In every age and across the whole earth, humankind has undertaken the spiritual quest. We are the pilgrim species, and whether we travel to Jerusalem, Canterbury, Damascus, Mecca, or the wilderness, or whether monastically confined in a solitary cell, as with Julian of Norwich and countless others, this spiritual quest involves a journeying, a going-forth so as to arrive at a higher destination. The thesis of this paper is that there exists a fundamental and essential connection between the spiritual journey of our species and the ongoing evolution of human nature, and that religion has functioned as humankind's evolutionary institution par excellence. That is, religion has functioned as the carrier of the evolutionary impulse, the bearer of the glad tidings of the new and future nature which may be born from within our species. In outlining a case for this speculative thesis, I proceed first by examining trends in traditional descriptions of human spiritual growth.

**Metaphors of Metamorphosis and Movement**

With a populace naturally wedded to the mundane realities of here-and-now everyday life there may always be difficulty in attempting to describe or explain that which falls beyond the bounds of common experience, perhaps even beyond the range of the senses, and that which may forever remain elusive from the imprimatur of the increasingly sacred .05 level of statistical significance. Because of such difficulty, the statement of transformative processes is perhaps best announced in the form of analogies, allusions and metaphors. Accordingly, teachers of religious traditions, both Eastern and Western, have often resorted to symbolic and metaphoric forms such as myths and parables in order to describe spiritual transformation.

Many of the most evocative portrayals of spiritual development have naturally involved images of transformation, of the movement or journeying of an individual from one place to another, from one state of being to another. Indeed Campbell (1956) has argued in his classic, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that diverse human cultures have been at work producing their own local versions of what he describes as humankind's monomyth, the hero-journey. As viewed in a number of traditions, the spiritual journey may be usefully portrayed through at last three different metaphors.
1. Coming Home: Images of Deliverance

Humanity's pervasive alienation from the world manifests itself in the profoundly recurrent theme of being an exile, a 'stranger in a strange land'. It is as though we possess a deep inner conviction of having been expelled from paradise, and carry within us the desire for the promised land. Modern culture views itself still as wandering in the wilderness, in Eliot's 'wasteland', wondering, as Roszak (1972) puts it 'where the wasteland ends'. The continuing power of the 'prodigal son' parable shows this ongoing longing for a return. It is relevant to note that Hixon's (1978) compilation of writings from the world's religious traditions was titled *Coming Home*. Evelyn Underhill (1913, p.4) in her description of mystical consciousness states, "We know then that the wistful eyes of Life are set towards a vision which is also a home'.

Allied to the sense of estrangement with its accompanying tradition of longing for the return journey, are metaphors of imprisonment, resulting in stories of a release into freedom. Not only is humanity chained in the darkness of Plato's cave, but so too, for a time, are the bringers of deliverance: the heralds of human freedom are themselves often described as undergoing a period of being constrained, of being immobilized in their journey. From Prometheus chained to a rock, Osiris embedded in wood, Odin tied to Yggdrasil the great world-tree, Christ nailed to a cross, through to gnostic notions of Sophia, divine wisdom, imprisoned in the *prima materia*: in all of these images there emerges a sense that the full journey of spirit is constrained by the material world. Hence the longing for Exodus, and for *moksha*, the Eastern theme of liberation. Perhaps the most vivid rendering of this theme of spirit's escape from material imprisonment is the metaphor in which the spiritual journey is described as the transition from death to rebirth.

2. The Journey into the Light

One of the most enduring images of the world's religious traditions centres not only on the experience of light, but more particularly on the importance of the movement from darkness into light. Thus, though it is true that spiritual leaders are described as being enlightened, even haloed, of being 'the light of the world', yet what is more to the point is that, to follow in their footsteps, we too must travel the 'dark night of the soul' of St John of the Cross (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, 1979) and find that gospel
of John's 'light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world' (John 1.9). This is no easy task, for as Plato showed in his allegory of the cave, humankind can be fearful of the light and desirous of the darkness.

