The Use of Religious Myth to Control the American Mind

A literature Review

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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January 2013
Abstract

This paper aims to explore the impact of religious myth to control and affect the minds of American people. It examines various aspects of religion to expose different ways that religion and the use of religious myths have become truths that many people use to guide their day-to-day lives, and in some cases, their fate. This paper also seeks to shed light on how religion has shape the very fabric of this country and its structure.
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Acknowledgement

I’d like to acknowledge the patience and understanding my children, PJ and Babs, extended for the number of weekends they were unable to have me present to meet their needs. They never complained but went with the flow. I’d also like to acknowledge my parents, my Father for encouraging my inquisitive nature during the short time I had him in my life and my mother for modeling the role of mother and elements of femininity, which I greatly enjoy. I also strongly believe that I would never have gone to graduate school if I’d never encountered my husband’s extremely colorful religious family. My desire to understand the inner workings of individual minds was most heavily influenced by my husband who, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt, loves me. I have come to realize that Love and Pain are partners. However, suffering is all together different from pain and heavily dependent on the mind. For the mind has the power to prolong or mitigate the pain. I’d like to thank my husband for showing me that Love is patient and does endure. Thank you to my siblings who had a great deal more to do with how I turned out than they may ever know. I think I turned out pretty good. I’d like to thank Alfred Adler, the staff and faculty of Adler Graduate School who taught me, by example and through study, the courage to be imperfect.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis and my graduate school journey to the inner child, which has struggled to understand the twists and turns Life, has given her. Thank you for your curiosity and stubbornness. You are an important part of my tribe and just as strong as any other part of my mental being.
The Use of Religious Myth to Control the American Mind

Religion as it is understood can be divided into three distinct views: “Fundamentalist” which ignores science and modernity in favor of religion; “Rationalist”, which set religion against modernity but opt for modernity over religion; and the “Romantic” position that reconciles religion with modernity (Segal, 1999). Rationalists believe religion can exist only as it serves to explain the physical world, which the rise of science now precludes. ‘Romantics’ believe that religion, while serving as an explanation of the physical world until dislodged by science, is at heart anything but an explanation (Segal, p. 547). The writer will show in this review that strict adherence to any view, which enforces mythological idolization of religion can be detrimental to the believer. When religion is used as a criterion for acceptance it creates division and separation not unity.

Religious ideas formed into idols become historical and therefore can be considered dead. This is because an event that may have taken place thousands of years ago must now be accepted as true even if modern man has the insight and knowledge to disprove the story as it has been told. Why must it be accepted? To avoid being thought of as strange, different, evil or perhaps to be happy and content within the world collectively created by man. Take for example the belief, long held by man, that the earth was flat. Many scholars were tortured and killed for disproving this idea, widely accepted as fact. Fundamentalist Religion has been used throughout the centuries to control the minds of men. Rationalists only maintain religious beliefs if they can be used to explain the physical world. Both Fundamentalist and Rationalist beliefs require blind faith for the politics of both to be successful.

For this reason the writer supports the Romantics view.
“For romantics, religion, while an explanation until superseded by science, can still exist and, more, thrive even when no longer an explanation. In fact, the conflict with science gives religion the opportunity to rid itself of its explanatory baggage and to make explicit for the first time its non-explanatory core. Far from threatening religion, science abets religion by obliging it to show that it has always been other than an explanation, even if its non-explanatory core is recognized only now. A virtue is made out of a necessity.” (Segal, 1999, p. 549)

Religion viewed through romanticist’s eyes can serve as a bridge to reconcile scientific rationalist and traditional fundamentalist views. Rationalist, depending primarily upon physical proof, have little to no use for fundamentalist’s views, seeing them primarily as myth. Fundamentalists have little use for science believing modern science seeks to negate religious myths born of fact (Segal, 1999). Religion need not be opposed to science and is instead of opposed to science supported by it. There are many unseen elements in the world. If they cannot be seen then does this mean they do not exist? And of everything that can be seen and known must there be an explanation? Religion can answer many questions, but only if one is willing to have faith by not questioning the incongruities that are countless.

**Religion**

**What is Religion?**

Religion is a construct invented, by Western civilization, to give definition to the study of man’s creation, a subject that contains a great deal of complexity.

It is a well-worn observation in the academic study of religion that the effort to define the object of study is an impossibility. "Religion," we have learned, is a heuristic invention, the product of the Enlightenment project and even, as some would have it,
the scholar's study.' As Jonathan Z. Smith has put it provocatively, "'Religion' is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define" (195-94). In other words, there is no stable object out there in the world that functions as the clear referent for the word religion as a generic classification. The generic term itself was produced through the experience and observation of difference. (Castelli, 2010, p. 125)

Robert Bernasconi, writes in his article, “Must We Avoid Speaking of Religion? The Truths of Religions,” there is difficulty and ambiguity involved in defining what ‘religion’ is (2009, pp. 204-223). Religion is a construct of Western civilization. As Western theologians began to recognize, through contact and colonization of different culture’s, worship or recognition of a higher power, they sought to define the newly encountered beliefs through the eyes of Christianity. Many of the newly encountered beliefs were recognized as being pagan. This created a dilemma for the Western theologian who feared for the souls of the pagans and questioned whether or not the pagans would be able to attain salvation, given Christianity’s respective beliefs (Bernasconi, 2009).

