

*Opening Lecture*

**The Identity Model of Religion :  
How It Compares with Nine Other Theories  
of Religion and How It Might Apply to Japan**

Hans MOL

The identity model of religion attempts to provide a comprehensive, social scientific accounting scheme covering a large variety of data from both ancient and modern religions. Rather ambitiously, it further attempts to fit in *both* the prevailing anthropological, psychological, and sociological theories of man and society, *and* the contemporary ethological accounts of primate behavior.

It is only in the last ten years that a dozen or so sociologists in as many countries have begun to use identity as a major variable to account for the religious data of their research. The anthropologist William Christian found in Northern Spain a close correspondence between shrines and the levels on which people formed a community, or had a sense of identity (nation, region, province, vale, village, *barriada*). Not the least influential in this way of thinking has been Morioka and Shimpo's detection of a similar correspondence in Japan between Buddhism and family identity, Shinto and communal identity, and Christianity and personal identity. Recently a book has been published (Mol 1978) in which a dozen scholars from all over the world relate religion to the identity variable.

In this opening address I first want to discuss what this rather recent and novel "identity" model is all about. Subsequently I want to compare it with nine other social scientific

theories of religion. Finally I want to apply it to the little I know about religion in Japan.

#### INTRODUCING IDENTITY THEORY

*Meanings of "identity."* Identity theory is a theory which links religion to identity in order to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for the large amount of data about religion in the social sciences.

The term "identity" has been chosen in preference to other concepts such as meaning, integration, interpretation of reality, order, security, and the like. It connotes "sameness," "wholeness," "boundary," and "structure." And these concepts in turn are crucial for the understanding of the function of religion for individuals as well as for groups, both in primitive and in modern societies.

This means that the term "identity" may refer to individual identity, group identity, or social identity. On all these levels identity has something to do with a tendency toward "sameness" or stability, with a tendency toward "wholeness" or integration of traits, or with a strengthening of boundaries around the unit in question.

To give an example of each: personal identity is the wholeness of a person, in so far as this person attempts to be and to remain a well-functioning unit in his environment. Similarly, a group will not have identity unless it coheres and maintains itself as a viable system in its surroundings. Thus again the identity of a nation depends on its wholeness being recognized and its boundaries being articulated.

Identity in this sense of "wholeness-maintenance" has a long history that reaches back into the building blocks of nature. The organization of an atom makes it into a unit which, under certain conditions (temperature conditions, for example), maintains its unity. The genes in any living organism bolster the wholeness, continuity, or identity of that organism in the face of many forces, such as mutation, which may alter

its form. Behavior too tends to contribute to wholeness-maintenance. Many animals will go to great trouble to defend their integrity or identity by outwitting predators or by chasing intruders from their territory. Humans too are constantly engaged in bolstering their wholeness by seeking health rather than death, by learning how to react effectively to the sources of change and danger in the situations in which they find themselves.

Yet this is not all. Wholeness in human existence does not stop with the integrity, physical or mental, of the individual human being. Groups or societies are wholes, existing independently of their individual members. They are *sui generis*, units in their own right. There was a good evolutionary reason for their independence. A group or tribe had a better chance of survival than the individual. Cooperation and efficient division of labor made it more adaptive. Neither in attack nor in defense, not to mention the hunt, could the individual or less efficient tribe match the group with an intricate social organization. Capacity for communication and the elaboration of symbols and language therefore became the hallmark of a successful social whole. Here too wholeness was bolstered to safeguard cohesion and to protect advantage.

Symbolism became the critical factor for efficient communication and for integrity maintenance. It was not sufficient to learn how to do one task well (for example, scouting or spearthrowing). It also became necessary to coordinate the various tasks, to minimize internal friction in order to cope optimally with one's environment. Better adaptation, or changes in procedures or habits, went hand in hand with strengthened cohesion and the capacity of tribal members to fit into, or submit to, the whole. Survival dictated that an intricate learning process had to take place so that aggressiveness could be optimized in the hunt or the attack, but effectively repressed for maximum cohesion and tribal identity. The same with altruism: the surviving tribe would teach its members the

subtle distinctions involved in determining where it was good and where it was bad.

*Key categories.* All this means that we think in terms of two contrasting, basic modes of existence. In the same way as logic maintains that sameness and difference are the purest logical categories, so social science must maintain that its basic categories consist of a tendency toward sameness and a tendency toward change, each balancing the other. One can use different terms to express a similar dialectic: wholeness versus breakdown of that wholeness, integration versus differentiation, etc. Yet whatever term is used, the central ideas are: (1) the balance between a tendency toward identity and a tendency toward change, and (2) the existence of this balance, the equilibrium between these two opposites, as standing at the heart of the natural and social sciences.

