'things and events' in the external world and 'verbal concepts'.

The employment of a real definition actually involves, then, ignoring the problem of definition creation altogether. As a result, studies based on the real definitional approach suffer almost universally from the two closely interrelated failings of 'reification' and what might be called 'intuition-al-essentialism'. That is to say, in the case of reification, they demonstrate a marked tendency to take hypothetical constructs--like culture, social structure, or religion--and treat them as if they substantially existed, or as if they were singular concrete material objects. Or, as is almost the same thing, they proceed on the assumption that a word like 'religion' corresponds to something out there--that has ini-

vocal ontological status--and the 'essential nature' of this thing can be apprehended by sifting through its myriad concrete manifestations. A fundamental phenomenological unity is posited a priori which renders the meaning of the word ultimately unambiguous and open to intuitive comprehension with sufficient exposure to representative phenomena. Accordingly, real definitions are 'truth' assertions (i.e., they can be judged to be either true or false) and they presumably come at the end of studies rather than at the beginning, where definitions are usually found. Regretably, however, such definitions are scientifically useless as the notion of 'essential nature' is always vague and almost invariably nonempirical.

But even more tellingly, the real definitional approach is subject to a much simpler and more obvious shortcoming. Melford E. Spiro captures the gist of this shortcoming in the following discussion of Durkheim's susceptibility on the same point:

. . . . Durkheim warns that in defining religion we must be careful not to proceed from our "prejudices, passions, or habits" (The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, p. 24). Rather, ". . . it is from the reality itself that we are going to define" (ibid.). Since any scientist--or, for that matter, any reasonable man--prefers 'reality' to 'prejudice', we happily follow his lead and, together with him, ". . . set ourselves before this reality" (ibid.). But since, Durkheim tells us, "religion cannot be defined except by the characteristics which are found wherever religion itself is found", we must ". . . consider the various religions in their concrete reality, and attempt to disengage that which they have in common" (ibid.). Now, the very statement of this strategy raises a very obvious question.

Unless we already know by definition, what religion is, how can we know which 'concrete reality' we are to 'consider'? Only if religion has already been defined can we perform either this initial operation or the subsequent one of disengaging those elements which are shared by all religions. (Spiro, 1964, p. 90-91)

In skirting the procedure of defining one's subject matter in advance a student of religion like Mircea Eliade claims to be freeing himself from any possible distorting effects of working with a priori concepts. But in point of fact the adoption of such a modus operandi simply serves to open the door for the much more dangerous intrusion of various implicit and unconscious a priori principles.

In the light of this it is reasonable to conclude that the field of religious studies is best served by studies that are founded on nominal definitions of religion. But to clarify the actual use made of the nominal definitional approach Baird speaks of two sub-types of nominal definitions: lexical and functional. As the latter term could prove confusing in the context of our further discussions, the phrase 'semi-arbitrary' will be substituted for the word 'functional' (this phrase being chosen for reasons which are explained below). A lexical definition involves identifying the meaning of some word and thing by arbitrarily accepting a meaning proposed and used by some actual person in the past as being authoritative. The meaning is simply stipulated in accordance with one prominent usage. Thus lexical definitions like real definitions can be judged to be either true or false in as much as they are

either accurate or inaccurate reflections of how the word has been used by a certain person or persons. Obviously, such a definitional approach could have but a limited utility for the advancement of our understanding of religion. Therefore, it is the functional or semi-arbitrary definition of religion that is of primary interest, and concerning these Baird says the following:

Usually it is stated that stipulative definitions are purely arbitrary. I have chosen the word functional instead of stipulative in order to indicate that the historian of religions is not interested in purely formal analysis, but in after definitions that are usable. Hence they are semi-arbitrary. This does not mean that they are determined by an examination of data or that their legitimacy is to be tested by available data. The functional definition is arbitrary in that there is no inherent reason why any word cannot be used for any thing. Logically one could define 'religion' as equivalent to the three angles of a triangle, but that would not get us very far. Hence, while in principle functional definitions are free or arbitrary and are not derived as a result of an examination of data, they are not formulated in ignorance of the data. Only if one is familiar with the data will he have any insight into meaningful questions that might be asked of them. Hence functional definitions are semi-arbitrary in that they are "not proved" by data documentation, but are thereby judged as to their 'applicability' and 'usefulness'. (Baird, 1971, p. 6-7)

All this means that a semi-arbitrary nominal definition of religion can never technically be true or false. But it can be 'appraised' as being "clumsy or elegant, appropriate or inappropriate, effective or worthless". (Baird, 1971, p. 7)

Or in other words, as Baird goes on to say, one cannot meaningfully speak of the 'precision' of a semi-arbitrary nominal definition as one can about the precision with which

the velocity of light is measured.

A functional definition makes a word unambiguous by stipulating that for a given work it means a single thing. The precision of the functional definition is dependent on the clarity of our language and not on the data. Hence one cannot say a certain functional definition of 'religion' or 'magic' lacks precision because of what it includes or excludes, though one might judge it because it is not useful. (Baird, 1971, p. 8)

It will be noted, though, that the criterion of usefulness still allows for students of religion being 'religious about religion' in the manner suggested by Robertson. But a vital measure of control has been introduced for in directly or indirectly stating why a certain definition of religion is being used (how it is presumably more useful than others) a scholar reveals much about the particulars of his metaphysical and ideological commitments.

An examination of the second order of distinctions around which definitions of religion have polarized--substantive or functional--reveals that there are additional assurances that a scholar's personal and intellectual presuppositions will be relatively apparent from the beginning.

In the simplest of terms, substantive definitions attempt to specify what religion 'is', that is, they isolate upon a crucial element of content. Functional definitions delineate what religion supposedly 'does', that is, what its consequences are for its social-structural context. The definition of religion employed by Peter Berger in his influen-

tial book The Sacred Canopy represents a classic example of the substantive type: "Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established." (Berger, 1967, p. 25) While that of his colleague Thomas Luckmann, in The Invisible Religion, probably represents the most radical formulation of the functional type: "It is in keeping with an elementary sense of the concept of religion to call the transcendence of biological nature by the human organism a religious phenomenon." (Luckmann, 1967, p. 49)

Two other examples of substantive definitions of religion are respectively provided by Ninian Smart and Melford E. Spiro:

A religion, or the religion of a group, is a set of institutionalized rituals identified with a tradition and expressing and/or evoking sacral sentiments directed at a divine or trans-divine focus seen in the context of the human phenomenological environment and at least partially described by myths or by myths and doctrines. (Smart, 1973, p. 15)

... I shall define religion as 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings.'
(Spiro, 1964, p. 96)

A further widely respected example of the functional perspective is provided by Clifford Geertz:

... a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz, 1973, p. 90)

The inadequacies of these alternative definitional types can be effectively summed up by saying that while functional approaches tend to suffer from being too general and all-inclusive, substantive approaches tend to be too arbitrary and restrictive. More specifically, functional definitions do not allow for the delineation of 'functional alternatives' to religion. As Berger protests, to include such things as modern science under the rubric of religion, as these definitions allow, is to obscure matters more than to enlighten them. For some form of differentiation of these two systems of beliefs and practices is still required and, the process of developing the necessary 'specifying factor' simply involves one in posing "the same definitional problem all over again." (Berger, 1967, p. 177)

The substantive approach is, however, subject to a similar defect. Such definitions are, like Berger's, almost always associated with the crucial differentia of 'the sacred'. The sacred being understood here in the same sense as it was used in Rudolf Otto's classic study, The Idea of the Holy (1917), and as it has been used in Religionswissenschaft ever since. In other words, quoting Berger himself, "by sacred is meant . . . a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience." (Berger, 1967, p. 25) The sacred is the centre around which man 'orders' his world and overcomes the terror of anomy. The antithesis of the sacred

is the profane, the realm of everyday life, and at a deeper level: chaos. As Berger also notes, this quality of being sacred "may be attributed to natural or artificial objects, to animals, or to men, or to the objectifications of human culture." (Berger, 1967, p.) This latter fact creates a definitional problem, however, for it is obvious then that the distinguishing trait of religion does not lie in any intrinsic aspect of the entities which are sacralized but rather in an attitude that is extended to these ideas, objects and acts. Accordingly, why one object has become sacred for any social group is going to be almost inextricably wrapped up with concrete and particularistic details of the socio-historical context in which the religious act has transpired. When removed from this context 'the sacred', it can be argued, becomes a rather meaningless and empty category. Spiro expresses himself well on this point:

What . . . does . . . sacred . . . really mean? How useful is it, not in religious or poetic, but in scientific discourse? It is much too vague to be taken as a primitive term in a definitional chain, and it is useless to define it by equally vague terms such as 'holy' or 'set apart'. But if such . . . definitions are unsatisfactory when the phenomenal referent of the definiendum is universally acknowledged, they are virtually useless when, as in this case, it is the phenomenal referent which is precisely at issue. If there is no agreement about what it is that is being defined, how can we agree on its central nature? (Spiro, 1964, p. 89)

As Spiro's final comment indicates, he looks on substantive definitions of religion built on the notion of the sacred as

further instances of the 'intuitional-essentialism' so characteristic of the naive 'real' definitional approach to religious studies.

As with functional definitions, then, one must introduce a 'specifying factor', namely, the society or culture under study, into all uses of the substantive approach in order to render the definition operational. On the theoretical level, dealing with religion in its generality, this necessity obviously impairs the usefulness of the substantive approach.

If the need to introduce this specifying factor is ignored, then there is a high probability that the definition will entail an undesirable cultural bias whereby one society's understanding of the sacred is artificially inflated into a universal category and unjustifiably superimposed on other cultures. The risk of this occurring is particularly conspicuous in the case of the study of primitive religions.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that in primitive societies there is an all-encompassing dichotomization of existence into the sacred and the profane. But the line separating the two realms is extremely fine and porous--the sacred and the profane interpenetrate to a remarkable degree. Thus, if religion is defined in terms of a sacredness which has its predicates drawn from a more 'developed' culture and religious life (as, it could be argued, must be done to render the category clear and substantial), it is quite probable that the unique dynamism of primitive religious life will be missed.

Moreover, notions like 'transcendence' or 'the supernatural' might be imposed which imply a rigid differentiation of the constituents of reality, a dualism, which in fact does not exist in the primitive worldview.

In broader terms, the need to further specify the content of the category of the sacred by, for example, operationally associating it with the presence of the notion of a transcendent world which exists over and against this world, raises problems for the attempt to understand the role of religion in man's affairs at either end of an evolutionary schemata. It restricts attention from being paid to very basic processes of 'nomos' creation (i.e., the establishment of a meaningful world order) which in their own right might be considered 'religious' in some definable sense. (Berger's inadequate handling of the process of symbolization is a case in point.) Correspondingly, it might prevent one from recognizing and adequately appreciating nascent sources of religion present in the contemporary world which belie the 'reality' of secularization. (Berger's analysis of secularization in The Sacred Canopy again being a case in point.)

In general, the point being made is that a substantive definitional approach to religion entails fixing on an adjective in order to more or less arbitrarily divide the continuum which actually holds between the sacred and the profane. As might have been recognized, then, a substantive definition of religion built on the idea of the sacred also represents an instance

of what has been identified above as a semi-arbitrary, nominal definition. (Berger himself acknowledges as much in his closing comment to the first appendix to The Sacred Canopy: "In the long run, I suppose, definitions are matters of taste and thus fall under the maxim de gustibus.") As will be remembered, such definitions, technically, cannot be judged to be either false or inaccurate simply on the basis of the data they include or exclude. However, they can be judged to be insufficiently useful, or clumsy and ambiguous.

With definitions like Berger's and Smart's, Spiro has thought this to be the case, and he therefore offers an alternative semi-arbitrary, nominal and substantive definition of religion whose differentia is the concept of "superhuman beings." There is no need to present Spiro's arguments for this proposal here, but it can be noted that while his definition avoids many of the pitfalls of Berger's it would still prove to be too restrictive for the tastes of some students of religion. (The case of Theravadin Buddhism presents obvious difficulties for such a position. Spiro rather ingeniously attempts to grapple with this apparent exception to his definition. But in our opinion he is ultimately unsuccessful as his arguments rely on an unjustifiable elevation of a feature of practice, treatment of the arhats, over the stipulations of doctrine and scripture.)

In the light of these observations we think that on the balance studies founded on nominal-functional definitions

of religion (like Mol's) provide a far more favourable forum for the growth, in scope and sophistication, of religious theorizing. But in order to justify this claim we must pause to consider yet another, higher order, distinction which is relevant to a proper understanding of the virtues and difficulties of Mol's specific nominal-functional approach to religious theorizing.

As will be remembered, in the Introduction it was stated that Mol's judgement and insight were not always consistent (see p.11). In most of the instances where this would seem to be the case, the cause lies in his confusion of 'methodology' and 'theory', formal analytic conceptualization and historical analysis and interpretation (I acknowledge T.E. Long's review for this phrasing), and/or the sociology of religion proper and his own personal and religious preferences. To some extent these sets of distinctions are redundant or, at any rate, there is a marked overlap in their meanings and applications. Accordingly, in assessing Professor Mol's work it will not always be easy to single out the precise nature and limits of the confusions which might be present at any one point in his arguments. In a broader sense, however, the suggestion of these dichotomies serves to orient one to the pervasive character of the theoretical questions to be addressed in attempting to develop Mol's fecund ideas. In general, the thrust of our argument will be that a high level or first order theoretical construct like Mol's theory should

seek to maximize the first component of each of these dichotomies and minimize the involvement of the second. In so doing Mol would be reinforcing the nominal-functional character of his approach to religious theory and thereby heightening its 'scientific' character.

'Methodology' Versus 'Theory'

To give some idea of what is meant by these distinctions and the role they play in our analysis let us consider the first one. This dichotomy is the most fundamental and important one for this thesis. And as will become apparent, the other two sets of distinctions essentially represent paraphrases of the principle involved in the contract which is formulated between 'methodology' and 'theory'. In postulating such a distinction Robert D. Baird's functional definitions of the basic categories of analysis in religious studies has again proved most helpful. But as the quotation marks around our two terms of reference indicate, here his understanding of the terms in question has been extended and somewhat modified to suit our own needs.

Baird gives the following definitions for method, methodology, and theory:

... 'method' in the study of religions is the procedure or procedures used to acquire, organize, and analyse materials which are considered religious.

'Methodology' does not refer to the procedure employed, but to an analysis of the assumptions and logical limitations of the method. Hence, methodology is the logic of method.

'Theory of religion' refers not to an analysis of the method or procedure being used, but to an analysis of 'the thing' that is found through the use of a given method and is defined to be religion. Theory of religion is not to be confused with methodology. The former presupposes the latter. It is only after we have clarified our terms through the use of functional definitions and have determined the questions that we are interested in asking of our data that we are in a position to analyse the "thing." (Baird, 1975, p. 112-113)

It is theory that provides or offers an 'explanation' of something in the sense that it attempts to answer the question of 'why' there is rather than is not such a thing at all. Further more, he states, as it is theory that deals with the thing itself, "theories of religion are inevitably normative, for they are concerned with offering explanations of a dimension of reality." (Baird, 1975, p. 113)

These latter two specifications are extremely important as they point to the possibility of a more specific understanding of methodology and to the existence of a crucial but fine line of operational differentiation between this broadened conception of methodology and theory proper. This differentiation is pivotal to the argument of this essay and it hinges on recognizing that a 'methodology' can exist, and be usefully employed to certain ends, independent of any attendant 'theory' per se. Consider, for instance, the following observation made by Baird:

Theory always deals with the thing while methodology may not. One may, for example, set out a reasoned method on the basis of a series of functional definitions so that the method being analysed is heuristic in intent. This means that it is only dealing with relationships . . . This can be done on the descriptive level, may have no interest in explaining 'why' there is religion, and may settle for an analysis of 'how' religion appears or functions. Since it is only interested in studying the multitudinous forms of religion in terms of the functional definition given, it does not involve one in a theory of religion. To theorize about religion would be a further step in which one then proposes to 'explain why' persons have ultimate concerns at all . . . One may take this further step, but it is hardly inevitable. (Baird, 1975, p. 113)

In practice the differentiation Baird is positing may not be wholly viable or realistic in as much as it is frequently necessary to imply a great deal about the 'why' of something while only seeking to say something meaningful about the 'how' of its existence. But here the distinction is being taken-up as a means for getting hold of the idea that any systematic analysis of religion in general should be directed to the goal of minimizing its own normative thrust. In other words, it should be concerned with understanding itself, and presenting itself, as first and foremostly, a 'methodology'--a way of seeing religion, and not a flat statement of religion's 'real' or 'proper' nature. That is, one's whole approach should be understood as being nominal (semi-arbitrary) and functional in character. For by stressing the heuristic nature of the undertaking a more realistic (because of the interpretative character of human knowledge) and constructive attitude can be brought with . . . to the . . . on and

criticism of systematic analyses of religious phenomena.

And in the light of the peculiar and severe nature of the difficulties facing the academic study of religion there is an urgent need to maintain just such a realistic and constructive perspective.

Briefly, then, in the context of this study 'method' will be functionally defined as Baird understands it--the procedure or procedures used to acquire, organize, and analyse one's materials. By way of clarification, more concretely, in this study we have more or less posited that in the field of religious studies there is still a quite fervent competition between at least two methods: the 'scientific' approach (in both a pre-Popperian and a post-Popperian form) on the one hand, and what we have called the 'intuitional-essentialist' or 'personalist' approach on the other.

The usage of the term 'methodology' in this study necessitates keeping in mind both a narrow and a broad conception of the word. The broad conception can be directly related to Baird's initial definition whereby methodology is simply the logic of method. Accordingly, when phrases like "methodological difficulties" are encountered it can be understood that the reference is to problems in the detailed formulation of one method, or in the selection and application of an appropriate method for the study of a particular subject. But in speaking of the need to logically adhere to or extend the possibilities of one's 'methodology' it should be under-

stood that the narrow conception is being brought into the discussion. That is, the concern is with staying true to the particulars and/or potential of one's specific 'way of seeing' matters within the bounds established by one's pre-determined method. Or it is a question of staying true to the idea that one's analysis of a subject is a 'methodology'--but one, hopefully useful, way of seeing that data--and not a 'theory'.

The term theory will, of course be used in a general way to simply indicate that one is dealing with some kind of abstract and systematic statement on a given state of affairs. But it will also be used in a more specific way to indicate a type of theoretical discussion which entails serious and fundamental commitment to certain metaphysical and ideological perspectives; commitments that predetermine the configuration of the subject matter, and hence the results of one's analysis, in a very specific way.

The more general and common usage of the term theory can be seen, then, as encompassing the more specifically defined understandings of both 'methodology' and 'theory'. In other words, it is a polarity within theory itself that is being, admittedly somewhat clumsily, postulated. At all times the context, however, should provide an adequate indication of the usage intended.

Moreover, if one harkens back to the discussion of definitions of religion, it can be seen that there is a direct

parallel between the distinctions used to draw out the implications of the various definitional positions adopted by scholars and the distinction being drawn here between 'methodologies' and 'theories'. Studies based on real-substantive definitions, or excessively vague nominal-substantive definitions, or excessively vague nominal-substantive definitions (which tend to collapse into an 'intuitional-essentialist' position), are almost invariably normative 'theories'. Whereas studies based on nominal-functional definitions are far more apt to produce desirable 'methodologies', as such an approach compels a greater awareness of the abstracting nature of the whole undertaking from the beginning. Therefore, as suggested above, the future of the theoretical understanding of religion in general would seem to lie with the further development of the nominal-functional (i.e., 'methodological') perspective. Only within the confines of this inclusive and of necessity methodologically self-conscious approach is the opportunity provided for the development of truly new and flexible analytical categories; categories which are specifically attuned to the unique features of the subject matter and yet still, in the broad (post-Popperian) sense, scientific.

In their book on Culture Theory, Kaplan and Manners draw a similar distinction using the terms "methodologies", "theoretical orientations", and "theories". Translated into our terms of reference, methodologies equal Baird's initial definition (the broad meaning of methodology), theoretical

orientations roughly equal our more specific conception of 'methodologies', and theories are the same thing for both perspectives with one minor but crucial qualification. Kaplan and Manners explain the reasoning behind the distinctions they have drawn as follows:

In the social sciences, what are often referred to as methodologies may be concerned with 'more' than the strictly formal procedures of inquiry. They may serve to orient the social scientist toward the substantive issues which concern him, and are therefore likely to have definite theoretical implications. Purely formal methodologies--as these are defined by philosophers of science--do not have such implications. It is because we wish to distinguish the purely formal meaning of 'methodology' from the way in which it is frequently used by social scientists that we call the latter a 'theoretical orientation'. (Kaplan and Manners, 1972, p. 33)

Their reasoning on this matter is thus reflective of our own.

Nevertheless, for two reasons we have decided not to utilize their preformulated distinctions. In the first place, a problem is presented by the broad scope of the four theoretical orientations they specify: evolutionism, functionalism, history, and cultural ecology. The breadth and interrelatedness of these approaches is such that Kaplan and Manners find themselves compelled to introduce, in a somewhat ad hoc manner, a further specification in the form of the notion of "types of formal analysis", under which they subsume such things as structuralism. For our purposes it is not necessary or desirable to indulge in this further measure of refinement. After all the divisions are essentially arbitrary and on close

inspection it can be seen that in practice the different theoretical levels all blur into one another--as Kaplan and Manners noted with regard to the social scientific use of the concept of methodologies. The important thing from our perspective is the more fundamental difference between all 'methodologies', whether they are called theoretical orientations or types of formal analysis, and 'theories' proper. Which brings us to the second reason why Kaplan's and Manner's terms will not simply be borrowed: they do not point to the normative aspect of all 'theories'. Our concern is with stressing the relative value neutrality of 'methodologies' as compared with 'theories'. If only because we wish to argue that Mol's analytical model can be accepted without necessarily accepting his substantive conclusions on various controversial subjects.

Finally, it should be noted that the statements that have been made on the difference of a 'methodology' from a 'theory' have not been made without due regard for the fact that no theoretical analysis can be completely free of certain metaphysical and ideological assumptions and ramifications. As has been amply indicated, it is appreciated that all inquiries into the nature of our world must, of necessity, begin by accepting a certain amount of problematic knowledge as being essentially unproblematic if there is to be a base from which to initiate one's questioning. However, what we understand here as a 'methodology' is a theoretical statement that finds

its justification, so to speak, in this very fact and at no time pretends to supersede the limitations imposed by this circumstance.

The theory of religion presented in Identity and the Sacred represents an advance in the social scientific understanding of religion precisely in the degree to which it may be interpreted and applied as a 'methodology'--a way, one way, of seeing religious phenomena that is particularly useful. This is how Mol himself has at times professed that he sees his work. But there is not sufficient reason to think that he fully grasps the implications and significance of such a claim. For on too many occasions, in and out of print, he has lost track of this insight and confused statements about the way something can be seen with statements about what it is actually possible to see. In doing this he implicitly aligns his theory with various metaphysical and ideological orientations which often moves others to criticize and/or reject the whole of his thought on the basis of the misapprehension that these specific orientations are intrinsic to his analytical framework. This latter point is extremely important, of course, for as has been suggested, we will be arguing that Mol's analysis can be stripped of these distortions and render a more appealing 'methodology'.

The Methodological Context of Identity Theory--Summary

By way of summary, then, it can be seen that the student of religion must concern himself with a number of fundamental methodological difficulties growing out of the need to avoid the hazards of the equally pernicious extremes of theological particularism and social-scientific reductionism. In balancing his judgements between these extremes he remains most true to the complexity of his subject matter. But he does so at the price of methodological clarity. Or at least superficially such appears to be the case.

In point of fact, however, the unique personal and social character of religion as a subject of social-scientific study has actually served to accelerate our awareness of the need for greater sophistication in the pursuit of the social-scientific enterprise in general. The sense of personal and social jeopardy generated for many students of religion by a heightened awareness of the spread and effects of secularization has given birth to a more 'religious attitude to religion' within the academic community of its professional scrutinizers. For some this has meant a retreat from any significant claim to the 'scientific' character of their discipline, with the proviso that the value of science itself is denigrated. The world is once again divided, in effect, into two realms of knowledge, the scientific and the religious or theological, and each is considered to be ultimately complete unto itself--

free from interference from the alternate realm. But for those who have really accepted the challenge of religious theorizing there can be no peace found in such an artificial truce. The opposition of religious and scientific patterns of thought has been more daringly accepted by these students of religion as grounds for, what we have called, a 'new realism' in religious studies. Such a realism recognizes that the humane character of knowledge can only be protected by actually increasing our preoccupation with methodological questions for the guarantor of the future knowledge is an ever more thorough comprehension of the essential arbitrariness and relativity of all of our present knowledge--its inescapable reliance on explicit and implicit systems of meaning. It is the careful statement of parameters that creates a 'fact' which may be tentatively used (accepted as being essentially unproblematic) to generate others.

To the extent that students of religion are cognizant of this state of affairs, they have rediscovered for themselves the wisdom contained in some observations passed by Max Weber over fifty years ago. For much of what has been discussed above boils down to an elaborate reiteration of two of the basic tenets of Weber's methodological position.

In the first place, recognition of the reliance of the soft sciences on the criterion of 'usefulness' does not undermine the credibility of such sciences. Long ago Weber demonstrated that "the selection and identification of the concerns

of social science is necessarily subjective--i.e., involves the selection of problems which are of interest because they have some definite cultural significance." (Giddens, p. 141) This does not necessarily mean, though, that the results of social scientific studies are 'merely' subjective. For from this vantage point all forms of science are at heart subjective. Rather, to repeat ourselves, it must be understood that it is the careful application of a defined method (i.e., for us, a 'methodology' would be more accurate) that produces an 'objective' result from a 'subjectively' motivated and defined line of inquiry. The terminology subjective/objective is strictly relative.

In the terminology of the philosophy of science, to believe that science is subjective (in a pejorative sense) because it is subjectively motivated, and to some extent subjectively guided, is to confuse the 'context of discovery' and the 'context of justification'. As Kaplan and Manners succinctly point out:

It is a mistake to try to locate objectivity in the minds and attitudes of individual anthropologists. Rather, as Karl Popper has noted, objectivity should be sought in the institutions and critical traditions of a discipline. It is only through the give and take of open criticism and the ongoing interplay of many different kinds of biases that anything approaching objectivity will emerge. In other words, the essential objectivity of a discipline is promoted cumulatively over time.
(Kaplan and Manners, 1972, p. 25-26)

Secondly, the developments discussed under the heading of a new methodological orientation in religious studies reflect a renewed appreciation of the value of Weber's separation of statements of fact and value. Weber warned social scientists that their interest in "formulating 'objective' statements about human social and cultural reality" must be "accompanied by a clear understanding of the significance of the essential logical discontinuity between factual or analytical statements, on the one hand, and normative propositions concerning not what 'is', but what 'ought to be', on the other." (Giddens, 1971, p. 134) In our terminology, it is 'theories', as opposed to 'methodologies', which are marked by a confusion of fact and value statements.

All in all, in the light of what we have learned, a 'better' theory of religion should at least broadly conform to a number of requirements. While bracketing the question of the 'truth' of religious phenomena, and approaching them instead from within a 'naturalistic' framework, a 'better' theory of religion should somehow take into account the 'transcendent' and 'sui generis' character of religious realities for religious practitioners. Or, to put matters more bluntly, while not necessarily accepting the professed views of the religious, the scholar of religion should avoid reductive explanations of religion which make the experience of the independent and transcendent character of religious phenomena appear completely spurious. This much should be done if only out of humble recog-

dition of the essentially 'interpretative' nature of even his own 'scientific' view of the world. Hand in hand with this latter fact, a 'better' theory of religion should be founded on the recognition that there are no fail-safe ways to verify or falsify theoretical claims. But there are very reasonable means available for maintaining a preference for one theoretical perspective over another, namely, the laws of verisimilitude coupled with the assumption that simplicity of formulation (provided the laws of verisimilitude are met) enhances utility.

In the realm of religious studies this orientation is most effectively guaranteed by the adoption of a 'nominal-functional' and 'synthetic' (as opposed to 'stratigraphic') approach. Or, in other words, in developing what we have chosen to call a 'methodology' (as opposed to a 'theory') for the study of religion. Out of 'methodologies' competitive 'theories' will emerge, but initially our time is better spent fabricating competitive 'methodologies' whose relative merits can be more pragmatically debated. The line of distinction involved is fine but far from inconsequential.

CHAPTER THREE
IDENTITY AND THE SACRED
- THE IDENTITY THEORY OF RELIGION

The first thing the reader encounters upon having taken up Identity and the Sacred is evidence of Professor Mol's essential sympathy with the new methodological orientation discussed in the previous chapter. Most generally, Mol immediately identifies himself with the movement to revamp and rejuvenate the analytical foundations of the study of religion.

This study . . . argues that existing categorizations in the sociology of religion are either inconsistent (the underlying assumptions of some of these classifications do not accord with others) or irrelevant for a systematic, comprehensive, sociological approach to religious phenomena.
(Mol, 1976, p. ix)

More specifically, his following comments closely reflect the views of Clifford Geertz. Cautioning his readers that the importance of conceptual schemata in general should not be "overestimated", he says that "classifications should never be more than scaffolds for generalizations." It should always be born in mind that even the most conscientiously designed strategies cannot cancel out the inevitable "partiality, or even prejudice of one's conceptual scaffolding." (Mol, 1976, p. ix, x) For as he comments elsewhere, "existence is woven of one cloth" (Mol, 1978, p. 73) and transcends the analytic

tools of scholarship. But the consequences of this state of affairs can be minimized through the realistic acceptance of the "relativization of one's assumptions" and a greater "awareness of the arbitrariness of one's methodological departures." If such precautions are taken then the "dangerous pitfall" of sociological reductionism can be avoided, by which Mol rather uniquely means "the absolutization of a sociological methodology or the sacralization of a sociological perspective." (Mol, 1976, p. x) Mol himself claims to have conscientiously striven to avoid this trap.

In doing so he thinks that he has "taken theological statements and religious expressions with more than usual seriousness." A situation which leads him to believe that his book "is somewhat more acceptable to the religiously orthodox than similar academic ventures" (1976, p. x). In other words, Mol believes that his theory allows one to continue to be 'religious about religion' without sacrificing the measure of scholarly objectivity called for in the formulation of 'useful' generalizations on the nature and functioning of religion. And after a manner it can be said that in his theory he makes a strong effort to keep in touch with and account for the transcendent and sui generis character of religious phenomena as a central aspect of man's religious life. But, in the last analysis, to the religious believer his analysis of religion, being naturalistic, is still incomplete and crucially reductive to a degree that he does not seem to be fully willing to admit.

And in his conscious attempt to appease the irritation of the religious Mol appears to have fallen prey to a certain methodological carelessness (matters explored in chapters five and six).

However, through his use of the two key concepts of identity and dialectic, Mol has brought his thinking in line with Geertz's 'synthetic' orientation to such cultural phenomena as religion. In the guise of identity theory this rather vague but important concept is given some particular definition; though admittedly, only after the crucial vagueness of Mol's own category of identity is corrected and elaborated in the light of systems theory (in chapter six). Mol's basic approach, then, shares much in common with Geertz. But equally as significantly his approach differs in one important regard: Mol alone has really taken up the Popperian challenge to boldly theorize. His reasons for doing so, however, are not as clear or free of naivete as might be desired.

Nevertheless, by broadly relying on the laws of verisimilitude, outlined above, it can be argued that the identity theory of religion represents a definite advance over many of the classic and contemporary approaches to the study of religious phenomena. To fully support this claim it would be necessary to engage in a number of lengthy and exacting comparative analyses between the work of Mol and that of such theorists as Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Freud, Jung and their contemporary intellectual heirs. But in a study of this scope

this procedure is obviously not open to us. Therefore we will have to content ourselves with a more generalized discussion of the relative merits of identity theory by confining ourselves to limited points of comparison. Supplementing this, however, we will pause to consider in some detail The Sacred Canopy, Peter Berger's extremely popular statement of the elements of a sociological theory of religion. A scrutiny of the basic argument advanced in this influential book can act as a most effective framework for identifying the greater methodological wisdom of the identity theory of religion. In general, in the space available it should be possible to demonstrate the relative advantages of Mol's uniquely flexible and comprehensive approach to religious realities.

To this end, though, it will be necessary to improve Mol's work by moving towards a differentiation of identity theory as a 'methodology' and identity theory as a 'theory'. For, as has been suggested, many of the present inadequacies of Mol's work hinge on his own tendency to be too methodologically ambiguous in his pronouncements.

One comment made by Mol readily springs to mind as capturing the gist of this overall state of affairs. Appropriately the comment is made by way of conclusion to his Introduction to the book Identity and Religion:

. . . the more Geertz and Bellah have moved away both in age and distance from mother-hen Harvard and father-figure Parsons the less interested they seem to have become in high level theorizing rather than

astute observations. Maybe this is the end of good scholarship: to let a cloak of 'preposterous postulations' hang rather loosely, inevitably guiding one's observations and protecting oneself against the coldness of chaos, yet keeping enough air inbetween to ventilate the sacralizations. (Mol, 1978, p. 14)

With just cause reviewers have mistaken the import of the last rather cryptic sentence and interpreted the comment as a condemnation of the Geertzian position. But in point of fact its meaning is quite the reverse. As we will have cause to complain on other occasions, though, Mol's language is by no means always chosen with as much care as it could be. As in this instance, he frequently uses terms in a rather idiosyncratic manner.

This passage is best understood in the light of the ideas on the role of conceptual schemata cited from the Introduction to Identity and the Sacred above. The "end" of good scholarship is meant teleologically and not in the sense of the demise of good scholarship. The scholar has to be guided by theoretical formulations in order to academically and personally make sense of the welter of information available to him (the 'cold chaos'). But as a safeguard against the pitfall of reductionism (as defined by Mol: the 'sacralization' of one's position), these theoretical supports must be open to constant modification in the light of new data and ideas (be thoroughly 'ventilated'). This openness will only exist, however, if one avoids creating and becoming committed to "symmetrical crystals of significance" (to use Geertz's phrase) which are too rigid

in their logic. Rather one's conceptual schemata should "hang rather loosely" and be recognized as nominal "postulations" and not descriptions of hard realities. Finally, the odd phrase "preposterous postulations" should probably be read as a somewhat self-mocking reference to the need Mol has felt to break worn-out patterns of thought by boldly conjecturing on a new set of theoretical categories. As the first sentence of the passage suggests, it is in this latter regard that Bellah and Geertz might be found a bit wanting for they have become increasingly more cautious in their approach to "high level theorizing". Yet, paradoxically, the overall passage also gives one the reasonable impression that this cautiousness about theorizing is causally connected with their wise avoidance of "symmetrical crystals of significance".

Somehow, then, Mol's recipe for good scholarship involves a fine balance of methodological cautiousness and loose theoretical formulations. From a post-Popperian perspective on scientific theorizing this unusual combination is understandable. But for it to work and be accepted by others such an approach must be carefully explained and justified in advance or it will appear, or actually come to be, a pretext for plain and simple loose thinking. Regrettably Mol has failed to sufficiently provide this explanation and in some instances his thinking is simply too loose. In some measure there are further extenuating circumstances, or methodological concerns, which we have yet to discuss which help to account for and justify some

of this looseness of thought. But in order not to overly burden our discussions with as yet unnecessary methodological baggage we will postpone raising these additional considerations until they become more immediately relevant to our task of elucidating the specifics of Mol's arguments.

Therefore, at last, let us turn directly to the task of delineating the basic argument of the identity theory of religion, avoiding for the moment any attempt to be critical.

Identity and the Sacred

The basic argument of Identity and the Sacred is that the sociological study of religion would be advanced by the following definition of religion being adopted: religion is the "sacralization of identity". (Mol, 1976, p. 1) At first glance this definition appears to combine substantive and functional elements. Mol's interest in specifying what religion "is" is indicated by his use of the category of the sacred. His interest in specifying what religion "does" is indicated by his introduction of the concept of identity. This division of the definitional elements is, however, too simple and from the beginning there are hints that Mol has purposefully tipped the balance in the definition, so to speak, in the favour of the functional perspective. In the first place he immediately declares that his definition involves using the term 'religion' in a very wide sense. Amplifying on this Mol goes on to explain that his choice of this definition was largely influenced by

his leanness of the limitations imposed by the definitions of religion popular in the past. With these definitional efforts in mind he comments:

Most of the time they were blinders or blinkers that restricted my field of vision . . . My fear was more of missing something crucial than of being swamped by a chaotic avalanche of impressions and data.
(Mol, 1976, p. 1)

Restrictions of this nature are, as has been seen, more characteristic of substantive definitions than functional ones, but it is not necessary to merely assume Mol has the shortcomings of substantive definitions in mind in making these comments. His very preference for the term "sacralization", over the more traditional "the sacred", confirms it.

In order to develop this point it will be necessary to discuss the wider conceptual framework of Mol's definition. Extending the ethologists' judgement that a firm sense of identity is imperative to the survival of animals Mol proposes that man is subject to an equally strong need for a clear sense of identity. The difference being essentially that while an animal's sense of identity is confined to matters of sex, social ranking (or "pecking order"), and territory, man, the symbolical animal, possesses an almost infinite array of identity foci. This fact is both cause and product of man's enhanced capacity for adaptation. But no matter how sophisticated this capacity becomes Mol asserts man's need for stable identity foci will persist. Clarifying this point and bringing

it into the realm of religious studies Mol then proposes:

There is good reason to go somewhat further and suggest that there is a dialectic between adaptation and identity or between differentiation and integration and that religious organizations and orientations (but also art and play) are anything but impartial in this dialectic. My definition puts them squarely on the identity/integration side of the dialectic, where since Durkheim, empirical research has located them. (Mol, 1976, p. 3)

This is not to say that religion is a totally conservative force opposed to all change. On the contrary, as Weber convincingly argues in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and elsewhere, under certain circumstances religion can actually facilitate change on a large scale. But Mol stresses, "historically, the function of specific religious organizations and orientations in preserving identity seems to be the strategically more important function for explaining social development". (Mol, 1976; p. 3)

Yet this overall situation will not be properly appreciated Mol argues unless:

(a) one's definition [of religion] directs attention to the process and response inherent in the concept of dialectic, (b) one's definition is wide enough to allow for parallel mechanisms, not all of which are necessary for the pattern all at the same time, (c) one's definition is narrow enough not to usurp the contributions that art and play, for instance, make to the integration side of the dialectic. (Mol, 1976, p. 5)

By focusing on the concept of "sacralization" Mol thinks he has derived a definition of religion that uniquely

meets all these criteria. He defines sacralization as follows:

By sacralization, I refer to the process by means of which on the level of symbol-systems certain patterns acquire the same taken-for-granted, stable, eternal quality which on the level of instinctive behavior was acquired by the consolidation and stabilization of new genetic materials. Sacralization, then, is a sort of brake applied to unchecked infinite adaptations in symbol systems for which there is increasingly less evolutionary necessity and which become increasingly more dysfunctional for the emotional security of personality and for the integration of tribe or community. (Mol, 1976, p. 5)

In the light of his own definitional criteria, then, the value of "sacralization" over the more static Durkheimian notion of "the sacred" lies, first and foremost, in the emphasis it gives to the dialectic of integrative and differentiating forces as expressed in the "conflicting but complementary relationship between the sacred and the profane".

(Mol, 1976, p. 6, 204) Moreover, Mol suggests:

For a sociological theory bent on developing generalizations in which both past and present, primitive and modern are adequately accounted for, it is necessary to have a conceptual apparatus geared to both stability and change, to similarities and differences. Treating the sacred as a fossil of the primitive past stresses the differences rather than the similarities between societies and cultures. In the fluid situation of modern western societies stability it is precarious, and a definition which stresses 'process' rather than 'being' is more capable of dealing adequately with what appears to be an endless parade of stunted, discarded remnants of 'sacredness'. A conceptual apparatus derived from primitive conditions just will not do, and since my emphasis is on 'identity', rather than on 'society', I need a concept which allows for the analysis of a kaleidoscopic variety of these 'sacrednesses' in the same society. (Mol, 1976, p. 7)

Here Mol has said many important things and we will have cause to return to these thoughts on numerous occasions in the discussions to follow. But at this juncture, the most important thing to be aware of is the fact that he is fashioning an image of religion as a 'mechanism' for coping with change. As such, religion itself is to be understood as a constantly changing, and as will become more apparent, one might even say 'evolving' phenomenon. }

Behind all of this is, of course, Mol's understanding of reality as a dialectical struggle, an ever-oscillating tug-of-war, between forces for order (integration) and forces for change (differentiation). But deeper study of his reasoning on this matter will have to wait until we possess a more complete understanding of his overall theory of religion. Here ~~it~~ will suffice to know that the 'larger definition' of religion given to him through the use of the processual term 'sacralization' does permit him a conceptual apparatus geared to both "stability and change, similarities and differences." For example, it permits him to treat religious phenomena like

conversion, charisma, and the rites of passage as essentially mechanisms for incorporating, rather than annihilating change. All of them desacralize (or emotionally strip) a previous identity, and sacralize (or emotionally weld) a new one. Conversion does this for personal identity in a relatively unstructured situation in the same way that charisma does it for a social identity. Rites of passage do the same thing in more structured settings. (Mol, 1976, p. 5)

In this example Mol has succeeded in functionally relating three religious phenomena which initially appear to be quite disparate. The linking factor being the thought contained in the following lines:

Religion always appears to modify or stabilize the differentiations it has been unable to prevent. More important, future differentiation appears to hinge on a baseline of existing identity and the guarantee of future identity. (Mol, 1976, p. 3)

In other words, religion allows things to change in such a way that at heart they stay pretty much the same (in terms of man's identity needs). For Mol is fairly reasonably positing that man will only leave the secure confines of one identity framework (i.e., accept fundamental change in his life) if faced with a positive identity alternative.