The dilemma of salvation led to a search for similarities in Christian principals and practices as compared to the newly encountered Pagan cultures. Similarities were found and perceived to be shadows of Christianity’s God. The more a Pagan culture’s practices resembled Christian teachings the more civilized the culture was believed to be. This gave comfort to Western theologians in that they believed God, as understood by Christians, had already deposited seeds, which now needed to be cultivated (Bernasconi, 2009). “To sustain this idea of religion, it is necessary to seek out and identify various practices as religions, using one or two religions as the model in terms of which all other religions are to be read—
positively or negatively” (Bernasconi, p. 207). Western civilization recognizes and acknowledges Islam and Judaism as having historical religious foundations. Both religions share common texts, themes and figureheads found in Christianity.

Today religions are primarily recognized as such if they closely resemble Western ideas of Christianity. The more dissimilar a form of worship is from Christianity, the more likely it is to be considered mystical, witchcraft, occult practice or Atheistic.

**Atheism**

“Atheism is relatively easy to define; it is the lack of belief in God or Gods. Atheists tend to subscribe to strong atheism, the belief that God, or gods, do not exist, or so-called weak atheism, the lack of belief in a supreme being” (D'Andrea, 2007, p. 152). Atheist in America, until recently, were not widely recognized or respected as deserving recognition or study as an independent group (D'Andrea, 2007). “It’s been...suggested that the reason this group has largely been ignored...is because scholars tend to focus their attention on topics that are politically correct and publishable, therefore ignoring topics that are likely to draw controversy” (D'Andrea, 2007, p. 150). Capitalism and freedom of speech are at the heart of the United States of America’s core value system. To be successful in America requires knowing the mindset of your audience for marketing purposes. In the United States separation of church and state is another core belief and practice. Yet this practice has not been strictly enforced as it pertains to the mind and it’s set of beliefs. Still, churches must employ business practices, such as marketing and fund raising (*tithing*) in order to survive and more importantly thrive. The message (*marketing*) delivered (*preached*) in a church must be palatable by visitors and parishioners alike; if it is not, the church may have little chance of success. For this reason most Christian churches, that reference the Bible, espouse the message of salvation from a fiery hell
and the deliverance to, an ethereal, heaven (Matthew 5:20-22 King James Version).

“Conservatives (Fundamentalist) understand the bible as the inspired word of God, authoritative to the life of believers, and containing sufficient and exclusive truth for salvation. The bible is believed to give a true account of events as recorded, and passages have a meaning that is universally true and clearly evident to those who have faith” (Village, 2005, p. 245). Faith in God is a requirement for salvation. Obedience to an authoritarian, albeit loving, God that will commit the non-believer to a fiery hell is also required (Rev. 21:8). If individuals are unable or unwilling to accept the Bible’s teachings as true they often are considered to be Atheists or non-believers.

Atheists are not widely recognized because of the risk involved with recognizing an Atheistic view as valid. “The current sociopolitical contour of the United States makes it unpopular to acknowledge, let alone focus, on this particular group, as is evidenced by the scarcity of scholarly material on this topic” (D'Andrea, 2007, p. 150). On the American dollar are printed the words “In God We Trust”. This gives a clear indication to the world and United States inhabitants how we define and align ourselves as a nation regarding God.

Recognition of human rights in the United States should leave a comfortable amount of room for the Atheist point of view. If diversity and multiculturalism are important to the United States, then Atheists have as much right to recognition as all other groups that are considered to be a part of the diverse groups of minorities that make up its populace.

It is estimated that approximately 4-5% of American citizens have consistently identified as atheist (more precise estimates of how many Americans are atheists are difficult because the law prevents the Census Bureau from asking about religious affiliation (U.S. Census, 2000); and about 14% of the population
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worldwide claim to be atheist, agnostic, or nonreligious (Hunter, 2005). For comparison, nearly 4-10% of the U.S. population identifies as gay or lesbian (Miller & House, 2001), 3.6% identify their ethnicity as Asian, and 0.1% identify as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In other words, there is approximately the same number of atheists (or nonbelievers) in the United States as there are Asians or gay and lesbian individuals. (D'Andrea, 2007, pp. 151-152)

Looking at the percentages listed above the writer can logically conclude that Atheists are a legitimate group of non-believers that deserve to be recognized and respected as such. What an individual believes should not exclude that individual from being recognized and acknowledged as having a valid, albeit unpopular viewpoint, no matter how much it may differ from the beliefs and ideas held by the majority. Belief in an idea does not construct reality because the number of believers is great. Remember at one time it was believed the world was flat, a small minority of disbelievers sought to prove otherwise. This small group pressed on for truth and clarity under pressure and persecution from the ruling majority to discontinue proving otherwise—these actions were widely considered to be blasphemy or non-belief. This may no longer be the case.

