

Faith

Fides quaerens intellectum
“Faith seeking understanding”

—ANSELM, *PROSLOGIUM*

The camel snorted and moaned gently as it made its way along the starlit gravel path. The Bedouin camel driver sang gently to his charge to keep him moving. As I gently rocked back in forth in the tight camel saddle, I gazed up at the desert night sky, moonless, with stars so bright, numerous, and appearing so close that one was tempted to reach up and pluck one down. As my gaze dropped onto the hulking, dark monolith that we were traversing, I saw fellow pilgrims, flashlights in hand, wending their way up the sides, looking much like a single strand of golden Christmas-tree lights cascading down a darkened canyon. We were clinging to the sides of Mount Sinai, and in the darkness time drifted away and we became one with the spiritual pilgrims of countless ages who had, since Moses and even before him, sought insight and solace on this mountain.

When we look up and gaze at the approximately three thousand stars that the naked eye can see on a moonless night, the questions inevitably come. Who are we? What is it all about? Where did it or we come from? And, of course, What is the meaning of it all? Mountaintops, especially at sunrise, cultivate such questions in the massive and yet delicate beauty of an apricot sunrise. These are quintessential human questions. They are the questions that inevitably arise as we contemplate our origins and become aware of our own finitude and mortality, the concrete awareness that we need not be. We are always pilgrims in this life. The wonder of existence has impelled philosophy, theology, and science for millennia. It is at the heart of the quote above from St. Anselm of Canterbury. We seek greater understanding. But while enhancing

faith, understanding will never be a substitute for faith. Wonder always drives us back to the questions of faith, particularly the basic question, *Why* are we here?

1. WHY ARE WE HERE?

“Why are you here?” All of us have been asked, or have asked, that question of ourselves many times. As one of the most basic questions we can ask, every word is important. *Why?* The foundational interrogative raises the question of meaning and purpose. All of us begin to enunciate this basic question early in life. It is the root question of meaning for the human condition and the foundation for both philosophy and theology. *Are?* The verb of being cuts to the core of human life. We exist, but we will not exist forever, and so begins the foundational question of being. What does it mean “to be”? and, somewhat insidiously, to “not be,” as Shakespeare’s Prince Hamlet would have us reflect. “To be, or not to be? That is the question!” *You?* This question is of subjective identity. It is my “you” and not your “you” that is in question here. To what does this “you” refer? Is there an enduring “I” or only an ephemeral passing presence of neurotransmitters that camouflages the absence of self by providing a continuity of experience that appears to have permanence and identity? *Who* are we really? *Here?* Where is here as opposed to there? How do we define time and space, especially in a relativistic, expanding universe? Can you only be at one here at a time, or are there multiple “heres” (the multiverse) that we inhabit simultaneously, only one of which we are conscious of? This one little question in many ways encapsulates the profound questions of human life and provides the context for this book.

A. MYSTERY OF EXISTENCE

The above question is one of the most profound questions that the human being can ask. As we mature, the thought finally occurs to us that there is no immediately evident reason that we should exist. We encounter the mystery of our life and its radical contingency. We need not be, and yet we are, and we realize this is true of everything that we encounter, from stars to butterflies. All existence is contingent, which leads us to ask whether there is something beyond the contingency. We have a profound awareness of something beyond ourselves upon which we and all that exists depend. Many cultures and individuals name this the Holy or the sacred. Rudolf Otto, in his classic, early-twentieth-century work *The Idea of the Holy*, called this the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the tremendous (awe inspiring, trembling)

mystery that is also fascinating. Elizabeth Johnson observes, “*Mysterium* refers to the hidden character of the Holy, beyond imagination not just because of our intellectual limits but because of the very nature of the subject. Far from being a pessimistic experience, however, encounter with the Holy as mystery is laced with the promise of plenitude: more fullness exists than we can grasp.”¹ This is what we mean by the spiritual dimension of life, of human experience. It is to embrace or be embraced by the Holy experienced in wonder and mystery. This is a transcendent fullness that goes beyond our ability to fully comprehend and as such stands over against us, reminding us of our finitude and mortality. It can make us tremble with both fear and awe as we become aware that we do not possess it but that it possesses us. We are humbled in the presence of the great mystery of all existence, whether seen through the electron microscope, the Hubble telescope, or the beauty of a sunset. We are driven to wonder, and wonder, as we have seen, is the root of all religion and of all faith. Wonder also drives us to fascination. We are fascinated in the presence of this mystery for which no name, no theory, no model, and no religion will ever be complete or all inclusive. The Holy defies our ability to demarcate at the same time that it draws us to itself with the power of fascination and wonder.

