

# GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

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*Prayer versus meditation? They're more alike than we realize*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Religious phenomena are an important branch of cultural landscape of geography, though its theoretical aspects remain un-discussed. Geographers may become more cautious of other approaches to the learning of religion. Whereas phenomenological awareness of the deepness of the religious quest in the human psyche is important, geographers are primarily concerned with religion's societal expression and hence will gain valuable insights through the adoption of an historical materialist approach to the study of religious institutions in class society.*

**KEY WORDS: Religion. Ideology. Institution. Institutionalization. Class. Historical Materialism**

The study of religion as a force in people's adaptation to and creation of landscape is certainly a proper and important endeavor of geography and especially of cultural geography. Landscape, in a very broad sense, conveys the idea of land utilization and development by people, and it is important to realize that ideologies, for example, religious beliefs, are crucial in the direction and accomplishment of this process. In turn, landscape formation affects the development of such beliefs. Whereas many geographers have studied aspects of the religious life and their environmental impacts very few have considered the nature of the geography of religion, that is, its areas of concern and its research perspectives. This paper suggests a research paradigm which geographers of religion have not generally adopted but which should prove directly useful to some and challenging to others. The adoption of phenomenological and historical materialist approaches have become commonplace in geography yet historical materialist approaches to the geography of religion have been relatively neglected. Here, an historical materialist approach is

suggested as a research perspective for geographers who want to appreciate more fully the socio-environmental impacts of religious institutions. More specifically, this paper addresses the question of the nature of the relationship between religion and society and its operation as an institution in class society.

## **RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF GEOGRAPHY**

That geographers have been interested in aspects of religious life is clear. A review of the last decade's work on the geography of religion by Sopher has shown that there has been a wide range of research, and that with a few exceptions, these efforts have been based on perspectives established prior to 1970.[1] Geography of religion is a sub-field of cultural geography which has lacked a theoretical debate.

Some cultural geographers have outlined the goals and subject areas of geography of religion. All have held positivist and idealist research perspectives. Even so, Pierre Deffontaines, Paul Fickeler, Erich Isaac and David Sopher have provided thoughtful studies and seminal insights in their attempts to define the geography of religion.

Human use of the environment has not only been directed towards people, it has also been oriented towards the sacred.[2]The perception of something beyond simple exploitation of the environment will have significant repercussions, both spiritual and physical. Pierre Deffontaines is very aware of the need to study the impact of thought and interpretation on action. This awareness of the impact of religious beliefs led him to produce the first major treatise on the geography of religion.[3]

In his work Deffontaines investigated the material repercussions of religious life and says that this is the task of the geography of religion. He stresses the importance of human intelligence and its perception of religious phenomena. Deffontaines does not dispute at all the reality of the spiritual but suggests that 'external causes act upon man through the intermediary of their psychological interpretation.[4] There are many different views of the supernatural and consequently religions arise.

There is a danger that this sort of analysis will emphasize individual perception at the expense of social forces. Deffontaines' work is consummately social, however, because he devotes himself to charting the social expression of religious beliefs.

Deffontaines sees religious acts as elements of the landscape and so, in his major work, he discussed mainly visible and physical acts. He dealt with religious phenomena in respect to what he felt were the five major elements of human geography: shelter, population exploitation, circulation, and genre de vie. Regarding shelter, he deals with housing for the living, of the dead, and of the Divinity. Concerning populations, he considers sacred sites, village rituals and layouts, cities' forms and functions as well as attitudes to birth, death and marriage and their consequences. With respect to exploitation, he refers to the religious origins of many crops, to the religious beginnings of domestication, to industrialism religions having required certain goods and to consumption. Circulation is used to refer to movement of people and goods which results from religious belief, for example, pilgrimages. Finally, regarding religion and the way of life, he discusses such things as food taboos, sacred meals and foods as well as work cycles. If a criticism were to be given, it is that this major treatise is sometimes like a catalogue rather than a thoughtful insight into the interaction of religion and landscape.

Deffontaines, one suspects, would be sympathetic to this criticism, for, as he wrote later,

the great task ahead consists in exploring with minute care, with wisdom, and with affection the motive power which has driven the human species to this point of industry and creativeness in fashioning human landscapes.[6]

Deffontaines' work does provide a frame of reference as well as inspiration for future geographical study of religion. What is central is an idealist philosophy which sees religion solely as a motive power in the transformation of landscape. He charts the social-physical expression of religious belief on the land. While this charting is important it is equally important to understand that religion is itself a social expression.