A new group of atheist is on the rise called the “Nones,” by current sociologists. This group represents a younger generation of individuals primarily under the age of thirty who have no religious affiliation. This is the same group that has historically made up 5-7% of the American population. By 2011 the group had increased to 19%, this was a huge demographic shift. This group of individuals also known as the millennials are less religious than their seniors; people tend to become more religious when they get married, have children, and put
down roots in a community (demographers call this the life-cycle effect). However this group in 2012 is much more likely to reject all religious affiliation than their elders did when they were young -- 33 percent today, compared with 12 percent in the 1970s (Campbell & Putnam, 2012).

**Religious Authoritarianism**

In the United States it is advantageous for a group that is not a part of the Christian majority to quietly practice it’s beliefs or find a way to assimilate and become invisible or appear more like the majority. This has not been an easy task for the Muslim community. “It is correct to state that the Muslims’ struggle in America has been not only to co-exist with the other, but also to make themselves comprehensible in the American milieu, to de-mystify and de-code Islam and to challenge its negative characterization in the media” (Takim, 2004, p. 345).

Is it possible for people of varying religious backgrounds to gain acceptance in the melting pot known as the United States? If history has been indicative of the outcome, then the answer is no; on the other hand, if one looks forward and allows for differing views and opinions, then open-mindedness may make way for communication of different beliefs. Communication must remain two sided. In order for this to happen no side can take an authoritarianism position. “An essential component in dialogue is the willingness to reexamine one’s faith in the light of how others relate to their tradition and the ability to strengthen or adjust one’s own engagement and interaction with the sacred based on the experiences of the other. Understanding the faith of others should strengthen rather than weaken a person’s commitment to his or her tradition” (Takim, 2004, p. 346).

The writer believes one would live in harmony more easily if Takim’s statement was
practiced. However Western Christianity’s overriding stance has been that its belief is correct and absolute by authority of Christianity’s God (Village, 2005). Due to this stance, “interfaith dialogue is also fraught with challenges that need to be addressed. Essentially, trust is an important element when human beings meet to discuss and share their personal beliefs” (Takim, 2004, p. 349). For example, “Muslims have yet to be convinced that dialogue is a way for reconciliation or expressing their beliefs. Given the history of Christian missionary work in Muslim countries, many Muslims see dialogue as a subtle form of evangelization” (Takim, 2004, p. 349).

Western Christianity’s values are deeply ingrained in the subconscious mind of many believers. A deep mental dependence on an external God is required. Three factors that shape the human psyche and entrap the mind are as follows: locus of control, impression management and self-consciousness. In Carrie Springer’s article, “Codependency: Clarify the Construct,” she explains these factors (Britt, Schlenker, & Springer, 1998, pp. 141-159). “Locus of control refers to whether people believe their lives are controlled by internal personal characteristics, or external environmental influences” (Britt, Schlenker, & Springer, 1998, pp. 141-159). Having an external locus of control has been prevalent in people who struggle with codependency. “Previous research has found a relationship between high codependency and high external locus of control…” (Britt, Schlenker, & Springer, 1998, pp. 141-159). This ties in closely with ‘impression management’, which often involves the packaging of information that is basically truthful… the concept is sometimes associated with public pretense and dissimulation” (Britt, Schlenker, & Springer, 1998, pp. 141-159). This can lead to acting and behaving in ways that are considered acceptable to fellow Christian believers. The third factor, “self-consciousness refers to the chronic tendency to focus attention on oneself…. There are two dimensions of
self-consciousness, private self-consciousness and public self-consciousness” (Britt, Schlenker, & Springer, 1998, pp. 141-159). The former is attributed to individuals who focus on their own internal barometers. In contrast, the latter are dependent on social opinion and approval and tend to ignore inner promptings. All three factors are utilized in fundamentalist and, to a certain extent, rationalist Christian views.

**Summary**

Religion, as it has been taught, from a Western Christian fundamentalist and rationalist standpoint, leaves little room for discussion. Any questioning or disagreement of what is perceived by many believers as truth may be perceived as a crisis or lack of faith in ideas or beliefs made true by the mere number of individuals who claim truth without any facts or proof. For many American Christian believers the Bible is believed to be the inspired word of God, any views that would state otherwise are not openly accepted. This is not because the Bible has been proven to be 100% factual. It is primarily because the believers have chosen to believe the teaching set forth to gain acceptance and approval by the general public. For example, if Islam were the primary religion being discussed by Islamists, the majority of believers would espouse Allah as their God. If Jewish believers were discussing Judaism, Yahweh would be their God. Alfred Adler would have most likely classified these sets of beliefs as “Guiding Fictions”. Fictions arise as “real in our mind” and are presumed to constitute reality. He recognized in his clinical work how people create fictions as a problem-solving strategy for coping with life and for dealing with problems apart from conscious recognition. People may employ fictions not “as if” true in some practical fashion but as definitely constituting reality (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964).