Dialectic thus becomes another central concept, because in this configuration of opposing, yet also complementary, forces, conflict issues in compromise, balance, equilibrium. In the same way as chemical structure and chemical reaction form a new equilibrium, or heredity and mutation form a new variation, so in societies and cultures, the dialectic between adaptation and holding things together provides the point where the advantages of each are maximized and their disadvantages minimized. In other words, too much change means disintegration and too much sameness means loss of adaptability. In fact, therefore, the point consists of a sufficient amount of each both to prevent chaos and to achieve harnessed chaos or flexible order.

There is of course nothing that guarantees the equality of these opposing forces. Evolutionary history is replete with instances of either too much or not enough adaptability. The New Zealand kakapo (a ground parrot) is threatened with extinction in its natural habitat because English settlers brought their dogs and cats as well as their rats; the aborigines

of Tasmania die out when Western culture in the guise of cruel Europeans begins to make inroads; the older immigrant pines away in a forgotten corner of a metropolitan slum area because he cannot unlearn old patterns and adopt the language and behavior of the new country.

Order (and the need for identity behind it) can become too much of a good thing – like too much sugar in one's tea. Similarly, innovation or creativity (and the need for adaption behind it) can become destructive of order – like too many prima donnas under one roof.

Identity, change, and dialectic are, then, the three major concepts that form the basic frame of reference.

*Religion.* How does religion fit into this outline?

Our major assumption, for better or for worse, is that religion in any of its forms favors the identity side of the dialectic. If it is involved in change (and it often is!), this is nearly always because it either wants to blunt the impact of change and harness potential chaos by anticipation, or because it wants to render change manageable or innocuous by dramatizing the conflict. Viable religions have never underestimated change, but have usually been a step ahead. Yet they have never introduced changes, such as advocacy of fertilizer, as ends in themselves. Such changes as were introduced were always clearly visualized as serving larger goals: greater justice, less tension, stronger cohesion of the community or group in question.

Religions were essentially and irrevocably committed to healing and reconciling what is broken (on any level) and to stabilizing and reinforcing wholeness. At the very moment that Christians or Hindus engage in social action for a better treatment of the disprivileged in New York or Calcutta, these religions heal injustice and reconcile urban divisions. On the other hand, at the very moment that death or frustration (or generally any change) undermines wholeness, religion

interprets the event in the context of its meaning system. Meaning systems of any kind always integrate what bears within itself the seed of disruption.

It is for such reasons that the identity theory of religion defines religion as *whatever sacralizes identity or a system of meaning*.

*Sacralization.* By sacralization, I refer to the process by 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. To say the same thing in an oversimplified way: sacralization is to the dysfunctional potential of symbol-systems what antibodies are to dysfunctional, cancerous possibilities in physical systems. Sacralization produces immunity against persuasion similar to the biological immunization process. The concept comes close to the concept of institutionalization. The important difference is that sacralization adds to institutionalization other qualities such as untouchability and awe, qualities that reinforce the materials of which the house of identity is constructed. Sacralization is the inevitable process that safeguards identity when it is endangered by the disadvantages of the infinite adaptability of symbol-systems. Sacralization protects identity, a system of meaning, or a definition of reality, and modifies, obstructs, or (if necessary) legitimates change.

How can we more concretely operationalize the concept of sacralization?

I suggest that we break the mechanisms of sacralization

down into at least the following four: (1) objectification (the projection of order into a beyond where it is less vulnerable to contradictions, exceptions, and contingencies – in other words, a rarefied realm where major outlines of order can be maintained in the face of temporal, but all-absorbing dislocations of that order), (2) commitment (emotional anchorage in the various proliferating foci of identity), (3) ritual (the repetitive actions, articulations, and movements that keep sacralized objects from being lost to view), and (4) myth (integration of the various strains in a coherent, shorthand symbolic account).

Obviously there is a good deal of overlapping between these various mechanisms: there are objectifying elements in almost any myth, and without commitment neither objectification nor ritual is likely to be very efficacious. Still, all four are sufficiently different to warrant separate treatment. It is rather reassuring that the mechanisms of sacralization seem to be roughly congruent with such widely divergent concepts as Glock's dimensions of religiosity and the ways Yoga (communion with the Supreme Being) is purported to improve the seeker in ancient Sanskrit writings.