Fickeler, in his major paper on the geography of religion, suggests that all religions have in their development created a more or less manifest cultus, that is, magical and symbolic events, objects and behaviours, and because of this 'religious phenomena appear in a real relationship with the earth's surface

and so can be studied geographically'. [7] The geography of religion is primarily concerned with how religious forms affect landscape. Every religion has internal and external aspects which relate to ethics (and hence conduct) and ceremony (and thus worship), both of which will be important in the shaping of landscape.

Fickler's paper centres on three concepts: sanctity, ceremonialism, and toleration. He distinguishes two types of sanctity, nature-magic which identifies particularly with space or things and historical-religious which is related to a person or event. Whether religions are one or the other or both will have consequences in the development of landscapes. So will the processes of sanctification, desanctification and re-sanctification. Of great importance is the concept of ceremonial religious arrangements and their application. He distinguishes a religious ceremonialism that is oriented to sensory life (for example, religions of nature) from perceptual ceremonialism more oriented to commandments and prohibitions (for example, Islam). Differences in ceremonialism may reflect differences in national character and landscape. Finally, religious tolerance is significant, that is, what the relations of religion and creeds among themselves are, is extremely important.

Fickler discusses aspects of religious life which might be studied. The use of sacred colours (for example, yellow in Buddhism), of ceremonial sounds (for example, the bell's ring), of certain plants (especially trees), and of animals (for example, the bull) constitute areas which geographers might find rewarding.

While Fickler has tried to outline how religion may be influential in landscape transformation, he has neglected to show how landscape might affect religion. He does not do this because he feels that it is the province of the science of religion not geography. Fickler, as had Deffontaines, sees religion as motivational in landscape change but does not see it as resultant of social forces. This negates an appreciation of a dialectic between religion and landscape. Generation of change in one may change the other and, so, neither can be neglected.

For Erich Isaac, the

Geography of religion is the study of the part played by a religious motive in man's transformation of the landscape. It presumes the existence of a religious impulse in man which leads him to act upon his environment in a manner which responds secondarily, if at all to any other need. [8]

Religion, that is, experience of the supernatural, is an important motivating force in peoples' lives. Isaac suggests that there have been four groups of geographical studies which have dealt with religion. [9] One group deals with the effect of religion on cultural landscapes or regions; another studies religious structures, their locations, sites and orientations and designs; another considers demographic issues such as the distribution of religious groups, and the last attempts theoretical arguments which seek to define the concerns of the geography of religion of which the work of Deffontaines, Fickler, and Sopher would be examples.

Isaac thinks that the study of religious phenomena by geographers is essential. He cites the effects of myth on landscape development and its importance in the perception of space. Religion experience "symbolizes" space by assigning religious values to natural phenomena'. [10] Religion influences the use of environment. Having acknowledged this, Isaac is unhappy about previous work. Deffontaines, for instance, is seen by Isaac as attempting unsuccessfully to systematize types of religious landscape phenomena. All of the comprehensive studies he sees as simple classification systems. The question which lies beyond such simplistic endeavors is 'in what lies the transforming power of religion upon the landscape and why in different cultures, has the extent of its effects been so disparate'. [11] With Isaac, as with Deffontaines and Fickler, an idealist stance which sees religion as motivator is central. To study rather than catalogue is a truly laudable goal one which one senses that both Deffontaines and Fickler would have been sensitive to. However, it is not enough to see it as motivator only and not at least partially as a result of a concatenation of social forces.

In *Geography of Religions* Sopher outlines the major concerns of this branch of scholarly endeavor. [12] Cultural geography is concerned with two kinds of relations; the interaction between a

culture and its complex earth environment and the spatial interaction among different cultures. Religion must be studied with respect to these general relations. The geography of religions cannot deal with personal religious experience per se but can study organized religious systems and institutional religious behaviour.

Sopher divides religions into three broad groups: *ethnic*, which are tribal, national or associated with a particular civilization, *universalizing* which see themselves as proper to all people and attempt to proselytize, and *segmental*, which have no universalizing aspirations or have ceased to have them. He goes on to discuss the ecological bases of religious systems.

