SEMANTIC SHIFT AND THE LINK BETWEEN WORDS AND CULTURE

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2008

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Dunai, Amber. **Semantic Shift and the Link between Words and Culture.** Master of Arts (Linguistics), December 2008, 85 pp., 2 figures, works cited, 85 titles.

This thesis is concerned with the correlation between cultural values and the semantic content of words over time; toward this purpose, the research focuses on Judeo-Christian religious terminology in the English language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is of central interest to this study, and the implications of the hypothesis, including a bidirectional interpretation allowing for both the influence of language on worldview and culture on language, is of great relevance to the research findings and conclusions. The paper focuses on the etymology and sources of religious terminology in the English language, the prominent category of terms with both religious and secular applications attained through semantic shift, and the role of religious words as English taboo. The research findings imply that a bidirectional understanding of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is the correct one. This is achieved both through analysis of historical events and linguistic development which emphasize the speaker’s role in language development and through the study of societal values that are reinforced through linguistic practices, namely taboo.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Opening Remarks

Humanity without a verbal communication system is hardly imaginable; *homo sapiens* is distinguished among the animal kingdom for his efficient use of tools, and language is certainly chief among these. The great orators had much to say concerning the many uses one might make of words: persuasion, exhortation, and elegy; the forms that rhetoric might take covered all the demands of society. The politician uses his language to gain supporters, the lawyer to argue his case, the writer to weave a tale. Yet one’s language is not limited to the formal or lofty aspects of life; it can be used just as effectively to tell about last Saturday’s escapades as to relate the long wanderings of Odysseus. A speaker may lend his words power through their arrangement into coherent thought, but without them he is powerless indeed. It can be no coincidence that nightmares have as a common theme the inability to cry out for help.

In fact, language is such an integral and essential resource that it is easy to recognize it as merely that: a tool. An indispensable tool, to be sure, but a tool nonetheless. Words are what we make of them, that much is true; however, it is often not recognized what they, in turn, reveal about us. In this thesis, I explore the relationship between language and culture and how this relationship may be illuminated through the shifts in word meaning over time. Toward this purpose, I focus on the religious aspect of culture and the development and role of the religious lexicon in the English language. The relationship between language and culture is explored in terms of linguistic determinism – the theory that language shapes the mind of the native speaker – and the idea that the culture of the speaker is influential on the language itself (Whorf 1956, Sapir 1962, Gumperz & Levinson 1996).
To lay the foundation for my study, I first looked back to semantic theory, analyzing the works of those who founded and built upon this relatively young but fairly well established field of linguistics. In the following sections I outline the developments in research concerning metaphor and semantic change and show how they specially relate to my research goals.

1.2 The Study of Word Meaning

In the posthumous collection of his lecture notes, *Course in General Linguistics*, the beginnings of what we now recognize as the field of linguistics can be found in Saussure’s deft and illuminating analysis of language (1916). Although the study of linguistics had begun long before his foundational teachings reached the world beyond Geneva, he was among the first to formalize the discipline and organize its aspects into detailed and interconnected branches. Here can be found the beginnings of a specialized branch: the study of word meaning, or *Semantics*. Saussure divided linguistics into two branches: *synchronic* (the state of a language at a fixed point of time) and *diachronic* (change in a language over a period of time) (Saussure 1916 [1972]). I will follow suit in my overview of the field of semantics.

1.2.1 Synchronic Semantics

Synchronic semantics deals with the semantic content of a word at a fixed point of time. Before one can begin to theorize on word meaning, one must first define the unit of meaning. The Greeks had an almost mystical understanding of their own λόγος, allowing it to denote either a mere unit of speech or the inward thought and even reason itself (Liddell & Scott 1889). The Gospel of John begins famously with the proclamation “In the beginning was the Word (λόγος), and the Word (λόγος) was with God, and the Word (λόγος) was God”; the implications of this esoteric statement continue to be discussed and debated among theologians and language
scholars alike. Goethe’s Faust famously quibbles over the meaning in his struggles to translate the passage:

“Tis writ, ‘In the beginning was the Word.’
I pause, to wonder what is here inferred.
The Word I cannot set supremely high:
A new translation I will try.
I read, if by the spirit I am taught,
This sense: ‘In the beginning was the Thought.’
This opening I need to weight again,
Or sense may suffer from a hasty pen.
Does Thought create, and work, and rule the hour?
‘Twere best, ‘In the beginning was the Power.’
Yet while the pen is urged with willing fingers,
A sense of doubt and hesitancy lingers.
The spirit comes to guide me in my need,
I write, ‘In the beginning was the Deed” (Goethe 1983).

Saussure linked mental concept with sound pattern in his own definition of the word; far from attributing mystical qualities to any particular semantic unit, he emphasized the arbitrary nature of this assignment (Saussure 1916 [1972]: 67). A tree is not called tree because there is a thing inherent in the phonetic pattern such that it cannot but always refer to the botanical object with a trunk of wood, roots, and leaves. The very fact that each language has its own sound pattern for this object (if it has one at all) makes such an assertion absurd (Chomsky & Halle 1968). Although linguists have explored the possibility of phonemic connotative value (high vowels having a “smaller” sound, as in teeny, with low sounds tending toward a “larger” sound, as in roar) (Tsur 1992), the combinations of phonemes into semantic units have no inherent meaning; even onomatopoetic words vary across cultures. Yet an English speaker is not free to choose for himself a phonetic pattern to express his mental conception of any particular object; he might, in theory, but his sound pattern would be meaningless to the rest of the language-speaking community, inhibiting communication and making his custom lexicon inefficient indeed (Saussure 1916 [1972]: 68). Before he can even decide to make his own phonetic
assignments, he must first learn the native language from which to deviate. A word’s sound pattern may be arbitrary, but this does not mean that the Spanish-speaker does not find it inconceivable that his *arból* might be called anything other than *arból*.

Uriel Weinreich (1980) expands on Saussure’s “signifier” and “signified” with his own “denotata” and “designatum”: that is, the object to which a word refers and the idea that is actually conveyed through the word, respectively. *Unicorn*, for example, does not denote an existing biological being; however, the word *unicorn* does not fail to designate a meaning, namely, that of ‘a mythical horse-like creature with a horn extending from its head’ (Weinreich 1980: 4-5). *Horse*, on the other hand, both denotes a member of the species *Equus caballus* and provides the language-speaker with the image of a four-legged, largish mammal that might be used to pull a carriage. The difference between the two words might be illustrated thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Denotata</th>
<th>Designatum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unicorn</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Four-legged mammal with horn; mythical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td><em>Equus caballus</em></td>
<td>Four-legged mammal; actual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: DENOTATA AND DESIGNATUM

Weinreich acknowledges the revision of the so-called “reductionists,” who sought to simplify the scheme by doing away with the designatum in favor of drawing a direct link between a word’s manifestation and the object it denotes. This construction, he points out, although it may seem a more rational and even scientific improvement on the earlier model, fails to account for words like *unicorn*, which denote nothing at all but still hold meaning for the typical English-speaker.
(ibid). Even positivist Ayers in his *Language Truth and Logic* emphasizes that a word’s existence does not imply that it refers to an existing entity, or denotata. The statement “unicorns are fictitious” presents no paradox; the existence of the word *unicorn* does not necessitate the existence of a four-legged mammal with a horn (Ayers 1952: 42-43). Language is far from clear-cut and does not conform easily to an idealistic scientific framework. It deals in the imaginary, the humorous, the poetic, and even the absurd, all of which fare poorly in the laboratory.

Stephen Ullmann cites the ‘basic triangle’ of Ogden and Richards in his own version of the relationship between the symbol, the denotata, and the designatum (Ullmann 1962). This representation puts a finer point on the denotata/designatum scheme by emphasizing the indirect relationship between the symbol and that to which it refers. This can be visually represented in the form of a triangle, which for the purposes of this paper I have represented in terms of Weinreich’s designata and denotata (Ullmann 1962: 55):

![Figure 2: SEMANTIC TRIANGLE](image)

The symbol is directly related to the mental representation, or designatum, and the mental representation is linked directly to that object which it describes, the denotata. The symbol and denotata, however, are forever in secondary relationship, drawn together by the mental activity
of the speaker. *Unicorn* is a direct correlation between the designatum (‘horse-like creature with a horn’) and its phonetic realization; there is no direct link between the word and its non-existent denotata, allowing for speakers to use the word as if the creature existed, unencumbered by the fact that it is a purely mythical entity.

I have described the semantic unit so far as if a word were capable of holding only one meaning; this is, of course, by no means the case. Polysemy, the attribution of several senses to a single word, is of great interest in the study of word meaning. This is not to be confused with homonymy, the accidental sharing of phonetic realizations by two or more words which do not share a common etymological background or semantic content. *See* and *sea* may both be pronounced [si], but their origins are quite independent, as are their definitions. Polysemy, on the other hand, deals with the evolving semantic content of a word. Ullmann chooses *handsome* to demonstrate this process; it can be used to describe humans (apt, proper, beautiful, etc.), concretes (of fair size, beautiful, etc.), actions (appropriate), conduct (fitting, gallant, etc.), and sizes or sums (fair, ample, liberal) (Ullmann 1962: 160). With the addition of senses and the increasingly positive connotations gained thereby, *handsome* has lost its weaker positive senses (proper, of fair size, appropriate) largely in favor of the explicitly positive (beautiful, gallant, liberal). Ullmann adds to the methods of semantic growth specialization (*paper* as a ‘legal document’), figurative language (*eye* as ‘the center of an entity’), homonyms (*weeds* misunderstood as ‘plants’ in *widow’s weeds*), and foreign influence (French *parlement* ‘speaking’ evolving to English *parliament* ‘judicial court’) (Ullmann 1962: 162-165).

1.2.2 Diachronic Semantics

The discussion of multiple word meanings provides a good transition to the study of diachronic semantics, the study of a word’s evolution. Once a word is born, it does not remain
the same forever; like a living entity, it develops and grows. Change within a language over time can be described in terms of phonological shifts, syntactic innovations, and semantic development. These branches of diachronic linguistics are by no means independent; phonological change can affect semantic content, as in the case of Latin *gattus* ‘cock’ morphing to *gat* in South-West France. The new phonetic realization conflicted so much with the previously-existing word *cat* that the former was replaced with the French *faisan* ‘pheasant’ and *vicaire* ‘curate’ in order to avoid confusion (Ullmann 1962: 185). Furthermore, the development of the English present progressive verb *going* (cf. “He is *going* to the store”) to use as a future auxiliary (cf. “I am *going* to give you a million dollars”) extended the verb’s semantic content through syntactic innovation (Campbell 2004: 284). The origins of a word’s semantic development are various and often complex.

As a word is given a wider range of meanings through polysemous development, it may begin to develop an overall positive, negative, or neutral connotation, as Ullmann’s example of *handsome* demonstrates. When a word attains a positive connotation through shifts in semantic content, that word is said to have *ameliorated*, or improved. English *luxury* is a textbook example of amelioration; originally denoting ‘lust,’ it has now come to express ‘comfort’ and ‘abundance.’ In contrast, a word may *pejorate*, or attain a negative connotation. This can be said of the word *awful*: once used to describe ‘an entity inspiring of awe,’ it is now used chiefly in the sense of ‘bad’ or ‘unpleasant’ (Greenough & Kittredge 1935); a friend’s revelation that she has just returned from an “awful vacation” does not suggest that the traveler was overwhelmed by the majesty and wonder of her new surroundings, but that she had had a thoroughly unpleasant time. Greenough and Kittredge note the tendency of these “tame” adjectives to manifest as adverbs as well (ibid). For example, the vacationer may describe her tour guide as
“awfully stupid” and her hotel room as “awfully filthy.” Despite the negative context of its use, in this sense the word *awfully* has little semantic value at all; it is used roughly in the sense of the adverb *very*.

Words are intimately connected with the speaker’s life and means of expression, and it is not uncommon for words to take on a positive or negative emotive quality based on the context of use and the speaker’s attitudes and beliefs concerning the ideas represented in the linguistic symbol. Denotation often gives way to connotation when it comes to a speaker’s word choice and the specialized meaning he or she attributes to it. Weinreich makes special mention of the *idiolect* in his essay on the ideal dictionary, stating that while “an ideal language is defined as a system of signs which are, among other things, interpersonal (as opposed to private),” the very nature of language learning and use paves the way for degrees of variance from the standard word meaning (Weinreich 1980: 280-281). A child may ask for a definition and receive either a formal (*a horse* is a ‘domesticated quadruped mammal’) or informal (*a horse* is ‘a great big animal that pulls a cart’) answer based on designata, or he may deduce a word’s meaning by trial and error through denotata (“look at the horse!”) (Weinreich 1980: 274-275). He may also decide that horses are frightening, evil creatures after being nearly kicked in the head by one, shudder each time he hears the word, and use it as an insulting epithet for his tormentors on the playground. As specialized word meanings and uses spread among a speaking community, substantial connotative content will morph the word’s semantic make-up and expand or restrict its range of normal use within the speaking population. Of course, one little boy’s aversion to “quadruped domesticated mammals” is unlikely to alter the linguistic practices of his family circle, let alone his language’s speaking population. Semantic content is much hardier than that;
if it were so pliable, it would be impossible to compile a dictionary that would retain its relevance long enough to reach the book store shelf!

This begs the question: what forces are sufficient to permanently change a word’s semantic content? A study of the English language will quickly reveal that one of the greatest causes of linguistic change of any kind is language contact and migration. As cultures and their respective languages are drawn together through warfare, diplomacy, or trade, they will soon share more than alliances, exotic goods, and blood. Wholesale word borrowing is a common phenomenon; English is liberally scattered with words lifted directly from foreign languages, supplying its speakers with terms to communicate about everything from the ballet to the horrors of an upcoming algebra exam to last night’s unfortunate binge on various vodka-based concoctions. Often when a previously-unknown cultural aspect is introduced to another country – say, the French ballet – the uninitiated speaker finds himself without a word to describe the new thing he has experienced. Rather than invent a phonetic symbol from scratch for the French dance form, one may simply adopt the foreign phonetic pattern, ballet, into the native language (Weinreich 1953: 47-48). This practice can produce amusing results after adaptation into the native phonetic scheme, such as the Italian sanemagogna (from the American phrase son of a gun) (ibid).