*Some implications.* There are a number of consequences directly related to the assumptions of the identity theory of religion. The major one is a fundamental disagreement with the axiom of almost all philosophy and a great deal of sociology that the rational individual is the pinnacle of evolutionary development. Instead we maintain that the data of the natural and social sciences fit better in an outline which postulates an ongoing dialectic between rationality and commitment, between personal and social.

In other words we refuse to think of the social as an epiphenomenon, as if it were in some way less than the individual. Religion can be much better understood if we consider it not only in terms of its whole-making capacity for the

individual, but also in terms of its equally important whole-making or wholeness-reinforcing capacity for society or the group. In addition religion should also be considered one of the arbiters between these two "identities." In the process of arbitration religion tends to minimize the friction or conflict between these major categories of identity and to intertwine them indissolubly. The objectification mechanism is linked strongly with order provision and is applicable to those forms of order which integrate the individual, or alternately the society, or which transcends them both in a new unity.

This outline is also an implicit challenge to the narrow assumption that feeling and emotion are an epiphenomenon, in some way less important than reason and rationality. In so far as reason is the major instrument of analysis and skepticism it contributes to the differentiation or change side of our dialectic. It opposes the dreary dullness of habit for its own sake, sharpens the wit, and makes truth changeable according to its criteria. As such, however, it invariably evokes its own, often latent and unarticulated, opposite: the commitment to specific paradigms of thought or ontological departures.

In religion this opposite is not hidden and unarticulated. It expressly propagates faith or commitment, again because its viability depends on uniting rather than bisecting, on feelings of union rather than the cynical slapdown and the game of wits. The second mechanism of commitment is therefore probably the most crucial one, if only because it is intertwined with objectification, ritual, and myth.

The limitation of an identity theory of religion lies particularly in its being "about" religion. It takes a stance outside the phenomenon itself and as such does by implication an injustice to the very object it tries to understand. Weber never understood that sociological analysis tends to distort what it investigates. In some respects, as in any other theory of religion, it is a competing perspective. It looks in from the out-



side, and yet even the outsider's stance contains its own tendency toward sacralization. Perspectives tend to become taken for granted and by continual practice (ritual?) they begin to carve out their own niche of security. If attacked, perspectives are often strengthened by the defense.

There is an inevitable bias and partiality in the very fact of observation. Analyzing religious phenomena means that one observes them from a specific point of view always distinct from other points of view, including those of "insiders" or "believers." Apart from the fact that the observer's stance is necessarily partial through the very aloofness inherent in the method, there is always the danger, in scientific enterprises, of making one's perspective into a world view in which the researcher has invested a great deal of his emotions. The reductionism (in this case, the reducing of religious phenomena to sociological variables) of which social scientists are so often accused is generally nothing but a sacralized perspective. With the maturation of the social sciences, however, the need to invest strong emotion in the perspective may become less urgent. The hostility which the sociologist of religion sometimes encounters from religious practitioners represents, at bottom, the clash of competing sacralized perspectives. It is impossible completely to resolve this competition. The social scientist can only minimize it by avoiding the sacralization of his own perspective.

And yet our very definition is a bias, in that it draws attention to identity as a basic need. A religious practitioner would start from the opposite point of view: his identity is shaped, interpreted by his religion. He is what he is because of his religious beliefs. Identity is a secondary by-product. Both the social scientific approach of this study and the theological approach are biased perspectives. Even our emphasis on dialectic and interdependence will only partly modify the contrast of perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

COMPARING IDENTITY THEORY AND OTHER APPROACHES TO RELIGION

There are at least nine other major approaches to religion in the social sciences: empirical, Marxist, conflict, functional, psychoanalytic, evolutionary, typological, phenomenological, and structural. We can discuss only one or two major features of each here.

*The empirical approach.* The empirical sociologists of religion keep very close to the data usually emerging from survey research. I will give an example of my own work in this area, after which I want to discuss how the identity frame of reference is a necessary complement to this way of handling data.

In the *Religion in Australia* survey (Mol 1971) one of the questions dealt with approval or disapproval of sexual relations before marriage. The percentage distribution of those disapproving by age, sex, and belief is indicated in table 1.

As can be seen from this table, there is considerable variation among the respondents. When percentages are used as scores, the average difference between the sexes when age and beliefs are held constant is 17. Similarly when sex and beliefs are held constant, the average difference between those under and over 40 is also 17. When age and sex are held constant, however, the average difference between those who believe that God really exists and those who hold deistic, agnostic, or atheistic beliefs is as much as 39.