As society and economy become more complex, symbolization and abstraction of ecological matter increase, the process becoming intensified in the transition from ethnic to universalizing systems. [13]

This trend is well worth investigating. Further, just as Deffontaine, Fickeler, and Isaac had, he suggests that geographers must deal with religion and the land and outlines 'positive' and 'negative' aspects which should be considered. The 'positive' aspects are sacred structures, land use patterns, aggregation of plants and animals, and names on the land. The 'negative' expressions are food taboos and work taboos. Also there are many indirect expressions of religion on the land including such things as attitudes to reproduction, life and death. Sopher also discusses the religious organization of space noting that there are sacred spaces, sacred places, religious centres, religious territories, such things as pilgrimages, and the interrelation of commercial and religious circulation patterns.

Sopher has provided a useful study of the geography of religion. Moreover, there is a possibility for looking at religion in a different manner than the other theoreticians have suggested. Whereas Sopher's consideration of the spatial expression of religious phenomena could lead to a descriptive mode of apprehending the religious quest, his appreciation of the ecology of religion heralds a potentially dialectical method of analysis which would see religion as social force and social expression.

The geography of religion is a great enterprise in terms of its scope. It has achieved some sophistication since the days when environmental determinists such as Semple, Huntington, and Bowman claimed that physical forces generated religious types. Such work, while being suggestive, is indicative of a vulgar materialism of which geographers rightly became wary' as the discipline evolved.

Geographers have dealt with a number of aspects of religious life, such as whole religious complexes and their implications, the spatial distribution of religious groups in several countries, the diffusion of religious groups, the effect of religion on movement, the settlement of religious groups, the practice of pilgrimage, the domestication of plants and animals for religious purposes, the acquisition of minerals for religious reasons, the cemetery as a cultural artifact, and the practice of food avoidance.[15] This work has largely been descriptive, taxonomic and unappreciative of the social nature of religion. It has followed the idea that religion is a motivator in landscape development but has not considered what this assumption means or how it could be proven. It has simply described, although often eloquently, a range of religious phenomena.

Whereas a considerable literature is being built it would be wise to listen to the warnings of geographers such as Isaac and Licata.[16] As Isaac suggests, it is necessary to study 'religion itself and not merely to classify religious phenomena.[17]' Licata asserts that geographers must become aware of religion and its effects through training in other branches of religious studies.[18] These are useful comments, but they have not been taken far enough as neither Isaac nor Licata suggest courses of action for geographers. Whereas it seems reasonable that the study of religion *per se* would lead to a greater understanding, it is unclear what level of analysis of the religion in question and the individual religious experience is appropriate for the geographer. Whereas a discussion of elements of religion in general and of particular religions is necessary, and whereas the deepness of the psychological impact of religion should be appreciated, the primary focus of the geography of religion lies not in the study of the individual religious experience, but, rather, centres on religion in an instituted, social form.

Geographers in recent years have proposed or utilized methodologies which have tried to comprehend the religious quest and its social expression. The findings and terminology of

phenomenologists of religion have been used by some geographers in order to appreciate religious phenomena. Further, some geographers have tried to understand the operation and spread of religious ideologies in social systems.[20] Geographers also have been concerned with religious effects on social geography.[21] Moreover, there has been suggestion that geographers understand the dialectical nature of religion.[22] It has been indicated that religion is an attitude of mind in interplay with the environment. Environment and attitude interact and transform each other.

There is literature which seeks to appreciate deeper aspects of religion itself and which tries to see elements of its social expression. However, it is reasonable to assert that there is need for a fuller understanding of the nature of religion and for a more sophisticated appreciation of its social expression based on a fuller understanding of broad social processes. Geographers should go beyond a simple empiricism which gathers religious mentifacts and artifacts, and they should go beyond an idealism which naively accepts religion's role as motivator of landscape change without looking at it as a social outcome. A materialism which does not retreat into unsophisticated determinism, as did the environmentalists, but rather exudes a dialectical understanding of religion as a social force would be a useful underpinning for the geography of religion.

Phenomenological, structural, sociological and Marxian views should be of use to any serious student of religious behavior. It is essential to understand and to make use of the work of other scholarly approaches. This paper addresses the question of the place of religion in society and makes use of a range of work of people involved in religious studies. The efforts of other specialists in the field of religious study is used here to derive a theoretical foundation for viewing religion in a social formation, and hence to evolve a research strategy and perspective which will be challenging and useful to the geographer of religion.