By resting his theory of religion on the process of sacralization Mol fulfills the second of his definitional criteria, that a definition should allow for a multi-factoral approach. For he suggest that at least four autonomous yet interrelated sacralizing mechanisms can be isolated:

(1) objectification (the projection of order in a beyond where it is less vulnerable to contradictions, exceptions, and contingencies--in other words a rarified realm where major outlines of order can be maintained in the face of temporal, but all-absorbing dislocations of that order); (2) commitment (the emotional anchorage in the various, proliferating foci of identity); (3) ritual (the repetitive actions, articulations, and movements which prevent the object of sacralizations to be lost sight of); (4) myth (the shorthand symbolic account). (Mol, 1976, p. 15)

The value of such a multi-factoral approach lies, of course, in the fact that it allows for a very wide range of phenomena to be judged religious. But, even more importantly, through this multi-factoral approach Mol has attempted to take into account both the cognitive and affective aspects of religious life, as well as the role of physical action and orientation in framing the contours of what man understands as religious. Few theories of religion have managed to do justice to all three of these considerations.

— In spite of the breadth of this approach, Mol, nevertheless, thinks that with the continued reference to the quality of sacredness he can satisfy his third definitional requirement: keeping his definition of religion sufficiently narrow as to prevent it from usurping the integrative role played by functional alternatives to religion like play and art. As Mol observes, the concept of sacralization appears to be close to that of institutionalization. However, sacralization differs and goes beyond institutionalization in as much as it entails reinforcing and protecting the framework of identity by attributing the qualities of "untouchability and awe" (Mol, 1976, p. 5) to the identity in question. Religious phenomena alone are marked off with these predicates and their corresponding emotional states.

Keying on the "process" of sacralization, then, Mol thinks he has successfully circumvented the excessive restrictiveness explicitly and implicitly present in the substantive

definitions of religion. Most specifically, religion is freed from too exclusive an association with a "transcendent referent" and the importance of this freedom for Mol is clearly indicated in his discussion of Richard Fenn's influential article 'A New Sociology of Religion' in the first chapter of Identity and the Sacred. In this article Fenn argues "that the conditions of advanced differentiation presently dominant in the West make it unlikely, if not impossible, for cultural integration to develop around any set of religious symbols". Countering this view, Mol asserts that many "integrating, symbolic, commitment-demanding, rallying points" can be found at the heart of modern industrial society, operating at both the personal and social levels. To illustrate his point he cites such examples as psycho-analysis, humanism, the sacredness of democracy in the United States, and the millennial hopes of communism. That sociologists of religion, like Fenn, fail to take proper note of these integrating belief systems reflects

not so much that they deny the differentiation/integration dialectic, but that they work with strategically dysfunctional definitions of religion. To Fenn religion is confined to whatever is theocentric or supernatural. As a result he concentrates so much on traditional Christianity that he cannot see the emergence of a kaleidoscopic variety of sacralization patterns elsewhere.
(Mol, 1976, p. 4)

As the above discussion suggests, behind all that Mol has to say on religion lies a critique of the dominant theory of the progressive secularization of contemporary society.

In shaping his definition of religion, then, this orientation was decisive, as the following passage reveals:

The definition and the exposition of its meaning are perspectives which make no claim to definitive comprehension. They have the bias of any perspective. If there is something unique about the bias, it is that it counterbalances the widespread pessimism about the viability of twentieth century institutional religious expressions with an equal optimism about the future of religion in the wide sense in which the term is used here. (Mol, 1976, p. 7)

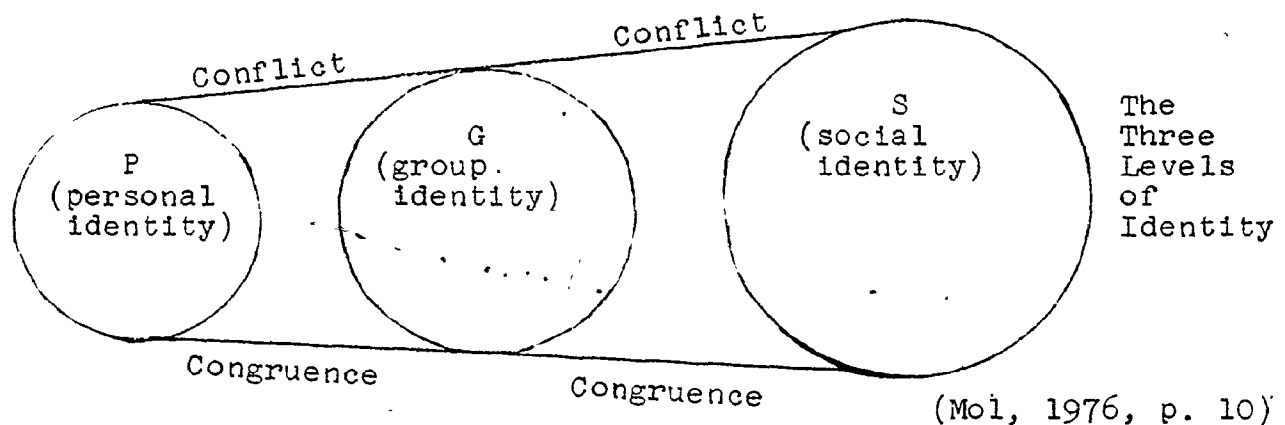
This optimism leads Mol to postulate a reversal of the usual evolutionary approach adopted in the West to the study of religions. Optimism, as regards the survival of the sacred in our society, can be maintained he argues for "something which is mature in primitive cultures may be only embryonic in modern societies". At present the "sacralization processes may be interrupted and prevented from maturing, but they are not disappearing: they appear to be as viable as ever". (Mol, 1976, p. 7, 205)

The other fundamental component of Mol's definition of religion is, of course, the concept of identity. Little has or at this juncture will be said about this factor because Mol's use of the concept is so complex yet vague that it is more appropriate that the discussion of it be almost entirely reserved for the more critical chapters to follow. Here, however it must be pointed out that a proper appreciation of the merits and innovativeness of Mol's approach to religious theorizing hinges on coming to a full understanding of his subtle

and quite distinctive notion of 'identity'. As will be demonstrated, there are reasons for the vagueness of Mol's own use and discussion of this concept, reasons connected with his desire to keep his postulations well "ventilated" and at the height of their suggestiveness. But until we come to the juncture where we can elaborate these reasons, and question the degree of Mol's reliance on them, we will be forced to work with a rather attenuated form of the identity theory of religion. We will have to work with a theory in which our understanding of 'identity' is essentially restricted to its colloquial and commonsensical meaning: the image or understanding one has of oneself, and of the groups, large and small, to which one belongs (family, peer group, class, nation, etc.). This is the meaning entailed in Erik Erikson's now quite popular phrase 'an identity crisis', which Webster's New World Dictionary simply defines as "the condition of being uncertain of one's feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins" Up to a point working with this notion of identity will not impair our understanding of identity theory. But the caution must be extended, once again, that this is not the whole story.

Self-image and group-image were mentioned above because Mol conceives of religious identity foci as operating on a continuum ranging from the sphere of personal identity or self-integration, to social identity and integration. This means that religiously promoted identity structures at differ-

ent levels, while clearly interdependent, may also be in conflict with each other. Mol most effectively captures and communicates this state of affairs through the use of the following simple diagram:



In the modern West, for example, Mol would argue that the sacralization of selfhood has progressed at the expense of the cohesion of social identity. By incorporating this perspective into his definition of religion, then, Mol has sought to render his definition multifactoral and comprehensive in yet another respect. More specifically, he has sought to avoid the restrictive implications of Durkheim's too exclusive functional identification of religion with the level of social identity (we will return to this point below).

In elaborating upon these theoretical considerations in the remainder of Identity and the Sacred Mol attempts to deal with a very wide array (perhaps too wide) of phenomena and ideas which are both central and peripheral to the sociology of religion. He begins with an assessment of the concepts

of religious evolution, secularization, marginality, and alienation in the light of the dialectic between differentiation and integration. He then delves into the meaning of identity, discussing in the process how religion as he defines it is related to morality and the legitimation of economy, polity, science, class, and family. From this proceeds an analysis of the foci of identity which raises the issues of the link between sexuality and personal identity, the role of cults and sects in shaping group identity, and the problem of universal religions in the modern world. In conclusion he turns to a more detailed statement of the scope and functioning of the four mechanisms of sacralization which have been introduced above.

Such a brief study as this does not allow for a reasonable survey of Mol's opinions on all these matters, though in the course of our analysis many of them will be raised. However, before passing on to a more critical exposition of the details of his theory some more general sense of the thrust and applications of Mol's mode of thought should be provided. Therefore, at this point, some attention will be dedicated to two particularly enlightening and well worked out aspects of Mol's book: the relationship between morality and religion and the function and significance of sects.

In the mind of the public religion and morality are almost synonymous with one another. Historically the two have always been closely affiliated and in comparatively simple

societies morality benefits tremendously in its perpetual struggle to remain discernable (in some definite manner) from such a state of affairs. For the sanction of the religious world order gives to ethical rules the quality of being taken for granted. But this very operational dependency points to the fact that the ethical and religious realms, while interconnected in a complex manner, are in essence quite distinct. In Mol's words, religion, being concerned with identity, "states what a society, group or person is. Morality, on the other hand emphasizes what is expected". The distinction is that between a cognitive system and a normative system. Nevertheless, these two separate systems are interrelated to such an extent that as society has advanced a full dialectic has arisen between them. Describing this dialectic in terms of functions and dysfunctions Mol concludes:

Religion appears to have a twofold effect on morality. The first, more functional, effect is stabilization and integration. The second, more disfunctional effect, which is most evident in societies in which keeping up with change is necessary, or at least an advantage, is rigidification. (Mol, 1976, p. 94)

Of course, with a dialectic the converse is also true. That is, morality affects religion in both a functional and a dysfunctional regard. The functional assistance morality lends to religion Mol describes with the term "concretization". Such assistance is necessary for "the more complex a culture, the more remote and general an over-arching belief system has to be, if it is to continue its sacralizing and integrative function. Yet,

simultaneously the need for concrete prescriptions and specific rules also increases because of the greater variety of relationships." (Mol, 1976, p. 94) The dysfunctional affect of morality on religion Mol designates "distortion". As with the other terms its meaning is straightforward. The concretization of any subtle religious experience or doctrine, such as the relationship between the attributes of God and his consequent will for men, entails a measure of distortion. But the distortion can be of a more pernicious nature such as when the strong association of a set of religious ideas with a set of moral practices leads, with time, to the replacement of the original objects of faith with worship of the moral condition itself.

To directly correlate religion and morality is naive and misleading, then, for the reality of the situation is a relationship of simultaneous conflict and complementarity. Religions are faced with the dilemma of constantly balancing functions and dysfunctions. For example, in the case of Christianity Mol notes:

This dilemma . . . is well illustrated by the sociologically sensible, but logically repugnant, paradox between sin and grace, or between the doctrines of sanctification and justification by faith. Sanctification provides the need for a stable moral system. Justification provides the need for maximum social motivation and acceptance, which the more esoteric core of a system of meaning promises in exchange for greater commitment. (Mol, 1976, p. 108)

Since the inception of the sociology of religion the study of cults and sects has presented the student of religions

with important and perplexing problems.. In chapter twelve of Identity and the Sacred, Mol tackles this difficult subject with a noteworthy comprehensiveness and innovativeness. In agreement with a large number of contemporary scholars, Mol begins his analysis by noting the inadequacies of Troeltsch's paradigmatic church/sect typology. For years Troeltsch's views dominated the sociological study of sectarian phenomena but the excessive restrictiveness of his classification of religious phenomena in terms of Western, culture-bound, organizational categories eventually necessitated the repudiation of his approach. As a corrective it should be seen that Troeltsch's church/sect distinction represents but one instance of a more general set of phenomena and generalizations. For Mol the distinction should be understood in the light of the functional notion of sacralizations of identities, most specifically of group identity. Keeping to the prime sociological component of Troeltsch's perspective, namely, that churches and sects are distinguished according to "the extent to which a religious body accepts the culture of the social environment in which it exists", the church/sect distinction could then be more constructively reformulated in the following manner:

Sects may be said to sacralize the identity of groups that flourish precisely because the social whole of which they are a part is uncongenial or inadequate as a system of meaning for some people. On the other hand, churches sacralize identities that are essentially congruous with and congenial to the social whole. (Mol, 1976, pp. 168-169)

By adopting this functionalistic perspective (with its intrinsic reference to the differentiation/identity dialectic) it is easier to account for the fact that with the decreasing dominance of religious institutions in the modern West the sects are paradoxically more conspicuous in their vigour than in their vulnerability. In their demand for single-hearted and single-minded commitment the sects are a religious form which are particularly suited to the fulfillment of the fundamental need for identity (order, interpretation of reality, system of meaning, integration) and hence they are now thriving because "that other fundamental need--for mastery (instrumental action, control of environment, adaptation, rational efficiency)--has overextended itself and has created meaninglessness and disorder". (Mol, 1976, p. 170)

It would be a fundamental mistake, however, to assert, as has been attempted, that on the basis of these facts sectarianism can be explained in terms of social protest only. Rather, as should be equally obvious from these observations, the strength of sects rests in the "bi-facial character of group identity (one face towards the individual, the other towards the social)". (Mol, 1976, p. 170) A full appreciation of the possible complexities of group dynamics must be maintained:

Groups 'both' provide individuals with possibilities for self-fulfillment, 'and' constrict individual autonomy for the sake of group cohesion. Groups 'both' reinforce many of the goals and values of a society, 'and' weaken societal cohesion by protest against society and the provision of conflicting systems of meaning. (Mol, 1976, p. 167)

As Mol points out, the viability of sectarian forms of religion on the American frontier provides a clear example of sectarian behavior which was geared more to the forging of a strong new sense of order and identity than to protesting against an existing social order (Mol, 1976, p. 171; Mol, 1978, p. 13). (But, of course, Mol fails to admit to the obvious limitations of this example for purposes of deriving widely applicable generalizations on religion).

Underlying Mol's assessment of the sociological functioning of sects is what he calls "a guarded scepticism about the deprivation hypothesis of sect formation, or as it is sometimes put, sectarianism as the religious response of the 'disinherited'". (Mol, 1976, p. 172) The most sophisticated rendition of this hypothesis is advanced by Charles Glock. Glock speaks in terms of "felt deprivation" (as opposed to there necessarily having to be real deprivation) and he detects at least five types of deprivation: economic, social, organismic (due to physical or mental handicaps), ethical (due to discrepancies in the values, ideals and realities of a society), and psychic (due to the lack of an adequate system of meaning). Mol surveys the several angles from which this theory has been heavily criticized in the past but here the focus will be strictly on the more immediate objections Mol himself raises to the "crudity" of the deprivation theories. This crudity

lies partly in their derogation of the maintenance function of the church-type religion, but primarily

in their assumption that in an undeprived state man would not need religion, or even more fundamentally, that religion is a way to smooth man's road to mastery . . . As we see it, religion deals with the interpretation of any reality--not just with a reality which can be reduced to a form of deprivation. Our objection to deprivation theories is essentially the same as Geertz's objection to Malinowski's 'throughgoing instrumentalist view' of religious phenomena and the world 'as consisting of techniques for coping with life rather than as consisting of a way, one way, of conceiving it'. (Mol, 1976, pp. 180-181)

The deprivations experienced by minority groups are obviously given expression in the theological beliefs, religious rituals, sacred objectifications, and sectarian commitments to which they ascribe. But, Mol asserts, this does not mean that the latter were concocted solely or primarily to legitimize the situation of the marginal group. Rather the legitimizing consequences of these sacralizing mechanisms is the natural by-product of the more immediate function of reality interpretation (or more accurately identity creation and maintenance which, as we will see, implies something more than what is strictly indicated by 'reality interpretation'). This point is, as Mol admits, a fine one but it is by no means a contrived or ultimately unimportant one.

For example, Mol suggests that a more fundamental orientation to religious movements or events as manifestations of a natural human need for identity security, and not just as a counter to a specific deprivation, better accounts for religious behaviour "when problems are less obvious or when the affluent, educated, and urbanized baffle the atheists by

religious propensities." (Mol, 1976, p. 62) In the simplest of language, such an approach just provides a fuller and more considerate statement of the religious situation.

By way of summary, then, it can be seen that the identity theory of religion as formulated by Professor Mol consists of three basic clusters of ideas: in the first place, the notion of identity, its importance for man's health and prosperity, and its three dialectically related (conflicting yet complementary) levels of expression (personal, group, and social identities); secondly, the process of sacralization and its four mechanisms (objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth); and lastly, the conception of reality as a dialectical interaction of forces of integration and differentiation, or more prosaically, of order and change, with religion firmly identified with the integrating half of the dialectic.

In the following chapters each of these clusters of ideas will be independently examined in some detail with an eye to delineating, refining and developing their theoretical potential. As will then be discovered, Mol's initially rather simple format addresses a large number of extremely complex issues and presents a considerable conceptual challenge to our rather complacent ways of thinking of the realm of action, so to speak, in which religion operates. Prior to embarking on this task, however, a few more things should be said about the polemical thrust of much of what Mol has to say about religion; highlighting some of the claimed advantages of the

identity theory approach over its predecessors. Having accomplished this it will also be necessary to begin to generally sketch out the manner in which we believe that Mol has deviated from 'methodology' into 'theory'.

A Closer Look at the Polemical Thrust of Identity Theory

Professor Mol has formulated identity theory with an eye to specifically correcting the influence exerted by two wide spread and somewhat antithetical tendencies in religious theorizing: a functionalist preoccupation with the contribution of religion to social solidarity, and the grounding of analytical orientations to religion in an ideology of rational individualism. The work of such scholars as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons is representative of the first tendency. While, for Mol, all work founded on some kind of synthesis of Existentialist and Neo-Marxist thought or that of social-psychologists like George Herbert Mead, is essentially representative of the second tendency.

Curiously enough, and conveniently for our purposes, Peter Berger's popular theory of religion (The Sacred Canopy) provides an effective illustration of the offending aspects of both tendencies. Accordingly, we have chosen to concentrate our attention upon a brief critical analysis of his influential thought in order to draw out some of the very real reasons for Mol's concern over the effects of these theoretical tendencies. An examination of Berger's work also provides an excellent

forum, then for a more concrete illustration of the relative advantages of the identity theory approach to the study of religion. But before we can turn directly to an assessment of Berger's ideas we must pause a moment longer to more generally outline the thrust and substance of Mol's objections to the two tendencies mentioned above.

With regard to the first tendency Mol's concern is to modify the functionalist's stance through the more fundamental incorporation of some of the criticisms leveled against the functionalists by 'conflict' theorists. Though his own work owes much to that of Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim, Mol clearly recognizes that these social theorists have overstressed the integrative functioning of religion as a social phenomenon. Therefore he has taken particular care to devise a theoretical perspective that takes into account the context in which religion may, and frequently does, contribute to the level of conflict within a given society. As Mol stresses in the Conclusion to Identity and the Sacred:

. . . Durkheim's theory of the integrative function of religion for society has to be both revised and elaborated. The correction is necessary because the integration/sacralization at the level of self or group may have a disintegrating/desacralizing effect on the wider social whole. As a result of his focus on primitive society, Durkheim operated too exclusively on the social level without paying the necessary attention to the dialectical conflicts between the parts and the whole in modern complex societies. Sacralization takes place at a variety of potentially, if not actually, conflicting levels. (Mol, 1976, p. 264)

In cases of religious dissention within a society or culture, then, the issue is not so much one of competition between faiths strictly as between identity levels or foci. This is not to say that strictly ideological differences cannot lead to conflicts but it is less often the case than manifestly it appears. The survival of a universal religion depends on its ability to address and balance the needs of all three identity levels--personal, group, and social. But this harmonizing activity itself gives rise to the conditions of conflict in a society; to the extent that it may be said that such conflict is rooted in a sense of relative identity deprivation at one or the other of the three basic levels of identity. For a firm social identity can only be purchased at the price of a measure of psychological disharmony as social cohesion rests on the muting or repression of the full expression of personal identity. Berger takes this into consideration by discussing the 'alienating' effect of religion. But Mol takes exception to the intrusion of this Marxist notion of alienation and argues that there are clear advantages in adopting a less pre-judicative perspective by couching the analysis of the situation in the language of identity theory. Foreshadowing the arguments he advances, the terminology of identity theory is preferable if only because it allows from the beginning for the possibility of the reverse transpiring. Under some circumstances a religion may work to reinforce a marginal personal or group identity at the expense of the stability of the larger collec-

tive (social) identity framework. As will be seen, in the context of his Neo-Marxist, Existentialist sociology of religion, Berger is compelled to resort to a rather undesirable intellectual contortionism to account for this possibility (i.e., a dealienating religion).

Thus for identity theory, while in the long run religion is at all times an agent of integration, this does not render religious systems intrinsically adverse to the promotion of conflict. On the contrary, the maximizing thrust of the movement for identity consolidation at each of the three levels of identity guarantees a good measure of religious conflict in any society. But this is especially the case in modern societies where a plurality of identities gives rise to a religious pluralism of considerable proportions. As Mol comments, once again in the Conclusion to Identity and the Sacred:

Modern societies consist of a cross-stitching network of pockets of meaning, definitions of reality, of identities not easily reduced to a simple self-group-society continuum. There is a continual shifting and changing of boundaries, even within the loosely grouped categories of the continuum. And this is not altogether without significance for the patterns of sacralization that are available. It is for this reason, that the modern world sometimes has the appearance of a cemetery of discarded and stunted forms of sacredness. The identity to be sacralized has often proved to be too slippery an entity to be an appropriate vehicle of stability. (Mol, 1976, p. 264-265)

At many junctures throughout his writings, then, Mol pauses to criticize various scholars for their excessively narrow presentation of religion as either an agency for social

consolidation or a cause of conflict. Alternatively, he stresses that at all times religion is in some respects simultaneously doing both things. In fact the dialectical character of the situation is to be found in the very fact that religions ultimately promote integration, within identities or between them, by successfully establishing (cognitively and affectively) new patterns of differentiation (i.e., identity boundaries) -- and this inevitably involves a destructive-revolutionary component.

Turning to the second objectionable tendency, a reliance on rational individualism, Mol argues that far too many approaches to religion give rise to a reductive and crudely projectionist understanding of religion through their inordinate stress on the central place of individual consciousness in the process of finding a meaningful order in the world. Or, in other words, using Geertz's terminology, they 'privatize' religion as a cultural phenomenon (see p. 38 of this essay). As a result insufficient attention is given to the sui generis character of certain social phenomena involved in man's religious life. More specifically, the element of autonomy entailed in the formation and action of group and social identities is not adequately taken into account. This is a very important and difficult aspect of Mol's theoretical orientation to which we will have to return at length when we undertake the detailed scrutiny of 'identity' as an analytic category in the fifth chapter.

More simply, at this juncture, it can be understood that Mol also importantly objects to the prevalence of rational individualist assumptions in religious theorizing because they tend to give rise to theories which are preoccupied with cognitive processes; thereby neglecting the vital role played by affective factors--emotional commitment--in the functioning of religions and the formation and maintenance of identities. As will be seen, Berger's theory of religion is decidedly 'individualistic' and 'cognitive' in its orientation.

Perhaps the best single illustration of Mol's precise views on these matters is his article in The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (Mol, 1979) entitled "The Origin and Function of Religion: a Critique of, and Alternative to, Durkheim's Interpretation of the Religion of Australian Aborigines". Here Mol successively takes Frazer and Durkheim to task for their respective interpretations of Australian totemism, arguing in each case that their narrow frame of reference fails to do justice to the data. Without repeating the body of Mol's arguments here, it can be noted that the superimposition of some variant or combination of the rational individualism or social solidarity ordering principles in each case simply produces a reductive and incomplete result.

Frazer saw totemism as but the primitive science of "the most backward of mankind", and reckoned that all group totems (which are numerous in type) were generated by the analogical extension of the 'conception totem' (the totem tying each

person to the place where his presence in the womb first became known--ostensibly used to explain the child's conception in terms of spirits residing there). Both assumptions are wrong, Mol asserts:

Australian totems are fundamentally concerned not with subsistence, but with delineation of a variety of intricately interwoven wholes: tribes, moieties, clans, sexes, individuals. These intertwining identities showed considerable social organization and emerged initially because they assisted in the survival of those tribes which developed them.

Neither are totems the best available means for the rational explanation and manipulation of the environment. Rational explanation is a far less critical issue than Frazer and many others assumed. More important was the anchoring of the delineations in the emotions through reverence or rituals. (Mol, 1979, p. 380)

Durkheim, of course, in reaction to Frazer, and others like Tylor and Spencer, committed the opposite mistake: "Not the individual, but the social, not the rational but the "collective effervescence" lay at the root of totemism, he said." (Mol, 1979, p. 380) If Frazer had made the group subsidiary to the individual, Durkheim had simply reversed the relationship rendering notions such as the individual soul (and totem) but the religious expression of the internalized component of the source of all that is sacred--society. At the root of religion was the worship of an idealized image of society, as it was social action that imparted to the individual a truly transcendent sense of personal strength and power. In Aboriginal culture, then, the clan totem was primary and

all others were derived from it. Yet such an account of matters fails to explain the very real conflict that does on occasion erupt between individual and clan totemic loyalties (i.e., between identity levels).

Similarly, Durkheim's singular orientation to social identity as the raison d'être of man's religious life made it difficult for him to adequately explain the degree of asceticism and sacrifice involved in Aboriginal totemic and initiation ceremonies. Veins are opened and blood is plentifully spilt in Aboriginal rites (voluntarily, but under the intense pressure of social-psychological expectations) and a simple application of Durkheim's sacred/profane dichotomy, whereby the social and manhood are identified with the sacred and the drives of the individual and boyhood are flatly identified with the profane, falls short of explaining the emotional intensity of these ascetic and sacrificial practices. Rather, Mol suggests, these situations are more exactly understood through the paradigm of "stripping" or subjugating one sacralized identity and "welding" or strengthening another sacralized identity. Only then is it possible to fully account for the degree of emotional intensity and physical hardship exacted in initiation rites, for example. For if the movement simply involved transference of cathexis from the profane realm to that of the sacred then the severity of the measures used would seem less called for as it is to be assumed that the boy would already be substantially steeped in emotional commitment to the only existing

centres of sacred values--society and manhood. Similarly the regular repetition of fairly stringent food taboos in connection with the clan totemic rites suggests that the Aboriginal is well aware of the fact that "any society contains internally competing forms of sacred and semi-sacred patterns." Such rites at gatherings are necessary for monitoring and "allocating commitments according to the saliency of competing identities." (Mol, 1979, p. 383) For contrary to the line of Durkheim's thinking, individual regeneration does not necessarily go hand in hand with social regeneration (i.e., personal and social identity are not perfectly congruent).

Summing up Mol's position, totemism is best seen as an embryonic system of objectification (Mol, 1979, p. 388). But it is a system which encompasses the full complexity of man's life: the dialectical interaction (conflicting and complementary) of multiple identity levels. Moreover, it works to organize and stabilize Aboriginal existence (hierarchically ordering identity relations) by couching this objectification (an essentially intellectual act) in an elaborate ritual and mythological context which speaks to the emotions and anchors the objectification in commitments. Such a view of totemism, Mol confidently asserts, is both more theoretically economical and comprehensive. And on the surface of matters we would have to agree. Though as we turn to a more detailed assessment of his basic analytical categories we will see that matters are not quite as simple as Mol presents them.

At the moment, though, we must continue to concern ourselves with presenting an overview of the intended polemical thrust of Mol's work and setting the ground for a comparative analysis of Mol's and Berger's perspectives on the nature and functioning of religion. To this end we must mention a third common methodological limitation which Mol attempts to overcome through the adoption of a more comprehensive approach. The limitation in question being the old and stale debate between idealists and materialists over the dominance of ideas or material factors in the shaping of man's behaviour. Mol has, consciously striven, though in a less specific way than in the case of the two limitations discussed above, to circumvent becoming embroiled in this philosophic quagmire.

In the context of the sociology of religion the materialist position has been broadly associated with Marxist analyses, while the idealist position has been commonly identified with the work of Max Weber. (In both cases the linkage is rather crude and cannot be pressed very far.) Mol's own concern is to show the importance of religious ideas in motivating the action of men by providing them with stable systems of meaning, and in this respect his basic orientation is Weberian. Moreover, he has dedicated a considerable amount of his time to a careful, effective, and essentially sympathetic reformulation of the famous thesis of Weber's book on The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Nevertheless, his analysis never overlooks the full interdependence of the superstructure and

infrastructure of human environments. However, unlike Marx, he is not willing to see either as a mere epiphenomenon of the other. On some occasions the Marxists' stress on the primacy of the material realm, in terms of changes in the mode of production, is warranted. But on the whole situations are far too complex for any such a clear line of cause and effect to be meaningfully superimposed and things are better understood from the perspective of a dialectical balance of material and ideological factors. In fact, as will be demonstrated, Mol's specific conceptualization of 'identity' as an analytic category (the 'stable systems of meaning' referred to above) involves a very deliberate effort to supply religious theorizing with concepts which bridge the subjective/objective dichotomization of our patterns of thinking and capture a measure of insight into the dialectical character of human realities; to see man's environment and actions as the product of a complex interaction of mutually conditioning ideological and materialistic considerations. For an identity (of any kind) is neither a strictly subjective nor strictly objective phenomenon by Mol's reckoning.

In general, in the three areas cited the thrust of Mol's polemic is directed at broadening the scope of one's thought about religion so as to generate analytical categories which are more comprehensive. The ideal is to develop social scientific terms for the study of religion that share in the unique capacity of the best religious concepts themselves. Namely,

the capacity to be eternally relevant, because attuned to the constants of human reality, and yet sufficiently vague in content as to be flexible and capable of adaptation to a great diversity of circumstances. Mol's own categories draw us much closer to this ideal and in successfully doing so they introduce a long over-due corrective to the multiple kinds of methodological reductionism that have plagued religious studies.

CHAPTER IV
IDENTITY THEORY IN CLOSER PERSPECTIVE
- A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE
SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF PETER BERGER

A comparative analysis of the work of Berger and Mol is recommended by a number of considerations. First and foremost, such an analysis is recommended by the simple fact that much of what Mol has written is geared, as we have seen, to specifically counteracting the effect of Berger's highly influential work. Secondly, a comparative study is recommended by the very fact that Berger's thought has been so enormously popular and influential. For as Popper's laws of verisimilitude suggest it is necessary to prove the value of a theory by clearly demonstrating how it surpasses existing theoretical alternatives.

To some extent this task has already been undertaken in the preceding pages. But, of course, no effort was made then to explore issues in depth. Moreover, the materials criticized were not drawn from systematic theories of religion comparable in scope and complexity to the theory advanced by Mol. Berger's work, however, quickly attracted a large audience precisely because of the highly systematic and comprehensive nature of his analysis. The unifying power of this theoretical vision, coupled with the ease of directness of his style of presentation, made The Sacred Canopy a valuable assess in the trying

task of exploring the roots and nature of religion. The Sacred Canopy appeared to present the student of religion with a relatively complete and condensed theoretical scaffolding with which to 'make sense of' a wide variety of religious phenomena, including the process of secularization. Therefore, an examination of Berger's ideas should provide us with a quite accurate insight into the relative strengths and weaknesses of Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion. We caution here, however, that many of the most significant issues brought to light by this comparative analysis can only be developed after we turn to a more thorough scrutiny of Mol's thinking. Thus our comparative analysis certainly does not come to a conclusion with the conclusion of this chapter. But by introducing the body of our complaints with Berger's thought at this juncture we provide a further element of rationale for the line of analysis we will be following in our scrutiny of identity theory.

Thirdly, a comparative analysis of Berger's and Mol's ideas is recommended by the fact that where Mol's thinking fails to satisfy the laws of verisimilitude it is possible to suggest that the cause lies with a regrettable collapse of his functionalist orientation into a substantivist stance reminiscent of Berger's.

The Basic Argument of 'The Sacred Canopy'

For the purposes of this study Berger's sociological theory of religion will be conveniently, though somewhat arbitrarily, broken down into a number of distinct clusters of ideas which sequentially build upon one another.

1. Man Needs Meaning:

The Sacred Canopy begins with the following proposition:

Every human society is an enterprise in world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise. (Berger, 1969, p. 3)

By this Berger means that through the existence and operation of society, and in some more specific way religion, man imposes order and hence meaning upon the vast landscape of awareness in which he lives. Berger refers to this process as 'nomization', the creation of a 'nomos' (i.e., a meaningful world order). The same basic principle, of course, marks the point of departure of phenomenologists like Eliade, structuralists like Lévi-Strauss, and functionalists like Geertz and Mol. All these theorists begin their investigations from the simple premise that man is the creature with an innate propensity for order, the creature who needs to structure his environment, who needs meaning in his life. Yet each envisions the meaningful order required by man in a distinctive, if essentially vague, way. For as the premise is essentially a point of philosophy so too are the resolutions reached by these theorists

with regard to the questions of just how much meaning or what kind of meaning man needs. In each case the possibility that man may require different types of meaning in different circumstances is overlooked in favour of the simpler and more elegant application of a universal standard. But to say all of this is to prematurely foreshadow problems to be addressed more precisely below.

2. Man the 'Unfinished Animal:

Berger speculates that "men are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality." (Berger, 1969, p. 22) Drawing on a philosophical anthropology which he shares with Thomas Luckmann, Berger argues that it is essential that we recognize the importance of the fact that man is born in a biologically "unfinished" condition. Unlike other animals man comes into life with deficient instinctual programming and therefore the order of his life (and hence his nature) is not a genetic given. Rather man must "finish" his nature by creating a stable environment through the development of culture. In the light of this man may be thought of as being unique primarily by virtue of the fact that he possesses two natures: one given by 'nature', another acquired through his interaction with 'society'.

3. The Dialectic:

In attempting to elaborate a sociological theory of religion Berger's concern is with the relationship between

religion and the latter nature--man's social being. To divine this it is necessary to understand the process through which this social being is created. To this end Berger asserts that it is essential to see that the empirical reality of society itself is that it is a dialectical phenomenon. By 'dialectical' he simply means that society, and hence man's social nature, is both a product of man and an autonomous agent which works back upon man. More specifically, Berger suggests that the actual process might be conceived as follows:

The fundamental dialectical process of society consists of three moments, or steps. These are externalization, objectivation, and internalization Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of the human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality sui generis. It is through internalization that man is a product of society. (Berger, 1969, p. 4)

This dialectical process lies at the heart of all of Berger's thought on religion. As a caution it should be noted that Berger's use and formulation of the concept of a 'dialectical process' differs from the classical Platonic usage, and the Hegelian and Marxist understandings of the principle. With the latter in mind it should also be noted that Berger's

dialectical process is not associated with any specific notion of a prime cause, such as Hegel's idealism or its reverse, Marx's materialism. Rather, Berger's understanding should be visualized as an unbroken circular circuit which Berger has arbitrarily chosen to begin talking about at the point of externalization or projection because he is a sociologist and interested in the interaction between the individual and social institutions (physical and mental). Alternatively, if one's concerns were theological or philosophical, one could just as easily and as justifiably begin speaking of the dialectical process from the vantage point of the process of internalization.

4. The Conversation:

This dialectical process by which a world order is created and man's nature finished is a collective undertaking. That is, it is the work of societies as a whole and not of individuals. The most obvious illustration of this state of affairs is the process of socialization to which the young are subjected. The aim of socialization is to create a healthy stable citizen through the "establishment of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual." (Berger, 1969, p. 15) Such a symmetry provides the individual with a sense of belonging and purpose.

Another way to express this is to think of the world as being built-up and kept valid by a vast but delicate continuum or web of conversation along common lines with

'significant others' (i.e., authority figures, friends and so on). The consensus found in this conversation acts as a guarantee of the truth of the ideas that one has of the nature of the world. If this conversation is disrupted and the consensus called into question, by new knowledge or contact with other quite different societies, then "the world begins to totter, to lost its subjective plausibility." (Berger, 1969, p. 17) The individual or group that experiences the disruption might be thrown into a state of 'anomy' in which the definitive sense of orientation in experience, of belonging to something greater and having a purpose, is lost. In Berger's opinion, anomy represents the most radical threat to man: "it is unbearable to the point where the individual may seek death in preference to it. Conversely, existence within a nomic world may be sought at the cost of all sorts of sacrifice and suffering--and even at the cost of life itself, if the individual believes that this ultimate sacrifice has nomic significance." (Berger, 1969, p. 22)

5. Religion as the Ultimate Legitimation-Cosmosization:

Even within a stable nomic order, however, the individual cannot totally elude the threat of anomy for it is always present in the 'marginal' situations of life which are unavoidable. These marginal situations, ranging from dreams to the marginal situation par excellence of death, are the moments when the humanly imposed order of things is suspended. But society equips its members with 'legitimations' that help to

stave off the nightmare of anomy. "By legitimation is meant socially objectivated 'knowledge' that serves to explain and justify the social order." (Berger, 1969, p. 29) This knowledge is both cognitive and normative in nature, extending from pre-theoretical assertions of facticity to highly evolved theoretical formulations and Weltanschauungen. The object, once again, is to reinforce the symmetry between objective and subjective definitions of reality. The teleological orientation of the world-building enterprise is to develop a nomos which may be 'taken-for-granted'. "Whenever the socially established nomos attains this quality . . . there occurs a merging of its meanings with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe. Nomos and cosmos appear to be co-extensive." (Berger, 1969, p. 24)

The particular legitimation in which this merging of meanings is embodied and through which it is promoted is religion (at least historically this has been the case until recent times). By this 'cosmosization' of the nomos "the tenuous realities of the social world are grounded in the sacred 'realississum', which by definition is beyond the contingencies of human meanings and human activity." (Berger, 1969, p. 32) In the conversation from which nomos arises "God then becomes the most reliable and ultimately significant other." (Berger, 1969, p. 38)

As all of this shows, and as will be remembered from chapter two, Berger is enunciating a 'substantive' or 'substan-

tialist' definition of religion. Religion is the creation of a sacred cosmos: a world where the things of the earth are matched with those of heaven and thereby rendered stable and true. Numerous examples of this analogical procedure can be drawn from anthropological and historical literature. Primitive peoples' households are put into order and rendered one with the cosmos through the elaborate symbolic paralleling of the natural and social worlds in the structural components of the house. The ancient Hebrew nation secured its identity through the dietary laws of Leviticus which harmonized man's activities with the order believed to have been imposed by the Creator on nature. More prosaically and immediately the principle of cosmosization can be seen in the belief in the doctrine of the divine right of kings or, in India, the holy sanction given to the caste system.

Beyond this, religions represent the most powerful legitimations because their reference to an all-important yet ultimately unknowable transcendent reality allows for the actual integration of marginal situations into the nomos. In the light of the transcendent, anomalous and fearful events are given a certain 'sense' and 'reason for being'. For example, in a Christian context the fear of death is assuaged with the promise of an afterlife, and the reason for death is explained by the story of Adam's fall. To these religious legitimations of anomic phenomena Berger applies the traditional term 'theodicies' and all rituals, myths, and shamanistic

seances can be classified as being theodic in some regard.

At this juncture it should be noted that for Berger religion is but a part of the dialectical process whereby man infuses his reality with meaning. Specifically, it is the final totalizing act whereby the particular is tied to the universal, the one integrated with the all. It also is marked off by the introduction of the concept and experience of the 'sacred', which apparently goes beyond the mere recognition of 'totalness' of some world order. But on the question of the precise nature of this category 'sacred' Berger is regrettably as vague as his intellectual predecessors.

6. Alienation and False Consciousness:

One of the consequences for the individual of this overall dialectical process of world-construction is the creation through the ~~act~~ of internalization of a "duplication of consciousness", in terms of a dichotomy of socialized and non-socialized psychic components. Consciousness precedes and supercedes all else, but "a 'part' of consciousness is shaped by socialization into the form that becomes the individual's socially recognizable identity." (Berger, 1969, p. 83) With this differentiation the 'external' confrontation between society and the individual is reiterated within consciousness in an 'internal' confrontation between socialized and non-socialized components of the self. As with the external process of ordering, the relationship between the internal components is of a dialectical character, but because the nomizing process

as a whole is geared to the establishment of symmetry between subjective and objective definitions of reality, the individual is pressured progressively to stress the supremacy of the socialized half of his being. Eventually, with the success of the world-building enterprise, an estrangement between the components sets in and the dialectical nature of the relationship is lost to consciousness. Concomitantly, "the individual 'forgets' that this world was and continues to be co-produced by him." Hence the "social world and the socialized self confront the individual as inexorable facticities analogous to the facticities of nature"--the individual enters a state of 'alienation' and, "inasmuch as this alienated consciousness is based on a fallacy, it is a false consciousness." (Berger, 1969, p. 85) Or, borrowing a term from Sartre, the individual enters a condition of 'bad faith'. With the triumph of alienation the world ceases to be an open arena for man's freedom and becomes instead an aggregate of reifications (objectivated externalizations) which confronts the individual as a world of fate and necessity.

It should be carefully noted here that Berger is positing alienation as an essentially inescapable anthropological necessity. For if man wishes to avoid anomy he must attain meaning in his life, but to do so he must engage in the dialectical process outlined by Berger and that process inevitably leads to the introduction of alienation. In other words, as modern economic man can at best only seek a balanced trade-off between the two evils of inflation and unemployment, nomizing man has

always been compelled to choose what balance of anomy and alienation he wants in his life.