“There was a time when many states' policies were directly and explicitly influenced by
its religious composition, often for the exclusive benefit of one group. For example, many of the colonies' tax policies favored one religious denomination over another, and Prohibition was an attempt by rural, Protestant native-born citizens to establish the superiority of their values over urban…Many states still have remnants of Christian-inspired blue laws that restrict activities…Even though direct financial subsidies and explicit legislative support might be a thing of the past, religion still appears to have a significant role in politics and policy making” (Hahn & Scheitle, 2011, p. 915).

Given the writer’s brief descriptions of mental factors, which shape the human mind, a critical thinker might surmise that many Christians are participating in a codependent relationship with an idea reinforced by laymen and ministers of the Christian church. Little if any critical thinking is encouraged or done when matters of religion are discussed. Faith is touted as the primary way to proceed in life when faced with any unanswered questions or dilemmas. It was documented in 2001, that of the approximately 159,000,000 United States inhabitants’, over 75% were Christian (Kohut & Rogers, 2001). The majority of believers are still Christians. In terms of America, a citizen is more likely to be accepted as an American if they are Christian. The writer finds it interesting that many stories told about the characters in the Bible, shape the beliefs and direction for many Christian Americans when many of the writers had no knowledge or concept of America as it is today. All a marketer has to do is pick out a story, next spin a captivating tale, which closely aligns with the plight of a biblical figurehead, and a myth is born; a myth to be upheld and followed until it is known, believed to be the truth or assimilated in one’s psyche as a guiding fiction to be lived until death.
Myths

What are Myths?

A myth is understood as a story or a narrative that is told and thought to be true (Brown, 2004). “It is a narrative that represents an active drama that people can identify with and participate in...” [Myth]…is a presentation of human history in a participating form so that in a myth one can tell that one’s own life and fortunes are involved in the story being told” (Brown, 2004, p. 276). Joseph Campbell studied myths from many different cultures all over the world. He found that a common pattern runs through them all. They start out with a hero who is enjoying life. All of a sudden there is a crisis, people are oppressed, a fiscal cliff is on the horizon and someone must be saved. The hero has no choice but to volunteer his/her help or hide until a powerful force pushes him/her into action. The hero next must find a solution or find a cure for the problem. In an effort to find a solution, he or she meets a magical helper. Together, they battle an evil opponent, who forces the hero to enter a kingdom of darkness — agreement with undesirables, the world beneath the Earth, or even the belly of a whale. The hero faces many dangers but refuses to give up. Finally, a change of events occurs and the hero captures the prize. Next the hero must escape from the kingdom of darkness...danger and return home. In the end the hero always brings home the prize and the crisis is solved (Levinson, 2008).

Myths can used to generate sentiment and unity that bind a group of people together. Questioning a myth that has come to be accepted as truth can lead to problems as severe as loss of life or difficulty surviving for non-belief. Slavery in the United States is a good example of a myth carried to the extreme. It was widely believed and erroneously proven through scientific racism, that people of African descent were inferior to people of European descent since the
1500s (Fairchild, 1991, p. 109). Because this myth was accepted and believed, many people of African descent were enslaved and forced, against their will, to build (Fairchild, 1991) and develop the United States into the country it is today.

“Myths are a critical way for all cultures to articulate shared beliefs and encourage future actions based upon a particular notion of the past (or the ‘present’ as articulated through the past)” (Brown, 2004, p. 275). Note that myths are maintained through a system of beliefs often not easily proven, hence the need for blind faith. The author Waldo Braden’s definition of myth is as follows: “The myth draws upon memory and imagination, that it results from a collective effort over a considerable period of time, that it represents an oversimplification of events, persons, and relationships, that its substance is more emotional than logical, and that it combines both reality and fiction. In other words, it results from considerable abstracting on the part of many persons.” (Brown, 2004, p. 276)

Braden’s definition of myth helps give understanding for the reasons why religion can be such a powerful force in the lives of believers. If the story given can gain enough believers who believe they are impacted by the tale, then the story becomes alive and present in the mind of the believer. For example the premise of heaven and hell, as told, in the Bible can increase allegiance through fear of winding up in hell (Rev. 21:8).

“Braden’s definition implies that myth is an idealized narrative, based on tradition that defines cultural values and beliefs and is perpetuated by society. Rhetorically, a myth upholds cultural values, defines acceptable morals, and validates certain beliefs, expectations, and behaviors. Although myths tend to appeal more to emotion than logic, the subject matter of the narrative must offer an acceptable justification of the ideas contained in the myth. The actual truth or falsity of the narrative is irrelevant. What is
important is whether the ideas presented in the narrative are accepted and believed to be true” (Brown, 2004, p. 277).