There are times, however, when a perfectly good term for an entity already exists in the language, yet the speaking population still chooses to adopt the foreign term. Linguistic prestige is an active force in speech and can influence not only word choice, but, as William Labov observed in his study of New York City English-speakers, even pronunciation and phonological emphasis in speakers who perceive themselves to be in more “formal” speech settings (Labov 1964). The Norman Invasion of 1066 brought Old English and French into close contact; soon
certain English terms began to give way to the French. French *pork* replaced *pig* in the kitchen; likewise, *beef* became the culinary term for the meat of the animal, restricting *cow* to the living creature. Indeed, French terms came to dominate the English language as far as food was concerned, adding to the vocabulary such indispensable jargon as *roast, boil, mince, saucer, plate, platter, dinner, feast, appetite, taste,* and *victuals* (Terms cited from Baugh & Cable 2002: 170-173; Payne 1868-1869, Skeat 1891). Furthermore, the language of the French conquerors invaded and thoroughly settled the linguistic realms of government (*govern, crown, minister*), law (*justice, crime, judgment*), military (*defense, stratagem, soldier*), fashion (*garment, lace, apparel*), education (*treatise, study, logic*), literature (*chronicle, romance, story*), art (*music, sculpture, painting*), and medicine (*physician, pain, remedy*); it became not merely the language of conquest, but the language of culture (ibid). These French words had their English counterparts, but the native terminology, when not restricted in meaning, was replaced altogether in favor of words from the language of prestige, a not uncommon motivation for linguistic change. Indeed, the high regard for “cultured” language is highly influential in word choice to this day, prompting the use of Latinate terms rather than their colloquial counterparts in a formal context (*speech* and *oration, fat* and *corpulent, thin* and *emaciated*) (Greenough & Kittredge 1935: 20).

Not all semantic change is motivated by outside influences on the language; good many words take on additional senses simply through the creative genius of their speakers. A *hand* can refer either to a part of the body or, by synecdoche, to a person hired to do physical labor. A *rat* is either ‘a small, furry rodent’ or, through the powers of metaphor, ‘an untrustworthy and unappealing individual.’ *Stars* are ‘socially-bright, specially-talented people’; *guns* are ‘outlaws who, as the name suggests, use violence to meet their ends.’ Sometimes the speaker’s linguistic
intuitions even lead to false conclusions, ascribing to words new, “incorrect” meanings that are frowned upon by language mavens but happily employed by everyone else. *Disinterested*, for example, has come to mean “not interested” more than it does “impartial” (Liberman 2008). One of the language purist’s favorite soapboxes, *hopefully*, is all but a lost cause; the word is used so seldom as an adverb that in many cases it sounds almost stilted for a native English speaker to use it “correctly” (Pinker 1994: 381-383). Historical circumstance and popular culture also influence the specialized meanings of words over time. The activities of state have made *red* not only a color but a proper noun denoting a member of or sympathizer with the Communist Party (OED), and, through the aptly-named “Red Scare” of the 1950’s, has become a term these days almost on the same standing as *bogey-man*. The *Vandals* were simply a people-group until others took ill to their destructive tendencies (ibid).

1.3 The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Metaphor

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is central to the study of language as it relates to culture. Hill and Mannheim (1992) go so far as to refute its distinction as a hypothesis, holding that it is, in fact, an axiom, “a part of the initial epistemology and methodology of the linguistic anthropologist” (Hill & Mannheim 1992: 383). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is generally referred to in terms of either “linguistic determinism” – the notion that there is a direct correlation between language structure and the speaker’s cognitive abilities (Gumperz & Levinson 1996: 22) – or “linguistic relativity,” the idea that, as Hill and Mannheim put it, “each language must be approached entirely on its own terms” with regard to linguistic patterning and any resultant variations in expression and thought between languages (Hill & Mannheim 1992: 383). In other words, because differences exist between the linguistic categories of languages, and these categories influence the speaker’s way of thinking, then some aspects of a linguistic
community’s thought will vary depending on its native language (Gumperz & Levinson 1996: 24).

Hill and Mannheim illustrate linguistic relativity through the work of anthropologist Franz Boas, whose studies on language variation were influential on Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf (unfortunately so in the case of Whorf’s infamous Eskimo hypothesis (1940), which I will return to later in this section). Boaz, in his article “On alternating sounds” (1889), analyzes a concept foundational to modern phonology through his research on American Indian languages and their unique sound systems. By showing that Native American languages contain sound distinctions indiscernible by native English speakers, Boaz contradicted earlier assumptions that these languages were “unstable” and “primitive” (Hill & Mannheim 1992: 390). The inventory of sound-types in a speaker’s native language diminishes his ability to produce and distinguish sounds not represented in the native lexicon. The fact that non-native speakers are almost always perceived by native speakers to have an accent demonstrates the difficulty they face when prompted to duplicate sounds not represented in their native language. Hill and Mannheim also cite research (Werker 1989) demonstrating that children are born with the ability to produce all sounds existent in human language, but lose that flexibility rapidly between six and twelve months of age as their phonological categories are set through exposure to the native language (Hill & Mannheim 1992: 390). Is this proof that speakers are deterministically locked into set potentials for thought and expression through the structure of their native language? The implications may not be quite so stringent; after all, some speakers overcome their sound-producing limitations when acquiring a second language, resulting in the distinction between non-native speakers with “heavy” and “slight” accents. However, the linguistic differences and difficulties in overcoming them do remain.
Is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, then, a unidirectional arrangement in which culture and thought are passive and language structure alone is the active agent? For many linguists, this is an overly simplistic and unrealistic interpretation of the relationship between thought and language. In “The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax,” Geoffrey Pullum criticizes Whorf’s erroneous interpretation of Boaz’s data on Eskimo words for snow, pointing out the absurdity of the study’s unfounded hype even if Whorf’s conclusions were entirely sound:

Horsebreeders have various names for breeds, sizes, and ages of horses; botanists have names for leaf shapes; interior decorators have names for shades of mauve; printers have many different names for different fonts…if these obvious truths of specialization are supposed to be interesting facts about language, thought, and culture, then I’m sorry, but include me out (Pullum 1989: 278-279).

Putting aside the exasperation of the author, his diatribe makes an important point: where the need for specialized vocabulary exists, the interests of the speaker will influence his or her personal jargon. Eskimos may not have a greater number of words for snow than a native Texan, but would the existence of a lengthy snow lexicon in Inuit be particularly unusual? Not really: in fact, it would be entirely logical.

Eve E. Sweetser (1990) mentions another well-known and problematic argument for linguistic determinism in her own analysis of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: namely, the notion that speakers of different languages literally see colors differently based in their own linguistic color categories. This conclusion was shown to be flawed (Berlin & Kay 1969, Kay & MacDaniel 1978, Kay & Kempton 1984); while different linguistic communities might choose to categorize shades and hues differently from one another, resulting, perhaps, in a culture that does not distinguish blue from green or purple from blue, the fact is that humans do experience colors
in the same way (Sweetser 1990 6-7). The words may differ, but the sensory data remains the same from speaker to speaker. For Sweetser, the “Sapir-Whorf problem” is the apparently bidirectional application of the axiom; in her own words, “it may not only be true that our cognitive system shapes our language, but – if such a relationship exists – why not the other direction as well?” (Sweetser 1990: 6) Gumperz and Levinson, too, question a unidirectional interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

…the phrase ‘linguistic determinism’ should be understood to imply that there is at least some causal influence from language categories to non-verbal cognition; it was not intended to denote an exclusive casual vector in one direction – probably no proponent has held the view that what cannot be said cannot be thought (1996: 22).

Benjamin Whorf’s study of Native American languages (1956) may be interpreted as further proof for a bidirectional interpretation of linguistic relativity. In “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language,” Whorf argues that the basic Hopi concept of time is present in its verb forms. The Hopi, who do not have the “objectified” time scheme of English-speakers (who “spend time” and “count minutes”), are said to have verbs of a more “durative” quality than the English, expressing assertions regarding what is or will be rather than fixed points in time (Whorf 1956: 144). The security and fast-paced lifestyles of Western civilization, by contrast, are echoed in a certain materialism and preciseness of thought; the uncertainty of seasonal dependence or a nomadic lifestyle is not evident in the grammatical constructions (ibid). Common sense prompts one to infer that culture influenced language; the Hopi, with their cyclical, seasonal lifestyles, have lent to their grammar a “durative” tone which mirrors their worldview, while the more “materialistic,” highly-scheduled Westerners tend to
express themselves in concrete, objectified phrases and constructions. It would take a good deal of chopped-logic to attribute the differences in lifestyle to the arbitrary whims of linguistic trends over which the speakers had no control, insisting that the Hopi took up farming at the urging of their grammar, while the British built watches because the English language compelled them to do so. Edward Sapir himself writes that

Language is becoming increasingly valuable as a guide to the scientific study of a given culture. In a sense, the network of cultural patterns of a civilization is indexed in the language which expresses that civilization (Sapir 1962: 68).

He goes on to say,

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection…The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (Sapir 1962: 69).

To demonstrate the “Whorfian” influence of language on the speaker’s world-view, Hill and Mannheim (1992) cite the system of third-person gendered pronouns in English. While she is specifically [+ FEMALE] (can only refer to the feminine), he is both [Ø FEMALE] (no particular gender) and [-FEMALE] (masculine). This dual application of he can lead to the argument that he is a sexist and therefore inappropriate pronoun for a [Ø FEMALE] group; the application of the masculine pronoun (although used in a [Ø FEMALE] context) is interpreted as
demeaning to women, who, through the interpretation of he as primarily [-FEMALE], are thought to be misrepresented. However, attempts to replace he in a [Ø FEMALE] context have been unsuccessful; it conflicts with a sense of human dignity by calling to mind animals and inanimate objects, while they has been attacked by prescriptive grammarians, who object to a plural pronoun being used in place of a singular pronoun (Hill 1992: 389). Hill and Mannheim summarize the effect of the English pronoun system:

The category system creates a particular cultural hegemony, the unquestioned acceptance, by both men and women, of men as a normative, unmarked category of person. The hegemonic structure is reproduced below the speaker’s threshold of awareness, unconsciously, but is challenged from above the threshold of awareness, consciously (ibid).

The study of English pronouns, then, points back to the original interpretation of linguistic determinism; the grammatical system of the language reinforces the concept of categorization in terms of gender and suggests that the masculine aspect of this system is the default. At the same time, gender roles and cultural movements can challenge this designation; some day – if native speakers can ever settle on an acceptable gender-neutral pronoun with which to replace he – it may change it altogether.

The complexities of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are of utmost importance to developments in modern linguistic thought, and their influence is evident in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s well-known linguistic work, Metaphors We Live By (1980). This foundational book to the contemporary study of metaphor takes into account a set of often-overlooked figures of speech and demonstrates the insight they can provide to the English-speaker’s mind. One famous example is the use of building terms to describe an argument: “Support your argument,”
“With a strong foundation you can build a solid argument,” and “His shaky argument soon collapsed” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 98). These are not uncommon phrases, and no native speaker uses them out of an attempt to wax poetic. However, the metaphors do not stop there. Lakoff and Johnson provide evidence that they extend even to the prepositions one chooses. Why is it that a native speaker slows down but speeds up, looks down on her enemies but looks up to her heroes? Through the study of preposition use and patterns found in their designations, Lakoff and Johnson hypothesize on spatial metaphors, showing that cultural values mirror the choice in preposition. For instance, metaphors having to do with the concept up (“She rose to the occasion,” “I’m at the peak of my game,” “He climbed the ladder of success”) suggest that up is ‘good.’ In contrast, metaphors for down (“That was a low trick,” “He’s feeling down today,” “How the mighty have fallen”) suggest that down is ‘bad’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1080: 16).

According to Lakoff and Johnson, these patterns, whether thematic association (arguments and construction) or spatial tendencies (up as ‘good’) shape the mind of the speaker, influencing his mental habits and tendencies of association. It is through metaphor that a speaker conceives of an argument as a ‘structure’ or even a ‘battle,’ of life as a ‘journey’ or death as a ‘hunter.’ These linguistically-imparted patterns have an incalculable psychological impact on the speaker and, by extension, the entire language community.

The subtleties of metaphor are not limited to the specialized application of prepositions; often they can be found in the very structure of the word. Metaphor, “understanding or experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing thought somehow to be similar in some way” (Campbell 2004: 256), is central to the aesthetic expression of ideas or objects, an indispensable tool to the poet and the writer. Metaphor, however, is not restricted to poetry and
the arts; it is a linguistic practice that permeates every aspect of speech. Greenough and Kittredge expound on this concept in their chapter “Language is Poetry”:

Language is fossil poetry which is constantly being worked over for the uses of speech. Our commonest words are worn-out metaphors. […] We shall find that there is no device which we are accustomed to find poetical, no similitude so slight, no metaphor so strained or so commonplace, that language has not seized upon it to make new forms of expression as the needs of advancing thought required them. Even when the resultant words appear intensely prosaic, the processes that created them are identical with those of artistic poetry (Greenough & Kittredge 1935: 11-12).

Among the examples cited in Greenough & Kittredge (1935: 11) are depend (from the Latin dependo ‘to hang on’) and incentive (from the Latin in and canere ‘that which sets the tune’) (ibid).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The subtlety that leads one to overlook the metaphorical nature of prepositions and everyday figurative language can, I believe, be extended to the role of religious terminology in the English language. The sheer volume of terminology pertaining to or originating in religious thought is staggering; as I show in the following chapters, the very extensiveness of this segment of the lexicon is often taken for granted by native English speakers, who overlook the religious nature of the terms and the extensive influence of history and culture on the very words he uses every day.