7. Religion and Alienation:

As religion represents the highest level of legitimation it must be assumed, in light of the above, that religion is significantly linked with alienation. Berger himself makes this point most explicitly:

As we have seen, religion has been one of the most effective bulwarks against anomy throughout human history. It is now important to see that this very fact is related to the alienating propensity of religion. Religion has been so powerful an agency of nomization precisely because it has also been a powerful, probably the most powerful, agency of alienation. (Berger, 1969, p. 87)

8. Religion and the Possibility of Dealienation:

Now it is precisely at this juncture that many of Berger's more naive critics accuse him of promulgating an understanding of religion, which like Marx's, presents religion as an entirely deceptive and repressive phenomenon. Such a critique is, however, precisely that--naive--for it overlooks his very careful efforts to leave open the possibility for a type of religious mentality that is actually dealienating. (Whether he is successful in this venture will be decided later; here the attempt is only being made to reiterate the limited lines of argument he actually employs in favour of the possibility of a dealienating religious worldview.)

From the beginning it is important to realize that

Berger endeavors to qualify crucially all of his statements on religion and alienation. In introducing the concept of the relationship that exists between the two, for example, Berger says the following:

It is important to emphasize that the estrangement between the socialized and non-socialized components of the human consciousness is given in the sociality of man, in other words, that it is anthropologically necessary. There are, however, two ways in which it may proceed--one, in which the strangeness of the world and the self can be reappropriated (zurueckgeholt) by the "recollection" that both world and self are products of one's own activity--the other, in which such reappropriation is no longer possible, and in which the social world and socialized self confront the individual as inexorable facticities analogous to the facticities of nature. The latter process may be called alienation. (Berger, 1969, p. 85)

It will be noted that the propensity to order that gives rise to both society and religion is somehow not conceived of by Berger as leading inevitably to alienation--the alternative of "recollection" exists. Nor is there any indication that when alienation does result that religion is automatically responsible. Rather the clear implication is that the movement in either direction, alienation or recollection, is initiated prior to the development of religious legitimations. Remember Berger suggests that religion per se does not come into play until the social order has already reached the level where its nomos is largely taken-for-granted. Moreover, Berger later states:

It would be quite mistaken to think of alienation as a late development of consciousness, a sort of

cognition fall from grace following upon a paradisaical state of non-alienated being. On the contrary, all the evidence indicates that consciousness develops, both phylo- and ontogenically, from an alienated state to what is, at best, a possibility of dealienation. Both primitive and infantile consciousness apprehends the socio-cultural world in essentially alienated terms--as facticity, necessity, fate. (Berger, 1969, p. 86)

Alienation apparently precedes any recognizable religious activity or ideation. In fact it might be put forward that religion is a product of alienation rather than the reverse and hence its "empirical tendency" to "falsify man's consciousness of that part of the universe shaped by his own activity", (Berger, 1969, p. 90) is a consequence not of the innate nature of religion but of this historical order of affairs. In other words, entering at a relatively late stage in a process of world-ordering that is alienating, the religious reference to transcendence may well serve to relativize rather than legitimate the existing social order (which rests on the alienating nomos). In Berger's terms, religion may actually exist in a dialectical relationship with this more basic human activity of alienation. Therefore, even if it springs forth from an alienated culture, religion itself may work back on that culture in a dealienating manner (it may promote 'recollection').

Religious legitimations arise from human activity, but once crystallized into complexes of meaning that become part of a religious tradition they can attain a measure of autonomy as against this activity. Indeed, they may then 'act back on' actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically. It is probable that this autonomy . . . increases

with the degree of theoretical sophistication
In any case, one cannot properly assume a priori that
to understand the social roots of a particular religious
idea is ipso facto to understand its later
meaning or to be able to predict its later social
consequences. (Berger, 1969, p. 41-42)

Berger believes it is possible to detect empirical
instances of this happening in the numerous forms of world-
negating mysticism that man has espoused, especially the sophi-
sticated soteriologies of India which depreciate not only the
value but the very reality of the so-called empirical world,
and in the prophetism of the Old Testament and the transcend-
entalism of contemporary neo-Orthodox Protestantism.

9. Secularization:

In the second half of the book Berger undertakes an
examination of some of the historical elements of the movement
towards an irreligious (at least in the traditional sense)
society in the West. Surveying the general nature and complex
origination of secularization he focuses on the question of
"the extent to which the Western religious tradition may have
carried the seeds of secularization within itself." (Berger,
1969, p. 110) In doing so he is not advancing a monocausal or
idealist explanation of secularization but rather he is follow-
ing up on that historical element of the process which serves
to illustrate and substantiate the theoretical conjectures he
has made about the possibility of a dealienating religion in
the first half of The Sacred Canopy.

The analysis Berger presents to this end is comparatively straightforward. Accordingly, only a skeleton sketch of his line of argument, briefly mentioning his main points of concern will be given here.

Berger begins his inquiry into the seeds of secularization within the Western religious tradition by briefly delineating the widely recognized historical nexus between Protestantism and secularization first noted by Max Weber and R. H. Tawney. This inevitably leads him to the question: Was the secularizing potency of Protestantism a novelty or did it have its roots in earlier elements of the Biblical tradition?

In reply to his own question he opts for the latter answer arguing that the "disenchantment of the world" begins in the Old Testament. In the great denial of the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian versions of the cosmic order by the Israelite religion Berger finds the beginnings of the progressive de-alienation that would undermine all religious belief in our era. Specifically, he isolates three pervasive motifs in the world-view of the ancient Hebrews which are responsible for the historical process of religion's self-denial in the West: the transcendentalization of God, historization, and the rationalization of ethics. (Berger, 1969, p. 115) In reading all of this one cannot help but call to mind the parallel ideas of Mircea Eliade with his firm association of homo religiosus with an archaic cyclical time schema.

In the remaining chapters of the book Berger returns to

an analysis of the phenomenon of secularization in the modern context, concentrating on the progressive "subjectivization" or "privatization" of religion since the eighteenth century. He argues that this subjectivization of religion has been a direct consequence of the triumph of Weltanschauung of the modern cognitive antagonists of religion in the minds of the theologians themselves. That is, the theologians have accepted, at least implicitly, the superiority of a scientific and empirical approach to the world and as most traditional religious claims cannot be verified scientifically they have accepted the proposition that these claims are the product of subjective experiences and not of an encounter with an objective reality available to all. And lastly, Berger discusses how, under conditions of religious pluralism (and giving rise to it, in part), the attitudes and techniques of the free enterprise market have infected the religious world.

The beauty of Berger's theory is that it has a surprisingly neat linear development. Everything condenses, so to speak, into a simple story of how religion helps man to 'make sense of' his world, but at the price of alienating himself. The caveat is added that under certain circumstances religion may actually become dealienating, but then only at the price of becoming essentially self-destructive. In the West, at any rate, religion, by giving man an increasingly more distant and detached (because transcendental) ultimate source for the order of the world, freed man's mind to take ever increasing cogniz-

ance of the natural sources of order that exist in the world without any logically necessary anchorage in the supernatural (i.e., God--the ultimate Christian cosmic reference). The net result being science and technology and the ultimate displacement of God himself from the cosmos.

Criticisms and Contrast with Identity Theory

To understand properly where and how Berger has been misleading in his thinking one should be sure to carefully read the two brief appendices of The Sacred Canopy. Here Berger gives a quite open statement of the most basic methodological underpinnings of his theory of religion. As Van A. Harvey has commented in his two excellent critical retrospectives of Berger's writings (Van A. Harvey, 1973 and 1979), these appendices reveal the extraordinary extent to which Berger is methodologically self-conscious. Nevertheless, the screen of Berger's self-criticism failed to detect and filter-out certain fundamental inconsistencies and paradoxes in his line of reasoning. In fact, as will be seen, the weaknesses that may be isolated correspond directly with the issues discussed by Berger himself in the two appendices. Moreover, this twofold division neatly corresponds with the major criticisms which can be made of Berger's theory from the vantage point of Mol's identity theory of religion.

In line with Berger's first appendix on "Sociological Definitions of Religion" it can be said that many of the problems

with his work grow out of, or at any rate are directly related to, his choice of a 'substantive' definition of religion. It is easy to sympathize with Berger's reasons for reverting to such a definitional stance, as detailed in chapter two. Functional definitions, like Thomas Luckmann's (which states the essence of all such definitional approaches), are too broad and by not developing a 'specifying factor' they do not allow for the reasonable delineation of 'functional alternatives' to religion (e.g., science). Moreover, Luckmann's definition makes any discussion of the relationship between religion in general and alienation a nonsensical undertaking for religion is virtually co-extensive with human nature. However, pointing out the short-comings of one definitional perspective does not justify the acceptance of an alternative set of short-comings attendant upon another definitional position. Berger himself as much as acknowledges this when he says that choosing a definition of religion boils down to a matter of taste (Berger, 1969, p. 177 - last sentence), but he does not pinpoint the bias and weakness of his own stance.

As will be remembered, substantive definitions of religion are too arbitrary and restrictive. This situation stems in the main from the fact that the differentia of the 'sacred' cannot be sufficiently operationally specified. All too often the meaning of the term collapses into the essentially Western and non-primitive concept of 'transcendence' or 'the transcendent'. (This idea is essentially Western and non-primitive

because many Eastern schools, like Zen Buddhism, do not ultimately recognize the existence of another religious world, in the metaphysical sense. Similarly, though for different reasons, in many primitive communities the supernatural is functionally and conceptually fused with the natural). Berger, for instance, speaks of understanding the sacred in the light of Rudolf Otto's phenomenological statements on the subject. But, as indicated above, in truth he does not introduce the concept except in the context of the cosmosization of the nomos.

In terms of the study of the history of religion this 'exclusive' definitional orientation raises problems in attempting to understand the role of religion in the affairs of man at either end of an evolutionary schemata. With an eye to the first stages of such a schemata, difficulties arise from the fact that Berger's definition of religion causes him to suggest that religion does not really come into being until the social order has already reached the level where its nomos is largely taken-for-granted. This sequence of events is surely fallacious, however, for the student of religion, examining the data of social anthropology, cannot help but suspect that religion plays an instrumental role, in some definable sense, in the process whereby a nomos is taken-for-granted from the beginning. In other words, it is too arbitrary a distinction to speak of religion as simply the ultimate level of legitimation. The pattern of legitimation by cosmosization must have its pre-

cursors in the process of nomosization in general and these precursors should be studied under the rubric of "religion" if the phenomenon of religion as a whole is to be understood.

At the opposite end of the evolutionary schemata, in the "secularized" contemporary world, a similar line of argument holds true, based on the premise that Berger's restrictive definitional orientation prevents him from recognizing and acknowledging nascent sources of religion which belie the "reality" of secularization (in terms of the rationalization of the world). As Mol argues, by not being geared to both stability and change, such a static conception of 'the sacred' artificially overemphasizes the differences between primitive and modern societies with regard to fundamental religious concerns. If only because it leads rather automatically to a pessimistic reading of the presence of a "kaleidoscopic variety of 'sacrednesses' in the same society"; a condition which Mol reads as signifying turmoil and change in religious realities but not necessarily the demise of religion as we know it or in an even wider sense (see p.105 of this thesis).

These limitations are rooted in Berger's failure to specify and scrutinize the actual 'mechanisms' whereby the sacred is established, and more fundamentally, through which man's dialectical process of world-construction is actualized (the former, of course, being merely a special extension of the latter). And in this regard, the limitations of Berger's approach are rooted in his neglect of affective factors in

human life in general and religion in particular. Berger notes that science provides a poor theodic counter to the threat of anomy because it cannot adequately deal with such human extremes as death. But when he comes to explain religion's superior capacity to deal with even the threat of death his argument seems to curiously over-extend the role of the cognitive functioning of the proposition of a transcendent order in satisfying man's needs for a sense of security in the face of such anomy. The emotional factor which Mol has tried (theoretically) to give equal stress to from the beginning, in the form of the mechanism of 'commitment', however, is obviously as, if not more, important to the functioning of religion in this regard. In general, when the functioning of such mechanisms as ritual and myth, and their symbolism, are examined, the narrowness of Berger's operational equation of religion and cosmosization becomes abundantly manifest. As is pressed home by a reading of anthropological literature (for example, any of Victor Turner's excellent works on Ndembu symbolism, myth and ritual), the very complex interlacing of all aspects of man's existence in religious symbols, stories, and ritual acts, gives tremendous meaning to life in and of itself and the sacred is not so much the transcendent or cosmic per se as a particularly overdetermined or pivotal nexus of meanings for a given culture. As in discussions of magic or witchcraft, the key lies in the symbolic correlation of events, in the isolation of patterns (at a

largely unconscious level) and conforming to them (rather, that is, in cases of magic and so on, in the actual accomplishment of an instrumental end). It is the very ordering process in general, which Berger deals with, that is religious. But it is an ordering process infused with a special affective importance from the beginning, and successful in combatting anomy because of this affective component.

To say this means, of course, a return to a definitional position very much like Luckmann's (which Berger has explicitly rejected). Yet as Van Harvey points out, Berger's own work seems to tread this same circular path:

. . . Berger . . . does try initially to see religion in substantive terms, that is, in terms of the sacred/profane dichotomy, but a careful scrutiny of his actual employment of the concept of the sacred reveals that it tends to be used primarily in opposition to chaos rather than the profane. Thus, at one point he writes that on a deeper level "the sacred cosmos emerges out of chaos and continues to confront the latter as its terrible contrary." Or again, it is the sacred that "provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy." In short, the sacred is seen as a nomic construction rooted in man's propensity for order. In other words, Berger's substantive definition seems to drift, like Durkheim's, in a functionalist direction. (Van A. Harvey, 1973, p. 83)

Once this implicit innerent connection between religion and the whole dialectical process by which man orders his world is recognized then Berger's denials that he has narrowly identified religion with alienation and false consciousness become more dubious. As has been seen, the logic of Berger's overall analysis leads to the conclusion that religious mean-

ings (legitimations) "may be described as 'alienated projections'". (Berger, 1969, p. 89) He attempts to qualify the force of this conclusion, however, by speaking of the linkage between religion and alienation as but a strong empirical and historical tendency. (Berger, 1969, p. 89f.) It is not a necessary linkage and thus he leaves the possibility open for a dealienating religion or religions. But in light of what has been learned about Berger's true definitional position his claim to this possibility is not very convincing for as Van Harvey once again astutely comments:

Surely these "dealienating" religions do serve some legitimating function even if it be the most formal function we have learned is characteristic of all religions, namely, they are a shield against anomy and terror. Certainly they do provide meaning. Moreover, they also seem to legitimated ways of life; like obedience to the Law, in the case of Old Testament religion, or the life of agape, in the case of New Testament Christianity To be sure, neither Old Testament religion nor Protestantism uncritically baptized all socially constructed worlds, but insofar as they regarded some understanding of the existence as absolute, they do not seem to fall outside Berger's definition of religion. If this is the case, how can one say that they are not alienating projections, given Berger's dialectical scheme? Put rather roughly, Berger's dilemma seems to be something like this: insofar as these forms of religion posit a sacred world and function as they do, they are alienating; insofar as they do not, the question is whether they should be defined as religions at all. (Harvey, 1973, p. 85)

In other words, in light of the breadth of Berger's true operational definition of religion (religion = nomization) he should have avoided the unnecessary confusion of wanting

to label both alienating and dealienating movements as religious. In a clear sense, considering his true definition, only alienating movements are religious.

In the second appendix of The Sacred Canopy, entitled "Sociological and Theological Perspectives", Berger advances the following important claim:

The argument in this book has moved strictly within the frame of reference of sociological theory. No theological or, for that matter, antitheological implications are to be sought anywhere in the argument--if anyone should believe such implications to be present sub rosa, I can only assure him that he is mistaken. (Berger, 1969, p. 179)

Discussion of the specific theological concerns he had in mind when writing his appendix and their relevancy to all of his work to date will be passed over. Here it need only be simply noted that Berger is claiming that his theory of religion is 'empirical' and 'value-free' (i.e., it is not philosophical, it is scientific). Is such a claim warranted?

Regrettably, for a number of reasons it is not warranted. In the first place, many aspects of his theory, while highly appealing and within the range of the possible, simply do not qualify as empirical in any strict sense of the word. Noteworthy in this regard is his crucial thesis that "insofar as consciousness is socialized, the effect is to congeal or estrange one part of consciousness against the rest, that internalization entails self-objectification and, therefore that alienation is anthropologically necessary." (Harvey, 1973, p. 87)

Even more broadly, however, it may be said that Berger's theory of culture and religion actually rests on two 'philosophic' assumptions:

The first is that human nature is almost entirely a cultural product, that is, the self is a process created and recreated in each social situation and held together only by the slender thread of memory. On this assumption it is difficult to speak about human nature at all. We are what we are by the recognition of others; we are dependent for our very identity upon social recognition. The second and correlative assumption is that all of the symbolic forms by which man orders his experience and that mold his consciousness are symbolic fictions cast over a mysterious and chaotic world. The order of the world is, so to speak, created and fictional. (Harvey, 1973, p. 90)

Neither of these suppositions is self-evident, verifiable or falsifiable.

Now in the light of what we ourselves have said about the actual character of social scientific theorizing the charge of non-verifiability or non-falsifiability may not appear to be particularly damning. However, in Berger's case it must be remembered that he offers no evidence that he is working with any kind of a more sophisticated understanding of science than that of the verificationists. Consequently, it is reasonable to bring Berger to task for working with concepts that are not open to any conclusive measure of empirical testing--of a verifying or falsifying nature. Even more fundamentally, though, the very plausibility of Berger's concepts is called into question when one attempts to logically think through the full implications of his arguments. For at the

heart of Berger's reasoning lies the traditional paradox of all Marxist 'false consciousness' orientations.

At the heart of Berger's 'theory' of religion lies the following proposition:

The 'objectivity' of religious meanings is produced objectivity, that is, religious meanings are objectivated projections. It follows that, insofar as these meanings imply an overwhelming sense of otherness, they may be described as 'alienated projections'. (Berger, 1969, p. 88)

Behind this Feuerbachian creed lies a philosophic anthropology that tells us flatly that part of man's nature is given to him by 'nature' (his instincts) and the other part by 'society'. Berger's supposedly sociological viewpoint places man, then, within a decidedly deterministic world.

Yet Berger wishes to mitigate this determinism by speaking of the possibility of dealienation through recollection, and the consequent possibility of a dealienating religion. To this end he posits a capacity on man's part to free himself from the effects of the social conditioning through which the process of ordering a chaotic reality by alienated projections is perpetuated. But if man's whole nature has in essence been shaped by the 'false consciousness' in which he has been raised (as Berger's philosophic anthropology implies), then from where does he derive the knowledge and ability with which to free himself from this false consciousness? Is not some extra-empirical realm of freedom being introduced to the discussion?

The only way that Marxist analyses can elude this problem is through their reliance on a 'philosophic' anthropology that provides a metaphysical and a priori standard of the conditions of man's freedom. A standard by which all of man's living circumstances may be judged. But, as Van Harvey keenly observes, within the frame of reference provided by Berger no such philosophical standard of freedom is advanced. Rather the 'freedom' (or, to use the Existentialist term, the 'authenticity') which Berger rests his argument on can only be defined as being essentially nihilistic in character. In Harvey's words,

. . . the basic metaphor for authenticity in his works is that of a self suddenly deprived of any normal marks of identity confronting the terror and nothingness of the night (existence).
(Harvey, 1973, p. 90)

In other words, at no point is Berger's concept of 'recollection' (a blatantly philosophic notion, with Platonic overtones) filled in, so to speak, with anything more substantial than the suggestion of a kind of Existential defiance of the abyss through the sheer exertion of an informed will-power.

Berger himself, of course, does not interpret this negative act of standing outside the taken-for-granted routines of consciousness as being nihilistic. Though in an examination of the text of The Sacred Canopy one would be hard pressed to discover precisely why. One thing is certain, he cannot easily have recourse to the Marxist philosophic anthropology. In the

first place, simply because it is 'philosophic' through and through, and makes no serious pretense to be otherwise. Secondly, because, as we have seen, he is opposed to any understanding of alienation that posits it as the product of some primeval cognitive fall from grace (see p. 145 of this thesis). Nevertheless, through an examination of the rudimentary logic of the argument of The Sacred Canopy coupled with the most general appreciation of its logical extension in his next brief book A Rumour of Angels (1970), it is possible to divine two other closely interrelated explanations for Berger's failure to directly address the paradox of the false consciousness thesis as used in his theory of religion. Neither of these explanations, however, frees Berger's work from a fundamental reliance on philosophical (metaphysical) and theological assumptions. Rather these explanations demonstrate that Berger's ultimate reliance on philosophical (metaphysical) and theological propositions is built into his understanding of religion as a projective system.

To fully understand this state of affairs it is helpful to have a good working knowledge of A Rumour of Angels but it is not imperative and in the discussion immediately at hand we will minimize our reliance on this text. But for those that are interested in pursuing the connections between the two texts and the manner in which Berger's overall methodological stance to religious theorizing is profoundly affected by the formulations he specifically advances in the latter book

we have supplied a brief appendix in which these matters are discussed in greater depth.

The paradox of false consciousness is rooted, in Berger's case, in the whole notion of 'projectionism'. For it is meaningful to speak of religion as a projective system only if it is implicitly assumed that it is possible to refer to an 'unprojected reality' (i.e., an uninterpreted reality) in which man's freedom is anchored. Therefore, logically, Berger is not really claiming that the order of the world is totally "created and fictional", as Harvey asserts. However, the specific formulation of his philosophic anthropology obscures this fact and does create the impression that the world outside of the sacred canopy is utterly "mysterious and chaotic". Rephrased, then, the pertinent question to be asked of Berger's theory of religion is: What is this unprojected reality that lies implicitly behind Berger's formulation of religion as a projective system?

There are two possible answers to this question: a theologically derived transcendent reality or, what Ninian Smart calls (in his perceptive critique of Berger's theory, Smart, 1973, p. 75-76) a "neutral concept" of reality, which is philosophically derived and entails subscribing to a naive verificationist view of science (in which Kant's separation of phenomena and noumena is essentially denied). Berger, in point of fact, seems to assume that both types of unprojected reality exist and in his book A Rumour of Angels he attempts

to argue, unsuccessfully in our opinion (see appendix one), for his own unique 'compatibility system' (i.e., an attempt to establish the intellectual compatibility of religion and modern science) between the sociology of knowledge and theology through the implication of a crucial interfacing of these two realms of unprojected reality.

The transcendent reality line of argumentation for an unprojected reality entails inserting into Berger's philosophic anthropology the possibility, from the beginning, of man possessing some fairly secure, direct or intuitive, access to knowledge of a transcendent reality (i.e., the Christian God, Brahman, Nirvana and so on). It is this access to knowledge which would supply man with some detached base from which to judge the social world. Technically, in both The Sacred Canopy and A Rumour of Angels, Berger has excluded this possibility by bracketing out of his discussions any consideration of the roles played by revelation and mysticism in man's religious life. However, as the objective of the latter book is to prove the reasonableness of thinking in terms of the existence of such a transcendent reality, even from strictly within the perspective of the sociology of knowledge (in Berger's terms of reference, to lay the foundations for an empirically and anthropologically grounded theology), it is to be presumed that the existence of such an unprojected reality is already accepted by Berger on faith. Similarly, in the light of Berger's past clear professions

of his personal Christian commitments and their instrumental role in shaping his sociological thinking (The Precarious Vision, 1961), it must be wondered whether his willingness to work with a projective understanding of religion was not conditioned by his Christian confidence in speaking (only implicitly in this particular case) of the possibility of an unprojected reality. In the second appendix of The Sacred Canopy Berger explicitly disavows any sympathy, as a sociologist, with the Barthian theological approach to the study of religion (the differentiation of religion and Christian revelation, see p. 18 of this thesis). Yet in contemplating his presentation of religion as a projective system one is sorely tempted to see in it but a social scientific equivalent to the Barthian perspective. Or, at any rate, one suspects that there has been a significant spill-over, so to speak, from the realm of theological concerns into the realm of sociological inquiry; a suspicion reinforced by A Rumour of Angels, in spite of its more Schleiermachian (the great nineteenth century liberal theological Friedrich Schleiermacher) approach. In general it seem reasonable to speculate that Berger's personal confidence in the existence and guidance of God--the guarantor of man's ultimate freedom--contributed to his overlooking the need to account for man's freedom from social conditioning through cognitive access to an unprojected reality in terms of the accepted language of the social sciences.

Such an oversight can also be explained, of course, by

the concomitant fact that such a social scientific account of an unprojected reality would appear to be nigh on impossible. For such an account would have to point to logical and empirical proof that all human knowledge is not interpretational. And the force of the argument for the interpretational character of man's sense of reality is reflected in the spirit and letter of Berger's own formulation of a philosophic anthropology and consequent presentation of religion as a projective system (i.e., a body of interpretational knowledge). For his line of thought in this regard is consciously, and quite wholeheartedly, guided by his own thesis of the 'social construction of reality' (see Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, 1966).

Now it might be argued that a measure of the order that man sees in this world is simply an accurate reflection of the order which does exist. To say this does not involve fully subscribing to a position of 'naive realism' (i.e., the belief that it is indeed possible to attain to a "literal representation of the world, a reproduction of the objective reality as it is in itself" (Ian G. Barbour, 1971, p. 35). For example, mathematics is a human projective system ordering the universe but the successful applications of that system to the solving of problems in the field of physics and elsewhere has led the scientific community to reasonably conclude that in some discernible way mathematics provides an accurate map to the contours of the objective world. In a similar manner, could not

religious ideas have some fairly strong correlation to a religious reality? If one answers "yes" to this question, then one, theoretically at least, has the criteria for differentiating between alienating and dealienating religions. An alienating religion would be one which is more committed to legitimizing the existing social order than to accurately reflecting the 'true' or 'sacred' nature of the universe (i.e., in Christianity, God's transcendent design and intent for this world).

In arguing for the possibility of dealienation and a dealienating religion in The Sacred Canopy this is implicitly what Berger is saying. He even goes so far as to "half-offer", as Smart says, the specific analogy of mathematics (see Berger p. 181). But because he initially makes certain misleading pronouncements about the basic nature of man and his reality things become confused.

In A Rumour of Angels Berger strives to correct this confusion. But in his argument there for what he calls "signals of transcendence" (i.e., certain "prototypical human gestures" that indicate the existence of a reality that is truly 'other', that transcends the immense array of human projections) he, in essence, merely extends the analogy of mathematics to more ordinary aspects of man's thought and behavior (see appendix one). In each case all that is being argued is that logically there are grounds for maintaining an openness to the idea of a transcendent or, as in the case of mathematics, an absolutely objective, unprojected, "neutral" reality. In

other words, Berger's argument represents, in essence, but a repetition in different form of Popper's arguments for an 'objective reality' (see pp. 55-61 of this thesis). When discussing Popper's arguments we were not convinced of the necessity to move from the acknowledgement of the need (semantically and psychologically) to employ the idea of objective reality as a 'regulative principle' to acceptance of the actual existence of an objective reality as revealed by science. Likewise, when confronted with Berger's 'signals of transcendence' there is no logical necessity to move from openness to the possibility of a transcendent reality to acceptance of its existence. As Berger himself admits (see appendix one), it is by an act of 'faith' (what he calls "inductive faith") alone that openness to the possibility leads to acceptance of the 'fact'. Reverting to Alfred Korsch's graphic phrase (see p. 39 of this thesis), to say that one has used a 'map' to great effect, attesting to its accuracy, is not to be able to claim that the 'territory' in question is 'map-like'. Acting as if the map were a perfectly literal representation of the territory may be feasible under almost all circumstances. But ultimately, as Gregory Bateson warns in his essay on "Pathologies of Epistemology" (Bateson, 1972, pp. 478-487), one pays a price for working with erroneous premises, especially in the social and behavioral sciences.

What all of this means, then, is that if one is going to speak of religion as a projective system one is essentially

dealing with a philosophical formulation of the nature and functioning of religion and not an empirical or scientific one as implied by Berger. For the necessary correlative idea of an unprojected reality is a decidedly philosophic, and in Berger's case, a theological idea.

Finally, before turning to draw Mol and the identity theory of religion into the picture, it is worth reiterating that even when the above clarification is taken into consideration man is left, at best, in Berger's account of things, balancing various levels of anomy and alienation. True or complete dealienation is impossible as even the objective reality that most directly impinges on man undoubtedly goes through some measure of translation and interpretation in the process of being internalized. And when man attempts to communicate and externalize that self-same reality he most certainly transforms it, yet again, in some manner. A dealienating society or religion, then, is simply one that is aware of the cognitive social dialectic (it is 'recollected') and attempts to use that knowledge to accomodate itself to a greater degree of anomy by possessing a more advanced system of legitimations (i.e., a more sophisticated form of alienation). This means that, ideally, religion in some form (as the concept is understood by Berger) should continue to play a significant role in the future of man for the transcendent component of religious legitimations renders them the alienating agents par excellence. But does the use of the term

alienation, with all of its perjorative and ideological connotations, add an element of realism to the theory of religion or merely serve to obfuscate matters and perpetuate old misunderstandings?

Mol is adamantly of the latter opinion, as the following long but most interesting passage reveals:

Our analysis is in no small way enhanced by Peter Berger's (1967a, p. 202), yet he, and most nineteenth-century philosophers, including Feuerbach and Marx, regarded a certain area of objectification (or Versachlichung) as wrong because it meant commitment to something which conflicted with their own sacred, individualistic, humanistic ideology. This area they called reification (or Verdinglichung) which meant those objectifications which desacralized full individual self-determination in that they treated things as external to the mind. The majesty and hegemony of the personality were injured, so it was thought, if these things were perceived as independent from, rather than dependent upon, man the constructor of symbols. Dehumanization and reification were thought to be the direct consequence of reification (or as Marx called it, false consciousness) in that man the creator became subject to his own creations. Commitment to, and acceptance of, reifications was bad, in that they took man's independence away from him. Similarly, Tillich (1959, p. 212) calls these objectifications 'demonic'. Objectifications on the other hand that were nothing more than innocent abstractions would pass the muster. The bias of those who use, and have used, the reification concept, unfailingly consists in their assumption that their perception of reality is the only 'real' one, whereas the reifiers make the unreal 'real'. The uselessness of this distinction for scientific analysis should be clear, yet the result of this influential theorizing has been the view that alienation erodes self-realization (as a summum bonum), rather than that alienation is the severance of the individual from any sacralized identity. The latter view we think is more honest: it does not hide in an unstated system of meaning for which the distinction is implicitly missionary. And it is more useful for sociological analysis (it treats the sacred as a category rather than a specific instance of ideological condemnation). (Mol, 1976, p. 213)

Mol, then, would add a third most important factor to our list of the undesirable philosophical foundations of a projectivist understanding of religion like Berger's: what he calls an "individualistic, humanistic ideology". As will become increasingly apparent, the emphasis should most clearly be placed on the first adjective: 'individualistic'. The term 'humanistic' is actually a bit misleading as it is not humanism, methodologically at least, that Mol finds objectionable. Rather this word, we suspect, is but a label which serves to locate the views in question in the intellectual history of the West and isolates the background out of which certain more specific conceptual problems arose. Most specifically, Mol is concerned with conceptual problems which he associates with the term 'individualistic'.

Here we need only reiterate, that from Mol's perspective, one of the chief problems with Berger's theory of religion is the inordinate importance and primacy it rather automatically attaches to personal identity over group and social levels of identity. Identity theory duly recognizes, as we have pointed out, that certain sacrifices must be incurred at the level of personal identity in order to shape and maintain a strong group identity. But it refrains from using the term alienation to describe this state of affairs for the full reality of the situation is that each identity level or foci acts in a complicated system of checks and balances to both reinforce and restrain the others. At any given moment human behavior is

guided, to put things somewhat simplistically, by whatever imbalances temporarily exist within an overall dialectic of multiple identities. In the long run, it might be possible to say that certain cultures, societies, or groups are 'characterized' by certain persistent identity imbalances (the historical and social structural reasons for the presence of any such imbalance being, of course, enormously complex and subtle). Or, in other words, vis-à-vis certain identity needs they are alienated. That is, for the sake of simplicity of expression, it makes more sense to speak of at least three possible types or levels of alienation: personal, group, and social, all of which are relativistic. As personal alienation decreases (because personal identity is growing stronger) then social alienation increases (because social identity is being weakened) and so on. Alienation is but the obverse of identity strength and stability.

However, even if one should wish to persist in using the more limited traditional association of the term alienation with some impairment of individual consciousness we would argue that an identity theory approach, linking alienation to an impairment of personal identity and not individual consciousness, is more "honest", to use Mol's own word, to human realities. The full import of what we are about to discuss cannot be developed here. This will have to wait until we turn to a scrutiny of some of the systems theory characteristics of Mol's formulation of identity as an analytical category. But at this junc-

ture, while Berger's thought is fresh in our minds, it is wise and expedient to begin to ask some embarrassing (to Berger, we would assume) and perplexing questions.

Berger himself argues that alienation (in his sense) is an anthropological given, a necessary fact of human life. Man's nature is derived from two sources: nature and society. It is the latter, however, which makes man human--separates him from the animals. Yet it is the social character of human existence that accounts for man's alienation. But if this is indeed the case then what possible scientific end can be served by perjoratively classifying this necessary and inescapable condition? Berger's whole use of terms like 'alienation', 'false consciousness', and 'bad faith' to establish the pernicious nature of the human enterprise in almost all of its conceivable forms clearly implies, once again, that we are running up against yet another a priori metaphysical standard. Human reality is being measured with some fanciful, idealistic, and unspecified yardstick of personal wholeness.

Berger is not promoting anew the myth of the noble savage whereby all that is good in man lies with his 'naturally given' nature. His philosophic anthropology makes this clear as does his assertion that in all probability the child and the primitive are more alienated than the modern adult (see p. 146 of this thesis). Therefore, the unalienated and recollected man (the ideal of personal wholeness) is a socially created creature

he has not invested his socially given nature with an artificial absoluteness. He has not 'forgotten' that as most of human reality is humanly fabricated it is open to modification. But what exactly does this mean? Apart from the obvious problems associated with the need to posit an unprojected reality, what does it mean to say that the unalienated man has not 'forgotten' the dialectical character of the human situation? Man is what he is because of the dialectic (of externalization, objectification, and internalization), and the dialectic is a collective phenomenon as Berger himself demonstrates. Where is the sense, then, in identifying 'freedom', and hence implicitly the ideal standard of human wholeness, with an individual consciousness that at best can have an abstract idea of the collective dialectic? This consciousness and this idea are themselves the product of the collective dialectic so in what sense has man's freedom to create his world been forgotten? The dialectic itself is the guarantor, the substance, of man's freedom, and individual consciousness of the dialectical character of the human condition may alter the nature of the specific products produced by the dialectic in the future (i.e., the particulars of man's Weltanschauungen) but it does not fundamentally introduce a creative freedom that did not previously exist. The freedom, like the creativity, at the level of nomosization, is collectively held and enacted. No individual, no matter how enlightened, is ultimately all that much more free for merely

thought is delimited by the mechanisms of communication, like language, that we hold in common; mechanisms that are undergoing constant modification with or without our rational consent. Therefore, to speak of 'forgetfulness' and to fundamentally associate it with a lack of freedom to create and control our world (to be alienated) is rather misleading. It perpetuates the tendency to artificially identify humanitas most exclusively with the power of the individual to effect his environment through the exercise of reason. When in actual fact who we are and what we do is determined for the better part of our existence by decidedly collective and prerational or extrarational criteria.

As Berger himself forcefully argues, man is very much a social creature, his reality is a social creation, and in no sense then is it reasonable to think and act as if he had an identity quite independent of social (i.e., collective) processes. Even more broadly, as will be elaborated in the sixth chapter, man's natures or consciousnesses (to use Berger's terms), or his identities, or his minds (to use Gregory Bateson's term), are by no means strictly subjective phenomena. Rather man's identities, in all of their forms, are localized in the objective order of the world (both natural and humanly created) as much as they are in the thought processes of the individual. Consequently, little scientific purpose is served by pitting an hypothesis of individual cognitive freedom against a reality of inescapable dependence on collective and largely unconscious processes of reality construction. The derogation of the latter

through a doctrine of alienation like Berger's merely serves to obstruct our perception of human realities by introducing an unannounced and non-essential value distinction. The fulfillment of human potential does not rest with allegiance to the conception of the primacy of a personal wholeness that consists of a consciousness ever on guard against emotional submission to the objectivated collective visions of man. Such a perspective on matters automatically prejudices the scholar in his assessment of the role of religion in the life of man.

Mol argues for quite the reverse of Berger's perspective. Berger's dealienated consciousness (in an absolute sense) is the equivalent of Mol's alienated one, as indicated by his definition of alienation as "the severance of the individual from any sacralized identity." It is precisely the act of emotional submission or, to use Mol's less perjorative term, commitment, that rescues man from an alienated condition. An objectivated, ritualized, and mythologized system of meaning is precisely what man needs to be able to face change and incorporate it with a minimum of disruption into an anomy defeating order in life (i.e., an identity system with firm boundaries).

In this clash of perspectives the student of religion can easily detect the Marxist roots of Berger's thought as opposed to the Durkheimian basis of Mol's thinking. For as Roland Robertson points out:

Both Marx and Durkheim claimed to be concerned with promoting the full flowering of integral man; both

also saw the social structure as of primary importance in establishing such a condition. But they had almost opposite recommendations as to the social-structural prerequisites of individual integralness. This, to the point that it must be concluded that they had different conceptions as to what integralness and individuality consisted in. Basically Marx saw the division of labour as productive of a condition of alienation--man estranged 'from himself', from others and from his work. Durkheim on the other hand tended to see the division of labour as productive of the conditions under which men could be genuinely individualistic. Man could only be completed as an individual through being involved in a reciprocal relation with another person, a relation which was productive and part of a wider series of relations. (Robertson, 1970, p. 203)

It must be remembered that Mol's Durkheimian orientation has been importantly modified, however, through the introduction of the idea of a plurality of identities which are dialectically (conflicting yet complementary) related. So that the integralness of man is not being statically and reductively associated by Mol with the successful and totalistic transformation of the crude individual into a 'social' creature through socialization and internalization. If such were the case then Mol truly would be just categorically reversing Berger's use or application of the term 'alienation'. Rather Mol avoids linking 'integralness' with either just the personal level (as Marx and Berger largely do) or with just the social level (as Durkheim largely does). The integralness that Mol is concerned with, and to which he links religion, is the integralness of man's identities and as man has several identities, by Mol's reckoning, then there are several kinds of integralness, all of which are semi-

autonomous. Nevertheless each of these integralnesses depends upon social processes, most particularly religion and the dynamic tension of a condition of identity pluralism itself, in order to maintain its relative autonomy. In other words, its existence and 'freedom' grow out its participation in a larger state of order not out its defiance of such order.

In Mol's overall orientation he has in effect functionally and logically collapsed the common understandings of the terms alienation and anomy into each other. For example, in his discussion of sectarian movements Mol stresses that such phenomena are most honestly and realistically assessed in the light of their positive contribution to identity reinforcement (group identity). Such a judgement is much more in line with the views of the religious themselves (i.e., is less reductive). Moreover, it sustains Berger's essential insight into the raison d'être of religion as a trade-off, so to speak, of alienation and anomy as in Mol's system of thought it is recognized that a price is paid in terms of personal and social identity (or integralness) for a strong group identity. But in speaking of an identity reinforcement in place of alienation Mol has freed his analysis of Berger's existential pessimism (i.e., the view of man as eternally forced to balance two evils: alienation and anomy), his implicit rational individualism with its tendency to underplay the role of affective factors in man's life and to neglect the importance of man's collective life, and the metaphysical baggage that comes along

with subscribing to the false consciousness thesis. In short, the identity theory perspective seems to offer a more straightforward, flexible, and comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of religion. A framework which does not tie religion, in advance, exclusively to either of the two poles of the dialectic between the individual and society or that between reason and emotion or integration and differentiation.

Mol confuses things somewhat, however, by retaining the actual term 'alienated' in his work. He uses it, for example, to describe the condition of an individual prior to a sectarian affiliation. But it would appear that the word 'anomy' alone would suffice to describe the general condition of estrangement from the dominant social and religious order that he has in mind. His continued use of 'alienation' risks muddling matters, then, for the term is too closely bound-up with the rational individualism which he is seeking to counter.

Mol's continued use of 'alienation', though, stems we suspect from more than just an oversight. As will be argued in the next chapter, it is an out-growth of a certain undesirable bias in Mol's thinking. As Robertson indicates in the passage cited above, the fundamental conflict of the in many respects similar views of Marx and Durkheim suggests that in the last analysis the two great theorists were working with opposed images of man's nature. The same we suspect is true of Berger and Mol. Mol's thought rests on what we will call a more 'conservative' understanding of man, his needs and

abilities, than does Berger's work. What we mean exactly by the label 'conservative' will be defined in the following chapter. Here we will only point out that this 'conservative' bias to Mol's thinking is directly reflected in his specification of 'alienation' as "severance of the individual from any sacralized identity." This specification of alienation, and hence the conservatism behind it, is objectionable because it merely reverses Berger's stance and implies that all identities outside of a religious framework are 'alienated', and hence inadequate and undesirable. But such a perspective on matters fails to ring true to common sense. Moreover, it violates Mol's own reasonable dictum that any theoretical formulation of the nature and functioning of religion must allow for functional alternatives to religion like art and play. As this suggests, then, Mol's 'conservative' bias has a very definite effect on his formulation of the identity theory of religion. As one of Mol's colleagues, Professor Louis Greenspan, has most appropriately observed: Mol's theory begins by speaking of how religion sacralizes identity, but it appears to end by implying, to all intents and purposes, that religion actually creates all truly stable identities.

