

Psychological and Economic Variables in Religious Enquiry An existential model of Belief-Faith-Practice

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ABSTRACT

This presentation focuses on the economics of the human condition in the religious sense by defining psychological variables allocated to: (1) ways in which Belief-Faith-Practice (a "trilogy") serves as a guide on the journey through a devotee's religious enquiry; (2) a position of progressing through stages of psychological development; and, (3) methods of value clarification of becoming in existentialism. The collective unconscious and archetypal theories of Carl Jung seem to reinforce both the psychological and existential model of Erik Erikson's "age-stage development" model, which was used by way to plot our religious enquiry data.

In the process of religious enquiry, Gordon Allport's theories of religious becoming (meditation, belief and thought) are presented. A person in h/his existential pose of gaining a spiritual-economic balance, experiences psychological growth through a series of developmental factors. This matrix foundation is spread across six of Erik Erikson's Stages of age development, which in this presentation are treated as critical divisions of age/religious transitions. Descriptive elements are identified as Belief, Faith or Practice under each of the six developmental periods to show human and religious characteristics of that period.

In looking at different models of practical applications of existentialism, these are explained from the writings of three (what can be called) "neo-existentialists", viz. Zen Master Thich Thien-An, J. Krishnamurti and Roger Shinn. I describe their philosophy as out-of-the-ordinary 20th century thought, which I found applies most directly to human development in religious enquiry. This is further emphasized with inclusion of works from three noted poets.

The approach I propose and material I reference are existential to the posture, or pose, of becoming, which can be evaluated in economic transition. These dynamics in the value of religious enquiry are based upon the progress in moving forward to an identified, stronger Belief system. Then the individual settles on articles of Faith which support that system, with feedback to elements of Belief by selected modes of Practice spiritually rewarding to the enquirer.

Existentialist Psychologists: Gordon Allport and Carl Jung

Human objective-subjective differences, within one person and among many, appear to be in constant battle, in the "personality" sense. Among most psychologists the realities of differences are conflicts in learning and socio-behavior. This author's views, however, agree with the existential psychologists and humanistic religious thinkers. The Buddha taught that ". . . ultimate realities . . . are things that do exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature", and *conventional realities* are not the interactions of positive-negative, male-female,

giving-receiving conflicts but are such true entities as . . . “living beings, persons, men, women, animals . . .” and so on. (Bodhi, 25) These teaching are a close fit to help punctuate the theories within existentialism, things (*dhamma*) existing as true observable phenomenon.

Agreeing with the existentialists, who would not deny that objective *becoming* mimics the subjective (and visa versa), are the behavioral psychologist. Likewise, religionists would adopt the attitude of “right views” as a way of openness to the existential beliefs that one feature of being human is the tendency, (and requirement) to regulate one’s own behavior. Such is the humanistic existentialists’ view that one is completely free, yet responsible for h/his own behavior.

We will now review briefly the theories and practices of two noted psychologists, both humanistic and existential, and the applicability of their work to developments in religious enquiry.

Gordon Allport’s Age and Religious Becoming

A person’s existential pose at any one point is described as a combination of factors in a continuous process of change. At birth the organism is passive in the scope of *becoming*, but reacts when stimulated. In age and psychological/ psychosocial adjustments, earlier impressions are more significant and lasting than later influences . . . but, like the young sapling, the youth is more passive and flexible.

The individual is not merely “a collection of acts, nor simply the locus of acts; the person is the source of acts . . . and stimulates the process of change (*becoming*)”. (Crapps, 150) (This author’s italics.) With emphasis on the changing personality’s existential pose, *becoming* is the pointed direction, observed in human motivation and behavior . . . the *need* to change as the need *for* change; living is more critical than life.

One’s personality, by the needs and desires for religious enquiry, as an emotion need to self-actualize, is in constant change. Religious survival from youth through late-adulthood depends upon identity by resolution of conflicts through Belief-Faith-Practice. Uniqueness of personality, according to Allport:

Although personality continuously changes, each individual is marked by a peculiar unity and distinctiveness, an inner core by which the person may be identified.