The survey further attempted to answer the question: is there something in religious activity as such which competes with sexual activity? If we can answer this question satisfactorily, we might be able to avoid the pitfall of narrow assumptions regarding the function of religion into which

1. This short discussion of the identity theory of religion is partly derived from Mol (1976). Some paragraphs have been taken in toto from this book, which should be consulted for a fuller explanation.

TABLE 1

Correlation of Age, Sex, and Religious Beliefs  
with Attitudes toward Premarital Sexual Relations

Religious Belief	Number of Respondents		Percentage of Disapproval Responses	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<i>20-40 years of age:</i>				
I believe that God really exists and have no doubts about it . . . . .	205	164	77	63
I believe in God, but have some doubts at least occasionally . . . . .	151	113	60	48
I believe not in a personal God but in a higher power of some kind (or: I am an agnostic or atheist) . . . . .	54	108	28	14
<i>Over 40 years of age:</i>				
I believe that God really exists and have no doubts about it . . . . .	322	204	87	78
I believe in God, but have some doubts at least occasionally . . . . .	113	116	73	50
I believe not in a personal God but in a higher power of some kind (or: I am an agnostic or atheist) . . . . .	77	116	69	37
Total . . . . .	922	821	74	53

Kardiner and Kinsey appear to have fallen. There is evidence from church history that a whole line of theologians – from St. Paul and Augustine to the early Pietists, Puritans, and Jansenists – thought of sex as a substitute for God or as an alternative form of commitment. They felt that hedonism in general and sexual indulgence in particular implied an interpretation of life that contrasted sharply with a singleminded and simplehearted dedication to divine authority. Asceticism, a capacity to postpone gratification, be it sexual or a general control over any appetite, was seen as proof that the meaning-

bestowing order in one's life did not reside in what man could control, but in a God who controlled man. The ultimate criterion was the interpretation of one's existence, and any physically based appetite could easily deny what St. Paul called "pneuma" or spirit, the only aspect of that existence which raised man above the animals and provided man's only contact with the divine. The charismatic, personal, meaning-bestowing function of religion stressed by Max Weber assists our understanding of the competitive aspects of religion and sex better than the social, preservative, integrative function of religion as stressed by Emile Durkheim. Both approaches deal essentially with the integrative function of religion, although in our instance the personality-integrative rather than the society-integrative aspect seems to help more. If faith is the focus of man's commitment, the role of sexual gratification in the total motivational economy of the personality will be relatively minor.

It appears, then, that religion can function as a world-view that filters the cues from one's environment. The sex-stimulating content of some of these cues may affect the non-believer more than the believer, precisely because the religiously involved person has acquired a degree of immunity through his personality-encompassing commitment. The sex drive is sufficiently forceful, however, to be interpreted as a serious alternative commitment. In Christianity this interpretation led to an articulated set of norms stressing denial rather than indulgence. So far the old interpretation.

The speculations about the meaning of the figures was entirely "ad hoc." It relied on a rather free-floating amalgam of readings and assumptions by the author, and the interpretation would obviously have differed if someone else had looked at the same figures. More important, the explanation was influenced by the taken-for-granted individualistic techniques and assumptions of the questionnaire.

If, at the time, I had thought in terms of the identity frame

of reference, both the questions and the interpretations would have looked somewhat different.

The questions would have probed more into the area of personality and social integration and the ambiguous relationship between the two. Consequently the belief question would have investigated the intricate relationship between the personal and the social referent of "belief in God." It would also have attempted to answer the question whether the social referent had a repressive effect on the individual attitude towards premarital sex.

The interpretation would have centered around sexual repression, analogous to repression of the aggression instinct, strengthening social or group (family) identity, and sexual permissiveness strengthening personal identity possibly at the expense of family or social responsibilities. The belief in God would then have been interpreted primarily in terms of its society- or family-ordering component. Yet these interpretations would have been regarded as ever so many hypotheses to be tested further with a much more refined instrument.

The advantage of the identity frame of reference would have been a more probing instrument to start with and a better set of hypotheses with which to finish.

*The Marxist approach.* Marxists tend to regard religion as a means to soften the blow of deprivation. Rather than accept an uncomfortable reality, the religious person projects an illusory world where there is no deprivation. It would be more appropriate, the Marxists think, for him to engage actively in the removal of the causes of his problems.