In exploring the roots of this observation it will be seen that it is Mol's 'conservative' bias which distorts his functionalist 'methodology' and gives rise to a 'theory' of religion which actually reflects a certain crucial element of agreement with the supposedly 'substantivist' position cultivated by Berger.

CHAPTER V

"THE TRANSCENDENTALIZATION OF ORDER"

- THE CONSERVATIVE BIAS OF IDENTITY

THEORY

The Conservative Bias of Identity Theory

Some sense of the kind of fundamental ambiguity which the student of religion encounters in Mol's presentation of the identity theory of religion is perhaps best conveyed by pausing to consider a rather lengthy passage drawn from a review of Identity and the Sacred written by Gregory Baum (Baum, 1979, p. 5'). The interesting aspect of this passage is that it attributes a point of view to Mol that appears to be almost in direct contradiction to the perspective we have presented (with regard to the functionalist tendency to overstress the integrative functioning of religion) in the previous chapter. The passage in question reads as follows:

The great drama of life, especially in the modern world, according to Mol, is the struggle for survival and identity in an unstable world of change and failure. Even though his social-scientific theory of religion has an affinity to functionalism . . . he finds that functionalists are not sufficiently sensitive to the integrative processes in society. Functionalists emphasize adaptation and then suppose that successful adaptation guarantees identity: they fail to observe that the adaptive trends must be countered by trends of continuity and cohesion and that sacralizing processes are necessary to establish identity.

Mol stresses more than the functionalists, the conservative forces in society. Both Parsons and Bellah, for instance, regard the evolution of religion in modern times, focusing as it does on personal life, personal conscience, personal meaning, as a successful adaptation: a growing differentiation makes religion fit in a society that is also becoming more differentiated. Mol, on the contrary, argues that this adaptive trend in religion in fact undermines its identity. Liberal religion inevitably wanes. Mol points to the growing indifference of people to the major Christian churches that have given into liberalism, and to the astounding success of the conservative, evangelical churches that weld strong group identities. These conservative churches, Mol believes, are correct when they look upon rationality, critique, and the application of science to religion as a counter-ideology. It is in fact a counter-ideology, the sacralizing of the liberals' identity. (Baum, 1979, p. 5 -)

We ourselves have probably already said enough to suggest the essential truth of Baum's comments. For example, one need only cast one's thoughts back to Mol's objections to Richard Fenn's stance on the future of religion in a modern environment. As will be remembered, Mol aggressively takes Fenn to task for overestimating the 'differentiated' character of modern life, and failing to take proper note of the presence of multiple, equally strong, new forces and foci of integration.

Of more direct importance and relevancy to the exploration of Baum's views is Mol's discussion of Bellah's quite famous evolutionary scheme of the development of man's religions. In chapter two of Identity and the Sacred, "Evolution, Differentiation and Secularization", Mol briefly outlines Bellah's five stage description of the progressive differentiation of man's religious symbolism (Primitive Religion, Archaic

Religion, Historic Religion, Early Modern Religion, and Modern Religion) and notes with approval the need to develop such evolutionary schemes in order to facilitate comparative analyses. As Mol comments, with regard to the work of such scholars as Comte, Spencer, Tylor, Muller, Durkheim, and Freud: "until-recently the evolutionary approach to religion has been in justifiable disrepute. It suffered from too many exuberant, but premature speculations." (Mol, 1976, p. 16) On the whole these approaches tended to be excessively reductionistic and/or they presented religious beliefs as but a pre-scientific "transitional mode of cognition". (Mol, 1976, p. 16) By focusing on the symbolical character of religious systems of thought Bellah manages to rejuvenate the evolutionary perspective, avoiding these pitfalls, and Mol uses Bellah's scheme to help plot out his own conception of the dialectical pattern of religious development (see p. 202 below).

Nevertheless, as Baum noted, Mol rebukes Bellah for his lop-sided emphasis on the effects of the forces of differentiation in men's religious life through the ages:

We may criticize Bellah's scheme in similar terms to our criticism of Weber, whom both Parsons and Bellah follow closely. It is like talking almost exclusively about differential calculus in mathematics without paying much attention to its complement--integral calculus. The emphasis on differentiation in religious symbolization, however valid and true in itself, fails to account for identity or integration.

. . . it is the capacity of commitment to be latched into another identity focus which appears to us to

be the crucial theoretical variable. Unless the 'identity' and the 'differentiation' side of the evolutionary process are continually paired and juxtaposed, either rationalistic or irrationalistic biases inevitably creep into the analysis. If differentiation is stressed too much the forces of rationality and adaptation will be overestimated and the importance of the constancy and salience of emotional anchorage will be underestimated. On the other hand, the opposite mistake is made when there is too exclusive an emphasis on identity and the forces which stress sameness and order.

Regarding the ability of the forces of differentiation to gain the upper hand over the forces of integration or identity, there must be traditional antecedents which lend the change both legitimation and, even more significant, a guarantee of the better fitting order and interpretation of reality. (Mol, 1976, p. 19-20)

Now as a close reading of this passage reveals, Baum's presentation of Mol's position does not really contradict our earlier observations. Nor is there evidence that Mol has contradicted his own position. Mol's criticism of the functionalist tendency to overemphasize the integrative functioning of religion refers to the analytical placement of religion as a phenomenon in the Parsonian systems model of human action, and to Durkheim's overly restrictive formal correlation of religion and the promotion of social solidarity. His objections to Bellah's overemphasis of differentiation, on the other hand, have to do with distortions in discussions of the character of the dialectical process of religious change. In each case the key word is 'overemphasis' as Mol happens to be in basic agreement with the views being expressed. The ultimate object of religion, according to identity theory, is to advance the

tural mechanisms for 'centering' man's thoughts and actions through the totalizing extension of some limited identity system. More often than not countervailing sacralizing patterns prevent the full harmonization of man's life under one identity system. But in the case of the great world religions an identity system arises which manages to address and hold in check most of man's significant identity needs, creating a more expansive nomos in which for man to think and act. The success of the world religions rests in their capacity to dynamically anticipate and absorb change rather than statically resist it. Most specifically and importantly, in agreement with Bellah, Mol would seem to believe that the world religions kept pace with and stimulated the increasing differentiation of the self (Mol might prefer to more explicitly say the personal identity; as we will see there is an important difference in meaning) from its environmental context. This differentiation being one which is brought about through the increasing objectification of the social order and the attendant withdrawal of 'cathexis from the myriad objects of empirical reality' (to use Bellah's phrase). (Mol, 1976, p. 19)

But, as the passage from Mol cited above suggests, Bellah fails to provide an adequate picture of the process of religious change because, in Mol's opinion, he neglects to communicate enough about the motivation for religious change. That is, he fails to relate his analysis of the change process itself to his own functionalist understanding of the nature of

religion as an agent of integration. In other words, as Baum's comments imply, Mol takes Bellah to task for failing to draw out the essentially 'conservative' character of man's religious life. For as Mol's definition of 'sacralization' reveals, Mol perceives religion per se as "a sort of brake applied to unchecked infinite adaptations in symbol systems" (see p. 105 of this thesis). As a result Mol implies that Bellah's analysis falls subject to a rationalistic bias which leads to a neglect of the primacy of emotional identity needs over cognitive processes and possibilities in the formulation and operation of man's religions.

Accordingly, with regard to the fifth stage of Bellah's evolutionary schema (the so-called Modern period), Mol offers the following cautionary note:

Also from the 'identity' perspective, one could question Bellah's postulation of the emergence of 'a dynamic multidimensional self capable, within limits, of continual self-transformation and capable, again within limits, of remaking the world'. If these limits are set by man's need for identity and order, the prognostication may be somewhat more acceptable. But since Bellah continues to write of 'man in the last analysis [being] responsible for the choice of his symbolism', we may regard him as coming close to denying a basic need for continuity of identity. (Mol, 1976, p. 21)

As this passage begins to reveal it is not so much religion itself which is clearly conservative in its orientation as it is man. The conservatism of man, as interpreted by Mol in terms of his identity needs, is at the root of Mol's understanding of the function served by religion. In criti-

cizing Bellah, then, Mol is going beyond a mere reaffirmation of the need to view all religious phenomena in the light of a dialectic of integrating and differentiating forces. In point of fact he is positing an implicit philosophical anthropology of his own. Regrettably, however, the exact nature of this philosophic anthropology is never spelt out. Rather, Mol almost hides the fact that he is in essence working with one behind the vagueness of his general references to man's 'obvious' need for identity and order. We would agree that man does need and crave identity, and identity stability. But just what does this actually entail? Are not identity needs quite likely as relative as any other human needs--varying from person to person, group to group, culture to culture? There may actually be a certain universal base level, a threshold common to all humanity, but its precise configuration has never been stipulated and Mol does little to advance our understanding in this regard. Moreover, even if the effort were made to isolate this level there is reason to suspect that the conclusion might well prove to be rather trivial.

Recognizing the relativistic character of the concept of identity does not invalidate use of the concept but it does necessitate that one exercise greater care in specifying the context in which any judgements on identity needs are valid. For obviously the identity needs of an Eskimo in Labrador differ significantly from those of a suburban resident of Toronto, as do those of a thirteenth century French peasant and those of

the same urban Canadian. Similarly, as Mol considers group identities independently from the identities of individuals (see the discussion of identity as an analytical category below) different kinds of groups, different in time, place, culture, structure and function, have significantly differing basic identity needs. Certain generalities may be derived but these generalities can only broadly direct one's thinking on the subject and individual applications of the general principles will necessitate close attention to the social, cultural, and historical particulars of the case in question.

Mol has worked to isolate some of these generalities in order to demonstrate the feasibility and advantages of the identity theory approach to religion. But as his primary focus has been religion and not identity per se he has for the most part based his thought on an impressionistic and intuitive assessment of the character of man's basic identity needs--choosing to place his thoughts within a rather simplistic universal framework. And in contrast to Bellah, Mol appears to see man, primitive or modern, as a most fragile and insecure creature, a creature most in need of sheltering illusions and monolithic systems of meaning. One almost gets the impression that Mol's rejection of the application of deprivation theory to sectarian movements rests more on his belief that deprivation theory accurately characterizes all of man's cultural endeavors than on a truly positive assessment of the benefits of sectarian membership. Man in general is weak (in terms of his identity needs), therefore there is no particularly special connection

between certain kinds of physical, psychological, and social deprivations and religion. But whatever, in the last analysis, one thing is certain: Mol's optimistic assessment of the future of religion in the wide sense hinges on his pessimistic assessment of the flexibility of man's basic identity needs. Of course, Mol himself would in all likelihood repudiate the use of the term 'pessimistic', saying it is too value-laden, and insist instead that his perspective merely reflects the truth of the human condition.

In his review of Identity and the Sacred, Baum appears to have failed to fully appreciate the dialectical or double edged character of Mol's methodological position. However, perhaps because of his own more liberal and Neo-Marxist theological and political leanings, he appears to have almost instinctively detected the presence of this fundamental streak of 'conservativism' in Mol's thinking. He makes two mistakes, though, in his overall assessment of Mol's formulation of identity theory: he over-simplifies matters by implying that the 'conservative' orientation of Mol's analysis of religion can be traced to but a perverse (in his opinion) social, political, and theological conservativism; and he over-reacts to this strain of 'conservativism' and improperly imputes that this bias is intrinsic to the very foundational principles of the identity theory of religion.

In point of fact, however, Mol's 'conservativism' is not easily traced through any of his writings to any obvious

set of personal preferences, especially of a political nature. Though we would argue impressionistically that Mol tends to exhibit a native conservatism with regard to social and cultural concerns. Theologically, Mol has long been intimate with the basic writings of Barth (his M.A. thesis, for example, dealt with Barth) and at several junctures in Identity and the Sacred he briefly takes it upon himself to defend the Barthian position against its detractors. But at no point do these discussions move outside of the social scientifically defined parameters of the identity theory of religion. Though, as the following passage reveals, they are reflective of the broader type of 'conservativism' which we think is characteristic of Mol's thinking.

From the 'identity' perspective one might almost want to reverse Bellah's appraisal of twentieth-century theologians. Barth's consistent, lifelong work was to theologize in terms of the Christian tradition. He attempted to carve out and reinforce a Christian identity, however sceptical one may be about this possibility within a highly abstract and intellectualistic theology. He, more than Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, and Tillich, reinforced a traditional baseline for the twentieth-century flux of accelerated differentiation, whereas they took their cues often implicitly from the flotsam of meaning which the flux casually deposited on the periphery. Tillich's compromises with rational scholarship and Bultmann's preoccupation with the higher criticism of Biblical literature cannot by any stretch of the imagination be deemed to have strengthened the faith. Neither may be as effective as the Jesus Freaks, the ecology buffs, and Mao's missionaries in the creation of identity foci for some twentieth-century youth. At least Barth consistently encouraged those whose commitment was focused on traditional Christianity. (Mol, 1976, p. 20-21)

In these comments, the language of which is highly typical of the manner in which Mol addresses such issues, it is possible to detect evidence of most of the elements we associate with Mol's 'conservativism'. We are not offering this passage as any kind of definitive proof of the presence of this so-called 'conservativism'. But we can effectively use it to begin to draw attention to some of the factors which we will be seeking to elucidate in the remainder of this chapter. Factors like the following: a positive emphasis on the role of 'tradition' in strengthening and stabilizing identity; a corresponding emphasis on the importance of 'emotional commitment' over all other factors in determining the strength and durability of an identity; hand in hand with this, a negative evaluation of the effect of 'rationality' in general, but especially 'intellectualism', on identity strength; a negative evaluation of the contributions of the modern world to man's quest for identity, and identity security; a consequent optimism over the role to be played in the future by relatively straightforward, emotional, and dogmatic faiths; and the clear suggestion that, in the light of the mental and social disruption man has brought on himself in the creation of a modern 'rationalized' society, his return to a religious life of this character might well be viewed as a healthy development. In broad terms, methodologically, this perspective on matters has given rise to a marked penchant for emphasizing the degree of continuity which exists between premodern and modern soc-

ieties with regard to religious (i.e., identity) needs.

Whether the presence of this tendency warrants labeling Mol as 'conservative' is a matter open to dispute. The labels 'conservative' and 'liberal' are themselves far too simplistic and relativistic. Hence they are not really all that helpful in getting to the heart of the matter. But to the extent that Mol demonstrates a preoccupation with the continuity of man's needs, and the continued ability of traditional religious forms to address those needs, his position does appear to be 'conservative' relative to the so-called 'progressive' views of the leaders of the intellectual community over the last century. More specifically, relative to the positions adopted by other functionalist theorists of religion, like Robert Bellah and Thomas Luckmann (The Invisible Religion, 1967), his orientation appears 'conservative'. For unlike them he does not seem to show much appreciation for or, alternatively, grant much significance to, the novelty of the modern condition. Beyond acknowledging the existence of some comparatively superficial social-structural changes Mol does not seem to fully sympathize with the views of his colleague George Grant:

It is not necessary to take sides in the argument between the ancients and the moderns as to what is novelty, to recognize that we live in novelty of some kind. Western technical achievement has shaped a different civilization from any previous, and we North Americans are the most advanced in that achievement. This achievement is not something simply external to us, as so many people envision it. It is not merely an external environment which we make and choose to

use as we want--a playground in which we are able to do more and more, an orchard where we can always pick variegated fruit. It moulds us in what we are, not only at the heart of our animality in the propagation and continuance of our species, but in our actions, thoughts and imaginings. Its pursuit has become our dominant activity and that dominance fashions both the public and private realms. (George Grant, 1969, p. 15)

Grant, Bellah, and Luckmann may stridently disagree on the particulars of the modern ethos and its consequences for religion and human consciousness in general. But, unlike Mol, they are at one in their estimation of its effect in shaping a new world of human discourse.

The Methodological Manifestations and Ramifications

In our opinion this conservatism on the part of Mol is regrettable as we believe that the greatest challenge confronting students of religious theory lies in seeking to ascertain the impact of 'modernity' (the social and psychological effect of high technology, urbanization, mass education, high levels of social mobility, and so on) on the religious life of man. And in saying this we have much more in mind than the kind of superficial phenomena, like declining levels of church attendance, that are normally considered under the rubric of 'secularization'. Our interest, like Bellah (and even more so Norman O. Brown, who has exerted a strong influence on Bellah's conceptualization of the modern period in religious development; see Beyond Belief, chapters fourteen and fifteen), is in the distinctive qualitative changes being

introduced to the thoughts and imaginings of our species as a result of the refashioning of our external environment over the last hundred years or so. But more prosaically, and to the point, in the context of this analysis, we object to the presence of this conservatism because, methodologically, it permeates Mol's thinking with a kind of operational conservatism which is out of keeping with the letter and spirit of the initial theoretical stipulations of the identity theory of religion.

Out of a desire to, as they say, 'have his cake and eat it', Mol actually appears to have a somewhat ambivalent relationship with his own theoretical model. As will be remembered, Mol declares that if there is any overall bias to his perspective it is a bias that "counterbalances the widespread pessimism about the viability of twentieth century institutional religious expressions with an equal optimism about the future of religion in the wide sense . . ." (see p. 110 of this thesis). It is in accordance with this overall orientation that Mol has chosen to work with a functionalist definitional approach. Such an approach is geared more to facilitating the discovery and due acknowledgement of nascent and emergent sacralization patterns and processes in our supposedly irreligious society. At any rate such is the clear impression created by his introductory comments to Identity and the Sacred (see p. 103 of this thesis). An impression which is strongly reinforced by his discussion of the advantages in using the processual term 'sacralization'

in place of the more static notion of 'the sacred' (see p. 105 of this thesis), and further reinforced by his rebuttal of Fenn's 'supernaturalistic' definition of religion. This rebuttal also strongly suggests that Mol believes there is ample cause to speak of the presence and emergence of many new and quite strong religious expressions (in the wide sense) in the modern world (see p. 109-110 of this thesis). Yet, as Baum's observations indicate, a complete reading of Identity and the Sacred actually leaves one with the odd impression that it is Fenn's position that has really been substantiated. For in most instances Mol appears to have been less than broad-minded or optimistic in his assessment of the many "integrating, symbolic, commitment-demanding, rallying points" which he says, countering Fenn, are to be found at the heart of modern industrial society. As has already been quoted, in point of fact Mol comments that ". . . the modern world sometimes has the appearance of a cemetery of discarded and stunted forms of sacredness" (see p. 105 of this thesis). And even more forcefully he comments elsewhere:

The tragedy of the [modern] situation is that although the forces of identity are everywhere visible, they operate slowly. In the eagerness to catch up, identities are structured around rather unlikely objects, and one is sometimes struck by the similarity of these private enthusiasms for limited causes and escapes to the efforts of those misguided animals in artificial environments which attempt to mate with their caretakers. (Mol, 1976, p. 43)

Outside of a brief discussion of the widely recognized

religious-like qualities of Maoism, Marxism, and Nationalism, Mol never really entertains any serious speculation on the existence or emergence of new religious expressions or modes of religious consciousness. Rather, one gets the distinct impression that he implicitly is inclined to question the validity of referring to such phenomena as many of the so-called 'new religions' (e.g., Subud, Meher Baba, Eckankar, Transcendental Meditation) as true religions. In almost every respect these movements along with such popular phenomena as hockey in the Canadian context (see Sinclair-Faulkner's rewarding and amusing essay "A Puckish Look at Hockey in Canada", in Religion and Culture in Canada, ed. Peter Slater) conform to the stipulations of Mol's broad, processual definition of religion (i.e., they entail an attempt to 'sacralize' a certain 'identity'). Yet, critically, Mol refrains from identifying these phenomena as being properly religious. Or, perhaps more appropriately in the case of the synthetic Eastern cults of North America, he questions their durability and hence their worth and worthiness of being judged true religions. As this clearly implies, then, underlying Mol's expansive and flexible stated methodological position (his 'methodology') one encounters a more specific set of criteria of demarcation for religious phenomena (the implicit methodological expressions of his conservative 'theory' of religion). Of course these more specific and restrictive criteria are never spelt out by Mol.

The nature of these implicit criteria soon becomes

apparent, however, if one pauses to consider just when Mol's declared enthusiasm over 'religion in the wide sense' expresses itself. An examination of Identity and the Sacred with this in mind reveals that it is actually the traditional world religions, and in particular Christianity, that receives a vote of confidence from Mol.

It is true that sectarian religion, together with Marxist, psychoanalytical and other group-therapeutical conversion techniques, continues to battle for pertinent forms of identity. It is also true that, in comparison, mainstream Christianity seems rather lethargic in this battle. Still the entire Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition (and not just their sects) has a rather enviable historical record of vitality, capacity of absorption, and depth of understanding of the human condition. Its present-day confusions and altercations remind one of the forlorn, anxiety-ridden poker player who holds a respectable number of aces. (Mol, 1976, p. 54)

There is nothing wrong with Mol's optimism on this point in and of itself. Though, once again, we might comment that in our opinion it appears that he is grossly underestimating the kind of quantum 'internal' and 'external' changes introduced by modernity. But his preoccupied contemplation of these aces, and this particular anxiety-ridden poker player, does not harmonize well with the natural implications of his declared functionalist methodological orientation. Moreover, as even the passage cited above suggests, the vote of confidence given by Mol comes across as a rather hollow affair. It is based largely on an optimistic reading of the record of Christianity's 'past' glories, and a complementary pessimistic

reading of man's identity needs in our increasingly 'alienating' (i.e., for Mol, anomy inducing) modern environment. The vote refers, then, more to an ideal potential than to an existing or rising effectiveness as Mol openly acknowledges that the influence of the traditional institutional religions has been severely undermined.

In the last analysis, the true cause of Mol's optimism over the future of religion in the wide sense lies with his generous assessment of the strengths of the conservative sectarian churches, especially in North America. For these groups alone display both a clarity of self-conception and a strong institutional commitment, as indicated by their healthy attendance levels. But if such is indeed the case, then Mol's line of reasoning appears rather incongruous to us. We can see no necessary reason for extrapolating the health of religion in the wide sense from the present (and quite possibly temporary) health of a multitude of fragmented sectarian bodies. Rather than being representative of a mass reaction to the sweep of differentiation in contemporary society, indicative of a resurgence of the integrative processes of old, the proliferation of sectarian groups may be but the product or by-product of advancing differentiation. Sectarianism may well be just a limited reactionary phenomenon characteristic of a period of transition from pre-modern to modern social and psychological realities.

A proper resolution of this problem is obviously out of

the question as the number of factors involved is enormous and not readily susceptible to any kind of significant empirical analysis. Therefore, to some extent Mol is as justified as anyone else in following a hunch or guess in suggesting that the strength of the sectarian churches foreshadows some kind of broader religious revival or, at least, the end of the decline of religious activities. Moreover, there is a certain merit in Mol's very attempt to show that it is not necessary to conform to the dominant thesis of the progressive and inevitable secularization of our world. However, even hunches must be elaborated and justified as substantially as possible and Mol has more assumed an optimistic consequence from the present vigour of the conservative sects than directly explained the advantages of this perspective over existing alternatives. Mol uses the framework of identity theory to rationalize his position, but only an identity theory infused with his essentially a priori judgements on the conservative character of man's nature (i.e., his identity needs) and the bleak nature of the modern environment (i.e., in terms of providing adequate identity supports) need lead to his conclusions.

The real value, we think, of the identity theory approach to religion lies in the fact that with a different bias it is useful for framing a quite different set of specific conclusions. Mol's implicit subscription to an understanding of man's basic needs and the conditions of the modern world that we find rather bleak and pessimistic leads him to posit too

severe limitations to the logical possibilities of his own theoretical framework (i.e., he collapses the identity theory of religion as a 'methodology' into a conservatively influenced 'theory' of religion). If Bellah is guilty of leaving his analysis too open to a "rationalistic bias" (to use Mol's own terms), then, Mol in seeking to correct the balance has actually tipped the scales too far to the other side and infused his statement of the identity theory of religion with an "irrationalistic bias" (see p. 183 of this thesis).

Signs of this bias can be detected in Mol's reaction to Bellah's postulation of a modern "dynamic multidimensional self capable . . . of continual self-transformation and capable . . . of remaking the world." From the little that Mol says at this juncture we are far from satisfied that Mol has properly appreciated the complexities and subtleties of the kind of 'symbolical consciousness' that Bellah has in mind. But, leaving this point aside, we further question his imputation that Bellah's comment that 'man in the last analysis is responsible for the choice of his symbolism' is the equivalent of a denial of man's basic need for continuity of identity. Mol is probably correct in suggesting that modern man's 'transformational' capacity is limited by his need for identity and order. Bellah would be the first (because of his discussion of 'symbolic realism' and the role of expressive symbolism in general) to acknowledge the need to see cognitive processes dialectically balanced by emotional needs. But this does not mean, as Mol's

assertion implies, that an identity must be nine tenths unconscious (i.e., not subject to rational manipulation) to be viable. We see no automatic reason why an enlightened understanding of man's symbolic nature need be considered incompatible with identity integrity and strength. But this is an issue to which we will have to return later.

Here let us return to a more direct consideration of the methodological fall-out, so to speak, of Mol's conservatism. If Mol's writings are pressed (disregarding the possible influence of unknowable personal considerations) for the apparent root of his optimism over the viability of traditional Christianity, and particularly its conservative sectarian off-shoots, it becomes increasingly clear that the single overriding factor is the firm association of these traditional religious expressions with explicit notions of transcendent order. In the first chapter of Identity and the Sacred, Mol asserts: "the success of transcendental religions in evolutionary history is to be attributed to the combining of catalytic and securing functions." (Mol, 1976, p. 10) Translated to fit the context of our discussion this very important statement reads: successful religions combine catalytic and securing functions and the mechanism that allows them to uniquely do this is the notion of a transcendent order. (Just how this is the case is discussed below.) Moreover, as Mol's discussions of Protestant movements in general (remember his attitude to Barthianism), and Protestant sects on the American and Canadian frontiers in particular (for

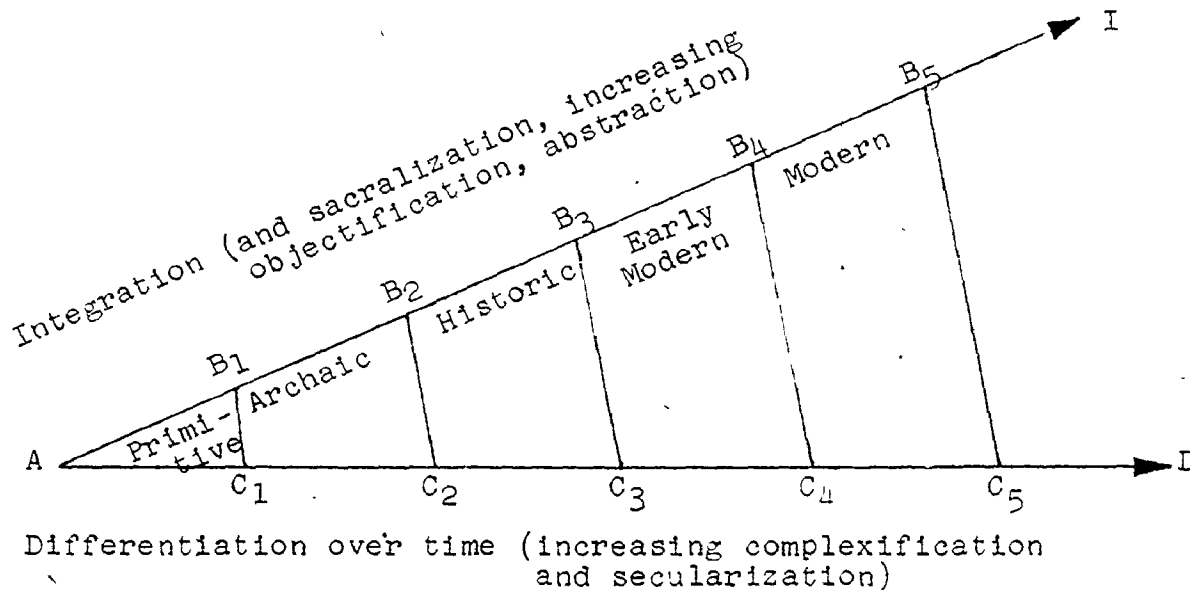
example, Mol, 1976, p. 170-172; Mol, 1978, p. 13), suggest, the greater the measure of transcendence displayed by a religion the more feasible it is in Mol's eyes (up to a mysterious breaking point where Mol, like Berger, admits that the drive towards ever greater transcendence gives rise to its opposite--secularization).

This 'transcendentalism' on the part of Mol appears to be out of keeping, however, with the strong 'immanentist' thrust of his overall methodology. For as has already been noted, Mol's orientation holds much in common with the work of Parsons and Bellah, and as Roland Robertson observes:

On the sociological front it is no accident or coincidence that those like Parsons and Bellah who, with reservations, favour the emergent civil religion, also hold to a sociological position, one combining functionalist and evolutionary orientations, which has frequently been charged with manifesting immanentist attributes.
(Robertson, 1970, p. 217)

The 'immanentist' character of Mol's functionalistic and evolutionary methodology is manifested in his very definition of religion: the sacralization of identity. For as will be remembered in formulating this definition Mol has done his best to develop as 'inclusive' an orientation as possible. He has sought to design categories which are equally applicable to all of the stages of Bellah's evolutionary scheme. That is, categories which capture the realities of pre-historical and pre-transcendent primitive religions, historical and highly transcendent religions, and the contemporary situation where

traditional transcendentalism has declined yet new pre-transcendent or non-transcendent religious foci may be arising. Yet, unlike Parsons and Bellah, it is clear that Mol has an ambivalent relationship with the logical implications of his own working premises for he is not willing to grant the possibility of man successfully fulfilling his identity needs through some form of non-transcendent religion. Rather, as his diagrammatic depiction of the historical dialectic between integration and differentiation with regard to religion (in the Introduction to Religion and Identity), reveals, he has established 'transcendence' (in the form of increasing objectification) as the norm of religious 'progress' (see diagram below).



Mol himself draws the reader's attention to the pertinent consideration here with the comment:

The line AI diverges in an upward direction primarily because of the objectification mechanism which tends to further transcendentalization and abstraction in order to be able to straddle the increasing complexifications represented by the line AD.
(Mol, 1978, p. 8)

The implication is that Mol is positing a unilinear transcendental progressivism. The success or even survival of religion (in the wide sense and institutionally) is reliant, Mol seems to be suggesting, on its capacity to rejuvenate the transcendental component of man's life for this is the backbone of religious culture. The rationale for this perspective, suggested by the last few words of the quotation given above, has yet to be delineated but it will be explored momentarily. Here, however, we must continue to limit ourselves to spelling out the methodological implications of this state of affairs.

We began this discussion with a reference to Mol's apparent desire to 'have his cake and eat it', and now we can see just what this entails: a contradictory desire to draw simultaneously upon the advantages of an 'inclusive' functionalist approach and the advantages of an 'exclusive' substantivist approach. For though Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion is explicitly functionalistic, implicitly and operationally it is substantivistic through its critical reliance on 'transcendentalism' to differentiate between religious and non-religious behaviour. Of course, the existence of this unacknowledged substantivism in Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion can prove most disconcerting to the reader

of Identity and the Sacred.

Traditionally functionalistic approaches to the study of religion, especially in a contemporary context, have not overly concerned themselves with the problem of the supposed 'secularization' of our society. The use of a broad definition of religion (an 'inclusive' definition) undermines the threat posed to religion by the processes and events usually subsumed under the concept of secularization (for example, see Thomas Luckmann's discussions of 'privatized' religion in The Invisible Religion). Of course, the very selection of such a broad definition is indicative of a less defensive attitude to the future of the traditional, institutional religions, especially of the West. On the contrary, the choice of a more restrictive (i.e., 'exclusive') substantive definitional orientation is very often characteristic of a more traditional personal religious orientation which entails a direct concern with the demise of the institutional religions (Christianity, in effect) of the West. This is certainly true of Peter Berger's highly influential work. Accordingly, substantively oriented approaches to the study of religion take the threat of secularization much more seriously and dedicate much more study to the subject. As Berger's book The Sacred Canopy reflects, however, it is substantivistic approaches which yield, ironically, the most pessimistic prognostications for the future of the traditional organized religions. For the straightforward adoption of a substantivistic definitional position, especially one focusing

on the supernatural or supernatural beings, actually serves to highlight the readily apparent fact that such beliefs have become sharply attenuated in the modern world. Mol wishes to dissipate the aura of pessimism generated by these approaches with regard to the future of religious beliefs and practices (in a broad sense) and accordingly he has chosen to utilize a functionalistic orientation. Yet it seems apparent that he is uncomfortable with the fact that the straightforward adoption of a functionalistic position fails, normally, to provide any special status for the traditional 'transcendental' religions. Why this should concern him is not immediately obvious. Unlike Berger, Mol has never declared his particular allegiance to any form of Christianity as a guiding force in his sociological endeavors. On the contrary, he insists that he is motivated by strictly scholarly concerns. Nevertheless, Mol has been a practicing minister of the Presbyterian church and continues to be a professing Christian and much that he has written bears a markedly apologetic tone (e.g., Christianity in Chains, 1969). But it is not necessary to revert to dubious speculations on the influence of Mol's personal inclinations on his scholarship in order to gain insight into the line of Mol's reasoning on this matter.

In our own words and drawing upon the observations of Mol himself we have already explained the merits of adopting a functionalistic approach to the study of religious phenomena. Why, then, should Mol wish to compromise this approach through

the introduction of an operational substantivism? And why does he fail to recognize that his 'transcendentalism' is compromising in this regard? An answer lies, we submit, not directly in a religious conservatism per se but in the crucial conditioning of all of his thought by a conservative reading of man's identity needs and an as yet still too restrictive conceptualization of identity and the dialectics of identity.

Once again, though, due to the complexity of the issues involved we will confine ourselves at present to delineating the general pattern of Mol's thought and leave detailed exploration of the category of identity to the next chapter. Here we need only reiterate that Mol views man's identities as vital but fragile phenomena. Man is motivated by an ever present and pressing quest for greater identity stability and religion is one of the preeminent mechanisms of cultural control through which man's thoughts and actions are guided to secure and assure identity stability. The standard by which religions are implicitly compared by Mol, then, is their type and level of service to the stabilization of identity. Using this standard Mol has more or less come to the judgement that the historical world religions, by virtue of their longevity and the scope of their identity frameworks, are more truly religious than other supposedly religious phenomena or movements. They have served the cause of identity stability well by surviving over a long period of time and providing identity continuity in the face

of substantial social and cultural changes. Furthermore they have served identity stability well by successfully integrating the identity needs of diverse elements of the human population and harmonizing or balancing the structural requirements of the diverse levels of identity manifestation (personal, group, social and so on). And the critical common denominator of the great world religions Mol assumes is their 'transcendentalism' (a problematic and debatable assumption at best).

In order to understand the logic of Mol's transcendentalist position let us turn to a consideration of some further ideas advanced in Identity and the Sacred, beginning with his approach to the concept of 'secularization'. As we have already suggested could be expected, Mol rejects 'secularization' as a "crutch-concept" engendered by the faulty reliance of scholars on too narrow definitions of religion. Berger's work, Mol declares, provides a classic illustration as his substantivist approach "preempts the analytical possibilities of actual process (or degrees of sacralization) and of historical change (or change in historical dominance of one mechanism over another)." (Mol, 1976, p. 4) Hence he is led to read the death of religion (to all intents and purposes) into a situation which may be more accurately explained as a temporary period of transition in Western forms and expressions of religiosity.

As a reviewer of Identity and the Sacred has written:

Mol sees little warrant for employing secularization as a basic concept in sociology; for 'man's enhanced capacity for adaptation has in no way modified his

need for integration and identity.' The concrete phenomena which secularization is invoked to cover--the privatization of Western religion and a decline in traditional indices of church attendance--point less to a reduced quantum of religiosity in society than to a changed situs where it is located.³ (Coleman, 1978, p. 568-569)

As David Martin, Dobbelaere and Lauwers, and even Berger himself, have pointed out, all too often the way the concept of secularization is employed it is "'a tool of counter-religious ideologies', to wit, rationalism, Marxism, and existentialism." In these instances the problem lies in the association of the concept with some sense of socio-historical evolutionary inevitability, involving the ultimate creation of a completely secular society. Berger sought to avoid this implication by specifying a limited meaning for the term: "The process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols." Mol has no objection to such a formulation of the notion per se, and in point of fact he notes its fit with his own use of the term in an article written earlier in his career. However, as he carefully observes, "the utility of most concepts in the sociology of religion depends on the frame of reference in which they are used." (Mol, 1976, p. 22-23) In other words, the utility of the term must be judged in the light of the sociological model into which it is fitted. But as has been demonstrated, on this score Berger's handling of secularization is defective as it is tied to a theoretical framework which embodies elements of the counter-religious ideologies spoken of by Martin, Dobbelaere

and Lauwers, and Berger himself.

But even more to the point, Mol finds even the more limited statement of secularization unsatisfactory in and of itself. For as he concludes:

... if this is all there is to secularization, it may be wiser to follow Parsons' example and look at the specific phenomena as so many applications of the much more general process of differentiation (Parsons, 1963). After all, what has happened to Christianity over the last 500 years is not different from what has happened to the family as economic, educational, welfare and many other functions have escaped from religious and family tutelage and acquired increasing independence of operation. Substituting 'differentiation' for this meaning of the word 'secularization' plainly makes sense: a good theoretical fit is guaranteed and the economy of our conceptual apparatus is advanced. (Mol, 1976, p. 23)

The substitution of the term 'differentiation' for 'secularization' provides further evidence of Mol's central concern to stress the vital measure of continuity that exists in religious matters between our own age and that of our forefathers. Changes in attitudes and institutions have indeed transpired but at heart Mol would argue that man's basic needs and motivation have remained constant--and preeminent amongst those needs is a desire for a comprehensive and secure system of meaning, such as religion has always provided. This need is so great, that in agreement with the American sociologist Andrew M. Greeley, Mol goes so far as to hypothesize the existence of a "sacralizing tendency" in the human condition. (Mol, 1976, p. 8)

In Mol's eyes, then, the common notion of a linear historical development of religious beliefs and practices should be replaced by an oscillating or cyclical pattern of developments whereby a swing of the pendulum in the favour of the forces of change and differentiation is always counter-balanced by a following backswing in the favour of the forces for order and integration. Accordingly, Mol interprets the present strength of sectarian movements as evidence for the beginning of an historical 'backswing' against the sweep of secularization. Or at least it is evidence of the 'foreswing' of differentiation (as secularization) having reached its limits and encountered the resistance of gravity (i.e., emotional needs for firm identity supports). Reflecting this attitude, Mol elsewhere concludes a brief discussion of Australian Aboriginal religion with the following passage:

Comparing Aboriginal and modern Western society we therefore conclude that in a surviving society a sense of place and identity is held in check by the human need for mastery, economic independence and technical progress. And the other way around: change or 'differentiation' is held in check by the need for stability or 'integration'. They seem to be the basic, countervailing forces in existence, now pulling towards more change, now counter-pulling towards more stability, according to which is on the upper side of the see-saw or winning the tug-of-war. If either of these forces has too much of an upper-hand in a particular society, doom is imminent. Evolution favours a roughly equal balance. A 'dialectic' (a conflicting and yet complementing relationship between two opposing forces) between 'differentiation' and 'integration' therefore appears to determine the survival of any civilization. (Mol, 1980, p. 8)

In contrast to the contemporary situation, Aboriginal society and religion disintegrated before the pressures brought to bear by contact with Europeans because their life-style was characterized by an excessive degree of integration. The Aboriginal culture lacked the flexibility to be able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Whereas in modern Western societies, Mol is of the opinion that things have become so amorphous that change has gotten out of hand and large numbers of people are emotionally and mentally suffering for want of stability in their lives. But the roots of this state of affairs are the same as those of the Aboriginals' problems: the existing traditional systems of meaning have proved inadequate to the task of integrating the influences of new material and cultural developments.

Another common way of saying this, of course, is to suggest that the traditional religious forms have become 'irrelevant'. Mol stresses that relevance is extremely important to the survival and successful functioning of any religious system. As he says, "in the same way as there should be a close fit between data and theory, so too the relevance of any religious orientation depends on the fit of its interpretative frame of reference." However, as he goes on to carefully emphasize:

Fit, or congruence, does not necessarily mean explicit similarity. A faithful and factual reconstruction of symptoms and events leading to death, disaster, or frustration is a far cry from fitting the event in a cosmic drama of good and evil. However, this cosmic

drama may, by its very oppositeness, provide the better fit. It may provide the coherence, continuity, and emotional anchorage in time and space which the actual events have put into jeopardy. If this is so, the cosmic drama fits and the factual account is irrelevant. (Mol, 1976, p. 72)

Aboriginal religion failed to sustain its influence over Aboriginal culture and behaviour because the scope of its cosmic drama was insufficient to allow for the integration of the white man's ways. More specifically, the Aboriginal system of meaning was too concretely associated with the specific characteristics of his physical environment and his daily activities and when these were forcibly altered by the white man's interference the meaning system lost all of its power of conviction.