Allport calls this uniqueness the *proprium*, a concept more narrow than person or personality and broader than ego . . . *Proprium* is personal identity, striving in the direction of self-assertion with emotions of self-satisfaction and pride.

(Crapps, 152-53)

Some highlights of Allport’s life and work follow: An American, he was one of four sons of a physician. He studied and taught in American and European

universities – Dartmouth College, Harvard, Hamburg, Berlin and Cambridge. During his professional career from 1919 to 1967, he received virtually every professional honor that psychology has to offer. Although his emphasis was on humanistic psychology, he believed, “the congruence of behavior and the importance of conscious motives lead Allport naturally to an emphasis upon those phenomena often represented under the terms *self* and *ego*”. (Hall and Lindzey, 440) “In his earlier basic text . . . he largely avoided the problems raised by these concepts; but finally came to ask directly the crucial question, ‘Is the concept of self necessary?’ His answer is guarded.” (Hall and Lindzey, 448)

Carl Jung: Individuation, Growth and Maturation

This world-noted Austrian psychiatrist was a cohort of Sigmund Freud, but his break with Freud came early in his career (1912). Their differences centered around Jung’s sensitive approach to psychotherapy practice, which are specifically expressed in a humanistic sense. First, Jung was mainly interested in the purposive, goal-striving interpretations of behavior rather than the causative sources. Behaviors of the individual arise from earlier adaptations to life, which signify steps forward to various life purposes: this process is the *becoming*.

Jung observed in a second sense that symbolic productions of mentally disturbed persons resembled those of primitive peoples. He speculated that there must be an hereditary portion of the mind that contains the imprints of ancestral experience. From this, he hypothesized the existence of the *collective unconscious*, a hint of his belief in the Buddha’s teachings of rebirth. For Jung, the collective, not the individual unconscious, is the seat of religion. (Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 162). Freud probably had opened up interesting new realms of the spirit for Jung, these being the mysteries of the psyche.

Archetypes, in Jung’s scheme of belief and psychotherapy practice, are primordial images, those mysteries of religion. He saw these in associations, drawings and dreams. The most common were the *animus*, the ideal mate of the female psyche, and the *anima*, the ideal mate of the male psyche. He further divided the psyche into the *persona*, the mask for the individual in social relationships. The ego for Jung is the deeper part of the psyche reflective of one’s personal experiences. According to Crapps,

Jung believed that the collective unconscious was continued from generation to generation through archetypes . . . He observed striking parallels in symbols used by otherwise diverse personalities and religious groups and accounted for the similarities in terms of the archetypes. . . Jung’s view of archetypes and their relationship to religion is illustrated in his interpretation of God. (Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 74.) . . . God for Jung was essentially a psychological event, an archetype that could be affirmed. (79).

Jung used dream interpretations as an aid for his patients’ understanding of current difficulties and future strivings, rather than past unconscious sources of psychic problems.

Jung's interest and existential association with Buddhism came through his contacts with D.T. Suzuki, a 20th century prolific author of Zen Buddhism. In America they dialogued in many personal meetings, and as the result of a growing interest on Jung's part, Suzuki asked him to write a forward to his book, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1964). His belief in the strength of the human spirit in healing the mind is illustrated by his style of compassionate interventions

Erikson's Stage Theory: A Model

Around 1962, Erik Erikson, noted personality psychologist, concluded that "events in early childhood leave a permanent stamp on adult personality", as Freud had done earlier. Erikson went further to theorize that "personality continues to evolve over the entire life span." In developing his stage theory, he proposed that a "stage is a development period during which characteristic patterns of behavior are exhibited and certain capacities become established." (Weiten, 435)

In 2000 I presented a paper entitled "Human Factors for Wellness" at the Sixth International Conference of the Society for Buddhist and Christian Studies. I posed a theory that in the process of religious enquiry, the functions of Belief, Faith and Practice can be observed and evaluated separately, each having unique characteristics and objectives.

The attendees at my two sessions brainstormed this idea to come up with what are called "factors" for each of these functions. It was suggested, and confirmed, that Erikson's stages of development would be the base model/matrix upon which to plot identifying factors for each of the three "trilogy" functions.