The identity theory of religion takes the view that deprivation, frustration, and alienation are only some of the experiences that weaken identity. There are many others, both on the personal level (death, birth, marriage, divorce, fortune as well as misfortune, rationality, diffidence, skepticism) and on the social (culture contact, military conquests, trade, injustice,

disaster). Since such factors are often part and parcel of social and personality structures, coping with them means not only to attack and remove them but also to understand them, even if they are irremediable. Religion satisfies this need to understand or conceive one's world.

Deprivation theories of religion assume that in an undeprived state man would not need religion, because it is only a means toward the end of mastery. But looking at religion solely in terms of technological mastery or social differentiation neglects the function it has for the other side of the dialectic: the knitting together or integration of societies and individuals. Religion deals with the interpretation of any reality, not merely with ones which can be reduced to a form of deprivation. The Jesus Freaks with their millennialism or the New Guinean cargo cults are not just compensations for the relative deprivations of this world but, more fundamentally, relevant ways of interpreting present disorder in the light of an anticipated event.

When religion reinforces identity, it thereby strengthens the side which complements rather than sugarcoats alienation. In other words the identity theory maintains that mastery (the profit motive, technical progress, etc.) are not independent of the way facts and goals are interpreted. It maintains that there are no uninterpreted facts or goals and that the only alternatives are interpretation or chaos.

To the Marxist the objectified point of reference is an unnecessary illusion which in the past led to exploitation and which in the present distorts reality. By contrast, in the identity model this objectified point of reference delineates and sums up an order in terms of which disorder and change can be better managed.

*The conflict approach.* Sociologists interested in conflict theories stress the ubiquity of conflict, contradictions, and change in society. Religion in this setting is regarded as one

of the means to mitigate these conflicts. The social gospel is looked upon as one of the means to counterbalance the injustices perpetrated on the weak by the powerful.

In the identity approach religion is treated rather similarly. Here too social action by the religious organizations is looked upon as one of the means to heal the brokenness of industrial society. Yet religion is thought to have a more comprehensive function. It also delineates the boundaries of primitive societies where the kinds of conflicts the conflict theorists are interested in are largely unknown.

More important, the relevance of religion is not confined to patching over economic frictions (slums and poverty versus affluence), political conflicts (establishment power versus radical powerlessness), and racial strife (negro versus white). Its relevance also rests with its capacity to place frictions in a larger cosmic setting, where threat and anxiety are relativized. In other words it too interprets reality – in the sects, for example, by means of the sin/salvation dialectic.

In the identity theory of religion conflict between the various levels of identity is treated as just as real as the corresponding congruence. It is the dialectic between conflict and congruence which makes, in part, for the various levels of identity. Religion, as we have stressed in the previous section, is paradoxically involved both in the mitigation of the conflict and in the strengthening of the conflicting units.

*The functionalist approach.* The conflict school in sociology came into being partly because it was critical of too great an emphasis on equilibrium by the functionalists. Not that the functionalists are not aware of change and conflict, but their sociological interest is primarily in how things hang together. This means that their interest in religion similarly extends to the contributions religion makes to the integration of society (as Durkheim called it) or to pattern-maintenance (as Parsons called it).

The identity theory of religion agrees that religion has an integrating function, but it modifies this position in two ways. First of all it maintains that this integration takes place on a variety of levels, not necessarily and exclusively congruent with one another. Precisely because there is ample evidence that there are conflicts and frictions between individual and group, and between group (for example, family, community, or tribe) and the larger society, the integration of each of these levels may challenge the integrity of the other "identity," or wholeness. In other words the sacralization of an ethnic community by means of ritual and commitments may loosen the weave of the larger society of which it is a part.

Secondly, it maintains that there is a dialectic also within each level. Integration and differentiation do not harmoniously alternate and flow into one another. Parturition is painful on both the physical and the social level. Religion functions to relieve the pain, but also to dramatize the dialectic. By doing the latter it reinforces meaning and makes the mundane manageable.

*The psychoanalytic approach.* The psychoanalytic approach in its Freudian version stresses the illusory aspects of religion, assuming that the scientific, rational way of interpreting existence is superior. In its Jungian version it stresses the contribution religion makes to "individuation" or the whole-making of the individual.

Both versions suffer from a lack of comprehension: religion deals also with whole-making on the social and group level and mediates between the various levels when they are at odds. Yet it is the psychoanalytic tradition which has opened the way to understanding the important function of feeling and emotion for the well-being of the individual. The prominence of the commitment factor in the sacralization mechanisms is a consequence of the trenchant treatment of emotion



and cathexis in the psychological literature.

