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Religious experience in childhood : a study of adult perspectives on early spiritual awareness.

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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN CHILDHOOD: A STUDY OF ADULT PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

to my father and mother

with love

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Finally, I offer my warmest thank to my husband, whose total support of this undertaking is what made it ultimately possible.

ABSTRACT

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN CHILDHOOD:
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SEPTEMBER, 1988

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Developmental psychology suggests that children are incapable of experiencing, perceiving or thinking as mature adults. But the first systematic study of religious experience, conducted in Great Britain, revealed evidence of profound levels of spiritual awareness in childhood which continued to be of significance in later adult understanding.

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: (1) What is the nature of this 'unlearned' or 'direct' knowledge in childhood?; (2) How is it related to

'learned' forms of knowledge, both in the short and the long-term?; (3) How do individuals integrate/synthesize these two forms (and how do they fail)?; (4) How does education assist or made difficult this integration?; (5) How is this 'direct' knowledge related to other talents?

Qualitative research methods were used. In-depth phenomenological interviewing was chosen as the methodology best suited to this subject. Eight adults participated in the study. A broad range of spiritual experiences and insights in childhood were described. These were unique, yet had many similar elements. The similarities were found to exist in the kinds of 'a priori' knowledge they described, and in the difficulties this knowledge created for them in environments which denied its existence. The educational process, (public school), was seen as destructive of their need to comprehend and integrate their insights. Involvement in imaginative activities was described as the primary means in which an integration of 'learned' and 'unlearned' knowledge could take place. All of the participants described this integration as a life-long process, and they described their early spiritual awareness as having on-going relevance to that process.

These findings suggest that the developmental model is inadequate to explain the nature of personal 'maturity'. A 'visional', as opposed to a 'juridical', model is proposed. The need for a rapprochement between 'objective' and 'participant' ways of knowing is discussed as one of the most important issues for education that this study reveals.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

It is remarkable that this century, which has made the study of the human mind a major new intellectual focus, has almost totally neglected the nature of religious experience. As Sir Alister Hardy (1979) has pointed out, this neglect is particularly surprising in view of the widespread recognition of the part religion has played in the development of past civilizations and in the development of our own culture. The explanation for this oversight lies in the epistemological underpinnings of Western culture.

The roots of all Western science are to be found in the first period of Greek philosophy in the sixth century B.C., in a culture where science, philosophy and religion were not separated. The Milesian school in Ionia were concerned with seeing the essential nature of all things, making no distinction between animate and inanimate, spirit and matter. All existence was a manifestation of 'physis', endowed with life and spirituality. Heraclitus called this unity the "Logos", which he saw as containing and transcending all opposing forces. But the epistemological foundations of modern science were laid down in the seventeenth century in the

radical dualism of the philosopher Rene Descartes. Nature had now become two separate and independent realms: mind (res cogitans) and matter (res extensa). Matter was entirely separate from mind, dead and 'mechanical'. God ruled from above imposing his laws upon this world machine. Similarly, the mind ruled 'from within' controlling the body. The idea of an 'objective' empirical science, as we know it, owes its existence to these basic tenets.

The study of the human mind itself, arose both because of and subject to, this same epistemology. What was observable, measurable, isolatable, causally explicable, could be the 'object' of science, what was not could not. With human ingenuity, of course, and the often unacknowledged use of metaphor (Freud's 'plumbing' metaphors are a case in point), many aspects of the mind could and have been approached through these doors. Those which could not were set aside, or simply denied. A clear demarcation was drawn between the realms of science and religion.

This dichotemy is still very much alive in our time, although points of contact have begun to appear. Contemporary physics has dispensed with a dualistic point of view. The universe is experienced as a dynamic inseparable whole which always includes the observor in an essential way. Traditional concepts of space and time, of isolated objects, and of cause

and effect, have become arbitrary constructions. Consider the way in which Philip Oppenheimer (1953) tries to describe the principle of complementarity in quantum physics:

> To what appears to be the simplest question we will tend to give no answer or an answer which will at first sight be reminiscent more of a strange catechism than of the straightforward affirmations of physical science. If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'No'; if we ask whether the position of the electron changes with time, we must say 'No'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'No'; if we ask whether it is in motion we must say 'No'.
>
> The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the condition of man's self after death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science (pp. 42-43).

It is not presently our purpose to draw any parallels between the world as experienced by contemporary physics and that experienced by the mystics, as has been done by Fritjof Capra (1975) and others. We are presently concerned with the more basic question as to what has been studied and why. The revolution in modern physics has coincided with the appear-ance of new attempts to look at the nature of 'consciousness'. Marilyn Ferguson, in "The Aquarian Conspiracy" (1980), chronicled these early explorations. A more recent survey has been completed by Nona Coxhead in 'The Relevance of Bliss' (1985). Yet, to a large extent, contemporary psychology (and indeed theology) still proceed as though this dichotomy were unchallenged -a situation which Abraham Maslow (1964) has called 'pathological' in it effects on both sides.

Sooner or later, we shall have to redefine both religion and science. As always, dichotomizing pathologizes (and pathology dichotomizes). Isolating two interrelated parts of a

whole from each other, parts that need each other, parts that are truly "parts" and not wholes, distorts them both, sickens and contaminates them. Ultimately, it even makes them non-viable (p.13).

We will return in more depth to the source and nature of this dichotomy in the chapters on the history of the emergence of the study of religious experience, and the methodological problems attending it. For the moment, this brief history serves as an introductory explanation to the remarkable fact that the first systematic and extensive research on the nature of religious experience was not begun until the year 1969. It was at this time that Alister Hardy established the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College in Oxford. His work will be examined in some depth in this dissertation, particularly an aspect of it that was not sought but discovered, as it were, by surprise. That aspect was a body of material describing religious experience in early childhood. Edward Robinson, who subsequently became director of the unit, at once perceived some of the extraordinary implications of these accounts. He undertook further research (1983) in this area and was led to the conclusion that an important aspect of the child's nature was being overlooked by current research and theory. His findings indicated that children may have a natural capacity for insight, imagination and understanding that does not need to develop into some higher form. He examined this capacity in terms of insight into certain fundamental themes occurring in the accounts, for example, 'nature', 'self-identity',

'morality' and 'death'. He also found that, for the majority of people who recalled early religious experience, the educational process was seen as either irrelevant or destructive to the understanding and integration of these experiences.

Robinson's research and reflections on early religious experience, which we shall later examine, represent initial explorations into an area which has been overlooked both because of our preconceptions and because it tends to be in the nature of the subject itself to be 'unspoken'. In most of the accounts of early religious experience given by adults they indicated that it was difficult for them to describe their experiences and that it would have been impossible for them as children. The kind of knowledge or insight that they describe is, therefore, of a different order to that which is immediately verbal. It stands intact, a priori to verbal ability. This characteristic of religious experience is repeatedly described. Here are two examples:

> "In my childhood we daren't let our elders know how mature we were. As for religious feelings and ideas -they'd been there all along."

> "This inner knowledge was exciting and absorbingly interesting, but it remained unsaid because, even if I could have expressed it, no-one would have understood. Once, when I tried, I was told I was morbid."

Such accounts do, of course, raise questions about the nature of memory, belief and authenticity, all of which will be explored in a fuller account of the history of this research in

Chapter II. But they also suggest that the observation and questioning of children used by developmentalists such as David Elkind (1970) may not be the best way to develop a theory for understanding the religious experience of children. Childhood may reveal to us significant and unique ways of knowing which are essential to later conceptualisation and knowing. It may be understood as a dimension of life (as well as a chronological period) about which we may become more fully conscious in later life. Developmentalism begins with the assumption that children are incapable of experiencing, perceiving or thinking as mature adults. A child's way is considered inadequate and undeveloped. The evidence collected by the Religious Experience Research Unit suggests otherwise - that children may be capable of profound insight and knowledge. The existence of such a capacity has profound significance for all developmental theory (whether of child development or, the more recently emerged adult development studies), and for all educational, therapeutic and self-actualization practices based on the developmental perspective.

To investigate this significance we have to find ways to answer the following questions::

1) What is the nature of this 'unlearned' or 'direct' knowledge in childhood?

2) How is it related to 'learned' forms of knowledge, both in the short and the long-term?

3) How do individuals integrate/synthesize these two forms (and how do they fail)?

4) How does education assist or make difficult this integration?

5) How is this 'direct' knowledge related to other talents, gifts?

The breadth of academic terrain these questions cover is an inevitable result of the neglect of such an important phenomenon in our lives. Accomodating the previously unperceived sometimes requires a shift in our attention which is akin to a paradigm change, throwing off a profusion of questions and revisions across many subject divisions. A fuller recognition of chldren's capacities may require such a shift.

It is to the detriment of the new fields of the psychology of religion and the science of consciounsess that they have omitted attention to the nature of religious experience during childhood. The field of child development research remains, consequently, largely untouched by their findings. Indeed developmentalism has recently been increasingly confident of its explanatory powers, so that we no longer find it solely in the area of cognitive studies, in which Piaget formed and applied his theory, but also in moral judgment (Kohlberg 1980), religious understanding (Goldman 1964) , faith (Fowler 1981) ,

adult life (Sheehy 1976, Gould 1978, Boelen 1978), adult male life (Vaillant 1977, Levinson 1978), reflective judgment (Kitchener and King 1987).

This proliferation of studies based on the model of chronological stages, from lesser to greater, may be creating an imbalance in our understanding of human nature, and actual harm in their educational or therapeutic application. Research into the nature of early religious experience, is urgently needed to determine whether this is true. It is also a vitally awaited point of contact between psychology and religion which will have many ramifications for both fields.

B. Clarification of Concepts

It is important, with such an implicitly boundary-cross subject as 'religious experience', that we begin with some clarity about the concepts that have been used in this field and those to be used in this dissertation. It may be that it is in the nature of the subject that its 'reality' or 'authenticity' remain ultimately out of the reach of any strict conceptual containment. Nevertheless, let us first begin with that effort.

The term 'religion' normally suggests some affiliation with a body of doctrine, but in this dissertation the term 'religious experience' is used in the sense of

experience whose meaning is a priori to any particular body of beliefs, whether 'religious', 'scientific' or 'common-sense' beliefs. Other terms have been used by writers in this field, depending on the emphasis they wished to give to the essential characteristics of these experiences. With the goal of more fully understanding the area of meaning with which we are concerned, let us look at some of these terms.

1. 'Mysticism':

Most writers on this topic have offered some kind of taxonomy. That of William James (1902) is the most celebrated. His criteria of a mystical experience are:

1. Ineffability - James calls this quality 'negative' in that it indicates that the experience defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows that it cannot be experienced at second-hand.

2. Noetic quality - by this James means that

> mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect (p. 371).

These two characteristics, James says will entitle any state to be called mystical, though he adds to the list two other qualities which are "less sharply marked,

but usually found."

These are:

3. Transiency -

Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day (p. 372).

Most frequently they are of momentary duration only.

4. Passivity -

the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance (p. 372).

F.C. Happold (1963) cites the same four common characteristics as James and adds a further three. These are:

5. "consciousness of the Oneness of everything."

6. "the sense of timelessness".

7. "the conviction that the familiar phenomenal ego is not the real I." (pp. 45-48).

No two of his seven characteristics are mutually exclusive but not all of them are necessarily present together.

These criteria do move us toward the meaning of 'religious experience' as it will be used here, but they are not complete. Many of the accounts we will consider later will stand outside their limits. For this reason the concept of 'mysticism' is not used in this dissertation. R.C. Zaehner (1957) has described the field of

comparative mysticism as one in which the angels might well fear to tread. He regards the term as misleading and rejects the view that preternatural experiences, conveniently described by the all-embracing term 'mysticism', must be all the same in essence (p. IX). We will heed William James warning that the term is often used in reproach as meaning "vague and vast" (p. 370).

2. 'Ecstasy':

Marghanita Laski (1961), in a very extensive study entitled "Ecstasy: a Study of some Secular and Religious Experiences", opted for this term. The New English Dictionary gives several definitions of this word, the best for our purposes being: "An exalted state of feeling which engrossed the mind to the exclusion of thought; rapture, transport, now chiefly, intense or rapturous delight." However, the emphasis on delight is too limited. There are many feeling-states associated with the experiences we will consider. C.S. Lewis used the term 'joy' to refer to his experiences, but even he acknowledged its weakness in the remark it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief (p. 20).

3. "Numinous":

The German theologian Rudolf Otto (1950) is largely responsible for the current meaning of this term. He writes:

> It will be useful to invent a special term to stand for 'the holy' minus its moral factor... and minus its 'rational' aspect altogether... There is no religion in which it does not live as the real innermost core, and without it no religion would be worthy of the name... For this purpose I adopt a word coined from the Latin 'numen'.... This mental state is perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined (pp. 6-7).

The numinous experience, he says, cannot be taught. It may take many forms and include many elements, such as, what he calls 'creative feeling', the 'mysterium tremendum' - which includes awe and dread - and 'fascination', the Dionysiac element in the numen. Unfortunately, Otto arbitrarily separates off the religious from the aesthetic. He divides states of mind related to the 'beautiful' from the 'holy' categorically. This last point alone makes his concept of the 'numinous' very inappropriate for dealing with accounts of children's religious experience, where, as we shall see, no such distinction is possible.

4. 'Peak-Experiences':

Abraham Maslow (1962) has approached the subject

of religious experience with the breadth and openness it requires. His term 'peak-experiences' refers to

> the parental experience, the mystic, or oceanic, or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, certain forms of athletic fulfilment, etc. (p. 69).

He regards them as integral to the 'self-actualizing' of a balanced and mentally healthy person.

> The peak-experiences of pure delight are for my subjects among the ultimate goals of living and the ultimate validations and justifications for it. That the psychologists should by-pass them or even be officially unaware of their existence, or what is even worse, in the objectivistic psychologies, deny a priori the possibility of their existence as objects for scientific study, is incomprehensible (p. 74).

However, Maslow's language suggests a kind of culmination of development, the peak of a triangle whose base is merely survival. This language creates a negative bias against an open consideration of the religious experience of children. The relationship of developmentalism to this study will be taken up again later.

5. 'Transcendental':

In his work, 'Inglorious Wordsworths', Michael Paffard (1973) recounts his inquiry into whether any of the young men and women, to whom he taught Wordsworth's poetry, had any personal experience of the kind of

perception Wordsworth recounts from his childhood. He chooses the term 'transcendental', meaning

> an experience which must by implication or description be felt by its recipient to transcend to a marked degree ordinary consciousness, thought, feeling or perception; to be experienced 'in another dimension' (p. 35).

The experience is likely, he says, to have some of the following characteristics:

1. ineffable
2. transitory
3. rare
4. unitive or desire for union or contact
5. loss of bodily sensation, of being outside the body
6. valuable or important (but not necessarily joyful)
7. giving knowledge or insight
8. giving a sense of timelessness or placelessness
9. having a divine or supernatural origin
10. exceptionally intense form of aesthetic experience.

Paffard regards these qualities as neither necessarily exclusive or inclusive. He uses Wittgenstein's helpful concept of 'family resemblances' to describe the way in which they are related and in doing so he gives us usefully open directions for venturing into an area which has, as yet, been so little explored. Paffard's approach is closer to that of this paper than any writer we have yet considered, but his terminology is not

chosen as it stands divorced from the main stream of work which has pioneered our study of this field. The importance of that work will be considered in our next chapter on the history of research in this field.

6. 'Religious Experience':

Finally, then, the term 'religous experience' is used in this dissertation, partly in recognition of William James pioneering study, and partly because it is the term used by the Research Unit founded by Sir Alister Hardy, whose work we will be considering. His understanding of the term is open and non-doctrinal as can be seen in the following passage:

> At certain times in their lives many people have had specific, deeply felt, transcendental experiences which have made them all aware of the presence of ... a benevolent non-physical power---. The experience when it comes has always been quite different from any other type of experience they have ever had. They do not necessarily call it a religious feeling, nor does it occur only to those who belong to an institutional religion or who indulge in corporate acts of worship. It often occurs to children, to atheists and agnostics, and it usually induces in the person concerned a conviction that the everyday world is not the whole of reality: that there is another dimension to life (p. 1).

To conclude these intitial abstract pointers into the territory, let us look at an actual example of the kind of experience to which Hardy is referring.

"I have had, especially during my childhood, several experiences where I felt very strongly that a power in which I could be wholly confident was acting for

and around me, even if at that time I was too little to give it a divine explanation.

One day as I was walking along Marylebone Road I was suddenly seized with an extraordinary sense of great joy and exaltation, as though a marvellous beam of spiritual power had shot through me linking me in a rapture with the world, the Universe, Life with a capital L, and all the being around me. All delight and power, all things living, all time fused in a brief second." (p. 1).

C. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the nature of early religious experiences by contributing to the initial building up of a body of knowledge about them from first-hand accounts. This is a new field of research in which such a preliminary descriptive recording is a first and necessary step. The methodological issues surrounding this venture will be fully discussed in Chapter III.

Individuals will be asked to recall early religious experience and to reflect upon its effect on their lives. Both the descriptions of the experiences themselves, and the meanings and influences later ascribed to them, will be collected, recorded and presented in as 'intact' a manner as possible. The purpose of this research is to collect and present these experiences, as they are understood by the individual concerned. It is only as such data become available that other forms of research will become possible, and it is with making this possible that this

study is concerned. As Raymond Moody (1977) has pointed out

> it has happened time and time again that science has slipped up in not listening more carefully to human testimony (p. 151).

D. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study occurs across several academic boundaries:

1) Child Development Theory - the mere existence of levels of insight in early life that developmental theory cannot explain creates profound implications for that theory. Further research into that insight will move us toward a new model that will encompass the discoveries of developmental psychology within a wider theoretical ground.

2) Adult Developmental Theory - the study of the integration of early religious insight, and its metamorphosis throughout life, suggests the need for a very different foundation for understanding the nature of 'growth' than the newly emerged 'adult development' research, which seems merely to have piggybacked on the notion of chronological stages.

3) Psychology of Religion - the whole thrust of modern experimental psychology in relation to religion has tended to by-pass one of the central and most important question of all: that concerning the nature and quality of religious experience itself as distinct from the beliefs, perceptions and allegiances which enter into it. The notable exception is the work of Alister Hardy and his team, which incidentally yielded the signficance of early religious experience. Hardy, himself saw this as pioneer work needing to be followed by much further research.

4) Creativity Theory - in studying 'insight', 'intuition', 'imagination' and 'creativity' the question "Where do new ideas come from?" recurrs as fundamental. Evidence of a capacity for insight and imagination in childhood that does not need to develop into some higher form needs to be investigated as potentially a very important key to this whole field.

5) Education - how have educational practices (whether at home or at school) been perceived by the young child who has had religious experiences? Have they tended to help or hinder his or her understanding of those experiences? These 'laden' questions were first asked by Edward Robinson in his research. The replies he received tended to cast education in a negative light. This work needs to be

continued with the aim of drawing out what practices are and are not helpful to the child.

Perhaps the ultimate significance of this study lies in its daring to approach two largely avoided questions, the first as 'romantic', and the second as 'paradoxical'. The first is "What is the life of the child within the man?", and the second is "How are we to understand the idea that the goal of spiritual maturity is to 'become as a little child'?" Reinhold Niebuhr (1937), as one of those who has approached these questions, writes

> Spiritual health in both individuals and societies is an achievement of maturity in which some excellency of childhood is consciously reclaimed, after being lost in the complexities of life (p.151).

What 'excellency' is this? How is it reclaimed? Must it be lost? To use a dramatic example, is this loss like that of King Lear, who must lose his eyes in order to 'become as a child' and 'see'. Or have we simply overlooked a reservoir of gifts we have had no labels or place for? To continue the example, were his court and offspring not corrupt (or 'blind') might Lear have 'seen' in a 'natural order' of things that included recognition of his kingly talents?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A. History of Research of Religious Experience

1. The Emergence and Development of the Subject

Scientific inquiry into the nature of religious experience has been, and still largely remains, an extremely limited field. In the nineteenth century such an inquiry was not conceived of as a possibility. Science and religion were dichotomized and separated from each other. Maslow (1964) expresses the situation well:

> this separation permitted nineteenth-century science to become too exclusively mechanistic, too positivistic, too reductionistic, too desperately attempting to be value-free. It mistakenly conceived of itself as having nothing to say about ends or ultimate values or spiritual values. This is the same as saying that these ends are entirely outside the range of natural human knowledge, that they can never be known in a confirmable, validated way, in a way that could satisfy intelligent men, as facts satisfy them (p. 11).

But it should be noted that this insight is with hindsight. It occurs in 1964. The pioneering work that emerged at the turn of the century is remarkable given the climate of the times.

William James, in his classic study 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' written in 1902, is, of course, the great originator in the field. His work gives innumerable examples of the reality of man's contact with a power beyond the conscious self. In his final postscript to the volume he says:

> I am so impressed by the importance of these phenomena that I adopt the hypothesis which they so naturally suggest. At these places at least, I say, it would seem as though transmundane energies, God, if you will, produce immediate effects within the natural world to which the rest of our experience belongs (p. 513).

He argues:

> we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance, to class them amongst the most important biological functions of mankind (p. 496).

A contemporary of James, Edwin Starbuck, also argues for a scientific treatment of religous experience. He used a questionnaire method to study the growth of religious consciousness in adolescents, and developed statistical analyses of his results. In 'Psychology of Religion' (1899) he writes:

> Science has conquered one field after another, until now it is entering the most complex, the most inaccessible, and, of all, the most sacred domain - that of religion. The Psychology of Religion has for its work to carry the well-established methods of science into the analysis and organisation of the facts of the religious consciousness, and to ascertain the laws which determine its growth and character (p. 1).

Another writer of the same period should also be

mentioned, James Leuba (1921). He used the empirical method of examining case histories, though to a lesser extent than our previous two writers. Detaching himself entirely from theological questions about God, Leuba claimed that psychology should study the relationship of the religious impulse to life. To the extent that he felt obliged to work under such a vigorous disclaimer, perhaps we should regard him as still labouring under the influence of the dichotomy between religion and science. Nevertheless his work contributed to this early thrust of the psychology of religion.

Two other works of the same period contain an emormous collection of accounts of religous experience. These are A.Poulain's 'Des Graces d'Oraison' (1901), translated as 'The Graces of Interior Prayer'(1910), and E.Underhill's 'Mysticism: a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness' (1911). They are written from a religous rather than from a psychological point of view but contain a great deal of material which is valuable for comparing with contemporary research.

Aside from the work of social anthropologists, such as Emile Durkheim (1915) and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1956), this whole area of inquiry became dormant until the 1960's. Sir Alister Hardy (1971) speculates on the reasons for this

neglect. He suggests that it has occurred, firstly, because it is difficult to reconcile religious concepts with the materialistic interpretation of life which tends to prevail in intellectual world. Secondly, because

> a good deal of what has been regarded as 'religion' has elements in it of superstition on the one hand and wishful thinking on the other (p. 7).

And thirdly, because contradictory ideas are claimed to be 'true' by opposing sects. He comments:

> This neglect of a systematic study of religious feelings in the modern world is particularly surprising in view of the widespread recognition of the part religion has played in the development of past civilizations and in the history of our own culture (p. 7).

and

> who can doubt that a systematic examination of religious experience, when all theological speculation is set on one side, must contribute towards a better understanding of human life and living? (p. 7).

A revival of interest began with Maslow's psychological studies of 'peak- experience' (1964), and Glock and Stark's questionnaire survey of religious experience in California (1965). In the 1970's Back and Bourque (1970), and Greeley and McGready (1974) conducted opinion-poll surveys of religous experience. There are also the sociological studies of religous behaviour of Argyle (1958), and Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975). In 1969 Sir Alister Hardy founded the Religious

Experience Research Unit. Its goal was to make the first attempt at a comprehensive and systematic study of religous experience.

Despite the fact that literature is liberally sprinkled with examples of children's religious experience, none of these first works in the psychology of religous experience considered their existence. Paradoxically, it was only in the undertaking of a large study, by Hardy's Research Unit, that it became noticed that many people spontaneously spoke of their experiences as children. Let us now turn to that study.

2. The Work of the Religious Experience Research Unit

a) Origins:

Sir Alister Hardy was a man eminently suited to the difficult task of both propounding and executing a scientific approach to religion. Born in 1896 and educated in the Oxford Greats tradition, he was chief zoologist on the Discovery Expedition to the Antartic of 1925-7. He was subsequently Professor of Zoology at the Universities of Hull, Aberdeen and Oxford. He was also broadly interested in philosophy, theology and psychology and throughout his life was concerned with their relationship to science. This interlinking did not come easily, as we see in the following passage.

> I am a convinced Darwinian. Indeed it was the need to reconcile fully the Darwinian doctrine of natural selection with the spiritual side of man which postponed my active attack upon the problems in this book for thirty-five years. But after much hard thinking and searching the literature I did eventually become satisfied that the two concepts were not contradictory (1979, p. 10).

The fruits of this long struggle were Hardy's Gifford Lectures, of 1963-1965, on 'Science and Religion', and his subsequent establishment of research on the subject. Lord Gifford's goals in founding these lectureships in Aberdeen were, specifically, for

promoting, advancing, teaching and diffusing the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of that term (Hardy, 1966, p.10).

In his will Lord Gifford had said:

> I wish the lecturers to treat their subject as a strictly natural science, the greatest of all possible sciences, indeed, in one sense, the only science, that of Infinite Being, without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special, exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation. I wish it considered just as astronomy or chemistry is ... (Hardy, 1966, p.10).

In 1966, Hardy writes:

> The science of natural theology, that Lord Gifford called for nearly 80 years ago, has not yet arrived. No one to my knowledge has yet produced even an outline of such a comprehensive, scientific treatment of the subject as a whole in its many different aspects (p. 11).

In his Lectures, published as 'The Living Stream'(1965), and 'The Divine Flame'(1966), Hardy makes this his goal. He contends with the materialist

reductions of his fellow biologists, on the one hand, and the contempt for natural theology of so many contemporary theologians, on the other. Citing a few rare allies, he writes:

> I believe, with those great neurologists Sir Charles Sherrington, Sir John Eccles, and Lord Brain, that mental events may belong to a different order which somehow, in a way we do not yet understand, is linked with the physical system. The mystery of the mind-body relationship is still unsolved; no doubt in time the two elements will be united in a single philosophy. Sherrington, perhaps the greatest investigator of our nervous action, in his Gifford Lectures 'Man on his Nature'(1940) said: 'mental phenomena on examination do not seem amenable to understanding under physics and chemistry. I have therefore to think of the brain as an organ of liaison between energy and mind, but not as a converter of energy into mind or vice versa (1979, p. 8).

He argues that modern humanistic man, excited by the successes of the scientific method, and exalted by his liberation from the absurdities of medieval thought, has been carried away into a new period of dogmatic folly only a little less absurd than that which preceded it. The dogma to which he refers is, of course, the categorical duality of mind and body. It is this dogma, he says, that has led to neglect of the question of the nature of consciousness. He is pleased to find Sir Cyril Hinshelwood giving prominence to this question in his Presidential to the Royal Society in 1959:

> It is surprising that biological discussions often underestimate human consciousness as a fundamental experimental datum. In science we attach no value to

> unverifiable deductions, or to empty qualitative statements, but nobody defends the neglect of experimental data. Among these we cannot validly disregard those of our own consciousness except by a deliberate abstraction for which we must assume responsibility, and which we should not forget having made... There is at present no obvious answer to the question of what kind of advance can possibly be hoped for in this problem of psycho-physical concomitance. This, however, is no reason for giving up thought which at least helps to avoid the kind of errors so easily made both about physics and about biology when the problem is ignored (1979, p. 14).

Hardy insisted that the time had come to use the scientifc method to demonstrate whether or not a belief in the spiritual side of man may be regarded as reasonable or not. Can we not, he asks, go back to an earlier attitude? He points out that the whole history of science until well into the eighteenth century had been a direct search for God. Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and Leibnitz believed that their work told us more about God than had been known before. Freed from our dogmatic dualism, we might again be able to take this approach.

Rising to his own challenge, having mustered considerable interest, Hardy founded the Religious Experience Research Unit in Manchester College, Oxford, in 1969. We shall now consider the work of that unit.

b) Research Methods:

From the beginning Hardy was interested in as large a number of accounts of religious experience from as broad a

base of the general population as could possibly be acquired. His first approach was to write appeals in the popular newspapers. He used the 'Observer'. 'The Times' and 'The Daily Mail'. In these early appeals he used some definition of the type of experience that would interest the Unit. Here is an example from the 'Observer', 8 March 1970:

> To further his research...Professor Hardy is seeking the help of Observer readers. He is not at present studying the more ecstatic or mystical states, but more general feelings examplified in this following quotation from an address by Baroness Mary Stocks to the World Congress of Faiths:
>
> 'Beatrice Webb',she said,, in discussing her autobiography, 'was conscious of experiencing a sense of reverence or awe - an apprehension of a power and purpose outside herself - which she called "feeling" - because as a result of it she achieved a religious interpretation of the universe which satisfied and upheld her and enabled her to seek continuous guidance in prayer - and this without compromising her intellectual integrity.'
>
> Professor Hardy proposes, if readers will kindly cooperate, to study and compare as many personal records of such experiences as possible. He invites all who have been conscious of, and perhaps influenced by, some such power, whether they call it the power of God or not, to write a simple and brief account of these feelings and their effects. They should include particulars of age, sex, nationality, religious upbringing and other factors thought to be relevant and should be sent with name and address to ... They will be regarded as strictly confidential and names will be suppressed in any published accounts of the research.

Hardy noted that, despite the qualification about the 'more ecstatic or mystical states', the results of these appeals contained many examples of the more dramatic type of example. He decided subsequently not to specify

any particular type but to leave it to people to send in whatever they decided had been an experience of a religious nature.

In addition to the newspapers the Unit also had printed and circulated its own special appeal entitled 'Research into Religious Experience - How You Can Take Part'. In this pamphlet some of the queries and criticisms of the Unit's work were addressed and it was pointed out that they were not only interested in the more isolated, exceptional experiences. This appeal ended with a selection of short extracts from the first thousand accounts of experience received to indicate their wide range of variety. Here are several:

(786) As far back as I can remember I have never had a sense of separation from the spiritual force I now choose to call God... From the age of 6 to 12 in places of quiet and desolation this feeling of 'oneness' often passed to a state of 'listening'. I mean by 'listening' that I was suddenly alerted to something that was going to happen. What followed was a feeling of tremendous exaltation in which time stood still.

(651) I think from my childhood I have always had the feeling that the true reality is not to be found in the world as the average person sees it. There seems to be a constant force at work from the inside trying to push its way to the surface of consciousness. The mind is continually trying to create a symbol sufficiently comprehensive to contain it, but this always ends in failure. There are moments of pure joy with a heightened awareness of one's surroundings, as if a great truth had been passed across.

(712) It seemed to me that, in some way, I was extending into my surroundings and was becoming one with

them. At the same time I felt a sense of lightness, exhilaration and power as if I was beginning to understand the true meaning of the whole Universe.

The Unit did not initially use a questionnaire method as it was felt that this would slant the content of the replies. Hardy explains:

> The specimens we are hunting are shy and delicate ones which we want to secure in as natural a condition as possible; we must at all costs avoid damaging or distorting them by trying to trap them within an artificial framework. In the first instance we prefer a description set down in the words and manner thought most fitting by those who have had the experiences; these tell us so much more about the personality of the sender than any replies given to a seires of questions on a form like an income-tax return (1979, p. 21).

Questionnaires were used only in follow-up work by members of the Unit making special studies of particular types of experience.

On the important question of what criteria were used to establish the honesty or validity of the accounts sent in, Hardy's answer was, as it finally has to be, that of 'self-evidence', although this is not the term he uses. He writes:

> Apart from a small proportion from those who clearly were mentally ill, some were no doubt emotionally exaggerated and others may have been written to give a swollen importance to the self, but no one with an unbiased mind, I believe, can read the majority of the accounts without being impressed by a feeling of their deep sincerity....It is conceivable that some records are false or designed as a deliberate hoax, but if so, I believe, they form a quite insignificant minority which among the large number of records we are

dealing with can have no real bearing on the results (p. 21).

This question of 'truth' will be taken up again when we consider the research on children's experiences.

c) Research Conclusions:

By 1979 the Unit had received over three thousand accounts and had established a system of classification. This was a subtle process as so few of the accounts could be put into just one particular classificatory compartment. It became clear that the only system which could serve must be one covering all the different characteristics which, in varying combinations, went to make up the accounts of the experiences, rather than being one which attempted to classify the individual examples themselves of which hardly any two offered the same set of ingredients. We see here the adjustment of the scientific approach to an essential characteristic of religious experience - uniqueness. Twelve main divisions were chosen, each of which was then sub-divided.

A Provisional Classification of the Various Elements found in the Accounts of Religious Experience So far Examined (1979):

Against each sub-division is placed (in brackets) the number of occurences of that category which have been

found in a thousand accounts, based on an average of the first three thousand received.

1. Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: visual

a) Visions (181.3)
b) Illuminations (45)
c) A particular light (88)
d) Feeling of unity with surroundings and/or with other people (59.3)
e) 'Out-of-the-body' (59.7)
f) 'Deja vu' (5.3)
g) Transformation of surroundings (24.3)

2. Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: auditory

a) 'Voices', calming (73.7)
b) 'Voices', guiding (70)
c) 'Being spoken through', gift of tongues (31)
d) 'Music' and other sounds (23)

3. Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: touch

a) Healing (15.3)
b) Comforting (29)
c) Feelings of warmth, etc. (53.7)
d) Being hit, shocked etc. (18.3)
e) Guiding (5.3)

4. Sensory or quasi-sensory experience: smell (11)

5. Supposed extra-sensory perception

a) Telepathy (36.7)
b) Precognition (69.3)
c) Clairvoyance (15.3)
d) Supposed contact with the dead (79.7)
e) Apparitions (34)

6. Behavioural changes: enhanced or 'superhuman' power displayed by man

a) Comforting, guiding (27)

b) Healing (344.3)
c) Exorcism (3.7)
d) Heroism (6.3)

7. Cognitive and affective elements

a) Sense of security, protection, peace (253)
b) Sense of joy, happiness, well-being (212)
c) Sense of new strength in oneself (65)
d) Awe, reverence, wonder (66)
f) Sense of certainty, clarity, enlightenment (1994.7)
g) Exaltation, excitement, ecstasy (47.3)
h) Sense of being at a loss for words (255.3)
i) Sense of harmony, order, unity (66.7)
j) Sense of timelessness (37.7)
k) Feeling of love, affection (in oneself) (56.7)
l) Yearning, desire, nostalgia (14.3)
m) Sense of forgiveness, restoration, renewal (40)
n) Sense of integration, wholeness, fulfillment (12.7)
o) Hope, optimism (15.3)
p) Sense of release from fear of death (36.3)
q) Fear, horror (41.7)
r) Remorse, sense of guilt (23.7)
s) Sense of indifference, detachment (11.3)
t) Sense of purpose behind events (113.7)
u) Sense of prayer answered in events (138.3)
v) Sense of presence (not human) (202.3)

8. Development of Experience

i) Within the individual:

a) Steady disposition; little or no development recorded (1.3)
b) Gradual growth of sense of awareness: experience more or less continuous (91.3)
c) Sudden change to a new sense of awareness, conversion, the 'moment of truth' (175.3)
d) Particular experiences, no growth recorded (13.7)
e) Particular experiences, each contributin to growth of sense of awareness (145.7)

ii) In Relation to Others:

k) Identification with ideal human figure, discipleship, hero-worship (6)
l) Development by personal encounter (113)
m) Participation in church, institutional or corporate life (29.7)
n) Development through contact with literature or the

arts (117.7)
o) Experience essentially individualistic, involving isolation from or rejection of others (27)

iii) Periods of significant development:

r) In childhood (117.7)
s) In adolescence (123.7)
t) In middle age (70.3)
u) In old age (7.7)

9. Dynamic patterns in experience

i) Positive or constructive

a) Initiative felt to be beyond the self, coming 'out of the blue', grace (124)
b) Initiative felt to lie within the self, but response from beyond; prayers answered (322.7)

c) Initiative and response both felt as within the self; the result seen as 'individuation' (Jung), 'self-actualization'(Maslow) (4.7) Differentiation between initiative and response felt as illusory; merging of the self into the All; the unitive experience (22.3)

ii) Negative or destructive

m) Sense of external evil force as having initiative (44.7)

10. Dream Experiences (87.7)

11. Antecedents or 'triggers' of experience

i) a) Natural beauty (122.7)
b) Sacred places (26)
c) Participation in religious worship (117.7)
d) Prayer, meditation (135.7)
e) Music (56.7)
f) Visual art (24.7)
g) Literature, drama, film (82)
h) Creative work (20.7)
i) Physical activity (9.7)
j) Relaxation (16.7)
k) Sexual relations (4)
l) Happiness (7.3)
m) Depression, despair (183.7)
n) Illness (80)

o) Childbirth (8.7)
p) The prospect of death (15.3)
q) The death of others (28)
r) Crises in personal relations (37.3)
s) Silence, solitude (15.3)

ii) w) Drugs: anaesthetic (10.7)
x) Drugs: psychedelic (6.7)

12. Consequences of experience

a) Sense of purpose or new meaning to life (184.7)
b) Changes in religious belief (38.7)
c) Changes in attitude to others (77)

Of these thousands of people who responded to the request for accounts of their religious experiences some 15 percent started with reference to their childhood. They were not asked to do this, but as one person explained "It is only today, gathering up the threads as it were, that I realize that this childhood experience set the pattern for subsequent ones." Edward Robinson, who succeeded Alister Hardy as director of the Unit, was particularly interested in further exploring the nature of those childhood experiences. He wrote back to the people concerned with a series of questions designed to throw further light on the nature of that experience and the spiritual development which followed. And thus evolved a hitherto unknown field of inquiry, one whose contribution to our understanding of the child is of radical significance.

B. Research on Religious Experience in Children

1. The Piagetian Perspective

Edward Robinson presents his findings and conclusions in a work called "The Original Vision" (1977). At the beginning of the book he informs us that, prior to his work at the Research Unit, he was much involved with students in training to be teachers. In this field, he reminds us, Piaget is the dominating influence. The developmental psychology associated with his name holds an unassailable position in Western educational theory. Robinson regards this unassailability as existing for two main reasons. Firstly, Piaget's method is convincing; in all his studies the conclusions follow from the experimental work. Secondly, his ideas about what it is important to understand about children are entirely in tune with the educational presuppositions of our society.

> For a culture increasingly concerned with the control of its environment and permeated with the spirit of competitive individualism, nothing could have been more timely or more appropriate than Piaget's discoveries in the field of cognitive development (1977, p. 8).

Robinson pays his respects to Piaget as an "acute and original thinker", but he says:

> Nevertheless I believe that Piaget's view of childhood was a limited one, and that these limitations can have a seriously damaging or at least impoverishing effect on our educational practice (p. 8).

He points out that the starting point of all Piaget's thought about childhood is the incapacity of children to see the world as adults see it. This assumption can be seen in the following passage from Piaget (1974):

> Representative intelligence begins with the child's systematic concentration on his own action and on the momentary figurative aspects of the segments of reality with which this action deals. Later it arrives at a decentering based on the general coordination of action, and this permits the formation of operatory systems of transformations or constants or conservations which liberate the representation of reality from its deceptive figurative appearances (p. 20).

Here the mind of the child is to be 'liberated' from its state of deception or illusion. 'Reality' is that which adults perceive, 'appearance' is that which children perceive. Since Piaget was a philosopher we cannot assume that this distinction is made lightly. From the viewpoint he gives us, the 'development' of the child is best measured in its progressive decrease in incapacity to see the adult 'reality'. Robinson points out that this view is surely related to Piaget's emphasis on verbal understanding:

> For a child to think is to deal in words (1974, p. 86).

It is this emphasis on the verbal criteria of development, Robinson says, that has made him so valuable to the teaching profession,

> and of rather less value to anyone who believes that there are positive qualities in childhood that remain

undetected by such methods, slipping like water through the finest net (1977, p.10).

Piaget presents us with the idea that our children are a resource to be developed, and offers the techniques for doing this in the quickest and most efficient way. Despite the many advantages this has introduced into our educational practices, over and against traditional practices, it has also contributed to the 'grow older younger' trend in education, turning our 'inefficient adults' into efficient ones as early as possible.

Being versed in this developmental perspective, Robinson instantly recognized the significance of many of the accounts he read on joining the Research Unit. He began rethinking the question of children's capacity for insight and understanding on reading remarks such as these:

"The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young, between 4 and 5 years old."

"I just know that the whole of my life has been built on the great truth that was revealed to me then" (at the age of 6).

"As far back as I can remember I have never had a sense of separation from the spiritual force I now choose to call God." (p. 11).

Before we consider the approach Robinson took to studying this capacity in children, let us look at one account in full. It is suggestive of the dimensions of insight and understanding that are involved.

When I was about five I had the experience on which, in a sense, my life has been based. It has always remained real and true for me. Sitting in the garden one day I suddenly became conscious of a colony of ants in the grass, running rapidly and purposefully about their business. Pausing to watch them I studied the form of their activity, wondering how much of their own pattern they were able to see for themselves. All at once I knew that I was so large that, to them, I was invisible - except, perhaps as a shadow over their lives. I was gigantic, huge - able at one glance to comprehend, at least to some extent, the work of the whole colony. I had the power to destroy or scatter it, and I was completely outside the sphere of their knowledge and understanding.

Turning away from them to my surroundings, I saw there was a tree not far away, and the sun was shining. There were clouds, and blue sky that went on for ever and ever. And suddenly I was tiny - so little and weak and insignificant that it didn't really matter at all whether I existed or not. And yet, insignificant as I was, my mind was capable of understanding that the limitless world I could see was beyond my comprehension. I could know myself to be a minute part of it all. I could understand my lack of understanding.

A watcher would have to be incredibly big to see me and the world around me as I could see the ants and their world, I thought. Would he think me to be as unaware of his existence as I knew the ants were of mine? He would have to be vaster than the world and space, and beyond understanding, and yet I could be aware of him - I was aware of him, in spite of my limitations. At the same time he was, and he was not beyond my understanding.

Although my flash of comprehension was thrilling and transforming, I knew even then that in reality it was no more than a tiny glimmer. And yet, because there was this glimmer of understanding, the door of eternity was already open. My own part, however limited it might be, became in that moment a reality and must be included in the whole. In fact, the whole could not be complete without my own particular contribution. I was at the same time so insignificant as to be almost non-existent and so important that without me the whole could not reach fulfilment.

Every single person was a part of a Body, the purpose of which was as much beyond my comprehension now as I was beyond the comprehension of the ants. I was enchanted. Running indoors, delighted with my discovery,

I announced happily, 'We're like ants, running about on a giant's tummy!' No one understood, but that was unimportant. I knew what I knew.

It was a lovely thing to have happened. All my life, in times of great pain or distress or failure, I have been able to look back and remember, quite sure that the present agony was not the whole picture and that my understanding of it was limited as were the ants in their comprehension of their part in the world I knew.

This inner knowledge was exciting and absorbingly interesting, but it remained unsaid because, even if I could have expressed it, no one would have understood. Once, when I tried I was told I was morbid. (Female. Age 55).

Here we have a description of 'knowledge' which confounds the cognitive developmental viewpoint, but gives us more questions than answers. Should we see this as a historical record, or as the most recent stage of understanding that was set in motion by the earlier event? What is the nature of the process that connects the two? Robinson builds these questions into his research, as we shall see.

2. Research Methods

"As any researcher knows", Robinson admits, "evidence can be found for almost any thesis by selecting cases that support it and ignoring things that do not (p. 15)". So he is careful to demonstrate that the conclusions he reaches are based not only on particular examples but on the general tendency of the material as a whole.

In the last chapter we looked at the research methods which yielded the original body of accounts of religious experience in childhood. Robinson's interest in these accounts led him to develop a questionnaire which he sent back to all those who had originally described childhood experience. He gives us a numerical analysis of the answer to each question, based on the replies of 362 correspondents.

a. The Questionnaire

1. How much do you think that you owe your early religious ideas or feelings to the influence of your family, or to any other individuals who were helpful, whether as models to be imitated or just as sympathetic people to talk to?
2. How far do you feel that your early idea of God was derived from what you saw in your parents?
3. How far do you feel that schooling was a help or a hindrance in the development of religious awareness,

whether through the influence of teachers, books, or general environment?

4. How far were you influenced, whether positively or negatively, by Church worship, or other forms of organized religion?

5. Do you think that the formation of your sense of right and wrong was entirely due to the teaching of your parents or others close to you? Or was there ever a sense of conflict between such a socially-induced 'conscience' and any religious feelings of your own?

6. Can you recall any particular moment, or period when you had a feeling of emerging into self-comsciousness, that is of feeling yourself to be an individual person with some degree of freedom and responsibility? And was this associated with any religious feelings or ideas?

7. Can you remember, when you first became aware of, or began thinking, about death, and what your early feelings about it were?

8. Some people look back to childhood experience as having been clearer, more vivid, more revealing than those of later life; while other see their early experiences as only the first steps in a process of growing awareness, which only came to full understanding in adulthood, or may not yet be complete. Do you feel that your experience falls into either of these two groups, or do you see some quite different pattern in your life?

9. Finally, how far can you really separate your early religious feelings or ideas from the interpretation you later put on them? It is of course very difficult, perhaps impossible, to recall what it really felt like to be a child, but perhaps one can do something to distinguish between the feelings one had as a child and the meaning one subsequently came to give them.

It should be noticed that all of these questions ask the writers to try to distinguish what is unique and, what we might call, 'self' or 'Other' given, in childhood, from what is 'other' given. Questions 8 and 9, particularly, ask the writers to consider for themselves the questions of 'meaning', 'truth' and 'interpretation'.

To pre-organize criteria of truth or validity, as standing independently of the understanding of the subjects, is to disrespect one's data when the research subject is religious experience. The understanding of the subject, him or herself, is the fundamental datum in this field. The questionnaire we have here both pioneers and exemplifies the way in which sensitive research may be developed.

3. Research Results

We will present several sample tables of Robinson's numerical analyses of the replies to the

questionnaire, some individual examples of the replies, and a more in-depth examination of several accounts with a similar 'theme'.

First, let us return to the question of 'authenticity'. In an article entitled "Experience and authority in religious education" (1976), Robinson writes

> To some five hundred of those who had written I wrote back, asking some fairly detailed and rigorous questions. I was concerned to assess how far these people felt they really had genuine and reliable access to the original thoughts and feelings of childhood, over an interval of, in some cases, more than 50 years.
>
> With the mass of evidence that this questionnaire brought in I can't possibly deal in detail here, I can only say that I find it most impressive.
>
> What was it then about their childhood experiences that compelled these writers to feel them worth recording? I think authority is the word: from the very beginning these experiences mattered, they were significant. They made a claim which later developments always bore out. Of course memory is selective. All that we have here, it may be said, is what later reflection has found to be significant. And years of interpretation, often a great many years, will have left little of the original feelings unaltered. In one of the questions I put this suggestion: the majority rejcted it. They protested that, distant as they might be in time, the actual feelings and insights of childhood remained distinct to them. The words available to describe them, yes, these might have changed; but the sense of the experience itself remained clear, accessible and, as I say authoritative. What can one say in face of such a claim? Those who were less positive, admitting that early memories were not so simply recoverable, often gave as the reason the fact of growth: the long process of understanding that its origin in some particular far-off event could not now be seen as distinct from the moment that sparked it off. 'Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die'... Of all those who replied, only 13 per cent maintined that the experiences of childhood were more significant in the long run than those of later years. Nostalgia plays little part in these records (Hardy, 1979, p. 105).

a) Analysis of Replies

These tables are based on the replies of 362 correspondents. We give here 4 examples.

Q.1. How much do you think that you owe your early religious ideas or feelings to the influence of your family, or to any other individuals who were helpful, whether as models to be imitated or just as sympathetic people to talk to?

Table I.

	F	M	All
A. Not at all	73 (26%)	29 (36%)	102 (28%)
B. To some extent	105 (37%)	20 (25%)	125 (35%)
C. Very much	104 (37%)	31 (39%)	135 (37%)
TOTALS	282	80	362

Q.2. How far do you feel that your early idea of God was derived from what you saw in your parents?

Table 3.

	F	M	All
A. Not at all	199 (71%)	52 (65%)	251 (69%)
B. To some extent	47 (17%)	20 (25%)	67 (19%)
C. Very much	35 (12%)	8 (10%)	43 (12%)
- No answer	1	0	1
TOTALS	282	80	362

Q.8 Some people look back to childhood experiences as having been clearer, more vivid, more revealing than those of later life, while others see their early experiences as only the first steps in a process of growing awareness which only came to full understanding in adulthood, or may

not yet be complete. Do you feel that your experience falls into either of these two groups, or do you see some quite different pattern in your life?

Table 13.

	F	M	All
A: Childhood experience significant, adult experience less so.	35 (13%)	11 (14%)	46 (13%)
B: Childhood and adult experience of equal significance.	50 (18%)	12(15%)	62 (17%)
C: Childhood experience significant, adult experience more so.	196 (69%)	56 (71%)	252 (70%)
- No reply	1	1	2
TOTALS	282	80	362

Q.9. How far can you really separate your early religious feelings or ideas from the interpretation you later put on them? It is of course very difficult, perhaps impossible, to recall what it really felt like to be a child, but perhaps one can do something to distinguish between the feelings one had as a child and the meaning one subsequently came to give them.

A: Felt able to distinguish more or less clearly between childhood feelings and subseqent interpretation.

B: Felt a continuity or identity between childhood and subsequent experience making any such distinction difficult or impossible.

-: No answer attempted.

Table 15.

	F	M	All
A	159 (61%)	54 (69%)	213 (63%)
B	102 (39%)	24 (31%)	126 (37%)
-	21	2	23
TOTALS	282	80	362

b) Individual Examples of Replies

Home:

I remember sitting in my mother's lap at the age of 5, while she affectionately explained that the idea of a God was a very nice and poetic way of explaining things, but just like a fairy tale. I felt embarrassed at what seemed abysmal blindness and ignorance and felt sorry for her. (F. 64)

I feel confident that I should have been amazed had anyone told me at an early age that I was conceiving of God in terms of my father. My father conceived of God in terms of a Father, and I absorbed this in the same way as his views on horses and strawberries. (M. 60)

Not at all. My father seemed either asleep or out. (M. 33)

Morality:

The childhood vision, which gave such an embracing sense of evolving life, light and meaning in the universe, was the fundamental measure against which I tested everything else.

I saw people and things in terms of quality and quantity of light; the presence of light, or its lack was my only yardstick of right and wrong. One outstanding and repeated experience was that, when I tried to speak to adults of the light, or tried to live by its implicit truth this was often met with blank astonishment, or as I grew older, active annoyance. I was continually told not to be insolent when speaking what I thought was the straight truth as I saw it, however wrongly. And I learned oinly slowly to compromise with the accepted norms and to keep silence on things that really mattered to me. Gradually I built a laughing and shallow persona to hide behind which made me more socially accepted. (F. 43)

At some level of "emotion" I am so reassured of the ultimate goodness inherent in everything that all the evidence to the contrary in the world around me seems suddenly to be of not importance relatively; and the strength derived from this feeling, though the experience itself may be put aside or even denied by reason - nevertheless is stron enough to be the basis of an optimism in living. I remember having this sense of a "rightness" in the universe when I was about 6 years old. (F. 49)

At the age of 7 I was lastingly aware of the superhuman force of righteousness. Religious background and training was slight, and this awareness was sparked off by something that might appear quite trivial. Standing at home in the garden with another hild I mentioned to her the name of a flower that had been given to us both a few day earlier. Immediately and to my astonishment this naming was contradicted. It seemed terribly important to me that rightness should be upheld, and I appealed to a nearby grown-up for support. Alas, this was seen as a personal issue and was brusquely put aside. I felt very much alone in a world which I believed couldn't make sense if such untruths were not only allowed but deemed to be unimportant. I can vividly recall how I stood reaching outward and upward (in my mind) for comfort. Comfort did come, not from any fatherly figure, but from a strong assurance that there was a governing power of universal righteousness. This experience I kept to myself. (F. 47)

School:

"God is spirit", etc., one of the most consoling thoughts given to me. There seemed to be a strange absence of people who could get me on with this idea. No-one understood my realization of something beyond the physical self. (F. 70)

I do not think that , apart from poetry, which I adored, anything that I was taught at school had much, if any, influence on my own natural and apparently inborn religious awareness, which on looking back at it now seems more like something deeply inherited and Celtic, because it appeared to grow and intensify almost entirely from being away from other people and by myself, either in the garden or the surrounding countryside. (F. 64)

Self-identity:

I must have been well under the age of 3. I remember distinctly being aware how silly grown-ups were not to understand, and I was also conscious of playing up to them and trying to conform to the image they had of me, or they projected into me (clever girl, funny child, etc.). I felt myself distinct from them, separated by teir lack of insight that there was far more of me than what they saw in me, the undeveloped child part. (F. 56)

We had to start school on the day we were 3 years of age. I can remember that soon after this I would toddle off to school trying to recall that lovely place where I was

before I came to this drab place with its rows of lower middle class terrace six-roomed houses. "I don't belong here". I had filmy memories that I could not pin down of an atmosphere that was raidant and luminous, smiling and gracious. When later, I read Wordsworth's "Intimations" I knew precisely what he meant by "apparell'd in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream". In a few years, alas, I also knew what he meant by "the things which I have seen I now can see no more" and the "man perceives it die away and fade into the light of common day". Wordsworth connected this raidant beauty with Earth and Nature, "meadow, grove and stream". As far as I can remember my mental processes, this radiant graciousness was nothing to do with anything "here". I doubt if these thoughts and feelings were in any way connected with religion. Had I been asked about this and had I had the vocabulary and ability to formulate it I would have said they were above, beyond and at the back of all this drab earthly business. (M. 73)

I remember instances in my childhood when I felt a unity with the world around me verging on mystical experience. I did not at first associate such feelings with religion. They were ususally the result of a deep realisation of beauty in nature or music. They were not so much a sense of self-consciousness as of absorption in somethng far greater than myself of which I was at the same time a part and glad and grateful to be so; an overwhelming sense of trust and gratitude to the world for letting me be a part of it. This was later amplified and deepened in periods of genuine spiritual experience when I and the world seemed to dissolve into a new and vastly more significant reality which had hitherto been only vaguely sensed but suddenly suddenly seemed to be revealed completely, so that one had the sense that it had always been there but that one had been unaware of it. Probably the first experience of this intensity of wareness came to me when I was a child of about 4 or 5 as I played on the terace of our house in Sussex one early morning in summer and looked out over the mist-filled valleys and woods into the distance. (M. 63)

I can remember being self-conscious from a very early age and feeling older than my physical body. (F. 39)

I was under a year old - unable to talk or walk. I was crawling on the floor and sat up to listen to a record that was being played on the gramophone. (I later identified the record; it was Segovia playing the tremolo study by Tarrega on the guitar.) I went into a trance state but much of it I remembered after. In trance I "touched heaven" - I became aware of an absolute totality and the magnificence of the ordering power - and also a complete

oneness. I was God and Totality in that instant and knew all. As I came out of the trance I was acutely aware of myself as an isolated part of the total that I had just been aware of. This trance is probaby the greatest single experience of my life. It is extraodinarily difficult to describe and probably only lasted for seconds. (F> 47)

Death:

I was made aware of death in an overwhelming way when my father died of cancer when I was 3 and 3/4 years old. In their well-meant desire to save me from the worst impact of death, grown-ups to my insistent questioning gave me an explanation of the terrible things I knew were happening which they thought would be appropriate for a child of my age to understand. I remember distinctly the frustration and exasperation I felt with adults for what I knew was failing to tell me the whole truth, which the "mature" part of me ouwld be able to take better than what I knew were fairy-tales to shield me. Consequently I felt utterly bewildered and the horrifying unkown aspect of death oppressed me. Only when my mother explained to me her own firm belief, that his spirit continued to be with us and watched over us for our good, helping to guide us, did I accept her explanation, which confirmed my own feelings. (F. 56)

In 1918 my Grannie whom I quite liked died at our home, the parents being away on holiday at the time. The maid said to me "Your Grannie died in the night. You mustn't go into her room.. Your parents will be home tonight." Well I waited till the maid had gone off somewhere and tiptoed in to have a look at Grannie. Lifting up the sheet that covered the face I was surprised to see nothing there but a waxwork figure... Grannie had very definitely gone and left behind a mask like the cases grubs left behind when they became butterflies. The parents probaby thought me very unfeeling when I didn't cry at the funeral. I felt it all to be rather a waste of time, like burying with pomp Grannie's old clothes. (F. 64)

Growth:

I think I have been simply trying, in adult life, to grow towards the vision of childhood, and to comprehend more fully the significance of the light which was so interwovern into those early years. The original impact of light was so powerful that my inner world still reverberates with it. Later logic chopping, analysis and interpretation have in no way diminished the immediacy of

that impact. Very importantly: this same consciousness of light has proved to be translatable as the light of common day living. In my own extremis, I have tried to remember the light and stand by it. (F. 45)

As we saw in Chapter II, a system of individual categorization of the kind of accounts we have just considered is not possible. In "The Original Vision", Robinson approaches both the original accounts and the answers to his questionnaire in terms of various common themes: 'reality', 'self-identity', 'morality', 'nature', 'education', 'home', 'religion' and 'death'. In all of these areas his reflections are rich with insight, suggesting a wide range of research questions. We will follow him in more depth into just one of these areas: 'nature mysticism'.

c) 'Nature Mysticism'

Robinson first advises us that the particular trigger of an experience, the immediate circumstances that set it off, may have no significant relation to the experience itself. It is, therefore, fruitless to study the relationship of those circumstances to the experiences people recount. For example, a study of the experiences that have occurred to people in going to church would be no more significant than an appeal to people for accounts of ideas, feelings and inspirations that had come to them in the bath. Robinson makes this point rather firmly to

counter the suggestion that experiences inspired by nature should be put in a class by themselves.

Wordsworth has become the paradigm to which most of us refer in considering insights inspired by nature. His

sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man (1909, p. 93)

may lean us toward putting this type of experience in a class by itself. But Wordsworth himself denies this with an account of a similar 'timeless moment' on the top of a London bus:

On the roof
Of an itinerant vehicle I sate,
With vulgar men about me, trivial forms
Of houses, pavements, streets, of men and things -
Mean shapes on every side.

Yet still it came 'as a thing divine' (p. 234).

Robinson demonstrates that the quality and later significance of a young child's experience of the impact and beauty of nature may vary tremendously. We will consider three cases.

Through the spring, summer and autumn days from about the age of 7, I would sit alone in my little house in the tree tops observing all nature around me and the sky overhead at night. I was too young to be able to think and reason in the true sense but with the open receptive mind of a young, healthy boy I slowly became aware of vague, mysterious laws in everything around me. I must have become attuned to nature. I felt these laws of life

and movement so deeply they seemed to saturate my whole mind and body, yet they always remained just beyond my grasp and understanding. (M. 68)

The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young - between 4 and 5 years old. I am not mistaken in dating this because I remember so clearly both the place where it occurred and the shoes I was wearing at the time, of which I was rather fond. Both of these facts relate only to this particular period in my life; I have a dated photograph of myself wearing the shoes in question.

My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land in Pangbourne Berks, known locally as "the moors". As the sun declined and slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground. My feet, with the favourite black shoes with silver buckles, were gradually hidden from sight until I stood ankle deep in gently swirling vapour. Here and there just the very tallest harebells appeared above the mist. I had a great love of these exquisitely formed flowers, and stood lost in wonder at the sight.

Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent.

The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity which has with stood many vicissitudes, and an affinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people too, which has which has often been commented upon. Moreover, the whole of this experience has ever since formed a kind of reservoir of strength fed from an unseen source, from which quite suddenly in the midst of the very darkest times a bubble of pure joy rises through it all, and I know that whatever the anguish there is some deep centre in my life which cannot be touched by it.

Of course, at the early age of four or five I could not have expressed anything of the experience in the words I

have now used, and perhaps the attempt to convey the absorption of myself into the whole, and the intensity of meaning, sounds merely over-coloured to the reader. But the point is that, by whatever mysterious perception, the whole impression and its total meaning were apprehended in a single instant. Years later, reading Traherne and Meister Eckhart and Francis of Assisi, I have cried aloud with surprise and joy, knowing myself to be in the company of others who had shared the same kind of experience and who had been able to set it down so marvellously. This is not the only experience of the kind that has come to me - indeed they occur relatively often - but it is without doubt the one which has laid the deepest foundations of my life, and for which I feel the profoundest gratitude. (F. 57)

The first approach to a spiritual experience which I can remember must have taken place when I was five or six years old at the house where I was born and brought up. It was a calm limpid summer morning and the early mist still lay in wispy wreaths like iridescent jewels in the sunlight, and the shadows of the houses and trees seemed friendly and protective. In the heart of the child that I was there suddenly seemed to well up a deep and overwhelming sense of gratitude, a sense of unending peace and security which seemed to be part of the beauty of the morning, the love and protective and living presence which included all that I had ever loved and yet was something much more. (M. 63)

In each of these cases nature is the inspiration of a profound experience. Yet, other than a sense of mystery and an inability to describe what was perceived, they have little in common. How should we proceed, then, into further understanding? We have seen that neither looking to common categories, nor to common circumstances, is advised as fruitful. What kind of 'grasp' will this areas of study permit?

In a fascinating follow-up to these three accounts, Robinson shows us how these experiences were by no means

arbitrary to the meaning of the lives of these individuals. To the first person the mystery presents itself principally as an intellectual problem. He later became a writer, first on Marxism and later on Theosophy. In the second account there is a powerful sense of aesthetic precision. This woman later trained as an art teacher, and became an authority on the development of architecture. In the third account the language of personal feeling and relationships is dominant: 'love', friendliness', 'a protective and living presence'. He later became a mangagement consultant and an advisor on industrial relations.

We saw earlier that a sense of 'authority' is given by James and others as a distinguishing mark of religious experience. The continuity Robinson uncovers in the lives of people presents us with greater empirical justification for understanding this term not just as a subjective impression that goes along with the experience (and may also die with it), but as an actual regulator of the development of the personality, both 'more than'and yet living 'within' its boundaries. Here we glimpse the implications for the concept of 'personality' that a consideration of childhood religious experience can introduce.

Similarly, it is clear from the actual examples of accounts given and from the more in-depth view we have just seen of the long-term meaning of the experiences for the subjects themselves, that our usual limited chronological concept of childhood is inadequate. Robinson is led to this conclusion, and formulates a different approach:

> 'Quand nous ne sommes plus enfants' said Brancusi, 'nous sommes deja morts'. When we are no longer children, we are already dead. Childhood, as I conceive it in this book, is not just a chronological period, a developmental stage to be defined however roughly in years, separating infancy and adolescence, it is an element of the whole person. It may temporarily disappear with the onset of puberty; it may be suppressed, crippled or almost totally atrophied in later life. 'If the boy within us ceases to speak to the man who enfolds him, the shape of life is broken.' So writes Sean O'Faolain at the end of his autobiography. On the other hand this childhood may continue to grow and develop with life. Strictly speaking, the years between say 3 and 11 are the proper time for childhood, when it has most scope to establish itself. If it does not succeed then, it may have a hard time of it later on. Seen like this, childhood cannot be fully understood simply by the observation of children. Quite apart from the difficulties of communication in the pre-adolescent years, there is often a dimension to our early experiences that we can only become fully conscious of (if at all) in later life, when we compare them with other forms of experience that lack that dimension; in childhood we may be wiser than we know (1977, p. 8).

We are pressed, by the accounts themselves, toward a concept of childhood that, in certain dimensions, can only be approached through the adult mind. For the psychology of religious experience, and for our understanding of imagination and creativity, this creates rich new potential, and, of course, new theoretical and methodological problems.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A. Methodological Model

For reasons which have been explored in the preceding chapter on the history of the subject, religious studies have always had something of a methodological 'identity crisis'. Steven Kepnes (1986) has recently pointed out that this chronic condition is currently in an aggravated state. Consequently, particular care is necessary in new research to clarify the methodological underpinning.

The debate continues between the seemingly irreconcilable approaches of what Robert Segal (1985) has called 'reductionistic' and 'nonreductionistic' methods, or Peter Berger (1974a) has called 'functional' and 'substantive'. Wilhelm Dilthey (1976) termed these two approaches as 'Verstehen' (understanding) and 'Erklaren' (explanation). 'Verstehen' involves a "total awareness of a mental state and its reconstruction based upon empathy" (1976, p. 181). Dilthey argued that the webs of human social and cultural life, rich with notions of meaning, value and intention, and guided by the free and unpredictable will of individuals, could not be studied as one studies the phenomena of nature which are ruled

by regular and universal laws. Peter Berger, a contemporary advocate of the 'Verstehen' approach writes that

> the human world is essentially a network of meanings and, therefore, nothing in this world can be adequately understood without understanding these meanings 'from within' (1974b, p. 126).

He asks us to learn from the phenomenological attempt to find pure descriptions "of the meanings intended by the religious consciousness" (p. 129). Berger suggests that Alfred Schutz's notion of 'multiple realities' (1967) is especially helpful in dealing with religion's involvement with transcendence. Other modern social scientists of religion who have developed Verstehen approaches to the study of religion are Carl Jung, Viktor Frankl, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas.