We condensed his eight stages to six stages, by combining three in the younger stages/time frames, (First year of life, Second and third years, and Fourth through sixth years). (Weiten, 436) This was to provide a model and format upon which to apply data and a base which would be more focused on pre-adolescent, to late-adult transitions. It is proposed that in working with Erikson's ideas, these six compartments, or element stages, would be a viable framework upon which can be plotted the related factors of Belief-Faith-Practice, and show their discrete matching elements. This approach gives the religious adept more flexibility to establish a compatible pose, not only with chronological age but within a span for religious development as well.

The two groups created and critiqued the descriptive names we call the "factors": seven related to Belief, seven to Faith, and seven to Practice. There was a consensus of agreement that the final selections would stand alone without further interpretations. The key words and descriptions making up these factors are shown in the following Figure. Since the 2000 conference I have been testing the usefulness and validity of this model with data obtained from clients/devotees in my psychological and spiritual counseling clientele.

Psychological and Economic Variables in Religious Enquiry:
An existential model of Belief-Faith-Practice

In Figure 1 below is our model of psychological development from Erikson's "stage theory", which shows each of the six stages. This is more in the economic sense and not solely in terms of "psychological age" development from-childhood-to-old-age. These are meant to be seen as separate, appropriate positions by which a devotee explores the economic and religious values of each stage in terms of "psychological crisis", and the general scope of adaptability to Belief-Faith-Practice. . . this in terms of how they are applied personally. (Erikson's Stages described in Weiten, 435-454).

Figure 1

<u>STAGES</u>	<u>Psychological Crisis</u>
Age 4-8	Initiative versus Guilt
Age 8-12	Industry versus Inferiority
Adolescence	Identity versus Confusion
Early Adult	Intimacy versus Isolation
Mid Adult	Generativity versus Self-absorption
Late Life	Integrity versus Despair

Stages and Development Questions

What governs the generation of the factors elemental to Belief, Faith and Practice is the relatedness of the questions proposed by Erik Erikson, those a person grapples with at any one single age-stage and those which are critical to an individual's psycho-economic and psychosocial adjustment. (Weiten, 436.) In our views it is theorized that the questions could reflect the temperament and attitude of the person involved in religious enquiry at the beginning of h/his search, at some mid-point, and/or in later reflections. These questions probably could be carried over to the next advanced stage.

We theorize that abiding by the factors suggested as descriptors for each "trilogy" function in order to establish religious stability, one can be influenced by questions with which s/he struggles. What governs the generations of the factors under Belief, Faith and Practice is the relativeness of the questions proposed by Erikson...critical to an individual's psychological adjustment. The questions should reflect the temperament and the attitude of the person in religious inquiry at the beginning of h/his search, at some mid point and/or in later reflections.

The questions for each of the six development stages are shown in the Following:

Figure 2.

Stages and Development Questions

Stages of Development						
	Age 4-8	Age 8-12	Adolescence	Early Adult	Mid-Adult	Late Life
Erikson's Suggested Development Questions	Can I do things by myself; am I good or bad	Am I competent or worthless	Who am I and where am I going	Shall I share my life or live alone	Will I produce something of true value	Have I lived a full life

Rationale for the Belief-Faith-Practice Trilogy

Generating Descriptive Factors within Belief-Faith-Practice:

In the brainstorming sessions during my presentation at the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies conference, we generated numerous factors which would describe, or help define, the specific intent of each compartment of the trilogy...Belief, Faith and Practice. The number of factors was reduced to seven, which are shown below under each function.

Belief System

- authenticity/credo
- truth of precepts/vows/commandments
- icons/gods/teachers
- verifiable from the beginning
- connectedness/tracking
- ethics
- value in life over time

Articles of Faith

- relationships to Belief factors
- details of articles
- doubt-arising (who, why, when, where)
- association in Truth with:
- Time, Talent, Temperament, Tenacity
- track to self-actualized state
- deliberate on doctrines of Faith (e.g. Six Perfections, Ten Commandments)

Practice*

- engage in acts to actualize Faith
- acts to verify Belief/Faith factors
- works to arouse spiritual strengths
- existence in the *becoming* experiences
- process/advancing to self-actualized states
- on-going Practice inventory
- changes through mindful meditation

*Later it was suggested “filial piety” and “diminished involvement in worldly activities” are critical here.