Most psychologists have also deepened the awareness in the scientific literature of the conflict between the self and the social, or as is the case with Laing, the conflict between the self and the family. In this respect the psychoanalytic tradition is a welcome complement to the opposite tendency (seen in Durkheim, for example) to overstress the congruence of the self and the social and to be concerned with the cohesion of the latter rather than of the former.

*The evolutionary approach.* In the nineteenth century many prominent sociologists and anthropologists believed that religion was a prescientific phase of human progress and that more accurate interpretations of man and existence would soon put an end to these puerile constructions. In other words scholars such as Comte and Spencer, Tylor and Frazer, assumed that rationality was a product of linear evolution and that as its importance waxed, that of irrationality would wane.

Comte and Spencer had cunning insight into the static/dynamic or integrative/differentiating aspects of society, but they failed to appreciate the dialectic between these fundamental bases. To them, the interaction between feeling and reason was too much a one-sided process from reason to feeling, rather than vice versa.

By contrast the identity theory of religion recognizes the independent contribution made by feeling and commitment to the survival of intersecting identities. Here evolution is not regarded as linear, but as the uncertain outcome of a complex network of forces in which reasoning and individual proclivities are merely a few in the midst of many. In this outline religion tends to be regarded as the stabilizer of both the system as a whole and its components. Here commitment to a traditional system of symbols is more functional for the stabilization than rational analysis. The latter contributes to the opposite: the loosening of the social weave. It con-

tributes to innovation and more efficient mastery of the environment.

The identity model regards religion as often dramatizing the core of the evolutionary dialectic: identity and change, wholeness and breakdown, k'un and ch'ien, yin and yang, purusa and prakriti, salvation and sin.

*The typological approach.* The typologists almost without exception confine themselves to categories of religious organizations in Western societies. Thus it is that Troeltsch discerns three types: the *church* with its professional priesthood, the *sects* stressing informality and appealing to the lower classes, and *mysticism*, typical of individuals seeking union with the divine.

The danger of the typological divisions is that they associate religious functions too closely with one variable only, such as church and middle class, sect and lower class. By doing this they prematurely exhaust the possibility that religion may be associated with different identity constellations. For instance, religion may have its independent reinforcing effect on the family and the community, not just on a variety of classes.

Another problem with Troeltsch's and other typologies is their culture-boundness. The categories cannot be transferred to other religions as they are tailored expressly for Christianity.

In the identity frame of reference, however, both these problems of culture-boundness and premature exhaustion of social associations are avoided. Troeltsch's three categories of church, sect, and mysticism are converted into the sacralization of social, group, and personal identities. After all, in the history of Christianity, churches have tended to consolidate national identities, sects have catered to alienated groups, and mysticism has been inclined to advance personal integration. By enlarging the categories to more universal identity categories, however, it now becomes possible to

meaningfully analyze, for instance, the reinforcing effect religion has had on Maori tribes or Indian castes.

*The phenomenological approach.* Like the typologists, the phenomenologists are particularly interested in the way religion appears to common sense observation. In the ensuing categorizations the phenomena therefore tend to stand in the way of more deepseated, often latent structures which may be quite different from external appearances. For instance, van der Leeuw's categories of sacrifice, ritual, prayer, and various religious concepts, such as fatherhood, savior, etc., are all described and impressive materials from a large variety of cultures are marshalled to fit under the various categories. The stated intention of the phenomenologists, then, is to systematize and clarify these appearances, but in fact the very cataloguing of the phenomenal prevents them from digging deeply into latent structures and functions. And so the weakness of phenomenologists of religions, such as Eliade, is the relative absence of systematic generalizations, even when their strength is detailed description and understanding through ideal types.

In so far as Weber, Berger, and Luckmann can be regarded as phenomenologists, their concern with the need for meaning structures and the provision of religion in this area is very much like our own. The difference is that they consider these needs and the subsequent emergence of systems of meaning in generally subjective terms. It is the individual who builds these structures rather than the society which hands them down from generation to generation and has ample means to reinforce them.

The problem here too is one of comprehension and the tendency to regard as unique on the personal level what in fact is also common for group and social identities, namely, the tendency toward objectification and unifying belief systems.