Associated with the journey into light are metaphors of awakening and of becoming a seer, i.e. gaining true sight. Thus the prevalence of notions suggesting that ordinary awareness is, as Wordsworth put it, 'but a sleep and a forgetting', in which our journey cannot begin until we awake from the dream-sleep of everyday existence, and become, like Buddha, 'the awakened one'. Thus while we may in Paul's words 'now see through a glass darkly', we must, as Blake enjoins us, 'cleanse the doors of perception', to see beyond the veils of maya.

3. The Ascent

Amongst many other recurring themes which have emerged in religious imagery, one of the most significant is the theme that the journey involves an ascent. Hence church spires, Olympus, Jacob's ladder, Martin Luther King's "I have been to the mountain-top", the reported levitation of saints and gurus, and Titurel's ascending to the mountain-peak to erect the Castle of the Holy Grail. Such images and narratives serve to direct our attention to higher realms. As Schonfield's (1985) translation indicates, even the theme of rebirth was originally phrased as 'ye must be born from above'. It also may be noted that the word 'heaven' derives originally from older English and Saxon cognates from which we also derive 'to heave': that is, it concerns a process of raising-up, of being elevated.

In summary, religion has a long tradition of expressing what may be termed metaphors of metamorphosis, a diversity of images which mirror the processes of transformation. In modern times, the expression of such images has a natural affinity with the theme of evolution.

Evolution

The concept of evolution could be considered to be one of pre-eminent paradigms of the contemporary Weltanschauung. Not only has the scientific theory of evolution been of immense significance since its accepted enunciation in Darwin's The Origin of the Species in 1859, the concept of evolution has functioned as a profound and pervasive perspective underlying human thought and capable of application to an amazingly diverse range of

The evidence supporting the theory of evolution has derived from fields such as paleontology, comparative anatomy, ethology, embryology, and biochemistry, and has involved analytical techniques as diverse as carbon-14 dating and chromosomal analysis. Although originally conceived as an account of the development of life, the perspective or mindform which has developed around the theory of evolution has been applied to such non-living entities as societal structures and the universe itself.

Yet, while the theory of evolution and its ramifications are so firmly impressed onto modern consciousness, it is unfortunately the case that, with rare exceptions, for many people the process of evolution is still primarily understood as though it was entirely completed, a process which had continued unabated for millions of years, only to somehow miraculously stop at the moment of their birth. That is, the theory of evolution tends to function in common thought as a perspective on the past, an account of 'the story so far', without due recognition being given to the point that, if there is truth in the theory at all, then it carries the suggestion of an ongoing transformational process.

Towards the end of the study he had called 'the descent of man' Darwin (1871, 1982, p. 597) drew attention to the possibility of our future ascent, thus:

"Man may be excused from feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale. And the fact of his having thus arisen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hopes for a still higher destiny in the distant future."

In the main, those who tend not to disregard the continuation of evolution are found to display a bias toward biology in their extrapolations concerning future evolution. That is, there is a tendency to conceptualise future evolutionary changes as being strictly material, involving either external morphology or internal organic changes. Sagan (1977) for example posits developments in the human brain, while Stableford (1984), enthused with developments in genetic engineering, discusses the prospects of modifying our bodily form so as, for example, to enable it to tolerate more pollution, to survive in space, and even to fight more fearsome wars. Such a focus on the external and biological seems to ignore the fact that the
increased organic complexity which determines how highly a species is placed on the phylogenetic scale is strongly correlated with increased mentation.

In a strictly biological sense, the being whose five fingers were drawn on the cave walls at Lascaux is effectively the same being who placed its footprint on the moon: but while the human body well have had a stabilised form over that time, the nature of our consciousness attests to a more inner invisible transformation (even if it might be simply an artifact derived from the invention of writing).