Representative Factors/ Data in Erikson’s Matrix

Representative Data

Trilogy Factors	Stages: Age 4-8	Age 8-12	Adolescence	Early-adult	Mid-adult	Late Life
BELIEF: authority	X		X			X
Icon/god trusted leader		X	X		X	
Value in life over time				X		X
FAITH: truth of time...			X			
Doubt-arising		X	X	X		
PRACTICE:						
meditation	X	X	X	X	X	X
(all works)	X	X	X	X	X	X

Most critical/important factors indicated by “X” in each age/development stage; Under PRACTICE all seven factors were designated as “critical”.

Applying Critical Factors to Bloom’s Domains

There are three domains, Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor established by B.S. Bloom and his committee of college and university examiners, in which to classify organizational principles for a Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Bloom’s committee placed emphasis on *principles* of importance for developing the taxonomy.

“...first, importance should be given to educational considerations...” “Second, the taxonomy should be a logical classification . . . to define terms...” “Finally, the taxonomy should be consistent with relevant and accepted psychological principles and theories”. (Bloom, 6-8)

These three domains are shown by classification according to their respective trilogy factors: *Belief* and associated factors as cognitive, intellectual abilities and skills; *Faith* and associated factors being derived from/by human emotions, interests and values (affective); and *Practice*, the activities carrying out Belief and Faith (psychomotor), combining in a “backward-checklist” way, the conditions of Faith which are governed by one’s Belief, i.e. by putting the Belief-Faith functions unto practice. This may mean developing a system approach to allow for flexibility.

To demonstrate the relationship of these three domains, this author’s exemplary link of events follows:

She is driving her car on a city street which has signal lights at major cross-streets. As she approaches a signaled intersection, she observes the green light turning to amber. Being already late for an appointment, she considers going through the intersection while the light is still amber, but as she comes to the cross-walk the light has turned red. She depresses the breaks and stops at the cross-walk.

The three domains are analogous to the events in this respect: her knowledge of traffic laws is clear, i.e. knowing how to stop her vehicle, and at a red signal light (*Belief*). The affective elements at work in this scenario are those having to do with the emotions of the result of running a red light . . . a traffic ticket and an instant thought of hitting a pedestrian in the crosswalk (*Faith*). The psychomotor elements are, of course, combining her Belief system with the elements of Faith, thereby depressing her brakes to stop her vehicle (*Practice*). For any of us to act out this episode just described would probably take less time than reading the descriptive text. Our point is to give a set of common, well-known series of events as a metaphor by which a person in religious enquiry can adapt the Belief-Faith-Practice functions to h/his own motivation for change in the psychological realm of *becoming*.

The Existentialist Posture of Roger Shinn

Existentialism finds itself as the arena for phenomenal controversy, scientific directions of objectivity, and the sometimes narrow path to a destiny of one’s self-exploration. In my first endeavor at research in this area in the early 1950s, I wrote some papers under my American name, viz. “Claude T. Ware” and as a practicing Christian, which were submitted to Shinn at Vanderbilt University for inclusion in his research. One purpose of mine in our studies was to resolve that the Christian attitude would be to bring existentialism out of the doldrums of mid-

European, pseudo-intellectualism and atheistic negativism to its appropriateness to religious freedom.

Not much has been resolved in the last few decades in neo-existentialism's commitment to society in order to insure an agreeable merging of existence with objectivity. Our research found that some individuals in religious enquiry take the pose of "being" as *existence* and are frozen there in permanence, so the only movement is backwards.

We discovered from some questions answered by university students and clients that individuals trudge along to find there must be two postures, *existence* and *objectivity*. Shinn is specific as he points out:

"... no one lives in existential concern all the time"... There is thus an existential impulse and an objective impulse in everyone"... "we might say that existentialism and objectivity are two postures that we assume in our living. Both are necessary in life – whether for survival or fullness of life. The relating of the two is one of the most difficult things anyone does. It is the business of becoming a person, of conducting a life, of entering into selfhood." "*Objectivity* asks whether life continues after death. *Existence* meets death confidently." (20-23).