What is it we are a part of but do not see? Loren Eiseley talks in similar terms in his book *The Star Thrower*, particularly in a chapter titled “The Hidden Teacher.”² A paleontologist searching for fossils, he was walking up an arroyo in the American Southwest one summer’s day when he ventured upon a yellow and black orb spider. She was spinning her web right at eye level, over a crack in the face of the gulch. More out of curiosity than malevolence, Eiseley took a pencil out of his pocket and gently touched the spider’s gossamer web. The thin threads started to vibrate until they were a blur of motion. The spider sat at the center of the web fingering away at the filaments of the universe that she had created from the interior of her own being. Finally, the vibration slowed until it came to a stop, and she sat there motionless, no longer interested. As Eiseley put the pencil back into his pocket, he realized that his pencil was an intrusion from the outside of this spider’s universe for which she had no precedent. Spider universe was circumscribed by spider ideas. It was sensitive to a raindrop or a moth’s flutter, but a pencil point was an intrusion for which she did not, and could not, have comprehension. In the spider universe, he did not exist.

1. Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 8–9.

2. Loren Eiseley, *The Star Thrower* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), ch. 11, “The Hidden Teacher,” 116–28.

As Eiseley wandered away, he mused, How different were humans from the spider? Here we sit at the center of our self-created webs of sensory extension, radio telescopes, microscopes, satellite telemetry, fingering away at that which we try to understand. What in our world constitutes an intrusion for which we have no comprehension? That is where the mystery of the Holy comes in. The Holy is that beyond in the midst of life for which we have no categories of thought or experience. It will not fit into our schemas, and yet we sense it is there and that it draws us to itself as the mysterious source from which all else has come. There is a spiritual yearning deep within the human person that the material world alone cannot satisfy, a yearning that seeks for the beyond in the midst of life. The Holy has the power to entice as well as to open our hearts and make us aware of the very longing for meaning, for purpose, and for the ultimate that is at the heart of our own being. As Augustine once said in his book *Confessions*, “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in You.”³

B. SEARCH FOR THE ULTIMATE

Abraham Maslow was a humanistic psychologist. As such, he did not see himself as religious in any traditional sense of the term, and yet, as he reflected on the very nature of human need in formulating his famous “hierarchy of needs,” he was driven to place self-transcendence at the top as necessary for self-actualization. This decision was based on his research of “peak experiences,” which are transpersonal, ecstatic, interconnecting, even euphoric types of human experiences.⁴ In the context of the present discussion, they would be considered examples of experiences of the transcendent mystery of existence, of the Ultimate, and open to anyone regardless of religious perspective.

Elizabeth Johnson observes three factors that root this fundamental, age-old quest for the Holy, for the living God, in life. First, the very nature of what is being sought is incomprehensible, limitless, unfathomable, and beyond description. Second, the human heart is insatiable and is driven by an immense longing in all human fields of creative endeavor but especially in matters of religion, where a brief taste drives us to a hunger for more. Third, it is the ongoing quest for the experience of God, which is always mediated through the changing history of human cultures. She concludes, “Putting all three factors together leads to an interesting realization: the profound incomprehensibility of God coupled with the hunger of the human heart in changing historical

3. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1. Albert Outler, ed, *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 38.

4. Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

cultures actually *requires* that there be an ongoing history of the quest for the living God that can never be concluded.”⁵ Throughout human history, human beings in all times and places have been driven to try and understand the ultimate, which has been given many names and characterizations, but all will fall short, even our most cherished images. If we treat them as absolute, then they become idolatrous, for we are absolutizing something of human origin and construction. We are treating as infinite something that is finite, something as divine that is not divine. That is why the quest for the Holy must involve faith, for only in faith does one reach beyond human understanding or conceptualization to catch a glimmer of that which is beyond human origin. It is faith as trust that gives rise to a dynamic human capacity.