What is religion? Given the number and diversity of belief systems around the world, it is difficult to find a satisfactory answer to this question. A common synonym for religion,
spirituality, directs one away from the corporeal to the intangible. Anthony Wallace defines religion as “a kind of human behavior: specifically that kind of behavior which can be classified as belief and ritual concerned with supernatural beings, powers, and forces” (Wallace 1966: 5). William James makes reference to two types of religious adherent: those who obligingly follow set cultural traditions with regard to spirituality, and those who intensely seek and achieve personal fulfillment through faith, whether healthy or harmful (James [1902] 1982). For the purposes of this paper, religion refers to a system of beliefs regarding spiritual entities and the supernatural, including any related rituals, traditions, and scriptures. Following this definition, “religious terminology” is comprised of those words and phrases that refer to or are associated with the spiritual aspect of culture. James ([1902] 1982) touches on the intimate relationship between religion and culture in his contrast between the “casual” adherent and the spiritual seeker; while religion may be viewed as a defining aspect of culture, it is important to remember the role of culture, a society’s way of life, in preserving and promoting religious observance, even the most nominal. The following chapters are concerned with the role of culture, particularly with regard to religion, on the development of the English language through semantic change, and the role of another aspect of culture – language – in the preservation of societal values.

From its humble beginnings on the British Isles, English has grown enormously in speakers over the years and is now a rapidly-expanding global language, the native tongue of over 300 million speakers in North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and the Caribbean and the second language of millions in Africa and Asia (Leith 1997: 180). Incredibly diverse in dialects and cultural communities, a study of the entire religious lexicon of the English language would be immense in scope; this paper will be concerned in part with the religious
language of native speakers in England and particularly with its former North American colony, the United States. Although both nations currently enjoy liberal religious tolerance, resulting in a wide variety of religions represented in the population, England is characterized by participation in the official Church of England as well as non-Anglican Protestant sects and the Roman Catholic church (“England”); in the United States about five-sixths of the population claims some form of Christianity as its personal faith, approximately one-fifth of the U. S. population adhering to Roman Catholicism with the remaining Christian population comprised of a myriad of Protestant denominations (“United States”). For this reason, this thesis focuses specifically on Judeo-Christian references and terminology within the English language.

The cultural trends made evident through the study of semantic change are particularly helpful in analyzing the psychology of the English-speaking people as manifest through their relationship with the religious lexicon. Motivated by history, fashion, even humor, the shift in a word’s semantic content is brought about by the decisions of the change-initiating speakers. While subsequent generations may learn words and use everyday metaphors without knowing their origins or the reasons for their designata, this does not negate the will of past language speakers; their motivations and the influences on their linguistic choices live on in the language. Semantic change is far from arbitrary; whether or not they ever are conscious of their active role in the growth of their language, speakers have their reasons for the meanings they allow certain words, and their motivations for these meanings are grafted to the word’s semantic content. The curious linguist will be able to look back to the origins and learn something of the historical and cultural footprint left on his language. It is in this spirit I intend to look to the origins of English religious words. Where did they come from? What forms have they taken? What is happening
to them now? How does the linguistic environment into which a speaker is born influence the speaker’s mindset and worldview?

The remainder of the thesis is organized into three main chapters. Chapter 2 deals with the major historical events that shaped the English language from its origin to the present day, particularly as they relate to the growth of the English religious lexicon in Britain and the United States. In this chapter I explore the idea that the etymology of religious terminology not only documents the particular languages with which English has come into contact over the years, but also indicates the values of the speakers and the progress of their relationship with the Christian religion from its introduction to Great Britain. Chapter 3 explores the presence of religious terms in the English language and their development through semantic change in the broader lexicon. The data presented in this chapter consists of words with both a secular and religious application gathered both through an electronic search for terms related to Christianity and through my own data gathered from native English usage. I take a qualitative approach to the analysis of a selection of these data, demonstrating their use through samples gathered from popular culture and media, observed speech, online writings, and native intuition. I continue in this approach in Chapter 4, which deals with the special status of religious words as taboo, exploring both the particularities of cultural word avoidance and the significance of its subversion by subcultures of the English-speaking population. Chapter 5 consists of a review of the previous chapters, returning to the question of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as it relates to semantic shift and the cultural data to be found in their analysis, and summarizing the conclusions reached through this study of English religious terminology.
CHAPTER 2
A BRIEF ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH RELIGIOUS WORDS

The study of English religious words is, in a way, a study of the language itself. Take a cross-section of the terminology and it is quite possible that their etymologies will point in a handful of directions: to the Germanic and the Romantic, the foreigner and the native, the “high” or “prestigious” and the “low” or “vulgar.” Regardless of their ever-changing form and evolving semantic value, each word is a sort of living artifact, linguistic information encoded in the structure and ready to divulge historical information to the diligent excavator. As Sapir notes in his *Language*,

> Our English vocabulary, for instance, is very richly stratified in a cultural sense.

The various layers of early Latin, mediaeval French, humanistic Latin and Greek, and modern French borrowings constitute a fairly accurate gauge of the time, extent, and nature of the various foreign cultural influences which have helped to mold the English civilization (Sapir 1962: 31).

As an extension of the purpose of this paper, to seek cultural information in a subset of its vocabulary, I will take a detour to the past, exploring the historical origins of these religious words and the reasons for particular linguistic choices and trends.

2.1 Celts and Romans

Before the arrival of the Germanic tribes of the European mainland, present day England was populated by Paleolithic and Neolithic tribal peoples of whom relatively little is known; with the arrival and expansion of the Celts on the island, we have our first concrete knowledge of England’s earliest languages. The place-name *England* was not to be derived for several
centuries with the arrival of the *Angles*, a Germanic tribe, producing Old English *Englaland* and *Englisc*, from which have evolved modern day *England* and *English* (Jespersen 1982: 32). The dim view of early English history is drawn into focus with the invasion of the ambitious Romans in 55 B. C.; the isolated island was drawn into world affairs with the arrival of Julius Caesar, although there is little evidence that the Empire played an active role in the lives of the natives after conquering Britain and neighboring Gaul (Leith 1997). The Celts do not seem to have had a name for their island home; present-day England was first referred to as *Albion* in a treatise ascribed to Aristotle, and then *Britannia* by the Roman conquerors, which was perhaps derived from a Celtic term related to Welsh *brethyn* and Irish *bratt*, ‘a cloth, cloak’ (Emerson 1919: 42).

The influence of Latin on the Celtic natives is unclear; the languages likely existed side by side, perhaps displacing Celtic languages as the primary tongue in areas of denser Roman settlement. The pre-Christian British settlers did incorporate some Latin terms of commercial relevance, such as *wine* (from Latin *vinum*), *monger* (from *mango*, ‘retailer’), and *pound* (from *pondo*), which were in turn transferred to the Old English of the Anglo-Saxon invaders (Jespersen 1982: 29). However, the main influx of Latin came later, with the efforts of the Roman missionaries.

2.2 The Germanic Invasion

As the overextended Roman forces began to weaken in England, Germanic invaders from the mainland, the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians, began their own conquest of the British Isles. The invasion began around 449 A. D. (the beginning of the Old English period); soon the Romans, preoccupied with matters on the European mainland, had withdrawn and abandoned the island to a new set of masters (Jespersen 1982: 30). It is unclear how the indigenous peoples fared under the new invaders; few traces of the Celtic language made their way into Anglo-Saxon (Jespersen estimates the total at around a dozen words; Jespersen 1982: 35). However,
there is no evidence that the native population was wiped out by the invaders; the most likely and widely accepted hypothesis is that they were simply absorbed into the new culture and its Germanic language. English came into contact with Scandinavian tongues at this time of the Germanic settlements (from the eighth through the eleventh centuries A.D.), both through Viking invasions and friendly trade. Through this somewhat schizophrenic relationship, English came by one of its most recognized religious loan words: *kirk*, or *church* (Leith 1997: 22-23). This word, ironically enough, originates from the Greek *kuriaká*, ‘houses of the Lord,’ a term the invading tribes encountered during raids on the failing Empire’s religious establishments, which often housed valuable ornaments and vessels (Jespersen 1982: 37). Accordingly, when the Germanic tribes were themselves Christianized by the Romans, they did not adopt the prominent Latin *ecclesia* to denote a house of worship, but held to the already familiar Scandinavian *kirk* (ibid).

2.3 Latin and the Christianization of England

Rome’s renewed interest in the pagan island began around 600 A.D. with an organized effort by Christian missionaries from the mainland led by the future St. Augustine himself. Although far removed from the natives’ own religious ideals, Christianity was not unknown to the early Anglo-Saxons; they were, of course, at least somewhat familiar with the faith of the Empire churches that they had raided as early as 313 A.D. (Jespersen 1982: 37). The religion gradually gained popularity, Christian themes even appearing next to pagan ideals in native poetic works such as the epic *Beowulf* (ibid), and as monasteries and churches were established, Latin was once again an important tongue, the language of the church, sermons, and, by extension, education. Although they originally existed as scholarly and largely inaccessible terms at the time of their introduction, borrowings from Latin have greatly enriched both the secular
and religious terminologies of the English language, providing such words as minister (Latin monasterium), nun (nonna), bishop (episcopus), pope (papa), noon (nona), school (schola), and verse (versus) (Kittredge & Greenough 1935: 42-44). In this way, the Christianization meant much more for the vocabulary of Old English than an influx in religious terminology; the Germanic language had undergone its first major encounter with and influence by a Romance language, and not the last.

2.4 The Norman Invasion

In fact, the next encounter would differ drastically from that with Latin; it came with the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the beginning of the Middle English period. While the teachings of the Roman missionaries were eventually accepted by the Anglo-Saxons and Latin voluntarily embraced as a language of religion and education, Norman French was set up as the cultivated language of the conqueror and the upper class (Jespersen 1982: 79). While Old English was by no means replaced by French among the Germanic population, it was reduced in status to the “vulgar” language of the people. Besides art, government, law, and literature, French also left its mark on religion, introducing into the English language such words as religion, savior, virgin, miracle, sermon, preach, prayer, grace, charity, pity, lechery, mercy, saint, and sacrifice (Jespersen 1982: 82). Taking this small sampling together with the Latin borrowings, it is not difficult to conceive how great an influence Romance languages have had on the Germanic English tongue over the history of its development. Let us study the nouns of a randomly-selected passage from Charles Spurgeon’s sermons:

While the Bible is one of the most poetical of books, though its language is unutterably sublime, yet we must remark how constantly it is true to nature (Spurgeon [1857] 2004: 274) [italics my own].
Bible, from the Greek βιβλια, is a borrowing that stems from England’s Christianization by the Romans (Liddell & Scott 1889). Book, believed to stem from the Anglo-Saxon term for ‘beech tree,’ bók, can be considered a native English word (Partridge 1958). Language is derived from Latin lingua, nature ultimately from Latin natura and is associated with Anglo-Norman and Old French (OED). Of the four nouns in the English sentence above, only one can be considered Germanic; the history of the speakers and their contacts with other speaking communities is evident in the etymologies of the words.

2.5 Religious Terminology; Native and Borrowed

Despite the heavy influence of contact languages such as French and Latin on English as a source of religious terminology, quite a few words find their origin in the Anglo-Saxon language. It would be difficult indeed to give a sermon without the word God, common to several Germanic languages (Old English god, Old Norse godh, Old High German got) and dating back to pre-Christian pagan religions, where it signified ‘the god’ or ‘the invoked’ (Partridge 1958). Holy, too, derives from Old English halig ‘sacred,’ and blood, of central importance to the religion of sacrifice, from Old English blod (Clark Hall 1960). Heaven has its origins in Anglo-Saxon heofon ‘sky’ (Clark Hall 1960), sin in Old English syn ‘guilty,’ hell in Old Frisian helle ‘place of the dead,’ and lord in Old English hlaford ‘guardian’ (Partridge 1958). Additionally, adjectives with strong religious association, such as almighty, awesome, and frightful, are also native Anglo-Saxon terms (OED). One might note that those remaining words of Anglo-Saxon origin are those with a fundamental significance for the speakers; god was not an uncommon concept for the Germanic people, although their native religions were governed by very different deities than the monotheistic God of the Christian faith. Blood is a fundamental enough concept in a warlike society, as is the
warriors’ lord. Terms more specialized to the new religion tend to be loan words: cross (from Latin *crux*, replacing Old English *rood*), redemption (French *rédemption*), sacrament (Latin *sacramentum*), and sanctification (Latin *sanctification*) (ibid).

The discussion of religious loan words in the English language does flesh out around one rather large elephant in the room. That is, that a good deal of English vocabulary, religious and otherwise, was not introduced by the people group so much as their scriptures and related religious texts: that of the Hebrew language. It is important to remember that many Hebrew terms were introduced to the English language through a medium; namely, Latin. Jehovah, for instance, an expression for God specific to the Jewish people and adopted by Christianity, was the result of a questionable Latin translation of *YHWH*. The vowels meant for adonai, a euphemistic substitution for the unspeakable Yahweh, were mistakenly attributed to *YHWH*, leading scholars to reconstruct the word *Iehoua(h)*, or Jehovah (ibid). Nevertheless, it remains an important sacred name to the Christian religion often found in Old Testament English translations. Jubilee, too, a word with both religious and secular connotations, is found as *jubilaeus* in Vulgate Latin, taken from Greek *ωβηλος*, derived in turn from the Hebrew *yobel* (AHD). Sabbath, initially introduced from the Latin *sabbatum* (derived from Hebrew *Shabbath*), has also taken an important place in the English lexicon, indicating the traditional day of rest commonly recognized on Sunday among Christian English-speakers, although observed on Saturday by the Jewish faith and various religious sects (ibid). Hallelujah, an exclamation used to express joy in either a religious or secular context, derives from Hebrew stems *hll* ‘to praise’ and *hwy* ‘Yawe’ (ibid).