There is much discussion about conducting a study to reveal how people feel about (religious) belief as just belief, with no strings attached. It might be revealing that in a sample of the population which either is, or is not religiously oriented, Belief, (as one element in our trilogy), as an element of truth may not stand alone (that is, without the support of Faith and Practice). Also, the consensus of a small sample we looked at thought of Faith as "truth".

In Shinn's emphasis on religious beliefs and faith, he might argue, 'Is belief, as a system, the whole truth, and does one accept all the elements of a system at once, or not?' His implication is that there is a gradual emersion into the periphery which make-up the elements of a **Belief** system. But, Shinn does not address the notion that elements in the periphery dip into **Faith** and **Practice** . . . only the thoughts are there, with the devotee being committed to the dogma, the rules, of Belief. One might conclude that Shinn being Christian looks at the existential factors of a system of Beliefs and not solely the *faith of the church*.

In Shinn's talks and papers he comments heavily on self-discovery. He explains, "Existentialism, we have noticed, starts with the question: 'Who am I? What does it mean for me to exist as a unique individual? . . . an impossible difficult question". We are bound by self-images which are obscure and some are deluded because of the fear in looking at the ever-changing self. We discover at the core of selfhood a deep *anxiety*. "Not admitting this anxiety we find is the cause of fear for others. . . "life is insecure" says the existentialist, when you enjoy life, know what you are doing." (55-57.)

One question to answer existentially might be about scientifically evaluating religion: What if we could scientifically test the economic validity of religious behavior of society in general, and of individuals in personal religious enquiry? In reality, there are the two sides to arguing religion: should religion be a matter of personal feeling without reasoning?; and, religion must be an objective to think about.

Shinn's notes in truism about "faith" are forward and dynamic – appropriate to existentialism. In writing as a Christian existentialist, his meanings and values highlight existentialism's impact on spiritual ideology of all religious leanings, as well as the directions devotees are free to take. On Soren Kierkegaard Shinn writes: "In true existentialist manner he derides the practice of separating the writing from the writer. He invites us to look at himself – so that he may make us look at ourselves (48-49.)

Shinn's posture is his reliance somewhat on Kierkegaard's emphasis that "without risk there is no faith". Then continues, hence faith requires a leap; this leap is not . . . "a kind of desperate lurch of the emotions that leaves the mind behind. It is a decision of the *whole* self – mind, will, feeling. But no one coasts into faith". The mind of the Christian is pointed to by Shinn as he confirms that ..

"the Christian existentialist knows well the faith that outleaps all reason". "Faith, as (the religious philosopher) Paul Tillich says, is not so much a grasping as a *being grasped*. (121) (The parentheses are this author's.)

To this author, faith cannot be put out there as a target. It has a flexible, almost evasive dimension that obscures the spiritual core of one's emotions – that drama that brings tears to one's eyes when the impact of true Faith is felt. That's when one has been *grasped*. Shinn points to the atheistic existentialists as being not so different, and in a sense praising their clarity of faith: Most of us, drifting with our society, keep up its typical religious practices. As the social conventions change, we change – and hardly know the difference the serious atheist has a more daring faith, a 'greatness and generosity' which his theories take no account of. He risks disapproval. He sees through the idols that lure most people into devotion . . .The atheistic existentialists have something to say to Christians who will listen. (78-79.)

Some concluding thoughts by Shinn on the spiritual complexion of existentialism . . . it can look to atheism for help. "His (Sartre's) atheism, for better or worse, has a positive purpose. He wants man to take responsibility for himself, to make his own decisions – yes to create his own values. Religion is too ready to buck these responsibilities to God" . . . "the question is whether the 'leap of faith' is a courageous response to the God who truly is, or a flight into illusion". (76-77.)

“The thirst for freedom and selfhood can readily degenerate into self-assertion. ‘Be yourself,’ say the existentialists. But which self shall I be? The self that finds its freedom in deep loyalties, or the self that seeks freedom from loyalty? (117).