In the methods of explanation which Dilthey called 'Erklaren', the model is taken from the natural sciences in which one explains a phenomena by subsuming it under a natural law. Classical attempts to explain the existence of religious experience in this way were made by Marx and Freud. Marx explained religious activity in terms of historical and socio-economic laws, and Freud explained religion in terms of psycho-sexual laws. A contemporary advocate of this approach is Ralph Burhoe (1974) who believes that religious experience is to be explained by the laws that govern the workings of the human brain. He suggests that religious experiences involve a complex combination of internal and external sensory inputs together with memories and thoughts. Religious symbols allow

us to speak of phenomena which are unmanageable in their complexity. This complexity is part of an ultimate reality which is being revealed by the hard sciences. Burhoe criticizes the representatives of 'Verstahen' for isolating religious realities from the "larger context of meaning" (p. 30) of these sciences. Other contemporary representatives of the 'Erklaren' school are Radcliffe-Brown, Claude Levi-Strauss, Leon Festinger, Milton Yinger and Robin Fox.

Kepnes suggests that these methods need not be alienated from one another, and applies Paul Ricoeur's work (1978a) in hermeneutic theory to the problem. Ricoeur argues that explanation and understanding need not be seen as opposed operations. They are mutually necessary. 'Erklaren' alone will leave us with descriptions of a world <u>other</u> than that of religion, which must be seen as having a sui generis character. 'Verstehen' alone will leave us with the task of empathizing with another's psychic life, which is, finally, both impossible and undesirable.

Ricoeur (1976) argues that what we want to understand is not the mind of the historical participant but the world in which that person lives. What we want to understand is "a possible world" and "a possible way of orientating oneself to it" (1976, p.88). To approach the alternative world which the religious

consciousness experiences we will have to employ both methods of explanation and understanding. In his words,

> understanding precedes, accompanies, closes and thus envelopes explanation. In return, explanation develops understanding (1978b, p.165).

The model that is, then, suggested by Ricoeur would involve us in three steps:

1) the development of a preliminary understanding of a religious phenomenon based on initial descriptions, preconceptions and intuitions;

2) the use of explanations and functions to analyze religion from a distance;

3) a "post-critical" movement of understanding of the world in which the religious participant lives. This last step will involve a fusions of the horizons perceived in the first two steps.

Kepnes suggests this model as a helpful move toward the reconciliation of religion and science. Its intent is very much in keeping with the work of Alister Hardy. As we have seen, Hardy strongly argued for, and subsequently put into practice, a full and systematic exploration of religious experience as, what can be readily seen as, the first step of this model. Edward Robinson's exploration of the phenomenon of religious experience in childhood is still very much part of that first step, although, as we have seen, he quickly saw the implications of that experience for the 'Erklaren' we currently use of childhood. He was therefore, according to this model,

led into the second step - if only for purposes of refutation. And indeed, in many of his articles on religious education, the synthesis he later created from the discoveries of the Religious Experience Research Unit, the philosphy of Gabriel Marcel and others, and his own work on the artistic imagination, can be seen as the 'fusion of horizons' of the third step.

B. Research Instrument

This dissertation is a descriptive exploratory study of the religious experience of childhood. Qualitative research methods were used. In terms of Ricoeur's model of understanding religous experience, it is part of the first step, a movement of 'Verstehen', the essential and preliminary development of the subject which respects and protects its sui generis character and does not prematurely subject it to forms of 'Erklaren'. As this is almost a new field of inquiry it is particularly important that research be conducted on this preliminary level. Qualitative methods, as noted by Patton (1980), yield descriptive data that are rich in depth and detail:

> Qualitative measures describe the experience of people in depth. The data are open-ended im order to find out what people's lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them in their own terms and in their natural settings. Qualitative measures permit the evaluation researcher to record and understand people in their own terms (p.22).

The study proceded through the basic research form developed by the Religious Experience Research Unit. This consisted in the distribution of appeals for accounts of religious experience, followed up by questionnaires and interviews pursuing specific aspects of the experiences described in the accounts received. This form closely corresponds to the peculiar characteristics of the subject. Religious experience is compounded of an immediate perception of an objective phenomenon, and a response to that perception, which is both immediate and long-term. The research tool which is best suited to exploring the relationship of these two dimensions is the in-depth interview.

In-depth phenomenological interviewing is interested in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience, rather than in being able to predict or control the experience. It also has the advantage, as a research method, of not prematurely dividing the cluster of questions which this study involves. It permits them to exist and overlap at uniquely different points 'in context' in the life of an individual.

C. Procedures

1) An appeal (see Appendix A) was distributed to prospective participants. These were adults who were either graduate

students or faculty at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA. Involvement was initially self-selective. The appeal requested written accounts of religious experiences in early childhood, and suggested that these were to be followed up by an interview. It suggested the basic orientation of the questions to be asked in the interview. The appeal also contained examples of accounts collected by the Religious Experience Research Unit, with the purpose of orienting and encouraging response. Since it is in the nature of the subject to be unique, the question of influence or bias was not of concern. Confidentiality was assured.

2) A small number of the respondents were invited to enter the second stage of the research. Criteria for the selection of this group of 8 persons, were based on the obvious honesty, sanity, articulateness and relevance of the accounts to the questions this study wishes to pursue.

The interviews were semi-structured. It was made clear to participants that they were not to be objects or subjects of study but, in fact, participants, and that the goals of the research would be best served by their active involvement. The following questions were asked:

1) Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your chosen field of work?

3. Where did you grow up? (City, town or rural area?)

4. What was the religious affiliation of your family?

5. What pattern did your education follow? (Public, private, alternative etc.?)

2) Interview Questions

1. Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child?

2. How old were you at the time(s)?

3. Could you talk about (expand on) the kinds of insight and knowledge that accompanied or followed from these experiences? (Themes - self, others, nature, morality, death etc.)

4. Do you also remember having insight or knowledge (not necessarily accompanied by transcendent experiences) that you know was other than what was being presented to you by your family or school?

5. Was any of this awareness in conflict with the view of the world being given you by adults?

6. How did you deal with this conflict? Did it, for example, create in you a sense of isolation? Was imaginative expression important?

7. Was there anybody in your home, educational, community or church life who touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it?

8. Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these experiences?

9. What features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself?

10. How did you deal with these elements? Do you feel that they to some extent succeeded in their destruction? 11. How is your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - influenced by (or a growth from) those early experiences?

The methodological goal in the interviewing was to have the participants reconstruct and reflect on the concrete details, the constitutive factors, of their experience. Care was therefore taken in questioning to allow the participants' thinking to unfold 'intact'.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

A. Review of Responses to Appeal

Response to the research appeal was at first hesistant. Investigation of this hesitancy confirmed the phenomenological tenet that it is indeed the relationship of the persons involved that forms the foundation of a rich in-depth interview.

The initial appeal was sent to approximately one hundred people who might be expected to be interested and able to make a vital response. These were graduate students, faculty and professionals in the fields of education and psychology. Only three of these people returned written accounts.

From a series of telephone calls to a selection of approximately twenty of these non-respondents it became clear that the following factors were involved in their reluctance to reply:

1) Writing - a general distaste for writing was expressed by each person on the grounds of

a) the time involved,

b) the difficulty of writing about such a profound aspect of their lives.

2) Uncertainty - as to whether the kind of experiences or insights they had had as children were relevant to the study.

3) Trust - both the desire to share their experiences, and the ability to unfold all their implications, were inextricably bound up, for these people, with the questions of "to whom?" and "for what?".

It was thus clear that preliminary ground work was necessary in order to facilitate the kind of in-depth interviewing needed. This work was conducted with all of the participants in this study in the form of meetings and telephone conversations that

1) answered all the questions each individual had in mind,

2) established the value of entering into the interview process for them personally,

3) provided a foundation for the more personal aspects of the interview in terms of rapport and ease of communication.

Great care was taken not to suggest any particular expectation of content during this preliminary elucidation and discussion.

Three of the interview participants had responded with written accounts to the original appeal. The other five were

referred by each other in a progressive manner that promised to have no end. A cut off point was determined after ten people had been interviewed. Eight interviews will be presented here. People referred in this way proved to be very suitable participants in that they were introduced through a person who

a) had found the interview process to be personally valuable,

and b) simply by being a friend of the person referred, created some of the trust that needed to be established in the preliminary ground work.

It was intended, if possible, that an equal number of males and females would be interviewed, but, in fact, only two of the eight people interviewed here were males. The fact that more females than males respond to studies of religious experience has been noted in larger studies. Of the original 3000 accounts received by the Religious Experience Research Unit 2080 were written by females and 895 by males, with 28 who had not indicated their sex. Alister Hardy (1979) himself cautioned against drawing the conclusion that spiritual experiences are more frequent among females. Many factors may be at work here, which are beyond the scope of this study to speculate upon.

B. Presentation of Interview Content

1. Introduction:

The time spent in each interview was from two and a half to three hours. The whole interview was tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The interview material presented in the subsequent pages represents approximately half of the original transcription, in each case. That which has been omitted consisted of conversation which was repetitious, circumnavigatory or irrelevant. No meaningful changes have been made. The content is verbatim.

It will be seen that the eleven proposed questions are adhered to fairly closely, although not necessarily chronologically. Care is taken to allow the participant to unfold his or her own 'story', consequently other questions and dialogue also occur. The first third to half of each interview was generally taken up with descriptions of early experience (Questions 1 to 4). In most cases a certain amount of exploration was required to find the language necessary for the individual to communicate what had never been formulated completely in his or her mind, or to find the 'translation' they were most comfortable with from the concepts they had habitually used for themselves to those used in the questions. Some of the participants commented on the difficulty of this. The interviews themselves involved intense concentration, and a continuous receptivity on the part of the interviewer to what

was 'intended', or as yet 'unspoken' by the participant, although no suggestion was ever made as to an idea that should be expressed. If one could say that 'establishing trust' was the first prerequisite discovered to be necessary for successful in-depth interviewing, 'grappling with language' was definitely the second prerequisite.

Five of the participants said that they had never spoken of their early experiences with anybody, and all said that they found the time powerful and meaningful in that they had discovered perspectives on their lives that they had not seen before. One person suggested that the questioning itself was so meaningful as to have a reverberative effect on life that could be studied in the later lives of the participants. This does indeed point us toward a future form of research that could be very illuminating for education.

2. David

At the time of the interview David was 44 years old. Two years previously he had changed his career from being a college teacher to a psychotherapist. David was raised in Chicago. His parents were, what he termed, "secular Jewish"; in fact he said they were "atheists". David's education was in the public school system.

Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child? (Question 1)

I have some early memories that are very intense. I think my earliest memory of all was when I was two to two and a half years old. We went to an outdoor concert in Grand Park in Chicago on the lake front. It was cool out and the orchestra was performing in the hat shell, lit up. The sky was cobalt blue and I was sitting on my father's lap and he was feeding me peanuts. I have a very intense memory of that feeling. If I had that feeling now I would call it transcendent. The colors, forms and feelings were very powerful.

-- Can you say what qualities it had that make you want to call it transcendent?

The quality of what I saw and felt totally overwhelmed any thoughts and perspective. There was no perspective, and there were no thoughts. It was just the intensity and poignancy of life; a sadness and happiness at once. It was so pure, almost painful.

-- Did the experience contain an awareness of self-identity?

Self-identity had no part in it. It was more life, the universe, the music, the sky: just the beauty and the intensity and the awe of life. It was an appreciation. It was raw life, so intense and vital. There was a unity, but it wasn't like the unity of everything. I melted away and there was life, and it was happening.

-- Were there any consequences of that experience, anything that followed from it for you?

No. It was an isolated memory. I had others, but less intense. If I had them now I would be more optimistic, more committed to being alive and more appreciative.

-- What other early spiritual experiences do you remember?

There is one. Let me give you the background. My father is

a real hard driving executive businessman. He was very 'macho strong'! This was in the 50's. He was very aggressive and I had absorbed this from him. I was like this with the kids, aggressive and domineering. We used to play baseball, just games we put together ourselves. Eight to twelve of us would get together and we would select two captains. Then the captains had to decide on their players. The first captain chose one he wanted, and the second captain chose one he wanted until everyone was on a team. There were no rules on who were captains, but I was almost always a captain. I was not the best player, in fact I wasn't in the upper half, but I was O.K. I was a captain on peer assertion. With kids, and adults, if you just lead, they will follow. I was a leader. One day - I was 6 or 7 years old - we were playing in a convent grounds. We would climb through the barbed wire into the field, out of sight of the buildings. We chose our teams. Then, I remember vividly, I had this awareness: "Why am I the captain?" "I'm the captain because I'm assertive, not because of my ability", and it suddenly struck me that the captain should be one of the best players. I saw my own behavior and I disliked it intensely. It was obnoxious to me. I made a decision not to do that again. So in my mind I stepped to the rear and, for the most part, I have been there ever since. At times I've stepped forward in leadership, but it always been on a strong

conviction that the leader should be the leader because of abilities and skills, not just assertiveness. I probably overreacted.

-- Would you say that this was a questioning of your father as a role model at that time?

Yes, but I wasn't conscious of it. I didn't think of my father, he didn't enter into this. I was looking at myself, and saying "I reject this, I don't want to do this any more". Yes, looking back I can say that I absorbed this behavior from my father, but I didn't consciously reject him. I still idolized my father until I was 12 or 13 years old, when I started seeing him as a human being. I had not thought of this as a spiritual experience until a friend said that she was amazed that I had that clarity at that age to step back and make a moral evaluation, and make a decision. It changed the course of my life.

-- Did it feel like you were actually pulling away and looking at yourself?

Yes. It wasn't visual, like looking down on myself. It was more mental. My mind occupied the space of all that borders everything in there. It was like a chess game. I was very detached from it.

-- Did you have any sense of where this insight came from?

None what-so-ever. No one ever talked that way ever. I never heard anybody say anything like that, so I was not influenced by anybody. I just thought "This is wrong, this is not the way it should be, and I'm not going to take part in it." It was definitely nothing I heard.

-- Can you expand on what it was you knew? (Question 3)

The ideas of justice and leadership - leaders are to serve the group. The group perspective is the group good, it is the standard by which people ought to behave and not by self-interest. The person who is the leader ought to be there because he/she is best qualified to help the group in that particular capacity. The leader should be detached from ego.

-- The leader should be the servant?

Yes.

-- This seems a very profound insight for a 6 year old.

Yes. It was just self-evident that the group good was paramount. I made a decision from then on as soon as I saw it. I immediately said "No", and it has been with me ever since. I

have had to work out some of the details.

-- Do you feel that you might have chosen otherwise, even after having the insight?

No. This gets into other experiences I have had. My neighborhood was about 90 to 95% Jewish, upper middle class. Most of the people's grandparents were immigrants. This made our parents strive hard. They were all ambitious people and very conscious of getting to where they were. I grew up with an awareness that there was nothing spiritual there, life was missing something. Deeper things were not there. I completely rejected that life. As a child I never thought, as would be natural for most children, that I would take my place in the world in which I was growing up. It was just not for me. Who knows where that came from!

-- Do you remember when you first rejected this life-style around you?

I never really accepted it. I always had other visions and ideas on what I wanted to do. It was always clear to me that I was not going to do. It was harder to find what I <u>was</u> going to do. I knew their way of life wasn't meaningful to me, from some deep level of meaning. That life was death to me. It was like tasting a cetain food and going "Yuk, that's not for me".

So I had had this knowledge all along, and the moment playing baseball sprang out of that awareness.

-- Would you say you were a happy child?

Basically not, although I had times of happiness. I loved my father very much and he loved me, and my family loved each other, but I saw the limitations. He became a model of what not to do. Justice became a big thing with me.

-- How did you deal with this basic conflict between you and the world around you? Did it, for example, create in you a sense of isolation? (Question 6)

I used not to play with other kids because I had problems with them. My conflict with other kids was the clickishness of their tight social groups, and their competitiveness and nastiness toward each other. The main form of aggressiveness and dominance was not physical fighting, but the "put down". I always had a conflict. I could choose to be part of the in-group, and then I would feel dirty and guilty for the way we were treating the out-people. So then I would get out of the group because I couldn't stand the guilt any more. Now I was part of the out-group, and that was difficult because I would be laughed at or looked down on. The in-group were having fun and we were just the losers. So I vascillated. Almost every

year or two I went back and forth. I liked playing with other kids but I didn't like myself very much in the way we were disrespectful, at a fundamental level, with each other. So I played by myself a lot, and I had some wonderful experiences. The neighborhood was being newly built then, and there were a lot of empty lots and fields. I remember one empty lot down the end of the block, where I used to play by myself. I built a whole world there. I was an Indian. I identified a lot with the Indians becuase they represented something clean, pure and unmateralistc. They were connected with nature. That was important to me. I had a kind of romantic view of them - they walked silently, they knew by the wind, the smell of the rain, animal tracks and so on. They were embedded in nature. They were very appealing to me. I wanted to be like them, and I practiced and did become like them in certain ways. I also did magic, my own little rituals and Shamanistic stuff. I remember being alone for hours, being an Indian and doing magic. I had this little hiding place. I was all alone, not part of a tribe. I was a solitary Indian. There was a fallen tree, that formed a table. I trampled down the grass around it, and made my place there and hid things in the roots of the tree. I would collect rocks, and different things, and arrange them in different ways. They were power objects for me. And I would scout around the neighborhood and look at people, and not be seen. I was looking from my world and wasn't going to join 'that' world, the materialistic 'yuk' world.

Twilight was a magical time for me when I was being an Indian, when the sky gets that electric blue and everything is silhouetted darkness. I remember one evening. It was getting cold. Everything became very intense. There was a poignancy about being alive, being connected to nature and to the universe. The cold was somehow part of it. I was connected to something much larger, more real, more substantial, more dramatic and more meaningful than this other little plastic world of cars and people and houses and mothers and fathers and the rest of it. That was like a miniature world. This was the real world.

-- How old were you at this time?

I was 5 or 6, and this kind of play lasted until I was about 11 years old.

-- Did you ever describe any of this to any one?

No. Never. You're the first person I've ever described it to. That world was the world I wanted to live in. The problem was of how to do that and still grow up and make a living in this world.

-- Through your imagination, your creation of an Indian-world, you lived out what you knew to be more 'real' than the real

world! Would you say that you were contacting anything 'beyond' yourself through this imaginative activity?

It was nature. I was always small, a part of nature, a brave, not a chief. I worshipped nature. It was not an ego thing. I would get lost in it. It was the way things ought to be - where we play our parts, not aggrandize ourselves. It was the real world. The other world didn't seem real to me, it was like a shoebox with little figures in it. When I was in the Indian world, the sky was so big and everything had a freshness to it, a mystery which the other world didn't have. They were two worlds side by side. They had no relationship at all.

-- So you lived with two realities! How did you deal with their 'non-relationship'? Did you make any bridges at all? (Question 6 again)

No, because I didn't have a belief system, any way to deal with this other than these certainties that I had, and have always had, and still do have. I had low self-esteem. I grew up thinking I was the black sheep in the family. I was the one that couldn't fit in. I accepted that role for myself on most levels. Thinking back, I feel my childhood was basically unhappy and nothing good. I was glad to be done with it. I was not the type of person my parents would have been proud of. But I held on to a certain depth of feeling, a spiritual

feeling, that I was not going to give up. I saw other people giving it up, but I wasn't going to grow up unless I could hold on to this. Again, I got no reinforcement from other people, other kids or anybody.

-- How about school? Was there ever any subject, creative activity or any person in school that encourgaged this feeling in you? (Question 7)

No, nothing.

-- How about in your community?

The only person that was somewhat of an inspirational figure was my grandfather. He lived life his way. It would have been easier if I had role models to talk to about these things, but I had nothing, and had to forge it myself. It was never a question of "Is this right?" or "Should I do this?", but of "Will I be able to do it?" I would die trying. I was not going to compromise. The relative merits of the two were so apparent to me that I wasn't going to attempt to become part of the regular world.

-- You were Barmitzvahed?

Yes.

-- Did you feel any points of contact, or conflict, between the religious teachings you received and your inner world? (Question 5)

No contact. I remember feeling angry with my parents for not following more what I thought was 'supposed' to be a certain way, when we had a holiday. I was 10 or 11 years old. But there was nothing in Judaism that I saw that was appealing to me. I remember thinking, that at least, growing up Catholic, there was the beauty of the Church.

-- The moral teachings didn't resonate with anything you were finding in yourself?

No, not at all. My grandfather was a radical leftist and my parents had been radicals when they were teenagers, in the early thirties. But they gave it up to become regular good citizens. My parents thought the purpose of life was to contribute to the community and the social good of the world. My father was totally unspiritual, and my mother had occasional flashes, but very limited.

-- So there was no point of contact for you at home, in your school, religion, or community?

No. It's amazing!

-- What features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself? (Question 9)

My father tried to break me (the military way). He thought it was for my own good. I knew he loved me, he just thought it was the right way to raise a kid. He thought I was always weird and strange. It was his will against mine. But he couldn't win because I didn't share his values.

-- Do you feel that this had a destructive effect on your inner life, or perhaps made you stronger? (Question 10)

On my psyche it definitely had a destructive effect. I had a lot of self-doubt and self-destructive behavior. But on my inner life, it had no effect. It had a solid reality to it. It was like a rock. Nothing influenced it, until I was old enough to have conscious understanding and make connections with it - and that was in college. I began to understand it and work with it.

-- In all those years of 'aloneness' with your truths, did you feel disappointed, confused with the world, or were you more 'on hold', so to speak, until you could make your own connections?

It was a great struggle. I used to get angry with the lack of

reverence or respect for the deep spiritual things. I was angry at everybody, not just my family: what they did to the out-people, how they could crush them, or beauty! I would get angry at how stupid people were. They were so destructive. But I knew they didn't know what they were doing, it was very clear. I knew this even when I was very little.

-- Would you call what you felt 'compassion'?

Yes.

-- How did you cope with the anger? Did you find ways of directing that? Did it influence what happened later in your life? (Question 6 again)

Yes. I was very rebellious, revolutionary. I had my Marxist phase, but then I saw the people in the 'left' were also destructive to each other! Then I began getting into spirituality. I began having conscious spiritual experiences.

-- Once you found a system of thought that acknowledged the possibility!

Right. It was psychology at first. The Jungian concept of God was where I began. I started a psychological kind of praying - "Dear God, I don't know if I really believe in you

but I believe there is something important about this , therefore I am going to pray....". Then I took some psychedelic drugs in graduate school, and they opened me up to the reality and intensity of these things, which matched the descriptions of mystical visions in religious literature. Things began to make sense and I started rejecting radicalism. It wasn't until I had those experiences that I consciously knew what I was searching for.
Then my question became that of how I could make good use of my time and energy to make an impact. I wanted to 'save the world' but the perplexing question question was "how?". This was a very pragmatic question.

-- You've described having a very clear vision, when you were a child, of the 'way things should be'; so it does make some sense that the adult question should be "How? What do I do?"

Yes. Part of me would have liked to just drop the world. Being a hermit appealed to me. But I knew it wasn't practical. I did join a contemplative order for a while, when I was 26 and 27 years old. My teacher was a very powerful man; I learned a lot from him. Again the questions for me were pragmatic.

My fundamental question became split: one part was "How do I best honour my vision <u>in</u> the world", and the other part was "How do I just <u>be</u> it and stay in contact with it in the world?"

My answer was to serve people, and stay close to nature. The service to people was in order to make a difference. The result is that I have been intensely interested in human nature in all its manifestations. At some level I am a psychologist innately. The understanding of the psyche is most important and fascinating to me. I want to know what to do to help. I suppose I am taking that pragmatic ideology from my father and applying it to my spiritual concerns. The divided worlds of my childhood are probably still in the process of resolution. I guess there's a tension here that I've tried to maintain, of trying to find the best answers I can and at the same time ultimately knowing that I can't - it's a mystery. A lot of people try to talk you out of doing that. Secular people believe there are no answers - all these big questions are just fuzzy, pie-in-the-sky stuff. The spiritual people tell you not to try to find answers, just live and be part of the 'dance' of life. Do you know the meaning of "Israel"?

-- No. Tell me.

Well, Jacob was the third patriarch. He didn't actually have it by birthright, he came by it in a slightly shady way. When he was a young man - and this is a mysterious passage in the Bible - he 'wrestled with an angel' one night. 'Angel' is used interchangeably with 'God'. He wrestled all night and was 'smote in the hip' - whatever that means. In the morning there

was a draw. God told him that because he had done this he would get the birthright, and from then on his name would be "Israel", which means "wrestler with God"!
I see this as very profound. You'll always struggle with God. You'll always wrestle.
To have some standard, some rule, would make it so much easier. But it is a daily struggle.

-- You've described how this perspective has arisen for you from your childhood. Can you further expand on how your present life is influenced by your early experiences? (Question 11)

My early experiences were never 'special'. They were hard rock reality. My connection with that reality was not 'special'. I never associated the awe and mystery with myself - it was the mystery that was special. My connection to it was rather matter of fact. I learned not talk about it. This led me to an elitist view - other people were just plain dumb, stupid.

-- You felt different from others?

Oh, always very different from others. I looked down at other people. Later that conflicted with my egalitarian views and I had to work that out. Why doesn't everybody have the same capacity? I always thought "Why don't other kids see this?"

None of my experiences ever helped me with the fundamental question "What am I going to do?" That was my responsibility. There was never any guidance.

-- Wouldn't you say that was part, also, of the responsibility of education - to help you to find ways to express what is true for you?

Yes. But school's not about that. It's about getting us to fit in to the world - getting a job and so on.
Creative education comes back to the teacher. If the teacher has a fundamental reverence for the human soul then things can happen, if he or she doesn't, then they can give them anything to work with and nothing will happen.
I didn't know this when I was teaching college. I wasn't really respecting the wisdom in my students. I was helpful, but I didn't know that if you go deep enough you find people's understanding.

-- Most teachers would have trouble relating that to the job of 'imparting' information, that they see themselves doing.

Yes. You need to work with both questions - pragmatic effect and the connection with truth. Where they intersect is real creativity. And there is no permanent answer to where they intersect. That is the central quest of the creative life.

I see the fundamental question we have to ask as "What is trying to come through now?" The soul is always creating. I think there is a new area beginning to develop. Psychology has an important role to play in helping us understand the relationship of spirit and mind. It can help us work with both, not one or the other. Spiritual writers disregarded the personal, and psychologists, poets and writers got stuck in the personal. We need to live with the creative tension of both at once. But I think this can be very hard, and we may need help. Therapy can help people go into what's there. This interview is a form of therapy. It asks me to go deeper into myself, and that creates change. I think if you were to ask people, a month or two after you had interviewed them, if there had been any changes, ripples, consequences, you would be surprised.

-- An interesting idea! Thank you.

3. Judith

At the time of the interview Judith was 42 years old. She was working as a consultant and psychotherapist. She grew up in a small farming community in Southern Pennsylvania. Her parents were members of the Church of the Brethren. This Church is part of the anti-Baptist movement that originally came to America in the mid-1700's from Germany. It is popular in the area in which Judith grew up, and varies from very traditional forms, that are close to the Mennonite Church, to more progressive forms. Judith's education was in the public school system.

-- Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child? (Question 1)

There are three situations that I would like to touch on. The first is the earliest that I can recall. It is about when I was very tiny in a crib, just a couple of months old. What is strange about this memory is that the perspective of the remembering fluctuates from being within the eyes of the child, and beside it. There is a sense of light, like a ball of light. It doesn't have any specific form or shape but it has a position and it is just in front of me. There is a real connection but also a slight separateness. The light was like great joy and great longing; it was the light of love, the

light of intelligence, the light of feeling and the light of all that unites us. It was separate from me but didn't feel separate. There was a wonderment about it.
It was as large as I could see. I think when you look out from your eyes you can see only so much. It seemed like it filled the space. As I think of it the feeling I get is in my heart and chest area, just a longing to be around it.

-- You've described your memory of your awareness of the light, can you also describe your awareness of the 'I' that was watching it?

Well, there isn't that much separateness and distinction. The amazing thing is that I can be aware of the difference, but the feeling is that there was no difference. My memory of the experience is of being connected, fluid.

-- Are you saying that the feeling you remember in your heart was of a oneness, but at the perceptual level there was a difference?

That is true. There was a dual level of awareness. What I think about this now is that it was an awareness of the soul entering the body. When I have looked back at that memory I have also seen my mother's image standing behind that light, and I feel it as part of a bonding with my Mom. And another

aspect of the memory is the discovery of my thumb.

-- That was the first part of your body you were aware of that you found separate and different from yourself?

Yes. Different, separate and I love it. I remember bringing it round to my mouth, and making a circle between it and myself.

Now I know psychology would have a lot to say about this, the mother/child bonding, the thumb and so on. But the reason I know this whole experience is more than that is because as I grow older I feel that same sense when I connect with nature. It is the sense that takes me out of myself into the blue of the sky, it is really what I have been following in terms of my spiritual path. I know that that basic early experience embodied all of this, and represented the way of my own development, a path, as well as the original relationship of myself to my body and mother. It's always been through aesthetic experiences that I have had that memory and that knowledge - like a cracking open of the ozone layer and seeing beyond time and space. I never know when I will feel this connection. It's something wonderful and familiar.

The second experience is one that recurred many times between the ages of 3 and 5. As I was going to sleep, after I said my prayers, I would just lie there in an open and receptive way. I began to notice that in between the time when I was awake and

falling asleep, when my eyes were closed, geometric figures and shapes would come. They were circles, triangles and squares, the three basic forms. There was a whole sequence in which they built over time. Although they were geometric shapes they took on many dimensions. Sometimes they were in color, sometimes they were three-dimensional. They would blend and change. They were solids which were in fact plastic or mutable. They would change shape, or move into each other. In the beginning I was a little cautious about them, but then I found them to be quite benevolent. At first they were just entertaining, and then they began teaching me things. I feel a little strange talking about it. I've never talked about this. These forms had so many qualities that you don't see in the earth. They took me beyond the senses that I'm aware of here. For example, a color could have a sound.

-- Can you describe what it was you understood them to be teaching you? (See Question 3)

Concretely I can't answer that, but abstractly I can say that they were teaching me a whole quality of changeableness, relationship, and trust in something that doesn't seem to have a context rooted in this earth, and this way of knowing.

-- Later, when you learned Euclidean geometry and so on, was there ever a conflict in your mind or a sense of discrepancy

between what you had learned in this implicit way. (See Question 5)

That's interesting. Geometry was one of the easiest classes I ever took. There was no conflict, but more of a sense of "When do we get started? This is so simple. What about the triangles, circles and spheres moving in and around each other and changing shape?"
But more importantly than this they were teaching me about building a relationship with that which is beyond my known world, and trusting that connection.

-- It was like a bridge being built?

Yes. It was a bridge between worlds that was built over a period of time. Most of this happened at the edge of sleep. I trained my awareness to be open as I was falling more deeply into sleep. That is when deeper levels came through. These hypnogogic states started at 3 years old and were gone by the time I started school, at 5 or 6.

-- Were you ever able to describe any of this to anybody?

No, I never talked about it. Actually, I've never discussed this with anyone but you.

-- Was there anybody in your home, school or community that touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

This inner world was not one that I shared with people. I nurtured it on my own.

-- In solitude. Was this lonely for you?

Oh, no. It was very rich, very full. I didn't feel alone in it. I felt included. It was very gentle, and the teachings were at levels I was ready for. And in a way, if I didn't want it to happen, it wouldn't happen.

-- Did you have a sense of the purpose of these teachings?

Bringing formlessness into form. That is the issue in my life. I have a lot of information but it doesn't get expressed here. That is what I grapple with now, at all sorts of levels.

-- So some form of recognition would have been helpful to you when you were little?

Well, I have always felt words could not convey these dimensions. The knowing was at a telepathic cellular level -my whole self would experience and know something in an instant.

-- If not language, do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these experiences? (Question 8).

Actually, for a while, sports was a form of expression for my inner knowledge. I was very good at golf. I started playing at the age of 5, and by 11 people said I could probably be the club champion for women, although I didn't particularly care. Everytime I played competitively, or with others, I would be self-conscious, and not good. I played for the aesthetics of it. I would play barefoot, by myself. There was a connection between nature, the smells of the cut grass, the greens that were so soft under foot and the strength, softness, precision, trusting and letting go - watching the extension of the movement go forward. I played all sports with this aesthetic sense. It was only in college that I realized that other people didn't do that; they played for other reasons. I was good at golf and basket ball. In these you have geometric shapes that become plastic as you put energy into them and move them in air.

-- Did you find any of this connection in the arts?

Yes. Music and art. I took piano lessons for ten years, and was very constrained by my teachers, very inhibited. When no

one was home and I would play the pieces the way I wanted to, they just welled up and through my fingers. The gardener would come in and say "Boy, your daughter plays well!". But when I had to put pennies on my wrists to keep them right and do scales forever, a kind of hate seethed inside me. I felt really inhibited and blocked about expressing myself. If I did my college education over again I would spend all my time with studio art. But my mother was an artist, so I shyed away from expressing myself in that form. My expression would have been creative, abstract, expressionistic. My mother's is more picture perfect. I would be very criticized for my own expression, so I stayed away from it. The form I would have chosen would have been sculpture, concretizing shapes.