In contrast, Hebrew kasher, ‘right,’ has made it directly into the English language as the loan word kosher, indicating both foods conforming to Jewish dietary law and, in a
broadened sense, anything fitting and proper (OED). This word was not introduced into the language until the late 19th century after the revival of Hebrew from a scholarly to a living language; for this reason, it had not passed through the medium of Latin or Greek, but directly into the English language through cultural interaction (ibid). While many Hebrew terms, like those of other language groups, find their way into English as loan words through the simple lack of a native term for the foreign concept, the fundamental nature of many of Hebrew borrowings, particularly the proper names, indicates a special relationship. Those introduced through the Latin of the Christian Old Testament are significant in that their adoption was on religious terms, removed from the living language itself. It was not cultural interaction with the Jews – although they were certainly well-known and, unfortunately, often persecuted among the Europeans – that brought about the noticeable influence of Hebrew on the English language; it was the adopted scripture of the often-alienated group that brought about this remarkable linguistic trend. Religion is not merely an isolated sector of the English-speaker’s life; it affects his speech, not only in immediate conversations, but in the long-term evolution of the language itself. Important words and ideas are imprinted on the mother tongue, a fossil of cultural devotion and, at times, an indicator of contemporary societal values. While one may argue that Christianity is not held in the same reverence and awe as it once enjoyed (a question which this paper does not by any means claim to answer), there is no denying that it is still a force among English-speakers to this day. Deeply-held cultural values make themselves present in the lexicon, whether they are wanted there or not; only time (barring a yet-unheard of deliberate and thorough linguistic purge) can erase them.

The study of etymology reveals at least two important facts about the speaking population. One is its historical background; this is found in the study of religious terms’
linguistic origins and reveals a wide variety of influence from languages of completely
different language families. In addition to native Germanic terms, such as God and holy, we
find a myriad of specialized religious words from other languages: grace, sanctified, prayer,
and temple, to name a few. On the other hand, the word’s etymology may also reveal the
intensity of religious devotion; the existence of Hebrew terms in everyday language, a tongue
far-removed from the English tongue and integrated almost entirely through ancient
scripture, reveals the significance and importance of Christianity to English-speaking culture,
a significance so deep that the language of its scripture becomes an intimate part of the
lexicon. Indeed, the expansion in semantic content from religious to secular significance –
and vice versa – may reveal much about the spiritual aspect of a language-speaking
community; it is to this topic we will turn in the following chapter.
In the previous chapter I showed how language contact and lexical borrowing works as a sort of linguistic fossil record, preserving both historical information and cultural values through language groups represented in the lexicon and the manner of their introduction to the English language. I will now turn to the semantic expansion of religious terms into secular domains; by this process, a word’s original meaning may be adapted for use in the general lexicon until it is no longer perceived as having an exclusively religious significance. This is evident in messiah, which once referred exclusively to ‘the Judeo-Christian liberator’ but now can refer to ‘any leader of a subjugated group.’ Conversely, a non-religious term may be specialized so that it attains a religious meaning in its semantic content; this is seen in words like brother, which originally signified ‘the biological son of shared parents’ but now can refer to ‘a fellow Christian.’

The data discussed in this chapter consist of English words with both a religious and a secular application. A OneLook® search of dictionary words related to the term Christianity yields 463 results; of this data set, I have eliminated those pertaining to specific denominations and those without both religious and secular significance in meaning. I have also in several instances condensed closely-related words (for instance, redeemer and redemption or Catholic and Catholicity) into a single term to avoid redundancy. The resultant list is, as follows: advent, angel, announcement, apostate, apostle, ascension, assumption, atonement, bible, blessed, catholic, choir, Christian, communion, consecrate, convert, cross, damn, epiphany, faith, father, god, grace, heaven, hell, heretic, holy, incarnation, inferno, Jesus [Christ], love feast, martyr,
millennium, miracle, neophyte, orthodox, pagan, paradise, perdition, perseverance, Promised Land, prophet, proselyte, redemption, religious, resurrection, revelation, saint, salvation, savior, sermon, skeptic, spirit, tithe, transfiguration, trinity, and word.

To this list I will add a set of terms I have collected that also fit the criterion of holding both religious and secular significance. This list consists largely of words and phrases borrowed directly from English translations of the Old and New Testaments and is certainly not exhaustive. These terms include: Adam, anointed, ark, Babel, Babylon, bead, blood, brother, Cain, casting the first stone, congregation, Delilah, disciple, doubting Thomas, Eden, eye for an eye, from the mouths of babes, go the extra mile, good Samaritan, hallelujah, hearse, Jezebel, Job, Jonah, jubilee, Judas, king, leap of faith, lord, Mary Magdalene, messiah, Methuselah, onanism, passing the mantle, pearls before swine, Pharisee, Philistine, praise, pray, preach, Sabbath, Samson, sheep, shepherd, shibboleth, sister, Sodom and Gomorrah, Solomon, thorn in one’s side, thou shalt not, turn the other cheek, walk on water, and worship.

Given the number of words in these collections, I will only analyze a selection at length (a complete listing of the data with original and extended meanings can be found in Appendix A). However, I believe that the sampling given will be useful in demonstrating the close relationship between religious and secular terminology in the English language. I will show how the dual senses of many of these words are attained through the expansion of a term’s semantic content into either religious or secular domains and through the specialization of terms with non-religious semantic content to a specifically religious sense.

A few of these terms, namely Jesus [Christ], god, damn, lord, and hell, will receive special attention in Chapter 4. Although god, damn, lord, and hell can all demonstrate forms of semantic shift from a secular to a religious sense and vice versa (hell, for instance, may refer
either to ‘a place of spiritual punishment’ or to ‘a state of extreme discomfort’), they also
function as religious profanity, and will receive special treatment as such in the next chapter on
 taboo.

3.1 Semantic Broadening

There are a great many words and phrases that have shifted to or from a religious
significance as the English language evolved. Many have broadened – that is, taken on
diversified and increasingly generalized meanings – to such an extent over the years that their
specialized religious significance has been obscured. These semantically broadened words may
occupy any position on a spectrum from enduring religious connotation to complete assimilation
through secular adoption. The success of these words in the “wide world” of the language’s
lexicon is, I believe, significant to the study of cultural influence on native language. If a word is
to flourish and expand in meaning and domain, it must first be recognized and eventually
adapted to the speaker’s personal lexicon. For an idea of the extent of this phenomenon, let’s
take a look at some of these assimilated terms and phrases:

The colloquial phrase walk on water, a reference to the miracle mentioned several times
in the Gospels in which Jesus was said to have literally walked across the surface of a storming
sea in order to reach his frightened disciples (Matthew 14: 22-33; Mark 6: 45-52; John 6:16-21),
may now refer to an impossible task that is nevertheless accomplished; one could say that Sally
“walks on water” after she manages to successfully complete a large project under a remarkably
short deadline (or Sally might complain that she can’t walk on water when her boss presents her
with the unreasonable task). The metaphor manages to tie together the two unrelated concepts –
the religious miracle and an extremely difficult task – into a meaningful comparison for the
native English speaker.
Likewise, the phrase *go the extra mile* derives from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount; Jesus instructs his followers “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matthew 5:41). The Greek verb for ‘forces’ is derived from a Persian verb for ‘presses into service,’ carrying implications, especially in the Rome-occupied Israel, of forced military service (*NIV Study Bible*: 1446). To instruct his followers to happily serve the occupying forces – indeed, to even offer additional service beyond what is required – is a radical teaching that may be lost on a modern audience. The phrase today carries a somewhat softer meaning, given the societal context; to *go the extra mile* is simply to offer a better service or product than is required by an employer, customer, teacher, or any other person to whom one is obligated. An employee may be encouraged to *go the extra mile* in order to please a client and secure her business, or a father may praise his daughter for *going the extra mile* by not only cleaning her room, but also doing the laundry and washing the dishes. Tom Donohue of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce recently used the phrase in his description of a new, stricter anti-piracy law, stating that, “By becoming law, the PRO-IP Act sends the message to IP criminals everywhere that the U.S. will go the extra mile to protect American innovation” ("Bush signs controversial").

On a playful note, the famous repetitive phrase of the Old Testament Ten Commandments, *thou shalt not* (Exodus 20: 4-25), may be used in a mildly irreverent manner by English-speakers when listing off general prohibitions to a secular institution or system. The comparatively frivolous “commandments” contrast whimsically with the deadly serious precepts of the ancient Hebrew faith (as in the Language Log’s exasperated mandate that scientific writers “shalt not report odds ratios”) (Liberman 2007). Similarly, grammar teachers may be tempted to tell their students “thou shalt not split infinitives” or dieticians to instruct their patients “thou shalt not drink sodas or touch chocolate cake.” The phrase may be of additional cultural interest
in its preservation of the archaic King James language well into the twenty-first century, a testament not only to the existence of linguistic coelacanths, but also to the enduring popularity of this particular Bible translation.

The phrase *leap of faith* is an interesting one in that it is strongly associated with the Christian faith, but cannot be found anywhere in the Bible; the phrase actually has its roots in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, the founder of Existentialism (“Hegelianism”). Kierkegaard argued that faith was a gift allowing one to make the irrational choice to put one’s trust in Christ, a “leap to faith” in reality, capable of overcoming the paradoxes of Christianity that would prevent the rationalist from believing. This philosophical concept, rather than remaining obscure and pedantic, has actually attained a great familiarity among English-speakers, and the phrase need not only refer to religious subjects, either. A devout Catholic can make a *leap of faith* and decide to devote his life to mission work in troubled neighborhoods; likewise, an investor can make a *leap of faith* and decide to buy some risky stocks recommended to him. “At three times in my life, I have taken a leap of faith and made a choice that put me squarely on the road to Doing My Real Work and walking away from financial security,” a blogger writes of her personal career choices, adding “I took my first leap of faith in 1984, when I left my job to spend nine months writing what turned out to be the first non-textbook on networks” (“When Should I Take”). The phrase has come to hold a generalized meaning of risk-taking for a worthwhile cause; the potential good outweighs the possible pitfalls. The popular significance of Kierkegaard’s philosophical speculation has made it easily understandable and useful to all levels of society; while not everyone may dabble in deep theological matters or philosophical treatises, the basic problems of faith and doubt are easily accessible to the English-speaking population given its long-running, involved relationship with Christianity.
Besides full-fledged phrases, the English language is scattered with one-word references to Biblical people, places, and events. One of the most well-known of these is *Judas*. The name of the disciple known for betraying Jesus into the hands of his enemies shortly before the crucifixion, it has come to signify a particularly traitorous individual (OED). Indeed, Dante chose to fix Judas firmly at the center of hell to keep company with Satan himself; treason is no light matter in Western tradition, and it is no coincidence that one is very unlikely indeed to meet a young man named Judas. Classic rock fans are familiar with the infamous incident at the 1966 Royal Albert Hall concert, when a painfully conspicuous voice that hurled the insult at Bob Dylan – no doubt expressing disgust at the artist’s transformation from “protest” folk singer to pioneering rock musician – prompted one of the rare recorded instances of strong profanity on Dylan’s part when he ordered his band to “play fucking loud” (Dylan 1998). From hurled invective to artistic imagery, the name of Judas is certainly not an unfamiliar one.

Nor is Mary Magdalene. The gospels indicate that she was exorcised of demons at her first meeting of Jesus, inspiring the notable devotion that characterizes her role in his ministry afterward (Luke 8: 2-3). Although demon possession is the only cited malady that had haunted the woman before her conversion, Mary Magdalene has somehow attained an aura of sexual waywardness and even prostitution before her spiritual deliverance (there even exists an outreach group for the rehabilitation of former prostitutes called The Mary Magdalene Project (*Mary Magdalene*). Some attribute this odd association to simple mistaken identity; Mary of Bethany, known for anointing Jesus’s feet and wiping them with her hair, and an unidentified “sinner” who did the same and had her sins forgiven her were identified as Mary Magdalene by Pope St. Gregory I the Great; this interpretation has been all but abandoned by modern scholars, who hold the three women as distinct individuals (“Mary Magdalene”). Whatever the reason for her
traditional designation as prostitute turned saint, the term may now refer to a penitent woman who has been reformed from a sexually promiscuous lifestyle (OED): thus, one might refer to the Magdalene whose recent conversion has inspired her to join a local church and give public testimonies and inspirational talks at religious functions.

A strong addition to the camp of linguistic infamy is found in the name of godless king Ahab’s domineering wife, the wicked queen Jezebel. The queen’s influence over her husband resulted in his conversion to the worship of the pagan god Baal and the neglect of the orthodox faith in favor of Baal’s cult (1 Kings 16: 29-33). In addition, she ordered the slaughter of the Hebrew priests and persecuted the remaining prophets, driving the most well-known and revered of these, Elijah, into hiding (1 Kings 19: 1-3). Perhaps because of her willful role in influencing the king and tyrannizing devout Israelites (especially when taken next to Ahab’s comparatively passive role), Jezebel’s name carries the more widely-known and negative connotation of the two, signifying a notably fallen or wicked woman (or, in certain contexts, a woman who wears makeup) (OED). The name may also signify an unusually independent woman whose attitudes are considered socially-unacceptable, as demonstrated by the 1938 film Jezebel, which portrays a domineering woman’s quest to reclaim the fiancée she has alienated through her overwhelming assertiveness (“Jezebel”). While the epithet takes its roots from the tyrannous and manipulative deeds of the Israelite queen, the context of its modern use may thus speak volumes about the contemporary culture’s social mores and gender roles, what a woman’s “proper place” is to be and which activities or attitudes (or even cosmetic habits) may designate her as a “wicked woman.”