Krishnamurti at the Oaks

When starting my doctoral work in the late ‘60s, I began a vigorous exploration of existentialism and how this philosophy applied to my work in psychology, and in teaching methods of recovery from human ills. I discovered “K” through my colleague/friend. We listened to K’s talks at the Oaks in Ojai, California for the next three years. My attention was intense on K’s writings and talks on existential *becoming* . . . talks of spiritual transformation with nature, love and consciousness and that “conditioning is the common factor of man”.

In associating K’s teachings with actions and ideas for connections to religious enquiry, one finds his spiritual pursuits and teachings do not conform to any organized religious belief, faith or practice . . . despite the spiritual and social pressures from the Theosophists, those who discovered him, nurtured him, and wanted him as their guru. His teachings are aimed at the practitioner to free h/his mind from disorder. The impact of his references in speech and writing catch one’s intellect off guard, as he explains when one observes . . . “The brain can only function in security, not in contradiction and confusion. So it tries to find some neurotic formulas, but the conflict becomes worse . . . When the observer is the (one) observed there is complete order.” (*K’s Journal*, 22) . . . “Not-togetherness is this fragmentation which takes place when the observer is not the observed, when the experiencer is seen as different from the experience.” (*K’ Journal*, 27)

And in arguing at times of the economic resolution of the dichotomy of sanity-insanity, and passive-aggressive barriers, he asserts . . . “seeing is the doing and not ideation first and (then) action according to the conclusion”. . . “when the analyser separates himself as something different from the analysed, he begets conflict . . . the observer is the observed and therein lies sanity, the whole, and with the whole is love”. (*K’s Journal*, 21).

And about meditation as religious practice, K is most direct. What is one seeking by meditating? “In meditation, the end is not different from the means. One has to be completely free from all methods, all systems . . . that is already the beginning of meditation”. . . “we have to be very clear about this searching, this seeking for experience . . . We have to understand the searching out of truth . . . Is truth ever to be found by seeking?” (*Flight of the Eagle*, 30)

K did not teach meditation as a discipline, as a gate to beginning religious enquiry; he did not treat it as an exercise in self-awareness, for socio-religious communication, arousing consciousness or spiritual searching. He held there is no

preparadness such as proper/improper sitting pose, hands forming a *mudra*, mantra recitation and other rigid instructions offered by sincere, inspired teachers. Meditation is a look into nature. "As you said the other day, the observer is the observed. I see what it means now. The benediction (meditation) I sought is not to be found in the seeking". (*K's Journal*, 25.)

K taught meditation as peace in relationship. In meditation it (peace) is. Meditation itself is the movement of peace. It is not an end to be found; it is not put together by thought or word. The action of meditation is intelligence. Meditation is none of those things you have been taught or experienced. The putting away of what you have learnt or experienced is meditation. The freedom from the experiencer is meditation. When there is no peace in relationship, there is no peace in meditation; it is an escape into illusion and fanciful dreams. (*K's Journal*, 64.)

Regarding the "existential", K writes . . . "the conviction of experience is the negation of enquiry. Intelligence is the freedom to enquire, to investigate the 'me' and the 'not me' . . . To be a light to oneself is the light of all others. To be a light to oneself is for the mind to be free from challenge and response, for the mind then is totally awake . . ." (*K's Journal*, 74.)

The Zen/Mu of *Becoming*

If the Buddhist view of existence is regarded as momentary, then the nature of reality has the sustained complexion of *becoming*, not "being". And, the Madhyamika (Mahayana Buddhism) position is that everything is devoid of reality and consciousness. (Huntington, 30.) Controversially, this existential pose neither regards consciousness nor external reality as ultimate. However, according to the *Abhidhamma*, "Ultimate realities . . . are things that exist by reason of their own intrinsic nature (*sabhava*). These are the dhammas: the final, irreducible components of existence which result from a correctly performed analysis of experience." (Bodhi, 25).