-- So in sports, music and art there <u>were</u> ways in which you could express your inner world, but you had the wrong kind of teaching and didn't really find anybody that would help you?

No. No one said "What are you trying to express?" They superimposed structures on it. Everyone thought there was the right way to do a thing. The right way for me was the way in which I would have explored it.

-- What other features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself? (Question 9)

I grew up in a family that was very different from who I am. Spontaneity is threatening to them. And also, I grew up in a religion which is very structured and limited; and in a town that was very narrow. So all round, there was very little that could support me.

-- Earlier I asked you if you were lonely and you said "No". What you have just described <u>does</u> sound lonely!

Oh yes. In that community, absolutely. It was in my inner world that I was totally accepted and connected. I found no ways to link the two worlds.

-- How did you cope with that disparity? (Question 10) Do you feel that you were ever confused, or questioned your inner world?

I never did. I learned not to share it.

-- But there was pain in that lack of connection?

Yes.

-- How did you cope with that?

Well, when I was 8 years old I started to get very fat.

-- Would you say that was a kind of barrier to this outer world that didn't recognize you?

Good question! I had my heels dug in all the way, and I resisted having to grow up in a society where I couldn't express my self, and wasn't wanted.

-- Wasn't wanted?

My parents were very judgmental and it was wrong not to think the way they were thinking. I split offf. The fatness was the distance between us. But I became popular, and achieved adequately. I stayed ostensibly connected to society. But who I was, didn't pull through. Humor was an outlet and one of the ways I did connect fully.

-- Because it was spontaneous and broke through the structures!

Yes. Also it was helpful to people. It was never biting or sarcastic, which was the predominant kind of humor in my town.

-- If you think of that basic discrepancy all those years, can you think of any ways you used to keep the spirituality alive in yourself? You have said you nurtured it. (See question 6).

I think that a part of me went underground for a long time. But I did also express it by being very adventurous. I had a little red bicycle, and I went everywhere on it. And I did a lot of creative plays in backyards. I directed and acted in them with the neighborhood kids. Drama was an essential expression all through elementary school and my early teens. In the summer there was freedom of adventure and exploration. I would play basketball way into the winter until it was too cold to be outdoors. I even played outside when I had a cold. Being outside was a way I could be healed and connected.

-- In the religious teachings from your church and community were there any truths that you recognized, or was there a difficulty? (See question 5)

I felt that it was important to be in the church. There is an experience that I had with the church that is rather poignant. The Church of the Brethren doesn't believe in infant baptism. We have confirmation, then baptism at that point. So the adolescents go through a lot of teaching and are then baptised in a chamber in the church - you are dunked three times. It used to be done at the old pond. Now this was when I was 13 years old. I had become very devoted, and was wondering if there were any churchs with nuns because I was thinking of a monastic existence. Solitude was my way to connect. Before we were baptised I kept feeling my body going rigid. I wanted to

leave, but didn't think I could. I remember feeling so uncomfortable, and feeling 'this is not the right place for me'. And yet I continued to sit through it. The inner conflict was between what I felt to be the church's values and my own inner connectedness. I was also fat at this point. You had to dress in this horrible white thing, and wear a bathing cap! How unnatural! Here I was about to be baptised into the church and I wanted it to be aesthetic and like my inner self. I was thinking "How am I going to be baptized, with my hair restrained and getting into this somewhat stagnant pool!" I wanted it to be important, becuase it was supposed to be. You had to come down a flight of stairs to the chamber, in front of everyone. When it was my turn I slipped on the top step and fell all the way down and made a big splash! I knew it was wrong for me and I unconsciously sabotaged it. What an incredibly embarrassing experience for a 13 year old who was fat!

-- And yet it was also you expressing your own truth, kinaesthetically!

Absolutely. I had forgotten about my truth there, and it stood up and said "No way!" My body was saying "Resist, this isn't right!"

-- And what was not right about the church for you?

Well, there was an incredible amount of hypocrisy. And it's only lately that I've forgiven the people in my church for being such incredible hypocrites. Now I see it as an aspect of humanness. Early on I had felt an aspect of divineness, and I wanted it to be in the church. I was very judgemental.

-- You had not been able to acknowledge the 'wrongness' until the brink of initiation?

No. And even after that I denied my body, never realized it as my teacher.

-- Perhaps until the last moment you were still hoping that your inner spirit <u>would</u> make its connection with the divine at the moment of baptism?

Yes. And I keep feeling it is, and was, part of my responsibility to make a bridge in some way.

-- What happened after this. How did you deal with the confusion?

I read my Bible a lot in my room, and reflected. But I really shied away from the group experience. I withdrew. Outwardly I still attended events, but inwardly I retreated. In fact I see the pattern of retreat throughout. I couldn't articulate my

own truth.

-- Did you have a choice? Were there any other avenues for you?

Times were difficult. There was no individualized approach to learning, so I didn't connect. And I had no spiritual mentors, at least, verbal ones. There were a few people I felt connected to. One was Joe, who ran the street sweeper. He was an old Indian. When I was tiny, before 3 years old, he would take me for rides on it. The other person was a cleaning woman, Mrs. Rock. I used to scrub floors with her. She had a simple eloquence about her. But they were not teachers who helped me to adapt or make a bridge. Because of their naturalness they were a delight and supported me. Out side of that, I felt out of place in my family, school and town.

-- You were going to describe a third experience...

This was a recurring dream I had between 7 and 10 years old. I am in a hallway with columns. I am walking on ether, moving down the hallway. There are three exits on either side. There is a holy sense. It is like a great cathedral. There are options available for exploration. I am learning about the fact of the existence of the avenues, the existence of choice! There are seven avenues, three on either side and one ahead.

-- Is there any significance in the fact that this learning about choice occurred between 7 and 10 years old?

It was a time when I was converting some of my adventurous qualities into leadership qualities, adapting truth into more routine structures for leading others. I compromised a lot.

-- So this was a bridge-making time?

I don't know. The two worlds didn't really meet. I compromised enormously.

-- You have some regrets?

Well, given my support system, I did what I did. As I look back I see it was an aberration of my truth. I made that choice and acted it out through high school. I let go of it in college. Then I did my own thing - the free adventurer. I went round the world, lived in Africa, and then came back. It is only in the last five years I'm coming back to the original spiritual connection and piecing this all together.

-- There seems to be some doubt, a sense that something was lost. Is that too strong?

I've tried to do what felt right for me. It has taken various

forms - spiritual awareness, aesthetic/athletic experiences, then adventure. The doubt is whether these forms were spiritually connected.

-- But you are now in a phase of connection?

Yes - sorting out, validating the truth of my own way and wanting to express that.

-- How is your professional work related to that?

As a therapist I support people's inner knowingness. That's the crux of my work, and part of what I hope to do is to go back and weave my therapeutic skills into business, in which I worked for years and which, I think, is way out of line. I hope to help people make their work directly relate to their inner lives. It is central to business to rebalance itelf. It has got too far away from ourselves.

-- This is an extension of the previous question, and also a summarizing of the themes we have been talking about: Can you describe how your present life - its pattern and sense of purpose - is a development from your early experiences? (Question 11)

We have different kinds of pain in our lives. Some pain is

feeling that we've done wrong in terms of what parents, social structures are telling us - that is one kind of pain. Then the pain of doing something that is counter to what your inner knowing is telling you to do - that is real suffering: to walk away from that. I've done that. I've walked away from my inner voice.

-- Why? The pressure to conform, lack of forms of expression, fear, confusion, laziness...?

All of those. In the 50's there was the onslaught of audio-visual messages that we have now, but there was an unawareness, and an anxiety about conformity - getting it right. We would try to pass things on before we got them ourselves, or know what is right for oneself. We became disembodied. I was part of that. And we still do it. We get beyond our noses. We need to internalize what we learn. The agrarian society kept one in one's body. We're so far from that. How do we learn in our kind of society? We need support for right-brained learning. That's coming. And we need patient teachers, who teach what they know.

-- And the implication for education would be to place more emphasis on teaching teachers to know themselves, than giving them curriculae to pass along.

Yes. They should feel "because I really know this you can learn". There is a confusion in the Christian Church around this.

-- Yes. "Doctrine" and "Truth"!

Right. Christ is a great example as a teacher.

-- Indeed. His teaching was what you would probably call 'grounded'. He didn't present undigestible 'structures'. It needs courage to bear the structures around you and to be present to truth at the same time. Is this perhaps an aspect of the meaning of 'the cross' for you?

Yes. It is very very hard. We have to be very careful and very patient about what truth is.

4. Carolyn

At the time of the interview Carolyn was 34 years old. She termed her work 'clairvoyant counselling'. She also held classes in meditation and philosophy. Carolyn grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her parents were Jewish. She was raised by her father, as her mother was very ill. He was a physicist and philosopher, who did not believe in organized religion, but influenced Carolyn toward an interest in philosophy and religion. Her education was in the public school system.

-- Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child? (Question 1)

1. Yes, the first one that comes to mind that's very vivid was when I was nine or ten. This certainly wasn't the first but it's the first that comes to my mind . I was tired and I lay down on my bed and I closed my eyes to take a nap and the entire room started to swirl and then I left my body and I was on the ceiling. I saw my body on the bed. I wasn't dreaming, I was conscious. I remember feeling that I loved this feeling of freedom, and I remember feeling that I was infinite and that I would never die. But I also remember feeling somehow different from others in that I felt this way and that I had this experience. It was like my secret that I couldn't tell and that I felt almost guilty for enjoying it. I remember

feeling that somehow "this isn't right but it's wonderful, so you can't tell anybody about it." I remember being filled with the feeling that I was an infinite being and that I wasn't my body.

When I was really young, I remember being about 3 years old and walking down the street in a town, holding my father's hand. I remember that the people who walked by me had light around them. Everyone had light. Some people had more light and some people had less light, and some people had darker colours. I remember feeling that the people that I could trust were the people who had more light around them. Yet I also felt that this was something I wasn't supposed to talk about because when I had tried nobody understood me. Again there was a feeling of guilt with the experience - that it was somehow precious but not to be disclosed.

I also remember listening to people talking and being able to hear their thoughts. I knew that what they were saying wasn't really what they felt. I became confused about trusting what people were saying.

-- The early experience of seeing light around people - was that continuous, or is it particular experiences that you remember?

It was very continuous.

-- So you were registering it more, or reflecting on it more at that moment, you remember, of holding your father's hand?

Right.

-- And you said you tried to talk about it. Do you remember what you said?

I remember when I was older what I said. I don't remember what I said when I was younger, I just remember the feeling that I couldn't talk about it. When I was older, because I would see energy and light not only around people but in certain rooms - there was a particular room in our house where I would walk in and I would see always light dancing all over the room - I tried to describe it to my father. I said "I can see molecules". He said "You can't see them with the naked eye" and he took me to see an electron microscope. When I saw what molecules look like, I realized I wasn't seeing molecules. Then I felt really uncertain as to what was seeing. Since my mother had multiple sclerosis, and her brain was affected, I worried that something was wrong with my brain and that's why I was having these experiences. So I felt elated and I felt frightened simultaneously.

-- How old were you when you talked about seeing the molecules?

8 or 9 Years old.

-- So that was a real attempt to approach the subject, and get some clarification. And actually it threw you back into more ...

Confusion. Right.

-- Was there anybody or anything you could turn to at this point?

My father was supportive in that he believed that I was intelligent and that I had a vivid imagination. He wasn't critical of me, but he didn't understand. So I felt loved but not understood. What I went to was nature. Behind our house we had fields, a brook, and a place where there were trees. I would get that feeling of being understood from nature. You know, it's interesting, I can feel the emotion now of how isolated in my perceptions I was. Even though there were people around me, they weren't people who understood me. So I would go to nature.

I have two brothers who are older. They both excelled in school, excelled in sports, excelled in societies' ways. But I was always experiencing these other currents which distracted me. There was a very deep feeling of inadequacy because of being aware of other levels of life that made it hard for me to

feel the importance of some of the material concerns of other people. I remember, as a kid, having the thought pretty consistently that what was important to me wasn't the things but the energy that was between the things. I can remember being about 5 or 6, looking at the energy between the rungs of a chair, and saying to myself consciously "What's important to me is not the chair but what's between the chair". Yet that sounded so silly to anyone I would try to express it to. But I remember continually feeling that way. So I would talk to the trees, talk to the birds, and make up songs about these feelings, but I think there was an isolation about it.

-- Were you lonely? Was this sense of isolation painful?

Well, I think that it can't be separated from the fact that I incarnated into a situation which was very painful because of my mother being sick. Surely there was pain, and I was always yearning or searching for life's purpose. I can remember being very very young and feeling this prayer yearning for understanding. I always felt older than I was.
I felt that somehow I was the teacher, although I was the littlest. I remember feeling that way, and that nobody was listening to me. That somehow I had something to say that was like another language that noone understood. It took me until I was nineteen to begin to figure out the pieces to the puzzle.

-- So there was considerable uneasiness accompanying your experiences. Was there joy too?

It was really mixed. There great joy and great anguish together.

-- And the experiences gave you many questions?

I think that the experiences were complete in themselves. I just didn't allow myself to be fully comfortable with them because of my conditioning.

-- Because of the discrepany with the adult world?

Right.

-- And the feeling of somehow betraying your family and others?

Right.

I was afraid to be too different because that would mean something was wrong. But the experiences themselves were very pure. I put on them this misconception.

-- Could you expand on what you have said about the kinds of insight and knowledge that accompanied these experiences? (Question3)

I knew that I was infinite, that I felt oneness - that when I communed with nature we were one. When I was seeing the energy 'between' things I knew that there wasn't separation. There was unity and connection. I felt that there was a communication of truth always coming out of people even when it wasn't verbal. I would hear a voice inside of a person speaking which wasn't verbal. It was their spirit. Spirit is always communicating.

-- Could you describe that 'voice'?

I would hear about people's fears, about people's aspirations, their real core self. Perhaps they would be talking about something to the neighbor - dogs or trees - but what would get communicated would be their essential feeling - the desire to be loving. I felt that everyone around me wanted to be different from what they were, but there was so much fear that people weren't allowing themselves to be themselves. What confused me was that I couldn't comprehend how other people didn't feel these things too. I still have trouble with that. Knowing I was infinite didn't ease that frustration because I wanted everybody to share in the knowledge consciously together NOW...

-- How did this perception of others influence you toward them?

I think that there was a compassion. I have a lot of memories of school. There was a boy in my third grade who was in a wheelchair because of polio. I made a point of sitting next to him. When he was scared I made a point of comforting him. I think I always went towards the kids who were rejected, because I felt their pain.

-- Do you remember any awareness you had about good or evil, about what it's right to do or not to do?

Yes, I had a sense of that as far back as I can remember.

-- Can you remember what you felt about death?

Well, I grew up with my mother - who had been an athlete and a nurse, was very vital and had many beautiful and admirable qualities, and who became a physical and mental vegetable. She died in a paralysed state unable to speak. I watched this. She woke up blind when I was two, and I watched this decline of her life. Because of the kind of suffering I saw her endure I remember thinking very young "Death is better than this". And I had a lot of fear that it might happen to me.
I also had a lot of guilt that maybe my pregnancy - my being born - helped to bring this about. I don't remember feeling a fear of death just of disease. I even wished sometimes my mother would die so that she could be liberated. I had a sense

that death would be a liberation.

I felt afraid of all disease: that a little disease could turn into something very frightening. It was my mother coming back to me after she died, that opened me up consciously to spirit. She explained to me why she went through what she did, and the karmic perfection of it.

-- How old were you then?

Nineteen.

-- Was there anything else that you found hèlped you cope with the aspects of yourself that the world around you didn't recognize?

My imagnation was the probably the number one way that I coped. I would go into fantasy. I would create images and harmony in my mind. Because I created it in my mind. Because it wasn't external I created it in my mind . I was communicated with consciousness. For example, when I was eight or nine, I pretended that every piece of furniture had an identity, male or female, and I would hold conversations in my thought with each piece of furniture. I would have questions and concerns, and the furniture would give me answers. And again also with nature, I would communicate in my thoughts with different

aspects of nature.

-- Your communication was always with a spiritual essence, rather than with spiritual beings?

Yes.

-- Were there ever other beings involved?

I have vague memories, at 2 and maybe 3 years old, of seeing spiritual beings with light who could communicate with thought or with their healing presence. I can remember being in a hospitol with pneumonia at two years old and having a presence look in at me, a being, and being in a crib very frightened because my parents weren't with me. A being of light was there. But when I was older it was mostly working with thought and imagination.

-- Was there any difference at all between what you felt, say in a room, and in nature - qualitatively?

There was more light and more expansion out in the woods, a greater sense of infinte feelings. In our house there was so much tension and stress because of the circumstances. The way that I dealt with it was by focusing on something else, and by imagining. That allowed me not to be caught in

it. When I was outside I was more free; there was a release.

-- Was there anything in your home, education or community which touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

Not until teenage years. I didn't have anyone that I could talk about these things with, and I almost forgot that I had these experiences until I had that awakening at nineteen. Then it was like a veil was lifted and fear was gone, and I knew I wasn't crazy. I had definitely come to believe that all these experiences meant something was wrong with me.
I did have a philosophical connection. I think that was a saving grace. At a very young age, as early as I could read, I was reading Bertrand Russell. I had philosophy to bridge this gap.

-- And to make you feel more sane?

Right. I remember an experience I had at 7 or 8 years old. I was wearing cowboy boots. I think I was being sort of a wise-mouthed kid, and I was swinging my legs and one of the cowboy boots flung off my foot and hit him. He got outraged. I saw his aura go like a blur of red, in rage. He spanked me, and I said "I'm never going to trust you again", and I never did. I didn't have anyone to talk to about these experiences.

-- Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these experiences? (Question 8)

I believe that I incarnated with these tendencies and these abilities, and that they were suppressed by my circumstances in order that I should come up with creative ways of coping, of maintaining sensitivity in difficult circumstances, which, ultimately, would give me greater compassion and empathy.

-- Are you saying that understanding of others is a related gift?

Yes. The deepest thing of all is compassion, empathy. And not judging, for everyone in the circumstances, even though it wasn't what I needed, was doing the best that they could.

-- Would you say your present work, your teaching, has, at least partly, evolved from the imgaginative life you had when you were young? (See Question 11)

Yes, they are a development of my imaginative life.
When I was a kid, and I would clean the house, I would use creative imagery to make it fun. One of the things I teach people is to use their envisioning ability to enjoy everything they do.
When you appreciate something you cleanse it of its negative

vibration and you fill it again with light. So, if there's a person who is very difficult, you need to look to see what it is about them that is inspiring and to start from that place. As a kid I made a lot of games up doing that - trying to make a difficult situation have some positive feeling to it.

-- So you didn't try to protect yourself by putting up walls, you rather tried to generate positive feelings?

I think I did both. I was timid, and that was a pulling away, a protection. Within that timidity I think there was sadness. I bounced back and forth between those two approaches; one which felt insecure and one which felt comfortable. The key was my frame of mind: where I focused.

-- When did you find out that you had that key, that control? Was that a gradual process?

I don't think I knew until I was nineteen and my mother came back. Then I really consciously knew that I was infinite and that I was a part of God. And of course I am still learning that.

-- What features of your early life either ignore or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself?

School was probably the number one crusher...
It's really sad isn't it. Yes, school. It crushed the love of learning, the feeling of power, competence. I felt a tremendous amount of fear in school. I definitely can feel a difference between my openness to these other things before and after school. Because there was such a pressure to conform, the desire to fit in was strong. Up until fifth grade I was struggling for any sense of identity. What I think changed that - I know this sound funny - was the Beatles in fifth grade because that was part of the in thing, and they had a message which gave the experience of connecting with creativity, connecting with ideas. Not just regurgitation, but respect for ideas and creativity.

-- School never suggested any respect for ideas or creativity?

Well, I didn't ever get that message. I never enjoyed school really until junior high shcool. Then I figured out what it was about. Again I had a lot of confusion because what I felt as the undercurrent and what was being said were so different. When I became a junior in high school I finally realized that I loved to learn, and that was what was important. That I had enthusiasm about knowledge, and that whether I got good grades or not, and whether I was accepted or rejected, wasn't important. But I could trust myself: what I was interested in had value. It took me until I was ajunior in High School to get

that. It was at that point that my grades went from C's to A's because I became interested for the first time. So it was very difficult.

-- Do you think there was damage done in those early years? (Question 10)

Well, I believe that I'm an intelligent talented person, that that my abilities just weren't developed in a lot of areas. For example I have a musical talent, and a literary talent, and these abilities weren't developed. But I see now why I went through what I did. What's important is not whether one writes a book that's successful, and so on, but whether we have love and compassion. When we die what we take with us are our attitudes, not our accomplishments. I felt inadequate because I didn't fit in, but now I see that as a blessing in disguise. I don't get pulled into the society because I never did get pulled in. I used to think that was my failing, and now I feel like it was my success.

I know now that my karmic circumstances had to do with learning about guilt when I was a child. In a past life I was a spiritual teacher and many people were killed because of my teachings. I was asked before they were killed to stop the teachings and I wouldn't, and so they killed these people. I wasn't killed because I was protected by my parents and position. So I had the guilt, which is connected to why, when

I had these spiritual experiences as a kid, I was frightened and felt guilty about them and was afraid to talk abut them. It was many years before I worked through the fear of talking about them in case something awful happened. I thought that I had caused my mother to be sick. I thought that to develop my abilities would have bad ramifications. So I had to keep myself in an isolated position, play with my own imagination, but not really be involved. It took me a while to put all these pieces together.

-- Until you were nineteen?

Right. My mother showed me that no matter how things appear there is always perfection. If you look deep enough no matter what's going on, it's really the working out of perfection.

-- So you don't look back at your education with any sense of disappointment?

Well, I believe that seeing the perfection doesn't make us passive. Yes, I accept what I went through, and I see its rightness, but it doesn't mean that I don't still strive to improve the educational system. I believe that we're in a process of evolution - I can accept what I went thrugh, and be at peace with it, without regrets, or bitternesss, and yet I can also learn from it and strive to make improvements. We're

evolving in both ways, in acceptance as well as in changing how things are.

My education did strengthen me, though I wouldn't have chosen it. I see my own daughter going though similar things. Public school is teaching her to be her own person and to be strong. I could put her in a more supportive environment but I feel that this is strengthening her.

-- Do you feel that it might potentially be destructive for some children, destroying their spiritual awareness permanently?.

Yes. But again I can't separate it from the particular karmic issues that the children are working out. My brother had tremendous enthusiasm in spirit, and he lost it. He became very successful as a lawyer and he just doesn't have that childlike spark that I remember in him. I feel that I still have that. I have been conscious of keeping it alive. Our greatest challenge is to not be overly affected by conditioning, whether its school, societal or parental conditioning.

-- Isn't one of the goals of your teaching to keep alive that spark?

Absolutely. Absolutely. To remind people of that connection.

How to keep it alive in a world that doesn't support it naturally. Yes that's absolutely true, and to try in as many ways as possible, in schools, institutions, and in workplaces, to find ways to bring spirit, the recognition of the infinite and the identity of who we are, to people. So that it's not just a religion, but a way of life, a philosophy of life that can be supported through all the different places we connect with.

-- You have already been answering this, but can you add some thoughts about how your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - is influenced by your early experiences? (Question 11)

The early experiences are supportive of what I feel to be basic princples of truth. They are just some of the many experiences that I have had throughout my entire life that support my philosophy and the way I choose to live. Those early experiences certainly haven't been any more important than any of the other experiences in life. My understanding that the thoughts I think have an effect, that everything I do, everything I say goes out in vibration and touches the universe and that we are all part of this God force is the basis for the way I live my life. It is like breathing. Those experiences that I had as a child were the foundation of my consciously feeling purpose in being alive.

-- Is there any sense in which you would want to say 'it was all there' for you as a child?

There were moments of feeling peace and oneness - in that sense it was 'all there'. I would put it this way: With certain attitudes I believe it is possible to feel that peace and oneness - I call it 'exctasy'- in any circumstance. I am learning what are the ingredients that create that feeling. There is the aspect of being 'like a child'. As a child you experience that oneness and wonder, but as a child you don't have wisdom. You don't have the understanding of why it is so. My early experiences gave the that parting of the veil so I was able to know what I wanted, but then I had gradual to work to acquire the wisdom to be able to will it, and understand it, instead of just being subject to whatever comes along.
This has been helpful to me, because I haven't looked at the way that my childhood has served me. I've looked at my life from lots of different angles but not this one. I can see that the struggles that I went through were hard, and that my childhood really has served me in the work that I do. Also it reminds me that it is so easy for me to be completely immersed in my work, that I forget about the enjoyment of life. I feel so many needs, so many cries and struggles that I tend to forget, to immerse myself in them and forget about playing - like, you know, flying a kite. Thank you.

5. Diane

At the time of the interview Diane was 40 years old. Her field of work was in music therapy and counselling. Diane was raised in Hammond, Indiana. Her mother was a Lutheran and her father a practicing Christian Scientist. Diane was brought up as a Lutheran. Her education was in the public school system.

Diane produced an initial written statement about her early religious experiences. The interview begins with this statement.

I don't have any memories of any vivid spiritual experiences as a child, even though I experience them frequently now as an adult. I do recall a sense of "knowing" about religious beliefs and myself. In Sunday school (Lutheran) I remember a special feeling whenever we sang a child's song "Jesus Loves the Little Children". I "knew" someone loved all of us and none of us were different from each other. I wanted to have all of us sing it as much as possible to get that idea across to everyone. I also "knew" the church wasn't representing the ideas found in our Bible stories - they somehow got twisted because the people weren't behaving like they said we kids should. Later in Jr. High, as I went through Catechism instructions, it became very clear that what was being taught was not the real message that God wanted us to

know. There were teachings and interpretations that just didn't feel right with what I "knew" to be true. But who was I to disagree!

This knowing carried over into my concept of self. I "knew" I was different inside from everyone around me: peers and grown ups. I could sense something within others that didn't match with who I was. Now I recognize it as being able to sense others' energy or vibrational level. Back then I became very adept at adapting myself to people and situations - I became a sort of chameleon. The only person I really connected with up until my late 20's was my Grandmother; she understood me. This differentness was not upsetting in any way, nor perceived as being better or less than others - it just was.

Outside of religious experiences I remember a period when I enjoyed out-of-body trips. It was summer and I must have been around 5 or 6. Bedtime was long before the sun set and I was upset that the other kids were still outside playing baseball in the nearby field. Not that I ever played with them or liked baseball, but it sounded like they were having so much fun! So, I would lie down, leave my body, float out through my bedroom window and over to the lot. There I would hover overhead and watch the fun. I would go home when the last kid left. Of course, I never told my parents because I was supposed

to be asleep, and if they found out I had left I was sure to be punished. I only recall this happening one summer as a child. The fear of my parents finding out kept me from exploring the experience, and after that I guess there wasn't any other enticement I strongly desired to attend.

-- Could you expand on the kinds of insight you had as a child? (Question 3)

I knew that so much that was being taught in my church wasn't quite right. It was too negative, and didn't get to the meat of things. They didn't really explain anything in a way that I knew was correct, for example the whole concept of 'sin'. And also what happens when we die, whether there is a heaven, a hell and purgatory.

-- What did you know about that?

That when you died there was definitely something better for everyone, no matter who they were. I couldn't quite sort out in my head about people who had killed others and good people. I knew we all went to the same place but when it came down to what happened to good and bad people I couldn't sort that out. I knew there was no hell fire or damnation. God was a loving God.

-- So you were presented with the teaching that after death came the punishment for sin?

Yes. I wasn't sure what "sin" was, but knew that when you died lovingness had some way of making it right and helping you.

How old were you when you knew this? (Question 2)

Three years old. And I knew that we were all the same no matter what we looked like.

-- What was that sameness?

Having difficulties, or different skin colour, didn't make a person any less. We were all equal. We were all human beings. There was no heirarchy. Nor was there, or should there ever have been, a heirarchy between males and females.

-- And how old were you when you knew this?

Four years old.

-- You have been describing an early awareness that was in conflict with the view of the world being given you by adults. Is there anything else you would want to say about that sense of 'difference'? (Question 5).

I remember very early on that my parents didn't know who I was, that they had a viewpoint of me that was totally incorrect. They had an image of me and were trying to bring me up with that image.

-- Did you feel that they didn't see other people either?

Yes.

-- Do you remember trying to reach them, to make contact from the real you?

No. I knew I couldn't. They definitely saw a child as knowing nothing.

-- And that idea stood between you?

Yes.

-- Was there also a conflict between your awareness and the view of the world given you by adults in school?

Yes. I knew when they were discussing Bible stories, they were only giving the surface. I knew they were much deeper than they described. And I felt they twisted the words. I never tried to put forward my point of view because I had seen from

experience what had happened to other children who had spoken. They were just put down.

-- Ridiculed?

Yes. Again the idea that children know nothing.

-- Did they ever give you the message that you were good as children?

Yes.

-- But they didn't recognize a source of goodness in you?

No they never did. I think I did not try to put forward my point of view because at home there was no opportunity to discuss anything. We 'knew nothing'. So neither my sister or I developed good discussion skills. And at school we weren't given much opportunity to talk, or discuss anything.
It's been very difficult for me to express my thoughts and feelings ever since. I tend to think in whole thoughts and have trouble breaking them down into sentences.

-- How did you deal with this basic lack of recognition? Do you think you resigned yourself? (Question 6)

Yes, but it didn't depress me. I wasn't angry a lot because they didn't understand me. Not until my teenage years. They were very emotional - anger and tears. I would get back at my parents by not speaking to them.

-- You were not so much confronting them with the reason for your anger as making some space for yourself, because you hadn't been recognized?

Right. They never knew me.

-- Was there anybody who did? I know you've described a closeness with your grandmother. Did she recognize this awareness in you?

Yes. I was very real with her. We just totally understood each other. We didn't have to say anything. She totally understood the goodness in me and where it came from. Therefore I totally trusted her ... It was a wonderful escape spending time with her.

-- And was there anybody else that touched on this knowledge in you - any body in your home, educational community or church life that recognized this knowledge and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

No.

-- Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these experiences? (Question 8)

Being able to tune into other people. By feeling the vibration of a person I would know how they would react to a situation, what their philosophy was, the kind of person they were.

-- And you would know these things in a kind of whole unspoken way, just on first meeting people?

Yes. It was like I would get this big thought-ball. It's like trying to unwind it to explain it all. People would profess one thing and yet I knew that they would act differently.

-- Did you have any other related gifts?

I always enjoyed music. I have very early memories of appreciating music. And I loved to sing. But I knew it went deeper than that. I knew that I had a talent for music. I remember just before kindergarten, going to summer school. We all had rhythm instruments. The teacher asked me to be the leader of the instrument band. I was in my glory. I knew I was doing it perfectly. Afterwards the teacher asked me what my father did. I said "He's a music teacher". She said "Oh,

then that makes sense!". But it was me; it was second nature to me. I knew what I was doing.

-- You had no music lessons before this?

No.

-- Was there a lot of music in the house?

Yes. My mother played the piano, and I would listen to records as a kid. My parents were technicians. They would like the sound of music, but whenever they heard something new their first reaction would be to criticize it.

-- So you felt you were hearing something different in music than your parents?

Definitely.

-- Could you say what features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself? (Question 9)

The Church definitely did tend to crush it because it didn't recognize anybody as having any spirituality. Nobody could express any different opinions. It was only dogma that was given us.

School never even addressed the inner life. It just ignored it. We never had any discussions about it.

-- Did school ever touch on it indirectly, through, for example artistic activities?

No, not at all. I remember feeling the art work was very stifling because it was all prescribed; and we never wrote any stories.

-- How about other adults, friends, your peers?

No. Not friends either. No other children. My parents definitely were crushers.

-- How did you deal with this? Do you think any of it to some extent succeeded in destroying your inner life? (Question 10)

No. I knew it was there. I would only be depressed at home when I felt really lonely. Most of the time I would meet my friends at their level, and I wasn't bothered.

-- And that was how you learned to adapt, as you said. You played the game.

I played the game: whether it was with other kids, or at school. There was approval for playing the game - lots of it. And it was really easy to do.

-- You didn't get any approval at home?

No.

-- So a certain amount with friends and at school was important?

I don't know if approval is the right word - recognition is better. There was a feeling that "if you can't recognize the real me inside I'll get recognition where I can".

-- So home, church and school were all deadening to the real you?

Yes.

-- And yet you maintained your inner life?

Yes, I think they helped strengthen it.

-- Can you think of any ways that helped you keep it alive? (See Question 6).

As I gained musical skills it was through playing the flute and piano. But when I was very little it was through creating things. There was no place in either school or home that ever encouraged the use of the imagination. But I was always making thngs. I had a corner in the basement, where I had art supplies.
And I can remember having out-of-body experiences. That was an escape.