2. FAITH AS A VERB

A. FORMS OF FAITH

At least since the Middle Ages, the Christian tradition has commonly distinguished the content of faith (the object of devotion, that believed in, *fides quae creditur*) from the process of having faith (the process of expressing devotion, the faith by which we believe, *fides qua creditur*). I find it helpful to think of this distinction not simply as a content/form distinction but as a grammatical one as well. Faith can be both a noun (the object of faith) and a verb (the process of engaging in faith commitment, “faithing”). For this reason, faith must also be distinguished from “belief” as well as from “religion.” James Fowler observes that belief in more recent thought has come to be equated with intellectual assent to propositional statements, particularly those that codify the doctrines or ideological claims of a particular tradition or group. Belief may be a part of a person’s or group’s faith, but it is only a part. Likewise, religion refers to the cumulative tradition composed of beliefs and practices that express and form the faith of persons in the past or present.⁶ Religion can include everything from art and architecture to symbols, rituals, narrative, myth, scriptures, doctrines, ethical teachings, music, and much more. If you will, religion can be viewed as the cultural embodiment of faith but is not identical to it. We turn, then, to a more generic and functional analysis of faith that focuses on process rather than on content, on faith as a verb.

The sixteenth-century Reformer Martin Luther was well aware of this distinction; indeed, in late medieval theology, faith had four aspects: *notitia*

5. Johnson, *Quest*, 13 (italics in original).

6. James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 55–56.

(“knowledge”), *assensus* (“assent”), *voluntas* (“action of the will”), and *fiducia* (“trust”). Luther was a practical and realistic thinker, and as he struggled with his own faith life, he came to realize that ultimately trust (*fiducia*) encompassed all of the forms of faith. Without trust in God’s justifying grace, none of the other expressions of faith were effective or meaningful. Luther’s favorite definition of faith was Heb. 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” By employing this text, he defined faith fundamentally as trust, trust placed in the justifying grace of God. *Faith is trust in that to which one gives ultimate devotion or loyalty.*

Luther understood well the subjective dynamics of faith and realized that our fundamental temptation was precisely to trust something other than God (idolatry). We will have faith. We are meaning-seeking creatures and will create an object for our devotion if there is not one visible (for example, the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32). Commenting on this condition in regard to the First Commandment, Luther observed in the *Large Catechism*, “As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. . . . That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”⁷ The issue, then, is, What does one trust with one’s life? Whatever one trusts and devotes one’s time and energy, affection and attention to, *functions* as “god” for that person, regardless of what that object is or what it is called. It can be anything from money and success to rock stars and the natural world. When we come to see faith as a verb, as a process and function of the human, we realize that all people place their trust in something, by means of which their actions and life take on meaning. The focus at this point is on the process of devotion, not on the worthiness of the object of devotion. This process of trust is open to both the theist and nontheist alike.

The great twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich developed Luther’s understanding further for our time. He said that faith is “ultimate concern,”⁸ that which concerns you ultimately, that one concern on which you center your life. Tillich observed that “faith is a centered act of the whole human person” such that “in faith reason reaches ecstatically beyond itself.”⁹ Which is to say that this process of faith involves all the capacities of the human; it is a fully committed trust and devotion, which while not contradicting reason, fulfills the ultimate yearnings of reason by going beyond which reason alone can support

7. Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 365.

8. Paul Tillich. *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 1–2, 5.

9. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

and defend. It is the completion of the yearnings of both the human heart and mind and will also necessarily involve doubt.

B. FORMS OF DOUBT

For Tillich, there are three forms of doubt, only one of which relates to faith.¹⁰ First, there is “methodological” doubt, which arises from a method of scholarly study such as in the natural sciences. This doubt is programmatic in that it is built into the course of investigation and will be resolved if the study is successful. This is not the doubt of faith. Second, there is “skeptical” doubt, that which questions everything at least for a brief time. René Descartes is one of the greatest representatives of skeptical doubt in the West. In his “Meditations,” he sought to question everything until he got back to an unquestioning foundation for belief. His famous conclusion “I think, therefore, I am” (*cogito ergo sum*) has been a paradigm for skeptical doubting ever since the seventeenth century. Descartes, however, did conclude that he could not question everything, and upon the basis of acknowledging his own thinking (To question that would be to question that he was questioning, which would be to cease questioning!), he then moved back to affirm much else in human life.¹¹ This also is not the doubt of faith.