Here Braden confirms the writer’s summation, that fear can be a strong motivator in emotionally stirring the hearts of men. The power of myth has shaped many minds and thus nations. Even today many religious believers offend their fellow man through various means, even to the point of murder through warfare “sanctioned” by God.

**Effect of Myths on Society**

From Braden’s definition the writer concludes that social acceptance is important when determining what should be believed or disbelieved for the individual beliefs. If as a member of a group an individual wants to gain or maintain social acceptance, then the member of the group does well to agree with the mythology of the group or face exclusion and difficulty within the group (Brown, 2004). The writer will examine how myths function in shaping the mind set of various groups in society.

“The literature suggests that there are four primary ways that myths function. First, myths function to confirm, intensify, and reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and values….

Second, myths serve as means for escaping reality… Third, myths are a means to unify diverse audiences because they convey universal values such as liberty, freedom, and patriotism…. Fourth, myths function to construct social structures…. Myths continue to be the basic models of culture because myths enable individuals to interpret and construct meaning in an ever-changing, technologically advanced society (Brown, 2004, p. 277).”

The process of constructing meaning and understanding further clarifies how myths influence communication and the values that guide our behaviors. It also conveys the dynamic
nature of cultural processes in which social reality is constantly developing and changing (Brown, 2004, p. 289). This means that whatever the majority decides to internalize will more than likely shape the social framework in which it moves, and as the majority moves—so society moves.

It is understood that a nationalist myth is a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation's past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology: a story that explains its contemporary meaning through reconstructing its’ past. It subsumes all of the various events, personalities, traditions, artifacts and social practices that (self) define the nation and its relation to all (Bell, 2003). “Myths are constructed, they are shaped, whether by deliberate manipulation and intentional action, or perhaps through the particular resonance of works of literature and art” (Bell, 2003, p. 75). Such can be seen in the Fundamental Constitution of Carolina. John Locke a major contributor in the Constitution of The United States helped to draft and implement Carolina’s Constitution. In it a provision was drafted that required “no freeman” for those who did not “acknowledge a God”, as represented by the Church of England. In this way all members of the American Indian nations, Africans, Catholics, Jews and other non-Church of England members were excluded from the free, semi-free, or wage workforce. This basically insured an enslaved poor unpaid working class of people who were cosigned to hereditary chattel slavery (Richardson, 2011). This law perpetuated the myth that people were born into certain stations and cultures that relegated them to live their entire lives as God ordained or created.

**Religious Myths**

Religious myths can be maintained and upheld especially if a large enough number of people believes in the story or narrative set forth (Brown, 2004). In the United States it is
believed that approximately 95% of the general population believes in God. If the majority of these believers believe in the same myths, the power of the believers can be stronger than a tsunami. The writer gives evidence of religious belief for United States Citizens below:

Results of 12 Gallup Polls over the last 35 years have been surprisingly consistent. Polls have indicated that:

(1) 95% of the general population believes in God;
(2) 84% of those surveyed considered religion important or very important in their lives;
(3) 78% pray on a regular basis;
(4) 42% had attended a religious service within the last week (Gallup, 1985).

Intuitively, many providers are aware of the important role of religion and spirituality in the lives of the general population. In many cases these influences form the basis of self-definition and are important factors in family tradition and social support. Religious activities consume a great amount of...time and serve as important coping strategies (Aponte, 1996; Benson, 1996; McEwen, 1998; Pargament, 1997, 1998; Smith, 1994; Waldfogel, 1997) (Coyle, 2001, p. 150).

In the United States the number of Christian believers is more than 75% of the population (Kohut & Rogers, 2001). Religious beliefs have been and still are used to move the minds of the American public. Take a look at the battle being fought by Gay and Lesbian couples to marry each other. The primary defense is based on religious views of morality. Many Christian American believe it is sinful for two people of the same sex to marry (Thomas, 2011).

In contrast religious myths can also be used to empower individuals to live productive and fulfilling lives. The writer believes for this to be the case the believer may believe in ideas
set forth and then strive to live by these ideas in order to live a peaceful and harmonious life. Still the writer also believes that it is necessary for the believer to think critically about beliefs, which are maintained, and in so doing let go of those beliefs that do not serve the believer.

Recent reviews and bibliographic collections have pointed to many beneficial effects of religion and spirituality in people’s lives...Older studies have clearly found that conventional religious beliefs are not a product of or associated with psycho-pathology and that in fact psychopathology probably impedes the manifestation of conventional religious beliefs and activities...These reviews have indicated a generally positive effect of religion on mental health, well-being, coping, self-esteem, drug and alcohol use, suicide, reduction of death anxiety and marital and family issues. Of particular note are several studies that have shown religious and spiritual activities to be highly protective for alcohol and substance abuse...Also, despite evidence that religious and spiritual activities are highly protective against suicide...researchers have found that religious assessment is absent from nearly all suicide risk assessments in current usage. (Coyle, 2001, p. 155)