-- Did you have any control over those experiences?

No. They generally happened when I was going to bed. I had to go to bed too early, so I would just leave my body and go to the park and watch the play. I became frightened that my parents would come into the room and find me gone. I didn't realize that my body was there in the bed.

-- In terms of the isolation you felt, or lack of recognition, why do you think this was happening? Would you say you were looking for something, or, perhaps, that there was a sense of incompleteness in your day?

Yes. That's a good way of putting it. It was a sort of combination of that, and also a feeling of "they don't know me and yet have all this control and power, but I, in my own little way, have this power to leave."

-- And when you were out of yur body did you experience the world at all differently, or were you just watching the fun at the park?

I was just watching the games, flying around.

-- You had the sensation of flying?

Yes.

-- And how did you characterize that to yourself? Did you think everyone could fly?

Yes. I thought it was part of everybody's reality - that's why I was afraid my parents would come in and find me gone.

-- Is that why you stopped?

Yes. Fear mostly.

-- Did you choose to stop?

No. Fear does it.

-- Did that fear stop any other kind of expression of your inner life?

I don't know. I don't know why the fear didn't crush my inner life altogether. I have no idea why I persevered. I can only attribute that to my nature. There was nothing in my life that helped me keep it alive.

It lived and flourished in me through music. Music was definitely a way to get in touch with other realities, healing energies. As my musical skill increased that contact intensified. I was able to participate more in more complicated harmonies. The energies would go from the top of my head all the way down to my toes, rushing up and down. It was very healing and pleasant. I never wanted them to stop. And also when I was listening to music there was a lot of imagery, an inner movie camera going in my head.

-- Did those images mean anything to you?

No. It was like going to the movies. I never connected. It was fun and pretty. I never realized that they had anything to do with me. But the energy itself I knew was healing. I always felt better after. I felt stronger emotionally.

-- Did the images become more relevant to you later on?

Not till much later. Not until I began exploring this whole area of guided imagery and music, which wasn't until my thirties. Then I realized that the field was there. I'm sure

that they had content but I never realized there was any connection between your imagery and yourself - nor even between your dreams and yourself.

-- Why do you think you didn't make that connection?

It's strange isn't it? There was never anything in my childhood that recognized the inner life.

-- So perhaps some of the explanation might be found in the lack of language available to you then to identify these things?

Yes, and also the fact that all fantasy was seen as terrible. You weren't supposed to fantasize or daydream. That was bad and a waste of time.
And another part of this is the lack of a place to express any creativity. Even at the times when I sat down to play around with my own musical thoughts on the piano, that was squelched.

-- Earlier you said that you thought your inner life was not damaged, that there was no loss. Would you want to qualify that at all now? (Question 10)

I think there probably was . What it all did was to make me a very left-brained child.

-- You were in touch with your musiccal ability, and you had no doubts about your understanding of others, but there were parts of yourself you were not accessing as a result of the denial around you?

Yes.

-- But you have since then?

Yes, definitely. They have been reawakened.

-- And this has happened through your studies, and through contact with other people?

Yes.

-- Could you describe how your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - is influenced by those early experiences? (Question 11)

The talent I always had for music, and the gift I always had for seeing and understanding others - I'm putting them both together now, in music therapy and counselling. We were talking earlier about feeling lonely, different to other people. Now I feel more connected to other people, and music has helped that.

-- Music breaks down the sense of separation, and also gives you a way to help others?

Yes.

-- Can you say what it is moves you to explore these connections?

A deep sense of compassion for others who are in pain.

-- Was that there when you were very young or is this something that has grown up in your adult life?

It was always there from my earliest memories. I wanted other people to love everybody, to treat everybody as equal and with real understanding. I knew that there was something a lot more positive than religion was telling me.

6. Eleanor

At the time of the interview Eleanor was 51 years old. She described her work as a combination of her interests in art, religion and psychology. She had trained as an art therapist, had a divinity degree and was in the process of becoming a Jungian analyst. Eleanor was born in South Africa, and lived there until 21 years old. Eleanor's parents were Presbyterian and she was raised in that faith. She was educated in the public (government) school system in South Africa.

Eleanor produced an initial written statement about her early religious experiences. The interview begins with this statement.

I was born in South Africa and during my early years our family lived out in the rural area of what is known as "the Gold Reef" in the Transvaal - my father being a mining engineer, opening up new mines in outlying areas. As a result, I had the good fortune to spend my first five years running wild, barefoot, climbing the "kopjes" (small rocky outcroppings and hills), and noticing, with immense curiosity, the many different forms of insects, birds and wildlife that crossed my path, or I their's, during any eternal day of playing and exploring.

A general understanding in our family was that the children ought to be home before dark - or before the sun set, actually, - and I remember often racing home with an eye on the sinking sun to be sure I made it on time! One late afternoon I was in a particular area of the "veldt" (prairie) which seemed to have become a special place for me to be in and explore and I realised that it was rapidly becoming dusk, and the sun was about to set... (I was four and a half years old at the time)... Instead of racing home, I stood still (a semi-conscious deliberate decision to "disobey" the family rule) and kept silent, aware of a peculiar quality to that particular "time" when the sun is setting in the African veldt. I heard a strange bird call, and smaller nearby birds rustling in their nests, and then I suddenly became aware of myself as an individual and yet part of all "this" that surrounded me - a very definite realization that I was loved by the Creator of all this beauty and nature, and was also part of mysterious nature and in a sense part of the Creator. It was a powerful insight for a four year old, and remained for me the basic and central source of my own religious and mystical orientation, deeply grounded in Nature and her rhythms, her dance and creativity, and the abiding belief all my life (right through theological school training as well) of the essential Oneness of life, and our being co-creators as well as being loved and valuable creations of the Mystery I sensed that day as God.

(A later realization came to me - that there is so often a close relationship between becoming an Individual, and discovering God, and the act of "disobedience" to an outer authority, in this case, the family requirement that we be home before the sun sets! By daring to risk heaven-knew-what "in the dark", I had this experience which still is the deepest and highest point of my life and spiritual journey. Years later I recognised a poet had experienced something very similar when he wrote of the "beauteous evening, calm and free" in which "the sun, holy as a nun, breathless with adoration, is sinking down in its tranquility"...)

-- The experience you describe in your account, is that the earliest spiritual experience you remember?

Actually it's not the earliest. I remember two other events in which the central experience was self-awareness, knowing one's self, and they were a year before.
One was at the age of about three years old. I had come home and forgotten my shoes outside. They were little red patent leather shoes, kind of magical shoes. My mother asked where they were and I had to go back and find them. Although it was just in front of my house, it seemed like it was a long journey that I had to go on. I went up this road, and again the sun was setting. I came upon this little puddle in the middle of the road and there, to my amazement, were my shoes. My little

red shoes were just sitting there by this puddle. For a split second, it was just I, my shoes, and the sun setting that were the only things in the world. It was awareness of one's self, discovering one's self.

The other memory is when I was about three and a half years old. I was walking across the veldt, holding my mother's hand. She was taking me to a dancing class. We saw these great sheets that had been laid out to dry by the African women. There were great mounds of billowing sheets. I said "What are those?" and my mother said "Oh, don't they look like ghosts." The word "ghost" went deep into me, and I had a strong feeling about the spirit world. It was an intimation of another world of spirits, other realms.

I have a very early memory, which I wouldn't call spiritual per se. My mother finds it amazing that I remember this because I was only four months old. I remember my hands with little white gloves or wrappings. My mother says that I was in the hospitol at 4 months old with measles. They put these wrappings because apparently some nurse made a mistake and let the crib come down on my hands, and they bandaged me up. And then I remember my mother holding me at the top of a long flight of stairs and seeing my little white cotton gloved hands, and this description, she says, is of the hospital where she came to get me out. My only explanation for the memory is that it must have been traumatic to have been separated at that age, and then to have this painful thing happen to my hands.

I have another memory from four years old. It was in an area of the veldt where I was not supposed to go. There was a dangerous sort of sinking sand area. It was the sludge left over from the gold mining operations. I was always told not to go there and I remember wanting to go there because it was dangerous. I was trying it out, putting one leg on the edge and rapidly sinking up to my knee. I was really terrified and thinking I was going to sink in forever and then - this is the part that is so odd that I never told anyone until much later in my life - I felt a real something, an invisible presence that really pulled me out, actually got me out of there. It lifted me up bodily.

-- You were really beginning to be pulled under?

Right. My second leg had gone half in, and the right one was all the way in. And I did feel some kind of presence. To this day I don't understand it.

-- You actually felt a physical pulling up?

Right. I ran home and I knew something amazing had happened but I never told anyone. I got right into bed with mud all over me and covered myself up with the sheets. Of course I got a scolding. But I kept it a secret for many many years. I have told it maybe two times before this. It is the kind of

thing many people would find weird. I think it was a very strong foundation for my faith, that there are other beings and presences in this world.

-- Did you feel any particular qualities accompanying that presence?

I just felt it was a helpful being. I was very grateful.

-- Did you ever turn back to it later, and check to see whether it was still there?

I think I always felt, even without checking consciously, that I have been accompanied by a companion. It was in the background always of my spiritual formation. The more powerful and more institutional-type conversion experiences I had at age 15, were really just building on these early experiences, putting them into a culturally visible mold.
And I think these early experiences have always made me somewhat of a heretic in the institutional church because I know they are open to anybody and you don't have to be a Christian to have these experiences, which I had early before I knew anything about creeds.

-- These experiences also made your institutional life real?

Yes, based on experience.

-- Could you expand on the kinds of insight and knowledge that accompanied or followed from these experiences? (Question 3)

One of the insights that stayed with me from those earlier experiences, was the feeling of being endless, or having no beginning or end. I felt very, very old, old as the world. I was like a grown up person in this little body from when I was four. I always had an older self that I talked to. No one else saw it but me. I would have conversations with my other self, most of my life.
Another insight I had was that behind everything is "Mystery", with a capital M. That, in fact, is still the basic theology and philosophy that I have. Whatever you might say about anything and whatever you might feel you know about anything, when you have said it all, or think you know it all, then you have to say "But - there is also the mystery!", which might actually negate everything you have just said.

-- You frame this knowledge in these words now, but, would you say that is what you actually knew at the time?

Yes. Mystery always inspired a sense of awe, but at the same time closeness and security. At that time, there was a sense of not knowing, that something was so very large that you could

not know it, yet it was so close that you could know it.

-- And you also had an older self?

Yes, which was somehow connected with this mystery too.

-- Yet had a limited identity?

Right. My older self I gave the name of Mabel to. I've never known why, because I hate the name in actual life. But that was her name. She was wise. I used to have conversations with her. She was part of me, but older and wiser and connected to this mystery. Then, as I grew up we became one.

-- In the beginning she was more of a teacher?

Right. Yes.

-- What sort of things did you ask her?

Well, I was a very melodramatic child - things were full of 'anxst'! I remember talking to her about 'affairs of the heart'. Even though I was between 6 and 10 year old I was talking abut relationships between men and women. She knew a lot about all that. And we talked about life, and why one suffers.

-- Did she build a philosophy for you? Do you remember actual teachings?

I can't be specific about that, I remember she was basically optimistic. Maybe my Pollyanna-ish attitude, which has infuriated people at times, stemmed from her. For her everything was the way it was because it had a purpose, and could be turned into something positive. And she held the value of accepting things: take what you are going through and go through it, not try to get away from it. She also had a rakish side, she enjoyed things. She had been around a lot. I guess she had had a lot of love affairs! It was odd having this strange older life going on behind the scenes; living a normal little child life on the outside, yet having this much more mature life going on in secret. She was philosophically stoic, yet had a sense of playfullness. It was a good combination.

-- So how do you really see her? Was she an independent entity, or an aspect of your inner life?

She seemed to be an independent entity, but she was also in a sense part of my imaginative life. It is hard to know. I had always felt very old even before she was around, since my four year old experiences. She was the part of me that could understand that I could understand things, where other people

didn't understand that I could understand! I was just supposed to be a little girl that couldn't enter into those depths of conversation.

-- Before we go on into the question of communication, could you describe any other areas of insight you had that accompanied these experiences?

There was an impetus early on toward overcoming barriers or differences between people. That was important in my South African setting, because I always felt that black and white people were the same and I didn't understand why they were living in two different worlds. I was very close to the African world through my own black nanny, who was a companion of mine, in the places she took me to, her friends and so on. I worked quite actively, quite young, trying to get black and white people to know each other. And also people of different religions. I think there was a longing for helping people understand an underlying unity that is actually shared.

-- You were being taught disunity, but you knew otherwise?

Yes. Because of the Mystery that was in everything.

-- And you later looked for ways to act on this knowledge?

Right. I was fortunate to have good opportunities to do that. I worked in a school for training black social workers, who were the cream-of-the-crop leaders. For example, one of the students in the school was Winnie Mandela. She and I actually became good friends. We worked together in the YWCA. The opportunities that came along helped me to believe that there is a meaningful pattern in life. I suppose that is why, later, Jung seemed to be the best psychologist for me because of his understanding of the wholeness of the world, and the synchronicity of events. I understood that very well.

-- You've described how you didn't share with anybody any of this awareness when you were young. Were there any ways that you could express that knowledge? (Question 6).

To me this is all absolutely connected with the arts. My early experiences of the oneness and beauty of nature, the stillness and peace in the veldt yet the whole playfulness and rhythm of nature. And my own movement - all those early years of climbing, running and jumping in nature. For me it is all rooted in one thing. All of art , all of play, comes out of nature mysticism. I danced from the age of four. I was always doing theatre productions on my own and with friends. I was in the Shakespearian theatre in South Africa, quite young. And I loved to recite poetry. I recited Bible verses and won all sorts of prizes in the Eistedfords in South Africa. It was

through voice and speech and poetry that my wise older self began to express herself.

That development has continued through the arts into and interest in world religions. That interest began at 15 years old. I used to meet with Indians in their homes and sing Hindu prayers. For white girls this was quite unusual. I belonged to the Theosophical Society. I was interested in the unity of world religions.

This has led finally into this third phase where I am now: interested in the individual soul's expression of this mystery. As an analyst I help to bring forth that expression. It all goes back to that experience at four years of age.

-- You said you were raised as a Presbyterian. You went to Sunday School and received their doctrines. Were there ever moments of conflict, or did you enjoy their teachings? (Question 5)

It didn't really seem to touch the inner part of me, my very profound experiences. I would say it seemed a bit thin! But that didn't worry me too much. It was only later, when I was 15, and I had had a deep experience of Christ that it worried me. It was in meeting Christ at 15 that I experienced this immediate propulsion to go out of the Christian Church and that is when I began studying other religions, and joined the Theosophical Society. The religious conversion that I had into

being a Christian actually sent me out of the Christian Church - it was like my real meaning was the spirit and essence of Christ, which was alike for everybody. (I had a very hard time with this in Theological school. I discovered in Simone Weil a person who understands this.) So these conflicts began at 15 and have been a great pain to me ever since. I think I would possibly like to be ordained, but I don't know how because of this struggle.

-- Could you dscribe the experience you had at 15?

Yes. I was in High School and there was a student Christian movement group that used to meet once a week for prayers. That seemed to be the one place where I could still keep alive this inner thread that had started at age four. We met in a gloomy balcony of the gym. It seemed very powerful. One of the leaders of the group announced there would be a student Christian camp at Durban, by the seaside. My friend and I signed up for it. Basically I was going as an opportunity to go to the sea. One night, toward the end of the camp, I walked outside and it was a very starry night. I had an overwhelming sense of a cosmic Christ. It was as though I almost saw Jesus, like a personal being, but also felt this very very over-reaching cosmic Christ. And I was suddenly powerfully overwhelmed by a feeling that Christ actually loved me. I was absolutely acceptable. I can't say I had been a

sinful person, but at that moment I knew that I did have sins and that I was accepted and forgiven. This experience powerfully rekindled my early experiences into a more social awareness of the power of love for South Africa. It became more of a social justice type of conversion. The early experiences were more of mystery and holiness and beingness, and this experience at 15 was of love. It led me to want to help people in the black and white conflict -understanding Christ as love. And the love itself made me see how narrow the Christian Church was, and their way of understanding and expressing this love.

-- And it intensified your early sense of purpose to break down barriers?

Right. That is what started me in social work, and studying at the London School of Economics in order to come back to South Africa. As it turned out I didn't come back to South Africa because I got married and my husband couldn't work there. We worked in other parts of Africa. But I actually feel that I missed my destiny a little. I feel I was supposed to be in South Africa. But I may still. I have always worked and suffered with South Africa no matter where I have been. I have always loved and missed it. So it was this experience of love that moved me into social work, and also to work to push down barriers between faiths.

-- That transcendent experience of love brought you into a paradox: the Christian Church acknowledges that love, yet in its very form of acknowledging it, it creates distinctions, barriers between people.

Yes, exactly. I don't know what to do about it. It's a suffering you have to face. Living with this pushes you to on to unknowingness, allowing new things to happen. It is in this way that we know Christ's love, risking one's being.

-- And that was how you had chosen to open yourself as a child, by taking risks?

Yes. Actually there were some quite dangerous things I used to do. For example I used to walk across a pipe over an old mine shaft, or we used to run through a thorn bush with long spiky thorns. We would be torn and bleeding. I think it was like an initiation rite that I was doing unconsciously. My understanding of faith is that it is risky. One does not know what it will cost, or the rewards.

-- You seem to be describing an unbroken flow of ways you found to express your early insights, and connect them with the world - first through the arts, then social work and the study of religion. Was there never any sense of isolation or difficulty in your early years in relating your inner world to

the outer world? (See Question 6)

Yes, there was always a deep sense of isolation. Everyone who has these experiences becomes 'strange', a 'stranger' in the world. And yet I have always found ways to be in the world. I have had a strong desire to be a recluse. At 15, when I had that experience, I wanted to be a contemplative, and it was a struggle for me later when I fell in love. I have always needed lots of solitude. That is one of the results of those early experiences: they give you a happiness with yourself, you are content to be alone.

And I was fortunate in that my mother let me got to classes to learn speech and poetry. If I hadn't had that it would have been very difficult. And I was always given lots of crayons and watercolors. I loved to paint and draw when I was small. I had the playful, the creative natural materials of Africa at my finger tips all the time. You could just play with rocks and stones and do little things with mud, using it as clay. Now I feel very strongly that there is such a close connection between artistic and aesthetic development and one's spiritual growth.

-- Can you say what features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself? (Question 9)

Many things. I was the youngest in a family of five children. I was left to run around. I was a very sensitive child, who would have benefited from more attention from my parents. I did feel lonely, maybe even neglected. I think I was unhappy, yet, paradoxically I was very happy in myself.

-- Was there anybody in your home, educational or community life who touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

I always felt very different and alone. When I was 8 years old I was going to write my autobiography. I wanted to call it "The Dark Years"! So I had this sense of the tragic, along with running around happily. My father was distant -the Victorian, patriarchal father who shows no affection. I was hurt by his lack of sensitivity.

When I was 10 a woman in our Sunday School, Mrs. Miller, noticed I recited very well and recommended to my mother that I have elocution lessons. I started going to her home for lessons and that was terribly important. Later I went to professional speech and drama specialists, but that one woman noticing me was extremely important. I believe that she saw some of the inner me, the artistic side.

But the one most important and powerful person in my life was Margaret Hathaway, an American woman sent by the world YWCA to form the multi-racial work among women in South Africa in 1954.

I was 18 years old. We met and she recognized all of this in me, my spirit, my soul. She opened up channels for me, working with black women in South Africa and having the vision of wanting to do more for women in the developing countries the world. Because of her I went to study at the London School of Economics. She was a spiritual guide for me, although we never talked about it intellectually. She had the same vision of love, of Christ in the world. I went to her 80th birthday this year.

-- From your initial statement, through our whole conversation here, you have been continously describing the relationship of your present life to your early spiritual experiences. Is there anything you would like to add to this? For example, despite the universality of your early experiences and your adolescent conversion experience, you have felt your stand must still be within the Christian Church. How do you see this?

It's always been very difficult. The most powerful spiritual formative body of knowledge in my most recent years has been Sufism. The Sufis say that the form in which the face of God is seen is the form in which you worship him. God has many faces, and it is this particular face that is given to me. It is the form in which you are worshiping the Mystery. I think my true ministry is to reach more understanding of Christ in the midst of all the religions.

In later years I have also come to see that that spiritual essence that communicated itself to me was Sophia or 'wisdom', the feminine creative aspect of God. With Sophia you get the whole connection with the arts and crafts. I feel that face of the Mystery is related to creativity and creation.

-- You described one aspect of your 4 year old experience as being an understanding of yourself and others as co-creators with God.

Right. Blake said that Christ is imagination. One is always looking for some form, or theological expression. Lately I have found Whitehead's philosophy to be helpful, and also the process theologians. John Cobb has been very helpful to me. He understands Christ as creative transformation.

-- An unsettling concept, that may involve risk and upheaval.

Absolutely. We are part of the risk God takes in coming into being. We are becoming.

7. Tom

At the time of the interview Tom was 40 years old. He earned his living as a plumber and steam fitter, and, for some years, he had been spending much of his leisure time in making his gifts as a healer and medium available to people, at no charge. He was raised in Greenwich, Connecticut. His father was a non-practicing Protestant and his mother a practicing Catholic. They married in a Catholic church and the children were brought up Catholic. Tom's education was in the public school system.

-- Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child? (Question 1)

As a child I was always able to see with my third eye. Of course I only know it as this in retrospect. As a child I thought everyone was the same way. But I did see with my third eye as a child very well. And I've meditated ever since I was a young child, without anyone in my house even knowing the word 'meditation', and without my knowing the word. Of course I learned about it when I was older, but then I associated it with hippies and gurus, so I didn't care for the word even then.

-- Can you remember how old you were when you began to 'meditate'?

Well, I've always seen from the third eye within myself. I only saw spirits twice with my regular vision, where they actually appeared to me, and that was around 7 or 8 years old. I always knew things, and was able to heal myself at all times, if I didn't feel good. This was rare, because I was not the type to get headaches or things like that, but I used to go and lay down in Mom's bed and meditate. I used to actually see the light, and feel it from head to foot, and stay for however long it would take. Then I would come out feeling very refreshed and good. I've always had a close rapport with an energy - whatever we name it: Jesus, Vishnu or Buddha - that felt like a friend of mine, that I personally knew. I felt very comfortable with that, and not with the religion I used to go to on Sundays. I never felt comfortable with that, and would argue about it constantly.

-- Are there any particular early experiences you can describe?

I remember specifically an experience I had when I was three years old. My Mom had a crucifix in her room all the time, and I was always fascinated by it. It was a very smooth crucifix of Jesus on the cross. I went up one morning to touch

it, and when I touched the head area my finger was pricked and bled. I remember going to my Mom with it. She brought the crucifix down right away so I wouldn't be afraid. She said "Feel, it isn't sharp at all". Then we both put our hands over it again, so I wouldn't be afraid of it, being so young. It was from that time almost that I felt the oneness all the time, more awareness of, not that person on the cross, but of something else other than our bodies, and our life here. From that time I started seeing with my third eye, and knew it wasn't dreams because I didn't have that vivid an imagination to see the many different thngs that kept coming though all the time.

-- Do you remember what you felt or understood at the time of that experience?

Not that moment. I just remember I always felt a oneness with myself and my environment. No separation. I always knew there was life other than this. That's where I argued with my Mom because she was so much with her religion. I would ask her questions and she would say "You have to have faith, there are no answers." But I always knew the answers. I always felt something more than we could see and feel.

-- Did you try to describe that to her?

Well I did, but even today my Mom is... she tries, but she's not the type to meditate. It's just not her job to know more than she does.

-- Was there anybody you tried to share with?

No. I really didn't realize that I was different.

-- You never felt different?

No. Well, I always felt different in that I felt protected and watched. I knew that I would never have an accident, that I would never have anything wrong with me. I always knew this. And I wasn't a joiner. I never did participate in sports or organization at all. Though I was always one of the ones that excelled, even though I didn't practice.
And, you know, I always felt secure. I have prayed all my life, not the prayers of religion. They used to say to me "We are here with you as friends; use exactly the words you want to talk, to grow. If you don't ask you won't receive". So I've done that all my life. I don't think I've missed a day.

-- How did you think of who you were talking with, or praying to?

Well I know now it was the White Brotherhood. But the name I

used was Jesus. My guides would come through - some of them have never been incarnated, and some of them have been - and they say the name is not really important.

-- But you felt you were talking with personal beings, as opposed to universal being?

Right. They come individually. Only in the purple brotherhood is it just the force of the Godhead itelf, where there's no individuality. But in the white, green and gold brotherhoods they come individually. I always felt like Jesus and I were just great friends.

-- Could you expand on the kinds of insight and knowledge that came with these experiences? (Question 3)

Well, ever since I was a child I knew things about people by being with them. When I met someone I knew if there was anything physically or mentally wrong with the person. And I was very close to nature as a child. I was very much a loner, always in the woods. I just about made it through school. I wasn't that good in studying, the only thing I cared about was anything to do with nature. I was very in tune with nature.

-- And yourself? You said you knew you were protected. Was

there anything else you knew about yourself?

No I didn't. I probably would have had I had a different childhood. But I had a lot responsibility as a young child, watching four brothers and a sister. People have always said I was an old man when I was 7 or 8 years old. I never acted like a regular child. I realize now that I was quite angry as a child because of the lack of privacy and the responsibility of watching these children, feeding them in the morning, helping them change, watching them on Saturday. Saturday was a very important day for me because I didn't like school all week. I remember from the very first day of kindergarten that I never liked it - from the very first day to the last! In the third grade I remember counting on my fingers, saying 9 more years. It was like a prison sentence. My friend Nicky said "No, then 4 more years of college" and I said "I'll never go to college. Once I get out of high school, that's it." I was very angry as a child and not well attuned. I remember working with myself, praying and everything, but if you don't pray for what it is you need you don't feel it. There was hardly a place to meditate in the house. I used to go out in the woods. But it was pretty difficult.

-- Do you remember what you felt or understood about death?

I knew, from my very earliest memories, that there was no

death. I never looked at it as such. Actually it's sort of amusing - we have five senses, and our three-dimensional experience, and we can't feel a trace of the vastness that they have there. We should be calling ourselves dead here, we say we're going to die but actually we are going to be reborn into what we always were. I always knew that.

-- So did you feel life as a kind of imprisonment?

No, except for school. I loved everything to do with life. I found it very easy and extremely wonderful. I knew there were no accidents or coincidences, that we bring on everything through our thoughts. I thought it was tremendous. We're very fortunate to have these bodies.

-- And do you remember what you felt or understood about good or evil, about morality?

I never had to be taught to be a good person. It was always there. I was never a mean child. I always liked people and unconsciously knew how they were. I have always known that we are all one, that everything is one. We are born with the knowledge we need in this life. Most of the way I am as a person I was born with.

-- Do you remember any of this awareness being in conflict

with the view of the world being given you by adults? (Question 5)

Very much so. The rules that I knew were rules were very different from the rules my mother felt were right. For example, I had an Uncle whose wife walked out on him when he was 21 years old. They had a little baby. According to the church he could never get married again. I was only 9 years old when this happened. I would argue back and forth with my mother about a person of 21 not being able to get married again. I said it was silly, then she would got angry and tell me I should have been a Protestant like my father. But we had a good relationship, my Mom and I. We had many long talks.

-- You were certain about your position?

I always knew.

-- Any other areas of conflict?

Well it never became really strong because I never worried about things. I never had good grades. I remember coming home one day in the 6th grade. I had failed everything except gym. My mother was very upset. She thought I would never be able to get a job, and get married. And I would say "I'll pass 6th grade and I'll always have an easy life. I don't even need to

go to high school. It will always work out the way I want." But she could never understand that, she was so much frightened of the material world. I knew that if you run your life well you get what you put out; I've known that since I was a young child. So there was always conflict of this kind with my folks and teachers.

-- And you knew they were wrong?

Well they were wrong in my case, maybe not for every one. I was just so different when I was young. They sent me to a psychologist and a social worker.

-- What did they say about you?

I understand why they thought there was something wrong. I would never participate in things. I would always go off on my own. So they said I couldn't get along with others. But I got along well with people, and had lots of friends in school. I liked people and wasn't shy. I was never a lonely child, I just preferred to be alone at times. When my brother went to school two years after me they couldn't believe he was my brother. We were like night and day. But everybody is different, with different reasons to go through life.

-- But that wasn't the approach they had?

Oh no, but I knew it as a child. And I knew I couldn't be like anybody else.

-- Didn't you ever wonder about their attitudes, or feel at all confused about the pressure of authority or your peers?

No, never. I remember when I was a teenager and my friends were going to have a bottle of wine. I never bothered with it. I just waved and left. I have never used artificial stimulants. I have always gone my own way. The guys I work with use the word 'maverick'. I don't know if I am, I just do the best I can.

-- You've said you weren't lonely as a child, but you were dealing with yourself as 'different'. Can you remember any ways you used to cope with this, for example in imaginative expression? (Question 6)

I used to go to the woods a lot. There were about 12 acres of woods, and there was a pond with frogs, and all types of little wild life. They were living woods. I was always there. I wanted to leave school to live there all my life.

-- Can you describe your imaginative life as a child?

I never had much of an imagination as a child. I never played

games. I never used toy soldiers, or cowboys and indians, or puppets. I never built model aeroplanes. I never did any of those things as a child. I just wanted to be outside all the time, whether it was in the rain or the coldest of days. It was not till a long time after we were married that I could finally stay in.

I was very different in a lot of ways. I remember my mother wanted me to go to parochial school, but that was a tremendous problem for me because I wouldn't wear a uniform. The same thing happened when my father wanted me to go to a physical fitness school, because he was a competing gymnast. I just absolutely wouldn't go. I said "You can hit me all you want, I won't go". Hitting me made me more defiant.

-- You didn't have too much fear as a child!

No, I had none. I had no fear as a child growing up of animals, or insects, or lightening, or thunder or the dark or anything. I always understood, that's why. Even if I couldn't put it into words I just knew things.

-- You weren't afraid, as a little child, of, for example, of a ferocious dog?

No. I don't know why but there wasn't a dog that didn't like me as a kid. The ones that were supposedly biters would always

be friendly with me. I always loved animals. And I'm always the same, never disappointed. I never expect too much. I've always been that way since a little child. I accepted it when things died. My brother Mark had a terrible time when his hampster died. I never understood why. I didn't feel like there was anything wrong, it was part of life. Even today I have to remember to say "I'm sorry" to people when someone they love has died, because I automatically know that they aren't 'dead', that it's a good thing.

-- So, for you there is no loss?

Not at all. My grandmother died four months before my son was born. I told her it was going to be a boy. I delivered him, wiped him down, cut the cord and everything. Everyone was so sad because Pauleen, my grandmother, who I had been very close to all my life, had died before the baby was born. We had been married over 15 years before we decided to have children and everyone was sad that Pauleen wasn't around to see it. I never felt like they felt. I read for her about her death. I said "You'll die in your sleep, Grandma. It won't be a painful thing. It"ll be good for you." And she did. She was eighty years old, and she went to bed one night, and my Dad found her the next morning, dead. No I don't miss her. I miss her laugh and her voice, but she's very much here when I want her. Of course it's not the same feeling she has for us as when she was

part of the family. It's more of a oneness with everything.

-- Was there anybody in your home, school, community or church life who touched on this spiritual knowledge in yourself as a child and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

No. I grew up in a very poor neighborhood, an Italian\Black neighborhood. People were not aware of themselves; they came home and drank beer.

--So there was no recognition, no name, no encouragement for this aspect of yourself?

No. Not at all. Not as a child.

-- Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to this spiritual knowing in yourself? (Question 8)

-- Becoming a channel. I look at it as a job I have to do. I was born with this knowledge, to do this particular job in life.

-- Any other creative gifts?

Well music was very important to me. And I did read a lot of books, but they were factual books. I didn't like another person's imagination.

-- You've said that you were frustrated by the burden of responsibility you had as a child, the lack of privacy at home, and the 'imprisoning' feeling of school (See Question 9). Do you feel that these things to some extent succeeded in damaging your spiritual life, or did they have a strengthening effect.? (Question 10)

Well, I think things that happened in my life made me stronger, a stronger person. It would make me be more in tune with myself, and pray more. The things that I thought were tough in school or whatever would bring me more to myself, not take me away from that. But things did not bother me. The principal said "You know Tom, I should take this paddle and really hit you with it like I do the other children. But you know you've been here a while now and I know you. I know that it won't do any good, so I'm not going to." I was so stubborn. I felt very good as a child, but as an adult looking back I can see that I was very confined by all the rules and regulations. I would have liked more freedom, more privacy. I was very controlled; looking back I can see I was angry.

-- But you don't feel any of this succeeded in hurting you?

No. Very much strengthened me.