While recognising that evolutionary transformation has allowed the manifestation of ever higher levels of consciousness, and while attempting to remain faithful to Darwin's hopes for a higher destiny, we can consider a most interesting phenomenon concerning our species, namely that, it is the only species that we know that has yet come to consciously identify and understand the principles of evolution, and yet is the species most free from the operation of those principles. That is, whereas the primary transformative principle underlying evolutionary change has been natural selection, or the shaping power of the non-sentient environment, it is now the case that humanity is increasingly determining its own environment. Paraphrasing Shakespeare's Othello, and echoing Suzuki (1988), we may not be doing this either wisely or well, yet it remains true that humanity has unnatured ourselves. Thus for example we meet in unnatural environments under unnatural lights with unnatural heating and pay medicare to employ unnatural means to thwart the power of environmental determinism. Such transcendance of the dynamic which, in the past, has driven the evolutionary programme is derived from the fact that the focus of human evolutionary transformation has shifted, according to Teilhard de Chardin (1969), from materialism, through 'chemism', into 'psychism'.

**Spiritual Evolution: The Second Genesis**

Those who have sought to tap the depths of the human soul have frequently sensed that more is yet to come, that the full flowering of human life and experience is not yet revealed. While accepting that "it is not yet made manifest what we may become" (1 John 3:2), yet we may discern a recurring vision of spiritual unfoldment. Joachim of Flora (cf. Waite, 1973) held, for example, that human history involves a tripartite progression from
the religion of God the Father, to that of God the Son, culminating with the advent of a religion of God the Spirit. Similarly, Berdyaev (Lowrie, 1965) proposed that the achievement of maturity by our species would usher in a new religion of the Spirit.

Amongst some scholars of religious experience, the understanding of the nature of mystical consciousness echoes this theme. Although mystics were at times dismissed as suffering from a range of psychopathologies, (cf. Leuba, 1925), an alternative account of mystical consciousness comes from the work of William James (1902) and Richard Bucke (1901) who argued that mystics are the advance-guard of the next phase in human evolution, that the mystic mentality is the prototype of the new consciousness into which our species would evolve.

The healthiest development of the individual person may also manifest an emergence of the spiritual dimension. Current understandings of 'the midlife crisis' (cf. O'Collins, 1978) echo Jung's (1933) claim that personal suffering in the middle of life's journey always involves the emergence (and hence the 'emergency') of spiritual concerns. The capacity of an individual to evolve beyond ego toward transpersonal states of being has also been identified as primarily a spiritual phenomenon, a perspective which holds that the transcendent is also immanent (Carr, 1985).

Among those who have advocated such views, Chaudhuri (1977) proposes that the full development of human consciousness manifests as 'integral consciousness'; he claims that we develop a new dynamic or motivation to evolve toward creative unity with Being. As Tillich (1957, p.249) views it, this is the telos, "the inner directedness of life toward spirit, the urge of life to become spirit, to fulfill itself as spirit". In Underhill's (1913, p.5) terms, "man seems to be Life's best effort towards the exhibition of that indwelling Spirit's meaning and power." The progression of human spirituality has been discerned also in the movement of historical processes. Foremost here is the Hegelian teaching of spirit-in-being becoming manifest in the march of human history to the contrapuntal rhythm of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Toynbee (1965), in seeing religion as the ultimate hope and salvation of mankind, viewed the path of history as being directed always toward Augustine's City of God. Thus humankind may well be 'God's latest image' as Milton claimed, and in that long struggle 'up from Eden' (Wilbur, 1981) the history of the evolution of consciousness might also be understood as the history of the unfolding of Spirit.
A specifically evolutionary perspective on spirit emerges from the Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo (1963). We are asked by him to reflect on the story — so far — of evolution. In doing so we have to recognise that if we could view this planet some billion years ago, then all that would appear would be physical matter, in the main just rocks and gases. And yet, given that we know how this story will unfold, we would need to acknowledge that somehow 'enfolded' within mere matter was the possibility of something markedly different, namely life. If we then were to view the planet about 750 million years ago, there would be ample evidence of life, and, once more, knowing the story as we do, we could acknowledge that somehow enfolded within organisms which were merely living there was material suitable for the birth of consciousness. Arriving to view the planet in this present day we may discern that matter still exists, that life, though threatened, is relatively abundant, and that consciousness exists in great diversity. If we have grasped the underlying trend in the story of evolution as it has unfolded up to this time, we may discern grounds from which to speculate whether, just as Life was enfolded within matter, and then Mind enfolded within Life, so might there be something else which is yet to emerge from Mind. For Aurobindo this something else is Spirit, such that 'the world is the Divine in evolution'.