*The structural approach.* Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss tend to concentrate on only one of our four mechanisms of sacralization, namely, myth. Yet their contribution to this area has been very significant. Myths are seen as consisting of structural units which progress according to the Hegelian logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. They mediate, reconcile, and resolve binary oppositions. The structuralists tend to stress the cognitive, logical resolutions of these oppositions at the expense of commitment and content. Building on a long French tradition beginning with Durkheim and Mauss, they regard delineations and classifications as fundamental for the understanding of religion. Yet Lévi-Strauss deviates from this tradition in his downstaging of the attachment (effervescence) to these structures.

Delineations and boundaries indeed separate and provide outlines of order. Yet we would like to go somewhat further than structuralism and suggest that delineations are never arbitrary and always fit specific social configurations. To us it is the delineation of a specific identity and the commitment to and defense of this identity which is central.

Identity is not secondary to rationality and differentiation, but an integrative counterpart. It restores the integrative counterbalance and thereby strengthens the dialectic between the analytic and synthetic modes by favoring the latter.

#### JAPANESE RELIGION IN IDENTITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

With the identity model in mind how does Japanese religion appear? As my knowledge of the latter is appallingly small, the next few pages should be regarded as nothing more than a collection of notes primarily for my own benefit after reading few, and possibly unrepresentative, books.

*Identity in ancient Japan.* In prehistoric times religion sacralized primarily the identity of each separate clan. When one of these clans began to dominate the others, its territorial

traditions seem to have unified the new imperial tradition with the country as a whole. Objectifications were embryonic: nature, man and kami were closely integrated. Kami originally was as concrete as "hair," but gradually became more abstract, coming to mean "above," "superior," "sacred," "god." Commitments and loyalties to clan hierarchies, to feudal lords, and later to the empire were reinforced by linking them with kami. Already in those early days an elaborate system of taboos retraced the delineations within a relatively simple society. Propitious and unlucky times for planting, travelling, behaving, constructing, marrying, etc. separated the arbitrary from the outline of order. The proscriptions and prescriptions reinforced the place of the individual both in his physical environment and in the social one (for example, vis-à-vis his superiors in family, community, clan, and empire). Myths sacralized the social structure. The oldest *Kojiki* myth stressed the descent of emperors and empresses from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. She in turn was the offspring of a mythical deity, Izanagi, who earlier, with his spouse Izanami, had solidified the lands that thitherto had been drifting aimlessly like jelly-fish on a bottomless ocean.

*Shinto and Buddhism.* Out of these myths and traditions Shinto emerged as a national religion. It combined the delineation of communal identities through local shrines and festivals with the national heritage. Yet already in one of the earliest documents, Prince Shōtoku's "Seventeen-Article Constitution" of the seventh century A.D., Confucian and Buddhist values from Korea and China similarly linked the state with its grassroot components. In the very first article of this Constitution, conflicts between classes and communities were relativized in terms of the larger Imperial commands portrayed for all intents and purposes as Heavenly decrees.

By the time Shōtoku's Constitution was drawn up, Buddhism had already begun to modify the native traditions.

Their independent consolidation had been prevented by culture contact, military conquests, migration, and commerce. Buddhism entered Japan as the cultural complement to the adoption of script, the superior skills of Korean artisans, carpenters, and architects, and silkworm culture. The initial rivalry between Buddhism and Shinto paralleled the rivalry between the clans, one of which, the ambitious Soga, supported Buddhism with its refined metaphysical structure and won the upper hand.

When in the eighth century A.D. Buddhism became a state religion to all intents and purposes, it heavily influenced Shinto so that, for instance, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the Sun Buddha Dainichi Nyorai became identified in one common objectified frame of reference.

Yet however much the nobility adopted Buddhism, the masses remained sufficiently anchored in Shinto for it to survive as the major reinforcer of communal identity until the present time. "Shinto shrine membership is determined by residence in a particular locality" (Morioka 1975, p. 156). The worship of village gods, the Shinto rituals, and festivals reinforced communal solidarity. The refusal of Christians in Annaka to contribute to the Shinto shrine created severe conflict (Shimpo 1968, p. 68) and was regarded as a slight to the community.

*National identity.* There seem to have been few countries where national identity was as strongly reinforced by sacralization as Japan. Scholars attach great importance to the change-over from the Buddhist establishment during the Tokugawa period (1600–1867) to the Shinto state religion that obtained during the Meiji period (1868–1911) and up to World War II. I assume that it is fortunate that a nation has competing religious organizations ready to take over when one of their number has become compromised through its involvement in a by now corrupt or defunct national entity. Yet the

difference between religious organizations instrumental in performing these sacralizations seems to me less important than the similarity in sacralizing mechanisms, the ordering objectifications, the loyal sentiments, the national rituals and myths (for example, the divinity of the Emperor).