-- How is your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - influenced by these early experiences? (Question 11)

I don't have a future goal. I take one day at a time. I live today to the fullest. I truly do try to live it as if it is my last day. I feel very good with my life. I understand myself. I work every day with myself to grow. I have a channel to read. And I do my regular job to survive.

-- That being that you were as a child, the feeling of it, is that still there?

Yes, it's still there. But actually my life is more now, because we are what we think. As I read the channel, I learn. I'm becoming more like the channel I read. But before I learned to use the channel I was intuitive with people. I knew things when I was near people, and I would meditate as a child. And I remember out-of-body experiences as a child. For example as a child of 2 or 3, I remember seeing my area, the whole neighborhood from an aerial view. (And of course I was never up in a plane or anything). I could see my yard - it was in the day time - the pear tree we had, the barn, the whole area. I know now as a medium that I've left the body many times. It's not really a big deal -if you haven't gone to a place

where you're going to grow from, if you're just hanging around the bowling alley that doesn't do you any good. If I leave now I try to do it for the reason of going to the highest energy field to help myself and my brothers and sisters when I come back.

-- Did you have any control when it happened when you were little?

No.

-- How frequently did it happen in childhood?

4 or 5 times.

-- Why do you think it happened? Was there a reason then?

I don't recall. I always felt very good, very light. I had a great childhood. (At least I always thought so until I was looking back!) We never had much money or anything. We grew up in the projects, so you walked out of your door and there were a hundred kids. And I had the woods. And it was very good. And if I didn't feel good I would heal myself. I would relax and visualize myself in light. I was always in light, all around and through me. Nobody taught me to do it. Nobody knew anything about it. And even today if I don't feel good, I do the same thing.

8. Karen

At the time of the interview Karen was 32 years old. She was a full-time student in a family therapy master's program and working in a small private practice. Karen grew up in Silver Springs, Maryland. Her father was Catholic and her mother, originally a Methodist, converted to Catholicism. Their children were raised in the Catholic Church. Karen's education was in the public school system.

-- Would you describe any spiritual experiences you had as a child? (Question 1)

I can very clearly remember sensing a presence, and that's always been with me. Often I don't have the words to describe what I'm sensing, and a part of me is sitting here trying to translate. I guess the key is that I've never felt alone, ever since I can remember, and I was very much a loner as a child. A lot of responsibility was placed on my shoulders at an early age, but I never felt like I was handling it alone.

-- Can you describe 'what' it was that was always with you?

Well, there was definitely another being with me as a child, and she was like my other self. I remember that at 2 to 3 years of age that it was not safe for her to be in this world

with me. Her quality of sensitivity, aliveness, pure intuition, spirit or whatever you want to call it, would have been hacked to death in my environment. She was too innocent, too vulnerable. I remembering a split occurring when I was 2 to 3 years old. She said to me "You're going to have to be a certain way to survive. I will be here talking to you." That's the voice I've heard guiding me most of my life.

-- But originally she was part of you?

Yes, because I remember the split. But I don't remember the union as anything different. I can remember an awareness as a child in a crib. I can remember being really expanded and aware of everything around me, and just observing everything around me. Everything was just fine, there was just a nice peacefulness.

-- How old were you then?

Probably under a year old. I remember being very aware of looking out through my eyes. I've had that experience as an adult since, as if time is suspended and you're just so in the moment that all you're aware of is the stillness of everything around you. Then the next thing I remember is somewhere around 2 years old knowing I could no longer be that vulnerable, that some part of me would die if I continued to be that way. So

this little spirit inside of me fled to safe ground, and said, basically, "I'll come back when you're ready." I only just got this connection back again in the last year. It was wonderful because now I have a picture of her. I know exactly what she looks like. There's a radiance, a glow about her and an innocent delightful look on her face. But she's still a little being in me, merging back.

-- Does she have a name?

No, just me. 'The little Karen' is how I think of her.

-- What was the unsafeness for 'little Karen'?

A lot of chaos. Both my parents are alcoholics. They were in the early stages then, but the tension was there. There would be fighting in the night time. I became the really strong one in the family, the background of the family in a lot of ways. One night my family were arguing, fighting. It was after hours when kids are supposed to be in bed. I had a sister, three years younger, who was very frightened. I must have been nearly 5 years old when this happened. I was praying. I was always in prayer as I've always felt like I've known God. I prayed for God to save my family, to release them from suffering. And I said out loud that I vowed never again ask for anything for myself if they could be helped.

This was a very solemn vow for me. I saw myself as holding faith for my family, and as separate, ready to do a real sacrifice for them. Of course psychodynamically this vow worked against me, and I have only recently realized that and released myself from that vow.

-- Do you think your notion of sacrifice was influenced by any Catholic teaching you received?

I don't think so, because I was so young.

-- Can you describe 'prayer' as it was for you then?

I had the sense that God was all around and that was that. All I had to do was talk to God and I would be heard. I knew at a very early age that I was held in some context of safety, of faith. Faith is a gift, not something we acquire.
My faith was to me my belief. I'm very clear that I had a high level of awareness at a very early age, which became a place that I could go to inside myself for renewal. But it also was a curse in that I had to do all this chameleon-like behavior in order to survive. I always knew when a fight was going to happen long before it did. Then I would position myself strategically to make sure all the bases were covered, so that when it did every body was cared for.
I remember one of my uncles, who also taught religion classes

and was really a deeply attuned fellow in his own way, coming to me at an early age and telling me that he knew that I was the only one in the family that knew what was going on. He also said he knew that I was the only one that could handle it because I was in the midst of it, but that he could help me from a distance. I remember thinking "I love and respect this man, and he's right. So this is my duty."

-- Aside from this time with your Uncle, was there any recognition of this interior awareness in you from anybody? Anyone who was a support to you? (Question 7)

No. Only my sense of spirit, my sense of faith that God was all I ever leaned on. There was my understanding of God, and also sometimes teachings that I would get through Catholicism. It would usually be the essence of a teaching that I'd get hold of. I'd just know what it was, because it fit right in with who I was. This was not like understanding an abstract teaching. There was a groundedness to it. Something inside me resonated with it. Also my older sister knew me and I knew she knew.

-- Did you talk with her?

No, we didn't need to until I was 11 or 12 year old. There was also my mother's best friend, who was deeply religious. She

was Catholic but she was very quiet about her religion. She wouldn't impose it on anybody but there was a level of consistency in her faith that I always banked on. We didn't even have a conversation, there was just a quality of interaction between us. I knew that I could go and be with her for short periods and be safe. And there was also a childhood friend - her youngest son. When I was with him there was an atmosphere of reverence, ever since we were very little. We both loved to be outdoors, and we would care for sick animals. And nature itself was very healing for me.

-- You've talked about a kind of knowing you had of what was going on in your family. Could you describe any other areas where insight occurred? (Question 3)

Really the way I related to the world was though 'knowing', which was a kind of continuous sense, an intuition. And I could see things sometimes. In nature I could see the inner connections between things. I would have sudden insights about the way everything fits together perfectly. I think that's why I enjoyed being in nature so much, because I felt reaffirmed there by the sense of order.

-- These insights were not articulated?

The only times that things got articulated were when there

seemed to be a need, which was when there was a crisis. There was often a crisis going on.

-- And that's when you drew on your verbal ability?

Yes, which may have been a curse, because I think it robbed me somewhat.

-- Can you describe the relationship between the intuition that was strong in you, and the verbal, intellectual competency that was obviously maturing very fast in you?

The intellectual was largely a cover up. It was a defiance, a reflection of how I needed to be to cope in my world, where I felt 'different'. I didn't fit in. I overheard my mother telling friends that I was different, special, and I was very hurt. It goes back to not letting that pure being in me come out.

Around 5th or 6th grade was when my strongest sense of purpose was coming through: knowing that I had some purpose in the world, and that it had to do with service to spirit, to God, to whatever this mystery was. I wanted to commit myself to God. That's when I wanted to be a priest. But that was not O.K.. It really burned me because I didn't understand it at all. I never identified myself as being male or female, in a sense of girl or boy kind of stuff. I just didn't do that, so it burned

me up. So then I naturally didn't even think of challenging that, and I decided I should be a nun. I began to increase my activity with the Church. It had always been a solitary experience for me. I never joined into the community of the church at all. But in my growing sense of contact with the spirit I began attending church daily. I was in the chapel one day and the priest, a real feisty Irish priest, was giving his sermon and all of a sudden time stood still. It was like I stepped ouside my body and I could see everybody in the church. I became grief struck and angry at the level of total lack of attunement of everyone in the church. There was no one who was listening to spirit, even the priest wasn't talking from that place. It was like someone had stabbed me the chest. I was so horrified, disappointed and angry that I got up in the middle of the sermon and walked out. I've never done that. I walked straight home. I was going in the front door and my father was there. He said "Honey, what's wrong?" I said "Don't ask me to go back. I will not go back." And this was at the height of my wanting to be a nun. I said "There's nothing but hippocracy there. Nobody in that church wants to be there. I just can't be around that." He became very quiet and asked me if I was sure of this. I said "Yes". He asked me if that meant I didn't believe in God. I said "No. I believe more than ever." He said he understood what I was talking about, and asked me to promise never to give up on God. I said that wasn't what I was talking about. I remember feeling very strong and promising to

look into every other religion and saying "but this isn't God - what's happening in this church." He seemed to really understand because he softened and supported me. I was the first in my family to leave the church, within the next couple of years my brother and sister left too. I think I broke the pattern in the family. They were attending because they were supposed to and not because they really wanted to.

Then, sometime after that, I remember sitting alone after everybody went to bed, as I often do. I was always a night person. All of a sudden, in my mind's eye, I had a vision. It was a very simple quiet moment. I found myself walking out into the ocean. I just kept walking and walking and walking. It was as though I knew I was totally protected. I was walking home. There was a huge golden powerful light almost like a sun over the ocean that descended on me. It was happening while I was sitting in bed at the same time as I was walking into the ocean. This was all happening at once. It surrounded me and filled me. I began to cry from a deep place of joy inside. God was with me. It was like everything I could have ever asked for. I never thought of it like this before but I think it was my initiation into some sort of path of service. I had gotten what I asked for because I really asked to serve. Being a nun was the only way I knew in my environment. But the point is I had asked and wanted to be shown the way to do it, and that's why the experience happened. I never felt so much love in my whole life, and I just knew that nothing mattered except

to have that direct contact with the light. It's hard to talk about it, because the words don't do it justice. There was a simple knowing. I knew now the path I was supposed to go on.

-- Which was?

Simply to come from that place. That was all I was supposed to do with my life. That was my purpose. To do less than that was not who I really was. When I decided to become a therapist at the age of 29 I had a similar experience. I mean I have had other powerful experiences like that since, but they grew out of that same quality. Becoming a therapist wasn't a new goal, it was part of the path. I knew I had to go that way. The challenge was to bring that quality of light to people, to hold them in my faith that we are loved, and that we are love. There is no separation. It's all illusion.

-- How are you doing interrelating this with the work in your academic program?

Well it is very difficult. I almost dropped out of grad school this winter. I had a crisis of expression. I was trying to find ways to translate, to change my language.

-- Would you say this struggling you have been doing in grad school has been a repetition of your childhood position: the

armour and the reality?

Yes, that's true. I certainly did a lot of projection into the authority structure of the school, thinking that they couldn't possibly understand what I'm going through. I'm alone with this, unsupported.

-- Could we go back to the earlier experience of school?

School was always a disappointment to me. I was never recognized for who I was. I think this is so true of every child. I had many ways of knowing that were not honored at all. For example, I knew math from the conceptual level instantly, but I had a hard time with the language of math. It's too finite for me. As a child I often felt "I know something you don't know, at least, that you're not aware of right in this moment. We're in two different places." And they would always take the stand that they were right.

-- You mean, you made efforts to articulate this knowledge and it was put down?

Yes.

-- How about other areas, for example the arts?

The feeling was the same throughout the whole time at school. Music and dance were always second nature to me. But I was never given much support in those things. There was the sense, through all my growing up, that I remember more clearly than anything, that nothing was ever unfamiliar to me. When I did something it never seemed like the first time. There was always a level of feeling connection to everything. My mother's favorite phrase is that "Karen's never met a stranger". I knew what others were feeling or thinking. I had this ability to jump into the other person's body and literally see it, and feel it through their eyes. Later in my twenties I loved to impersonation. It was as though I literally became the other person.

-- You were a good actress?

Yes.

-- Did you have an ability with languages?

I spoke French at an early age, and that was really very easy for me.

-- Would you say there were any particular talents or creativity in yourself that are related to your early spiritual awareness? (Question 8)

A keen knowing of where someone else is gifted. I believe, as I heal myself, that I can recognize and help that gift to come forward in some one else. It was not done for me. But as I move to seeing God in every little fragment of life, it is as though I know the gift a person brings, and I can cherish it and empower them in it.

-- What would you say were the features of your early life that tended to ignore or crush your spiritual awareness? (Question 9)

Well, school in general crushed all of that. You couldn't be creative. There was something about my creative mind - which goes a million miles a minute - that was not allowable in school. They would take who you are and condense you into some narrow strip of life, and that's how you were defined.

-- And your religious education?

That was very narrow as well, except for two women who were generally supportive of some impulse in me, just by the nature of who they were. People always liked me. That was never a problem. I was never rejected.

-- But your real being was?

Yes. Often they liked me because I could fit in at their level. I was like a chameleon. I would join in, but it was not from all of who I was. It was from my understanding of what was appropriate. I always felt separate, different.

-- Do you think that these crushing or conforming elements had a destructive or a strengthening effect on you? (Question 10)

I think primarily they strengthened me. The ways that they caused damage were on a personality level that I've been able to work through. No permanent damage was done. But I had to go underground for a while until my personality structure could handle being in the world.

-- And that meant losing 'little Karen'?

That's what hurt. There's always been a longing in me, and I think it's been the callng of that child in me, that spirit in me, to come back, to connect.

-- And it finally has?

Yes, I've reclaimed a lot. I'm still being trained,and learning about the ways that I don't do it. But my faith has deepened. It took some actual work to bring her back, using her as a guidance. I had an actual image of me as an adult

woman, me as a little baby, and me as the little wise spirit - the three of us together taking turns healing me, helping the armor melt away. As I opened up, my notion of God changed, and it continues to grow.

---- And what is she bringing to you?

I think mostly she represents my intuitive knowing, my spiritual knowing.

-- Yet you have describe your childhood as very full of those qualities.

Yes, but I couldn't live them outwardly. I couldn't talk about them. I had to be careful. I watched myself constantly, and I was very aware of everything around me. Now I am more relaxed. There is a sense that I don't need to worry about my environment as much any more.

-- I think you have been talking about this all along, but could you sum up with some thoughts about how your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals, is influenced by those early experiences? (Question 11)

Well, I think I have said it for the most part. I've always known that there is a purpose that I'm to fulfill. It's as

though I finally stepped onto the path instead of walking beside it all these years. I walked beside it because I didn't feel worthy to step on it.

-- And reclaiming your childhood intuition has made this possible?

Yes, all of that has been a part of it.

9. Ann

At the time of the interview Ann was 27 years old. She was studying to be a psychotherapist. Ann grew up on Long Island, New York. She was raised in the Jewish faith. Her education was in the public school system, although during high school, Ann received some "alternative" education. She attended a school, within the high school, that based its activities on the theories of Rogers and Maslow.

Ann produced an initial written statement about her early religious experiences. The interview begins with this statement.

When I was about 4 years old, I recall standing with my father by the front porch in our house. We were having a conversation. Suddenly he said to me, "You're my daughter". I stated immediately "No, I'm your son". This response was without a moment's thought. It was as if a higher force had helped these words come out of me.
After that time, I had several memories, during childhood, of myself as a man, an old man, who walked with a walking stick in Egypt, along sand. (I recall that in these memories, it felt like a past life). I was given deep respect by people.
My sense is that it was a difficult transition for me to have spent a life as a highly respected man and to then enter this

present life as a child who was far from respected, and who felt very "out of place" in a woman's body.
I had many experiences, from early on, where I would feel out of place both in a woman's body, as well as in 'bodily form'. I would feel a type of trapped feeling, a feeling of being closed in and trapped inside this bodily form, that felt very strange to me and very foreign. I would wake in the night feeling like screaming "Get me out of this body". And I questioned from a very early age "Why am I here?" The people in my life - family, friends, teachers - all thought I was quite crazy. It has only been in the past five years or so that I have received support and guidance (through therapy, a psychic healer and a few trusted friends) in attempting to understand these and other experiences in an effort to use them to deepen my own growth and my compassion for those around me.

-- Could you go into more detail about your childhood spiritual experiences, starting with the very earliest? (Question 1)

The earliest thing that I can remember is being 3 or 4 years old and feeling very old. I remember that it was very strange to be a woman, and very strange to be in a child's body. I felt out of place in this world. My feeling about where and who I was didn't match with the body I was in. I actually felt more in touch with being a man than a boy or

girl, a grown old man. I had recollections of being in a position in the clergy, of some sort, of being a leader and having strong philosopical leanings. I kept on having this memory of walking along sand with a walking stick.

-- That came to you in the form of images?

Yes, very vivid. I'm not saying I was Moses or anything like that! There is no grandiosity about it. And in the experience I describe where my father had said to me "You're my daughter" and I said "No, I'm your son", he kept on saying "No, you're my daughter" and I kept on saying "No, I'm your son". I kept on feeling that I was right.

-- Despite the obvious evidence, and what everyone told you, you were trying to describe something you knew was true?

Yes, very much so. And it was very upsetting to me to receive so little respect from people. I knew that in this life before that I was very respected by people. I felt like, as a child, I wasn't taken very seriously.

-- Did this feeling have more to do with just being a child, or the way that you were, in fact, treated by your parents?

I think that I was really down-graded for the feelings that I

did have. I had expressed some feelings to my parents about why I was born a woman, and I remember conceptualizing it more and more. At the age of 12 I realized I had to keep myself under wraps or someone was going to throw me in a cage and lock me up somewhere. So I think I guarded myself a lot, but I said at a couple of points to my parents that I was not comfortable being a woman.

-- Could you describe what 'came with' this experience of the old man. Were there any insights or knowledge that that experience brought with it? (Question 3)

Yes. There was a strong feeling of incongruence. I felt so old, and that there was so much that I knew that I couldn't say. I think that the old man inside me was there to give me guidance.

-- What guidance did he give you?

Well, as time went on I found myself getting a lot of philosophical knowledge. I am not that smart, and I was just too young to have gotten it from books.
Somehow I was getting that there was a very deep purpose for my being in this life, and a very deep purpose for my being born a woman, in spite of my resistance and discomfort with it. I knew that I had entered this world with a lot of ambivalence.

(Actually my birth was very complicated. I came out arm first and was pushed back three times before I came out. I also had a vision impairment when I was born. I think that there was a part of me that just didn't want to see this world very clearly.)

I had the sense, when I was young, that I was comfortable when I wasn't in any bodily form, and when I was in a man's body, but not in a woman's body.

The trapped experience that I described happened to me many times when I was growing up. Typically it happened at night. All of a sudden I would wake up, and people have told me I would say "Help me" or "Get me out of this body" or something like that. It is one of the most terrifying feelings I have ever experienced. I wouldn't say it's a panic attack, but a feeling of being trapped inside a body and feeling I would do anything at that moment to get out of that body. Generally what I did to deal with it would be to get up and walk around or get a breath of air outside. It occurs rarely now.

-- When you were little did your parents see this as a childish nightmare? Did they help?

No, they didn't. I really withdrew from them about it. But I did communicate to them that I was uncomfortable wearing tight clothes, because that would bring it on sometimes.

-- So you went through it by yourself?

I went through this myself, and it would pass. There was always the feeling that "this body is not home for me".

-- Did you have any sense of what was 'home'?

It was a mystery. There was always in me a sense that there is more, and a sense that "I am a lot bigger than this physical body".
At 12 or 13 I began to conceptualize it more. I was very old and philosophical for that age. I felt my soul, as a source of wisdom, teaching me that I had an important purpose to fulfull. It was important for me to go through a lot of struggling because there were lessons I hadn't learned in previous lives. But the struggle would all lead to compassion, to richness in this world.

-- Would you distinguish this "source of wisdom' from the old man?

Yes. He became more a recollection of a past life. This was my soul. It was teaching me that it is important to be kind to other people, to try to accept them as they are. I had difficulty applying that to myself.
I felt a deep tie, at 12 or 13 years old, to little children.

I felt I could relate to them because they weren't as attached to the physical world as adults.

-- Young children are generally characterized as being <u>more</u> in the physical world in their understanding, more concrete, than adults. You felt this was not true?

Yes. So much of them is the spirit with which they've been brought into this world. I knew this through empathy, knowing it first in myself. I also felt a deep tie to older people for the same reason. In my work with terminally ill people I've experienced people becoming more aware of the spiritual world.

-- Can you remember how you understood death, as a child? (See Question 3)

At 10 or 11 years old I remember being afraid of death. But at 3, 4, 5 and 6 years old I wasn't afraid because I knew that death was O.K. That knowledge changed as I began to conceptualize and gradually associated death with the stories of violence and pain that I heard all around.

-- Are there any other areas of early knowledge that you can identify? (Question 3)

Being treated disrespectfully wasn't right. It wasn't right

for parents to devalue what kids said, to not respect them. I felt this strongly.

-- What aspects of this awareness were in conflict with the view of the world being given you by adults? (Question 5)

When I would talk about death I was told "We don't talk about those things".

-- So you did try to express these different levels of knowledge?

Absolutely. Teachers called me a 'day-dreamer', 'different'. There was a lot of judgement.

-- You were dealing with different thoughts than they had in mind for you!

Yes. Their agenda was more important!

-- How did you respond to this judgement, how did you deal with it? (Question 6)

I felt an intense sense of depersonalization. I felt I was not a creature meant for this world. I felt this when very little, but it increased in school.

-- Do you think this was a self-protection , or a withdrawal?

I think both. I was protecting myself because I didn't want to be put down, and rejected. I wanted to be accepted and loved. At the same time I felt myself shrinking because I wasn't valued. I felt invisible.

-- Did you feel like you were being asked to give up that inner self?

Absolutely. I wanted recognition and acceptance, but I didn't want to 'play the game'.

-- Was there anybody in your home, education, or community life who touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it? (Question 7)

When I was 15 years old there was someone. She was in her sixties, a babysitter for some friends of mine. By chance I spoke to her about my meditation and she looked at me and said "Ann, trust whatever your soul tells you". From that time until she died, when I was 18, we would spend long periods meditating or talking together. She was a wonderful woman. She died of cancer. She made me feel so valued.
I felt "It's incredible, I'm being seen!"

-- For the first time!

Yes.

-- How did you cope until then? (Question 6)

Well I didn't deal with it very well. I went into a very severe depression at 13 years old. The bulk of what I was feeling was devaluation, depersonalization. I got the message that my inner life was unacceptable and I suppressed it in the early years. But a part of it stayed alive. A part of me kept saying something like "The time is going to come when it's all going to feel O.K." It was a long limbo.

-- Did you become isolated?

Yes. I had a very difficult time making friends with kids of my age. I don't remember any from when I was little. I felt the difference between us was very great.

-- Was there any means of expression that helped you? (Question 6)

I kept a diary at 10 or 11 years old. I tried to put down psychological ideas to help myself understand. I was the oldest of three children. I felt like I was always blamed, and

my sisters were favored. I remember trying to figure this out in writing: something like - "Maybe my parents behave this way because they are more like my sisters" etc. Some of my thoughts were very advanced. It seemed like the insights were coming from something greater than this life.

-- Can you remember any imaginative activity that was helpful to you from before you had this conceptual ability?

From much earlier I remember fantasy. I felt an intense painful aloneness. I would imagine different people in my life giving me comfort, holding me and comforting me.

-- You created some of what you needed with your imagination?

Yes. Also, I think on some level the memories of a past life were comforting. They showed me "I'm bigger than this kid who feels like a piece of garbage".

-- What was your response, as a child, to the religious teachings you received?

I enjoyed them. I felt very at home with them. In Sunday school I was always very interested. Growing up I got great satisfaction from hearing religious language which, in a broad way, confirmed my own experiences. It was the general feeling

of religion that I felt connected with, rather than any particular content. I felt I had had past lives in the clergy so it was wonderful, connected. I remember when I studied Hebrew, a feeling that "We're getting there!"

-- Were there any points of conflict between these teachings and what you were experiencing? (Question 5)

I questioned them at 13 or 14 years old when I became aware of the issue of sexism. That made me question the whole view of God. But growing up they were very helpful.

-- Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these experiences? (Question 8)

Yes - insight ability into other people's behavior. I felt my intuition was very strong, and I could see what others couldn't see. I knew if I could trust people. I knew a lot more than they were presenting outwardly. I knew them on another level. I also had a sensitivity that worked for and against me. I was very sensitive to people's responses to me.
For example, I remember when I was 11 years old, there was a boy who always wanted to be the first one off the bus. Something about his attitude really bugged me (of course I didn't know anything about the "macho" attitude then). I remember I would look at him and say to myself "That's not the

real him, he is more than this".
I remember taking time to really look at people, to see this 'more'.

-- And this insight and understanding was not related to anything you had learned in any way?

Absolutely not!

-- Did you, or do you, have any creative talent that springs from this intuition?

I think there was a wisdom carried over from past lives. I knew a lot more than my age. One way it came out was in writing. Writing came easily. I had very advanced writing skills from quite young. I felt that when I wrote things that were very deep there was a greater source than just me in this life.

-- What features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself (Question 9)?

My family were very critical of me. I often heard "Why can't you live life simply. Why do you look into things? Lighten up" and so on.

-- And this had a crushing effect on you?

Yes. School did too. Teachers told me similar things. They gave me the message that I was a pretty strange kid and I'd better straighten up. In fact they sent me for psychological and neurological tests when I was in the kindergarten and first grade.

-- A pretty strong 'you're not-OK' message!

Absolutely. I felt a real lack of acceptance when I was growing up. I think that the images of the past life and the part of me inside that kept saying that there was purpose to all this helped me to keep going.

There was something very vivid that happened when I was in Nursery School and I was 4 years old. When I grew up curly hair was not very acceptable. The kids would make fun of it a lot. I remember painting on an easel and one of the teachers, who was very loving and affectionate, started gently stroking and playing with my hair in a very sweet way. Something inside me was so moved. I think it was the experience of being loved without having to do anything, for just being me. About a year ago, I found out where this teacher lived and I wrote her a letter telling her how much I remembered that and that I wished there were more teachers like her.

There was also a connection with my eye doctor. I had major

surgery when I was two. I was born slightly false-eyed. I had a weak muscle in my left eye. I had a marvellous connection with this man. I just remember feeling so loved by him. I remember thinking to myself when I was two "This is a man who sees me as I am and really loves me"

-- So aside from these special experiences, that you remember so vividly almost because of their rareness, the rest of your childhood was characterized by a rejection of what you felt to be the 'real' you. Do you feel that to some extent this rejection succeeded in destroying any part of you? (Question 10)

I think that there was a strong part of me that wanted to go on. But, really, it destroyed my self-esteem. I had to rebuild it. There is only so much strength a small child can have when friends reject, family rejects, and school rejects! It really destroyed any good feelings I could have had about myself.

-- And this emerged into a full crisis when you were 13 years old?

Yes. A very severe depression. It was very difficult. I think what made it more difficult was that my spirituality was getting formulated into more concrete terms. I also

think that my identity as a lesbian was getting more formulated. Either one of these is hard enough. Having two things that are de-valued by others is very difficult to deal with.

-- Would you say that there was any sense in which the rejection also had a strengthening effect on you?

Very much so. Through all the struggling, as painful as it was, the part of me that knew there was a purpose got stronger and grew bigger. The denial was hard but I think, paradoxically, that it gave me a certain empathy toward other people. I feel I am intensely sensitive to intuition and empathy in others. For example when I was going into therapy, I knew that I would know within five minutes whether the person would replicate the depersonalization or not.
I think I gained a lot of empathy toward people in the areas of feeling what it's like to be really alone, depersonalized or alienated. And I really appreciate people's struggles more, whether they have to do with growing up, the spiritual, dying, or whatever.

-- Could you describe how your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - is influenced by those early experiences? (Question 11)

What a good question! Well, here I am in a helping profession: wanting to work with people who are dying, wanting to work with people that are going through a variety of struggles.
I did my Master's internship in the Women's Center at the University. Given all my issues about growing up as a woman, what an interesting to happen! At this point, I am very happy to be a woman. It was treacherous for a while until it got pieced together.
I think also another benefit my childhood experience has given me is that there is nothing that can really freak me out that someone tells me. I feel very strong, very solid. I feel like I hit the bottom of the bottom, and I know what it is like and I got through it. As hard as struggles can be at times a part of me knows that it won't happen again.

-- How about the struggle of wanting to be out of the body, is that still there?

I found out that all of the talking therapy and empty 'shrinks' that my parents sent me to didn't do any good. But the one year I spent with a spiritually oriented person, reliving some of the past lives and recalling them vividly, worked more for me than any other therapy. About the trapped feeling, I had a psychic reading done and was told that in a past life I was buried alive. When I heard this my heart almost stopped. It felt so true to me - "My God, it really happened, that's it!"

The reading said that I was buried alive; there was a seven day waiting period I wasn't given. After this I felt like I wanted another source to help me with this. I had a follow up with a reader who is also a therapist and I recalled in vivid content the whole experience: what led up to it, who from my present life was involved in it and what happened. The frequency of the claustrophobia decreased incredibly. It's only once every six months now. Knowing has made such a difference.

-- Do you think there was any way you might have dealt with this earlier?

If I had had support for my reality, for my spirituality, I could have dealt with it. Without that I wouln't have had the confidence.

-- And now, in resolving the rejection and - the term that comes to me is - the "buried truths", you have both the resources and the empathy to help others?

Yes, and myself. There are two things that have been strong sources of strength for me. One is my continuity in meditation since I was 15 years old. And the other is humility. I have lost a lot of the judgement I had when I was younger. I feel now I am just like anyone else. We are all going through one struggle or another.

C. Analysis

As can be seen, the content of the previous interviews is enormously rich. Alister Hardy developed his classificatory scheme (pp. 31-34 of this dissertation) as a preliminary means to organize written accounts of religous experience. Each account might appear in two or three different subsections of this scheme. In order simply to show the effectiveness of in-depth interviewing as a research instrument in this area, let us compare how the content of these eight interviews is highlighted by this scheme. It is applicable largely only to the answers to questions 1 to 3. The greater part of the content of these interviews of course cannot be approached this way.

A Preliminary Analysis using the Classification Scheme used by the Religious Experience Research Unit:

1. Sensory or Quasi-sensory experience: Visual
   (a) Visions - Judith, Karen, Tom, Carolyn.
   (b) Illuminations - Carolyn, Tom.
   (c) A particular light - Judith, Karen.
   (d) Feeling of unity with surroundings and/or with other people - David, Eleanor, Carolyn, Tom.
   (e) 'Out-of-the-body' - Tom, Diane, Carolyn.

(f) Deja Vu - None

(g) Transformation of surroundings - David, Carolyn.

2. Sensory or Quasi-sensory Experience: Auditory

(a) 'Voices', calming - None

(b) 'Voices', guiding - Carolyn, Tom, Karen, Eleanor.

(c) Being spoken through, gift of tongues - None.

(d) 'Music' and other sounds - Judith, Diane.

3. Sensory or Quasi-sensory Experience: Touch

(a) Healing - Tom, Diane.

(b) Comforting - None.

(c) Feelings of warmth etc. - Tom, Diane.

(d) Being hit, shocked, (taken hold of, pricked etc.) -Eleanor, Tom.

(e) Guiding - None

4. Sensory or Quasi-sensory experience: Smell

None.

5. Supposed Extra-sensory Perception

(a) Telepathy - Diane, Judith, Tom, Carolyn, Karen.

(b) Precognition - Tom.

(c) Clairvoyance - Tom, Carolyn, Judith, Diane, Karen.

(d) Supposed contact with the dead - Tom, Carolyn.

(e) Apparitions - Carolyn, Tom.

6. Behavioral Changes: Enhanced power displayed by man

(a) Comforting, guiding - Tom, Carolyn, Diane, Judith, Karen, Ann, Eleanor, David.

(b) Healing - Tom.

(c) Exorcism - None

(d) Heroism - None.

7. Cognitive and affective elements

(a) Sense of security, protection, peace - Karen, Tom, Eleanor, Judith.

(b) Sense of joy, happiness, well-being - Karen, Tom, Eleanor, David, Diane, Judith, Carolyn.

(c) Sense of new strength in oneself - Carolyn, Karen, Tom, Eleanor.

(d) Sense of guidance, vocation, inspiration - Karen, Tom, Eleanor, Judith, Ann, Carolyn, Diane.

(e) Awe, reverence, wonder - David, Eleanor, Karen, Tom, Judith, Carolyn.

(f) Sense of certainty, clarity, enlightenment -Karen,

Diane, Tom, David, Eleanor, Judith, Ann, Carolyn.