Here the author Coyle gives evidence of religious beliefs actually being beneficial and possibly a sign of good mental health. He states above that it would be difficult to maintain and practice conservative religious beliefs. Trying to do so might lead to secularization or a decline in religion. Carl Marx was perhaps less sure of religion’s decline, though he was pretty sure of it, given people’s need to throw off chains. But he was certainly no less sure that, if such a decline occurred, the result would be liberating. Religion was an opiate without which clearer heads would prevail (Clark & Grandchamp, 2011).
Summary

In this section the writer sought to give explanation of myths and tie them into religious beliefs. If an individual adheres to a belief and internalizes the narrative or story that supports a belief, the belief can become a *guiding fiction* for the person without the individual being aware of the internal transformation. Transformation illustrates the change from an idea becoming a part of the believer. Take for instance a therapist who holds many traditional Christian beliefs, one such being the only way to God is through Jesus, and is expected to give therapy to a Native American who is having a crisis of faith. Will the therapist be able to address the Native American’s crisis objectively or proselytize his/her client? It has been noted in professions requiring an ethical treatment, that professionals, when faced with dilemmas, often will use intuition. However this doesn’t always lead to appropriate behavior. Intuition is often colored by one’s cultural upbringing or guiding fiction. A “professional’s immediate reaction to a dilemma may be based on his or her familial upbringing but may bare little relationship to sound ethical decision making” (Parker, 1990). Faced with the dilemma of how to proceed in therapy a fiction can easily be constructed to give meaning to an unknown territory. For example, a therapist could tell his/her client that it must be fate for the Native American client to have come in to see him/her. Next, inadvertently the therapist could share his/her own experience and belief of God instead of helping the client draw his/her own ideas and conclusions about what faith is to him/her. If not done in a clinical fashion, the therapist could wind up evangelizing the client on behalf of the therapist’s own faith.

Social Structures

Societal Norms/Social Structures

In this section the writer discusses societal norms in the United States. These norms are
shaped and adhered to by the majority of America’s citizens. Because America is predominately Christian these norms can hardly be formed without Christian participation (Kohut & Rogers, 2001).

It is important to note that, “although norms of religious freedom, tolerance, and respect for human rights make it possible for non-Western religions to be accepted as part of civil society, the degree to which their members become fully integrated into the society depends not only on public tolerance but also on the resources these groups have at their disposal” (Hackett & Wuthnow, 2003, p. 653).

In other words, the more financially independent a person is, the more tolerated a non-Western religion may be.

The sciences of “psychology and theology are discourses (among others) that create the lens by which we make normative claims about human beings and human behavior and they make sense of experience by creating systems and patterns in order to make sense of the broad mix of complex and contradictory events of modern life” (Belvins, 2008, p. 26). Again the more a non-Western religion resembles Christianity, the more likely it is to be accepted (Takim, 2004).

Social structures are the organized patterns of social relationships and social institutions that together compose society. Social structures are not immediately visible to the untrained observer, however they are present and affect all dimensions of human experience in society. For example Social class is one example of social structure. Social class shapes the access that different groups have to the resources of society and it shapes many interactions that people have with each other. As a social structure, it guides and shapes human behavior at all levels, no matter how overtly visible or invisible it is at any given time (Crossman, 2013).
Divine Control

Divine control is defined as the extent to which an individual perceives that God has a final authority over the way a person’s life plays out, good or bad (Christopher G., Leonard I., Tetyana, & Scott, 2006). No matter what form cultural, local or personal anxieties are made up of religion presents a remedy to calm and assuage fears by recourse to reassuring beliefs, practices, or amenities. It is believed that all religions have a selection of suffering and prescribed remedies for relief (Ellison, Pearlin, Pudrovska, & Schieman, 2006).

Divine control helps to facilitate Secondary Control and Social Affiliation. Both vehicles that help support and solidify religious structures that allow America to operate as it has up until recent times.

Control may be one pathway through which people benefit from religion (e.g., George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Krause, 1992; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), and research suggests that control can take two forms: primary and secondary control. Although both forms of control involve active agency, primary control refers to the attempt to influence the external environment according to the self's needs, whereas secondary control refers to the attempt to adjust part of the self to accept the situation (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Oerter, Oerter, Agostiani, Kim, & Wibowo, 1996; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Although religions may recruit varying amounts of primary and secondary control across situations, psychologists have theorized that religions emphasize mostly secondary control, as they endorse alignment of the self to a god or spiritual force and acceptance of circumstances as core principles (Spilka et al., 2003; Weisz et al., 1984). In addition, empirical research has shown that religious coping strategies predict positive psychological outcomes, with the most
beneficial form being “collaborative” religious coping, or trying to gain a sense of control by believing that one shares responsibilities of solving a problem with God (Pargament et al., 1999). A recent review also concluded that religion promotes greater self-control, or the ability to override an initial inclination in order to achieve another desired goal (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). It seems that, overall, religion may have the beneficial effect of increasing secondary control, allowing people to accept the situation and adjust the self by exerting greater control over their own behaviors.