For Tillich, the doubt intrinsic to faith—indeed, a structural feature of it—is “existential” doubt, the uncertainty and anxiety based on our very finitude. Existential doubt arises precisely when the finite attempts to commit itself to the infinite. As limited human creatures, we can never know with certainty that our object of devotion is fully worthy of such trust. We can never infinitely know, feel, or experience in this life, so there will always be an element of this doubt in every human expression of faith. It may not be on the surface and does not have to be present constantly, but it is there, and for this reason Tillich sees faith as requiring courage. Faith is the courage *to be* in the face of our *nonbeing*, our mortality. It is not only the pain and loss of a friend or family member that makes the pathos of a funeral so intense but also our knowledge that at some other time, and thank God we do not know when, it will not be someone else in that casket, but us. And what then? Where will we be? Whose will we be? Will we be?

Human beings live their lives in the dash, the dash inscribed on the grave marker between the date of birth and the date of death. Existential thinkers such

10. *Ibid.*, 20.

11. This process contributes to the philosophical position known as “foundationalisms,” which many postmodern thinkers, such as Richard Rorty, now seriously challenge and reject.

as Tillich invite us to contemplate our dash and how and why we live it. Do we rush through it? Do we “dash” through the dash? I find it interesting that such a terse and cryptic symbol comes to represent all the hopes and dreams, successes and failures, joys and sorrows of a human life. Perhaps its very brevity bespeaks the nature of our time, but we must not let life pass us by. Theologians like Luther and Tillich invite us to pause and contemplate our lives and what we are committed to, for it affects all that we do. When we view faith as a verb, we begin to see that faith is not optional for humans but is of the quintessence of the human. While our feet are of the clay, our eyes and minds scan the stars. Humans exist juxtaposed between time and eternity, the finite and the infinite, in what I call the “mesocosmic,” the cosmic middle between the microcosmic and macrocosmic forces of existence. We find our place between quarks and quasars in such a fashion as to contemplate both. We are an example of the universe become self-conscious, and we are able to reflect on time before our own beginnings and after our own demise.

C. STAGES OF FAITH

Human beings are always beings on the way (*Homo viator*).¹² Developmental change and growth are intrinsic to our very lives. Human beings are becoming beings. Indeed, our being is in our becoming. The entangled relationship between the becoming of individuals and of God is the focus here and throughout this text. Over the last several decades, a number of cognitive and developmental theories have been formulated that have opened up this fascinating human process. It is not my purpose here to survey them all but to highlight a few of the ideas that can be helpful in understanding the emerging field of faith-development studies. James W. Fowler is the founder of the discipline of faith-development research, although many others, including William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, have investigated the psychological dynamics of faith. Fowler, however, was the first to intentionally develop a new discipline, drawing on many developmental theories to investigate faith dynamics. His intention is descriptive, not prescriptive. It must also be said that this is not the only way of understanding faith development, and there are some criticisms of Fowler’s approach, particularly as he attempts to merge a structuralist model (Piaget) with a psychosocial one (Erikson).¹³ It

12. Much of this section comes from my earlier work, *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), ch. 5, sec. 2.

13. For critical review, see such works as Craig Dykstra and Sharon, eds., *Faith Development and Fowler* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986); Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); and articles such as Marlene M. Jardine and

is not our purpose to get into this internal debate but rather to simply indicate that one can talk about faith development in a clear and descriptive way that is approachable through clinical research and analysis. Undoubtedly, further revisions of the approach will be made, but it is still a helpful starting point for understanding the diverse positions and needs concerning faith.

Fowler has seven stages of faith development. In his words, “*The stages aim to describe patterned operations of knowing and valuing that underlie our consciousness.* The varying stages of faith can be differentiated in relation to the degrees of complexity, of comprehensiveness, of internal differentiation, and of flexibility that their operations of knowing and valuing manifest. In continuity with constructive developmental tradition faith stages are held to be *invariant, sequential, and hierarchical.* I do not claim for these stages *universality.*”¹⁴ The seven stages are as follows.

1. Primal faith (infancy)
2. Intuitive–projective faith (early childhood)
3. Mythic–literal faith (middle childhood and beyond)
4. Synthetic–conventional faith (adolescence and beyond)
5. Individuative–reflective faith (young adulthood and beyond)
6. Conjunctive faith (early midlife and beyond)
7. Universalizing faith (midlife and beyond)

Fowler makes the point that faith development includes a number of factors: biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, psychosocial experience, and religio-cultural influences. He concludes, “Because development in faith involves aspects of all these sectors of human growth and change, movement from one stage to another is not automatic or assured. Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining defined by structural stages of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood or adolescence.”¹⁵ He also goes on to indicate that a transition from one stage to another does not necessarily mean a change in the content or the direction of one’s faith but rather in the way one holds, understands, and takes responsibility for one’s faith.¹⁶

Henning G. Viljoen, “Fowler’s Theory of Faith Development: An Evaluative Discussion,” *Religious Education* 87, no. 1 (winter, 1992): 74–85; and William O. Avery, “A Lutheran Examines James W. Fowler,” *Religious Education*, 85, no. 1 (Winter, 1990): 69–83.

14. Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 57 (italics in original).

15. Ibid. For the overview of the stages, see ch. 2 and his earlier work, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

16. Ibid., 68.

Primal faith is prelinguistic and is grounded in the care given to the infant, to offset the anxiety that results from separations that occur during infant development. If their needs are met they will develop a trust towards adults and the world. Dependability confirms them as being “at home” in their life spaces, but if significant deficits occur, they can give rise to a foundational mistrust of self, others, and the larger environment.¹⁷

Intuitive-projective faith begins with the use of language and the use of symbols, stories, dreams, and the imagination. Not yet controlled by logical thinking, this stage combines perception and feeling to create long-lasting images that represent both the protective and threatening powers surrounding one’s life. At this stage, a child cannot distinguish fantasy from fact, but there is in this stage the possibility for aligning powerful religious symbols and images with deep feelings of terror and guilt or of love and companionship. It is in this stage that the child develops their first representations of God.

With *mythic-literal* faith, we enter the first stage that, while beginning in middle childhood, can persist into adulthood. Individuals in this stage engage effectively in narrative, although they do not place themselves in the flow of the narrative itself. The use of symbols remains largely concrete and literal, and the transition to the next stage begins when these persons, whether children, adolescents, or adults, experience that “bad things happen to good people” and that evil persons do not necessarily suffer for their transgressions. It becomes impossible to maintain the concept of a God built along the lines of simple moral retribution. This may lead to a temporary or permanent giving up of belief in God.

With the *synthetic-conventional* stage of faith, one also enters into the full-blown physiological impact of adolescence. The emergence of early formal operational thinking (Piaget) enables young people to appreciate abstract concepts, and they begin to think about thinking and to name and synthesize meanings. While this developmental stage does involve “synthesis,” it is still heavily tied to the thoughts and feelings of others and feels the pressure of the “conventional.” It is with the next stage that truly individual reflection develops.

Fowler observes that for *individuated-reflective* faith to emerge two very important movements must occur. First the previous stage’s tacit system of beliefs, values, and commitments must be critically examined; and second, one must define the personal identity one has developed independently of earlier conditioning relationships. The person becomes reflective about both their worldview and their personal relationships as they begin to assert their

17. *Ibid.*, 58.

own personal identity and take over personal authority for themselves, a role previously conducted by others. This perspective permits a transcendental view of self-other relations and a standpoint from which to adjudicate conflicting expectations as one's own inner authority develops. One is then capable of codifying frames of meaning that are conscious of their own boundaries and inner connections, so that persons at this stage can "demythologize" symbols, rituals, and myths, translating their meaning into conceptual formulations. Clearly at this stage one has entered the phase of critical awareness and thinking.

Conjunctive faith in many respects requires the dismantling of some of the clearly defined boundaries produced in the earlier stage. In this stage, the "coincidence of opposites" (from Nicolas of Cusa, 1401–1464 CE) are found to be present in our apprehension of truth. One becomes aware that truth may be approached from a number of different perspectives and that one's own identity is heavily dependent on unconscious as well as conscious forces. Persons in this stage display what Paul Ricoeur has called the "second" or "willed" naïveté where, having passed through critical analysis of their faith, they are ready to enter the rich meanings of true symbols, myths, and ritual in a clear move beyond the demythologizing strategy of the earlier stage. As a correlate, this stage also exhibits a principled openness to the truths of other religious and faith traditions.¹⁸ Clearly, this is a mature and rich stage of faith development, and one that many of us would be fortunate to achieve. Fowler does, however, open up the possibility of one last stage.

Universalizing faith is possible but rare. Gradually, the circle of those who count in faith, meaning-making, and justice expands to the point where one reaches a pervading inclusiveness. There is a degree of saintliness associated with such people because the self in this stage has moved beyond the usual forms of defensiveness and exhibits an openness grounded in the being, love, and regard of God.