(g) Exaltation, excitement, ecstasy - David, Karen, Carolyn, Eleanor, Tom, Judith.

(h) Sense of being at a loss for words - Karen, Diane, Judith.

(i) Sense of harmony, order, unity - Carolyn, Tom, Diane, Eleanor, David, Karen, Judith.

(j) Sense of timelessness - Eleanor, Karen, Judith,

(k) Feeling of love, affection (in oneself) - Karen, Ann, Carolyn, Eleanor, Judith, Tom.

(l) Yearning, desire, nostalgia - Ann, Karen, Judith, Carolyn.

(m) Sense of forgiveness, restoration, renewal -Carolyn, Eleanor, Ann.

(n) Sense of integration, wholeness, fulfilment -Tom, Eleanor, Carolyn, Karen, Diane, Ann, David, Judith.

(o) Hope, optimism - Tom, Eleanor, Carolyn, Karen, Diane, Ann, David, Judith.

(p) Sense of release from fear of death or sickness - Ann, Carolyn, Karen.

(q) Fear, horror - Eleanor, Ann, Carolyn.

(r) Remorse, sense of guilt - Judith, Carolyn.

(s) Sense of indifference, detachment - Tom.

(t) Sense of purpose behind events - Ann, Eleanor, Tom, Karen, Judith, Carolyn.

(u) Sense of prayer answered in events - Tom, Karen.

(v) Sense of presence (not human) - Carolyn, Tom, Karen.

(8) Development of Experience

(i) Within the Individual

(a) Steady disposition, little or no development recorded - None.

(b) Gradual growth of sense of awareness: experience more or less continuous - Carolyn, Tom, Diane, David, Judith, Ann, Karen, Eleanor.

(c) Sudden change to a new sense of awareness, conversion, the 'moment of truth' - Eleanor, Carolyn.

(d) Particular experiences, no growth recorded -None.

(e) Particular experiences, each contributing to growth of sense of awareness - David, Eleanor, Judith, Karen, Carolyn.

(ii) In Relation to Others

(k) Identification with ideal human figure, discipleship, hero-worship - David.

(l) Development by personal encounter - Eleanor, Ann.

(m) Participation in church, institutional, or corporate life - Eleanor, Karen, Judith.

(n) Development through contact with literature or the

arts - Eleanor, Diane, Karen, Judith.

(o) Experience essentially individualistic, involving isolation from or rejection of others - David, Karen, Ann, Tom, Carolyn, Judith, Eleanor, Diane.

(iii) Periods of significant development

(r) In childhood - David, Tom, Carolyn, Eleanor, Judith, Ann, Karen, Diane.

(s) In adolescence - Eleanor, David, Karen, Ann, Judith, Carolyn.

(t) In middle age - Eleanor.

(u) In old age - None.

9. Dynamic Patterns in Experience

(i) Positive or constructive

(a) Initiative felt to be beyond the self, coming 'out of the blue', grace - David, Eleanor, Judith, Karen, Tom, Carolyn, Diane.

(b) Initiative felt to lie within the self, but response from beyond; prayers answered - Karen, Eleanor, David, Judith, Tom, Carolyn, Diane, Ann.

(c) Initiative and response both felt as within the self; the result seen as 'individuation' (Jung) or 'self-actualization' (Maslow) - None.

(d) Differentiation between initiative and response felt

as illusory; merging of the self into the All; the unitive experience - Tom, Eleanor, Carolyn.

(iii) Negative or destructive

(m) Sense of external evil force ashaving initiative -None.

10. Dream Experiences - Judith.

11. Antecedents or 'Triggers' of Experience

(i) (a) Natural beauty - David, Eleanor, Judith, Carolyn, Tom, Karen.

(b) Sacred places - none.

(c) Participation in religious worship - Karen, Eleanor.

(d) Prayer, meditation, - Tom, Carolyn, Karen, Ann, Judith.

(e) Music - Diane.

(f) through (s) - none.

(ii) (w) Drugs: anaesthetic - none.

(x) Drugs: psychedelic - David.

12. Consequences of Experiences

(a) Sense of purpose or new meaning to life -Eleanor,

Ann, Judith, Carolyn, Tom, David, Karen, Diane.

(b) Changes in religious belief - Eleanor, Karen, David, Ann, Judith.

(c) Changes in attitude to others - David, Ann, Karen, Eleanor, Carolyn, Judith, Tom, Diane.

The value of such a classificatory scheme used in a context such as this lies in the way it very quickly highlights the richness of the research material, but its limitation is obvious when placed in juxtaposition with these in-depth accounts. All the elements of uniqueness, source, particularity and interconnection, that actually determine the meaning of these events for an individual, are omitted. Such a form of analysis may act as a 'signpost' toward the material, but in no way an 'entry' into an understanding of the material. Not only does it ultimately, in any particular case, tell us nothing, but it actually distorts by straining 'dynamic' concepts, to be understood within a temporal 'life story', into 'static' concepts to be arranged upon some kind of spatial 'grid'. We have a key here to some of the distinct characteristics of 'Verstehen' that make it quite different from 'Erklaren' as a form of understanding, and a key also to the way in which the two might best be reconciled in this subject area. This somewhat reflexive point is emphasized here in keeping with the fundamental tenet, suggested earlier, that, as we move into a new area of enquiry, we are trying to discern

not only the content of what constitutes understanding, but also its form. Conclusions we may be able to draw in this area will be taken up after we have discussed the interview content.

Our only legitimate point of entry into an understanding of the content of these interviews is the actual list of questions that were asked. The answers to these questions are given in the form of unique 'stories', within which are an abundance of common themes. We will consider and discuss some of these themes as they are given 'in answer' to each question. The 'commonality' or 'generality' of these themes is not to be seen as abstractable, or isolable, from the contexts in which they appear.

Common Themes given in Answer to Questions 3 - 11:

The answers to Question 1. are not considered to contain common themes, but common 'descriptors'. Quantitative studies tend to aim at these as their 'data', and isolate them into some form of taxonomy. This would be the way in which 'Erklaren' would work, and an example would be the preliminary analysis provided above. In this study we have chosen to leave these descriptors in context in order to understand them more fully through the following questions.

3. Could you talk about (expand on) the kinds of insight and

knowledge that accompanied or followed from these experiences?

The following are qualities or objects of childhood knowledge described by the participants. It is important to notice that all of these are 'unlearned' kinds of knowledge.

1) Knowing oneself as very old - Karen, Eleanor, Tom, Ann.

2) Knowing oneself to be infinite - Carolyn, Tom.

3) Knowing and communicating with another (very wise) aspect of oneself - Ann, Karen, Carolyn.

4) Knowing that one has more knowledge than one can articulate - David, Karen, Ann, Carolyn, Tom, Diane, Eleanor, Judith.

5) Knowing what others are thinking and feeling, and whether they can be trusted - Tom, Diane, Judith, Ann, Carolyn, Karen.

6) Knowledge of what makes actions 'good' or 'bad' (moral knowledge) - David, Ann, Carolyn, Eleanor, Diane, Tom, Judith, Karen.

7) Knowledge of the nature of 'reality' (the substance, order, or unity of the physical world) - Carolyn, David, Carolyn, Karen, Diane, Judith, Tom.

8) Knowledge of other levels of existence, life after death etc. - Ann, Carolyn, Tom, Carolyn, Diane, Karen, Judith.

9) Memories of pre-existence or other lives - Ann, Carolyn, Tom.

10) Knowing how to communicate with (pray to, worship) a supreme being (God) - Karen, David, Eleanor, Carolyn, Tom.

The answers to questions 4 and 5 overlap with each other, and follow on from the answers to question 3.

4. Do you also remember having insight or knowledge (not necessarily accompanied by transcendent experiences) that you know was other than what was being presented to you by your family or school?

All of the above 10 aspects of knowledge were described by the participants as being other than that which they learned from their family or school. They were quite clear that their knowledge was direct, immediate, personal and a priori to learned forms of knowledge. They were also clear about its certainty. This knowledge was not, either at the time or later in life, challengeable as to its truth. Rather was it seen as a referent or criterion of the adequacy of learned knowledge. Only its source and relationship to other ideas were seen as open to speculation and further learning.

5. Was any of this awareness in conflict with the view of the world being given you by adults?

All of the eight participants described 'taught' ideas, moral or religious edicts, as being perceived by themselves, as children, as either not 'fully' representing the truth, or profoundly misrepresenting it.

This perception was closely related to the awareness, described by the participants, of adults' real thoughts and attitudes, and seeing that this did not match with their professed thoughts. Again, all of the participants describe the confusion this evoked in them and their consequent difficulties with what they saw as ignorance or hypocrisy.
In all but one of the participants, (Eleanor), this early 'gap' between perceived truths and taught truths became severely exacerbated as they entered the institutions of learning - school and church. Our exception, Eleanor, was able to achieve some reconciliation through being given access to artistic activities. But even here the reconciliation was only of a preliminary nature and was due more to her <u>own</u> creativity than the ability of educators. For all of the other participants this reconciliation became one of the major ongoing tasks of adulthood.

6. How did you deal with this conflict? Did it, for example, create in you a sense of isolation? Was imaginative expression important?

1) For <u>all</u> of the participants the 'gap' we have mentioned, or the incongruity in their early perceptions of the world, created a sense of 'loneliness', 'difference', or 'strangeness'.
All of the participants, except Eleanor, described periods of

unhappiness, struggle, anger, 'getting fat' or depression that followed from this sense of 'difference'. They essentially describe being inwardly at war between the demands of integrity and conformity. The normal development of 'self-esteem', in which the young child finds herself able to meet a whole range of the criteria of 'acceptablility', was not possible for these people. An alternative, if not articulated, set of criteria were implicitly understood by them.

2) Other 'selves': Several of the participants - Karen, Eleanor, and Ann - describe being in communication with another aspect of themselves that informed and guided them. They each remark that this made available to them advanced forms of communication that were not recognized as possible by the persons around them. A 'split' in personality development is generally seen as a deviancy, dangerous to its healthy growth. Let us take note here that, for these individuals, the movement of separation takes place as the only possible means of safeguarding the knowledge 'contained' in the self until it is possible to integrate it at a later time. Seen from this perspective, the 'split' has a profoundly beneficial effect on the long-term health of the personality. Here we have a hint as to a perspective that might be helpful to the study of 'multiple-personality', a perspective that is not generally recognized because it demands as a prerequisite the acceptance not only of trauma and illusion, but also of 'untaught'

knowledge. Certainly, the potential of early spiritual experience for creating schisms in the sensitive developing personality is obvious. The effects may range from the violent dichotemies of the mentally ill to a less dramatic, but equally deadly, separation from the source of vitality and enthusiasm in the personality. Let us also remember, in this light, those participants in this study who put up a stone wall against any kind of self-separation - Tom, David, and Ann. These people intuitively understood as children that they were faced with a loss which was unthinkable, and they had personalities that were strong enough to pay the price at the time, rather than later. We must ask the unanswerable question (unanswerable becaue it involves what 'might have been'): how many children have neither the early strength to protect, nor the later capacity to reintegrate what might have been revealed to them as their 'real' selves?

3) 'Chameoleon-like Behavior': It is interesting that several of the participants actually use this expression to describe how they coped with producing a socially acceptable identity while sustaining their real identity. Karen, Diane, and Carolyn all use this term. Ann, David, and Tom use the comparable expression of 'playing the game' to describe the same coping mechanism, although in their case it is used more pejoratively since, on the whole, their personal way of sustaining their inner life was to refuse this adaptation.

'Invisibility' is the term used by David to describe his real self in its social setting, and all of the participants describe 'not being seen'. All of these expressions point to the fact that early religious experience and insight plunged all of these people into the precarious difficulties mentioned in point (2) above. Lack of recognition, understanding or affinity in those around them is the primary cause.

4) Imaginative expression: Imaginative activity, whether entirely inward or expressed in art or play, was described by all but one of the participants as the immediate means available to them as children for coping with the discrepancies in their understanding of the world, for creating forms of resolution or compatibility between the implicit and the explicit, and also for maintaining or protecting their inner lives.

The forms of this imaginative expression described in these accounts include inner images, inner dialogue (including prayer), music, dance, art, drama and sport. The activity of the imagination, as described here, is a vital means of communication between the 'mysterious', the pre-conceptualized, and 'language', the conceptual in all its forms. The one participant, (Tom), who denied the need for this imaginative bridge-like activity between the worlds he understood in childhood, is an interesting exception. Tom's spiritual awareness in childhood is expressed in the most secure and

confident terms of any in this group. This utter security seemed to create in him a disrespect of 'images' of his contact with spiritual realities as illusory or unnecessary, rather in the spirit of "Thou shalt have no graven images". It is this security in his knowledge that makes him comfortable with 'opting out' of social demands at a very young age. For the rest of the group, and for most of us needing acceptance and participation in all the facets of our being, personal integration requires amelioration of these alternate realities, and the imagination provides the key.

5) Nature: All of the participants except one, (Ann), describe nature as a profound resource for nourishment and healing as children.

Nature is described as that which opens the door to, confirms and expands their early religious experiences. It is seen as both the facilitator of insight and worship, and as the object of insight and worship. In other words, these participants, as very young children, perceived in nature the paradoxical unity of, what has been described as, the transcendent and the immanent. Each of them struggled to communicate the idea that nature was for them both the establisher (or reestablisher) of their connection with spiritual realities, and also an immediate expression of them. This idea reached its fullest expression in the Romantic movement, and is now in rather rare circulation. It is not, of course, accidental that it was also

the Romantics who proclaimed that children are capable of understanding this idea, in an immediate and non-conceptual form. Empirical evidence of some such understanding in children suggests that it might be helpful to look again at the whole framework in which the Romantics came to recognize this understanding. This is a framework which conceives of 'imagination' as having very much the role that we have seen described above, in point (4).

7. Was there anybody in your home, educational, community or church life who touched on this knowledge in yourself and gave you an opportunity to express or develop it?

Occasional rare figures are mentioned by the participants - a grandmother (Diane), a brief moment with a teacher or doctor (Ann), a inspirational meeting in adolescence (Eleanor). But the overall response to this question described a complete ignoring of the intuitive depths of these people as children by their families, peers and the institutions within which they grew.

Most of the participants said that they could not, and did not, attempt to communicate their feelings and insights. But those who tried were either 'put down' (Ann, Karen) or not understood (Carolyn, Tom). We have already noted that, even for adults, difficulty in expression has always been one of the characteristics of profound religious experience, and this, of

course, holds far more true of young children. But let us also note that language has to be learned, and, for these children, the common recognition necessary for communication to occur was absent. We see, in these people's lives some of the dimensions of what amounts, in our society, to almost a taboo against speaking of personal religous experience.
None of the participants mentioned any person who vitally communicated with them in their early years to the degree of consciously supporting the development and understanding of their capacity for spiritual insight.

8. Do you feel that you had any particular gifts or talents that were related to these spiritual experiences?

The response to this question was surprising and illuminating. The intent of the question was to probe for any connections seen by the participants between their talents, in the broadest sense of the term (including artistic, verbal, analytical, mathematical, scientific, and physical abilities), and their intuitive abilities. Yet everyone of the participants gave the same answer! They each said that first, and most important, was the gift of compassionate insight into the nature of others. Secondarily, came their individual leanings towards music, drama, the visual arts and so on. They saw the nature of their aesthetic appreciation as a bridge builder, as we described in the section on imaginative

expression, with its development being, at least somewhat, dependent on the availability of materials and encouragement. The gift of insight into others they describe as being different in its role and development. In each case the participant describes this gift as being there when they were very young, but as, paradoxically, strengthened and honed into compassion by the very struggle they went through in its being denied by the world around them. Indeed, several of the participants, (Karen, Ann, Tom, and Carolyn), describe understanding this process as part of the purpose of their lives, and of having some knowledge of that purpose when very young.

It is this dynamic, this paradox, that forms the crux of the answer to the last question in our list. It is the intersection where the early source of truth and its ultimate purpose in life meet for these individuals. Awareness of that intersection in its 'dawn' must be one of the most profound ideas it is possible to imagine a young child dealing with, nevertheless intimations of its latent meaning <u>are</u> described by the people mentioned above. For all of these people it is this point of intersection, this struggle, which creates the cohesion and meaning later perceived to exist in their lives. It becomes an ongoing 'revelation', what one of the participants, David, calls 'wrestling with God' and another , Eleanor describes as the 'process' of co-creativity with God. We will return to these points when we look at the response to

the last question, but for the moment it is important to notice that the ability to find 'meaning' or 'purpose' in their lives is inextricably linked for all of these individuals with the origin and growth of compassion.

9. What features of your early life either ignored or tended to crush this spiritual activity in yourself?

1) Home: All of the participants described their parents as being ignorant of, and/or remote from, their 'real' selves. Four of the participants - Diane, David, Ann, and Karen - saw their parents as actively destructive of their sensitivities. Home was not 'home' for any of these people, as children. As we have seen, most of them seemed to feel most 'at home' in nature, since it provided the qualities of affirmation and nourishment they needed. Nature, of course, could not nourish their need for parental recognition and acceptance, hence the quality of 'aloneness' they all describe.

2) School: All of the participants were educated in the public school system, seven of them in the United States and one in South Africa. All of the participants described school and the whole educational process as, at best, indifferent, and, at worst, actively destructive of any kind of integration of their 'unlearned' knowledge into the activity of learning. They describe school, as they experienced it, as designed to

insist on its own viewpoint rather than to encourage inquiry or the exercise of individual gifts. It is in school that the world becomes acutely 'dichotemized' for these people. Eleanor (growing up in South Africa) is the only exception, in that her school, and one teacher in particular, did facilitate and encourage her artistic gifts, which, for her, were inseparable from the development of her spiritual understanding. For all of the other participants school was seen as the daily demand to 'play the game', to put on a mask and to perform artificial tasks. One of the participants, Tom, saw it as a 'prison sentence'. As we saw, willingness and ability to 'play the game', while keeping oneself inwardly intact, was handled in different ways by each individual. These responses range from anger and resistance to sadness and resignation. Overall, school emerges as the single most 'crushing' influence these individuals feel existed on their inner lives.

By the very nature of the enquiry, we are here examining accounts of individual experience which has 'weathered' this crushing effect and not been destroyed by it. Again arises the unanswerable question we must ask - how many succomb? How many 'well-adjusted' adults have been adjusted out of recognition of their early gifts? One of the participants, Carolyn, described seeing this happen to her own brother.

3) Church: The role of religious institutions, and their

teachings, is more varied for these people. They were raised with very different religious backgrounds. For three of the participants - Eleanor, Karen and Ann - there was a small amount of early support in the religious teachings they were given, in that they were able to feel a 'resonation' between what they knew to be true and what they heard, some quality of agreement between their own experiences and the religious concepts they were exposed to. Still, none of these three describe any active affirmation of their individual perceptions. In adolescence and later life these three individuals struggle with the discrepancy between the breadth of their own inner vision and the narrowness, as they perceived it, of the the religious structure in which they grew up.

For Diane, Tom and Judith, this 'resonation' did not occur. They were struck as very young children by the 'wrongness' or severe limitation of the interpretations of the religious teachings that they heard.

For David and Carolyn, religious institutions and their teachings remained remote from the immediacy of the experiences and insights which filled their early years. In adolescence they both leaned toward philosophy and psychology to create relationships for them between their own spiritual insights and those embodied in the world religions.

One common factor appears amongst these variations: none of the participants received from their different religious backgrounds any kind of teaching which directly affirmed or

strengthened their own spiritual experience. They each knew that their own spiritual capacity remained 'unseen'.

10. How did you deal with these elements that tended to ignore or crush you? Do you feel that, to some extent, they succeeded in their destruction?

The response to this question builds upon that to question 6, discussed above. We saw that all of the participants felt that some damage was done to their developing personalities, and to their early self-esteem, and some of the participants felt that this was considerable. Yet in answer to this question all of the participants describe their inner selves as untouched by this damage, and finally, actually strengthened. We have here a profound indication that what has been described all along as a different 'level' of reality of their being, by these people, is in fact so. They all equate that 'strengthening' of the real self with its capacity for understanding and compassion for others. All, except Eleanor, admit that there were talents and gifts lost in childhood by their being denied by adults, but they all see this as to some extent correctable in adulthood. There is a common recognition that this is a part of the price they must pay for the development of compassion, and a common recognition that this is the purpose of life.

11. How is your present life - its pattern, meaning and goals - influenced by (or a growth from) those early experiences?

It was expected that the answer to this question would unfold gradually throughout each interview, as indeed it did. It is posed, finally, as a way for the individual to review and reflect upon what has transpired during the discussion. In several cases this led into a short exposition of the participants current beliefs and concerns. Although theorizing had been discouraged in the descriptive base of the interview, at this juncture it was seen as a component of meaningful perspective-taking over the broad issues this kind of interview would raise in the mind of an intelligent person, and as part of their personal creative response to their own spiritual life.

All of the participants felt that the whole interview process was valuable to them precisely because it gave them an extended opportunity to reflect on this last question. Most said that they had not previously done so, and several said that this reflection would itself create changes in their lives.

In considering the relationship of early religious experience to later life Carolyn expressed well, in part of her answer, what is true for all of these people -

"The early experiences are supportive of what I feel to be basic principles of truth. They are just some of the many experiences that I have had throughout my entire life that support my philosophy and the way I choose to live ... Those experiences that I had as a child were the foundation of my consciously feeling purpose in being alive."

All of the participants felt that their early experiences were a foundation which had subsequently to be integrated, built upon and further permitted (or invited) to be an active influence in their lives. Their understanding of the nature of the 'purpose' of their lives involved all of these elements. We see that 'purpose', as it is revealed to us here, is a complex concept, seeming, paradoxically, to involve more awareness of 'process' than 'end', and, like all processes, it seems to need to be kept in working order. The breakdown of this continuum of 'fulfillment', this activity of integration, expression and further insight, leads to the loss of an awareness of 'purpose' itself, however powerfully it may have been initiated in early experience. As we have seen, this extended process is tenuous and fraught with obstacles in the early years. Much of our social 'nurturing' seems bent on refusing the elements necessary for its accomplishment. The individuals we have studied have all been willing to make the efforts required by this process: to respond and sustain. They are spiritual 'survivors', and like all survivors they have the characteristics of ingenuity, adaptation and persistence.
All of the participants describe, as the basic requirement for this process of 'fulfillment' of 'purpose', the willingness to 'be present to', or 'stay with', their own spiritual perceptions and discover, for them, its unique and changing intersection with the world. It is their own patience and courage in this effort that yields its harvest (and further

committment) of 'purpose'. We spoke earlier of the remarkable fact that all of these people describe slowly coming to understand, in later life, that the 'end' of this process is the increased understanding and compassion for others that it brings about in themselves. This understanding was revealed to them as a result of their own willingness to be 'faithful' to the 'truths' that they perceived in early transcendent experience.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

A. Significance of Results

In Chapter I it was proposed that the evidence collected by the Religious Experience Unit suggested that children may be capable of profound insight and knowledge. It was, further, stated that the existence of such a capacity would have profound significance for all developmental theory, and for all educational, therapeutic and self-actualization practices based on developmental theory. It was suggested that to investigate this significance we would have to find ways to answer the following questions:

1) What is the nature of this 'unlearned' or 'direct' knowledge in childhood?

2) How is it related to 'learned' forms of knowledge, both in the short and the long-term?

3) How do individuals integrate/synthesize these two forms (and how do they fail)?

4) How does education assist or make difficult this integration?

5) How is this 'direct' knowledge related to other talents, gifts?

It was also proposed that the purpose of this study was to contribute some of the initial descriptive records necessary

for the foundation of such a new field of research as the study of the nature of early religious experience.

Let us turn now to a consideration of how this initial empirical data, that has been presented in Chapter IV, may have begun to answer the above questions.

1) What is the nature of this 'unlearned' or 'direct' knowledge in childhood?

In our analysis of the answers given to Question 3, in the interviews, we saw that the participants described at least ten different qualities and objects of this kind of knowledge. Let us review some of the language they used in trying to describe some of the essential attributes of this knowledge.

David described knowing a 'rock hard reality', so unquestionably actual that it seemed more real to him than the social world he grew up in. It had the qualities of obviousness, tremendousness, beauty, and needing to be worshipped. It was contacted through nature and it communicated to him certain moral truths, for example, that a true leader should serve and not dominate others.

Eleanor described knowing her 'self' as 'endless', and she described knowing the universal 'mystery'. This 'mystery' had the qualities of love, beauty, protection, and was contacted through nature. It communicated to her certain moral truths, for example, that there is a unity underlying all peoples and all religions.

Judith described knowledge of a 'light' that had the qualities of love, intelligence and unity. It was contacted through nature, sports, music and art. It communicated the idea that the source of all moral knowledge is in our connection with truth, and that 'sin' arises from our disconnection from it. Tom described a knowledge of a 'oneness', a continuous awareness which was other than his awareness of his material and psychological life. That awareness had dimensions that included the use of light to heal. The awareness was contacted more deeply in nature, and communicated certain ideas to him, for example, the idea that there are universal laws at work in our lives.

We can see here, as in all the descriptions our participants provide, many similarities. It is clear that each of the people in this study tries to describe 'transcendent realities' as they have understood them. It is also clear that the experience of these realities spills over into, or carries with it, moral and aesthetic awareness.

We shall return to the nature of 'transcendental reality', and how it might be approach by educational theory and practice, later in this chapter.

2) How is it related to 'learned' forms of knowledge, both in the short and the long-term?

These interviews suggest that the 'unlearned' knowledge is more 'global', and initially more 'undifferentiated' than learned

knowledge. They also suggest that it is more formative over the long-term than learned knowledge.

We have learned that the relationship of learned and 'unlearned' knowledge in time is not sequential. While learned knowledge may have a beginning and an end, with many points in between, 'unlearned' knowledge cannot be understood on a linear basis - for, in many cases, its end is, at least partly, at its beginning. We see that there may actually exist an acute tension between these forms of knowledge, a dynamic source of paradoxes which moves the individual into creative activity.

We have also learned that the 'imagination' is seen as the means to resolve those paradoxes. It is an interconnection between learned and 'unlearned' knowledge which makes possible the assimilation and use of intuitive knowledge, and then further illumines and expands it.

We have seen that where this link is not facilitated by the home and educational world in which the child is growing, that particular talents and gifts will atrophy. We have seen that these gifts themselves require that open passage between the 'unlearned' and 'learned'. In many ways this material suggests that the true nature or, to use an Aristotelian term, 'virtue', of these gifts is the expression of the 'unlearned' or intuitive knowledge.

These interviews also suggest that where this facilitation does not occur in youth, damage will be sustained to the personality

and its talents, but that renewed contact between the learned and the 'unlearned' is always possible and that it will, if permitted, transmute some of that damage into deeper understanding. All of our participants agreed that the result of that transmutation was 'compassion'.

3) How do individuals integrate/synthesize these two forms (and how do they fail)?

We have seen, in these accounts, that the key to this integration is the 'imagination'. It is clear, from our interviews, that these people, as children, needed support in this integration. They needed the space, the tools, and the inspiration and emotional support to make such an effort successful. In none of our participants lives was this fully provided, in some it was severely under-provided. To the degree that it was provided, artistic expression occurred; and to the degree that artistic expression occurred there is the individual understanding that some integration occurred. In fact, all of our participants felt that, ultimately, they had failed to integrate these two forms of knowledge. But, as we have seen, they all felt that in the long-term their strength and understanding was increased. For these people, a sufficient connection with their personal source of spiritual awareness was somehow maintained throughout the pressures of childhood for it to become creatively active in adolescence and adulthood.

4) How does education assist or make difficult this integration?

The participants in this study describe their educational histories as either indifferent or destructive to their innate capacities and insights. Education emerges as 'artificial', a social 'game' that perceives the child as 'raw material' to be fashioned into an acceptable 'finished product'. Anger, sadness and resignation mark these accounts of the experience of public schools. There is a general feeling of never having 'been seen' as a child, of never having engaged in any vital communication with any teacher.

The encouragement in artistic activities, that Eleanor felt was so important to her, is the only exception and an important one.

The profound loneliness, the sense of being a 'stranger', that characterizes all of these accounts (including that of Eleanor) is severely exacerbated during the school years. All of these people had an openness to learning when very young. Like most children, they approached education expectantly, needing to find meeting points between their own complex potential, and tacit knowledge, and that of others. Their first educational need was the joy of communication, which, in its fulfillment, would have naturally given rise to a love of learning. But as Carolyn says "School was probably the number one crusher..... It crushed the love of learning."

These people all describe 'getting the message' that their own

enquiries and insights were of no value. The educational system was designed, as far as they were concerned, to create alienation. It was something one tried to survive, like, as Tom said, a 'prison sentence'.

We will discuss later in this chapter some of the implications of these findings for a more helpful model of education.

5) How is this 'direct' knowledge related to other talents and gifts?

We saw earlier that this question found a two-fold response in our participants. Firstly, they all described a 'direct' knowing or insight into the nature of others. They all called this knowledge 'compassion'. Its existence and development was seen as inextricably bound up for each individual with a sense of 'purpose'. It was seen as an a priori knowledge, 'intended' to be deepened by experience. Secondarily, they described the various talents and propensities they felt they had as young children. These interviews support the idea that no matter how talented a child may be, those talents will wither and die without access to 'direct' forms of knowledge. Equally the use and integration of 'direct' knowledge requires the expression of these talents. As we saw, it is the role of the 'imagination' to provide this interlink, a dialogue between the 'unlearned' and the 'learned'.

In Chapter I it was suggested that the significance of this study would transcend academic boundaries, and be of

importance to several different fields. Let us look now at some of the implications, and possible alternatives, the results of this research suggest for developmental theory and for education.

1. Developmental Theory: Implications and Alternatives

It was suggested, at the outset of this dissertation, that the model developmentalism gives us of a 'movement' of knowledge along chronological stages of 'less to more' is seriously inadequate to explain the kind of insight in children that the Religious Experience Research Unit revealed. We have now looked more deeply at the attributes of that early insight, in a specific number of cases. We have looked at the kind of context in which it occurs and its relationship to later knowledge in the life of the individual. The profundity and range of those attributes confirm the need for alternative models. They do not, per se, disprove the very substantial contributions made by developmental research to our knowledge of the mind, but they do suggest that, as a comprehensive approach, developmentalism is severely limited. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to attempt any conclusive alternatives, but rather to suggest possible directions toward explanatory models which might better serve the evidence we have begun here to assemble.

Craig Dykstra, in his work "Vision and Character" (1981a), critiques Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Kohlberg's approach to the psychology of moral development is an extension of that of Piaget's work in this area. He is interested in the kind of cognitive structures which permit the increasingly complex handling of moral judgements which he asserts is the ability required for us to progress toward moral 'maturity'. Dykstra describes this approach, which has dominated the field of moral development in recent years, as one which gives us a 'juridical' picture of moral knowledge. He suggests that there is much that this picture omits or distorts, and proposes that we explore a 'visional' picture of moral knowledge. The principle advocate of a visional approach is Iris Murdoch. She, herself, sums up the difference between these approaches in the following way:

> There are people whose fundamental moral belief is that we all live in the same empirical and rationally comprehensible world and that morality is the adoption of univeral and openly defensible rules of conduct. There are other people whose fundamental belief is that we live in a world whose mystery transcends us and that morality is the exploration of that mystery in so far as it concerns each individual (1966, p.208).

Dykstra sees the distinction between the two as fundamental. Juridical ethics he describes as problem-solving, while visional ethics he describes as mystery-encountering. 'Mystery', for Dykstra, does not have the ordinary usage of a perplexing problem or riddle that no one seems to have the answer to. This kind of mystery has a solution. Rather, he intends us to understand that

mystery is an enduring reality that we know only through a glass darkly and never exhaustively. What we do apprehend is somehow disclosed or revealed to us. We receive our knowledge of mystery as a gift and cannot grasp it for ourselves through our own powers alone. We encounter mystery as it encounters us (1981b, p.34).

The philosopher who has most fully explored the implications of this distinction is Gabriel Marcel. He describes the difference between a problem and a mystery in the following way:

A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I myself am involved... A genuine problem is subject to an appropriate technique by the exercise of which it is defined; whereas a mystery, by definition, transcends every possible technique (1960, p.260).

In the light of this distinction, the developmental view of reality becomes, ultimately, a set of problems. For Piaget and Kohlberg, objectivity requires that reality be a system of coherently reversible relationships, relationships that can be logically and exhaustively understood. Dykstra points out that reality may not always be open to this kind of 'objectivity', partially because we are so deeply involved in it. Marcel tells us that

It is no doubt always possible (logically and psychologically to degrade a mystery so as to turn it into a problem. But this is a fundamentally vicious proceeding, whose springs might perhaps be discovered in a kind of corruption of the the intelligence (p. 260).

Mysteries cannot be seized, Dykstra tells us, they can only be given.