Similarly, the woman Delilah has lent her name to the list of unpleasant epithets for wayward women. Hers carries a definite aura of evil-minded seduction (OED 2008), which is
only natural considering her role in Old Testament scripture; she is paid by the enemies of
Israelite judge and hero Samson to pry from him his secret source of incredible strength. This
she accomplishes by nagging him until he finally gives in and reveals that his hair must never be
cut, or else his power would leave him. Of course, disaster follows; Samson’s treacherous lover
cuts off his hair as he sleeps, and the once invincible man is shamefully taken prisoner by the
men who had previously cowered before him (Judges 16). Accordingly, Delilah is not a
flattering term for any woman, connotative of both loose sexuality and treacherous, self-serving
motives. Samson, too, has left his mark upon the metaphorical lexicon of the language; as one
might expect, a Samson is a man of remarkable strength, a term as flattering for a male as his
counterpart’s name is unbecoming for a female (this in spite of the fact that as far as Hebrew
judges go, Samson was certainly the least reverent, dishonoring his parents’ wishes in marriage,
killing thirty men on a spiteful whim, and falling into the company of the unsavory Delilah
(Judges 14, 16)).

Even a very briefly-mentioned character may become iconic to the English language. In
the book of Genesis, Methuselah is noted as being nine hundred sixty-nine years old when he
died (Genesis 5:27); for that extraordinary designation his name has come to represent anyone of
extremely advanced years (AHD). Thus a schoolgirl may scornfully regard her aging teacher as
“old as Methuselah” or use the term to refer to her great-grandfather. One feisty blogger,
annoyed that elderly Harry Dean Stanton complained of Republican candidate John McCain’s
advanced years, responded with the vitriolic quip, “John McCain is ‘old and ill,’ says
Methuselah’s undead corpse” (“John McCain”).

“The wisdom of Solomon” is not an unfamiliar concept for the native English speaker
either. The son of King David, Solomon was said to have been given the opportunity to have
anything his heart desired; he chose wisdom as his heaven-sent boon. To reward him for his far-sighted choice, Yahweh also gifted him with those things the typical man would ask for: immense wealth, honor, and a long life (I Kings 3: 5-14). He became well-known and revered for his sound judgment, typified by his wisdom in dealing with the two quarreling prostitutes who brought a child before him, each accusing the other of stealing the boy and substituting her own dead child for the live one. Solomon ordered the boy to be cut in half and one half given to each woman; of course, the true mother protested in horror, while the dishonest woman remained calloused at the prospect (I Kings 3: 16-28). An archetype of wisdom and irreproachable judgment, the name of Solomon brings these qualities immediately to mind: one might refer to the judge responsible for a particularly insightful decision as a Solomon, or lend the term to a thoughtful parent who manages to stem the youthful irresponsibilities of his son.

In a Biblical story of special interest to linguists, the Israelites, in an effort to prevent their enemies, the Ephraimites, from escaping them, forced all strangers to pronounce the word shibboleth. The Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the “sh” sound, thereby betrayed themselves and were slaughtered (Judges 7:4-6). A shibboleth has come to designate any sort of word or sound that distinguishes one as a linguistic “outsider” (AHD). For instance, Dick Leith writes of the much-touted “grammatical error” of using the phrase it’s me rather than the “correct” it’s I: “The pervasiveness of such reasoning can be judged by the fact that people still write about this shibboleth in letters to the press” (Leith 1997: 52). A shibboleth is not merely a deviation from the linguistic norm; it is often a point of pride where the language maven is concerned and may even prompt ridicule toward those who do not adhere to it. Language is often taken quite personally by the native speaker, and while it may not cost ones life to
“mispronounce” a word, it may cost a good impression, respect, or, in some cases, even a job opportunity.

Several place-names have become by-words in modern times. One of these is Babylon, a once-grand city of ancient Mesopotamia. Despite its magnificence, it carried a darker association for the Israelites, who were oppressed by the powerful empire during the 6th century Babylonian exile and abhorred the pagan gods of their captors (“Biblical literature”). Due both to this negative connotation and John’s “Whore of Babylon” from the apocryphal book of Revelation, Babylon, despite its glory among the cities of the ancient world, has retained the negative connotation of scripture, and has spawned such contemporary references as the title of Kenneth Anger’s Hollywood Babylon, wherein he chronicles the depravities, scandals, and wild lifestyles of the city’s most well-known stars.

Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities blotted from the earth in the Old Testament book of Genesis, are also somber additions to the English lexicon. According to scripture, the cities were held in such contempt by Yahweh that he chose to destroy them with fire from heaven; only a few relatives of the highly-favored Abraham were warned in time to escape (Genesis 19: 1-29). Among the crimes for which the city was condemned were violence, rape, and unconventional sexuality, particularly homosexuality; even the two angels sent to judge the city were threatened with sexual violence during their stay. Today a Sodom and Gomorrah might refer to a place considered corrupt and depraved to the extreme, similar to the modern treatment of Babylon: a conservative woman might describe her ill-advised vacation among the casinos of Las Vegas as a “trip to modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah.” Additionally, the term sodomite, a derogatory term for a male homosexual, derives from the Old Testament place-name, as does sodomy, ‘homosexual practices’ (OED).
Babel also takes an unfavorable connotation in the language. Another tale, earlier in Genesis, describes the ambitious project of the early peoples of the earth; they gathered together to build a tower reaching all the way to heaven, The Tower of Babel. Yahweh took note of their displeasing arrogance and determined to foil the plan; this he accomplished through division rather than destruction. Suddenly the builders were thrown into confusion; their language had been shattered to pieces, and the universal tongue was no more. Dividing into groups united by a common dialect, they split into the nations of the world (Genesis 11: 1-8). Now Babel can refer to either a lofty project (particularly a tall edifice) or a great din (OED). For example, “I attended the students’ forum in hopes of benefiting from their tireless study, but was instead treated to the babel of insufferable bores,” or “the grim office towered above me like a Babel that I wished someone had left unfinished.” It is also worth noting that the homophonous noun and verb babble (‘nonsensical speech’ or ‘to speak nonsensically’), although not conclusively of the same origin as Babel, does share strong associations with the Biblical tower (ibid).

Messiah is a word with a strong Judeo-Christian connotation; from the Hebrew term for ‘anointed,’ the Messiah is the deliverer whom the Jews have been awaiting to forever free them from their enemies and establish a lasting Kingdom of God with his triumphant arrival on the earth (AHD). The identity of this Messiah is the point of contention between Judaism and Christianity; while the Jews believe that the arrival of the Messiah is yet to come, Christians hold that Jesus Christ fits the identity of the deliverer foretold in the Hebrew scriptures and that the Kingdom of God is already established. While the term may, therefore, mean different things for different English-speakers, signifying an as yet unknown man for the Jew and Jesus Christ for the Christian (or any person brought up within a predominantly Christian culture), the primary significance is a spiritual one specific to the Judeo-Christian community of believers. However,
the term has broadened in meaning over the years; now it typically refers to any person, spiritual or secular, who is regarded as the liberator of an oppressed subculture (ibid); thus a popular revolutionary figure may be held as the messiah of his nation or an influential civil rights leader the messiah of a downtrodden race or ethnicity. Rock musician David Bowie appealed to this generalized meaning of the word when he referred to his alter ego, Ziggy Stardust, as the “leper messiah” of the marginalized and increasingly rebellious youth of the early 1970’s (Bowie 1972). The term also popped up in recent news when a journalist wrote an article concerning Barack Obama’s trip to the United Kingdom: “He’s not even President, but Obama’s visit to London yesterday was little short of messianic” (“He came, he saw”). The term has also been appropriated by the psychological community, who attribute the messiah complex to individuals with delusional and even dangerous pretentions of supreme power and importance (OED). This diagnosis is often applied to cult leaders who demand that their followers partake in unhealthy and even deadly practices.

Similarly, disciple, which originally referred to one of the twelve New Testament followers of Jesus Christ, now signifies any pupil dedicated to a particular teacher, spiritual or otherwise (ibid). One may declare himself a disciple of a zen master or the founder of a new theory of linguistics. The term may conjure up uneasy cultic connotations through its close association with the semantic spectrum of messiah; the rock opera Tommy goes quite awry shortly after the title character makes the observation that all he touched “now are disciples” (Townshend 1969). Where one finds disciples, a messiah complex may not be far away.

The verb preach, too, once held a strictly religious significance, referring to the delivering of a sermon or spiritual treatise (AHD). By extension, a preacher was ‘one who delivered a sermon.’ However, the definition has since broadened to include the act of
delivering any sort of speech in favor of a specific cause, a preacher being the one who delivers the persuasive speech. Thus a reference to an individual who “preaches abstinence” can lead to ambiguity; is the individual a religious speaker who promotes abstinence for moral purposes, or is he a sex education teacher who champions abstinence as the superior means by which to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease? A religious scientist may be accused of “preaching” creationism in his classroom, the atheist of “preaching” Darwinism. An agnostic may resent the preaching of a priest in a public square, while a young Christian girl may be ruffled when her schoolteacher “preaches at her” for not completing an assignment. With time, the domain of the word and its flexibility within the language have greatly expanded.

This is also true of the term religious. The word first referred to that which pertains to a faith or a deity, particularly that which is considered ‘pious’ and ‘devout’ (OED). One might refer to the Bible as a religious document or to a pure-hearted young man as a religious individual. However, religious has also attained a sense of rigidity and strictness (ibid); thus a child might abhor the “religious” rigor of his mother’s housecleaning, the mother herself confiding in a friend that she relies “religiously” on bleach and Ajax cleanser in her daily housekeeping ritual. And finally, it may be used to express solemnity (ibid), so that an old man may reminisce of the “religious fear” he had of the headmaster of his childhood classroom (incidentally, he might also refer to the childish trepidation as a “holy fear”). It is interesting to note the strong connection between the religious and the frightening or stringent in this semantic shift; such correspondences may be quite revealing to cultural psychology and the deep-rooted emotional reaction which religion invokes from English-speakers, whether they consciously acknowledge such connotations or not.
3.2 Semantic Specialization

The reverse of this semantic broadening trend may also occur; many words with secular origins have attained a specifically religious significance over time. These terms have undergone semantic narrowing, or specialization. While many have retained their former senses, they tend to conjure up religious connotations and are easily understood as pertaining to the spiritual in certain contexts. In some of these cases, as with lord, the introduction and spreading popularity of a new religion to the English-speaking region prompted the appropriation of old terms to illuminate new ideas. Of solid Anglo-Saxon origin, lord (from Old English hlaford) originally referred to the head of the household, the ‘giver of bread,’ and, by extension, ‘the master or leader of a group or clan’ (OED). It is, however, recorded as early as 1000 AD in a specialized context; Lord (with the capital L) may now refer to the Christian God, the old sense of the term applied to the master of all the earth (who is, indeed, invoked in the famous “Lord’s Prayer” to grant the suppliant his “daily bread” (Matthew 6: 11)). While the word now occupies a greater domain of use, applying now to both earthly and heavenly rulers, it has also become specialized, resulting in a term with a specifically religious connotation.

King, too, has a special meaning for the religious English-speaker. From the Anglo-Saxon cyning (Clark Hall 1960), king may also refer specifically to Jesus Christ, as in the phrase King of Kings, often paired with Lord of Lords (Revelation 19: 16). Again, father has come to be closely associated with Yahweh himself, prominent in well-known Christian phrases such as Abba, father (Galatians 4:6) and Our Father, who art in heaven (Matthew 6:9), and evidenced in an opinion letter to USA Today in which the writer, annoyed at a minister columnist’s claim that fathers have few parenting role models scriptures, states that fathers “have another role model: the fountain of love, generosity, patience and perfection. I am also a minister and author, and I
choose to promote my heavenly Father” (Fyle 2008). As with the specialization of lord, it is interesting to find the native English terms grafted into the non-native religious faith; their presence in the religious language suggests the compensation for unfamiliar concepts and entities through the introduction of familiar English terms while establishing a close relationship between the religion and the English-speaking population. The importance of the new faith mandated that the language shift to accommodate it; words bent and forever changed semantically, and their special senses shape our understanding of the words to this day. To sense the difference, one may read a book on an obscure or minority religion, scan through its sacred texts or look over a list of the names of its major deities. It is likely that few of the words will be familiar to the English reader; they will have a “foreign” feel to them, resisting quick memorization and mastery of the unfamiliar discipline. Not so with Christianity; the names themselves will often be familiar simply through English metaphor, as shown in the first part of this chapter; others will be easily accessible through foreknowledge of the English language itself.

Like father, brother and sister attain an additional significance in the context of Christianity. One may refer to his “brothers and sisters in Christ,” extending the biological ties of the original meaning to spiritual kinship through a common faith. The members of a congregation are thus referred to as brethren, a now-archaic term for brotherhood (OED). I remember an amusing occasion on which the ambiguity between the spiritual and literal senses of brother brought about mild confusion during a conversation with a Korean student. The student first told me about his biological family, who still resided in Korea. He shortly thereafter mentioned that he was meeting with his brother that weekend. Confused, I asked him again whether all of his family lived in Korea. He affirmed that they did, and then, sensing my
bafflement, clarified that he was referring to his “church brother,” not the one with whom he shared biological parents.

Sometimes metaphor from the original language of scripture is transplanted into the language of the converted. For instance, *shepherd*, originally signifying the keeper of a herd of domestic animals, was extended to include spiritual protectors of a metaphorical “flock” of believers (ibid). Origins of this special application can be found in scripture, first in the 23rd Psalm of the Old Testament, which contains a poetic prayer wherein one finds the famous lines:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul* (Psalm 23: 1-3).

In the gospel of John, Jesus refers to himself as “the good shepherd” (John 10: 11), the vigilant protector of his followers; the metaphor surfaces in Matthew as well, where Jesus tells the parable of the “lost sheep” who will be carefully sought out by its master (Matthew 18: 12-14), just as the wandering sinner will be sought out by his savior. By extension, a *pastor*, originally one who looked after flocks, now almost exclusively refers to a person who leads a congregation (AHD). This running metaphor can lead to humorous, if irreverent, jokes, prompting Bertie Wooster’s quip, “What, shearing time again?” when a dubious curate informs Wooster that he must “return to his flock” (*Pearls Mean Tears*).