## **RELIGION AND SOCIETY**

Geographers should become aware of the nature of religion and its institutional impact in society. Religion is a deeply personalized yet inter-subjective inspection of ultimately intimate and important questions and it is an institutionalized force which both legitimates and challenges social relations in society.

Religion is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. [23] It is imbued with doctrine, myth, ethics, and ritual. Moreover it is experiential, part of the lived world, and, as such, is undeniably, inextricably social.

Integral to its sociality is religion's particularity and its historicity. Each religion has apprehended the profoundness of life and death in its own way and within an historical context. Some argue that this particularity makes it impossible to speak of religion *per se*: that it is only possible to speak of unique faiths and only of personal experience of such faith.[24] Yet one must generalize about religion in order to speak of it all"[25]

Many anthropologists have argued for appreciating religion solely in its historical context. Boas, in his telling critique of non-historical explanations of myth argues forcefully for an historical and connected approach to religious life. [26] At its root this contains fundamental principles of historicity and sociality which no social researcher can overlook. However it is not to say that one cannot conceptualize religious behaviour. [27] What follows is a postulation of general features of religious behaviour. The historicity of religion should not be lost sight of. However, this paper argues for an historical approach to religious study.

## **THE NATURE OF RELIGION**

Religion is, at its core, an attempt to understand and to influence the awesome forces of life and death. It is an awareness of the meaningfulness of being its recognition of power outside of people. This awareness and recognition manifests on personal and societal levels. The personal experience of religion and its social impact are integrated.



*ceramic vessel used by the lobi people to store medicine in a shrine in the home or in the family courtyard.*

Whereas it is not the primary task to delve into the intricacies of the personal religious quest, it is important for the cultural geographer to be aware of the deep psychological questioning which religious institutions appeal to and inculcate. To gain awareness, the geographer may find guidance in the rich literatures of phenomenology, sociology/functionalism, structuralism, ecology, theology and to a lesser extent, historical materialism.

These vast bodies of study make one aware of the vividness and deepness of religious understanding of the human condition. For example, phenomenologists tend to see religion as an attempt to comprehend ultimate reality, that is, to see life at its most fundamental level. [28] Encompassed in this desire is the realization by people that there are important supernatural forces with which they must cope. [29] Bound to this is the realization that life is meaningful, that being is inherently ideological. Religion seen as an attempt to cope with reality and as an understanding of all that is meaningful is the essential contribution of phenomenologists

Functionalists in both sociology and anthropology have tended to see religion as a factor in creating social cohesion. [30] Religion reflects social morality and reaffirms society. Religion has both manifest and latent functions. Latent functions which promote social solidarity exist yet functionalists also acknowledge the manifest function of religion as apprehending and explaining that which is outside humankind and mysterious to it. Religion is a system of beliefs and practices related to forbidden and foreboding things. [31] Religion is not illusory; it does see and influence the world. [32] Religion unites its adherents and forces social cohesion through its interpretation and practice regarding the other worldly.

Structuralists are concerned with homologies between basic religious elements and the physical and social environment. [33] Their understanding of religious experience tends to reduce it to other social structures. Even so, they would say that religion is a response to the question of access to the deity's world and also that religion attempts to deny death.[34] Religion is an ordering experience reflecting other realities and it is structured in congruence and accord with social reality. It establishes paradigms for activity.

Ecologists see religion as a system of symbols which establish motives in people through a formulation of the general order of existence.[35] Religion is a model. It sees the problem of meaning in a world of apparently inescapable ignorance, injustice and suffering.[36] It provides conceptions of society. Historical materialists have conveyed the idea that religion is of the world and that it is illusion and mystification [37] Religion is an expression of real misery, of life's trials. Religion is produced by people. [38]" Theologians tend to hold the idea that religion is a spiritual act directed toward understanding life and finding meaning with it. [39] Meaning and religion are intimately bound.

Many elements and institutions are important in the religious attempt to comprehend and control the mysterious powers of life and death For example, phenomenologists and structuralists have been concerned with myths, symbols and rituals and their role as guides to religious action, specifically and social activity in general. For phenomenologists natural and symbols reveal the sacred in the world they communicate meaning of incredible importance[40] Myths are models which become paradigms for human activity.[41] Myth is a verbal element of a form of life.[42] Rituals, symbols and myths are clues through which sacred space, sacred time and sacred life may be comprehended.