The purpose of this overview has been to give us a sense of the types of stages and movements that may be found in faith-development analysis. But it must also be said that development in faith is not simply linear. It is more of a spiral,¹⁹ a cycle that may return to questions and issues time and again as one reappropriates, revises, and perhaps even rejects the faith content of one's tradition. It is to reflection on this wider communal (not individual) expression of faith that forms tradition that we now turn as we consider the broader nature

18. *Ibid.*, 65.

19. Fowler, *Stages*, especially "Structural Stages and the Contents of Faith," 274–81, and the spiral diagram on 275.

of religion itself. Like our discussion of faith, it is important to consider the functions of religion prior to focusing on specific content.

3. FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

The word *religion* comes from the Latin word *religare* and means “to connect,” literally “to bind” together. Historically it means to connect the human and the divine, and has to do with humanity’s relationship to the transcendent. Religion usually includes patterns of belief (creeds, doctrines) and practice (rituals, liturgies) that are intended to help connect the individual person with what is embraced as holy or sacred. For this reason, all of the great world religions have some form of community at their base, a monastery, church, temple, mosque, synagogue, or tent. For this reason, religions usually involve some form of institutional expression, including religious leadership and communal structure. The religious individual thus usually exists in religious community. One provides support and resources, while the other provides oversight, guidance, and care. Religions usually serve three primary functions for the practitioner:²⁰ a frame of orientation, an object of devotion, and a source of transformation.

A. FRAME OF ORIENTATION/WORLDVIEW

We seek to make sense of our lives and of the world around us. We seek coherence so that we can function within that world. To provide such an orienting worldview²¹ or frame of orientation is one of the main functions of religion not only for the individual but for the whole community of faith. A worldview usually communicates the fundamental beliefs and commitments of a culture, what is real and valuable, as well as how to achieve and sustain those commitments. A worldview simply communicates the “way things are” to its practitioners. It grounds a vision of reality. In the West, the “Christian worldview” has dominated for almost two thousand years. In this worldview, the origin of life and existence was understood to be the product of a beneficent creator God who then enters into this creation through Christ and is sustained in existence by the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit. As we will get into in the fourth chapter, this threefold involvement of God with the creation gave rise to the doctrine of the Trinity. At this point, however, it is important to note

20. See Richard Creel, *Religion and Doubt: Toward a Faith of Your Own*, 2nd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1990).

21. See Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Cross Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 3rd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999), especially ch. 1, “Exploring Religion and Analyzing Worldviews.”

that the Christian worldview itself replaced an earlier, polytheistic worldview embraced by ancient Greece and Rome. Today some would argue that the Christian worldview is in the process of being replaced by the “scientific worldview.” It is one of the main purposes of this book to challenge that argument and to demonstrate how the Christian worldview can be reconciled, perhaps even harmonized, with the understanding of the world given in contemporary science. It is also important to note that the East has also had multiple worldviews for millennia, from the East Indian worldview of the karmic cycle and the ultimate existence of Brahman to the practical social worldview of Confucius in China. Worldviews are essential to coherent, organized cultures and their religious expressions. Paul Tillich observes that “religion is the substance of culture, culture the form of religion.”²² Religion tells the community or culture what is important and valuable, the second function of religion.

B. OBJECT OF DEVOTION

Every person and culture values something as ultimate, embracing it as “holy” or “sacred” and centering their life on it. This something may be recognized religiously as a “god” or “gods,” but it need not—for example, “success,” or “wealth.” The power of a functional analysis of religion, precisely, raises our awareness of how something can function in this capacity in a person or society, whether it is formally recognized as such or not. Nationalism has often functioned in such a role and still does today in many countries. When a bumper sticker can read, “My Country Right or Wrong!” the country is functioning as an object of devotion, as holy or sacred, as something ultimate, and is treated as such, even though it would never be referred to as a “god.” One of the primary purposes, then, of the object of devotion, the Holy or sacred, is to ground or center the worldview of a religion. What is most important in life is that on which we center our lives and to which we make sacrifices of time, energy, and possessions. The emphasis on consumerism in contemporary American culture is a case in point. When a person sees the main purpose of work as providing income for them to buy things and to acquire their heart’s desire, then consumerism functions as a religion. Religions change people and direct their actions, and that is the third function of religion.

22. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), ch. 1.