Besides helping individuals to gain a sense of control, religion seems to carry socially relevant advantages. By encouraging fellowship with others and formal involvement in other social activities (Chen & Contrada, 2007), religious communities may offer members the benefits of social ties and increased social support to help them cope with mental and physical stress (George et al., 2002; Hill & Butter, 1995; Rogers, 1996; Seybold & Hill, 2001). For example, one study on the relationship between social ties and mortality showed that membership in a church predicted longevity, whereas membership in other types of groups (e.g., labor, political, service) was not significantly related to mortality risk for the elderly (Seeman, Kaplan, Knudsen, Cohen, & Guralnik, 1987). High levels of social support from religious involvement may also be associated with reduced cardiovascular reactivity, which is linked to lower risk of cardiovascular mortality (Chen & Contrada, 2007). Thus, it seems that social affiliation—drawing on a social support network and gaining a sense of belonging to a community—is also an important outcome of religious involvement. However, research on how religion relates to secondary control and social affiliation has
been conducted primarily in North American cultural contexts, and most of these studies assume the impact of religion to be largely universal… (Sasaki, 2011)

As is shown here in the study conducted by Joni Sasaki, religion affects the culture it supports (Sasaki, 2011). People stay calm and accept circumstances that are often less than desirable. Taken at face value this can be seen as beneficial as long as it does not take on the characteristics of an opiate.

**Politics**

Politics are as important to the foundation of a nation as are its beliefs. It is often through the maneuverings and manipulation of the voters that politicians gain power, power to change perceptions and shape policy. The past is often used to engender fear, hope or inspiration for the politician seeking to collect voters. Using the past creatively can be a birth to myths that can be detrimental or positive for the people who adopt them.

Tzvetan Todorov wrote that when commemoration freezes into permanent forms that cannot be changed without cries of sacrilege, we can be certain that it serves the particular interests of its defenders and not their moral edification (Bell, 2003, p. 75). Politicians are key in shaping national views. How a nation views itself, as a whole, will be closely allied with how the individuals of that nation view themselves (Bell, 2003). “To recognize oneself as a member of a particular nation — indeed to feel a powerful sense of belonging - and to be recognized by others as such, is a perquisite for the formation of the inside/outside, self/other, this/them boundaries that define the topography of nationalist sentiment and rhetoric” (Bell, 2003, p. 64).

Politics are largely concerned with the organization of power. The organization of
power, whether it is in a State or a site of resistance, is ultimately a tactical question. For the organization of power may either capture and dissipate the varied energies of the political or it may transform and proliferate those energies…Philip Goodchild outlines the three kinds of power, which make up the political:

1. The first kind of power is the purely physical power of limited physical resources, such as petrol, ammunition and food.
2. The second kind of power is that of the human will as expressed in speech and action articulated in law and the market.
3. An intangible energy, which cannot be identified with either physical power or human will: “It is the authority that guides and authorizes the action of will upon will.”

Goodchild writes, “The modern notion of the political remains contaminated by a theological problematic inherent in its very notion of power. Power rests on meta-human flows of beliefs and desires” (Smith, 2011, pp. 69-71).

From the day the Pilgrims stepped off the Mayflower, religion has played a prominent role in American public life. The faithful have been vital participants in nearly every major social movement in U.S. history, progressive as well as conservative. Still, the close intertwining of religion and politics in the last 40 years is unusual, especially in the degree of the politicization of religion itself. Indeed, religion's influence on U.S. politics has hit a high-water mark, especially on the right. Yet at the same time, its role in Americans' personal lives is ebbing. As religion and politics have become entangled, many Americans, especially younger ones, have pulled away from religion. And that correlation turns out to be causal, not coincidental (Campbell & Putnam, 2012).
In other words Politics and religion have been purposely intertwined to gain at the very least influence and most likely power over the masses. The value of politics and civic action by the people as a primary source of progress toward a civil society retained, however, the idea of the legitimacy of external authority. Over time with the advent and acceptance of Science opened the possibility for modern technology, economics, and social organization characterized in the United States by freedom from a monarchy linked to divine providence to a hierarchy of secular authority grounded in white supremacy, paradoxically, like aristocracy, an inborn characteristic that cannot be acquired (Richardson, 2011). In other words just as English monarchy had maintained rule and status due to divine providence, the new Americans sought to define and create a division between the civilized and barbaric people. Both were born into their respective stations and were expected to remain into perpetuity (Richardson, 2011).

**Summary**

This section shines light on how malleable societal norms and paradigms can be. Both are shaped and enforced by the minds of the people that maintain beliefs about how they should play out their respective lives. Politicians are adept at recognizing what will move a nations people. For many members of American society these beliefs are shared, in particular beliefs about God (Kohut & Rogers, 2001). In a study done by, Radha J. Parker, it was noted,

"that dogmatism and orthodox Christian beliefs are incompatible with ethical acuity… The significant inverse relationship between orthodox Christian beliefs and ethical judgment further indicates that individuals who adhere to fundamentalist Christian dogma tend to have lower ethical orientations than do their more liberal counterparts. The combined variables of dogmatism and orthodox Christian beliefs, which have a high positive correlation, account for a significant amount of the total variance in
Power, if left unquestioned and challenged, will further enslave the minds of the masses through the continued use of paradigms created through the use of myth that have been received and now considered beliefs which are thought to be rooted in fact.