Functionalists have argued that the elements of religion are the means through which religion inculcates social solidarity. Religions are complex systems of myths, dogmas, rites and ceremonies. [43] These beliefs and practices express 'collective realities'[44] As religion has manifest and latent functions so too do its constituent parts. Expressly they are routes to salvation and/or apprehensions of the divine; implicitly they are paths to social cohesion, harmony and solidarity [45]. Religion is an image of society and these acts and beliefs reaffirm that image.[46] Functionalism may be criticized because it often does not see religion or its elements in their own terms [47]' However, functionalism need not do this and its founder, Durkheim was adamant that religion and its elements not be seen as merely epiphenomenal.[48] To say that a rite has the latent function of social cohesion is not to deny its intrinsic beauty or veracity.

Structuralists have focused on myth, ritual and symbols as reflections of the world in general and social reality in particular. These elements constitute a principle of intelligibility [49] Totemism, a form of symbolization, is a way of bridging what is outside ourselves and our knowledge of nature.[50] Ritual and myth reconstruct sets of events, establish homologies between planes of life and provide a guide for action.[51] Structuralist views of religious elements may be criticized in the same way as functionalist perspectives in the sense that they may be too reductionist although again, these viewpoints need not be.

Ecologists see religious forms and actions as paradigms for society at large.[52] People need symbols and rituals as guides. Further, this school sees rites, myths and symbols as ultimately legitimating the core paradigm which itself is geared to social ordering," [53]

Religious belief and practice may be seen as ideological behaviour which has important consequences. Ideology may indicate a wide ranging theory or belief about the universe or it may indicate a circumscribed view of the world, a false or partial view.[54] It has been used as both an evaluative and descriptive term.[55] In this paper ideology will denote belief (and practice) which constitute and reinforce a particular view of life. Religion in this sense is ideological (it is here a descriptive rather than evaluative concept). In assessing religious behaviour, too often Marxists and others have seen it as false or illusory and hence ideological. [56] Religion is neither necessarily false nor illusory yet it is ideological as it is mental construct and physical practice which influence society and is influenced by it.

Ideology may be seen as a generic level of analysis, produced collectively which explains how society functions and further provides justification for social existence.[57] Ideology is not necessarily false consciousness. Ideology may also be a tool for maintaining the status quo in a society. In this sense it may be functional to society.[58]" Ideology however cannot be seen as merely reproducing dominant relations of production as materialists have often urged[59] Yet ideologies can be seen as symbolic models of reality which legitimate, justify or explain individual and group interests.[60] Ideologies may be seen as abstractions which are simplistic and constrained[61] but this in itself is simplistic and constrained.

Ideologies may only be partial views of society. Marx has claimed that ideologies must be such. Ideologies may be 'totalizing theoretics' which explain reality only in terms of one or few aspects of reality[62] This kind of view though cannot be ideology writ large because ideology in its most pristine form is merely a viewpoint about the world it may be accurate or inaccurate.

Finally, ideologies encompass behaviour or practice. Form is ideological [63] Expression both results from and is influenced by ideology. A procession in a religious ceremony is imbued with religious vision and influences and affects practitioners and audience.

Religious belief and practice is a particular ideological activity directed to the apprehension of the reality of life and death, the sacredness and meaning of life on earth. It is neither false consciousness nor misguided practice but rather is a peculiar and special understanding and action. Appreciation of its reality and its immediacy is the chief gift of phenomenologists to religious studies. Notwithstanding its manifest goals, perception and conduct, religious ideology does have social functions, and does affect social structure as functionalists, structuralists and materialists concerned with ideology and religion have shown. Belief in and adherence to a set of religious ideas and practices will have enormous consequences for society. Religion establishes a relationship with the world and legitimates social institutions.[64] Religion prescribes conduct, legitimizes socio-political order and channels human motivations and interests.[65] religion is very much a part of the social order.[66] Religion, while is a deeply personal experience, is inevitably a social phenomenon. It is a habitualized, routinized, institutionalized form of human interaction.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND RELIGION**

Religion is an institution, but what is an institution and how do religious institutions arise? Geographers have advocated institutional approaches to the explanation of phenomena. There has been some attempt to 'develop theory concerning the impact of institutional controls on the activities of individuals or companies'. [67]' It has been recognized that rules and institutions shape and structure peoples' activities. [68] Moreover, in cultural geography there have been calls for an institutional

approach. There has been however a dearth of discussion on the nature of institutions and institutionalization. What institutionalization is, has been neglected by a wide range of writers, including recent 'radical' work on the inculcation of ideologies in sociocultural groups.[69] Both, geographers and students of ideology have neglected a rich literature on institutions which has been provided by 'bourgeois' writers. This paper draws on elements of this important early literature.