In Berger's terms, it might be said that the Aboriginal nomos lost its socially founded 'subjective plausibility'. But Mol would argue that such an assessment does not go far enough as it does not attempt to specifically pinpoint what aspect of Aboriginal religion was most wanting. Utilizing his own terms of reference, Mol would alternatively specify that while Aboriginal religion did not want for 'relevance B' it did lack a sufficient manifestation of 'relevance A'. As Mol explains:

Relevance depends upon the capacity for integration, rather than on the faithful representations of fact. But capacity for restoration and integration depends in turn on the fragilities of a specific identity frame being both recognized and accounted for. Religious forms can be relevant only when they grow together with the culture in which they find themselves, while at the same time remaining altogether different in order to perform their functions better. It is inevitable that particular fragilities of particular times and cultures are prominently reflect-

ed in religious manifestations. But in all cultures, the essence of the religious function is to reinforce by sacralization personal, group, or social identity. The relevance of religious organizations should therefore be judged 'both' in terms of the maintenance of otherness, a prerequisite for the execution of its essential function, 'and' in terms of its sensitive reflection of the specific fragilities of a specific identity frame.

In successful or, at any rate, in surviving religions an implicit congruence is to be expected between the sacred abstractions and profane manifestations. At the same time the configuration of beliefs, rituals and myths must be sufficiently separate, self contained and stable to successfully absorb mundane threats to identity. (Mol, 1976, p. 72-73)

Aboriginal religion was certainly not lacking in "its sensitive reflection of the specific fragilities of a specific identity frame (relevance B)." (Mol, 1976, p. 75) But it possessed an insufficient sense of 'otherness', specifically in the sense of the relation of man's world to a more perfect and permanent transcendent order of things (relevance A).

The need for strong group solidarity and the retention of hard-won traditional knowledge in such a harsh environment was effectively served by the concepts of The Dreaming, totems, holy sites, and a plethora of taboos and rites. But a frame of identity so sacralized bordered all too closely on an all too corruptible profane realm. Religions in possession of a more transcendent and abstract sacred frame of reference can afford and adjust to a greater measure of change in the material conditions of life. For their followers have a more universal and general notion of the 'true' nature of the world from the beginning. They have been provided with, through

their religion, a vital measure of detachment from their immediate environment. Moreover, the comparatively insulated position of an other-worldly sacred allows it to act as a relatively independent catalyst for necessary change as much as an unimpeachable anchor for identity. For it stands over and against this world as a standard for judgements of this world: it provides, to use one of Mol's favourite expressions, an Archimedian point from which to seek to move the world. (For good historial analysis of how this has proved to be the case on many occasions throughout the history of the West and the East consult Guenter Lewy's book Religion and Revolution. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.)

As Berger argues, however, the seeds of secularization are buried in the hyperextension of relevance A at expense of relevance B. For, as Mol would state matters, the dialectical functioning of religion is critically impaired by the inability of atrophied religious ideas and symbols to meaningfully reflect the dialectical quality of reality. The key to understanding this state of affairs is to recognize that religion works to assure an appropriate measure of stability in man's life by accurately reflecting the dialectical character of reality in its rituals, myths, and objectified frames of reference (e.g., theologies). Religion effects a dialectical balance of change and order in actual events and behaviour by constantly and repetitiously relating the message, through a multitude of symbolic codes of varying subtlety, that such a balance is

desirable, necessary, and possible. Moreover, it indicates both generally and specifically through parables, stories, myths, doctrines, and rites, just 'how' the balance is to be struck by the believer and his compatriots. As the structuralists argue for myth, Mol says that all of religion may be essentially understood as a complex system of dyads (which all basically represent the integration/differentiation dialectic) which are constantly being mediated. But the mediation effected is both a soothing fiction and an actual fact. At all times religious beliefs and practices involve both a complex participation of the believer in an historical dialectic of integrating and differentiating forces, and an equally complex detached reflection on, and anticipation of, this dialectical process, through the use of abstractions from its historical substance. Borrowing Geertz's well known distinction, religions can be said to act both as models 'of' reality and models 'for' reality. In Geertz's words, "they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves." (Geertz, 1973, p. 93) The complexity of this situation is magnified, further, by the fact that on both levels the precise correlation of symbols with thoughts, actions, social movements and so on is heavily overdetermined (in the Freudian sense of the word).

In Mol's eyes the strength of sectarian preaching in a modern world lies precisely in its faithful and constant reit-

eration of the dialectic:

Compared with more liberal sections of the theological spectrum the orthodox sectarians continue to occupy themselves with the traditional concepts. In contrast to liberalism, the binary oppositions in all theologizing and preaching of these groups revolve around the themes of sin and salvation. Altogether different terminology may be used. Very concretely Adam, the Fall, Pharaoh, Goliath, the scapegoat, any moral aberration, pork, the tower of Babel, or the crucifixion, may represent sin. Or, more abstractly, sin may be represented under the guise of man's disobedience, self-sufficiency, etc. Vice versa, paradise, exodus, Boaz, the Messiah, righteousness, grace, or angels, may represent salvation.

In the manner of Levi-Strauss we may similarly postulate with good reason that in this theologizing and preaching there is often a hierarchical build-up, for example, from Ruth the stranger, and Boaz, the native, to the danger of rejection and the desirability of acceptance, to the idea that God's work of salvation from man's predicament and sin finds its climax in Jesus Christ, who became sin so that man could be saved. Similar patterns can be detected in most sectarian/evangelical sermons with God or Christ at the synthesizing apex of the argument, or God as the 'coincidentia oppositorum' (Simmel, 1959, p. 17). . . .

It is through the kaleidoscopic diversity, and yet the underlying similarity, of the dialectical theme, that sectarian preaching differs from its liberal counterpart and even more radically from, for example, the scientific analysis of religion. (Mol, 1976, p. 255-256)

By way of contrast, liberal theology and religion has undergone a cognitive surrender to the modern antagonists of religion and the vital symbolic overdeterminacy of the sectarians' emotional creed has been replaced by a stale and rationalistic literalism. The sacred focus has become too transcendent and abstract and it no longer acts to emotionally engage the believer in the dialectical process of life--giving

him confidence in its purpose. Thus left bereft of a simple and stable external identity context the believers of this world have turned to other sources for meaningful guidance--sources which they have attempted to sacralize once found.

Foremost amongst these sources, in Mol's opinion, is science and by association technology. Though movements such as nationalism and Marxism-Maoism have been prominent secular or pseudo-religions as well. From the beginning, however, Mol assumes the inadequacy of the religious functioning of these "sub-systems" for they entail sacred foci without a proper sense of 'otherness' and consequently they cannot provide the emotional succour stable identities require. As Mol concludes in Identity and the Sacred:

It seems that the success of science and rationality for mastery and instrumental action is balanced by an equal failure to integrate and stabilize man's world. Objective observation and strict canons of rationality and scepticism appear to be dysfunctional for individual and social identity. They appear to avow change and by implication disavow continuity. The effort to maximize the autonomy of the sub-system by also developing internally integrating or sacralizing mechanisms, through for instance sacralization of the scientific ethos, has been unsuccessful, largely because this mechanism gnaws at the heart of the system. . . . Another major reason for the failure of internal sacralizing mechanisms within the sub-system of science is its demonstrable incapacity to anchor a comprehensive system of meaning emotionally. Personal struggles, losses, frustrations, successes and failures, social conflicts, achievements, norms, beliefs, and values and views of reality can only be inadequately accounted for, and even less remedied, by the scientific ethos as a system of meaning. (Mol, 1976, p. 126)

Whatever the merits of Mol's understanding of science

as defective religion (and there is room for a considerable amount of debate), the point that we are driving at here is that he has singularly associated the presence of a transcendent frame of reference with the successful functioning of religion as an agent of cultural control, and hence as a bulwark of cultural survival and prosperity. In saying this, however, we are discounting for the moment his equally strong but methodologically much more vague and ambiguous emphasis on the role of emotional commitment in man's religious activities. In support of this claim consider the following paragraph drawn from Identity and the Sacred: to the enlightened reader the statements it contains reflect a great deal about the implicit pattern of Mol's thought:

More than both Durkheim and Swanson, we have assumed that the sacralization of identity is an inevitable process in both ancient and modern societies, and that tendencies develop within the secular sub-systems of modern societies (economy, polity, science) towards the creation of independent, sacralizing mechanisms. We have cast a rather wide net by adding such categories as objectification and commitment to the sacralizing mechanism. Swanson tends to confine himself to one (supernatural beliefs), and Durkheim to two (beliefs and ritual). Through this inclusiveness we think that we can gain the strategic advantage of seeing the similarities, rather than the discrepancies, between, for instance, ancient religious beliefs and modern nationalism instead of being mesmerized by such trivial differences as those between supernaturalism and scientific abstractions. A common commitment to a transcendent order appears to be functionally more salient than the different contents of specific systems of meaning.
(Mol, 1976, p. 187)

This passage is quite remarkable in that it provides us with an effective summary of both the merits and, though

Mol does not seem to have realized, the demerits of his 'theory' of religion. In passing, moreover, it might be noted that the passage cited is not unique as Mol has generously peppered his work with summary statements which frequently expose (though in an oblique manner) the fundamental ambiguities present in his thought. Here Mol begins by reconfirming his debt to Durkheim and to an expanded functionalism, based on a multi-factoral 'processual' approach, that improves on Durkheim by allowing for the detection and appraisal of new religious forms in the contemporary 'secularized' environment. Yet, ironically, the last sentence of the paragraph immediately conjures up memories of Berger's 'substantivist' approach to religion. 'Transcendence' is being singled out as the key interpretative variable, and as the hair-raising statement immediately before it suggests an incredible importance is being attached to it. It takes considerable daring, to say the least, to call the differences between supernaturalism and scientific abstractions "trivial". Many a philosopher and historian of science might be inclined to voice strong disagreement with such a sweeping pronouncement. Note that in one of the quotations cited above (see p. 203 of this essay) Mol rather indiscriminately lumps together 'transcendentalization' and 'abstraction', implying that the two things are largely synonymous or minimally that an increase in the one is inevitably accompanied by an increase in the other. However, while it is probably true that an increase in transcendentalization is accompanied by

increased abstraction, the reverse need not hold true. It is possible to imagine or even to specify (e.g., sub-atomic particle theory) dramatic increases in latter, increases in abstraction which work much like a traditional transcendent religious focus to assist man in his efforts to straddle the increasing complexification of his world, which do not entail any notion of transcendence in the sense of positing the existence and influence of some 'other' world on our own. But even granting the essential validity of Mol's point that there are strong connecting links between science as a belief system and traditional religions, his almost cavalier overstatement of his case has further significance. It points to the problems raised by Baum's observations on Mol's excessive preoccupation with the integrative aspect of phenomena; a synchronic perspective which has its diachronic counterpart in an excessive preoccupation with the 'continuity' of different historical periods, and as will become evident later, of human and pre-human and extra-human realities (i.e., Mol's evolutionism). In general, Mol's conservative (?) concern with stressing similarities works to operationally deny the 'processual' aspect of his own methodology. As we have already pointed out, for Mol things only change to stay the same. But while this is undoubtedly true on a certain extremely generalized or broad level it is frequently patently untrue at levels of more meaningful sociological analysis. Mol, however, fixes on 'transcendence' as the crucial defining factor of religiosity (or

at least 'successful' religiosity), because historically he thinks it has been the most significant aspect of the great universal religions. Thus he never seriously entertains the possibility that a new age (modernity) may have a new, non-transcendental religion. A religion that is 'successful'; which better secures modern identities because it has a better fit with modern realities--a better fit in terms of both Relevance B and Relevance A.

The problems raised by the attempt to speak of such a distinctive modern possibility are incredibly complex. But it is not the complexity of the situation that causes Mol to shy away from entertaining such notions. It is his conviction that there are no reasonable possibilities to even begin to consider; a conviction that is not clearly grounded in his 'methodology'.

Undoubtedly all attempts to develop an analysis of such modern possibilities must be highly speculative. But leads do exist which must be followed up if the question of the future of religion in a modern, so-called secularized, context is to be properly explored. One such intriguing lead with which we are familiar is that offered by Norman O. Brown, and commented on by Robert Bellah under the heading of "symbolical consciousness" (See Brown's Life Against Death, and especially his Love's Body, and Bellah's discussion of the latter work in chapters fourteen and fifteen of Beyond Belief). We will do no more than to merely mention it as any discussion of the notion of

"symbolical consciousness" would carry us head over heels into matters that are well beyond the immediate scope of this study. Nevertheless we mention it by name to indicate that there are fascinating new perspectives on man and the nature of his "religious" life (in the broadest sense of the word) which ought not to be implicitly and explicitly excluded in advance from a comprehensive theory of religion which purports to have a special interest in the existence of new patterns of sacralization in a supposedly religionless world.

In general we would like to just suggestively note here that a religious sense of 'otherness' need not be strictly translated as 'transcendent order', as found in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, or even more particularly in the Protestant tradition that is closest to Mol's heart.

Even more importantly, it must be remembered that changes in identity can be brought about by changes in the material infra-structure of a society or by the influence of functional alternatives to religion which exist in some measure in all societies. These changes in identity may in turn fundamentally alter the configuration of religion, in its superficial forms and, more tellingly, with regard to the very structural mode by which identities are 'sacralized' (whatever that precisely means apart from Mol's operational substantivism). In this line of thought, Richard Sennett's highly original work in The Uses of Disorder (1970) offers much food for thought on the subject of the effects of different types of urban environments

on-personal identity.

In saying this we are just reiterating Mol's own emphasis on the fully dialectical character of the relationship between the superstructure and infrastructure, religion and identity. Mol displays a marked tendency at times to forget the complexity and flexibility of both relationships and to render his analyses of various situations too static and unilinear. In sum, to repeat Dr. Greenspan's observation: Mol begins by speaking of how religion 'sacralizes' identity and ends by implying, that to all intents and purposes, religion (really just transcendently oriented faiths) 'creates' identity. Or at any rate, Mol implies that transcendent religion alone is essential to the establishment of 'successful' identity for the vast majority of mankind: whatever 'successful' means in Mol's system of thought, where the notion of more or less successful identities and more or less successful religions is clearly utilized.

In general, when speaking to the contemporary situation Mol displays an inordinate tendency to stress the disruptive and conflict inducing effects of a concentration of attention on the level of personal identity at the expense of social identity. At the same time he tends to thoroughly underplay the costs, in terms of full identity development and expression, attendant on the securing of a strong social identity. Perhaps this correlative expression of conservatism grows out of his sympathy for the position of the traditional universal religions. But whatever the case may be, this expression of conservatism

leads him to distort, subtly but importantly, his own system of analysis. Consider for instance the following statement drawn from Mol's discussion of the universal religions (underlining added):

Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam sacralize a social identity, but not at the expense of man. Their survival very much depends on their capacity to mute, as well as to motivate individuals, to constrain as well as to co-opt recalcitrant groups, to reform as well as to reinforce the social whole. (Mol, 1976, p. 184)

Overlooking the odd use of the word co-opt (giving the usually negative term a positive connotation), this passage seems innocent and acceptable enough. But when in a reading of Mol's work one fails to detect a single appreciable disparaging comment about some of the consequences of this muting and constraining activity it becomes apparent that the spirit in which the phrase "but not at the expense of man" was written conflicts with the wisdom of Mol's own dictum that "large scale cohesion may be attained only at the expense of lesser cohesion elsewhere, and religious organizations cannot avoid the predicament of sacralizing one identity at the expense of another." (Mol, 1976, p. 93)

But here again it must be emphasized that as the very point we are dealing with is an element of inconsistency in Mol's thinking it is possible to free him of the charge of manifesting an unwarranted conservatism by simply holding to a selective and trusting reading of his work. Yet we are confident that a close scrutiny of his comments reveals a marked penchant

for tailoring the use of identity theory to an unduly generous assessment of the strengths and virtues of 'old time religion' (as epitomized by the sectarian groups) and an unduly cramped assessment of new religious expressions, or modes of religious consciousness, in the modern world. That is, Mol's orientation to the task of countering the intellectual and popular fall-out of the rational-individualism of modern man has interfered with his ability to appreciate nascent religious movements that are geared to an expansion of the framework of personal identity and to the relative stabilization of the new expanded identity through mechanisms other than belief in a transcendent order.

It seems apparent from Identity and the Sacred that Mol has attempted to develop some kind of synthesis of the substantivist and functionalist perspectives on religion through an argument for the logical and historical uniqueness of 'transcendentalism' as a mechanism for identity stabilization. In order, essentially, to heighten our cognizance of potential new foci of religious activity in the modern 'secularized' world Mol utilizes a processual and multi-factoral methodology, transforming 'the sacred' to 'sacralization'. Yet, like all functionalistic approaches, because of the extreme breadth of the definition of religion generated, this processual approach is incompatible with the specification of functional alternatives to religion. And when we speak of the specification of functional alternatives we have in mind more than simply stating, as Mol does, that such alternatives must exist and vaguely suggest-

ing a few possibilities like art or play. Harkening back to our summary description of the basic principles of the identity theory of religion it will be remembered that Mol argues that he has avoided this problem (thereby satisfying his third definitional requirement) by maintaining reference to the quality of sacredness in his definition of religion. Admitting that the concept of sacralization appears to be close to that of institutionalization, Mol notes that sacralization differs and goes beyond institutionalization in as much as it entails reinforcing and protecting the framework of identity by attributing the qualities of "untouchability" and "awe" to the identity in question. Mol's reference to these phenomenologically coined terms, however, proves to be somewhat of a red herring as he appears to have appreciated the extreme difficulties attendant upon operationalizing such imprecise intuitionist-essentialist categories. And in their stead one actually encounters a critical reliance on 'transcendentalism'. Not so much, one gets the impression, so as to prevent his definition of religion from operationally usurping the contributions made by art and play to the integration side of the dialectic (Mol's statement of his third definitional requirement) as to assure that religion is clearly differentiated from other identity reinforcing cultural phenomena.

In Mol's eyes this combination of functionalistic language and schemata with the more substantivistic specifying factor of transcendentalism appears to represent some kind of effective compromise between the (artificially?) polarized definitional

positions common to religious studies. The rationale for this belief being the supposition that the critical role of transcendence is historically given, when religion is examined from the perspective of identity stabilization, and is not the product of some comparatively arbitrary, theologically motivated, a priori stipulation, as might be advanced is the case with Berger. Regrettably, however, Mol's argument in this regard never really amounts to more than a rather weak conjecture. At no point in his work are we confronted with the kind of detailed historical and anthropological studies that would be required to conclude that the process of transcendentalization played an absolutely irreplaceable role in the survival or development of any religious tradition (primitive or modern). As has been indicated, in the case of Australian Aboriginal identity and religion was rendered additionally vulnerable to the disruptive influences of European ways because of the relative lack of a transcendent component to their nomos. But neither Mol nor anyone else has undertaken the kind of indepth study that would be required to properly assess this conjecture relative to the multitude of other enormously complex factors that have contributed to the disintegration of Aboriginal cultural identity. In light of this one is left to fundamentally question the universal significance Mol seems to assume must be attached to transcendence as 'the' religious variable. If one is less conservative in one's reading of human nature, having ascribed to man a greater capacity to deal with a fundamental

measure of uncertainty or cognitive ambiguity in his life, then the imperative to move to some form of transcendence to secure identity is lessened; perhaps most appreciably. Moreover, it seems reasonable to conjecture that the use of transcendence to secure identity may be conditioned by numerous factors that restrict its utility to a specific historical period or to a particular set of social-structural conditions.

Regardless of the difficulties raised by these rather broad and simple observations, Mol's implicit reliance on transcendence is incompatible with his processual approach. For as was seen with Berger, emphasis on such a variable presents problems when trying to honestly deal with primitive religious life and aspects of Buddhism which, it could be argued, are non-dualistic in thought and practice (e.g., Zen). As with 'the sacred', one may try and avoid this state of affairs by speaking of 'transcendentalization' instead of the 'transcendent'. In fact this is what Mol in essence does through a circuitous chain of reductions whereby the sacred becomes sacralization and that in turn operationally amounts to but one of the sacralizing mechanisms, namely objectification, which in turn reduces to transcendence. Yet as transcendence per se is an empty category outside of some specific socio-religious context (see Appendix I, pp.331-355 for further discussion) to speak of a process of transcendentalization is to employ a notion which needs further specification.

Of course, as the above observations suggest, to all

intents and purposes religion is critically defined through reference to but one of Mol's four sacralizing mechanisms, namely, objectification (i.e., transcendentalization). Objectification is the 'necessary' component of Mol's definition of religion. The three other components (discluding for the moment concern with the concept of 'identity') are merely 'sufficient' factors.

Through this whole confusion of ideas it can be asked if any kind of synthesis of functionalistic and substantivistic positions has really been effected. Mol's operational substantivism, like Berger's declared substantivism, dissolves upon close examination into a rather clear-cut and extremely broad functionalism. With Berger, as Van Harvey pointed out, the sacred/profane dichotomy breaks down operationally into a more functionalistic order/chaos dichotomy. At the root of man's religious life lies his 'propensity to order' itself and the concept of transcendence is but the natural extension of the dialectic process set in motion by this propensity. In Mol's case the 'propensity to order' is replaced by the drive for 'identity stabilization'. This concept obviously subsumes the same concern with an order/chaos dichotomy, as is indicated by the dialectic of integration and differentiation which Mol posits as the backdrop to his thought. But the important question is: Does it go beyond this to offer a more sophisticated and rewarding base from which to begin investigations of the nature of man's religious life? Or ultimately can Berger's and Mol's

perspectives on religion be reductively equated as defining religion as the creation of transcendent orders? This is the issue to be explored further in the next chapter.

Consequences for the Innovativeness of Identity Theory

In an excellent review of Identity and the Sacred written for Sociological Analysis by Theodore E. Long both the strengths and weaknesses of Mol's work, as we have been discussing them, have been most effectively summarized. Accordingly, by way of conclusion to this chapter it is well worth quoting Long at length:

This is a rich and provocative work, synthesizing a wide range of theoretical ideas and situating much of the empirical material on religion in a unified framework. Of the recent writings emphasizing the vitality and importance of religion in secular society, it is perhaps the most impressive in combining broad historical and comparative analysis with an elaboration of a general theoretical basis for such interpretations. Most importantly, by synthesizing and specifying themes already enunciated by others, Mol's conception of the sacralization of identity enhances the utility of "broad" definitions for the analysis of religion and society. One concrete example is his formulation of the problem of secularization in terms of the possibility, dynamics and consequences of sacralizing various identities in complex society; thereby he provides a good analytic base for extending and/or specifying Luckmann's "invisible religion" thesis, both theoretically and empirically. In general, Mol's conception supplies a more acute analytic resource for the critically necessary task of advancing our severely retarded understanding of the broadly religious nature of complex society and its institutions.

Unfortunately, these possibilities remain unrealized and sometimes unanticipated in Mol's work. The virtue of interlocking conceptual and historical analyses is also a liability, for neither receives the detailed elaboration and specification it needs. Moreover, the two lines of thought are often not clearly separated,

thereby confusing important issues. The critical confusion is over the import of the analytic scheme for the interpretation of the course and consequences of secularization. Mol's general contention is correct that his interpretation of secularization is dependent on his conception of religion, but it is not correct in the sense that it addresses any new 'questions' generated by a revised conception. Instead, his empirical analysis offers only different 'answers' to questions rooted in the traditional conceptualization, the analytic scheme supplying the 'reasons' that make those answers plausible. This use of ideas reflects a greater concern for the fate of religion than for the state of social theory, and if Mol thereby buttresses his own optimism, he also reinforces the prevailing mode of problem formation in the sociology of religion. (Long, 1977, p. 421)

Long has been remarkably perceptive in his reading of Identity and the Sacred but for his arguments to have force and to be truly instructive it is necessary to continue to flesh-out his points and understand them in the larger context of the need for a new methodological orientation in the social scientific study of religion. In this regard it should be noted that Mol, Kaplan and Manners, and Geertz all display in various ways a certain fundamental ambiguity in their acceptance of the Popperian position on theory construction and extension. In all three cases there has been an effort made to mix water with wine, so to speak, by holding to some of the conventional patterns of thought appropriate to the verificationists view of science. They have not been able to completely strip themselves of the naive empiricism born of the social scientific community's desperate efforts in the past to legitimize itself by emulating the statistical and experimental procedures of the natural sciences.

Kaplan and Manners exhibit this ambiguity by holding to the view that social scientific explanations are 'probabilistic' --their truth content lies in their degree of probability.

(Kaplan and Manners, 1972, p. 15) For as we saw in our examination of Popper's position probability per se is not a guarantee of scientific worth for the most probabilistic statements are those that are tautological.

Geertz and Mol both share this misconception in some measure, but they also exhibit their ambiguous understanding in more subtle ways. For example, if we harken back to the passages cited from the Introduction to Identity and the Sacred in the introduction to this chapter it can be seen that in the very breath with which Mol links himself methodologically with Geertz he reveals the incompleteness of his understanding of the lessons of philosophy of science.

Classifications should never be more than scaffolds for generalizations. True, scaffolds tend to determine the contours of the structure they surround and erect. But then one can choose one's apparatus with the larger goal in mind! I therefore tend to defend the conceptual scheme of this book . . . not on intrinsic grounds. What is the use of indestructible scaffolding, if one only intends to build a ramschackle hovel with it? However, I will defend it on the grounds that it directs attention to specific propositions about religion which I believe to be of strategic importance to the sociology of religion, which I hold to be consistent with existing anthropological, psychological, and sociological theories and which I feel to be most productive of innovative interpretations.
(Mol, 1976, p. x)

Apart from the fact that the latter claim may entail a logical contradiction (to be consistent and yet innovative--reflecting

the overall problem with Mol's work broached by Long), this passage clearly reflects a sympathy with Geertz's antipathy for the tendency to construct "impeccable depictions of formal order in whose actual existence nobody can quite believe."

(Geertz, 1973, p. 18) In other words, the passage reflects Mol's like distaste for self-justifying and self-perpetuating systems of analysis and explanation. It reflects his concern to ground his theoretical speculations in historical and empirical analyses whenever possible--which is natural enough in the light of his background in empirical sociological studies. On this score nothing is wrong. But both Geertz and Mol attempt to imbue their views with a greater sense of security by implying that the specifics of their theoretical perspectives have grown quite naturally, so to speak, out of the data at hand. To believe, however, that theoretical validity stems from such a state of affairs is erroneous.

To be more specific, Geertz, in speaking of 'thick description', at a crucial juncture in his argument annoyingly glosses over a number of very important questions by casually commenting that small facts can be made to speak to large issues. (Geertz, 1973, p. 23) At no point does he manage to specify 'how'. How is his stress on fine detail in the description of phenomena compatible with theorizing at the level of culture as a generic concept? With Mol, more generally, one gets the impression that the substantive illustrations he provides in support of his theoretical suppositions are being advanced as

telling concrete demonstrations of the veracity of his opinions. Such an impression, of course, contravenes the supposedly relative and arbitrary character of his analytical scaffolding. Moreover, as Long observed, throughout his work Mol provides confusing signals as to the line of influence between his theory and his historical analysis. Did his theory lead him to novel lines of historical interpretation of various developments? Or did his historical insights lead him to postulate innovative theoretical perspectives? Mol often claims that he has been 'inductive' in his approach but there is little evidence that he literally is.

In terms of the above questions, the former position is more in line with the thought of Geertz, at his better moments, and the leading figures of the philosophy of science in general. While the latter position is more reflective of a traditional, and less defensible, though still more conventionally held in the social sciences, verificationist perspective. In the former case one is dealing with the Popperian insight that the growth of knowledge actually proceeds from a preoccupation with problems, their definition, and attempts to solve them (in all instances thought shaped by theories) and not from raw observations or the aimless assimilation of data. In other words, it is the confrontation of alternative theories, the endless process of refuting one theory and conjecturing on the increased feasibility and utility of another, that is at the heart of man's scientific accomplishments. Empiricism per se only enters the

picture as one of the means of testing the theories being advanced. It does not represent, as the verificationists would have it, the exclusive channel to an objective and self-evident or manifest truth (consult the Introduction to Karl Popper's Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge).

The irony of the situation confronted here is that while Geertz has displayed an awareness of the need to adopt a Popperian perspective in the social sciences he has nevertheless allowed the anthropologist's traditional fear of abusing cultural particularities to bully him into retreating into a narrow theoretical perspective. He has abdicated the demand for bold and imaginative theorizing that is attendant on the Popperian view of the advancement of knowledge. Mol, on the other hand, has failed to display much sophistication in his awareness, at this broad and philosophic level, of what he is up to as a theorist. Yet he has, nevertheless, demonstrated an almost instinctive appreciation of the need at this time to theorize in a grand and bold manner if new ground is to be broken in the field of religious studies. But as Long concludes: "Mol's neglect of conceptualization leaves him with no analytic guidance in defining the focus of his empirical analysis. In its place, his positive sentiment for transcendental religion alone directs his attention." (Long, 1977, p. 422)

CHAPTER VI
THE FRAGILE FRAME OF IDENTITY
- THE NEED FOR CATEGORY REVISION

The cornerstone of the identity theory of religion is obviously the notion of 'identity'. It is the concept of identity that truly renders the theory processual, setting Mol's work off from that of his more straightforwardly functionalistic predecessors, critically avoiding the reductionisms of a Durkheim or a Berger. Yet no other concept in Mol's work is as difficult to grasp. The most elaborate statement of Mol's understanding of the concept is presented in the fifth chapter of his book Identity and the Sacred; a chapter which is appropriately entitled "The Fragile Frame of Identity". The 'fragility' Mol explicitly has in mind is the precarious and vulnerable nature of man's various identities. But implicitly the title may be understood as bearing a second, probably unintended, connotation, namely, the fragility of the idea of identity as the foundational analytical category of a theory of religion. In both cases, the nuances of the word 'fragility' render it a particularly apt descriptive term.

Fragility in the latter sense does not simply imply inadequacy. On the contrary, Mol would argue, and we agree to a point, that the 'fragility' of identity as an analytical category actually enhances its use in the social scientific

theory of religion. For fragility in this sense refers to the concept's unique balancing of a heuristically advantageous vagueness with sufficient specificity, giving the concept a pragmatic utility without sacrificing its intuitive appeal. In other words, the term is sufficiently abstract and generalizable to be used in almost every conceivable cultural context, yet it is not so vague that the logical limits of its explanatory powers cannot be delineated. Moreover, it avoids the awkwardness attendant on so many clearly defined but hopelessly artificial or contrived academic terms of reference.

In a more pejorative sense, however, the analytical category of identity is 'fragile' as Mol presents it. For his discussions of the concept are marked by a regrettable confusion and ambiguity that interfere with coming to a proper appreciation of the potential of the concept. Therefore, prior to undertaking any kind of significant critical development of Mol's overall argument a good measure of attention must be paid to the task of clarifying his basic working understanding of identity.

In chapter five of Identity and the Sacred Mol begins his discussion of identity by noting that "there are as many definitions and uses of the word 'identity' as there are theories employing it." (Mol, 1976, p. 55) As things stand, he admits, the term is remarkably ambiguous, diffuse, and elusive. Yet apparently he is convinced of its superior explanatory power and thinks that it can be rendered sufficiently definite for social scientific uses. Regrettably, however, the

procedure fixed upon by Mol to serve this end obscures matters as much as it enlightens them. For Mol chose to define his usage of the concept by systematically "contrasting it with other usages." (Mol, 1976, p. 55) Perhaps he did this out of a desire to provide better insight into the many permutations of the notion of identity that have been used. But whatever the reason, the procedure proves woefully inadequate as Mol fails to ever provide, either initially or by way of conclusion, a truly clear and comprehensive summary statement of his views. Consequently, the reader is left to piece together a working understanding of identity by gleaning and integrating a host of fragmentary insights scattered in different contexts throughout a running critique of alternative perspectives on identity. His efforts are hampered, though, by his lack of sufficient prior knowledge of the general nature of Mol's actual position. For without this knowledge it is frequently difficult to discern the full import of many of Mol's criticisms and comments on the alternative existing uses of identity, let alone integrate the implications of these comments into some kind of coherent expression of Mol's own notion of identity.

It is true that as early as the first chapter of Identity and the Sacred Mol offers a brief description of what he has in mind in speaking of identity. But as will become apparent in the light of the discussion to follow, the comments he then offers by way of definition are too general and ambiguous in reference to provide an adequate guide for piecing together

the puzzle of identity presented in chapters five and six of Identity and the Sacred.

At all junctures Mol's language seems to indicate that he has not adequately appreciated the need to ever so carefully and repeatedly differentiate his usage of the term identity from its crucially different use and meaning in common parlance. In later work, like The Firm and the Formless, there is evidence that he is moving to rectify this situation. But a close scrutiny of his later statements actually suggests that he has adopted a position which no longer warrants the label 'identity theory'.

In order to illustrate this state of affairs, and to demonstrate the veracity of our presentation of Mol's formulation of identity, it will be largely necessary to follow Mol's

own rather rambling line of argument. Where appropriate, however, we will pause to further elucidate the significance of his comments. In effect, then, the discussion which follows amounts to a kind of exegesis of Mol's analysis of the nature of identity as presented in chapters one, five and six of Identity and the Sacred, and in a few paragraphs from other sources. From this exercise in exegesis will emerge the realization that much of the confusion which presently surrounds the identity theory of religion stems from the remarkable fact that Mol fails to develop anything like a clear or consistent definition of identity. In addition to the ambiguity of many

of Mol's comments, and the apparent disjuncture between his early statements on identity and his latest observations, there is reason to believe that Mol is attempting to use a single term to denote two rather different things. Close scrutiny of some of his most critical comments suggests that he is confusingly using the single term 'identity' to speak (sometimes almost simultaneously) of two different concepts; conceptions of identity which might be differentiated by referring to Identity and identities. In simple terms, the former denotes a movement in nature towards 'wholeness' on the part of all its constituent parts, the latter refers to the individual integrity or wholeness of these variously (and 'semi-arbitrarily') defined parts.

In both cases, Mol's understanding of identity is intricately bound-up with his conception of a dialectic of integrating and differentiating forces in this world. Therefore, for clarity's sake, at this juncture a few more things should be briefly said about Mol's dialectical framework for the identity theory of religion.

The Dialectic - Backdrop to Identity

To get a firm hold on what Mol has in mind in speaking of a dialectic of integrating and differentiating forces it is imperative that a reading of the relevant passages in Identity and the Sacred (for example, chapter 1, p. 3;

chapter 2, p. 16-22; chapter 3, p. 31) be supplemented with a reading of Mol's introduction to Religion and Identity (which he edited) and his small book Wholeness and Breakdown. The latter book consists of a series of six lectures presented for the Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy at the University of Madras, in the summer of 1977. In these lectures Mol sought to demonstrate the pervasive use made of dialectical models of reality, similar to his own, in a wide array of fields--physics, astronomy, biology, genetics, ecology, ethology, semiology and linguistics, and social theory. As such these lectures represent a greatly extended explanation and justification of Mol's own earlier use of a dialectical orientation in his theory of religion. A proper critical assessment of Mol's thinking on the specific matter of dialecticism would necessitate an extended study of this text. For our immediate purposes, however, such a study will have to be postponed and the following discussion will lean heavily upon Mol's Introduction to Religion and Identity. Such a limitation need not impair our analysis as the relevant conclusions of Wholeness and Breakdown are essentially summarized in this Introduction. But as will become apparent in the course of our analysis of the concept of identity the full exploration of many of the most fundamental problems of the identity theory of religion depends upon an examination of Mol's notion of a dialectical pattern to reality in much greater detail. Here, because of restrictions in time and space, we will have to content ourselves

with pointing out the aspects of Mol's thought which have helped to lead us to this conclusion.

Like the other 'grand' theorists of religion over the last two centuries Mol has cast his analysis of religion against an evolutionary backdrop. Unlike his predecessors, though, Mol's evolutionism does not consist of oversimplified notions of man's progressive development through a typology of ideological stages ending in the Hegelian consciousness of the Absolute or the Comtian (August Comte) triumph of science. Nor does it seek to match phylogeny with ontogeny as in the metapsychology of Freud. Rather, though he broadly accepts (with qualifications) Robert Bellah's well known stages of religious development, the heart of Mol's evolutionism rests with his understanding of all natural and social processes and events within the general context of "Darwin's, or rather Spencer's, 'survival of the fittest'." (Mol, 1978, p. 4) With the emphasis being on the character of the struggle which leads to survival: the dialectic between integration and differentiation.

Painting with sweeping strokes, we begin with the most elementary of processes--man's evolutionary necessity to cope successfully with his environment. This process is itself dialectical, between, on the one hand, change/differentiation (that acquisition of a more invulnerable position in the environment) and on the other, stability/integration (the consolidation of that gain). Progressive mastery of the environment depends on both the complementarity of these forces and on their opposition to each other: they must therefore be roughly equal to one another. Adaptation to changing conditions and increased mastery of them may be impossible when integration has become petrification. Consolidation of the gain and pattern maintenance may be impossible when the forces of change have run amuck. (Mol, 1976, p. 31)

. . . optimal functioning is the result of unresolvable tension or constant dialectic between change and stability, or differentiation and integration. Progress seems to depend on each side of the dialectic maximizing the functions and minimizing the dysfunctions of its side without actually succeeding, because that would mean that the opposition has atrophied. (Mol, 1978, p. 5)

As has been indicated, Mol conceives of this dialectic as a constant between nature and culture. Within a biological unit the division of labour and introduction of genetic change is balanced and rendered adaptive by a complex integration and harmonization of internal diversifications and of the organism as a whole with its external environment. If inner unity and external fit with the relevant ecosystem is not secured then 'change' and complexification of the organism's structure and/or behaviour will simply impair its survivability. Yet by the same token, of course, the organism must be continually open to and engaged in some measure of change if it is to keep its fit with its natural environment and cope with internal and external threats to its existence. The paradox of this state of affairs is that increased complexity of an organism creates a demand for an increased interrelatedness or unity of functioning amongst the sub-units of the organism. The complexification increases the adaptability of the organism. The increased unity, however, increases the possible ramifications of a comparatively minor defect in the organism's structure or a small disruption of its behaviour patterns. Nevertheless, the complexity of the organism also allows for the possibility of

countering all of these ramifications through multiple coordinated minor adjustments. Complexity itself, then, and its evolutionary advantage does not simply consist of an extension of differentiation but in the establishment of a moving equilibrium of differentiating and integrating processes and pressures. The evolutionary struggle is a process of 'controlled change' and to succeed both factors, 'change' and 'control', must receive equal weighting.

As Mol goes on to say,

This most basic dialectic seems to be just as much part of man's non-biological, psychological and social existence. A primitive tribe would survive better in its ecosystem through a division of labor whereby the hunter best at scouting could coordinate his efforts with those best at running, aiming or brute strength. Here too differentiation of function must be counter-balanced by integration or stabilization of function. For the first division of labor is as necessary as conformity to expectations is a prerequisite for its subsequent success. (Mol; 1978, p. 5)

Moreover, as this should lead one to expect, man's use of signs, symbols, and language is perhaps best understood in the light of this dialectical principle.

Some signs and symbols denote and thereby facilitate a more intrinsic division of labor and mastery of the environment. Yet precisely because signs and symbols make for greater flexibility and more efficient change than genetic mutations they have to be counterbalanced by other signs and symbols which represent the opposite: stability, conformity and security. Acts of mastery and conquest appear to be doomed unless they take place in a context of legitimacy, emotional support, and confidence. This most basic distinction between concepts which deal with mastery, instrumentality, and differentiation and

those which deal with integration, stability, and expressiveness Langer (1951: 113) calls the distinction between discursive and non-discursive symbols. (Mol, 1978, p. 5)

Now as might be noted, there is not a complete similarity between the categories discursive/non-discursive and differentiation/integration; or, for that matter, between instrumental/expressive and differentiation/integration. But this is a problem in Mol's thought which we will have to be content to merely point out. For those interested in pursuing the matter, pages 21-22 of Identity and the Sacred and pages 6-7 of Identity and Religion should be consulted. On these pages Mol greatly extends the number of dichotomies that he thinks have been used throughout the ages to communicate a sense of the dialectical character of reality. In both instances he notes the diversity of ideas that he is attempting to assimilate under one conception but he does not seem to really appreciate the destructively reductive implications of his approach. In general we think that these passages are reflective of a pronounced tendency on Mol's part to operationalize a dialectical pattern of perception and analysis in terms of an overly simplified and rigid scheme of universalized polar opposites. In Geertz's terms, such a tendency marks a retreat from difficult 'synthetic' patterns of analysis into simpler yet far less realistic 'stratigraphic' patterns of analysis (see pages 63-65 of this thesis). The proper elaboration of such a line of criticism would necessitate a more extended

analysis of Mol's use of dialecticism. Here we will satisfy ourselves with drawing attention to the overall pattern of Mol's thinking about the dialectical framework of his theory.

The Concept of Identity in "Identity and the Sacred".

Returning to our original subject, religion enters into this dialectical process on the side of integration, promoting order and stability in human affairs by sacralizing identities. But what are 'identities'? Just what is encompassed by the term 'identity'? In exploring Mol's answer to these questions, and more importantly, in seeking to improve upon his answer, two things should be kept in mind. In the first place, from what we have already said, it should be our minimal assumption that much of what Mol has to say about identity is directed at establishing the sui generis character of identities. In other words, statements will be directed at causing people to think in terms of a pluralistic conception of identity. For as already stated, it is only with the pluralization of identities that Mol's perspective on religion becomes truly processual through the concretization or operationalization of the dialectic. Secondly, in thinking of the nature of an identity it will be necessary to exert ourselves to keep the wisdom of Mol's dialectical approach at the back of all our thoughts. If this is done it will become apparent that Mol's halting efforts at conceptualizing identity come to a natural culmination in a primitive systems theory.