The content of these sacralizations may have differed as between the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, but the process has remarkable similarities. Neither did disestablishment of State Shinto in 1945 make the great difference attributed to it. Religious function and religious organization should not be too closely identified. National anthems and flags, commemoration ceremonies, and other rituals have solidarity reinforcing effects with or without the participation of religious organizations. More important is the unity or lack of unity of the nation as such. And here the increasing pluralism of a very mobile population, the urbanization and industrialization of a society have a greater effect than disestablishment.

*New religions.* The spectacular rise of new religions in Japan since 1945 certainly has less to do with the widening of organizational freedom and scope (as compared, for example, with their persecution during World War II) than with their capacity to create strongly bounded havens of belonging and meaning in a society suffering from too much heterogeneity and anomie.

In the identity theory of religion sects and new religious movements are treated as buffers between the threats of alienation on the personal and of anomie on the social level. The upsurge of Sōka Gakkai, for example, seems to me related to the fact that the larger society has too many options and not enough structure. The flourishing of sectarian movements in the beginning of the Christian era as well as in the modern West in the latter half of the twentieth century are essentially similar reactions. In the same way as communal and denominational identity may conflict and actually profit from one

another's weakness, so group identity may use the erosion of social identity to its own advantage. The new religious movements seem to absorb large numbers of individuals whose personal identity is unfocussed. The clear structure of these movements – enhanced by special features (such as the exclusivity of Sōka Gakkai) as well as by their roots in history (for example, Nichiren Buddhism) – provide the alienated individual with iron for his weak spine.

In addition, the charismatic leadership of the majority of these religious movements strips the membership of old unsatisfactory ties (wherefore exclusivity is often necessary) and welds them emotionally into the new group identity. Sects, then, often revitalize a society and guide change by detachment and attachment.

*Life transitions, family and other loyalties.* Rites of passage do the same. They too guide change by reintegrating a family, primary group, or community after birth, marriage, and death. What is more, the rites of passage, like charisma and conversion, desacralize a previous pattern and sacralize a new one, usually creating a void of meaninglessness in between to separate the processes. Thus the infant is taken to the local Shinto shrine, where traditional weddings also take place. By contrast funerals are generally conducted according to Buddhist rites. The detaching phase here consists in the facilitation of the dead person's progress to heaven, whereas the reintegration phase is symbolized in a common meal.

The importance of the family in Japanese society is reflected in the beliefs, sentiments, and rituals reinforcing its identity. Ancestor worship in the Japanese family is one way to reinforce its moral unity. Through the link with the dead the family is anchored in time and made part of a meaningful tradition. One does not want to be ashamed when one stands before the memorial tablets in the *butsudan*. To be able to hold up one's head before the ancestors gives the individual



a sense of belonging to a major unit of social organization. It provides strong motivation to be true to the expectations of one's family through one's action in the world.

Yet there are many other meaningful group identities in Japanese society apart from families and sects. They too provide a sense of belonging and often use at least some of the sacralization mechanisms for their reinforcement. I am thinking, for instance, of the life-long loyalty of employees to their firm, strengthened by company hymns and other in-plant rituals. One of the advantages of the identity model of religion is that it trains the observer to look for secular substitutes or for the tendency to sacralize by agencies other than the religious organizations. Secularization in the identity model is the outcome of differentiations exceeding the capacity of religious organizations to integrate them in the traditional frame of reference. One begins to look for sacralizations in all meaningful identities.

*Coincidentia oppositorum.* Finally the identity model regards religion as often dramatizing the evolutionary dialectic. In Japan the teaching of *onmyōdō* or the way of positive and negative principles (*yang* and *yin* in Chinese) represents a similar dialectic. Fifty years ago Anesaki, the founder of the scientific study of religion in Japan and the first occupant of the chair in religious studies at what was then known as Tokyo Imperial University, contrasted some similarly opposed pairs: perfection/progress, response/activity, authority/freedom, composure/speed, bliss/utility, faith/experimentation. These opposites, Anesaki said, were united in the final goal of perfecting human life toward the divine.

All this was said long before structuralism and dialectics in religion had become fashionable. The scientific study of religion should heed these interpretations of its first Japanese exponent and use accounting schemas of this sort to fit data and theory.

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