They come as a gift to which we can only in some way respond - either by ignoring them, by reducing them, or by receiving them. Our encounters with them do not take place by our

initiative. They approach us almost without our knowing. And our knowledge of them is not a direct knowledge (p. 36).

It is immediately obvious that this concept of 'mystery' is very compatible with the kind of language used by the participants in this study. They have all tried to describe forms of knowledge which have come as 'gifts', occurring in no particular logical or chronological sequence. They have described a variety of responses to these 'gifts', and we have seen that the description of their long-term responses constitutes their spiritual 'stories'. We have had the opportunity to follow some of the unique complexities of the way in which individuals receive and respond to such 'mysteries'.

Dykstra would characterize the emergence of these unique complexities as the formation of 'character'. Juridical ethics, he points out, scorns the notion. For Kohlberg, 'character' is an illusory concept, a 'bag of virtues' or 'collection of traits' which psychology has failed to discover. Psychology, for Kohlberg, can only describe the patterned structures we have for accessing information and connecting events in terms of 'fairness'. The visional approach, Dykstra says, reminds us that what we see depends not only on what is in front of our eyes, but also on what lives within our hearts and minds.

Our emotions, evaluations, descriptions, predispositions, and desires are all brought to bear in our seeing. Attention is the concentration of the whole self in a moment of time. The quality of that attention is largely determined by the quality of the self who attends.

> But that is not all. The quality of our lives is, in turn, shaped by what we see. Acts of attention do not leave us unchanged. Each new act of attention broadens not only our world, but also our capacity to see deeply into that world (p.51).

Again we find the participants in this study perceiving the interconnections between insight, response, action and further insight, over the span of their lives, in very much the terms Dyskstra uses here. It is because they so well understand the indivisible relationship between understanding, perception and action, that they make the investment of 'attention' which these interviews attest to.

For Marcel the 'juridical' and 'visional' are not simply alternative approaches, relative to one's view of reality. The juridical may be fundamentally 'false'.

> From the very fact that I treat the other person merely as a means of resonance or an amplifier, I tend to consider him as a sort of apparatus which I can, or think I can, manipulate, or of which I can dispose at will. I form my own idea of him and, strangely enough, this idea can become a substitute for the real person, a shadow to which I shall come to refer my acts and words (1962, p. 17).

Repeatedly our participants testify to being aware of this psychological manipulation. They describe themselves as having been 'seen' through an 'idea' of childhood, and not as they really were. They describe seeing others as they really were, and also seeing them going through the process of placing thoughts between themselves and reality. Most of the participants in this study describe wrestling with the phenomenon of 'hypocrisy', although they not not have been able to conceptualize it as such until later years.

Not only does the developmental view fail to take account of the profundity possible in childhood experience, it also ignores the uniqueness of particular experience in its relationship to insight, character and purpose. A very fine example, which complements the accounts in this study, can be found in Jacques Lusseyran's autobiography, "And There was Light" (1963). Lusseyran was blinded in a school accident at the age of seven, but through a transcendental experience of light within him, and the support of his parents, he accepted the fact of his blindness. He writes

> I know that since the day I went blind I have never been unhappy (p. 8).

At nineteen years old Lusseyran was held at Buchenwald, the Nazi concentration camp, for his activities in the French resistance. Here he helped the other prisoners to

> go about holding on to life. I could turn toward them the flow of light which had grown so abundant in me ... Often my comrades would wake me up in the night and take me to comfort someone, sometimes a long way off in another block (p.283).

The themes we see repeated here, corresponding to those we have found in this study, are an early experience of 'light' and accompanying profound insight, the consequent 'vision' this gives him of his purpose in the world, and the inseparability of that purpose from 'compassion'.

The developmental approach to explaining the concept of overall 'purpose' in life would inevitably have to try to account for both immediate practical components and final teleological components. Life is implicitly compared to a

'game' in which there are more or less effective 'moves' toward the 'goal' of completion or winning. But as we have seen the concept of 'purpose' used by the participants in this study, it is not primarily concerned with means or ends. Again, the 'visional' approach approximates more closely to the language they use. Each of the people in this study had chosen a profession of service to others. Their notion of 'service', in each case, is linked with the concept of 'compassion' rather than 'change'. They see themselves as 'serving' more by 'being with' others than by 'acting on' them in planned sequences of 'cause and effect'. They see themselves as involved in a continuity of awareness and affirmation of the mystery and value of others. For them, this continuity has no known beginning or end. What they have to give to others is the communication of their 'vision'.

2. Education: Implications and Alternatives

Sofia Cavaletti, in her work "The Religious Potential of the Child" (1983), describes her research with children from three to six years old. The book is the result of twenty-five years spent observing young children in her education center in Rome. The distinctive quality of her work resides in the unusual respect with which she approaches children. This respect had a rather inspirational origin. Cavalletti was an admirer of Maria Montessori's work, although she had never met

her in person. Two years after Montessori's death, a friend brought her seven-year old son to Cavalletti for religious education. The deep joy of the child's response to her talking about God with him had a life-changing effect upon Cavalletti. It has since been the motivation for her search to know the deeper levels of the child's knowledge, and the art of releasing that power and insight.

Cavalletti suggests that our educational response to young children is still inadequate as we tend to underestimate the capacity of young children for wisdom and spiritual experience, and we consequently seriously understimate the young child's need for nourishment and affirmation of this aspect of herself. She cites a series of examples of 'untaught' knowledge in children whom she has personally known. For example,

> this one involves a three-year old girl who grew up without the slightest religous influence. The child did not go to nursery school; no one at home, not even her grandmother, who was herself an atheist, had ever spoken of God; the child had never gone to church. One day she questioned her father about the origin of the world: 'Where does the world come from?' Her father replied, in a manner consistent with his ideas, with a discourse that was materialistic in nature; then he added: 'However, there are those who say that all this comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God.' At this point the little girl began to run like a whirlwind around the room in a burst of joy, and exclaimed: 'I knew what you told me wasn't true; it is Him, it is Him!'
> (p. 31).

Cavalletti goes on to comment

> Evidently we are dealing with transient moments, and we wonder what degree of awareness the child himself has of them. This does not prevent them from constituting true facts of life, which sometimes ferment for a long while within the depths of the child's spirit without his being conscious of it (p. 32).

She then moves naturally to the point that these 'true facts'

may have profound meaning in the later life of the individual, and she quotes an experience written by the French novelist Julien Green (1967):

> In the course of these dim years, I can remember a minute of intense delight, such as I have never experienced since. Should such things be told, or should they be kept secret? There came a moment in this room, when, looking up at the windowpane, I saw the dark sky and a few stars shining in it. What words can be used to express what is beyond speech? That minute was perhaps the most important one of my life and I do not know what to say about it. I was alone in the unlighted room and, my eyes raised toward the sky, I had what I can only call an outburst of love. I have loved on this earth, but never as I did during that short time, and I did not know whom I loved. Yet that he was there and that, seeing me, he loved me too. How did the thought dawn on me? I do not know. I was certain that someone was there and talked to me without words. Having said this, I have said everything. Why must I write that no human speech has ever given me what I felt then for a moment just long enough to count up to ten, at a time when I was incapable of putting together a few intelligible words and did not even realize that I existed? Why must I write that I forgot that minute for years, that the stream of days and nights all but wiped it out of my consciousness? If only I had preserved it in terms of trial! Why is it given back to me now? What does it mean? (p. 8).

On the basis of her experience with children, coupled with her understanding of the possible long-term significance of early insight, Cavalletti develops some directions for education. She suggests that we begin by looking again at the concept of 'wonder', and reminds us that Plato understood 'wonder' to be of fundamental importance to all learning and understanding.

> This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin. (Theaetetus, 155d)

A UNESCO report (1972) on education also gives it primary significance:

> Man's capacity for wonder is at the source of activities, such as the ability to observe, experiment and classify experience and information; to express himself and listen... to question the world in ways combining the scientific and poetical frames of mind (p. 155).

Wonder, as Cavalletti, would have us consider it

> is a dynamic value; nevertheless it does not drive us to activism but draws us to activity, to an activity we do as persons immersed in the contemplation of something that exceeds us. Maybe the particularity of wonder is that we find activity and contemplation inseparably blended within it (p. 138).

She suggests that wonder arises from the attentive observation of reality. An education that encourages and builds upon the sense of wonder will be an education that assists us to go more deeply into reality. Wonder is not superficial. It arises only in the mind which is able to settle and rest in things, in the person who is able to stop and look. "Openness to reality and openness to wonder proceed at the same pace (p. 139)". It is not, of course, confined to youth but rather to the ability to see things 'as new', which indeed they are to the young child. It is in this sense that wonder is the natural capacity of the young child.

Cavolletti bemourns the fact that modern education is "loosing more and more the sense of surprise (p. 140)" - we are no longer amazed by anything. One of the first concerns of education, she says, is the question of what we must do to prevent the capacity for wonder from being lost. She makes some suggestions which are incomplete yet valuable in that they suggest a quite different orientation, a different 'atmosphere' of learning from that which pertains in most classrooms. They

lead us to think about quality rather than quantity, and they lead us back to the role of the teacher.

Her first suggestion is that we should offer less stimuli. As we, as educators, alter too often and too rapidly the object of the child's attention we begin to build, in the child, an intentional indifference to this kind of wearying, continuous movie. Here lies one of the root causes of the destruction of wonder in our educational process. The child becomes an alienated witness to 'too much' of 'too little' value. For, as Cavolletti says,

> If the child does not have the time to dwell on anything then everything will come to seem the same to him and he will lose all interest in things (p. 140).

She also points out a second consideration. Just as wonder may be stifled by too much food, it may be starved by food that is not nourishing. It will wither if it does not find a 'worthy object', but is focused, by the teacher, on limited objects. It is the educator's task to offer the child an object whose frontiers are always expanding, as the child slowly proceeds in the contemplation of it. In the lives of the people we have considered in this study, it was nature which offered them, as children, such 'worthy objects', while their education was seen to dwell on systems and tasks that were 'limited' and superficial.

Cavolletti suggests that this alienation occurs because we attempt too early to focus children on a fragmentation of reality. She proposes that the level of teaching of young

children should be metaphysical, and the approach global.

> The task of the educator of young children, it seems to us, is not to assist the child to distinguish this or that element of reality. The educator's work is far greater. It is a matter of helping the child to contemplate the miracle of Life in itself (p. 142).

Enjoyment of life's details must be based upon this original 'enthusiasm'. Similarly, the task of the educator of the older child must be to keep alive the connection between this 'global vision' and an increasingly differentiated reality.

> Reality enlarges itself before the older child, yet it also becomes more fragmentary, and so it is necessary that the child face it carrying within himself a global vision (p. 143).

These reflections and recommendations certainly seem to give us an orientation toward education which, at least, permits the possible existence of the kind of early experiences and insights we have seen in this study. But, at this juncture, it might well be asked how we can ever make provision for the affirmation, by the teacher, of such unique and often unexpressible knowledge in her pupils. How does a teacher facilitate 'wonder'?

This was a question that was important to Plato. Are there, then, some aspects of his epistemology which could further help us here? Plato asks the question: how do we seem to know so much upon the basis of so little? For contemporary man this seems to be a debased question. In this 'information age' our 'sources' of knowledge have assumed extraordinary proportions. Who, then, today thinks to ask such a question? Yet it arises from this study as a central

question, and as fresh with mystery as it must have been for Plato. Plato's attempt to answer this question is to be found in the doctrine of 'anamnesis'. We know about 'goodness', 'beauty', 'geometrical relationships' and so on, because the soul was once separate from the body and saw these things clearly for itself. Now that it is incarnated it is confused by sense perception, but gains some refreshment from the contemplation of eternal objects to which it is akin and which it feels prompted to rediscover.

Learning is, therefore, recollection. (Phaedo 91e). Wisdom comes to us by 'divine dispensation'. The creative mind instinctively connects, 'recovering' profound ideas to join with the familiar. These thoughts did not, of course, originate with Plato. The idea of 'divine inspiration' was commonly recognized in Ancient Greece, and the Muses were, after all, the daughters of Memory, but Plato moves the idea into a more systematic form in conjunction with his theory of Forms and the notion of the 'dialectic'. It is not our intention to enter the centuries of debate about the way in which he does this, nor do we need to. It is enough for our purposes to notice that, for Plato, the following notions cohere:

1) We know transcendent realities a priori to empirical knowledge.

2) We 'recover' these realities by a mysterious process of direct knowledge, akin to 'remembering'.

3) Truth exists only in immediate consciousness. Writing is precisely a way of absenting oneself from truth and reality.
4) An educational process that facilitates the understanding of truth must, therefore, be a dynamic one in which the mind is assisted to stand open to the truth. Plato called this process a 'dialectic'. The director (or facilitator) of the process is more akin to a 'midwife' than an 'informant'.

If we may be permitted to isolate these four points from Plato's epistmology, we have now a somewhat stronger ground on which to base an approach to education which finds a place for the material described in this study, and the suggestions we have just considered in Cavolletti's work. How, then, might such a groundwork be of practical importance in teacher education?

First of all, it highlights the fact that it is on the basis of the various dimensions of self-knowledge that curriculum knowledge becomes viable for both teacher and pupil. Teacher education will discover ways to discern and encourage an active enthusiasm in the pursuit of knowledge, which is aware of its own origins and growth. In Cavalletti's terms, the prospective teacher will be assisted to rediscover and renew her own 'global vision'. It is only on this personal basis that there could exist, in an adult, a recognition of, and empathy with, the dynamic processes of 'wonder' in young children. We are speaking here not of the 'need for empathy' which is often paid lip-service to , at least in early

childhood education, and which is usually practically interpreted as a kind of 'pleasantness' and 'warmth'. We are referring to a more radical process: an immediate involvement in understanding some dimension of reality and sharing it in a moment of communication, perhaps silent. To actually participate together in such moments, child and adult must meet on equal terms. The metaphor of the 'midwife' is salient. In the birth process neither the midwife nor the mother 'creates' or 'directs' the advent of the child. Each, in their separate roles, 'makes way' for the child. The midwife has some specialized knowledge which has to do with alternative possibilities in the process. The more she knows the better 'facilitator' she will be. But she is not a technician, determining certain events. The metaphor shifts our attention to the 'living' quality of the objects of teaching and learning.

An education for teachers that reveals to them that knowledge has this 'living' dimension will necessarily involve its students in some of the recognizance that has gone on in the interviews presented in this study. The remembering, reflection and reintegration of early experience should be a vital part of education for teachers of young children. A person who sees no purpose in such an activity, who does not find in it any source of renewal, will be the teacher well qualified to wither the quality of 'wonder' in her charges!

This process, of renewed recognition of the vitality of

childhood, will be the foundation of understanding on which a carefully planned presentation of our current 'obective' systems of knowledge can be based. We have here returned to the relationship between 'participatory' and 'objective' knowledge, which has been a recurring concern of this dissertation. We have now arrived at the conclusion that not only is the participatory methodology of particular value in the study of religous experience, and the ways in which people perceive 'meaning' in their lives, but it is also important to an educational method which enables the recognition of these dimensions. We will further discuss this importance in our concluding remarks.

B. Suggestions for Future Research

We indicated that this study should be seen as an initial exploration of a new field - the study of religious experience in childhood. We have approached this exploration through an in-depth model which attempts to take a broad view of the relationship of early religious experience to the later attribution of 'meaning' in the life of an individual. Many other approaches are possible. There is a need both for quantitative research and further in-depth exploration. This study has thrown up a plethora of questions for examination and of possibilities for research. The following suggestions are by no means meant to be exclusive.

1. There is a need for a broad socio-cultural base to our understanding of early religious experience. The research that we have, conducted in America by Greeley and McCready (1974) and in Britain by Hay and Morisey (1978), is preliminary and not primarily concerned with childhood. Research from the cross-cultural perspective would be very valuable. We also need knowledge of possible differentiation between regions, economic groups, personality 'factors' and the influence of different educational approaches.

2. Experimental research should be conducted in teacher education, following up different possible ways of implementing some of the suggestions made in the preceding section. This research would inevitably have a participatory element. The personal response of the student teachers to exploring their own early experiences, and reflecting on the quality of the education they received in meeting the needs implicit in those experiences, would be the foundation for creating new forms of teacher education.

3. The relationship between the artistic imagination and transcendental experience emerged as very important in this study. There are many dimensions of theoretical and practical concern here, and, again, research possibilities abound. A statistical study, conducted throughout the British Isles, has approached some of the complexities involved in looking at the

relationship between religious experience and artistic gifts. This study was made by the Alister Hardy Research Centre, (1987), and concerned itself with adolescents from 16 to 19 years of age. But apart from this work the field is fundamentally unexplored. Further in-depth research is clearly needed to establish the parameters of the questions we should be pursuing here.

4. This study has considered childhood religious experience in the light of adult understanding. This retrospective approach was necessary in order to do justice to all the dimensions of a previously ignored subject. But, hopefully, it also paves the way for direct research with children. Methodological considerations will, of course, be different.
Where very young children are concerned, 'diagnostic' methods, such as those developed in the field of 'play therapy', will be of most value.

5. The results of this study lean us to the conclusion that many of its most interesting questions can only be approached through longitudinal research. Unfortunately the facilities and the committment for this kind of research is usually lacking. An example of the extraordinarily rich material it could afford us is provided by an internationally award winning documentary called "7 to 28". This documentary presented the results of long-term research with a group of people about

their understanding of their class position, opportunities, values, and purpose in life, at the ages of 7, 14, 21 and 28 years old. One example serves to show how this kind of research reveals the evolution of religious insight. The film showed one of the participants at 7 years old, at prepatory school, speaking of his desire to bring opportunities to other races, to bring them the knowledge that we are all equal. At 14 years old he was seen, in a well-known public school, speaking tenderly of a knowledge of God's love that he could not put into words. At 21 years old we saw him reading Mathematics at Oxford, describing himself as the only 'socialist' there, and again trying to speak of goodness and love. At 28 years old we see him having spurned society's gifts to him as a member of a priviliged group. He is living in the East End of London, teaching mathematics to the working class children, of whom a large percentage are West Indian and Asian. Again he tries to communicate the importance of acting on God's goodness. The consistent, yet unpredictable way, in which he 'works out' his early insight is illuminating. There is a clear basis for further research here.

1. Further Methodological Considerations

Finally, let us end with a cautionary tale, the story of a life history which exemplifies themes which directly counterpoint those in the lives of the people in this study.

It is cited by Henryk Skolimowski, in his paper 'Life, Entropy and Education' (1986). Skolimowski is a professor in philosophy in the College of Engineering at the University of Michigan. The story he shares is that of the suicide of one of his students, Richard Grabowski. Skolimowski tell us that this student " was not entangled in any hopeless personal affair. He was not a failing student either (p.307)". Grabowski was close to graduation, and a good job was awaiting him.

Or, should we say, a well paying job was awaiting him, as he was a graduating student of aerospace engineering. And here lies the root of the tragedy. As a good student he was under pressure both from within himself and from outside to take a job with a prestigious company. It is only that he would succeed as was expected of him. His choices were narrowed to NASA and Douglas. However, in each of these companies he would have to design weapon systems. After having examined his conscience in depth, he came to the conclusion that he could not be a part of the machinery of death (p.307).

In his suicide note, Grabowski wrote

If I were to live out my potential, I would only destroy life... I have such unfounded respect for the practical application of physical ideas that I would go so far as to murder humans... I am incapable of love. I am incapable of compassion. I can only respect rational, physical ideas. It is for this reason that I must die. If I were to continue living, I would only prolong my death. I cannot 'live' by any sense of my imagination producing weapons (p. 308).

Skolimowski points out that this is not

a case of a confused student failing by the criteria of the system... but on the contrary, a case of an extraordinarily lucid mind which sees clearly how well he has succeeded (p.308).

He stresses that this is not a singular exception, but, rather, an exceptionally eloquent one. He tells us that he has frequently observed in his students that their training in

rationality has created difficulties for them in coping with life. He argues that the time may have come to look critically at the so-called rationality and objectivity of the entire educational system.

> There is a clear relationship between over-emphasis on rigorous, scientific, abstract, objectivized clinical education on the one hand and existential dilemmas and social crises on the other (p. 307).

Skolimowski points out that the healing mind and the objective mind are two different entities. The scientific mind, as it is presented in our educational system, is too narrow. Its methodologies do not help us create our own wholeness, or help to maintain peace. 'Objectivity', strictly speaking, does not know the meaning of 'compassion'. Skolimowski argues that it is time we paid more attention to the methodology of participation.

> Let us realize that, on the one side, we have a vast body of scientific methodology based on objectivity. On the other side, we have some insights based on ancient tradition of empathy and compassion. Though rudimentary, these insights are immensely important. We need to develop these insights systematically until they form a new methodology, a new set of intellectual strategies -which will incorporate the methodology of objectivity (we don't want to lose any of the glorious achievements of science) yet transcend it at the same time (p. 309).

These thoughts bring us, in a full circle, to the issues discussed in the first four chapters of this dissertation: the history of the dichotomized relationship between religion and science; the effect of that dichotomy on other branches of knowledge, particularly psychology; the boundaries and omissions it has created in our understanding; and the way in

which research methodologies and educational programs have perpetuated these omissions. It is only in our recent history that we have achieved some understanding of the indivisibility of our epistemology, methodology, perception and discoveries. This understanding has barely begun to be turned in any reparative form to the great 'pathologized' systems of knowledge, as Maslow (1964) called them. This dissertation has attempted to begin an empirical exploration of one of the areas of omission of our 'pathologized' knowledge, namely, the religious experience and insight of young children. This study demonstrates that the question of the epistemological boundaries of our educational system is not just 'academic'. The lives of the people in this study reveal something of the human 'price' that is paid by our educational system, as does the life of Richard Grabowski.

It is significant that those few who have occasionally reminded us that our 'objectivity' may be a limited lens on reality, have tended to remember childhood. Consider this entry made by Marcel into his "Metaphysical Diary" (1965),

> I was thinking just now that our 'condition' - I will not exactly define this term for the moment - implies or requires a kind of systematic sealing-off of mystery, both in ourselves and in our surroundings. The sealing is done by the almost indefinable idea of the 'perfectly ordinary'. There is a close connection between the objective and the 'perfectly ordinary'. A grip on being is only possible for us when we suddenly break through the enclosing shell which we have grown round ourselves. 'Except ye become as little children...' Our condition can be transcended, but only by a heroic and necessarily intermittent effort (p. 122).

We have certainly seen, in the accounts in this study,

that that transcendence has been 'heroic' and 'intermittent'. Yet must it be so? We have argued that we share in the creation of the 'enclosing shell', and we have considered some possible educational alternatives.

To conclude, the most helpful way in which we can conceive of a future direction based upon the ideas and findings of this dissertation is to realize that, at this juncture of our history, we should be looking for 'points of interaction' between our different disciplines. An excellent new contribution to the discussion of the problems and possibilities in this venture can be found in "One World -The Interaction of Science and Theology" by John Polkinghorne (1987). Polkinghorn is a man whose life itself is such a 'point of interaction', as it has comprised both the vocations of being a theoretical physicist and a priest. He argues that the old opposition of science and theology no longer exists: while modern physics has been demolishing the view of the world as objective and determinate, theology has moved to more analytical, less dogmatic viewpoints on religious experience. Theology and science are both

> concerned with exploring, and submitting to, the way things are. Because of this they are capable of interacting with each other: theology explaining the source of the rational order and structure which science both assumes and confirms in its investigation of the world; science by its study of creation setting conditions of consonance which must be satisfied by any account of the Creator and his activity (p.97).

Polkinghorne describes reality as a 'multi-layered unity'. The interlocking layers of that unity combine the world-views

of science, aesthetic, ethics, and religion. These different viewpoints gives us the mysterious coherence of truth. To deny any of those layers of that reality in our perception, treatment or education of a human being is to do harm, perhaps violence, to that being. We suggest that it falls to the field of educational psychology, in particular, to desist from the practice of 'specialized' adherence to particular aspects of that reality, and to turn to the task of facilitating ways in which we can 'participate' in all of these interlocking layers of our world.

APPENDIX A

Appeal for Research Participants

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
AT AMHERST

School of Education
352 Hills South
Amherst, MA 01003

Human Services and Applied
Behavioral Sciences Division

APPEAL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS.

SUBJECT: THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

At certain times in their lives many people have had specific, deeply felt, transcendental experiences which have made them aware of a non-physical power which appears to be partly or wholly beyond, and far greater than the individual self. Over the last fifteen years a team in Oxford has conducted the first systematic and extensive research into the nature of these 'religious experiences'. It was noticed that, unrequested, many people spontaneously described religious experiences occurring during early childhood. To my knowledge no other research exists on the subject, yet these findings have radical implications for our understanding of childhood, and for its 'embedded' relevance in our adult lives. One important consideration is that children may have a natural capacity for insight, imagination and understanding that does not need to develop into some higher form. Some examples are attached to demonstrate the great variety of their nature and the insights they contain.

I am deeply interested in furthering this research, and am looking for people who can recall religious experiences from early childhood and would be willing to explore these memories. This will be very much

subject-participant research. I am requesting an initial written account, that, as far as possible keeps distinct the actual experiences, the insights then issuing from the experiences and the insights/developments later associated with the experiences. These accounts will be followed up with interviews. To some extent the interview questions will issue from the accounts themselves, but, as I perceive them now, these are the basic kinds of questions I would be exploring with people:

1. The kinds of insight/knowledge they had that were other than socially given (or developmentally explicable);

2. whether or not this created a tension with their home or school life, or was compatible with the given 'picture' of the world;

3. whether education in any way 'tapped' or further enhanced this insight, or, rather 'crushed' or 'by-passed' it;

4. whether or not their pattern of adult life is influenced by, fulfills or is in any way to be explained by these early experiences/insights.

Lorelie Farmer
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Early Childhood Education.
Chairperson: Doris J. Shallcross.

Examples

The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young - between four and five years old. I am not mistaken in dating this because I remember so clearly both the place where it occurred and the shoes I was wearing at the time, of which I was rather fond. Both of these facts relate only to this particular period in my life; I have a dated photograph of myself wearing the shoes in question.

My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land in Pangbourne, Berks, known locally at the "moors". As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground. My feet, with the favourite black shoes with silver buckles, wee gradually hidden from sight until I stood ankle deep in gently swirling vapour. Here and there just the very tallest harebells appeared above the mist. I had a great love for these exquisitely formed flowers, and stood lost in wonder at the sight.

Suddenly, I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent.

The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity with has withstood many viccissitudes, and an affinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people tookd, which has often been commented upon. Moreover, the whole of this experience has ever since formed a kind of reservoir of strength fed from an unseen source, from which quite suddenly in the midst of the very darkest times a bubble of pure joy rises through it all, and I know that whatever the anguish there is some deep centre in my life which cannot be touched by it.

Of course at the early age of four or five I could not have expressed anything of the experience in the words I have now used, and perhaps the attempt to convey the absorption of myself into the whole, and the intensity of meaning, sounds merely overcoloured to the reader. But the point is that, by whatever mysterious perception, the whole impression and its

total meaning wre apprehended in a single instant. years later, reading Traherne and Melster Eckhart and Francis of Assisi, I have cried aloud with surprise and joy, knowing myself to be in the company of others who shared the same kind of experience and who had been able to set it down so marvelously. This is not the only experience of the kind that has come to me - indeed they occur relatively often - but it is without doubt the one which has laid the deepest foundation of my life, and for which I feel the profoundest gratitude. (F.57)

I must have been well under the age of three. I remember distinctly being aware of thinking how silly grown-ups were not to understand, and I was also conscious of playing up to them and trying to conform to the image they had of me, or they projected into me (clever girl, funny child, etc.). I felt myself distinct from them, separated by their lack of insight that there was far more of me than what they saw in me, the undeveloped child part. (F.56)

We had to start school on the day we were three years of age. I can remember that soon after this I would toddle off to school trying to recall that lovely place where I was before I came to this drab place with its rows of lower middle class terrace six-roomed houses. "I don't belong here". I had filmy memories that I could not pin down of an atmosphere that was radiant and luminous, smiling and gracious. When later, I read Wordsworth's "Intimations', I knew precisely what he meant by "apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream". In a few years, alas, I also knew what he meant by the "man perceives it die away and fade into the light of common day." Wordsworth connected this radiant beauty with Earth and Nature, "meadow, grove and stream". As far as I can remember my mental processes, this radiant graciousness was nothing to do with anything "here". I doubt if these thoughts and feelings were in any way conected with religion. Had I been asked about this and had I had the vocabulary and ability to formulate it I would have said they were above, beyond and at the back of all this drab earthy business. (M.73)

I was under a year old - unable to talk or walk. I was crawling on the floor and sat up to listen to a record that was being played on the gramophone. (I later identified the record; it was Segovia playing the tremolo study by Tarrega on the guitar.) I went into a trance state but much of it I remembered after. In trance I "touched heaven" - I became aware of an absolute totality and the magnificence of the ordering power - and also a complete oneness. I was God and totality in that instant and knew all. As I came out of the

trance I was acutely aware of myself as an isolated part of the toatl that I had just been aware of. This trance is probably the greatest single experience of my life. It is extraordinarily difficult to describe and probably only lasted for seconds. (F.47)

I can remember being self-conscious from a very early age and feeling older than my physical body. (F.39)

I do not thing that, apart from poetry, which I adored, anything that I was taught at school had much, if any influence on my own natural and apparently inborn religious awareness, which on looking back at it now seems more like something deeply inherited and Celtic, because it appeared to grow and intensify almost entirely from being away from other people and by myself, either in the garden or the surrounding countryside. (F.64)

The childhood vision, which gave such an embracing sense of evolving life, light and meaning in the universe, was the fundamental measure against which I test everything else. I saw people and things in terms of quality and quantity of light; the presence of light, or its lack was my only yardstick of right and wrong. One outstanding and repeated experience was that, when I tried to speak to adults of the light, or tried to live by its implicit truth, this was often met with blank astonishment, or, as I grew older, active annoyance. I was continually told not to be insolent when speaking what I thought was the straight truth as I saw it, however wrongly. And I learned only slowly to compromise with the accepted norms and to keep silence on things that really mattered to me. Gradually I built a laughing and shallow persona to hide behind, which made me mroe socially accepted. (F. 43)

I remember instances in my childhood when I felt a unity with the world around me verging on mystical experience. I did not at first associate such feelings with religion. They were usually the result of a deep realisation of beauty in nature or music. They were not so much a sense of self-consciousness as of absorption in something for greater than myself of which I was at the same time a part and glad and grateful to be so; an overwhelming sense of trust and gratitude to the world for letting me be a part of it. This was later amplified and deepened in periods of genuine spiritual experience when I and the world seemed to dissolve into a new and vastly more significant reality which had hither to been only vaguely sensed but suddenly seemed to be revealed completely, so that one had the sense that it had always been there but that one

had been unaware of it. Probably the first experience of this intensity of awareness came to me when I was a child of about 4 or 5 as I played on the terrace of our house in Sussex one early moring in summer and looked out over the mist-filled valleys and woods into the distance. (M.63)

Yes, I can remember at six years old sitting in the sun on a compost heap in a cottage garden and seeing myself "as a dressed body in which I was", and thinking that I was "me" in a strange place and yet I was all right in the religious sense of being in an ordered universe. It's very difficult to put that into a child's words, but the glow of assurance has lasted against much disillusionment and through states of disbelief. (F.49)

At the age of seven I was lastingly aware of the superhuman force of righteousness. Religious background and training was slight, and this awareness was sparked off by something that might appear quite trivial. Standing at home in the garden with another child I mentioned to her the name of a flower that had been given to us both a few days earlier. Immediately and to my astonishment this naming was contradicted. It seemed terribly important to me that rightness should be upheld, and I appealed to a nearby grown-up for support. Alas, this was seen as a personal issue and was brusquely put aside. I felt very much alone in a world which I believed couldn't make sense if such untruths were not only allowed but deemed to be unimportant. I can vividly recall how I stood reaching outward and upward (in my mind) for comfort. Comfort did come, not from any fatherly figure, but from a strong assurance that there was a governing power of universal rightiousness. This experience I kept to myself. (F.47)

I think I have been simply trying, in adult life, to grow towards the vision of childhood, and to comprehend more fully the significance of the light which was so interwoven into those early years. The original impact of light was so powerful that my inner world still reverberates with it. Later logic chopping, analysis and interpretation have in no way diminished the immediacy of that impact. Very importantly: this same consciousness of light has proved to be translatable as the light of common day living. In my own extremis, I have tried to remember the light and stand by it. (F.45)

APPENDIX B

Subject Release Form

SUBJECT RELEASE FORM

Date _____

I agree to participate in this research on religious experience in childhood, as set forth in the accompanying appeal by Lorelie Farmer, doctoral student.

I understand that no individual's name will be associated with the contents of the research. I further understand and agree that results of this study may be published.

I am aware that I may withdraw my consent at any time without prejudice to myself.

_____ Signed

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