As has already been indicated, in chapter one of Identity and the Sacred, Mol begins by linking identity to the territorial imperative displayed by animals and their creation of rigid ranking orders. The latter is explicitly linked by Mol with human identity needs. A consistent status ranking is characteristic of "tree-shrews, baboons, gorillas and man . . .", though the ranking systems used vary qualitatively as one moves up the evolutionary scale. Mol is less direct in subscribing to Robert Ardrey's speculations on the existence of human territorial imperative (though he quotes Ardrey). But his repeated references to man's need for a clear sense of physical "place" (Meaning and Place, chapter one; The Firm and the Formless, chapter five; Identity and the Sacred, chapter six, p. 66--as but a partial list) strongly suggests that he does subscribe to a similar perspective, whereby man roots his identity in a specific physical environment--habitually, if not instinctively.

Of course, with the rise of language the loci of man's identity greatly multiplied and "identity may now be symbolically located in a great variety of forms rather than merely territory or hierarchy." (Mol, 1976, p. 2) Some of the examples Mol mentions being: celibacy, sex, beauty, virginity; war, nationalism, money; totems, Christ, Vishnu, psychoanalysis, and Maoism.

Beyond this little else of a truly helpful nature is explicitly said about 'identity' as a category in this first

chapter, excluding summary reference made to matters more thoroughly covered in chapters five and six. The importance of the chapter for the task of conceptualizing identity rests with the emphasis given to two basic considerations: the roots of the human need for identity in the very biological pattern of life (a notion developed much more thoroughly, if indirectly, in Wholeness and Breakdown) and the unique character of the human extension of this biological reality through the use of symbolism and language. In a subtle yet critical manner Mol draws too much out of the first fact for the formulation of his identity theory of religion and concomitantly neglects the full consequences of the latter consideration. This state of affairs will not become apparent, however, until we come to discuss Mol's unacceptable reliance on an organismic analogy in positing the sui generis character of group and social identities.

Mol's discussion of identity in chapter five may be broken-down roughly into four sections: identity and the philosophers, identity and the psychologists, identity and the social psychologists, and the advantages of adopting a "larger theory" (p. 62) of identity.

Surveying the use that has been made of the term 'identity' by western philosophers, Mol notes that the notion is inextricably bound-up with that of 'consciousness'. Consciousness itself in turn being limited to 'self-awareness', 'reflection', and 'thinking'. This was the position of Locke, Leibnitz,

and Kant; and "a related emphasis on self-awareness is found in Kierkegaard's view of identity (1941, pp. 112, 299), in Jaspers (1963, p. 125) and in Bronowski (1965)." (p. 56) In addition by logical extension Descartes might be added to this list, though Mol does not mention the fact, as it is his understanding of the self as being equivalent with conscious reflection that influenced Locke's and Leibnitz's reasoning on these matters.

But as Mol goes on to observe, amongst the philosophers there has been one most noticable exception:

Heidegger . . . seems to have gone much beyond the earlier formulations. He questions the principle of identity as a principle of thinking (Heidegger, 1969, p. 25). Instead he links identity with the Being of beings, a fundamental characteristic of which is the unity within itself, a belonging together. Generally in existential literature the word 'being' is often used where we prefer 'identity'; and 'becoming' where we think 'change' is more appropriate. (p. 56)

No more elucidation of the significance of these comments is provided by Mol at this juncture. Though, as will become apparent, the passage on Heidegger can be of considerable aid in coming to a proper understanding of Mol's view of identity. As things stand we believe that the average reader upon first encountering this passage has not been adequately prepared to grasp its full meaning. This is especially the case as the preceding discussion of the philosophers and the concept of identity fails to actually spell-out Mol's objections to the philosophers' restricted orientation. This state of affairs

makes it unnecessarily difficult for the reader to penetrate to the heart of his reasoning on this issue.

Admittedly, in the next paragraph Mol begins to spell-out his differences of opinion with the philosophers by making comments like the following:

To us, rationality has a toxic potential and consciousness or awareness of the self, we feel, does not automatically lead to the integration of the self. To us, identity is a taken-for-granted, rather than a reflected-upon phenomenon. To us, identity is often sacralized by commitment and ritual rather than by observation and analysis . . .
(p. 56)

However, the full scope and character of his objections is not covered by these comments, and inadequate linkages are made to the vital connection he has just drawn between 'Being' and 'identity' (Identity).

The problem with the philosophers' perspective on identity is that it is too narrowly restricted: in the first place, to 'personal identity', and secondly, to the 'conscious' as opposed to the 'unconscious' operations of the mind. The latter restriction now appears most unrealistic in the light of modern psychology. It leads to a quite unacceptable neglect of the functioning of affective factors, like emotional commitment, in the forging and perpetuation of identities. The difficulties attendant on the former restriction are far more complex in nature and in delineating them we are drawn close to the polemical heart of Mol's rather confused and confusing discussion of identity.

First and foremostly, the problem with the philosophers' concentration on identity as 'personal identity' is that it denies due recognition to the existence and sui generis character of group and social identities. Another way of saying this, to use Geertz's convenient terminology, is that the philosophers tend to present a 'privatized' or strictly psychologized image of identity. As will be remembered (see p. 38 of this essay), Geertz complains that the task of anthropology, which is to understand the 'meaning' of man's diverse activities, is obscured by various misconceptions as to what 'culture' is:

One is to imagine that culture is a self-contained "superorganic" reality with forces and purposes of its own; that is, to reify it. Another is to claim that it consists in the brute pattern of behavioral events we observe in fact to occur in some identifiable community or other; that is, to reduce it. But though both these confusions still exist, and doubtless always will be with us, the main source of theoretical muddlement in contemporary anthropology is a view which developed in reaction to them and is right now very widely held--namely, that, to quote Ward Goodenough, perhaps its leading exponent, "culture is located in the minds, and hearts of men." (Geertz, p. 11)

The latter confusion is labeled 'privatizing' because it entails forgetting the 'public' character and context of all cultural acts. In Geertz's judgement, "culture consists of socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them or perceive insults and answer them". But to say this is not to say that culture "is a psychological phenomenon, a characteristic of someone's mind, personality, cognitive structure, or whatever". (Geertz,

p. 12, 13)

As he most effectively argues,

To play the violin it is necessary to possess certain habits, skills, knowledge, and talents, to be in the mood to play, and (as the old joke goes) to have a violin. But violin playing is neither the habits, skills, knowledge, and so on, nor the mood, nor (the notion believers in "material culture" apparently embrace) the violin. (Geertz, p. 12)

Similarly, in contrast to the popular implications of the word as used in such conversational commonplaces as "he is having an identity crisis", the term 'identity' does not refer to a strictly 'subjective' phenomenon. Though ideational, an identity does not just exist in someone's head. Personal, group, and social identities do not just represent differently focused mental constructs, whether with group and social identities being conceived as sub-systems of ideas within the larger framework of personal identity (Freud) or the reverse, personal and group identities as sub-systems of social identity (Durkheim). Mol does see a certain parallelism between Freud's differentiation of the id, ego, and superego, and his own three levels of identity. But unlike Freud, Mol's levels do not represent different aspects of personality or human consciousness. Though unphysical in formal conception (much like 'culture'), Mol's identities do incorporate certain elements of the so-called 'objective' world. An identity is not an occult entity, even though the division between personal, group, and social levels of identity is comparatively abstract and arbi-

trary. As with the cultural act of playing the violin (creating music, not just noise) to experience an identity is to derive meaning from a subjectively and objectively conditioned structuring of reality. There are biological, geographical (or physical-environmental), sociological, and psychological variables or, in other words, individualistic and extra-individualistic variables, that go into the structuring of the three levels of identity in which any individual participates. So that with the death of the individual it might be said that his personal identity has ceased to be as well. But in the case of the group and social identities in which he participated the situation is far less clear. This individual's particular subjective understandings of these identities have died with him, so to speak, but as these identities as units are collective phenomena they can only metaphorically be said to have died when they cease to structure the thought and behaviour of an individual. For this to happen literally not only would many people have to die but the material culture of the people would largely have to be destroyed or quite completely transformed, as an identity (like culture as a whole for Geertz) is the product of symbolic action and hence becomes concretized (in part) in particular objects.

Now in saying all of this we have gotten well beyond ourselves, or at least we have far out-stripped the analysis presented by Mol in chapter five of Identity and the Sacred. Though, implicitly, all of the points are present in some form

in his text. However, as we will comment on again, it is only with the distinct advantage of hindsight that the real thrust of his critical analyses of other uses of the concept of identity emerges into the full light of day. The insights given above are far from complete as there are many more specific references that must be drawn from Mol's writings to complete the description of his own conception of identity. For example, we have still yet to draw out the significance of the Heidegger passage quoted above, and in point of fact this undertaking will have to continue to be postponed while we collect the necessary background information from the rest of chapters five and six. But already one can begin to clearly detect the kind of extremely complex methodological problems attendant on this conceptualization of identity (which we believe is close to what Mol has in mind). For example, how would one go about the task of operationalizing a concept like social identity, so that one could meaningfully (specifically and precisely) speak about some religious development being motivated by anomie and/or alienation brought on by an 'unnatural' weakening of a given society's social identity (which is integral to Mol's explanation of the strength of sectarian movements in modern North America)?

Long before attempting to deal with these questions, we must spend considerably more time doing our homework and getting at the heart of Mol's less than straightforward use of this term identity, and its place in a theory of religion. Accordingly, let us turn to the second section of Mol's discussion of

"The Fragile Frame of Identity": identity and the psychologists.

By far the better part of Mol's discussion of the understanding of identity that has been utilized by various psychologists is taken-up with a critique of aspects of the work of Erik Erikson. For the most part the details of his arguments need not concern us here. All that need be noted is that while Mol approves of Erikson's work on the whole he takes exception to the value-laden and/or culturally parochial (favouring modern America) character of some of his terminology. More generally, Mol observes that the psychoanalytical tradition, with the exception of Jung, still tends to follow the philosophers in overestimating the integrating and stabilizing affect of reason and reflection on personal identity. But, of course, unlike the philosophers they are much more open to the role of unconscious and affective factors in shaping and supporting identity.

In addition, Mol also commends Erikson for further developing the social aspect of identity. The problem is, as this is the first time in the chapter that the notion of collective identities is explicitly introduced Mol should have taken greater care in the formulation of his discussion. For once again, as things stand, it is far from clear that Erikson's position is not essentially a 'privatized' one. Mol's pertinent comments read as follows:

Erikson further developed the social aspect of identity. 'The term identity . . . connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness)

and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others' (1960, p. 30). . . . The persistent sharing with others involves an inner solidarity with a group's ideals and identity. Erikson is aware of the importance of collective identity as separate from personal identity. If, as with the Sioux Indians whom he studied, the basis for collective identity formation is denied, the 'reservoir of collective integrity from which the individual must derive his stature as a social being' is also in jeopardy (1963, p. 154). (Mol, 1976, p. 57)

With the advantage of hindsight, and the understanding it gives us of the true degree of separation between personal and collective identities that Mol has in mind, it can be seen that Mol is reading Erikson's comments as being directly supportive of his own position. { Erikson's actual comments, however, strongly reflect his preoccupation as a psychologist with inner states of personality and mind, and the 'objective' or sui generis character of collective identity is only very vaguely implied. Mol would have done well, at this point, then to more specifically highlight his own further development of the notion of the separateness of collective and personal identities.

But more importantly, Mol's examination of Erikson's work leads him to conclude that the "sense of identity" rests upon an awareness of one's personal, group, and social "boundaries". (Mol, 1976, p. 57-58) The sense of being "bounded" is the functional essence of identity and the defining criteria of one's boundaries are the factors of one's identity conception. This latter point cannot be overstressed, for Mol himself neglects to give it due emphasis and clarity, though all of his

work rests upon the opening this understanding provides to interpreting identity phenomena in terms of 'objective' correlates as opposed to strictly subjective or psychological ones.

To further elucidate the problem with Mol's presentation of these matters, which accounts for much of the confusion and/or critical doubt surrounding this aspect of Mol's thought, let us briefly consider a few further comments he makes at the beginning of chapter six of Identity and the Sacred on this same notion of the importance of boundaries. Here Mol says:

Human beings want 'to locate themselves in a "system", a "universe", a "process" transcending the immediate give-and-take between the individual and his environment' (Brinton, 1958, p. 11). Or, as Gabrielle Roy (p. 35) has it about Alexandre Chenevert, the cashier, in her novel of that name: 'He had entered the savings bank and there he had stayed, as almost all human beings tend to stay once they have found a safe refuge.' The German poet, Rilke (Laing, 1971, p. 134), puts it, if anything, more strongly when he says: 'Where you are, there arises a place.'

Inevitably this place is bounded and the more precarious the place is, the more essential boundaries become. Boundaries also serve to provide humans with 'images of limits and restraints, if only to help us grasp what we are transcending' (Lifton, p. xii). This is as true for groups and societies as it is for individuals. 'Boundaries define a group, set it off from its environment, and give it a sharp focus, which facilitates commitment' (Kanter, p. 169). Religious organizations have traditionally reinforced these places and boundaries. In Northern Spain Christian (p. 99) observes: 'The more clear-cut the sociographic unit, the sharper its boundaries, then the more likely it was to have a cultural symbol, a protector, a patron in a shrine image.' (Mol, 1976, p. 66).

The connection between a sense of identity and an awareness of boundary lines between various apparently self-integrating

wholes (the 'unity within itself', and 'belonging together' of Mol's comments on Heidegger's Being of beings) is perhaps self-evident. But the actual character of the boundaries (and hence of the identities) is perhaps not quite so apparent. Transcendent "systems", "universes", and "processes" are essentially mental constructs. But as Mol's next sentence begins to imply, through the example of Alexandre Chenevert's bank, these mental constructs, these identity frameworks, are grounded in concrete and objective phenomena. In other words, identity, like the sense of 'place', is both a subjective and objective phenomenon. It in effect straddles the subjective/objective dichotomy, as Geertz says culture in general does. But even more than this, any particular identity is tied to very specific objective correlates--in Alexandre Chenevert's case, one particular bank. Thus the nature and dynamics of many, if not all, identities can be quite extensively explored and charted by simply isolating, studying, and referring to the events affecting the various concrete loci (whose various natures will be discussed below) of the identities in question. Provided, of course, that these loci can themselves first be isolated.

In going on to quote Rilke, however, Mol obscures this obliquely revealed insight. For the statement, "Where you are, there arises a place", overemphasizes the subjective or mentalistic character of the notion of 'place' and suggests a flexibility in its establishment which is inconsistent with the implications of Roy's comment on Chenevert and humanity in

general. Not just any place can be a "safe refuge"; 'home' is but one place and it cannot be readily transferred. If it could, then Mol himself would not have a case for arguing that such identities are precarious and that modern man suffers for his mobility. Nor, then, could one hope to learn very much about any particular identity by studying its concrete boundary markers.

Now a careful reading of the first sentence of the next paragraph sets matters right again: places can be physically precarious (insufficiently defined or protected), therefore, to counter this state of affairs one places a greater cognitive and affective importance on the few objective boundary markers that do exist, and are recognized by those outside of the identity as such. That this is the proper understanding of this sentence seems to be underlined by the phrasing of the next sentence, where it is stated (underlining added) that "boundaries also serve to provide humans with 'images of limits and restraints . . .'. In other words, concrete boundary symbols also become boundary markers for purely mentalistic processes. As anchors for thought, though, these structuring boundaries can only be empirically approached indirectly through or, by way of analogy from, the study of their more concrete and objective correlates in the physical and social worlds.

In saying all of this we are again actually moving beyond the general bounds of the passage cited. But in doing this we are merely aiding, with the help of hindsight, the inquisitive

reader to do what he must if he is going to come to a proper appreciation of Mol's theoretical position. The calculated vagueness of Mol's approach demands a certain crucial measure of reading between the lines. The problem is, of course, that it is too easy to read the wrong things into the text--such as a more or less privatized understanding of identity.

Reiterating the point already made, the sense of being 'bounded' is the functional essence of identity and the defining criteria of one's boundaries are the factors of one's identity conception. One thinks one's identity or, better one feels it. But even in the case of personal identity, in a certain substantial measure, the identity is independently embodied in the physical and social constituents of one's environment. In differently conceived contexts identity assumes, in a relatively arbitrary manner, different forms. But as the social psychologists, like Berger and Luckmann, Soddy, Klapp, and behind them Mead and Schutz, have forcefully pointed out, man's boundary creation and awareness is primarily a product of his interaction with others in social groups. In other words, man is most decidedly a 'social' creature. Accordingly, it is most natural that three of the more obvious, important, and definable identity formations should be the personal, group, and social levels of identity. These being the identities which correspond with the three most basic physical loci, so to speak, of human interaction.

In Mol's eyes, however, in their development of this

state of affairs the social psychologists have tended to be rather reductive for they have limited discussions of identity, its emergence and maintenance, to a complex dialectic between just the individual and society. Such a perspective is too simplistic, but not merely because the group level of identity receives inadequate attention as an independent variable. Mol asserts, from an even broader perspective, that the work of the social psychologists (like Berger) is in need of some fundamental modifications:

They stress interaction too much and the framework which makes this interaction possible too little. Most social psychologists tend to think of identity as the conglomeration of roles which are the product of social expectations and personal responses. What we have in mind, however, is the stable setting in which these exchanges can successfully take place, and which by definition is more enduring than a galaxy of roles and phases of maturation.
(Mol, 1976, p. 59)

With this statement we are drawing close to the heart of Mol's conceptualization of identity. A connection with his comments on Heidegger seems readily apparent: identity as the stable setting in which role interactions take place somehow equates with identity as the Being of beings. The precise nature of the connections between these notions, that is, the actual character of this broad conception of identity, however, is regrettably not spelt out. A vagueness persists in Mol's approach which, again it must be stated, impairs the reader's ability to really come to grips with the issues he is raising.

Moreover, in the paragraph which follows Mol does not appreciably add much clarity to his position. Though he seems to be convinced otherwise as he repeats it almost verbatim in his Introduction to Identity and Religion.

We therefore have more sympathy for those who think of identity as 'the most essential nucleus of man which becomes visible only after all his roles have been laid aside' (de Levita, p. 131), or as Wheelis (p. 200) has it: 'Identity is founded . . . on those values which are at the top of the hierarchy--the beliefs, faiths, and ideals which integrate and determine subordinate values' (p. 200). Bellah's definition (1965, p. 173) of identity as 'a statement of what a person or group is essentially, and, as it were, permanently', is also much more acceptable. (Mol, 1976, p. 60)

Now these quotations from other theorists are certainly enlightening to a degree. Yet, in the last analysis, things still remain remarkably vague considering that we are dealing with the pivotal analytical category of Mol's whole approach to the study of religion. How is one to gage phrases like "more sympathy for" and "much more acceptable", especially when it is not necessarily clear that all three quotations cited are truly stating similar things? De Levita's and Bellah's comments (because they are so vague?) have an obvious enough fit with Mol's preceding description of identity as the stable setting in which roles operate. Though they add little to our specific comprehension of its character and dimensions. But Wheelis' statement is more problematical as it is difficult to detect how his position (on the basis of this quotation) differs from

that of the social psychologists. From a social scientific perspective, values, whether preeminent or subordinate and secondary, are clearly founded upon the individual's interaction with his society, vis-a-vis the process of socialization for the most part. Moreover, the singular stress placed on values could prove misleading as it once again suggests the 'privatized' understanding of identity.

Up to this point, then, Mol has been most sparing in the information he has provided on the nature of his category of identity. Little more has been suggested by his own words than that identity is to be conceived in the broadest terms possible--as an affective as much as a cognitive phenomenon and one which is not simply psychologically or socially derived. Most of what has been said about identity above is based on a speculative extension on our part of hints supplied in Mol's text. Holding to the letter of Mol's text it would be hard to progress beyond his initial vague description of identity as "a stable niche in a predictable environment" (Mol, 1976, p. 55). But how does this notion relate to the stipulation of multiple identities (e.g., personal, group, and social identities)? And in just what respect is such an approach to be considered innovative? Perhaps information relevant to these questions can be culled from the remaining portion of Mol's discussion of identity; information which might allow us to attempt the further exegesis, so to speak, of the important passages already cited.

To this end the first thing to be noted is Mol's belief that the social psychologists have also made the error of over-emphasizing the close interdependence of personal and social identity at the expense of giving due recognition to the potential and actual conflict between these levels of identity. Over-stressing the role of social imprinting in the emergence of personal identity they have under-estimated "the boundary construction of social, group, and personal identity" (Mol, 1978, p. 2). Yet a proper comprehension of the latter is vital for understanding much of the dynamics of religious conflicts, the strength of sectarian movements in a modern or modernizing (the third world) world, and the rise and persistence of religious pluralism. As was indicated in chapter three, recognition of the dialectical (conflicting yet complementary) character of the relationship between various identity levels or foci is salient for the full understanding of religious phenomena. This is especially the case in a modern pluralistic society where the structure of identity is, according to Mol, constantly threatened and particularly fragile.

Even the sociologists of religion who are more cognizant of this dialectical relationship, though, have limited themselves to drawing a linkage, causally or otherwise, between specific existential problems and specific types and functions of religious beliefs and practices. Mol, on the other hand, argues that all of these specific relationships "can be subsumed more comprehensively in the generalization that there is a tendency

for personal and social identity to become sacralized and that this is particularly so when changes, upheavals, injustices, and uncertainties make a specific identity both fragile and precarious" (Mol, 1976, p. 62). The economy of this approach is the first of three advantages Mol sees in adopting his "larger theory" of religion.

As this reaffirms, it is most important to Mol's argument that the relative autonomy of different identity levels or foci be appreciated. Yet how is the reader to reasonably arrive at such an appreciation when Mol's references to identity are so vague about the actual criteria that may be used to separate out the relative identity interests--the key to boundary construction and detection. Mol's references in chapters five and six are all in the singular (i.e., references to 'identity'), making it difficult to relate his comments on his "larger" understanding of identity to the operational reality of identity pluralism (i.e., identity is analysable in our world only in the form of 'identities'). In the light of this state of affairs Mol's generalization on the sacralizing tendency of personal and social identity tends to read as but a simple reiteration of the trivial functionalist premise that man is an order loving creature.

Of the other two advantages which Mol sees to his 'larger theory' we will only speak of the second at the moment, leaving discussion of the more controversial third claim until after we have finally pinned-down Mol's understanding of identity.

This procedure is recommended by the fact that this third claim raises some broad methodological concerns which can be effectively used as a bridge in our own discussions linking identity theory in general with its methodological context in the social sciences. Moreover, discussion of the claimed second advantage of the larger theory provides a more natural introduction to the issues to be raised by way of coming to a final overview of Mol's conceptualization of identity.

The second advantage, then, reads as follows:

the larger theory also has the advantage of being able to account for religious behaviour when problems are less obvious or when the affluent, educated, and urbanized baffle of the atheists by religious propensities.

By way of example, Mol briefly refers to the conversion experience of T.S. Eliot, concluding:

It would be rather difficult to 'explain' Eliot's conversion in terms of the theories outlined above (various specific deprivation theses). However, it makes sense if one postulates an innate search for the kind of identity which best fits a specific situation of time and tradition, and if one further postulates that the fragility of any possible foci of identity is an important impetus for providing it with a strong emotional anchorage. (Mol, 1976, p. 62)

Our concern here is not to directly assess the veracity and merits of this claim. Rather we would point out that it is noteworthy that in this passage Mol refers to an "innate search for . . . identity" and simultaneously to the "kind of identity which best fits a specific situation", two phenomena

which are interrelated but not one and the same thing. Through the presumption of a kind of evolutionary functionalism Mol collapses these two phenomena into each other. Yet methodologically they are distinct. The first phrase refers presumably to a biologically founded predisposition while the second phrase refers to the socially structured product of man's efforts to satisfy this predisposition. In other words, the first phrase refers to an urge which would be manifested as an ongoing 'process' characteristic of human life, while the second phrase refers to a more or less definable 'entity' created in response to this urge. The first phrase, it should be noted, is singular in reference, while the second, as Mol himself has stressed, has a plurality of referents (i.e., the identities one participates in).

The relationship between the two phenomena might be thought of in terms similar to Heidegger's phrase: "Being of beings" (or so we read Mol to be implying). The innate search for identity being the generalized constant of human reality, as Being is of all reality. While the notion of identities fitted to specific situations is the equivalent of the individual manifestations of Beingness (i.e., beings). In light of this, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter, we minimally favour drawing attention to the distinction between the two conceptions of identity by emulating Heidegger and referring to 'Identity' and 'Identities' respectively. But even this differentiation is far from satisfactory, as is

indicated by following through on the parallel. For beings manifest Being in but one way, so to speak, but a single being gives manifest form to the innate search for identity through the creation and maintenance of multiple identities. Moreover, the connection between an innate search for identity and sui generis collective identities like group and social identities is unclear and open to question. Of course, this problem is largely rooted in the extremely ambiguous conception of these identity types provided by Mol.

Mol fails to draw this distinction and blithely uses the simple term 'identity' to denote both the actual phenomena, as in personal, group, and social identities, and the innate drive to create, maintain, and reinforce these phenomena, as in his problematic substitution, on numerous occasions, of 'identity' for 'integration' when speaking of the dialectic pattern of reality (a matter whose significance shall be discussed further below). This ambiguous state of affairs is reflected in Mol's actual reference to Heidegger where he first links identity with the Being of beings and then proceeds to obscure or ignore the relevance of the distinction made in the Heideggerian phrase by flatly correlating "being" (meaning Being, beings, or both somehow?) with identity. Completing the confusion he goes on to suggest that the Existentialists' being/becoming distinction can be reduced to his own formulation of an identity/change dialectic.—

Mol profoundly confuses matters when he substitutes

'identity' for 'integration' in his discussions of the dialectic for this creates the false impression that 'identities' are essentially non-dialectical phenomena. The concept of creating an identity becomes unilaterally associated with the process of integration (whatever that really entails?), neglecting the imperative role played by differentiation in the formation of identities. A role which Mol himself rightly highlights through his emphasis on boundary creation and delineation.

In chapter six Mol offers the following indirect explanation of his substitution:

Yet there are instances . . . when the concept of 'integration' is more appropriate because the unification under discussion has little to do with simultaneous delineation. Admittedly this is more the exception than the rule, particularly in modern societies. However, even the identity of a primitive tribe with no outside contact whatsoever has a distinct outline. It is a construct and a system in no-construct and no-system. (Mol, 1976, p. 67)

Now this explanation makes little sense to us. Mol himself qualifies his position so extensively in the very process of stating it that one is left seriously doubting its merits. But as this passage clearly shows, to imply an equivalency between the terms identity and integration is very misleading as it contradictorily ties the dialectical phenomenon of 'identities' to but half of the actual dialectical process-- integration. To attempt to justify this state of affairs by suggesting that there are non-dialectical identities (i.e., identities created and maintained without some form of ongoing

process of delineation) and to speak of "constructs in no-construct" is to play with words and contradict the logic of his own supposition of the sui generis character of different identity foci within even the most primitive communities (e.g., as argued in his Durkheim article with regard to the Australian Aboriginal community). If on no other basis, as Lévi-Strauss has forcefully demonstrated, primitive man carefully and elaborately delineates his relationship with nature, contrasting what might be broadly referred to as his cultural and natural identities. But as also suggested, beyond this multiple identities are differentiated (and hence integrated) within each such community.

But as these facts are readily apparent why does Mol persist in the misleading habit of substituting identity for integration in some of his discussions of the dialectical character of reality? An answer lies, we think, in understanding Mol's tendency to think of identity in terms of Identity (i.e., man's innate drive to secure a predictable environment through the creation and maintenance of identities). When Mol contrasts identity and differentiation he is stressing and arguing for or, more accurately, assuming and insinuating a strong intrinsic link between human nature and the forces of order and resistance to change in this world (remember that for Mol, identity/differentiation is synonymous with integration/differentiation which in turn is synonymous with order/change). In other words, he is giving expression once again to what we have rather

qualifiedly called his 'conservative' understanding of man, and hence of religion.

In part then Mol's use of identity as a concept simply recapitulates Berger's functionalistic assumption of an innate human "propensity to order". In The Sacred Canopy and A Rumour of Angels, Berger roots religion in this propensity. Here Mol is simply drawing the same linkage. However, he would have been wise to have made his point without attributing a confusing dual connotation to the single term 'identity'. To our way of thinking it would suffice to specify that man appeared to have a strong natural inclination to create and integrate his world through the elaboration of identity frameworks. The concept which we have differentiated and labelled 'Identity' could then be more simply translated as 'integration' (as already specified in the dialectic, avoiding redundancy), with the proviso that one is postulating a drive on man's part not just for an increasingly integrated and ordered world, but a world ordered in terms of 'identities'. Such a formulation of matters clarifies the identity theory of religion by placing the emphasis squarely on the notion of 'identities' and their character. In so economizing on the use of the term identity it highlights the most distinctive contribution of the identity theory to the social scientific theory of religion. Of course, it also places the onus on communicating a clear definition of identity as a phenomenon (i.e., what identities are methodologically) and Mol's nominal functional definition is lacking in specificity.

Mol himself comes close to explicitly acknowledging this state of affairs in a very significant passage drawn from chapter six of Identity and the Sacred in which he contrasts identity with the "kindred concept" of order. The fact, however, that the passage in question is found buried without particular distinction in the midst of observations of far less weight suggests that Mol has not fully appreciated the significance of his own words.

It is obvious that the proclivity of man and society for order is closely intertwined with the need for identity. Identity presumes the sameness of order. The stable frame of reference, the chronological and spatial continuity of identity, are all basically derived from, or certainly strongly advanced by, the veneration of order and abhorrence of chaos. Identity, however, has the advantage of drawing the attention to a crucial delineation of concrete forms of order, and to the conflict that disorder produces when these delineations are eroded by competing 'forms of order' operating equally under the internal driving force of maximum integration. (Mol, 1976, p. 71)

In this passage we find confirmation of Mol's agreement with the basic functionalistic premises of Berger's theory of religion: man's activities in the world are crudely cast against a backdrop of the fundamental dichotomy of order/chaos. Or as Mol puts it, religion is rooted, via the notion of identity, in the "veneration of order". As this implies, then, there is a near functional and logical equivalency between Berger's 'propensity to order' and Mol's 'Identity' conception of identity. We say 'near' equivalency because the

two ideas while similar are crucially not the same, though it would appear that Mol would like to obscure this fact or is simply not aware of the difference. Yet the difference stems from the very advantage of the identity theory approach to religion that Mol himself correctly pinpoints in the passage cited above.

The advantage we are speaking of being, of course, that pinpointed with the phrase: "Identity . . . has the advantage of drawing the attention to a crucial delineation of concrete forms of order". In other words, the advantage of the identity theory of religion lies with what we have differentially called the 'identities' conception of identity. For as Mol argues, it is only with the recognition of the plural manifestation of 'forms of order' (i.e., identities) that we gain insight into the full complexity and dynamism of religions' functioning. The term identity, as opposed to order, by a process which Mol fails to specify, but presumably has to do with the fact that the word identity more readily brings to mind the image of a specifiable 'entity' or 'entities' (meaning a comparatively self-contained system and not literally and crudely a material thing), more directly raises the possibility of a dialectical interplay of these 'entities'. Mol rather clumsily, but nevertheless effectively, draws attention to the dialectical perspective which emerges from the identities conception of identity with the phrase: "the conflict that disorder produces when these delineations are eroded by competing

'forms of order' operating equally under the internal driving force of maximum integration." As this statement of matters implies, the existence of multiple 'forms of order' automatically breeds a certain measure of 'disorder' in this world as each 'form of order' erodes the delineations giving specific form to the other 'forms of order'. Hence the identity orientation is advantageous as in pointing to the existence of multiple 'forms of order' (i.e., identities) it points to an inherent source of conflict and presumably change in the human environment. A natural structural tension is introduced to human affairs, one which religions actively promote. And this perspective on matters counters the Durkheimian and Parsonian tendency to overemphasize the integrative and conserving function of religion. For though religion continues to be associated with forces of order, by linking religion with the sacralization of identities, it is immersed in a dialectical process and becomes simultaneously a force in the service of change and adaptation.

A number of problems arise, though, with regard to Mol's statement of the differences between the "kindred concepts" of 'order' and 'identity'. In the first place, it is misleading for Mol to speak of 'society's' "proclivity . . . for order" and of 'identities being driven by an internal force of maximum integration'. In both cases we must assume that the language is metaphorical or that Mol is reifying collective entities like society or group and social identities. Either way, in

and of itself, this tendency is objectionable for many reasons. At the most fundamental level, the presence of this kind of language points to Mol's broad reliance at certain crucial junctures of his argument on a rather simplistic organismic model or analogy. Treating social process as if they were the equivalent of the behaviour of an organism Mol begs the important question of how the interaction of individuals might actually give rise to order in human affairs, and especially in the form of identities, by vaguely postulating a teleological functional need for order in the form of identities.

We can turn to Berger's and Luckmann's philosophical anthropology to get at least the beginnings of an explanation for positing a human proclivity for order. But Mol's discussions of the evolutionary advantages of increased group integration and so on do little to advance our appreciation of why it might be said that man more or less has a need for identity (ies). Rather in such passages we merely encounter the comparatively trivial assertion that man must concern himself as much with the promotion of group solidarity as with the pursuit of instrumental ends. Identity is linked with the former. But as Mol never truly enlightens us as to just what an identity is this amounts to little more than a reiteration of the position that the more ordered the human situation is the more enhanced are man's possibilities of survival, and hence it might be said that there is a 'need' to maximize the amount of order present in human affairs. In addition we are told that the kind of

order involved in integrating a group is more affectively founded than that involved in securing an instrumental end. But all the same, we are supplied with no more substantial image of just what an identity is than the vague phrase used in the passage cited above: an identity is a "form of order". However, without some more exacting understanding of the nature of identities as phenomena it is impossible to explore the psycho-sociological interactionist process by which identities come into being and develop (the process being presumably slightly different for each type of identity). Yet unless some sort of effort is made to trace out the details of the origins and raison d'être of identities, differentiating 'forms of order' and 'identity', then the very existence of these phenomena is fundamentally open to question. Some effort must be made to explain why man should choose or be compelled to organize his reality in terms of identities if the notion is to even appear to be more than an arbitrary construct imposed on reality to serve certain academic or ideological ends.

By implicitly relying on an intuitive extension of the commonly accepted notion of personal identity, and through the repeated use of such vague concepts as 'innate drives and needs' Mol glosses over this fundamental problem. However, he does so at the cost of gravely impairing the clarity and hence the utility of his theory. For example, Mol's continued failure to adequately specify the actual character of identities undermines his own argument for the sui generis nature of group and social

identities--the very thing which Mol himself identifies as being the central advantage of using the term 'identity'. By relying, as he does in the passage cited, on such excessively vague and misleading euphemisms for identity as 'forms of order' Mol all too readily allows for the driving forces of maximum integration operating within identities to be equated with the notion of a proclivity for order. Yet such an equation leads the mind quite naturally back to a 'privatized' conception of identity, where group and social identities are essentially understood as but ideational subunits of, or expansions upon, the biologically founded level of personal identity. In general Mol's reference to an innate search for identity is unfortunate as it can only literally be applied to the level of personal identity and thus, contrary to Mol's own wishes, it misleadingly inclines the reader to restrict his understanding of identity to this level.

Mol does work with what we have chosen to call the 'Identity' conception of identity. But obviously it is a mistake to limit his understanding of this conception to 'an innate search for identity', at least in the most obvious sense of a biologically founded drive. Rather through the use of such phrases as an "internal driving force of maximum integration" Mol seems to be seeking to assert the existence of some sort of inherent tendency for each identity to maintain its integrity, its existence as a comparatively independent and self-contained and self-sustaining unit. This tendency involves

more than just a process of 'integration'. It involves a process of ongoing change and adaptation. Mol is aware of this fact and elsewhere (Mol, 1978, p. 10) he explicitly draws attention to it by stressing that the 'dialectic' (of integration, differentiation) is present not only between different identities but within each identity. Similarly, in the passage under consideration here, his use of the adjective 'maximum' in the phrase "internal driving force of maximum integration" implies an ongoing or incremental process.

However, the explicit use of the term 'integration' does breed an element of confusion as in the frame of reference of Mol's identity theory this term calls to mind but one half of the dialectical process. Therefore, once again, the student of religion is more or less led to misconceive the nature of identities, seeing them as essentially static patterns of order which man imposes on reality. Viewed in this light their inherent instability and great need for ideological support from such sources as religion becomes readily apparent. Thus in part we are inclined to believe that this impression is not purely the accidental product of careless word usage on Mol's part. Rather it is reflective of the conditioning influence of his conservative orientation to human nature and religion on his formulation and presentation of the basic methodological scaffolding of the identity theory of religion.

When one begins to explore the train of thought in Mol's work which we have isolated through a discussion of the 'Identity'

conception of identity it is hard to shake the further suspicion that Mol has generalized the inherent tendency for each identity to maintain its integrity to the overall dialectic of life itself. In other words, Mol's work seems to imply that there is a direction to the dialectical processes of life in general, at least in the sense that all appears to be geared to the achievement of ever greater patterns of integration. A kind of Dialectic (in the Hegelian or Marxist sense) exists within the dialectical character of life processes and reality as a whole. Mol, of course, never directly acknowledges a faith in such a Dialectic. Nevertheless, the ease with which he accepts three less than self-evident propositions leads us to suspect its presence in his thinking: his casual postulation of a 'need' for identity and his unquestioning extension of the notion of 'need' to collective entities like groups and societies; his tendency to simply equate the notions of identity and integration, implying that the ultimate object of the dialectical process called 'identity' is simply integration; and his failure to explain why a human environment composed of a plurality of sacralized identity frameworks does not fly apart in a sea of perpetual conflict.

In general the suspicion arises that Mol has been led by thinking in terms of organic analogies into 'reifying' the dialectical pattern of reality. Change within an organism or even a species is guided, so to speak, by certain normative prerequisites and following Schrodinger it can be said that organ-

isms as systems reverse entropy (manifested as disorganization). But when we move beyond the biological level we have no grounds for suggesting the primacy of ordering or disordering processes. There are no firm grounds for asserting a kind of cosmic homeostasis, as is implied by Mol's references to alternating swings of the pendulum in the favour of integration, then differentiation, then back to integration, and so on. Such an alternating pattern may be commonly detected in the course of events (natural and social). But unlike in an organismic system, it does not stem from the fact that there is a relatively fixed structure that is normal for a species at a given time. In other words, it does not stem from an evolutionary need to preserve a certain order essential to the survival of the organism. There is indeed a certain organizational logic to collective social phenomena which exercises a certain control over the manner in which these phenomena change. But the only imperative needs present for the maintenance of any particular order, or order in general for that matter, are the needs of the individuals associated with these phenomena. Therefore, it is unsatisfactory to seek to explain some development or event by simply referring to 'group identity needs', unless the notion of group identity is meant to imply no more than a certain mental image individuals have of a group to which they belong.

As is indicated above in our own brief discussion of Mol's description of the dialectical framework of his theory,

there is a heavy reliance in Mol's thought on religion and identity on organismic analogies. Out of this reliance it appears that Mol has come to too simplistically 'reify' identities, treating them roughly like 'organisms' with independent 'needs'.

Having drawn this distinction between 'Identity' and 'identities', and pointed to some of the confusions that stem from this dual conceptualization, can we now go back and make more sense of some of the crucial passages dealing with Mol's understanding of identity which have already been cited above? In thinking of identity Mol speaks of the need to stress the framework, the stable setting, in which roles are created and adopted, which he suggests is greater and more enduring than the conglomeration of social roles that is often conceived as constituting identity. And he states his sympathy with de Levita's definition of identity as 'the most essential nucleus of man which becomes visible only after all of his roles have been laid aside.' Now to which of the two conceptions of identity (Identity or identities) do these statements apply? The answer is, of course, to both in some sense as Mol himself has confused and collapsed the two conceptions of identity. It is most helpful, however, to approach these passages with the Identity conceptualization in mind as it appears that this line of reasoning was foremost in Mol's thinking at this juncture. Though on close examination there is little clarity or consistency in any of his statements on identity as an analytic category.

From the little that has already been said it should be clear that the 'identities' conceptualization of identity importantly transcends the confines of that which is normally encompassed by sociological role analysis. This is true if for no other reason than the fact that identity conceived as identities is not restricted, as it is by Berger and Luckmann (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 100), to individual subjective identity (i.e., a 'privatized' notion of identity). But also because identities properly conceived, like personal, group, and social identities, are the bounded worlds of discourse and action in which man's various specific roles are cognitively, affectively, and physically situated. Within a single identity framework, a family group identity for example, multiple roles may be simultaneously or sequentially operative, roles which are complementary and conflicting. One may be a son and dependent, a brother and an equal, or in later years head of the family and chief protector and provider, all within the context of a single identity orientation.

But this is not the time to elaborate on these matters. For though with hindsight the fit is obvious enough, when the reader encounters Mol's vague reference to identity as the framework within which social expectations and personal responses interact to create social roles he has at hand little solid information with which to extrapolate such a comparatively complicated understanding of identity.