Guided by the phenomena of existence and non-existence, both occurring simultaneously, Madhyamika would set out to negate any merits derived by the religious and psychological perspective of "enquiring". It is our thesis that by seeing into Belief as belief, Faith as faith and Practice as practice, progress is our goal, not actualizing emptiness. According to Zen Master Thien-An's teaching, duality would be resolved, and oneness overcomes the *illusion* of separateness. (Thich Thien-An, Teaching materials, 1974-1940). Zen, on the other hand, does a right-about-oblique on emptiness with nothing, or *Mu*, as the ultimate. Below we recap Master Thien-An's steps in Zen Realization.

1st Step: Intellectual understanding of emptiness, but not able to explain it. Yet, one may demonstrate Mu in every phase of the day.

“Everything is empty/void, but actualization is the space in a room that”
makes the room.

2nd Step: The Zen master brings the student from the void back to the
world of reality with the *koan*.

“In advancing, first retreating; my defense is no defense – the second
cup of tea.” (This author’s *koan*, 2003)

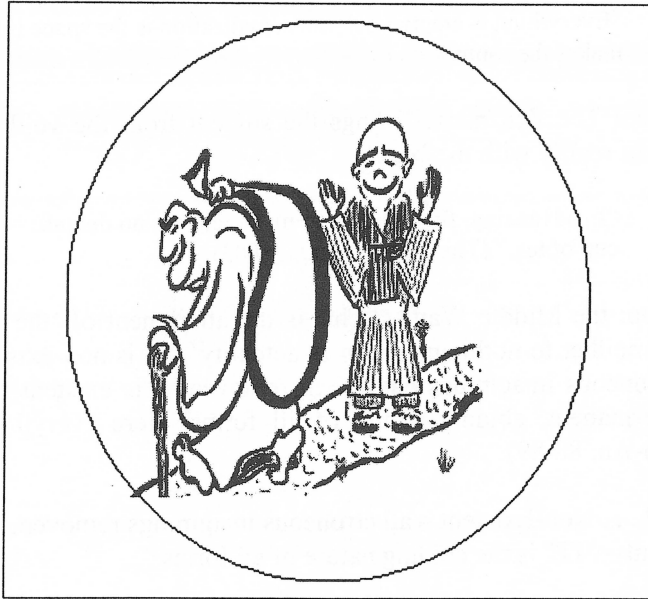
3rd Step: the Middle Way – “This is the attainment of ‘the mind which
clings neither to nothingness nor to actuality’. “It is non-existent because
all erroneous imaginings have been removed; it is existent because it is
the permanent, abiding nature of all forms. Here everything is Mu.”
(Thien-An, 88-89).

BOTH . . . Non-Existent – all erroneous imaginings removed, and
Existent – “IT” is the abiding nature of all forms

Metaphor of Wisdom

Zen Meaning of Life

- During the T’ang dynasty there lived a stout fellow who walked through
the streets carrying a big linen sack over his shoulder collecting gifts.
When his sack was full he’d give the gifts to the many children who
gathered around him.
- Once when this stout fellow was about his work/play, a Zen master
happened along and asked, “What is the significance of Zen?”, meaning
“What in the meaning of life?” In response, the stout fellow plopped his
sack on the ground in silent answer.
- The Zen mast then asked, “What is the actualization of Zen?”, meaning
“What in the meaning of life?” For an answer he swung his sack over his
shoulder and continued on this way.
- Today that stout fellow is recognized as Maitreya, the next Buddha to be,
and a manifestation of Hotai (Jap.), Pu-tai Ho-shang (Chan_ and Di Lac
(VN). He is seen everywhere sitting and walking with children all around
him, and he wears a great smile of joy for carrying spiritual gifts in his
linen sack... and carrying the problems of all beings in his belly.



Text for “Zen Meaning of Life” is abstracted from Paul Reps’ *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*;
The art work is by Zen student, Matthew “Tam” Higgins, 1996.

Existentially-Aware Poets

Let us look at Roger Shinn’s comments on the spirituality of literature, in the true existential sense. “. . . in *activity* – in writing, warring, marrying, praying – persons discover themselves and other selves. The recorded discoveries are literature.” (101.) He further elaborates on poetry.