Gerald Heard (1975, p.45) is similarly convinced that "In a phrase the Life of the Spirit is no more and no less than the continuation of our evolution..". He advances the argument that since the pattern of evolution has led from responsiveness, to consciousness, thence to self-consciousness, there is a distinct implication that evolution provides for the Life of the Spirit not only the site (within human consciousness) and the form of its further progression (mystical consciousness?), but also for the method of that progression. "But as this is now to be evolution carried on in consciousness, it must be done consciously." (1975, p.48). That is, simply put, the product of evolution must now become its finest instrument of production.

Not only must our consciousness envisage and then choose its further unfolding, but many argue that the consequence of not seizing this evolutionary opportunity may be the foreclosure of evolution itself. From H.G. Wells, in a work significantly titled *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, there is the claim that:

"There is no way out for man but steeply up or steeply down. Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative. The odds seem to be all in favour of man's going down and out. If he goes up, then so
great is the adaptation demanded of him that he must cease to be a man. Ordinary man is at the end of his tether." (Wells, 1945, p.16).

That is, not only may spiritual evolution be viewed as both natural and nascent, it might also be considered to be necessary. In the face of the seven global threats of population explosions, food shortages, environmental deterioration, resource scarcity, unguided and chaotic technology, nuclear threat, and the human capacity for myopic inertia, Higgins (1977) offers seven 'sensibilities' as our salvation. Foremost amongst these, in an elaboration of the pop slogan that "the world is fragile, handle with prayer", Higgins argues there is a need for an ethic of consciousness, visionary awareness, and a reawakening to the religious. Roszak (1972, p.99) also speaks of the need for a "revolutionary mysticism".

Pre-eminent amongst those who proclaim a spiritual progression underlying and driving evolution is Teilhard de Chardin. In what is perhaps the fullest flowering of the vision of spiritual evolution, Teilhard (1969, p.16) envisages that "a vast evolutionary process is in ceaseless operation around us, . . . situated within the sphere of consciousness (and collective consciousness)." The increasing 'psychism' that has become manifest through the evolutionary progression, Teilhard argues, has a direction, pointing clearly to "the probable existence of an Ultrahuman ahead of us". (Cf. Rushforth, 1981).

From the study of history, from depth psychology and individual enrichment, from perspectives on evolution itself, we can find grounds for speculating that our species may be in the nascent stage of a second genesis, that humankind is evolving in what may be discerned to be a spiritual or religious direction. But what of religion itself: is it to be simply swept up in the path of this transformation, or could it be that it was always waiting, as it were, like the psychopompas one step ahead, lighting the way?

Religion as the Evolutionary Tradition

The 'Great Chain of Being' may now be more aptly considered as a 'Great Train of Becoming' — an evolutionary process that is directed, unfolding along a channeled pathway towards what may be a predetermined and guided destination. Such a speculative view raises the issue of the nature of the guiding process and the questions whether and how a human society could hope to reveal, nurture, promote or even provoke the continued progression toward higher stations or states of our possible evolution?
Whereas manifestations of the desire to direct our attention upward appear from many sources, ranging from Nietzsche's (1933) 'I teach the Superman' to even such as the I Ching (Douglas, 1972), with its advocacy of life decision-making based on a model of 'the Superior Man', yet it may be argued that the most persistent and powerful of such expressions are manifested in the substance of religion. Thus, as Huston Smith (1958 p.11) says:

"Religion alive confronts the individual with the most momentous option this world can present. It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles, peaks, and deserts of the human spirit." "Authentic religion is the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos can pour into human existence".