Epitomizing this state of affairs, in the Summary to this

chapter (chapter five) Mol offers the following remarkably unhelpful statement of matters:

Identity on the personal level is the stable niche that man occupies in a potentially chaotic environment which he is therefore prepared vigorously to defend. Similarly, on the social level, a stable aggregate of basic and commonly held beliefs, patterns, and values maintains itself over against the potential threat of its environment and its members. 'Consciousness' and 'awareness' are less central to the usage of the concept than 'boundaries'. (Mol, 1976, p. 65)

Having read this one finds oneself quite reasonably asking: What is 'the stable niche' which a man personally occupies? After having read an entire chapter which was purportedly going to supply us with a working definition of identity we find ourselves confronted with the same vague generality we were given in the first paragraph of the chapter. A tentative answer to our question might be formulated on the basis of what we have said about identities and their simultaneously subjective and objective character. But once again we must note that at no point does Mol directly supply this information, at least not by this juncture in his argument. Moreover, the second sentence of this 'summary' passage would appear to deny us the opportunity to develop this line of thought. For social identity we are told is an aggregate of basic and commonly held 'beliefs', 'patterns' (patterns of what?; patterns of symbols or of action), and 'values'. Does not such a statement of matters, however, take us back to an essentially cognitive and 'privatized' understanding of identity?

Personal and social levels of identity are differentiated, but what is the precise nature of the differences? Is personal identity merely another collection of values, patterns (?), and beliefs focused on the life events of the individual as opposed to those of the group or society? If so, then in what sense does Mol's identity perspective truly diverge from that of social psychologists like Berger and Luckmann? Are not all such values and beliefs but the product of the dialectic between the individual and society and as such adequately analyzed with the existing methods and concepts of social psychology and the sociology of knowledge? Does not an analysis in terms of social roles provide an effective channel of access to these values and beliefs, one which is more easily operationalized than Mol's vague notion of identity or identities?

Berger's and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge does not require a reliance on the notions of 'consciousness' or 'awareness'. Rather they have most conscientiously geared their analysis to a concern with everyday taken-for-granted ideas, values, and beliefs; what they refer to as 'pretheoretical' views of reality. And it would be difficult to argue that their discussion of the operation of these phenomena, using the notion of social roles, stresses the role of cognition in man's life any more than an analysis utilizing the notion of boundaries presumably would if Mol is going to allow us to assume that identities are aggregates of values, beliefs, and patterns (whatever they are).

All of this is not being said to suggest that identity theory cannot be significantly differentiated from sociological role analysis. Rather, as will eventually be reaffirmed, we think quite the opposite, as supposedly does Mol. More simply our objective is to thoroughly reveal how Mol's ambiguous presentation of identity as an analytic category has led to much unnecessary confusion. By sorting out this confusion it is hoped that we will arrive at a more carefully delineated conception of identity that does not appreciably deviate from the spirit of Mol's own approach yet renders the distinctive methodological advantages of the identity theory approach to religion more manifest.

In general in approaching Mol's comments on Berger's and Luckmann's social psychological understanding of identity it is necessary to keep the dual connotations which Mol attributes to the single term 'identity' in mind. But most explicitly it would appear that Mol has the generalized conception of 'Identity' foremost in his thoughts. Of course, once again it must be stressed that we are able to say this only with the aid of hindsight and by way, we must admit, of a bit of reductive speculation. However, we know of no other way of making sense of baffling observations like the following:

To Berger and Luckmann, identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society (1967, p. 174). Yet, they also occasionally use it in the more acceptable sense of 'a definite, stable and socially recognized identity', or as anchored in a cosmic reality protected from both the contingencies of socialization and the malevolent self-transformations of marginal experience' (1967, p. 113). (Mol, 1976, p. 59)

From this passage it is to be assumed that Mol sees identity as being independent from or existing prior to the dialectic between the individual and society. Most definitely he is suggesting that Berger and Luckmann have missed the mark in implying that identity is a product of the dialectic. Presumably, then, Mol has the Identity conception of identity in mind at this point. For on the basis of his own statements this is the only way we can make sense of his implying that identity is predialectical in character when we know that identities, as symbolically structured entities, are dialectical phenomena.

However, this interpretation of matters instantaneously runs into problems. For if care is taken to sharply scrutinize the second sentence of this passage we find Mol contradicting the natural implication of his first statement. For within the context of Berger's and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge 'a definite, stable and socially recognized identity' can in no sense be interpreted as an extra or pre-dialectical phenomenon. On the contrary, their whole point is that such phenomena are inextricably bound up with the social dialectic by which man's nomos (including a subjective sense of identity) is created and maintained. In the passage of Berger's and Luckmann's text from which this phrase is drawn they are arguing that the sense of individual identity is secured by the very fact that identity is the ongoing product of a social process. Therefore, though the subjective sense of identity may be threatened by the "sur-realistic" metamorphoses of dreams and fantasies", in the long

run it is guaranteed by the fact that social reality is symbolically structured on the premise that every individual does have a 'true self' that is 'knowable' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 100). It is this 'symbolic world', which is a product of the social dialectic, which is the 'cosmic reality' that protects the subjective sense of reality from 'both the contingencies of socialization and the malevolent self-transformations of marginal experience'. By 'cosmic reality' Berger and Luckmann were not implying some extra or pre-dialectical anchorage for identity, like a biological drive to secure identities or an orientation of the dialectical process of life itself to the promotion of ever greater integration, as Mol seems to be implying. Their reference to protection from the contingencies of socialization does not have to do with escaping from socialization (i.e., the social dialectic) altogether, but rather with escaping the consequences of a deviant type of individual socialization.

Perhaps Mol was misled in his analysis of these observations made by Berger and Luckmann because their discussion of the anchorage of identity in a 'cosmic reality' superficially resembles his own implicit assumption that the transcendentalization of identity is imperative to its stabilization.

But whatever the case, returning to Mol's key passages on the nature of identity we see no recourse but to assume that his thought is being conditioned by the Identity conception of identity--in all its vagueness. It is this fact which accounts

for Mol's constant reference to identity in the singular, as in his specification of identity as the framework in which role interactions take place and as the essence of man which remains after all of his roles have been stripped away. It is this fact which also accounts then for the major methodological weakness of Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion. For as we have consistently argued, it is the 'identities' conception of identity that must be established in the minds of students of religion if the innovative potential of Mol's perspective is to be appreciated. Yet possibly because Mol is more preoccupied with providing an over-arching justification for the 'conservative' thrust of his thinking on religion his analysis of the nature of identity ends up concentrating on the Identity conception of identity. For it is through the connection of religion with this conception of identity that Mol lends an air of natural logic to his essentially 'reactionary' understanding of religion as a kind of 'braking action against changes in symbol systems'.

As will be remembered, Mol defines the process of sacralization as follows:

By sacralization, I refer to the process by means of which on the level of symbol-systems certain patterns acquire the same taken-for-granted, stable, eternal, quality which on the level of instinctive behaviour was acquired by the consolidation and stabilization of new genetic materials. Sacralization, then, is a sort of brake applied to unchecked infinite adaptations in symbol systems for which there is increasingly less evolutionary necessity and which become increasingly more dysfunctional for

the emotional security of personality and for integration of tribe or community. To say the same in an over-simplified way: sacralization is to the dysfunctional potential of symbol-systems what antibodies are to the dysfunctional, cancerous, possibilities in physical systems. Sacralization produces immunity against persuasion similar to the biological immunization process (Mol, 1976, p. 5)

With this passage Mol began the process of leading his readers to think of religion as the natural socio-cultural extension of the biological evolutionary process. With his discussion of identity, a discussion which is suffused with the Identity conception of identity, Mol completes the apparent logicity of this perspective by tying man's efforts to symbolically order this world into an overall evolutionary Dialectic. But without the 'filling in', so to speak, of the basic socio-cultural evolutionary unit--the identity(ies)--Mol has still failed to take us appreciably beyond Berger. The 'sacralization of identity' reads essentially as the 'transcendentalization of order'.

Moreover, the 'reactionary' understanding of the nature of religion promoted by this perspective fails to do justice to the truly processual implications of the identity theory of religion. In Identity and the Sacred this 'reactionary' quality of Mol's view of religion (and implicitly of identity and hence man) is reflected in comments like the following: "Sacralization protects identity, a system of meaning, or a definition of reality, and modifies, obstructs, or (if necessary) legitimates change." (Mol, 1976, p. 6) Intended or not, these words clearly

imply that by nature 'change' is alien to identities, hence the need of transcendent religious systems which provide an unchanging stable anchor for identities which is sufficiently removed from this world to allow (if necessary) the measure of change which must occur if man is to adapt and survive. Such a perspective on identities is unrealistic, however, and it makes more sense to follow through on the implications of another aspect of Mol's theory which he himself fails to develop: the dialectical character of identities. For identities as truly dialectical phenomena are not static systems of ideas and symbols but historically conditioned patterns of interaction with the world which are undergoing a gradual and continuous change in their structure over their "lifetimes". Change is not foreign to identities. It does not exclusively intrude upon them from the outside. Therefore, in an even more fundamental way, religion must be looked upon as a socio-cultural mechanism facilitating necessary change in human affairs. Religion and change are not simply linked by the existence of a plurality of identities. But to realize this state of affairs a serious effort must be made to come to grips with 'identities' as a unit of analysis. Mol never makes that effort and the details of our own effort to begin to fill-in this gap in his theory will have to be postponed until we complete our survey of Mol's own pertinent comments on identity.

In this regard the last significant passage to be consulted from Identity and the Sacred deals with the differentiation

of identity from the kindred concept of 'interpretation of reality' or 'definition of reality'.

The concept of reality definition, however, relates generally to socialization and symbolic interaction, and is therefore less suitable for dealing with boundary conflicts of established or emerging personal and social foci of identity. Because of its emphasis on interpretation and cognition it leads generally to disregard of man's biological nature. It is therefore a narrower concept than 'identity' which we wish to employ when we have in mind a stable niche in a whole complex of physiological, psychological, and sociological patterns of interaction. We use it interchangeably with identity only when we deal with symbolic interaction and cognitive interpretation. (For the use of the concept, see Berger and Luckmann, 1967. Also Holzner.) (Mol, 1976, p. 68)

With these words we finally encounter a passage that appears to be moving fairly directly towards the understanding of 'identities' that we have been attempting to slowly piece together. Though for some reason (perhaps because Berger's and Luckmann's statements are limited to the subjective sense of identity) Mol's comments seem to be restricted to the personal level of identity. This is confusing as once again it allows the reader to persist in thinking of identity in 'privatized' terms, the very thing Mol is trying to counteract with his reference to a stable niche in a whole complex of physiological, psychological, and sociological patterns of interaction.

However, with the emphasis placed on the biological component of the personal level of identity the concept of identity is certainly being differentiated from that of social roles. The phrase 'physiological patterns of interaction'

introduces an objective, pre-dialectical (Berger's and Luckmann's social dialectic) factor into the analysis. As Mol implies, it opens the doors to a fuller appreciation of the grosse and physical boundary co-ordinates of human life, and the consequences of their violation (e.g., in the case of personal identity some sort of physical impairment of the body, and so on; and by extrapolation, with a national identity, the infringement of a nation's geographic border's by another nation).

In the Summary to chapter five, Mol generalizes on this point as follows:

Personal and social identity very much depend on one another, but there are also numerous possibilities for conflict between the two. Even so, conflict is only one of many reasons for the fragility of the frame of identity. Death, diffidence, conquests, economic disasters, injustice, and, in modern societies, an excessive emphasis on instrumental values, relativization, and over-choice of identity foci are some of these other reasons. (Mol, 1976, p. 65)

Once again, however, the reference is so oblique in character that it is doubtful that most readers would appreciate its significance. A greater effort must be made to advance the potential operationalization of the notion of identities by differentiating different identity types, and one of the first steps in this direction would be to at least broadly correlate these types with different kinds of fragility.

Returning to Mol's comments on the differences between the notions of identity and reality definition one further

ambiguity should be pointed out and rectified. This passage might leave one with the impression that identities and identity conflicts are not to be associated with symbolism or symbolic interaction. Yet, in point of fact, quite the opposite is true. Identities, like cultures, are very much symbolical entities. But as the last sentence of Mol's own comments suggests, the point is that identities, like cultures,

are not strictly mentalistic phenomena (i.e., are not to be 'privatized' in conception). Therefore it is misleading to refer to them with phrases like 'interpretations of reality' which have a strictly ideational referent. Mol himself tends to be a bit careless on this point, using phrases like 'definition of reality' too readily where the notion of identity is more precisely meant (as in the passage cited on p. 289 of this thesis).

The Need for Increased Category Clarity

All in all, Mol's formal presentation of the analytical category of identity in Identity and the Sacred makes the task of arriving at a reasonably definite working understanding of identity unnecessarily arduous. Throughout Mol's work hints are provided as to the possible analytical advantages of thinking in terms of identities. By calling on a parallel which

we have detected between Mol's line of thought and Clifford Geertz's much better known speculations on the nature of 'culture' we have tried to draw out some of the substance of these hints. In so doing it is possible that out of our desire for clarity we have imparted a greater definiteness to the category of identity than can be readily or fully justified through reference to Mol's actual statements. In fact we recognize that even after undertaking a careful exegesis of chapters five and six of Identity and the Sacred we may well have distorted Mol's actual understanding of identity. If such is the case, however, the cause lies with Mol's critical failure to provide a clear and systematic definition of his key theoretical variable. A definition which would free the notion of identity from a strictly 'privatized' interpretation and would spell-out the grounds for claiming a sui generis character for group and social identities.

As things stand, the term as used by Mol seems to rely all too heavily on an intuitive apprehension of its essence and applicability. Accordingly, in the light of the arguments advanced in chapter two, we would argue that Mol's excessively vague formulation of 'identity' puts the 'scientific' character of his theory of religion in question. This claim has nothing to do with "faith in scientific watertight compartments" or belief in "absolute . . . categories of analysis" that are free of "implicit hypothesis" as Mol tends to imply. (Mol, 1976, p. 55) On the contrary, it grows out of a recognition of the increased

onus placed on the clear definition of categories by the very fact that the categories used in social scientific theorizing are arbitrary and relativistic. As argued in chapter two, the 'scientific' character of such theorizing rests with exercising as much care as possible to make sure that one's terms of reference are sharply delineated and logically complete. For only then are social scientific theories open to some significant measure of 'appraisal' (to use Geertz's term once again).

Mol resists demands to increase the specification of 'identity' as a category, arguing that the attempt to introduce such specificity would jeopardize the potency of identity as a heuristically valuable metaphor. In part we sympathize with Mol's line of reasoning on this point for there can be no doubt that in many circumstances an apt metaphor can more effectively communicate a wealth of information about some particular subject than pages of closely reasoned analysis. As Robert A. Nisbet says:

Metaphor is, at its simplest, a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown. . . . It is a way of cognition in which the identifying qualities of one thing are transferred in an instantaneous, almost unconscious, flash of insight to some other thing that is, by remoteness or complexity, unknown to us.

Metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image. (Turner, 1974, p. 25)

Seen in this light, Mol would likely argue that identity as a metaphor, confused though it may be in details, is sufficiently

rich in implicative power to be useful as a speculative instrument.

In addition Mol seems to be persuaded that the "fuzziness" of a category like identity is the inescapable price to be paid for seeking to be as comprehensive as possible in one's approach to the study of things like religion (see the quotation cited on p. 13 of this thesis). Moreover, Mol seems to naively believe that the vagueness of the concept of identity can act to promote the kind of 'humane knowing' Wilfred Cantwell Smith is concerned with by protecting an ambiguous and subtle reality from being distorted by one of the "impeccable depictions of formal order" ridiculed by Clifford Geertz.

The latter attitude is reflected in Mol's statement of the third advantage of his "larger theory" of religion:

Another advantage of the larger theory is that it minimizes the justified objections of religious practitioners that so many theories about religion assume naive anachronisms or puerile projections. These religionists accept the view that religion defines man and his place in the universe which is essentially what we are also maintaining. The premise that to reinforce a specific identity (which is what religious practitioners do) leads to greater sanity than to observe and analyse other identities (as we do), which is affirmed in our larger theory, favours rather than disfavors any religious orientation. The observers of a specific religious orientation usually emphasize those variables that have an effect on religion, whereas practitioners of religion stress the factors upon which religion has had an effect. Observers tend to take religion as the dependent variable, practitioners as the independent one. Any good sociological theory of religion and any good religious belief should have in common that they establish a

close correlation between the system of interpretation and the data to be interpreted. Otherwise either or both will be irrelevant. If the data does not fit the theory, or conversely if the beliefs do not interpret man's world, both are irrelevant. (Mol, 1976, p. 62-63)

In other words, what is rather ambiguously being argued is that the identity theory of religion is more acceptable to the religious than Frazer or Freud-like patterns of thinking because it intrinsically values being religious over studying about religion. Here, in his own manner, then, Mol is following Berger in the attempt to reverse the elevation of the academic enterprise over the religious. But by reading between the lines just a bit, using the little that we know about Mol's approach, what is really being said is that identity theory does not threaten the essential integrity of the religious life of man because it is couched in sufficiently vague terms as to be so general in its pronouncements that it cannot possibly offend any religious sensibilities. For Mol's identity theory does not just point out that an act of emotional synthesis is humanly superior to an act of rational analysis, it actually attempts to condition the academic study of religion to a similar appreciation by curtailing the amount of reductive analysis seen as relevant to the social scientific study of religion. To this end, the as yet purposefully not specified category of identity is being offered as the ideal base upon which to build a systematic understanding of religion that is not reductive (in the more traditional sense of that term and in Mol's more specific sense of a tendency to absolutize or

sacralize a sociological, or more generally, a rational-analytical perspective).

Moreover, as the rest of this peculiar passage seems to be implying, identity theory fits better with its data-- religion--because it treats religion as an independent variable just as the religious themselves do. The trouble with this claim is that, in the first place, it is less than obvious that it is true. In virtually all of Mol's discussions of specific religious situations the dialectical character of his thinking seems to make it abundantly clear that both religion and identity are being dealt with almost simultaneously as both dependent and independent variables. Which is dependent or independent at any one moment in the analysis is comparatively arbitrarily determined by whatever aspect of their interaction is of particular interest. And all too often for the truly religious, religious developments or changes in the character and efficacy of the sacred are explained away through reference strictly to changes in the secular environment from which identities emerge.

However, there need not be anything distortive in this state of affairs. For as Mol himself noted, in the context of discussing the relevancy of religious views of the world, the fit between data and interpretation does not have to conform to the pattern of a one-to-one correspondence. And this fact is not simply dependent upon the emotional character of the 'meaning' that can be given to a situation by a reli-

gious interpretation, as opposed to the logical character demanded of a scientific explanation of the same situation.

Overlooking his own insight on this point Mol far less satisfactorily ends up covering up the potentially reductive thrust of his analysis of religious situations by implying that though religious changes are rooted in identity changes, identity formation and establishment is itself an essentially religious phenomenon. At no point is this equation explicitly stipulated or completed, but such we have been arguing is the implicit pattern of Mol's thinking.

But regardless of the persuasiveness of this line of criticism, one thing is clear: the vagueness of Mol's conception of identity has done little to effectively prevent complicated human realities from being distortively interpreted, in a reductive manner or otherwise. And as for the notion that "fuzzy" categories are the price paid for seeking to be comprehensive, we can only say that while the correlation noted is for the most part true in practice, it is a matter to be despaired and as far as possible corrected. It certainly does not provide any grounds for the willing acceptance and use of "fuzzy" categories.

The American philosopher Max Black has observed that "perhaps every science must start with metaphor and end with algebra; and perhaps without the metaphor there would never have been any algebra." (Turner, 1974, p. 25) Identity can operate as an effective metaphor for reorienting our thinking

on religion, especially with regard to studying the connections between group life and religious systems. But as Black's comment suggests, if understanding is truly to be advanced then the long, slow struggle from metaphor to algebra must be undertaken. In fact the effective operation and future of the metaphor hinges upon taking up this challenge as is brought out by Stephen C. Pepper's discussion of "root metaphors".

The method in principle seems to be this: A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common-sense fact and tries to see if he cannot understand other areas in terms of this one. The original area then becomes his 'basic analogy' or 'root metaphor'. He describes as best he can the characteristics of this area, or if you will, "discriminates its structure." A list of its structural characteristics becomes his basic concepts of explanation and description. . . . We call them a set of categories. . . . In terms of these categories he proceeds to study all other areas of fact whether uncriticized or previously criticized. He undertakes to interpret all facts in terms of these categories. As a result of the impact of these other facts upon his categories, he may qualify and readjust the categories so that a set of categories commonly changes and develops. Since the basic analogy or root metaphor normally (and probably at least in part necessarily) arises out of common sense, . . . a great deal of development and refinement of a set of categories is required if they are to prove adequate for a hypothesis of unlimited scope. Some root metaphors prove more fertile than others, have greater power of expansion and adjustment. These survive in comparison with others and generate the adequate world theories. (Turner, 1974, p. 26)

As Nisbet's description of a metaphor stated: "metaphor is . . . a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown". Yet in Mol's work 'Identity', through to the end, remains

largely an unknown. So how can such a concept really enlighten the human situation and the place of religion in that situation? One is reminded of Spiro's disparaging comments on the notion of 'the sacred' as used in substantive definitions of religion cited in the second chapter of this thesis (see p. 77).

If a social scientific theory is to be open to any significant measure of 'appraisal' the first requirement is that the degree and nature of the arbitrariness characteristic of its semi-arbitrary nominal functional categories be revealed through the most meticulous delineation of the categories in question that is possible.

Theoretical generalizations, unlike empirical generalizations, are not open to simple confirmation or invalidation through direct observation. But, as Kaplan and Manners point out, they must nevertheless be operationalized:

Theories . . . always involve abstract terms which refer to nonobservables, especially if their explanatory power is to transcend a particular relationship or set of relationships. Thus, in the social sciences, theories characteristically include such abstract terms as 'social cohesion', 'anomie', 'class', 'caste', 'values', 'norms', 'symbols', 'themes', 'ego', 'unconscious mind', 'segmentary lineage', etc. . . . Now, all of these terms denote highly complex processes, arrangements, patterns, emotional states, "states of the system", or entities--none of which is open to simple and direct observation. Nor are any of these the product of simple induction from observational data. Rather they are constructs 'created' by the social scientist to help explain various items of behaviour of institutional arrangements that may have provoked his interest and perhaps even wonder.

The implication, then, is that theories, because they are more abstract constructions than empirical

generalizations or laws of nature, are only 'indirectly' confirmable or disconfirmable. Before we can verify or refute a theory, we must provide the key terms of the theory with an empirical interpretation or, 'in the language of certain philosophers, we must 'operationalize' the key theoretical terms.
(Kaplan and Manners, 1972, p. 13-14)

In two works entitled The Firm and the Formless and The Fixed and the Fickle, on Australian Aboriginal and Maori religion respectively (both are unpublished manuscripts at present), Mol has attempted to undertake such an operationalization of his categories. These works provide interesting illustrations of some of the possible concrete applications of the identity theory of religion, raising specific issues in the interpretation of these traditions that might be pursued as effective test cases of the fruitfulness of Mol's perspective. However, the delineation of the key variable--identities--is not appreciably advanced. In fact, if anything, matters become more confused if one pays close attention to the introductory comments to The Firm and the Formless.

In the first chapter of this work an important shift occurs in Mol's thinking. The subject of "Religion and Identity" is introduced with a brief discussion of the dialectic of order and change, and the adaptive function of integrating processes in the evolutionary struggle for the survival of the fittest. As in his other works, Mol quickly sketches a connection between phenomena like the territorial imperative of animals and the levels of identity experienced by humans

("territory is for them what identity is to humans", p. 2).

But here he carries the connection between the human and animal worlds a step further rendering the proper conceptualization of identities even more obscure:

Yet certain animal species have gone further. They have survived because of concerted action. A school of small fishes or a flock of birds is a more formidable enemy for the shark or the hawk than the individual fish or bird. This means that sometimes conformity to the herd rather than maximization of individual aggression has proved to be the better solution of the survival problem. It also means that already in the animal world personal identity or individual integrity has become juxtaposed with group identity or social integrity. And in order to understand this juxtaposition well, these 'wholes' or different levels of identity should be studied as sui generis phenomena. That is, the values, such as altruism, or rituals, such as mating dances can only be understood incompletely if the individual or his genes are the only point of departure or the sole principle for understanding. Altruism can be understood much better if the social whole in which it functions is taken seriously as such.

The same applied to many of the animal rituals or ceremonies. They can be understood much more thoroughly if the pair, rather than the individual animal is taken as the whole for which these rituals have reinforcing functions. (Mol, 1978, p. 2)

The fourth and fifth sentences of this passage draws an equation between the notions of 'wholes' and 'identities'. Yet a strict adherence to this proposition reduces a term like 'group identity' to redundant nonsense as the word 'group' already incorporates the notion of independent 'wholeness'. Moreover, the notion of identities surely implies more than the simple physical distinction between different 'wholes', such as the individual, the group, and larger groups like societies. But

Mol's fourth sentence apparently denies this as it equates 'the herd' and 'the flock' with group and social 'identity'. Perhaps Mol merely meant to suggest that the two were analogous phenomena but this is not the literal import of his statement of matters.

An identity, unlike a herd, is a creation of human consciousness. It is a symbolical entity and this fact is crucial to understanding its nature. Animals can be said to have rituals and ceremonies only in a metaphorical sense and the integrity of their groups (i.e., herds, flocks) is instinctually founded. The integrity of the school of fish does not rest on the active consent of the individual fish but a human group identity obviously does rest on the consent of the individual. It is for this very reason that phenomena like religion are required in the human world. But this means that one cannot avoid reference to the individual as the ultimate unit of analysis in examining human concerns like identity.

The effects of a ritual may be directed at improving the functioning of a collectivity of individuals as a unit--as a group. But the ritual effects group functioning by influencing the behaviour of the individuals composing the group. Following Mol's example, individuals mute their aggressive drives in favour of promoting group solidarity because it is in the survival interest of the individual, and not the group per se, to do so. Therefore, identity in any of its manifestations (personal, group, or social) is a concept which must

maintain a structural reference to the consciousness which resides in the individual--to the subjective mind.

Mol may assert that the object of a ritual is the reinforcement of group cohesion or integration. And he may state this in terms of a ritual having a reinforcing effect upon 'group identity'. But the cohesion or integration of the group is not the 'group identity'. Nor is the group as a physically specifiable entity the 'group identity'. And, as stressed at the beginning of the chapter, it is equally incorrect to think of the 'group identity' as nothing more than a set of ideas shared by the individuals making up the group. If in Identity and the Sacred, Mol did not take sufficient precautions to guard against this latter misinterpretation, in the opening pages of The Firm and the Formless he has formally over-compensated to the point of stripping the term of its natural association with the consciousness of the individual.

It is not necessary to protect the principle of the sui generis character of group and social identities by abandoning the natural 'psychological' implications of the term identity and reducing its technical meaning as an analytical category to the notion of 'wholes'. When Mol states that certain values and rituals 'can only be incompletely understood if the social wholes in which they function are not taken seriously' and 'the individual or his genes is assumed to be the only point of departure' he is in essence making an indirect argument for what the system theorists would call the 'emergent properties'

of each level of organization over its immediate predecessor in a hierarchy of organizational complexity. He is arguing that the principles of rational individualism are inadequate for explaining a ritual whose functional orientation is to the group as a unit because the properties of the group system are not limited to a summation of the properties of the individuals who compose the group. This stipulation can be made, however, without identifying the group as an entity with the concept of the group's identity. To say that a religion through the support of certain values and rituals is concerned, first and foremostly, with addressing and promoting the organizational requirements of the group (reinforcing the group integrity) is not to say that the religion literally addresses itself to the group and not the individuals participating in the group. It is to the mind of the individual that religion speaks but to that part of the mind which is attuned to the survival of the individual through his integration with and subservience to the group as a unit and its unique properties and requirements as a system (requirements which Mol refers to as 'needs' introducing an unnecessary tendency to reify groups). It is this 'part of the mind' which is concerned with the group life in which the individual participates that is the 'group identity'.

But here we ourselves are risking confusion by speaking of a 'part of the mind' as identity for a privatized understanding of identity is easily read into such a statement. But this problem stems from the fact that we have been compelled

by the nature of this study to limit our discussion of identity as a category to the terms of reference made available by Mol's own approach. These terms of reference have been stretched to their limits and if progress is to be made in the delineation of identity as an analytical category we must press on to begin to develop a new conceptual framework for 'identity'. The grounds for this framework grow out of the systems theory implications of Mol's thought as a whole. Therefore the first step to be taken towards postulating a new conception of identity is to draw out elements of the family resemblance between Mol's formulation of the identity theory of religion and the basics of systems theory.

The Identity Theory as a Systems Theory

Mol's obvious sympathy with the 'holistic' patterns of thought associated with a systems theory approach is reflected in his concern to stress the sui generis character of social systems and the dialectical pattern of interaction between individuals, groups, and societies. Moreover, its influence can be detected in the functionalistic organicism which colours so much of his thinking. Such a sympathy is far from uncommon in the field of religious studies. Rather, as the insistent preoccupation with the threat of reductionism in one of its many-varied forms testifies, scholars of religion almost universally conceive of the essence of their subject matter 'holistically'.

However, outside of Robert Bellah's all too brief suggestion that a cybernetic model of religion should be developed (Bellah, 1970, pp. 9-12), the literature on religion displays little systematic understanding of the methodological implications of such a basic attitude. Having grown principally out of the influence the phenomenological approach to religious studies the holistic insight has only been used to bolster an irrationalist apology for religion. In a manner not all that unique to the field of religious studies (as is illustrated in D.C. Phillips, Holistic Thought in Social Science, 1976) an insight basic to systems theory has been perverted by certain students of religion into a justification for adopting various intuitionist-essentialist approaches to the subject of religion. The simple proposition that religious systems of thought and action are not susceptible, anymore than other complex systems, to a full explication in terms of the simple analysis of their constituent parts has been falsely extended into the claim that religious phenomena represent 'synthetic' realities which transcend full explication in terms of the 'analytical' mode of perception itself.

As passages like the following reveal, Mol's thought is far from free of the taint of this misconception:

. . . many scholars nowadays are less sure that the analytic mode is the only valid one. Others are inclined to defend methods of observation, such as participant observation, which allows for full empathy with the religious beliefs they study.

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Sympathetic scholarship may (and this is our position) point to both the differences between myth and reason or religion and science and the compensations each provides for the other. In other words one can adopt the view that existence is too narrowly conceived when the scientific/analytic/differentiation mode prevails. Leaving room for the religious/synthetic/integration mode extends the horizon. (Mol, 1978b, p. 48)

In this same discussion Mol refers to religious scholarship as a "contradiction in terms".

Nevertheless, in his own work Mol does not fail to take up the challenge to 'analyse' religion and his analysis moves from the holistic orientation towards its logical systems theory implications. But a residual element of the holistic misconception of the phenomenologists persists in his formulation of the pivotal category of identity (i.e., identities).

At a very rudimentary but important level this aspect of Mol's thought can be greatly clarified through a comparison with Arthur Koestler's discussion of 'self-regulating open hierarchic order.' Specifically, an understanding of Mol's position is greatly enhanced by a brief description of three of Koestler's basic concepts: the 'holon', the notion of 'integrative and self-assertive tendencies', and of 'fixed rules and flexible strategies'. Koestler's thought is patterned on that of the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, father of General Systems Theory, and is much more elaborate in its formulation than can or need be revealed here. For our purposes a more piecemeal appreciation of but a few key points of Koestler's overall perspective will suffice.

In a brief summary given in Appendix I of his book Janus (1978) Koestler describes what he means by the term 'holon' as follows:

I. The Holon

I.1 The organism in its structural aspect is not an aggregation of elementary parts, and in its fundamental aspects not a chain of elementary units of behaviour.

I.2 The organism is to be regarded as a multilevelled hierarchy of semi-autonomous sub-wholes, branching into sub-wholes of a lower order, and so on. Sub-wholes on any level of the hierarchy are referred to as 'holons'.

I.3 Parts and wholes in an absolute sense do not exist in the domain of life. The concept of the holon is intended to reconcile the atomistic and holistic approaches.

I.4 Biological holons are self-regulating open systems which display both the autonomous properties of wholes and the dependent properties of parts. This dichotomy is present on every level of every type of hierarchic organization, and is referred to as the 'Janus phenomenon'.

I.5 More generally, the term 'holon' may be applied to any stable biological or social sub-whole which displays rule-governed behaviour and/or structural Gestalt-constancy. Thus organelles and homologous organs are evolutionary holons; morphogenetic fields are ontogenetic holons; the ethologist's 'fixed action-patterns' and the sub-routines of acquired skills are behavioural holons; phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases are linguistic holons; individuals, families, tribes, nations are social holons. (Koestler, 1978, p. 304-305)

In the light of this description it can be seen that Mol's three levels of identity should be understood as holons. The word itself is not important, but the Janus-faced properties associated with the term are instrumental to a proper comprehension and use of identity theory.

Elaborating on this point it is helpful to proceed on

to Koestler's distinction between integrative and self-assertive tendencies:

4. Integration and Self-Assertion

4.1 Every holon has a dual tendency to preserve and assert its individuality as a quasi-autonomous whole; and to function as an integrated part of an (existing or evolving) larger whole. This polarity between the self-assertive and integrative tendencies is inherent in the concept of hierarchic order; and a universal characteristic of life.

The self-assertive tendencies are the dynamic expression of the holon's wholeness, the integrative tendencies of its partness. (Koestler, 1978, p. 306)

In Wholeness and Breakdown (p. 23) Mol notes Koestler's idea of the Janus-faced tendencies of holons. But he treats Koestler's thought as but another illustration of how scientists and philosophers have come to think of reality in dialectical terms. In point of fact, however, it is more instructive to turn the tables and see Mol's rather simplistic dialecticism as a prerequisite insight of a systems theory approach to organic and social phenomena. Wholeness and Breakdown then might be read as a prolegomena to Koestler's Janus.

The great advantage of Koestler's approach is that it economically focuses attention on the holon and by speaking of the conflicting tendencies within each holon it draws a more direct and manifest connection between the overall dialectical struggle and the character of the holon. In Mol's system of thought, where the notion of 'the dialectic' is more abstractly introduced, there is a marked tendency for the overall dialectic to become rigidified as a completely external dichotomy of

reified forces of integration and differentiation. And attention becomes fixed at the level of the 'congruence' and 'conflict' which exists between identity levels. This state of affairs leads to neglect of the equally important fact that the internal condition of each identity is dialectical in character. Identities are not static patterns of order after all but evolving processes of ordering; a fact which provides important clues as to how 'identities' should be conceptualized.

But reference to Koestler's distinction between rules and strategies more effectively draws out the strengths and weaknesses of Mol's approach:

3. Rules and Strategies

- 3.1 Functional holons are governed by fixed sets of rules and display more or less flexible strategies.
 - 3.2 The rules--referred to as the system's 'canon'--determine its invariant properties, its structural configuration and/or functional pattern.
 - 3.3 While the canon defines the permissible steps in the holon's activity, the strategic selection of the actual steps among permissible choices is guided by the contingencies of the environment.
 - 3.4 The canon determines the rules of the game, strategy decides the course of the game.
 - 3.5 The evolutionary process plays variations on a limited number of canonical themes . . .
- (Koestler, 1978, p. 305)

Recalling the analogy which Mol draws between the process of genetic stabilization and the process of sacralization it becomes apparent that the identity theory of religion is oriented to the delineation of the 'fixed rules' of religious behaviour viewed from the vantage point of man's identity needs.

Hence Mol's preoccupation with systematic, functional, or structural concerns over substantive analyses; with the general laws of the dialectic of integrating and differentiating forces, and the different identity levels, over the more detailed assessment of critical substantive and culturally parochial factors that might condition the specific realities of the action of these laws (i.e., Koestler's strategies).

Digressing on this point for a moment, in general Mol has geared his thinking to demonstrating the advantageous fit of his 'system' of analysis to religious realities and problems. As a result he frequently demonstrates an inadequate appreciation of the conditioning effect that specific matters of content will have on the application of his system of analysis. There is clearly a certain natural logic to identity theory but it is of a highly generalized nature. And to be able to diagnose what a specific religious event or development signifies about the identity needs of a specific group it is necessary to engage in an intensive analysis of the historical and cultural particulars of the group in question. Put quite simply, conditions that may appear to signify an imbalance in favour of personal identity at the expense of social identity in one context may have quite the opposite significance in another setting. Cross-cultural generalizations may be found but only with the 'filling-in' of Mol's sketch through very elaborate empirical studies of test cases.

Mol himself has attempted to undertake some of this

'filling-in' through his work on Australian Aboriginal religion and Maori religion. However, given the opportunity we would argue that his efforts are still far too broad in scope to be truly convincing.

Saying these things demarcates the very real limits of identity theory as it now stands, it by no means belittles it. For at least Mol's approach, over that of someone like Berger, more readily lends itself, by design, to an elaborate specification and refinement of analytical criteria and their potential applications. Preeminently, this room for development is guaranteed by the fact that Mol's categories, relative to Berger's, are free of any intrinsic allegiance to a specific philosophical or ideological position. In a less telling way, however, Mol's broad conservative bias does interfere with all efforts to undertake the constructive extension of identity theory. On too many occasions this bias has led Mol to overlook the need to substantiate his rather sweeping functional analysis, couched in the language of identity theory, with more exacting substantive analyses of the specific variables selected through the application of identity theory to a particular situation. By artificially curtailing his comprehension of the full logical possibilities encompassed by his broad functional analyses in any given context this conservatism has caused him to be too easily content with limited systematic reinterpretations of fairly traditional perspectives in the field of religious studies.

As indicated in chapter four, this conservatism is given expression in his theory of religion primarily in the form of what Long called Mol's "positive sentiment for transcendental religion". But as we further argued this sentiment is rooted in his 'conservative' reading of man and his identity needs. And this conservative reading stems in large measure from his failure to fully and properly explore the nature of 'identities'. This failure in turn being a consequence of his contentment with speaking in terms of group identity 'needs' on the basis of an organismic analogy of the nature of identities. For this contentment prevented him from inquiring into the psycho-sociological well-springs of man's urge to organize his reality in the form of identities. And such an inquiry would have pressed upon Mol the clear need to conceive of identities in more 'systemic' (systems theory-like) or, using Mol's less exacting language, dialectical terms. A more systems theory-like specification of the character of identities, being geared to the greater conceptualization of change as an intrinsic aspect of the character of identities, would have in turn lessened the conservatism of his reading of man's need to erect rigid identity boundaries. And if this need is viewed to be less urgent then there is less cause to see man driven by a strong impetus to seek the extreme protection of transcendentalizing his identity frameworks.

Of course, before proceeding it must be acknowledged that Koestler's brand of systems theory is itself too substan-

tially dependent on an organismic analogy. He moves too quickly and casually from evolutionary holons like organelles to social holons like individuals, families, tribes, and nations, and too readily applies the notion of a canon of fixed rules which determines the 'invariant properties' of systems to all of these holons. But as we argued with Mol, such an approach can crucially mislead us about the nature of the human social world, sui generis. For it attributes principles like genetic continuity, telic growth, and cumulative development and progress to social phenomena. Yet many, if not most, social phenomena do not display such a 'directional' character or manifest an invariant normative structure. Rather social holons like tribes and so on are infinitely more flexible and mutable phenomena than anything in the organic world as they are 'systems' born of the communicative interaction between individuals, together with their self-conceptions and the environmental situation. To get at the canon of such a system presents an extremely formidable task. The driving forces of such systems must be isolated through the elaborate analysis of the fundamental interaction of individuals and the process of symbolic communication which shapes this interaction. And the ~~xx~~ needs of the individual must be linked to the emergent properties of the group system. In this most rudimentary way an attempt must be made to gain insight into the complex adaptive system which is the group. A system which as an ongoing process or network of transactions (which in a sense becomes a single transaction) is

continuously generating, maintaining, or altering meanings and patterns of behaviour.

Seen even in this crude light it is possible to understand why both Mol and Koestler in their efforts to fashion theories on a grand scale have tended to overlook these incredible complexities. But in simply advancing an unqualified organicism they have done a disservice by failing to draw attention to those concerns which must be explored in depth if social phenomena are to be truly brought into a systems theory-like perspective. Moreover, as we will illustrate below, even with a theory of high generality and great scope it is possible to proceed much further towards a more definite and systemic conception of identities.

From a reading of Identity and the Sacred it is difficult to specifically discern what a group or social identity is and how it is to be differentiated from a personal identity. In The Firm and the Formless a clear line of differentiation is achieved, assuring to a greater degree the treatment of group and social identities as sui generis phenomena, but at the extraordinary price of reducing the meaning of identity to a nonsensical redundancy. We are informed that personal identity refers to the 'wholeness' of the individual as a unit in the dialectical struggle of the forces of integration and differentiation, and group and social identity similarly refer to but the 'wholenesses' of groups and societies in the same struggle. The three identities are differentiated, then, in this context

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by little more than the sheer physical distinction that exists between individuals, groups, and larger groups called societies. But such a reductive understanding of 'identity' as an analytical category unnecessarily sacrifices some of the most suggestive and innovative potential implications of the concept.

Above we spoke of conceiving the notion of an identity as a 'part of the mind' but we were compelled to postpone explaining our precise meaning. But with the systems theory-like attributes of the identity theory of religion before us we can now proceed to develop the meaning of the curious phrase utilizing Gregory Bateson's formulation of the nature of the 'mind'. Born of his own cybernetic or systems theory his approach to this subject provides a model for the conceptualization of identity that is more definite in outline than anything offered to date and one which completes the 'processual' character of identity theory.

The simplest and most comprehensive way to relate this understanding of the nature of the mind is to quote Bateson himself at length as his explanation is clear and to the point. But prior to doing this we must quote in addition, at some length, his definition of the word 'idea' as it is rather unusual and quite central to his explanation of the nature of the mind.