The original, literal meaning of *anointed*, ‘smeared or rubbed with any unctuous matter,’ has morphed into the spiritualized ‘consecrated or sacred’ with time (AHD). This is most likely an extension of the traditional practice of pouring oil on the head of a person as part of a sacred rite; as opposed to the common phenomenon of religious words becoming metaphorical for the secular, it seems the secular in this case serves as metaphor for the religious. By this specialization of meaning, a missionary might be described as “anointed by God” to his vocation,
or even referred to as simply “anointed.” An example of this use can be found on a Christian writer’s personal website, where the term is used continually in a strictly spiritual sense: “Who are the anointed of God? They are those who follow Christ, who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit! ALL Christians, not just ministers and leaders, are God’s anointed[…]. If you are a believer, a follower of Christ, then God has anointed YOU and given YOU authority” (Gibson 2000).

Blood, too, serves as a religious metaphor; typically signifying the specialized tissues that transport oxygen and nutrients to the cells of the body, to a large segment of the population blood often refers specifically to that of Jesus Christ (OED). Strongly associated with the gory execution that Christians believe atoned for their sins and sealed their futures in paradise, blood has come to represent the means of their spiritual salvation through sacrifice. Thus, one may hear Christians employ poetic phrases such as “saved by the blood” and “washed in the blood” with regard to their religious faith. This semantic narrowing has occurred to an even greater extent with regards to cross, which, to a great number of English-speakers, refers not only to the instrument of execution implemented by the Romans in the time of Christ, but particularly to the very one on which the prophet was put to death (thereby becoming invested with all the emotions the speaker invests in the historical event) (ibid).

Taken on a case-by-case basis, some cases of semantic shift may provide tantalizing glimpses into the underlying cultural values that shape the ever-shifting semantic value of the words. A Jezebel is not just any unethical woman; specifically, it is a negative term for a woman who wears cosmetics, or one who is “unnaturally” willful. While the social mores governing the acceptability of makeup in everyday use may have shifted over the years, the lingering significance reminds the speaker of the days when a woman would be looked down upon for
wearing lipstick or rouge. It also implies the importance of personal appearance with regard to a woman’s reputation, the stigmas that haunted women whose appearance suggested sexual availability or self-determination, and the standards of sexual purity to which women were held during the heyday of this particular meaning of the term. Indeed, the variety of Biblical terms referring to women of poor moral standards—Jezebel, Delilah, and even to an extent Mary Magdalene—are notable when compared to the lack of stigmatized male names. After all, Samson might be said to have done much worse: not only did he take a notable interest in the female sex, but he was also known for disobeying his parents, killing needlessly, and squandering his God-given strength. Yet Sampson conjures up largely positive connotations: virility, power, and incredible physical feats. Solomon, too, when he was not making insightful judgments, spent a good deal of time among his enormous retinue wives and concubines, and, like Ahab, was lead to displease Yahweh by joining his darlings in idol-worship. Even so, his name is spared negative connotation and linguistic slander. Are these the logical products of the merger of two patriarchal societies, those of the Hebrews and the Anglo-Saxons? Perhaps so. The analysis of semantic patterns may provide one with hints into the underlying attitudes of one’s culture, or it may confirm what one expected all along.

As a whole, the heavy presence of religious terminology in the everyday language of the English-speaker is noteworthy, expanding greatly from its status as scholarly terminology at the time of the Roman missionaries to a lexicon easily accessible to the general population of native speakers (Kittredge & Greenough 1935). It is a largely mutual relationship: the wider language is enriched by the Judeo-Christian imagery, the religious terminology enhanced through the extension of pre-existing English words. While one cannot determine a speaker’s religious beliefs by merely counting the number of spiritual references in her language, one may gain
insight to the history of the language itself and the cultural forces that have shaped it.

Conversely, one may learn something of the culture by analyzing the nature of its influence on
the language. That which is valued by society will not escape its language: it will be spoken
about, spoken often and heatedly, and eventually sink into the speech itself.

The examples thus far of this revealing linguistic evolution have, however, neglected one
very important aspect of the language: subversive or provocative speech. There are a handful of
verbal themes that burst from an individual’s mouth at times of extreme excitement, provocation,
or dismay: those of sexuality, excretion, and religion. An anguished cry of *god damn it* rarely a
pious invocation that God send a wicked entity to its just rewards, nor is a disgruntled *Jesus* a
prayer for divine assistance. Indeed, while some speakers may utter these blasphemies out of
almost subconscious emotional stimulation, others may choose to consciously use what they
know to be offensive and irreverent language to express their emotions and personal values.
How do English-speakers subvert the socially-acceptable uses of religious words to express
ideas, and why is this done? What does the untouchable status of certain religious terms tell us
about the language-speaking population? What does the profanity of the irreverent reveal about
them? This will be the topic of the next chapter on the presence and function of religious
terminology in the English language.
Words as units of semantic value may be arranged in an incredible number of combinations for the purpose of human communication and expression of thought. Mathematician Alfred Korzybski felt that there was another, sinister side to English semantics and the “meaning” of words. In his ambitious 1933 publication, *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski argued that the Aristotelian mindset of Western civilization had bequeathed to modern society a form of superstition imprinted in its very language: the belief that words were somehow equal to objects (Korzybski [1933] 1994).

To summarize a complex and elegant theory, Korzybski’s thesis centered on the [mis]use of what he called “the *is* of identity,” a verb practically unavoidable in everyday English speech. In his own words, “Whatever we *handle* is unspeakable; yet we *say* ‘this *is* a pencil’ which is unconditionally false to facts, because the object appears as an absolute individual and is *not* words. Thus our [semantic relations] are at once trained in delusional values, which must be pathological” (Korzybski [1933] 1994: 35). This particular use of *is* descends from the Aristotelian doctrine that every subject must have a predicate (that everything *is* something else), which leads to the objectification of the unspeakable and the elementalism of non-concrete ideas, such as color and taste. It is nonsensical, Korzybski would argue, to say that a leaf *is* green; greenness does not exist as a tangible entity (Korzybski [1933] 1994). Rather, we perceive the light reflecting off the leaf as green in hue; some people, namely, the colorblind, will not perceive the leaf as green in hue at all. Their eyes interpret the light data differently than those of the general population.
Korzybski called the Aristotelian manner of speech infantile and primitive, arguing that the illogic imbedded in the language could result in serious harm to the speaker molded by its nuances and trapped in its backward paradigm. Words became objects, which in turn became superstitions in the guise of logic and “common sense.” “Mere similarities were evaluated as identities, primitive syllogisms were built of the type: ‘stags run fast, some primitive Indians run fast, some Indians are stags,’” Korzybski writes, taking the phenomenon to its absurd limit (Korzybski [1933] 1994: 403).

4.1 Linguistic Piety

A taboo topic may represent matter that is held in either an explicitly or subtly awful regard. In ancient times, the Hebrew word for God, \textit{YHVH} or \textit{Yahweh}, could only be spoken by priests on Yom Kippur in the chamber holding the ark of the covenant; at all other times a Jew would refer to God as \textit{hashem}, “the name” (Pinker 2007: 19). This is not an unusual linguistic practice; Frazer includes the names of gods under his section on taboo in \textit{The Golden Bough}, suggesting that many cultures prohibit the speaking a deity’s name from a primitive belief that a personal name is directly linked to an entity’s power (Frazer 1951: 302). This conviction corresponds closely with Korzybski’s idea that a good many linguistic choices are motivated from the conditioned belief that \textit{words} “are” \textit{things} (Korzybski [1933] 1994). The severity of the Hebrew reverence for the name of \textit{YHVH} may seem foreign and bizarre to the typical English-speaker, but linguistic piety is by no means a thing of the past. There are a wide variety of “colorful” words that an English-speaker may choose to employ or avoid depending on social context and personal taste. Steven Pinker refers to the abrupt conversational turns to “sexuality, excretion, or religion” (Pinker 2007: 18) that comprise common English profanity in his book on language and its link to human nature.
Why is it, for instance, that English-speakers do not allow for a polite transitive verb for sex, choosing instead to rely upon a network of euphemism and metaphor? It is acceptable to speak of “making love,” “having sex,” or “engaging in intercourse,” but the transitive verb to fuck is one of the most abhorred of the canon of English profanity, no matter how inoffensive or clinical the speaker’s intentions may be. One may refer to the act of human intercourse with impunity so long as it is done indirectly; to speak plainly of sexuality is an almost unforgivable faux pas. This instance of linguistic Puritanism pales in comparison, however, to the delicacy of Victorian ladies, who blushed to speak of a piano’s “legs” and referred to them instead as “limbs” (OED).

One could cite the society’s value system and sense of propriety as the sole reason for this squeamishness for words; however, there seems to be a deeper level to the avoidance of certain terms. Consider the relatively mild expletive, ass. It can be used in this context either to indicate a person’s posterior, from Old English ars, ‘buttocks’ (as in, “I kicked him in the ass”) or to label him a ridiculous or contemptible individual, from Old English assa, ‘a donkey’ (an insult Shakespeare puns on marvelously after Nick Bottom’s bestial transformation in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (MND III: I)). Perhaps because of the homophonous etymological origin of the terms, they are condensed into a single profane expression for most English speakers; ass is considered rude at best and downright unacceptable in many settings, regardless of whether it refers to the buttocks or foolish behavior (it would never do to drop the word in front of a customer or a friend’s small child). However, the word is easily replaced by a slew of “clean” and neutral terms: bottom, behind, and rear end, to name a few (say, “I kicked him in the bottom” and the listener may question your sense of decorum, but not your speech). The same
holds true in the other sense of the word. Consider the following two statements, in which *ass* is used to signify ‘a contemptible individual:’

1. My brother is an ass.
2. My brother is a fool.

In the first statement I would offend the squeamish listener merely by using the word. I might also challenge his regard for my brother, a second reason for the listener to take offense. In the second statement, the same listener would only be offended if the second reason for taking offense applied: that is, that he had a certain fondness or respect for my brother. The choice of words, although essentially the same in meaning, could make the difference between offending the listener and merely giving information. It is not the idea that is distasteful, but the word itself.

Now let’s consider religious words as oaths. Geoffrey Hughes defines blasphemy as “the contemptuous use of religious symbols or names, either by swearing or abuse” (Hughes 2006: 31). The frivolous use of weighty religious terms or themes is no new development; the use of *zounds*, a euphemism for ‘God’s wounds,’ is recorded as early as 1600 A.D. (OED), and *God* can be found in an exclamatory sense as far back as 1340 A.D. (ibid) (these, of course, are only written records; the words must have existed earlier, perhaps much earlier, than the written instances). In his essay on American profanity, H. L. Mencken cites the unpublished “A Dictionary of Profanity and Its Substitutes” by M. R. Walter, wherein the author provides a long list of variations on common blasphemies; these include *Jesus H. Christ, Jesus H. Particular Christ, holy jumping Jesus, Jesus Christ and his brother Harry, ke-rist, and G. Rover Cripes* for *Christ* and *Jesus Christ* (Mencken 1944: 244). While some instances of religious profanity may seem whimsical and even humorous to English-speakers for their wordiness or eccentricity, most
of these terms would be considered offensive to the religious speaker; the careless use of the
divine name is considered blasphemy by adherents to the faith, a blatant disregard of the Third
Commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:7).
Compare this to the strict ban on even speaking God’s name by the ancient Jews, and suddenly
the age-old taboo is not quite as foreign as one might think. To cite a recent example, John
Lennon’s “The Ballad of John and Yoko” was banned from radio play in the U. S. due to the
repeated irreverent use of Christ in the famous chorus: “Christ, you know it ain’t easy / You
know how hard it can be / The way things are going / They’re gonna crucify me” (Lennon 1969).
The song was described by miffed listeners as “‘profane,’ ‘sacrilegious,’ ‘offensive,’ and
generally ‘objectionable’” (Fong-Torres 1969). Of course, it did not help that Lennon had
already stepped on sensitive listeners’ toes with his blasphemous 1966 comment, “We’re more
popular than Jesus now” (speaking of himself and the other three members of The Beatles)
(“John Lennon”).

A good many other words pertaining to Christian religious dogma feature as English
profanity. Damn, a verb referring to a sinner’s fate of eternal torment in the fires of hell, has
long existed as an English taboo term. It takes its origins from Latin damnare, a word with
implications of legal rather than spiritual punishment (Hughes 2006: 116). The word has lost
much of its original power through the secularization of society; if one does not fear eternal
damnation, the suggestion that one ought to go to a seemingly mythical place of torment carries
considerably less sting than it would for one who reverently believes in the danger of such a fate
(ibid).¹ Many contemporary English-speakers do, however, believe in the horrors of eternal
punishment as foretold in Christian scripture, and damn continues to hold its taboo status in

¹ This calls to mind C. S. Lewis’s comment to the effect that moderns need not congratulate themselves for their
moral progress in not burning witches when they do not believe that witches exist (Lewis [1952] 2003).
contemporary English speech in many forms (damn it or dammit, god-damn, and give a damn,\(^2\) to name a few). Similarly, hell and devil retain their place as taboo terminology by means of their frightening religious associations and often function in the same way as damn through acerbic phrases such as go to the devil and go to hell. Timothy Jay distinguishes between two uses of religious profanity, one in which the speaker of the curse apparently wishes a specific evil (namely, being sent to hell) upon the person who has provoked him, and another in which a deity’s name (Jesus or God) is invoked, apparently in order that divine retribution might be brought upon the wrong-doer (Jay 1992). This corresponds with Frazier’s (1951) taboo religious terms marked by the belief that a deity’s name is inherently powerful; it also implies a lack of respect for the deity in that this presumed power is brashly intruded upon, typically for trivial purposes (and is a clear breach the Third Commandment’s stipulation that one never misuse the name of God).