Perhaps the first and most coherent statement of this view is found in Attar's metaphor of religion as a vehicle:

"All religions, as theologians — and their opponents — understand the word, is something other that what it is assumed to be. Religion is a vehicle. Its expressions, ritual, moral and other teachings, are designed to cause certain elevating effects, at a certain time, upon certain communities. Because of the difficulty of maintaining the science of man, religion was instituted as a means of approaching truth. The means always became, for the shallow, the end, and the vehicle became the idol. Only the man of wisdom, not the man of faith or intellect, can cause the vehicle to move again." (in Shah, 1968, p.261).

We may also note here not only the Taoist emphasis on 'the Way', the notion of Christ as The Way, but also the yanas (literally 'vehicles') of Buddhism.

What emerges from these suggestions is a distinctly neo-functionalist view of the institution of religion. Function, however, is no longer confined in a Malinowskian sense to mere enactment of social order and hence socially sanctioned 'right living', but understood so as to serve the needs of 'the way'. Religion may be functioning, not to induce conformity to an extant social system, but to educate capacities unconsciously intuited as serving the ongoing evolutionary trends. This would suggest that, underlying and informing those priestly injunctions about serving others, on how to pray, on what is worth striving for, there may be a calling, from our depths, to our higher nature.
Underlying this formulation is the broader and central issue of what formally constitutes a religion? That is, what features of belief or practice make it possible for us to identify an ideological system as being a religion?

Here it is important to note the similarity between religions and advertisements: both function by contrasting inferior states of existence with images of ideal or preferred states — cf. the origin of the word 'heaven' above — and offer a procedure to promote one's personal transition toward the ideal (Carr, 1988). The essence of religion involves an attempt to enact changes in the consciousness of individuals and societies; these changes involve growth toward ever higher states of being, states consistent with the ongoing unfolding or evolution of consciousness as spirit. Thus both Tillich's (1957) view that Jesus as the Christ is to be understood as conveying a model of 'the New Being', and Teilhard's conception of the 'Ultrahuman ahead of us', may be comprehended not as distortions of religion, but rather as deep discernings into the ethos or agenda which makes an ideological schema religious. Jung (1933) had recognised that the psychic tendencies operating deep within human consciousness were saturated with the symbolism which lies at the basis of the world's great religious movements. These symbols originating as messages from 'the unconscious' and functioning as vehicles of transformation (Martin, 1976; Neumann, 1954), enable us to comprehend an intentionality which is distinctly religious and which underlies the focus within religion upon metaphors of transformation.

The conceptualisation of religion which thus emerges is that it is a mindform engendered by a basic and unconscious motive toward higher evolution, a motive which is inherent within consciousness itself, and which serves to direct human behaviour toward more advanced life-styles which are consistent with the evolutionary trend. That is, religions constitute those social semiotic systems which allow the projection into symbolic form of intuitions emerging from consciousness's own grasp of its fundamental and higher evolutionary agenda.

This understanding of religion accords with the idea put forward by Ross and Jeans (1974), that inner transformation is the central aim of religious belief and practice. Holding that Christ as the 'Son of Man' is the potential in every human (p.187), they recognise that his life is thereby a true never-ending story: "not something which happened once, 2000 years ago, but the essence of a drama waiting to take place in the life of every living person." (p.184) What adds special meaning to this notion is the idea that Golgotha,
as 'the place of the skull' has by tradition (cf Cooper, 1978, p.154) been held to be the burial place of the skull of Adam. We have here a most powerful and distinctly evolutionary symbol, in which the underlying image is that of the 'New Being' (Tillich) being raised up above the remains of the first and 'old Man'.

To sum up, the two speculative propositions outlined in this paper are, first, that the spiritual journey of our species represents the ongoing evolution of human nature and consciousness, and, secondly, that religions have functioned as humankind's evolutionary 'agent provocateur'. Religion has functioned as the carrier of the evolutionary impulse, the projection into societal consciousness of the future and higher nature which may be born from within our species, and which we may yet become. In Meister Echart's imagery, religion is the diligent farmer, ever challenging human consciousness to grow into God:

"The seed of God is in us .. it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is; accordingly its fruit will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds grow into nut trees, and God seeds into God." (Blakney, 1941).

REFERENCES:

Darwin, C. (1952, orig 1871) The Descent of Man and Selection by Sex,