Even more than fiction, poetry communicates directly. A genuine poem – I am excluding prose that happens to rhyme and meter – conveys more than it says literally. It requires a peculiar concentration of the listener, who must himself be drawn into the world of the poet, there to discover what the poet cannot say boldly. In this broad sense, poetry is inevitably existential. The sensitive imagination of the poet often beats the philosopher to existential insights. Thus Robert Frost, whose sturdy New England spirit is remote from the seething atmosphere of most existentialism, nevertheless has expressed existential yearnings profoundly.

We may not be able to extend Shinn’s remarks of meeting the ways of literature to all poets and all poetry, but here are examples of the works of three selected existential/Zen poets we can consider.

Robert Frost, in “The Road Not Taken” (223), his most quoted, and misunderstood, poem, tells us that he stood at a fork in the road, undecided which path to take. He chose the one less traveled, but actually there was no difference,

for “the passing had worn them really about the same”. Yet at the moment of choice, Frost questioned the importance of a choice. His last stanza reads:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverge in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

From that decision-indecision point, the road Frost took was the only road he could have taken, “different” even from that at his life’s beginning.

Hue Neng, rice-pounding Buddhist layman at the Fifth Patriarch’s monastery in China, (6th C.C.E.) answered the Fifth Patriarch’s request to have a poem written by all monks and devotees expressing their knowledge of “transcendental wisdom”. The author of the winning poem would be appointed Sixth Patriarch. First, the head monk/abbot composed and wrote his poem on the south corridor wall. The Fifth Patriarch saw the poem and had all disciples read it. (The other monks would not compete with the abbot. Hui Neng went and made obeisance before the verse.

Supposedly being illiterate, Hui Neng had a monk write his poem on the west wall, one expressing transcendental wisdom as he had learned from the “Diamond Sutra”. The two poems are shown here side-by-side.

Head Monk	Hui Neng
The body is the Bodhi Tree,	The mind is the Bodhi tree,
The mind is the stand of the mirror bright.	The body is the mirror stand.
At all times we must strive to polish it,	The mirror is originally clean and pure;
And must not let the dust collect.	Where can it be stained by dust?

Hui Neng’s poem won the competition and he was appointed Sixth Patriarch of that monastic tradition. (de Bary, 211-217.)

Our third poet, Robert Townsend Rogers, was born to *become* an artist in painting, floral design and poetry. As a devotee of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and student of Robinson Jeffers, he learned to express his spiritual existentialism in the auras of nature, not in temples, nor from the pulpit. He dared to write of the Zen of living for the average reader, and succeeded magnificently.

Love Will Live expresses some obsessions of his naturalistic principles. In the voice of anxious seekers, he urges us to BE where we are ... acknowledge it ... and then move on, and on, and on ... His pose: (1)

“I pack a bag, I run, I flee,
but where I am there’s
always me.
Dammit!”

Conclusions

We can conclude from this study that the trilogy, i.e. “Belief-Faith-Practice” factors, with their associated functions, as described herein, can be combined favorably with six of Erik Erikson’s stages of development to help the religious devotee find h/his existential pose and map a plan to fit a spiritual future. We found it an appropriate model upon which to express religious opinions in ways to help define more specific functions of psychological development for religious enquiry. The references I have made to existentialism (Shinn), its role in teaching (J. Krishnamurti), in religion/psychology (Thien An, Allport, Jung) and the self/personality theorist apply to the process of *becoming*, as a devotee learns to regard the *affect* of *nowness* and *emptiness* by self-identification (Who am I, really?).

Emphasis is placed on the need, in a psychological and economic sense, to continue to exploit the dynamics of Belief-Faith-Practice functions, and relationships with the personal factors through research of a specific religious system. There is the matter of the religious enquirer’s motivation for “moving on”, that is, *becoming* in spiritual awareness when one existential pose is saturated. Our support of the existential pose is emphasized in living literature with works of Zen masters and ancient and modern poets (Hui Neng, Frost, Rogers). Accordingly, we find ways to express economic balance through investigating models of age and psychological development in religious practice.

“Psychological and Economic Variables in Religious Enquiry”

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