Societies are bound by institutions, by rule makers and regulations. Institutions have been seen by people such as Weber as maintainers of a society's legitimacy, of its values and norms. [70] Institutions harness and dominate creativity, or charisma. [71] They are an assault on individuals' creativity. Institutions can change but only by a bearer of charisma. In religion for example, a prophet would challenge the existing order. [72] This kind of view counter-poses the individual and society. The individual attains freedom and responsibility inside an institutional frame but does this by challenging the frame. Charismatic challenges in turn became common practice and institutionalized. The dichotomy between charisma and institutional aspects of social organization is problematic. Weberian analysis tends to atomize material into rigid categories such as charismatic and institutional rather than interrelating phenomena. [74] There is no doubt that institutions are binding, legitimizing forces. However, is there a clear line between the charismatic and the institutional? Are they not part of each other? There is individualism in the Weberian analysis which is unfounded.

Similarly, in phenomenological sociology there is an individualism which sees each person as ultimately choosing the groups which he/she wants to belong to.[75] Such a view, despite arguments regarding inter-subjectivity, is, in the final analysis, anti-social for it fails to appreciate the impact of institutions and the social nature of human interaction.

Human knowledge and practice (religions no less than any other) is a social product. [76] Too much research has emphasized the individual as against his/her society it exudes an individualistic bias. [77] People are essentially social and institutionalization is a constant, dialectical process.

People constantly establish a relationship between themselves and the world.[78] This fundamental dialectical process has three parts: externalization or the outpouring of human activity into the world, objectivities or the apprehension of phenomena as facts of living and internalization, or the re-appropriation of this reality within social life.[79] Furthermore, they do this in the context of their own sociality and their omnipresent institutionalization.

The geography of religion is primarily concerned with the institutionalization of a particular ideology. Ideas and ideological practices are directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of people.[80] Ideas often become institutionalized. This is partly because human activity is subject to habit.[81] Every social situation may lead to some form of institution and the subsuming of activity under social control. The institutional world is experienced as objective reality. Institutions which encompass or define certain ideologies are an attempt to make routine part of what may be seen as the world view of the social organism.[82] Institutions play a very important role in the transmission of the world view which typifies, interprets and provides guidance regarding life's questions. Indeed, transmission is based on the efficiency of the institution as a permanent solution to permanent problems of the social entity. The institution conveys its objectivized meanings as knowledge. Further, all transmission of institutional activity implies control and legitimation procedures. Often there is the emergence of full-time personnel. Indeed a whole mental and physical apparatus may spring up which legitimizes a certain world view. Further, institutions often become reified, that is, they seem beyond human control and, hence, become alienated from human control.

Religious institutions are world-founding, world-maintaining, knowledge transmitting, legitimizing and controlling entities. They are special because they grapple overtly with the profound desire to comprehend the significance of life. The institutionalization of the comprehension of the sacred cosmos leads to a well-defined doctrine, the differentiation of religious roles, and the enforcing of doctrine and ritual by special agencies.[83] Religious institutions claim the exclusive right to interpret ultimately significant matters, and they pursue a range of social aims and practices determined by their own social organization or by conflict with other institutions or by vested interests within its body of

experts. Religious legitimations are important because they ground socially denned reality in ultimate reality. [84] To attack these legitimations is to risk conflict with primeval forces. [85]

The religious institution can be profoundly alienating as it seems separate from human control.[86] Related to this is the problem of the religious expert becoming separate from the lay people.[87] Another problem is that a routine procedure in belief and worship may threaten the ultimate religious significance of the religious institution.

Geographers should be concerned with religion's role as a world-founding institution. This process is inherently geographical since it is the establishment of a relationship with the world. It influences the way in which the environment is used and shaped and, in turn, the world shapes it. Understanding the particulars of the institutionalization of a religious ideology will help the geographer attain a fuller understanding of the socio-environmental impact of religion and its impact on religion.