What makes the modern taboo really interesting is the network of words that exist in order to cheat it. Wherever a blasphemous term exists, a euphemism has been created to replace it. Not only does the very existence of these mild expletives indicate the terror people have of committing pure blasphemy, but it also indicates the very real power that they attribute to words themselves. Mencken provides an excerpt of Walter’s list of euphemisms for profanity, which include land, law, and lawks for Lord; gosh, golly, guns, good grief, great Scott, and gum for God; gee, geez, jiminy, Jehosaphat, gee-whiz, and gee-whittaker for Jesus; cripes, crickey, and Christmas for Christ; and Jiminy-cricket, Judas Priest, and Judas Christopher for Jesus Christ (Mencken 1944). These little exclamatory words and phrases provide an emotional outlet while remaining “quaint” and “clean,” almost comically so (an internet search of the phrase “good

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\(^2\) Film buffs are familiar with producer David O. Selznik’s decision to retain Clark Gabel’s famous, if risqué, line in the 1939 film “Gone With the Wind”: “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn” (at a cost of $5,000 for breaching Production Code) (Hughes 2006: 117).
grief,” in fact, produces many a reference to Charles Schultz’s beloved comic strip pessimist, Charlie Brown). Combined with other terms and euphemisms, one is supplied with a variety of humorous and – above all – safe exclamations often associated with goody-goodies and television shows from the 1950’s: gee-golly, gosh-darn, gee whiz, and the like (journalist Hunter S. Thompson exploits the absurdity of these half-oaths in his parody of a panel of drug experts at a convention in Las Vegas: “Gosh darn that fiendish LSD!” (Thompson 1996)). Polite replacements for hell exist as well in terms such as heck, blazes, Sam Hill, Hades, and thunder (Hughes 2006: 227); of course, damn is not to be used lightly either, but may be easily changed for darn, dang, blast, blame, and bother (Mencken 1944: 243). Additionally, the word itself may be printed with a portion replaced by a dash or asterisks, as Mencken observed in a printing of his own spoken observation that “American grammar is fast going to h–l” (ibid).

Let’s now return to one of the major tenants of modern linguistics: the arbitrary nature of a phonetic pattern’s semantic value. No word is invested with an inherent meaning; applied to the instances of religious euphemism, one is led to wonder: is it the act of disrespecting a deity that the faithful abhor, or the blatant use of taboo phonetic patterns? If dummy words such as gosh and gee did not exist in good social standing among the general population, one might come to the conclusion that main evil in blasphemy lies in the abuse of a divine figure’s linguistic representation; in effect, that by throwing around the holy name, a person is expressing contempt for the holy itself. This may very well be the case; however, by allowing for other, slightly-altered phonetic patterns to replace the revered words and be used in the precise context in which the original word would have been used blasphemously, those who condone the practice also reveal a very real reverence for the phonetic pattern itself. Take, for instance, the following set of sentences:
(1) Jesus, I’m hungry.

(2) Gee, I’m hungry.

The only difference between the pair of sentences lies in one little syllable: the sus missing at the end of gee. However, the two statements fall on far-removed ends of the spectrum of social acceptability. Bolinger addresses this odd inconsistency in “Profanity and Social Sanction,” noting that while the Bible warns against “strong language,” he observes that few Christians balk at exclaiming My Lord, Jumpin’ Jehosaphat, or Judas Priest, concluding that the pious are “concerned with what society for the time chooses to ignore as unmentionable; they depend more upon the superstitions of the period[…] than upon any literal meaning” (Bolinger 1938: 153-154).

It is important to remember that these rules of blasphemy etiquette are not an inclusive, isolated phenomenon among the religious alone. Anyone and everyone may use the euphemisms – or their unadulterated forms – in daily speech. Everyone participates in this cultural philosophy of phonetic value and power, whether consciously or not. Remember the banning of John Lennon’s song; it was not a devout or religious organization that made this decision: quite the contrary. Even among the mainstream media, certain codes of religious reverence, at least as far as mere words are concerned, are recognized. In fact, in 1968 an El Paso radio station banned Bob Dylan’s albums from airplay, not because of any particularly offensive lyrics, but because his often incoherent vocals might contain profanity of some kind (Freemusepedia). The sensitive English-speaker’s terror of using or even overhearing a taboo term, whether it refers to sex, God, or bodily functions, rivals any “backward” tradition of an exotic society or subculture; indeed, Americans take linguistic purity so seriously that laws exist to keep public airwaves “clean” of any offending profanity, complete with hefty fines for offenders and amendments to prevent loopholes that might allow unseemly words to slip into a broadcast (Pinker 2007: 360).
It is not the purpose of this paper to determine whether these patterns are a perfectly healthy aspect of human nature or the result of harmful and primitive superstition; however, Korzybski’s keen observations certainly ring true with regard to the study of religious blasphemy and taboo. Beneath the reverence represented by careful use of a holy name lies a sort of awe – even a fear – of the phonetic form which it has taken, to the point that the phonetic form need merely be altered in order to pass the test of reverence. These replacement words attempt to legitimize up a deep-seated instinct to revert to religion, among other very basic themes, in instances of extreme emotional flux.

4.2 Subversive Language

If substitute profanity indicates an attempt to “clean up” the instinctive reference to fundamental themes in times of great emotional stimulation, the choice not to mask these words presents a paradox of sorts: the individual responds to the instinct to revert to religion, while at the same time defying the cultural taboos to which his unconscious mind leapt at the moment of excitement. The reflex to a verbal emotional outlet is much the same as any English-speaker’s, but there is an added touch, a slight lack of constraint (or, perhaps, an added touch of expression). The careful speaker, when excited or provoked, may respond with a hearty, “dang it!”; another pulls no stops, but boldly exclaims “God dammit!” Of course, this speaks for only a portion of religious profanity; artistic blasphemy cannot assign part of the blame to instinct and provocation. John Lennon’s repetitive use of Christ was no slip of the tongue; the lyrics of “The Ballad of John and Yoko” were penned with the same deliberate artistry that any song would require. Neither does Jack Kerouac shy away from any profanity where his characters are concerned, giving them such colorful expressions as “Them goddam cops can’t put no flies on my ass” (Kerouac 1957) and “by God, it is Monterey (Kerouac 1962).” Similarly, Thompson
does not avoid religious oaths in his own autobiographical writings: “O Christ, I thought, he’s
gone around the bend…Jesus! Did I just say that?” (Thompson 1996)

The conclusion one draws from the instances cited are, admittedly, self-evident; one who
does not particularly value societal rules of etiquette will not go to lengths to avoid blaspheming
it. In fact, they may draw attention to the point by consciously not utilizing the softer, socially-
acceptable euphemisms available. The fact that this flaunting of linguistic taboos is often found
among individuals whose values lie outside traditional, conservative morality suggests that their
motives may extend to a desire to annoy the conventional segment of society. As journalist and
Catholic philosopher G. K. Chesterton noted, “Sooner or later a man deliberately sets himself to
do the most disgusting thing he can think of…It is artificial and even artistic; a sort of art for
art’s sake. Men do not do it because they do not think it horrible; but, on the contrary, because
they do think it is horrible” (Chesterton 1953: 119). In Forbidden Words, Allan and Burridge
contradict Freud’s claim that taboos “have no grounds and are of unknown origin,” asserting
that, rather, taboos, whether pertaining to sexuality, religion, or bodily functions, arise in the
event that an individual’s acts may “cause discomfort, harm, or injury to him/herself and to
others” (Allan & Burridge 2006). They are, in a sense, an unspoken social contract, the deep-
seated laws by which polite society agrees to abide for its own well-being; thus the aura of the
forbidden concerning female genitalia suggests a reverence for the mysteries of reproduction
with which they are associated, avoidance of religious names a fear of perceived spiritual peril
(ibid). By ignoring or even deliberately violating linguistic taboos and refusing to avoid certain
terms considered offensive by “polite” society, the blasphemer may not necessarily attain the
status of a rebel, but he is certainly thought rude. And, Allan and Burridge propose, this is most
likely the entire point. “There are probably people who don’t swear; but you can bet they have
passive knowledge of almost all swear words. Everyone knows how to insult. With insulting, the in-group is defined by the use of ritual insults (Allan & Burridge 2006: 89).” Cursing not only provides an outlet for aggression through insult and emotional expression, but, whatever the context of its use, serves as a sort of bonding ritual, shared indulgence in “antisocial” verbal behavior. As Jay (1992) stated, the role of religious profanity is, largely, to express contempt, either through ill-wishes concerning the subject’s eternal fate or frivolous appeals to divinities for retribution. While the blasphemer may or may not mean any particular disrespect toward the gods, he certainly harbors ill-will toward the object of his verbal wrath.

In addition to the free use of religious profanity, is the peculiar tendency among linguistic subcultures to attribute positive connotations to previously negative words. This occurs heavily among slang terms: take, for instance, the use of bad to mean exactly the opposite, ‘good’ (OED): “That’s one bad motorcycle,” or, in conjunction with profanity, “he’s one bad motherfucker.” In the second of these examples, even the normally negative slur attains a positive meaning with the addition of bad, shifting from expressing disdain through obscenity to a sort of reverent awe (the same method is used by the apparel company “One Bad Bitch,” which markets to female motorcycle riders who “are not afraid to take on challenges[…]and are liberated in their quest for adrenaline” (One Bad Bitch)). Likewise, wicked can be used colloquially in a positive sense; this term has even stronger moral connotations, signifying that which openly defies righteousness (OED). Examples of this use include “that’s one wicked motorcycle,” “we’ll have a wicked good time,” and blogger Nate Welch’s claim to “making the web wicked awesome since 1996” (Welch 2008). Sick, a designator for both physical and moral debility, functions much the same as wicked and bad (OED): “He showed us some real sick records he dug up at the second-hand store.” Even dope, originally a term for an addictive illegal
drug, has found a positive connotation among the slang of musical subculture (ibid): “The opening band at the show last night was really dope; we’re asking them to play at the club next month.”

Why this paradoxical play on words? The answer may lie in the defiance of standard semantic designations: that which wider society considers positive becomes negative (or, in the case of religious slurs, disrespected), while that which is negative is re-assigned a positive semantic value. This sort of linguistic contrariness is prominent in the re-claiming of slurs by the despised minority. Consider *queer*, a derogatory term for a homosexual; originally used to demean people of a certain lifestyle, it underwent cultural reclamation beginning in the 1960’s, shifting from a negative to increasingly neutral connotation and featuring in university programs such as “Queer Theory” and “Queer Studies” (Hughes 2006). Similarly, the rebellious musical movement of the 1970’s, punk rock, took its name from a negative term for a delinquent or sexually-exploited young man (ibid). The most controversial instance of the cultural reclamation of a negative term is that of *nigger*; among African Americas, the term may be used in a positive sense as an inclusive self-referential name (OED).³ The key word here is “inclusive;” used by whites as a derogatory slur for centuries before the gradual emancipation of blacks and restoration of basic human dignity and civil rights to the long-exploited community, it is perhaps the most taboo of taboo words among the wide English lexicon of unsavory terms, a linguistic stigma played upon by author Jabari Asim (2007) in the title of his book *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn’t, And Why*. The hands-off status of the word was made very plain to white poet and rock musician Patti Smith, who sought to help along the reclamation of the slur in her song “Rock N Roll Nigger”; despite the fact that she attempted to break the stigma of the word

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, in fact, does not even allow for this use, listing only three definitions, all of them “offensive” and “disparaging” (AHD).
by attributing it to “Jimi Hendrix…Jesus Christ and Grandma too” (Smith 1978), the song was not altogether favorably received, prompting critic Dave Marsh’s assessment: “Smith doesn’t understand the word’s connotation, which is not outlawry but a particular kind of subjugation and humiliation that’s antithetical to her motives” (Ruhlmann 1008). No matter what the motive of its use, the word is absolutely off-limits where the wider, non-African-American culture is concerned.

This is, in fact, the shortcoming of every subculture’s reclamation of its own demeaning slurs. While its use among community members can be entirely benign and even aid in the building of solidarity, the instant the word is used with hostile or even friendly intent by a speaker outside the community, the spell is broken. “The use of such words,” writes Sapir of special familiar terms, “at once declares the speaker a member of an unorganized but psychologically real group…The extraordinary importance of minute linguistic differences for the symbolization of psychologically real as contrasted with politically or sociologically official groups is intuitively felt by most people” (Sapir 1962: 17). Hughes (2006) notes that while queer is an acceptable form of self-reference among homosexuals, it still considered derogatory when used by outsiders to the community. Similarly, young slang-users may assert their defiance of mainstream cultural values through a topsy-turvy re-assignment of semantic values, but this practice is fulfilling only within the subculture; teenagers may enjoy describing favored entities in terms of morally-negative words, but it may not soften the blow of accusations that their behavior and values are “bad,” “wicked,” or even “sick.”

While English-speaking youth and marginalized subcultures may subvert the meanings of religiously-charged words through the ironic assignment of the opposite sense to its positive or negative counterpart, the “respectable” segment of society has its own re-assessment of certain
spiritual terms. In many ways, these specialized designations are more lasting and powerful than those of the slang-speakers; they may be more subtle, but they also tend to creep into a word’s meaning, growing like weeds in the word’s semantic garden and slowly choking out the original connotation of the term. Take, for instance, the word *sanctimonious*. Originally denoting that which is set aside and holy, it quickly attained a double-meaning of religious hypocrisy: the outer display of piousness toward selfish ends (OED). *Pious*, too, carries a sense of self-styled holiness; even the relatively neutral verb *to preach* can take on an unflattering sense when it is used to indicate an overbearing tirade or unwanted advice (not to mention its use in the age-old warning against the lure of hypocrisy: “Practice what you preach”) (ibid). *Pharisee* carries a heavily negative connotation through the Hebrew teachers’ role in the persecution and death of Jesus Christ after he challenged their religious hypocrisy and misuse of their spiritual authority. These extended uses do not entirely limit the positive and neutral senses of the words, but their existence does indicate a certain wariness and mistrust of religious authority and outward appearance of holiness. The English-speaking community may be no strangers to religious devotion and the more inspiring aspects of spirituality, but they are no one’s fools, either.