A paradigm is a collection of beliefs, values, and approaches held by members within a particular community. Paradigms shape fundamentals beliefs, including what may be perceived as real solutions used by members of a community (Ashcroft, 2010). One such paradigm still widely maintained in America is the legal recognition of only heterosexual marriage. Same sex marriages are considered illegal in many states (Thomas, 2011). This paradigm is strongly upheld by the Christian religion in the United States. It will not change until the mindsets or consciousness of many Americans change. It will take an awakening—a paradigm shift—to unlearn inaccuracies and deprogram prejudices that have been repeated innumerable ways throughout the centuries (O'Haynes, 2011). The prejudice and inequality that continue are in large part to an overwhelming number of individuals that resign themselves to the belief that a higher power is responsible for the way things are and the only way things will change is if and when God comes back to change them. If the majority of American Citizens can be convinced that their faith, belief in God, is threatened they can be moved to do a great deal, regardless of the logical repercussions ethical or otherwise.

Summary

The writer has shown the power and force of religion in the United States. The relative power theory maintains that economic inequality not only makes religion more attractive to wealthy individuals, it also magnifies their ability to spread religion to others. Because money is a source of power, if a society’s income and wealth are more concentrated, power will also
be more concentrated: the rich have more power relative to the poor when inequality is greater (Solt, 2008). Because power can be exercised to shape the attitudes and beliefs of others, this greater relative power of the rich allows them to spread their own values and beliefs more extensively than where economic resources are more equally distributed. In the context of religion, this can be seen most clearly through inequality’s effects on contributions to religious organizations (Grant, Habel, & Solt, 2011). Laws whether they are religious or civil can offset the irrational extreme of power and authority in the historic formation of the liberal nation-state, America. The biggest enemy to humanity in the present millennium is the undermining law by the monopoly of power (Richardson, 2011).

Through the use of myth and societal structures the majority of Americans have been persuaded to act on emotional impulse instead of critical reasoning. This is not because Americans are not intelligent, but because the majority has been trained to proceed by faith. Faith that is based largely in a God, who gives directives from the Bible, written by man and interpreted by an appointed individual, believed to have divine understanding.

Faith in religion is not bad if it helps maintain a positive outlook and life trajectory. On the other hand, if religion is used to manipulate and enslave it can lead to the death in spirit of the individual who maintains a particular religious belief. John Locke once wrote that consent of the governed is central in just political societies. “The only way that a person can divest himself of his natural liberty is to agree to do so in order to join a community that secures comfort, safety, peaceful living, and property rights (Richardson, 2011). Many have given up their freedom figuratively and literally by maintaining and reinforcing the traditions and convictions handed down from previous generations. When John Locke was writing about civilized society in contrast to what he believed the American Indians to be, disorderly and
uncivilized, he more than likely had little idea about the road map he was setting forth to be followed by the young and growing new Americans (European), He argued that the true “liberty of man in society” can only be established by subordination to a higher authority (Richardson, 2011).

Those who have sought to preserve society’s fantasy of sovereignty and perpetuation of the material world have long sought to keep the masses in permanent denial…They will not seek ancestral knowledge or desire a paradigm shift, for it would mean an end to their materialistic bubble; a disintegration of their power illusions; an end to their amnesia of past cataclysmic cycles; and recognition of their humble place within the universe (O'Haynes, 2011).

I challenge the reader of any religion to shift from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control. In so doing freedom of mind may began to arise and self-confidence increase. Do not fear that you are losing God; you may only be releasing the mediator who has stood between you and God for most of your life. The Bible states that broad is the road that leads to destruction...yet narrow is the road that leads to salvation, Matthew 7:13. Could it be that the broad road is the road that many follow as sheep being herded by the rich and powerful, while the narrow road is the one traveled by a few who see and realize the impoverished nature of man? The nature that may not have been encouraged to look within for guidance and understanding, the nature that has become afraid to follow it’s dream and thereby offer an unknown gift to the world. The great leaders and people who have left the world and it’s inhabitants better for having lived were not afraid to live their truth and share their desire for freedom and abundance in life for all mankind. Unfortunately many of these very individuals died in effort to share their inspiring beliefs. Instead these very individuals were
made into idols to be worshiped and paid homage to for the benefit of a few here on earth with the promise of great reward in the after life. Sounds a lot like Christmas. The writer maintained a guiding fiction, which held a belief in Santa Claus. At some point the writer made a conscious choice to release the belief until it needed to be passed on to the writer’s children for their own enjoyment and a minimal amount of coercion.
References


of Homosexuality, 58(3), 315-329.