## **SOCIAL CLASS AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

The process of institutionalization is encompassed by a social system and setting. While institutionalization is a process of the fabric of societies it is also part of another historical social process namely, the dynamic interaction of social classes. Whereas there have been some social formations characterized by one class (e.g. primitive communism) and whereas most societies have had two or more classes, all societies have had a class structure. Class analysis is crucial to the comprehension of the religious enterprise because it characterizes and seeks to understand the underlying dynamic of society itself. Classes are expression of people's relation to production.[89] Critics of class analysis see this production basis as a form of determinist reductionism.1,0 Production should be seen as an all-embracing process. Production is activity [90] It is the creative and life sustaining impulse of humankind. An emphasis on production does not mean economic determinism; rather it indicates interest in people's industry. That industry historically has been con-trolled. One group has dominated another's ability to create and survive. Such control or lack thereof is the basis of class analysis. Here the term class analysis is used in its broadest sense and is not intended to be constrained to use in the study of only capitalist societies.

The relation between institutions promoting certain beliefs and social classes is exceedingly important. It has been asserted that ideas are social products that they reinforce social relationships, and that ideas and ideological institutions holding sway in a social formation are those of the dominant class. Is this so?

Ideas, beliefs, rituals, politics are ultimately part of the production process; they are part of the relations of production. They are shaped by economic, political and cultural forces and in turn influence and mould these forces. They are class bound and, dialectically, class shaping. Economic relationships are not sufficient to determine social class as politics and ideological practice are exceedingly important in their formation [92] all societies have been distinguished by some form of class structure, class contradiction and class struggle.

At any historical moment, social classes occupy objective places in the social division of labour places which are independent of the will of the agents. Every social formation (with the exception of primitive communism) has had at least two classes, the exploiting and exploited class. The measurement of the exact bounds of classes has been seen as problematic [93] Classes are not always neat, discrete entities indeed they are often intricate and complex. Historically, classes have been sub-divided into fractions and strata. Social classes are not simple aggregates of individuals as say in a Weberian analysis, but are expressions of relations between people in a given mode of production

Ideas, beliefs, and/or ideological practices are articulated in and through class structure. Ideological institutions are integral to class relations. How the world is seen, what is the meaning of activity is important in the production process. Beliefs are integral to class relations. A dominant class seeks consciously and unconsciously to stabilize its position by advancing a legitimating ideology which 'explains' and 'justifies' its place in society.[94]

How such ideologies are maintained in a social formation is an important question. Because ruling classes dominate society it is not necessary that their ideologies dominate society.[95] Yet

there are legitimating institutions or apparatuses. Institutions operate to reinforce world views but they also operate with respect to broad social groups or classes. Three separate issues which relate to this area are class consciousness, what are 'ruling ideas', and what is the import of historical continuity of institutions between social formations?

Class consciousness means an awareness of class interests by the members of each class.[96] Such class interests may be expressed in a range of ways and in various institutions. Classes for various reasons might be diverted from class interest, that is, they might not have evolved sufficient class consciousness to know of or to act in their class interest.[97] Institutions become mediating devices which promote or defuse class consciousness.

Any class will try to promote its own interests in the economic, political and ideological spheres of activity. If it is dominant then presumably its ideology will *prevail* in society. However, while these may be ruling ideas they are not the only significant ideas. All social groups have their intellectuals and logically will form their own institutions. [98] Moreover, it is possible that an institution while promoting the interests of the dominant class will also attempt to grasp the interests of others. The pro-motion of significant but not ruling ideas may be important in the transition from one social form to another. While a prevailing ideology may exist there are sets of ideologies not 'ruling' but subtly infused in the multiplicity of interests which all characterize a social formation.

Some institutions will have historical continuity in that they survive different social formations and articulate between modes of production.[99] this is not to say that they will not be sub-servient to a prevailing or dominant ideology, indeed their ability to adapt may make them all the more efficient tools of a ruling class. However, they might function with respect to several class interests and may operate to challenge ruling class interests.

Institutions should be understood within the particular class structure of the society in question. The action of religious institutions may be understood within this context of class interests and class struggle. Do religious ideologies promote the interests of one group or are they subtly infused in the ideas of all classes? Does religion in a particular era promote social change or social conservatism or both at the same time? Focusing on class helps the geographer appreciate the nature of production and the relations of production which constitute the way in which the environment is used.