C. SOURCE OF TRANSFORMATION

In addition to providing an orienting worldview and an object of devotion, religions also function as change agents. In the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), one hears the term *conversion* when one becomes a member of a particular faith tradition. That process assumes some foundational change in understanding and in action. “I was blind but now I see,” as composer John Newton put it in his hymn “Amazing Grace,” describing his shift in worldview and commitment from slave trader to English clergyman. Change is not only possible but often desired and necessary in life. Religions provide such change. They can also propel social transformations as well, as witnessed by the eventual dominance of Christianity in the Roman Empire or the forced dominance of Maoism in China, more recently.

Religions thus orient in life, provide a basis for devotion, and direct change both personally and socially. Perhaps two brief examples of these functions in what would be considered nonreligious realms of thought and experience will demonstrate that it is really not a matter of whether one is religious but of what one is religious about.

The first example is Marxism. In its classical expression in *Das Capital*, Marxism, despite being avowedly atheistic, contains all the functions of religion. The frame of orientation is “dialectical materialism,” where everything is understood in terms of the socioeconomic value it possesses. Individuals are units of production, and the worker is the fundamental social unit, *homo economicus*, economic humanity if you will. Workers are defined by what they produce. You are what you make. This frame of orientation, then, centers on the ultimate goal for Marx, that of the classless society, the final overcoming of capitalism as an exploitive and oppressive economic and social system. The change agent that brings this about is the proletariat (worker) revolution, in which the workers will take the means of production into their own hands and use it for mutual benefit, as the *Communist Manifesto* says. This was captured in Marx’s phrase, “From each according to his ability, To each according to his needs.”²³ Thus classical Marxism contains all three functions of a religion and indeed functions as such for ardent Marxists, who have been and are willing to die for their “faith.” One need not believe in God to express religious devotion.

The second example, and more germane to the purpose of this text, is scientism. Scientism sees natural science, particularly the physical and life

23. Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” in *Marx/Engels Selected Works* (1875; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 3:13–30, accessed at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>.

sciences, as the sole arbiter of truth and meaning for our time. It takes science as a method of investigation and elevates it to a worldview. It is assumed in such a worldview that only material existence is real, there is no spiritual or transcendent realm, and only scientifically demonstrable knowledge is worth knowing. Truth is that which can be discovered by one or another expression of the scientific method, that is, that which can be observed, measured (quantified), and repeated by others in a systematic way. So scientism's frame of orientation is scientific materialism, the object of devotion is scientific truth, and the sources of transformation are the various scientific methods of study and investigation, which leads to new truth and understanding of the material world. While this may strike the reader as a fairly narrow definition and source for truth, it is being widely encouraged by the so called "new atheist" movement led by Richard Dawkins. In his book *The God Delusion*, Dawkins makes explicit claims for the role of science in defining all truth and meaning worth knowing.

Science itself, of course, cannot demonstrate scientifically the acceptance of science as the sole arbiter of truth. That is not a scientific but a philosophical claim, though Dawkins's working assumption is that it is scientific. Science, specifically evolutionary biology, functions like a religion for Dawkins and those like him.

It is helpful, then, to understand the functions of both faith and religion if we are to truly begin to understand the role of religion in personal and social life. This then raises the question of knowing, of epistemology. How can we know anything about the world, much less about the divine or that which is embraced as holy or sacred? While religion provides the framework and object of commitment, one must also consider how it is possible to know what these objects and frameworks are. That is, how do we go about the knowing process? While a great deal has been written on this from both a philosophical and scientific perspective, I will attempt in the next chapter to give a simplified overview of the process and to demonstrate that all human processes of knowing involve something like what I refer to as the "House of Knowing."

KEY TERMS

Abrahamic Faiths

Belief

Forms of Doubt

Forms of Faith

Functional Definition of Faith

Functions of Religion
Holy
Mystery of Existence
Orienting Worldview
Religion
Scientism
Spiritual
Stages of Faith
Ultimate Concern

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Note the definition of the *spiritual*. What is the relationship between the spiritual and Holy mystery? How does this differ from your understanding of religiosity? How is it similar?
2. Consider the question, *Why are you here?* Which of the words/concepts in this sentence do you find most valuable?
3. In what ways do humans seek the sacred or the Holy? What functions as religious to people of traditionally religious and secular backgrounds?
4. What is surprising or controversial about Fowler's seven stages of faith development? Does society speak to the betterment of one stage over another?
5. The topic of doubt is addressed on its own and in the context of faith development. In what ways does doubt alter, deter, or strengthen "religious" (not in the traditional sense) worldviews?