I suggest to you now, that the word "idea", in its most elementary sense, is synonymous with "difference." Kant in the Critique of Judgement--if I understand him correctly--asserts that the most elementary aesthetic act is the selection of a fact. He argues that in a piece of chalk there are an infinite number

of potential facts. The Ding an sich, the piece of chalk, can never enter into communication or mental process because of this infinitude. The sensory receptors cannot accept it; they filter it out. What they do is to select certain 'facts' out of the piece of chalk, which then become, in modern terminology, information.

I suggest that Kant's statement can be modified to say that there is an infinite number of 'differences' around and within the piece of chalk. There are differences between the chalk and the rest of the universe, between the chalk and the sun or the moon. And within the piece of chalk, there is for every molecule an infinite number of differences between its location and the locations in which it 'might' have been. Of this infinitude we select a very limited number, which become information. In fact, what we mean by information--the elementary unit of information--is a 'difference which makes a difference', and it is able to make a difference because the neural pathways along which it travels and is continually transformed are themselves provided with energy. The pathways are ready to be triggered. We may even say that the question is already implicit in them. (Bateson, 1972, p. 453)

With the correlation of the concepts 'idea' and 'difference' thus established we may proceed directly to Bateson's statement of the nature of 'mind'.

What do I mean by "my" mind?

I suggest that the delimitation of an individual mind must always depend upon what phenomena we wish to understand or explain. Obviously there are lots of message pathways outside the skin, and these and the messages which they carry must be included as part of the mental system whenever they are relevant.

Consider a tree and a man and an axe. We observe that the axe flies through the air and makes certain sorts of gashes in a pre-existing cut in the side of the tree. If now we want to explain this set of phenomena, we shall be concerned with differences in the cut face of the tree, differences in the retina of the man; differences in his central nervous system, differences in his efferent neural messages, differences in the behaviour of his muscles, differences in how the axe flies, to the differences which the axe

then makes on the face of the tree. Our explanation (for certain purposes) will go round and round that circuit. In principle if you want to explain or understand anything in human behaviour, you are always dealing with total circuits, completed circuits. This is the elementary cybernetic thought.

The elementary cybernetic system with its messages in circuit is, in fact, the simplest unit of mind; and the transform of a difference travelling in a circuit is the elementary idea. More complicated systems are perhaps more worthy to be called mental systems, but essentially this is what we are talking about. The unit which shows the characteristic of trial and error will be legitimately called a mental system

And in addition to what I have said to define the individual mind, I think it necessary to include the relevant parts of memory and data "banks." After all, the simplest cybernetic circuit can be said to have memory of a dynamic kind--not based upon static storage but upon the travel of information around the circuit. The behaviour of the governor of a steam engine at Time 2 is partly determined by what it did at Time 1--where the interval between Time 1 and Time 2 is that time necessary for the information to complete the circuit.

We get a picture, then, of mind as synonymous with cybernetic system--the relevant total information-processing, trial-and-error completing unit. And we know that within Mind in the widest sense there will be a hierarchy of sub-systems, any one of which we can call an individual mind. (Bateson, 1972, p. 458-460)

Substituting the term 'identity' for Bateson's 'mind', we would be inclined to offer this passage as the logical starting point for an investigation into the structure of identities. Such a statement of matters preserves and accentuates the transcendence of the subjective/objective dichotomy which we attempted to draw out above by developing the parallels between identity as a category and Geertz's delineation of the nature of 'culture'. Yet it preserves the natural connotations of the term 'identity' by maintaining the anchorage of the

phenomena in the consciousness of the individual, and by preserving our understanding of it as a symbolical construct. As stated at an earlier point in this chapter, as with the cultural act of playing the violin (creating music, not just noise) to experience an identity is to derive meaning from a subjectively and objectively conditioned symbolical structuring of reality.

A family identity or a national identity differs from a personal identity, is sui generis, by virtue of its different external world co-ordinates (i.e., boundary markers) and the appropriate differences in the kinds of information transmitted along the circuit which these co-ordinates delineate. Such a system is subject to a constant measure of change and modification by virtue of the feedback or memory character of the system itself (as pointed out by Bateson). There is an equilibrium to the system but it is very much a moving equilibrium as the system can only in the barest sense be said to have a fixed normative structure. Yet as Mol is concerned to stress with identities, the system is fragile--it is subject to profound change with far reaching and geometrically ramifying consequences, even the complete destruction of the system--because interference with any of the co-ordinates of the system (those within the skin of the individual or without) alters and jeopardizes the whole identity. Permanent elimination of a major co-ordinate or set of co-ordinates (e.g., the traditional 'territory' of a tribe), without some form of substitution (which



would be rare as substitutes of various kinds are usually readily available), will break the information circuit in question and kill the identity, at least as a "living" entity, a going concern. Often, however, a static mental image of the destroyed identity may persist and become incorporated into a new and related identity system. But with this incorporation it will become subject to change, change born of its participation in a new set of information concerns.

Identity understood as such an information circuit is subject, of course, to inputs which produce changes which are the result of a direct appeal to the intellect or emotions of the individual--like religion. That is, change and development can be effected through the introduction of new ideational content as well as through the direct physical alteration of some of the external boundary co-ordinates of the identity system. And there is nothing about such a conception of identity that removes it from the dialectic of conflict and congruence between identities that is so central to Mol's perspective.

But most importantly, in giving some specific form to the idea of an identity, a structure which may be explored and developed in detail, a conception of identity modeled on Bateson's understanding of mind frees the basic 'methodology' of identity theory from the organicism and functionalistic teleology at the root of Mol's conservative 'theory' of religion.

CONCLUSION

The identity theory of religion presents students of religion with an intuitively satisfying and comprehensive framework for the study of man's religious life. But a close scrutiny of the theory suggests that it falls short of living up to its potential. As Theodore E. Long suggests in his perceptive review of Identity and the Sacred, the suspicion arises that a new 'methodology' for the analysis of religion has been devised with an eye to merely reaffirming a rather traditional 'theory' of the functioning and place of religion in man's life. Pointing directly to the heart of the problem, Long observes (Long, 1977, p. 421):

The critical confusion is over the import of the analytic scheme for the interpretation of the course and consequences of secularization. Mol's general contention is correct that his interpretation of secularization is dependent on his conception of religion, but it is not correct in the sense that it addresses any new 'questions' generated by a revised conception. Instead, his empirical analysis offers only different 'answers' to questions rooted in the traditional conceptualization, the analytic scheme supplying the 'reasons' that make those answers plausible. This use of ideas reflects a greater concern for the fate of religion than for the state of social theory, and if Mol thereby buttresses his own optimism, he also reinforces the prevailing mode of problem formation in the sociology of religion.

Over and again Mol's desire to counterbalance what he refers to as the "pessimism" (a value laden term?) of the

secularization theorists (see p. 110 of this thesis) comes into conflict with his equally strong desire to accurately depict religious realities by generating a set of new and effective analytic categories. The proper pursuit of both desires being crippled, moreover, by the interference of his native conservatism on the issues of man's basic identity needs and capacity for religious innovation. The only way he can satisfy the first desire is by reverting to a level of generality that calls into question the satisfaction of the second desire, and calls for the serious entertainment of propositions about possible new forms of religious expression that are not readily acceptable in the light of the stress placed on the centrality of transcendentalization by his conservative analytical leanings. Yet in catering to his conservatism (his "sentiment for transcendent religion") in his efforts to satisfy his second desire he falls short of accomplishing his end, as nothing truly new is generated, and he fails completely to satisfy his first desire as a result.

This state of affairs can be recognized in Mol's endeavor to reverse the common evolutionary perspective on the role of religion in human society (see p. 110 of this thesis). Whether one accepts this reversal proposal or not, if one wishes to be optimistic in a potentially 'appraisable' way about the future of religion then one is faced with the awkward task of demonstrating that a strong continuity exists in religious matters between the modern world and the societies of the past

without understating the marked and undeniable differences which exist between our age and the past. If one accepts Mol's reversal this burden is increased for then it is instrumental to one's proof of the continued health of religion that new forms of the same old phenomena truly have arisen in the modern world. Yet Mol's criteria, the process of 'sacralization' and the need to create and bolster 'identity', are so general that they do not really allow for any meaningful measure of discrimination between modern religious phenomena and traditional ones. To note the change that has transpired these criteria need to be specified further. However, when Mol implicitly does this the analytic criteria that emerge, 'transcendentalization' for sacralization and 'forms of order' for identity, will not support an optimistic prospectus on the future of religion.

To circumvent these difficulties Mol seeks to have recourse to an all too convenient and hence weak line of argument (1976, p. 263-264):

Society appears to be no different from the antheap disturbed by the horse's hoofs. In both the antheap and society, feverish reconstruction and reintegration begin as soon as destruction has taken place. The difference between the antheap and society is that in the latter both the forces of destruction and reconstruction are much more latent, complex, and invisible. Therefore, 'ostensibly' the forces of differentiation, alienation, anomie, and meaninglessness run amuck, whereas actually at the heart of technocratic empires, or the societies in which they are embedded, reintegration has already begun. The problem is that our tools for discerning these latent processes are still too inadequate. Guessing and speculating complement inadequate knowledge.

If only in the form of speculative propositions, presumably Mol thinks that he has provided the student of religion with some of the new tools that are required if he is to discern these "latent" (?) processes of sacralization.

The problem is, his reasoning in this matter appears to be somewhat tautological. Mol asserts that the new patterns of sacralization will be recognized when the right new tools of perception are devised. But the only advice he gives about how and why these new tools are to be developed is to suggest that one's understanding of religious phenomena must be altered in accordance with his ideas on the nature and existence of these new sacralizations. In other words, new sacralizations will be discovered if one accepts, without clear substantiation, as an analytic a priori the very point to be proved, namely, that new forms of the same old religious process do exist. The nature of the tools and hence the nature of the evidence they will uncover is to be determined by conclusions which have already been made as to the nature of the new sacralizations. To the extent that his tools are free from this tautological viewpoint they are derived from the study of past religious phenomena. But then they are of only very limited use for the isolation of 'new' patterns of sacralization. (Such a state of affairs reflects, of course, the general epistemological bind faced by the sociology of religion in dealing with the problem of secularization. See p. 28 of this thesis.) The critical criteria, then, remain Mol's own relatively arbitrary ones.

In the light of what we have said about the semi-arbitrary, nominal and functional character of 'scientific' categories in studies of socio-cultural phenomena there need not be anything inherently wrong with this state of affairs. But as we have argued, the criteria Mol uses are simply too traditional and vague to be of much use in dealing with new patterns of sacralization. Moreover, they only aggravate the bind mentioned above. Overall the situation boils down to the statement--if new behaviours and attitudes are to be called religious, then, they must display a strong similarity with traditional forms of religious behaviour and attitudes (i.e., stress transcendent reference)--if they do not, then, why bother to call these behaviours and attitudes "religious"? Mol cannot adhere to a traditional Western conception of what a religion really is and expect to advance a convincing argument for the future of religion by reverting when appropriate to a broad functionalistic methodology that allows him to point to emergent patterns of sacralization. He must either abandon his optimism over the future of religion or consistently adopt and operationalize a broader functionalistic understanding of religion.

In service of this latter approach the category of identity must be developed beyond the point to which Mol has taken it. A systems theory view of identity would cut into the heart of Mol's conservatism on religious matters by reducing the tendency to view identities as rather static and

inflexible entities. And in introducing a new complexity and sophistication to an analysis built on the notion of identity the systems theory approach subverts Mol's too simplistic reliance on organicism in dealing with group and social identities, and necessitates moving away from the methodologically undesirable tendency to become "religious about religion" towards a new methodological "realism" like Geertz's. But such a methodological realism calls for the much further elaboration of the interactionist process through which collective identity structures are maintained and constantly adjusted. At this juncture we can but point to the value of such seminal works as Walter Buckley's Sociology and Modern Systems Theory (1967). The enormous challenge presented by such an undertaking can be sensed by merely reading Buckley's simple description of the constituents of the most basic interaction model (Buckley, 1967, p. 124):

The basic interaction model should include at least the following components: a. the biological individual, his inherent impulses to action, and his self-conception and self-consciousness; b. environmental objects of potential relevance or interest to him; and c. another individual similarly endowed. These components are intimately linked together by d. communication and information interchanges to constitute a complex adaptive system--not simply an equilibrium or homeostatic system--operating as an ongoing process or transaction which is continuously generating, maintaining, or altering meanings and patterns of behaviour to which we attach various labels (for example, cooperation, conflict, and competition).

Of course, with the exploration of larger "negotiated orders"

like group and social identities the complexity of the situation manifoldly increases.

As Buckley's passage implies, such an approach does not reduce everything to the level of the individual, as in the case of the kind of nineteenth century rational individualism to which Mol rightly objects. The unit of analysis is not the individual but the system in which individuals participate. But there can be no escaping the anchorage of all human realities in the consciousness of the individual and in the needs of the individual. The emergent properties of a group system may impart to the group survival requirements that are not immediately congruent with the perceived needs of the individual. But in the last analysis the group system exists to facilitate the survival and development of the species which is embodied by each individual--it is the individuals which truly have needs and must survive, not the group per se. To speak of group 'needs' too literalistically, as Mol is inclined to, is to distort a metaphorical mode of speech and to reify groups.

An identity theory of religion escapes the reductionism of a Freud and that of a Durkheim. Berger's stratigraphic triad of nature, individual consciousness, and society is replaced with the synthetic (in Geertz's sense) concept of identity. Identity, properly understood, provides a single unified framework for dealing simultaneously and realistically with the subjective and objective elements of human life in such a way that the systematic integration of nature, individual consciousness,

and society is brought to the fore and humanitas is not more exclusively identified with any one of the three variables.

APPENDIX

AN ANALYSIS OF 'A RUMOUR OF ANGELS'

- ANCHOR TO BERGER'S THEORY OF RELIGION

A Rumour of Angels was specifically written in response to those critics who had declared that The Sacred Canopy "read like a treatise on atheism" (Berger, 1970, p. ix). Being an avowed Christian Berger felt called upon to answer such a criticism, and in this brief book he indicates and advocates a procedure whereby he believes a rediscovery of the supernatural may transpire in modern society.

In The Sacred Canopy and A Rumour of Angels, Berger focuses on the ongoing secularization of Western society and attempts an explanation of this process in terms of the sociology of knowledge. In the first book such an approach seems to have led Berger, the sociologist, to a definition of the social function of religion which entails an identification of religious belief with an alienating and false consciousness. In accordance with this the text appears to present the death of religion as an inexorable fact of modern life. Utilizing a similar approach in the second book, however, Peter Berger, the religious man, suggests that his analysis of the contemporary situation need not "read . . . as a council of despair for religion in the modern world" (Berger, 1969, p. ix). For, in large measure, he argues, the fate of contemporary religion may be accounted for in terms of the inadequacy of existing theological systems which have failed to take proper advantage of the most viable and appealing modern support for religious belief: a theological extension of the sociology of knowledge itself.

In other words, as indicated in Chapter I, Berger ends

up arguing in his own novel way for a kind of reconvergence of theology and secular religious studies. Theology takes precedence over sociology as a perspective on reality for Berger and the sociology of knowledge, despite the apparent implications of The Sacred Canopy, supports the logicity of this arrangement. In the initial theory (of The Sacred Canopy) the logic of the situation simply was not carried far enough. Matters were restricted to a relatively conventional social scientific 'naturalism', which meant that a reductionistic image of religion was presented. But the logical incompleteness of the theory (to be detailed below) so created marked it as a second order and not first order statement of the facts. Hence social scientific accounts of religion must always be understood to be ultimately partial in nature and reliant on complementary theologies for their completion.

So runs the basic line of reasoning in A Rumour of Angels. As will be seen, however, in the last analysis Berger's position proves to be not only unorthodox but inadequate. The arguments presented to demonstrate the undergirding of theology by the sociology of knowledge just are not convincing or logically apparent. Consequently, rather than demonstrating the feasibility of a reconciliation of theology and social science his work actually serves to graphically illustrate the fundamental and extremely complicated nature of the difficulties standing in the way of such a desirable reconciliation. Thus Berger fails to achieve his own initial objective of forging an approach

to the study of religion, a 'science' of religion in a sense, that is more open to the actual opinions of the religious practitioner.

Of course, all of Berger's problems stem from his own inability, in the first place, to develop a social scientific theory of religion that did greater justice to religious realities. This inability, in turn, being rooted in his too ready acceptance of a division between religious phenomena and those phenomena which are susceptible to scientific investigation. A position that caused him to believe that the best he could seek to obtain is a theoretical understanding of religion that is open to the possibility of interfacing elements between the realms of science and religion proper. But which, in the last analysis, meant still subscribing to the view that religion is one thing, seen from the vantage point of academia, and quite another thing when viewed from the seminary. A view which is obviously inimical, from the start, to the undertaking of a true revision of the formulation of a general social scientific theory of religion.

In A Rumour of Angels Berger picks up the thread of his discussion of the process of secularization with the issue of the progressive 'subjectivization' or 'privatization' of religion in the West since the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. As briefly noted in The Sacred Canopy, he suggests that the chief factor contributing to this tendency towards the subjectivization of religion has been the triumph of the Weltanschauung of the modern cognitive antagonists of religion in the

minds of the theologians themselves. In support of this thesis he points to the numerous efforts in the last quarter century or so to 'translate' religious affirmations into more 'relevant' contemporary forms and the prevailing institutional (church) policy of 'aggriornamento' (limited, controlled accomodation of untraditional and even unorthodox views and behavior).. Both of these compromise efforts will eventually prove to be ineffectual, Berger asserts, because they involve an unhealthy degree of "intellectual contortionism" and they posit a religion whose benefits "are also available under strictly secular labels", such as the various forms of psycho-therapy. (R. of A., p. 35) These two criteria are worth very carefully noting and remembering for, as will be seen, they will come to bear in a telling manner upon Berger's own theological suppositions.

In spite of the ongoing secularization of Western society, Berger feels, however, that there are signs that belief in the supernatural is surviving and even thriving in certain contexts. He accounts for this extraordinary state of affairs by remarking that "the human condition, fraught as it is with suffering and the finality of death, demands interpretations that not only satisfy theoretically but give inner sustenance in meeting the crisis of suffering and death." (R. of A., p. 40) In other words, the need for a theodic counter to the threat of anomy persists. Of course, there are secular theodicies but, Berger observes, "they fail . . . in interpreting and thus in making bearable the extremes of human suffering. They fail notably in inter-

preting death." (R. of A., p. 41)

Taking his cue from this fact, Berger¹³ proposes that religious questions should always be approached on the level of 'truth' and not 'timeliness'. That is, the individual should attempt to come to grips with and express a religious concern in terms that reflect as directly possible a sense of what is universally and objectively true. The prime concern should not be to make the religious issue 'relevant' to one's times, as Berger feels was done by the liberal theologians who tried to 'translate' religious affirmations into the popular secular languages of their day. "No one, to be sure," he says, "can think about religion or anything else in sovereign independence of his situation in time and space. The history of human thought demonstrates rather clearly, however, that it is possible to go some way in asking questions of truth while disregarding the spirit of an age, and even to arrive at answers that contradict this spirit." (R. of A., p. 42)

Berger is confident that the way to approach religion on the level of truth in our skeptical mental environment is, curiously enough, via the sociological perspective (especially that of the sociology of knowledge) which "constitutes the 'fiery brook' [(a pun on Ludwig Feuerbach's name)] through which the theologian must pass--or, perhaps more accurately, ought to pass." (R. of A., p. 44) Historical scholarship and the advent of modern psychology have both worked to render the absolutes of traditional religions increasingly relative but it is socio-

logy that "raises the vertigo of relativity to its most furious pitch, posing a challenge to theological thought with unprecedented sharpness." (R. of A., p. 47) It does this, of course, by showing (remember the theory of The Sacred Canopy) that all beliefs are socially conditioned. The "truth" of a proposition is directly dependent on the amount of consensus there is in favour of that proposition in the 'conversation' of which man's social reality (and hence his nomos) is composed. It is the consensus that gives 'plausibility' to the idea for the individual. The sociology of knowledge shows, then, that the relativity of beliefs is not only a historical fact but actually a necessity of the human condition.

But in this very respect, Berger asserts, sociology effects the rescue of religion as well for "one cannot throw a sop to the dragon of relativity and then go about one's intellectual business as usual". (R. of A., p. 55) The relativizing analysis must be pushed to its final consequence in which event it "bends back upon itself. The relativizers are relativized, the debunkers are debunked--indeed, relativization itself is somehow liquidated. What follows is 'not', as some of the early sociologists of knowledge feared, a total paralysis of thought. Rather, it is a new freedom and flexibility in asking questions of truth." (R. of A., p. 59) The perspective of the sociology of knowledge frees the investigator of religious phenomena from the tyranny of the present completely 'naturalistic' view of reality (which by definition automatically excludes

hypothesizing a supernatural cause for or influence on any event) to the point that "the entire view of religion as a human product or projection may once again be inverted, and . . . in such an inversion lies a viable theological method in response to the challenge of sociology." (R. of A., p. 63)

In other words, religion can no longer be securely founded on the meta-empirical (the flat claim to the supernatural existence and action of God) because "nothing is immune to the relativization of socio-historical analysis." But the socio-historical analysis, with its empiricist and scientific orientation and background, is itself but a product of certain contemporary social structures of plausibility and as such must be seen as a completely relative perspective on the 'true' nature of reality. With this key qualification in mind, then, the theologian can acknowledge the relative nature of his conception of the meta-empirical reference of religion (i.e., in Christianity, God) yet still go on to point out that "in, with, and under the immense array of human projections, there are indicators of a reality that is truly 'other' (i.e., meta-empirical, transcendent) and that the religious imagination of man ultimately reflects." (R. of A., p. 65) This involves initiating theology from an anthropological foundation, turning from the projections to the projector to obtain a theology "of very high empirical sensitivity that seeks to correlate its projections with what can be empirically known." (R. of A., p. 65) These indicators of the transcendent sacred within the

empirically given human situation Berger calls 'signals of transcendence' and they are expressed by certain 'prototypical human gestures' (reiterated acts and experiences that seem to define man, not archetypes in the sense employed by C.G. Jung or Mircea Eliade). Some of these signals of transcendence are man's orientation to 'order', 'play', 'hope', 'humour', and what might be termed his desire for the possibility of 'eternal damnation' (and hence indirectly for 'justice').

As Charles Corr says in a review of A Rumour of Angels:

The point is that prototypical human gestures have a certain timelessness and metaphysical quality which transcends the individual situation in which they appear. They are, in another phrase, "experiences of ecstasy--of 'ek-stasis', a standing outside of the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life." (R. of A., p. 35) Although these acts are to be found in the midst of normal human experience, Berger's contention is that their ecstatic quality permits us to stand outside the ordinary course of events and to adopt a perspective from which those events are to be judged. (Corr, p. 429)

Recalling the previous discussion of The Sacred Canopy, the signals of transcendence are evidences for the possibility of man's 'freedom.'

Concerning the first of these signals Berger says the following:

One fundamental human trait, which is of crucial importance in understanding man's religious enterprise, is his propensity for order This is the human faith in order as such, a faith closely related to man's fundamental trust in reality. This faith is experienced not only in the history of societies and civilizations, but in the life of each individual . . . (R. of A., p. 71)

In essence every ordering gesture from cultural nomizations through to "the ordering gesture by which a mother reassures her anxious child" (R. of A., p. 72) is a signal of transcendence. That is, when the mother says "everything is in order, everthing is all right," according to Berger, she is making a comment which transcends the individual situation and "implies a statement about reality as such." (R. of A., p. 68) In light of the discussion of relativity above, there is no cut and dry reason for assuming that her intuition on this point is in error.

Now this is not to say, Berger stresses, that religion cannot be analysed along Freudian lines as but "a cosmic projection of the child's experience of the protective order of parental love." (R. of A., p. 75) But such an interpretation reflects a restricted view of the possibilities that is based on certain a priori metaphysical assumptions that do not follow of necessity from the reality of the situation. In addition to and without functionally contradicting this Freudian perspective it is possible to argue, in light of the potential for radical relativization, that "what is projected is . . . itself a reflection, an imitation, of ultimate reality. Religion, then, is not only (from the point of view of empirical reason) a projection of human order, but (from the point of view of what might be called 'inductive faith') the ultimately true vindication of human order." (R. of A., p. 75)

There is no empirical proof that what is projected is

a reflection of ultimate reality, the movement from the empirical to the metaphysical, entailed in accepting the above proposal as fact, represents an act of faith. But, Berger stresses, it is an act of 'inductive' faith. That is, it is not a belief deduced from some mysterious revelation but rather one founded upon as logically consistent a hypothesis as that upon which science operates. Thus it is Berger's opinion that such a perspective represents the most secure and enlightened foundation possible for a contemporary theology.

In arguing an inductive approach to theology Berger believes that he is arguing for the only reasonable way of breaking through what he calls the "the impasse of contemporary Christian thought." The impasse he has in mind is that born of the "sterile antithesis of neo-orthodoxy and secularism", or more specifically, the polarization of theological thought between the positions of the Barthians and the exponents of a so-called secular theology. As has already been seen in the second appendix to The Sacred Canopy, Berger has repudiated the Barthian position, flatly arguing that the neo-orthodox attempt to differentiate between 'religion' and God's 'revelation' in the Bible is inviable for empirically it makes no sense. It is just a convenient a priori theological assertion which allows the theologian to extend a privileged status to Christianity and in the contemporary world of substantial and growing religious pluralism such an arbitrary distinction lacks subjective plausibility. In A Rumour of Angels he is addressing

the inadequacies of the other half of the antithesis--the 'secular theologians'. It is this type of "liberal" theologian he has in mind when he speaks of "the triumph of the Weltanschauung of the modern cognitive antagonists of religion in the minds of the theologians themselves." Theologians such as Harvey Cox, author of The Secular City, epitomize this position for Berger, as do, in a different respect, Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, promoters of the 'God-is-dead theology'. In contra-distinction to these schools of thought, Berger conceives of his own approach as a reversion to the problems and methods (though not necessarily the answers) of classical theological liberalism, in the line of the work of the great eighteenth century Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. In Schleiermacher's grounding of theology in 'experience' Berger believed he had found the key to recognizing and utilizing the power of the scientific approach to reality without paying the price of abandoning belief in a transcendent reality.

Berger's castigation of the Secular Theologians is not without its ironic aspects, however, for as Van Harvey points out, the logic of Berger's own theory of religion, as presented in The Sacred Canopy, would seem to lead naturally to the adoption of such a position.

In order to see the way in which Berger's position so easily tumbles into that of the Secular Theologians, it is only necessary to consider two of his basic ideas: that religion is alienation, and that Protestant faith is analogous to the liberation of secularism (the world come of age). It seems to follow

from Berger's sociology of religion that archaic peoples, those who live in traditional societies, are alienated--just as it is difficult to avoid the correlative inference that secular people, those for whom the world has become disenchanted and relativized, are liberated from alienation, which is to say, unalienated. Berger himself drew such a conclusion in The Precarious Vision (1961) and had affirmed Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" and the maturity of the world come of age. The Secular Theologians simply and undialectically identified religion (including Christianity) with alienation, secularity with liberated faith, and dropped Berger's Barthian Archimedian point, which he himself had conceded was untenable.

But as Harvey goes on to say,

Berger was repelled by this simple equation of faith and secularism; quite naturally, because it surrendered the reference to transcendence in Protestant faith, a reference Berger continued to affirm, which enables the believer, as he conceives the matter, to be in but not of the secular world. It was because Berger so understood Protestantism even in The Sacred Canopy that he could classify it as a religion but as a dealienating religion. (Harvey, 1979, p. 5)

In surrendering to modern standards of cognitivity and abandoning transcendence (i.e., the supernatural) in favour of a completely naturalistic understanding of the world Berger could see that the Secular Theologians were actually spreading alienation by legitimizing the present, taken-for-granted worldview. In other words, they were defeating their own purpose (to advance the cause of freedom and dealienation) by not keeping themselves open to the possibility of transcendence (they were absolutizing a relative perspective).

Realistically, however, how much protection does Berger's

openness to the possibility of transcendence provide against the onslaught of alienation (i.e., in this context, secularization)? Can one really use and trust in systems of thought like the sociology of knowledge without succumbing to their naturalistic bias? When Berger's sketch of a new theology is scrutinized with these questions in mind it soon becomes apparent that his compromise position is not quite the happy synthesis of modern and traditional perspectives that he thinks it is.

At the root of understanding how this is the case it is first necessary to recognize that the theoretical confusion arising from Berger's ambiguous formulation of the relationship existing between religion and alienation/dealienation are compounded and intensified by his analysis of secularization and the Secular Theologians in A Rumour of Angels. By the logic of Berger's theory of religion, as propounded in The Sacred Canopy, it must be assumed that a dealienated society (i.e., a secularized society) is one that is largely flooded with anomy, which is highly undesirable. Yet here when it is precisely this state of affairs that the Secular Theologians are welcoming the charge which Berger levels at them is paradoxically one of heightening alienation. But if the society really is suffering from an excessive amount of anomy, and by the terms of reference of Berger's theory this can be the only reason for judging that a secular society is undesirable, then the Secular Theologians act of religiously legitimizing the secular order must be viewed

in a positive light as a necessary anomy countering measure.

It will be remembered from the previous discussion that true or complete dealienation is an impossibility, and that the best that any society can strive for is a sophisticated system of legitimations that serves to maximize the reduction of anomy, while minimizing the costs in terms of alienation. Berger's advocacy of the possibility of transcendence over against the position of the Secular Theologians can only properly be understood, then, as the advocacy of a preferable, because more sophisticated, mode of alienation. Berger himself, however, does not seem to be totally aware of the subtleties of this situation as he has chosen to constantly refer to the possibility of transcendence as if it were simply and forthrightly a dealienating force in society (i.e., as if it had nothing whatsoever to do with alienation).

The complexities of this state of affairs are perhaps most immediately reflected in the initially very surprising fact that the very propensity to order on the part of man that in The Sacred Canopy is viewed as having tempted man into alienation and inauthenticity is related in A Rumour of Angels to man's fundamental trust in reality and is viewed as a signal of transcendence (i.e., an aid to dealienation through ecstasy). The propensity for order which gives rise to the notion of transcendence is from the beginning, then, potentially both a source of alienation and dealienation. Whichever it is, however, has nothing to do with the propensity for order or the notion of

transcendence inherently but is completely dependent on the nature of the order that is imagined and attributed to this world and the transcendent realm respectively. If the order here on earth and the order in heaven are sufficiently similar, then the nomos in general is legitimated and there is substantial alienation and little anomy. If these two orders are significantly dissimilar, then there is little legitimation and alienation and a great deal of anomy. In a relative sense, the latter, of course, represents a condition of dealienation. But not necessarily the social ideal of a stable source of dealienation which is in reality but a sophisticated brand of alienation and an effective counter to anomy.

Having realized this the question can now be asked: Is Berger's empirically sensitive, anthropologically derived theology a more sophisticated system of alienation and hence a better bulwark against anomy and for the maintenance of a relative condition of dealienation? With the very limited information provided in Berger's brief book it is doubtful that his position is actually as strong, in this regard, as that of the Secular Theologians. For Berger's signals of transcendence suggest that there is some reason for believing in the abstract assertion that there is a 'transcendent component to human experience' but the transcendent reality in question remains without any content of either a positive or negative form. Thus it can possess little or no power to either alienate or dealienate in a constructive sense. At best its open-ended

nature could be seen as a force for sheer rampant dealienation, or in other words, chaos.

Berger does not see things in this light, however, (though the analysis has not wandered from the implicit terms of reference of his own theory of religion) because he has personally infused this abstract possibility of transcendence with content from his own Christian convictions. But this content is the product of an old, and by Berger's own reckoning, no longer viable system of theological thinking. In the last analysis, then, while proving itself to be dealienating Berger's system, as it stands, is essentially nihilistic (just as his understanding of freedom and ecstasy itself is) for it rejects old supports for religion without viably replacing them.

Now the force of this conclusion is mitigated by the very real fact that A Rumour of Angels only represents a tentative and exploratory undertaking and Berger is accordingly most careful about inferring too much from his limited evidence. Nevertheless, as Charles Corr observes, with reference to the development of Berger's work, the task of properly finishing his anthropologically derived theology would be formidable.

As a program for the future, Berger's procedure requires the construction of a comprehensive philosophical anthropology. This entails a more thorough empirical analysis than Berger has yet undertaken, together with a full enunciation of the principles which govern the inclusion and exclusion of data for this kind of theodicy. It will also be necessary to examine more closely each particular kind of data as it comes under scrutiny. This need can be illustrated

in the ambiguities of a category which subsumes both "a propensity for order" and a "trust in reality", and in the obvious implications--which Berger acknowledges but does not pursue--of damnation for the broader context of moral evil, the claims of justice, and the possibilities of a modified natural law theory. In short, what is needed for the philosophic extension of the procedures initiated in A Rumour of Angels is a typology of choirs of Berger's "angels," so that we may obtain a fuller understanding of their ultimate significance. (Corr, p. 434)

The question of the amount of real protection Berger's system supplies against the threat of alienation in the form of secularization may be followed up on from a number of other angles as well. For example, many relevant questions come to mind when one pauses to think over the implications of the following presupposition of Berger's approach:

Genuine timeliness means sensitivity to one's socio-historical starting point, 'not' fatalism about one's possible destination. What follows, then, is based on the belief that it is possible to liberate oneself to a considerable degree from the taken-for-granted assumptions of one's time. This belief has as its correlate an ultimate indifference to the majority or minority status of one's view of the world, an indifference that is equally removed from the exaltation of being fully 'with it' and from the arrogance of esotericism. (R. of A., p. 42)

This 'indifference' is an admirable ideal perhaps but even at the level of common sense it must be wondered whether any religious body could realistically sustain itself by maintaining such an attitude. But more importantly, does such an attitude make any sense in the light of what we have learned from the sociology of knowledge about man's reliance on social

consensus in order to give his ideas of the true nature of the world plausibility? Was not A Rumour of Angels itself written because Berger recognized the need to bolster the plausibility of a religious (especially a Christian) view of the world by supplying religions oriented to the transcendent with a better formulated base in the dominant social consensus surrounding an empirical and scientific view of the world?

This last point raises the fact that in positing an empirically sensitive theological foundation for religion in the modern world Berger has actually countered his own pre-supposition. For such a theology must exhibit a marked concern for the majority or minority status of the empirical data from which it derives its point of departure as, in the last analysis, scientific theories and laws are established by consensus. Extending this situation it can be seen that Berger's theology has not been placed on a very firm base, then, for as he has to admit:

There are some prototypical human gestures that appear timeless and that may be considered as constants in history. It may be that there are necessary and necessarily recurrent expressions of 'humanitas' (i.e., what is essentially human). But no one can deny that there have been far-reaching changes in the understanding of 'humanitas' in the course of history. (R. of A., p. 93)

In other words, Berger must admit the possibility that his signals of transcendence may be explained away or abandoned by man in the future. Does not this admission relativize

Berger's own approach in such a manner as to greatly dissipate its usefulness as a support for a religious attitude in the modern world? For if one is going to operate on the basis of possibilities, then all possibilities (especially in an empirically sensitive approach) must be weighted equally. In which case, the possibility of transcendence may be seen as effectively being countered, or even cancelled out, by the possibility that the signals of transcendence are a relative phenomena.

However, for Berger, once again, this question does not arise for as Corr so effectively summarizes below, in the phrase 'inductive faith' the emphasis is in point of fact solidly on the latter variable in Berger's thought.

The general thrust of A Rumour of Angels would seem to suggest that the empirical data shape the act whereby that data is interpreted as evidence for a transcendent reality. One might easily assume from this that Berger's position is a fairly traditional form of metaphysics in which the premises validate the conclusion through a process of strict implication. However, Berger undercuts this view by candidly admitting the possibility of naturalistic explanations of the data. The problem is one of choosing the appropriate interpretation, not one of rigorous logical implication. Berger insists over and over again that no empirical "proof" can be offered for his religious interpretation, and he avoids an attempt to vindicate his choice by appealing to pragmatic considerations. His own request of the evidence is only that it bring him to the moment of a free commitment of faith. Indeed, the data itself cannot properly be called "evidence" until seen under the aspect of this faith act. (Corr, p. 435)

Berger's act of faith in making the transition from empirical analysis to the metaphysics of transcendence, inductive or

otherwise, is ultimately just that--an act of faith. It possesses no more power to convince an empirically minded individual or society of the validity and need for a religious outlook on life than the traditional arguments and professions of faith.

Berger's empirically sensitive theology undoubtedly provides effective support for those who are already believers, especially if they are individuals deeply involved in any one of the empirical sciences (pure and social). Thus in a way it may be said that he has designed a theology to ease the tension of his own position. But the vital ingredient that makes such people religious exists prior to and probably in spite of the validity or invalidity of Berger's signals of transcendence.

Another weakness in Berger's chosen means of establishing a religious option in a modern empirically biased society stems from the fact that his option is born of the radicalization of the process of relativization. For the process of complete relativization strips all religious statements of their emotive power, of any implication of compulsion. Religion becomes simply an intellectual option to a certain considerable extent and takes on the guise of "patient openness and humility before all available intimations of religious truth." (R. of A., p. 107) It is essentially estranged from what even Berger admits is the prototypical gesture of religion--worship. (R. of A., p. 109) This is an attitude that may be infinitely defensible on rational grounds but in comparison to the vigour demonstrated by religion in the past and by contemporary secular competitors for the

hearts of men, Berger's religious option appears rather anemic.

For the most part, then, Berger's efforts suffer from the very failings which he felt he detected in the position of the Secular Theologians. His theory involves an unhealthy degree of "intellectual contortionism" and he posits a theology whose benefits "are also available under strictly secular labels." The application of the first point to Berger's work should be self-evident by this point in our discussion. The essential truth of the second point is demonstrated by the fact that it is not particularly difficult to be aware of the complete relativity of all world perspectives, and hence free of alienation, by recognizing the sheer possibility of transcendence and yet remain utterly irreligious (in any traditional sense) in one's attitudes to life. Openness to the possibility of transcendence imposes no more need, in and of itself, for some kind of 'religious' response than openness to the possibility of extra-terrestrial life necessitates belief in U.F.O.'s.

In spite of these limitations, Berger's work is valuable for it presses home the very real need for theologians to face up to the indisputable power of secular and secularizing thought. The adoption of an intransigent attitude in the face of these dominant patterns of thought can only result in the ghettoizing of religion in general. A process of cognitive bargaining with the modern secular world must be undertaken by theologians, at the level of the highest theoretical concerns as well as the issues of everyday life, if traditional religious thought is

to avoid being stripped of all plausibility. But, as is equally stressed, this bargaining must be very carefully undertaken within a well-conceived format if the desire for a synthesis of positions is to be prevented from simply giving rise to an occasion for cognitive surrender to a reductionistic notion of religion as a human projection. Regrettably, however, Berger's efforts have not gone far enough in the direction of actually developing such a format. But as Charles Corr perceptively concludes, recognizing this weakness in the "overture" to a new philosophy of religion given in A Rumour of Angels,

. . . does not . . . detract from its principal value which is in the open and humanistic character of Berger's approach. Through his appeal for a broader reading of the data of our experience, Berger resists a premature closure which arbitrarily restricts our recognition of the full human situation and which dogmatically forecloses even the possibility of an encounter with transcendence. By immersing ourselves in the full richness of human experience--and in an awareness of the constitutive elements of that experience, both objective and subjective--we acquire the only possible foundation for a comprehensive understanding of man and the human situation. For these reasons, it seems to me that Berger's little book is pointed in the direction which offers the most fruitful potential and which can encompass the best results of the many modes of contemporary philosophizing and of other related disciplines. Such an approach soon brings us to a confrontation with the question of whether a religious interpretation enriches and is warranted by our experience. Men of good will may differ on this difficult and fundamental question, but Berger has presented the issue fairly, and he has suggested a proper base upon which philosophers might meet and work towards its resolution. (Corr, p. 437)

— Parenthetically, it might be noted that Berger and other Western theorists could learn much in this regard from the learned

traditions of the East, such as Yoga and Buddhist Abhidharma, where this programme of research has been followed for centuries, though within a somewhat restricted traditionalist framework. Through such further extensions of our awareness of the depth and contours of human experience our appreciation of the fundamental importance of Berger's tentative efforts can only be heightened.

Now it may appear that we have wandered too far afield in spending the time we have on Berger's attempt to outline the grounds for an anthropologically founded theology. However, a proper study and critique of Berger's position necessitates a thorough analysis of both The Sacred Canopy and A Rumour of Angels. For his approach to the study of religion involves maintaining a delicate and complex intellectual balance between interacting yet independent social scientific (in his case, in actuality, philosophical) and theological variables. It is only by reading and examining both books that this becomes fully apparent and that one gains a firm handle on the variables involved; or, moreover, on the severe problems Berger's adopted position generates.

All in all one is left to conclude that, in part almost by intent, and partly as a result of an element of confusion in the formulation of his basic working premises, Berger fashions a social scientific understanding of religion that is essentially anti-religious in its tone and implications. But he counters this by pointing to its logical insufficiency, and by 'relativ-

izing the relativizers' methodologically opens the way for the logical entertainment of theological propositions hand in hand with those of a naturalistic approach. Thus in an abstract way he has protected his right to be 'religious about religion' as a subject of study. But substantively he has done little to really advance the social scientific study of religion itself. If Berger had exercised greater care and insight in the formulation of his basic theoretical position and analytical categories the whole convoluted process of his reasoning could have been avoided.

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