Adopting such an approach will provide a social grounding for the geographer's study of religion. Unlike the new geographical humanism which has argued for forms of phenomenology and existentialism [100] which are rooted in individualism, class analysis sees people as socially intertwined and societally constrained. Unlike geographic idealism, which is uni-directional and deterministic,[101] class analysis recognizes the importance of social forces in shaping belief systems and their related rituals in addition to the impact such belief and ritual has on society. It is important to recognize the bounded-ness of human action.[102] Class analysis does this. Religion is quintessentially a social phenomenon. Class structure is of the essence of society. Focusing on religion and class will help the geographer to comprehend more fully the operation of this beguiling human invention in an environmental complex.

## **RELIGION, INSTITUTIONS, CLASS AND AN HISTORICAL METHOD**

By adopting an approach which understands the importance of the dynamics of institutions and class formation, geographers will acquire tools with which to analyse the socio-environmental impact of religion. Adoption of these tools is not the adoption of a reductionist or determinist view of the operation of religion in all societies.

The toots of institutionalization and class are not substitutes for historical analysis. Each religious artifact and mentifact must be considered in historical context. What is being argued for here is not an extreme structuralism. [103] rather a form of Marxist humanism akin perhaps to that of Thompson is what is urged. [104]

What these tools offer, as does historical materialism itself, is an appreciation of social context. Geographers in general and of religion in particular, must be willing to confront the social context and not merely to plot religious distributions or describe religious rituals if they are to understand religious phenomena.

Having said this what is a geographer of religion to do? Is he/she to abandon research on food avoidance or the use of land for cemeteries? Surely not, rather what is urged is an holistic historical method unfettered by the romanticism and individualism of the new humanism in geography, yet sensitive to the emotional impact of religion and to its social bounds.

What then might an agenda be? There is no one pattern which can be suggested for studying all religious phenomena and their geographic implications. However, let us take an example and suggest an historical materialist method which utilizes a class institutional approach.

Suppose one wanted to study the impact of Christian groups in Kingston, Ontario, Canada in the late nineteenth century. One would want to know the beliefs of whatever groups were picked, that is, one would want to know their view of Christianity as well as their view on a range of social issues (e.g., temperance, trade unionism, Sabbath observance, etc.). One would also study their resource use how, where and on what they expended money and used labour (voluntary and paid) how did they promote their views and themselves that is. What process of institutionalization took place? Beyond this internal view, class relations, the fabric of society, must be understood. One would come to grips with the specific class configuration in this city in a country with a mercantile capitalist base yet with an emerging industrial capitalism. How did social transformations influence the churches and how did they react to and influence the profound social change before them? Age old institutions though they were they were beset with a new industrial order. How did class relations affect the make-up of congregations, their church locations, and their resource use? Using an historical materialist approach would help the geographer explore traditional geography of religious questions and to understand the context of those questions. It would help the geographer of religion escape the idealist tendency to see religion solely as motivator and it would redirect a misplaced humanism which is ultimately anti-social.

## CONCLUSIONS

As in other sub-fields of geography, studies in the geography of religion have often been mere catalogues of artifacts and mentifacts. It is essential to go beyond this kind of narrow empiricism and to try to appreciate religion as a profoundly social force. It is also necessary to go beyond an idealism which sees religion as motivator in landscape change but fails to appreciate the social nature of religion.

Whereas the geographers of religion who have concerned themselves with theoretical arguments have outlined appropriate agendas regarding areas of research interest, they have not suggested approaches which would guide the researcher in understanding the impact of the religious quest in the social and physical environments or the environmental impact on religion. Geographers of religion have maintained that geographers must be concerned with religion as an institution but they have not hitherto explored fully the implications of that assertion.

Phenomenologists and others have been forceful in their conviction of the reality of religious experience. Religion is not merely an epiphenomenon or a super-structural element of society. It is an important understanding of and attempt to control a multiplicity of life's forces. It is though a social phenomenon. In order to understand religious institutions' role as socio-cultural agents it is necessary to appreciate the nature of society in its institutional and class dimensions. An historical materialist approach will lead to a fuller appreciation of religion as an agent in the cultural landscape. It challenges geographers to seek deeper explanations of the profound phenomenon they are studying.

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