Religious oaths and semantically-subverted religious terms, then, reveal much about the language-speaking community. The very existence of blasphemous terms speaks both of a deep-seated sense of religious awe – a belief in the power of words themselves – and a will to flaunt this societal reverence. The power lies in the phonetic patterns themselves; blasphemous words and phrases can be neutralized with the simple substitution of one sound for another or through sound deletion (*darn* for *damn*, *heck* for *hell*, *gee* for *Jesus*). While religious oaths are often a result of a sudden shock or provocation, the calculated, artistic use of the words suggests the distinction of counterculture through linguistic expression. Furthermore, the re-assignment of
positive meanings to formerly negative religious connotations – and vice versa – serves to emphasize the dissonance among language speakers with regard to acceptable behavior: slang terms often indicate the bold reclamation of slurs and insults, a thumbing of the nose at the disapproval of cultural authority, while the subtle negative connotations given formerly positive terms suggests a wider distrust and hesitation to take at face value the infallibility of cultural authority figures. Through the study of the ever-changing semantic value of religious terms, one begins to gather a wider sense of its significance in society – all facets of society, no matter how isolated or disenfranchised – and of the real power of words in the establishment of cultural identity.
The previous chapters have covered a wide range of influence that religious terms have had on the English language throughout its development, from the contributions of missionaries to the turns of speech introduced through subcultural slang. There is certainly no simplistic way to address the relationship between the religious aspect of culture and the English language, nor to fully explain the deep psychological processes that lead language-speakers to hold words of any sort in awe or disdain. I will, however, return to the questions posed at the beginning of the paper; I hope, through the wide range of linguistic inquiry in the previous chapters, that the significance of culture to language – and language to the native speaking population – may now emerge.

The first step to gauge the influence of religious speech in the English language – and the cultural information that the words may impart – comes in a study of its etymology. Through a short survey of the history of the English language we see first how the cultural interactions that have shaped the English-speaking population may be traced through the linguistic artifacts present in the lexicon. Through a sampling of English religious terminology – or of a great many other jargons, for that matter – one finds a variety of linguistic representatives: Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Latin, French, and even Hebrew. In these etymological specimens one may discern an outline of the history of the English people: the primary invasion of the Romans, the interactions with the Vikings, the arrival of Roman missionaries, the Norman Invasion. The large proportion of loan words in the English religious lexicon indicates Christianity’s initial status as a foreign religion on the island, as well as the familiarity of interacting cultures with the faith that would
find a home in the English isle. Furthermore, one may deduce the wider influence of religious activity on the language, particularly through the influence of the Roman missionaries’ language on secular aspects of the culture, namely education.

Of course, words do not remain the same once introduced to the language. They shift in meaning, taking on specialized definitions and even acquiring metaphorical significance. This is largely a linguistic game of give-and-take; religious terms broaden to take on secular meanings, while secular terms are specialized into terms with a religious connotation. Broadening is represented through the expansion (messiah, Judas) or specialization (blood, shepherd) of semantic content. Patterns in semantic shift – from the connection between terror and God to the conspicuity of Biblical metaphor for “fallen women” – provide tantalizing glimpses into the psychology of the speaking population and its relationship with the prominent religious faith.

After exploring the history locked in the etymology of the English language alongside the development that has produced the contemporary realizations of religiously-themed English words, one may finally consider contemporary trends in language usage. Through the slang of English-speaking subcultures, one may discern a clever method of subversion through the attribution of positive meaning to formerly negative terms (bad as ‘good’ and wicked as ‘excellent’); furthermore, the pronounced use of religious words as blasphemous oaths may contribute to the effect of linguistic rebellion against cultural standards of decency. The very power of taboo words in the English language suggests an awe of words themselves; to utter an impious oath is a serious matter, so much so that phonetically-altered euphemisms abound for easy, inoffensive substitution in times of excitement and provocation and laws exist to prevent the casual use of unwanted speech in public media.
Let us now return to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. One interpretation suggests that the speaker molds the language through the choices he makes concerning its everyday use; this is evident in the semantic change of religious terms, whether expanding to secular domains or originating in previously non-religious terms. Human creativity stretches the meanings of words through semantic shift; furthermore, human motive influences the way in which religious terms are used, whether with reverence or in contempt. Even in taboo and profanity, deeply-embedded cultural phenomena that tap directly into the subconscious (as evident through the semi-reflexive utterances of profanity), still afford the speaker choice; some speakers may fight the urge to blaspheme in distress (often marked by substituting “safe” expletives for strong profanity), while others override the culturally-enforced horror of taboo.

However, linguistic determinism and relativity are not without evidence. The very existence of taboo language and the notion that a little phonological quibbling can neutralize an otherwise “dangerous” word or phrase indicates a very real cultural conditioning and the determination of certain societal fears and values enforced by the workings of the native language. The linguistic atmosphere into which a language-speaker is born, with its system of “clean” and “unclean” phonetic patterns, serves as a re-enforcer of the cultural values embedded in this system and will shape the psychology of the speaker, whether he ultimately decides to conform to these linguistic standards or not. The very choice to flaunt one’s contempt for taboo is a form of acknowledging both its existence and importance to English-speaking society (As Chesterton noted, people do not say horrible things because they do not consider them horrible: quite the opposite). Furthermore, the ideas passed down through Biblical references – for instance, the high volume of pejorative terms for “loose” women as compared to the lack of such terms for promiscuous men – may also serve to re-enforce cultural values. Again, the
application is two-fold: language-speakers choose to define certain characters in terms of their sexual activity and perceived deviance, while later generations may find that these terms have become engrained in the language to such an extent that they set the tone for their own perceptions of gender relations and a woman’s “proper” place.

Language, then, is more than a tool for the purposes of communication. Although it would be difficult to overstate the importance of the language in daily human interaction, it may also serve as a record of a culture’s history and a revealing psychological profile. Through the study of the history of the English language with respect to its religious terminology, one may trace the interactions of the English-speaking people and the cultures that have influenced its spiritual development. Furthermore, through the development and shifting domain of the religious lexicon, one may begin to sketch the role of the religious aspect of culture on language, as well as the role of the English language on the psychological make-up of the native speaking population. The further study of patterns within the religious lexicon may easily reveal finer points of the culture and the beliefs that have shaped the mindset of the English-speaking population; the fruits of this etymological study are practically limitless, and it is my hope that further research concerning the strong ties between language, culture, and thought will continue to provide revealing and useful data on the human mind and psychological profile. The better we understand ourselves, the wiser and more informed our decisions and future actions must become; beyond the simple achievement of communication of thought, one may hope for more thoughtful, well-informed interactions: the best of all possible worlds, the words with which to communicate an idea and a frame of mind best suited to make use of them.
APPENDIX

SEMANTIC CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS TERMS
The following is a chart of the data set analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4. The column to the right of each definition indicates the sense in which that definition is considered: $R$ refers to religious, $S$ to secular, $P$ to profanity, and $A$ to ambiguous. $A$ is indicated in the Expanded meaning(s) column when the Original meaning(s) column contains both religious and secular senses; it is not clear whether the religious or secular sense of the word was used first in the English language. This is common among loan words, which may have been introduced into the language as both theological and secular terms (see atonement, catholic). Despite the ambiguity with regard to semantic shift, these words are representative of the widespread interaction between the religious and secular lexicons and have been included for that reason. Concerning words with Anglo-Saxon origins, the earliest etymological sense is considered the original, even if both religious and secular senses are found fairly close together in written recordings (this takes into account the lack of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon written records: see blood, lord, father). For specific dates, original etymologies, and the general chronology of each word’s meanings, I have consulted the Oxford English Dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Original meaning(s)</th>
<th>Expanded meaning(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adam</td>
<td>R the first created human being (Genesis 1)</td>
<td>S primevally old or, in the phrase “not to know from Adam,” which means ‘not to recognize someone’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advent</td>
<td>R the religious season preceding the Nativity</td>
<td>S an important arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angel</td>
<td>R a divine messenger</td>
<td>S a kind or gracious individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anointed</td>
<td>S smeared with an unctuous matter</td>
<td>R consecrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annunciation</td>
<td>R church event commemorating the</td>
<td>S the act of publically proclaiming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostate</td>
<td>one who forsakes his religious faith or moral conviction (1340)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostle</td>
<td>a messenger, in the context of Jesus's apostles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ark</td>
<td>a chest or box (from Old English <em>arc</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascension</td>
<td>the ascent of Jesus into heaven 40 days after his resurrection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assumption</td>
<td>the Virgin Mary’s reception into heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atonement</td>
<td>reaching harmony with another after strife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babel</td>
<td>the tower described in Genesis which was to reach to the heavens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babylon</td>
<td>the grand capitol of the Chaldee Empire, in the context of the Hebrew captivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bead</td>
<td>a prayer (from Old English <em>bedu</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bible</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blessed</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>consecrated by God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S happy or fortunate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blood</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>red liquid that circulates in the vessels and arteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brother</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>male son of shared parents (from Old English bróðor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cain</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the first child of Biblical Adam and Eve who killed his brother, Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casting the first stone</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from John 8:7, when Jesus said that the member of a vigilante crowd who was without sin could throw the first stone at a captured adulteress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catholic</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R pertaining to the Catholic church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choir</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>group of singers in a religious (especially Christian) context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a follower of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communion</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>the state of sharing or holding in common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R fellowship among members of a church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or, the meal shared among Christians commemorating Christ’s sacrifice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congregation</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a Christian gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S any sizeable collection of persons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consecrate</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to set aside for a deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>convert (v)</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>to adhere to a different party or opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to adhere to a different religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cross</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>(from Latin <em>crux</em>, replacing Old English <em>rōd</em>) a Roman instrument of execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>damn</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>to pronounce judgment on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to condemn to eternity in hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delilah</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the woman who seduced Sampson and discovered the source of his strength in the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>disciple</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the context of the New Testament, a follower of Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(doubting)</em> <strong>Thomas</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>New Testament disciple who initially rejected news of Christ’s resurrection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eden</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the initial home of Adam and Eve before their temptation and sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>epiphany</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>religious festival commemorating Christ’s manifestation to the Magi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>eye for an eye</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from Exodus 21:23-27: Hebrew law concerning just compensation in physical conflict (“an eye for an eye” and “a tooth for a tooth”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>faith</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>belief or trust in an individual or entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>belief or trust in a deity or, a specific religious system of belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>father</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>a biological male parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>from the mouths of babes</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>from Matthew 21:16; Jesus responds to indignant priests who overhear children praising him by quoting the Psalms, “From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>go the extra mile</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>from Matthew 5: 41; Jesus’s exhortation for a follower pressed into service to serve longer than legally required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>god</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>a deity (from Old English god), later used to refer to the Judeo-Christian deity Yahweh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(good) Samaritan</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>from Luke 10: 30-36; from a parable in which Jesus contrasted the mercy of a Samaritan toward a wounded man with the complacency of two respected Jewish authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>grace</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>favorable regard with reference to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hallelujah</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>Hebrew “praise Jehovah,”” found in New Testament scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hearse</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>a triangular frame used to carry candlesticks in Holy Week ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>heaven</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>the sky or firmament (from Old English heofon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hell</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>the place of the dead; the underworld or grave (from Old English helle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>or, used in a profane expression or exclamatory sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>heretic</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>one in opposition to orthodox religious belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>holy</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>set apart, especially for a deity (from Old English halig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>incarnation</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>in reference to Christ’s earthly manifestation as a god in human form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>inferno</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>hell (in the Christian sense of divine punishment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus [Christ]</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>the Christian messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jezebel</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>in the Old Testament, an evil queen known for persecuting the Hebrew prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>in the Old Testament, a man whose faith was tested through extreme hardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jonah</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>in the Old Testament, a wayward prophet whose rebellion was taken for the cause of a storm at sea, resulting in his being thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jubilee</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>in the Old Testament, a Hebrew celebration held every fifty years in which slaves were set free and land ownership reverted to the original owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judas</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td>the disciple infamous for betraying Jesus Christ for thirty pieces of silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>king</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>the leader of a country or people, from Old English cyning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leap of faith</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from Kierkegaard’s writings; the means by which a Christian can overcome intellectual obstacles to belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lord</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>a leader or guardian (from Old English hlaford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love feast</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the Christian community, especially when gathered to celebrate the sacrament of communion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>martyr</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>one who suffers greatly, even to death, for a religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Magdalene</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the New Testament, a devoted follower of Christ who was delivered from demon possession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messiah</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the promised deliverer of the Jewish people (in Christianity, Jesus Christ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methuselah</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in Genesis, the man said to live 969 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>millennium</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the period of prosperity for the righteous following the second coming of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miracle</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>an incredible event or phenomenon attributed to supernatural powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neophyte</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>one who is newly converted into a religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[onan]ism</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from Genesis 38:9; Onan was a man struck dead by Yahweh for refusing to impregnate his dead brother’s wife through the intentional spilling of his semen during</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>word</strong></td>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intercourse</td>
<td></td>
<td>in accordance with accepted theological doctrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>orthodox</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the Christian faith, the original home of Adam and Eve or, a reference to the eternal bliss of the righteous after death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>paradise</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from 2 Kings 2: 13; the prophet Elisha picks up the mantle that had fallen from his teacher, Elijah, when the latter was caught up into heaven. Elijah’s power passes to Elisha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>passing the mantle</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>physical ruin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>peril</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>constancy in religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>perseverance</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>the unwavering pursuit of a goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pharisee</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the New Testament, a religious group characterized by strict interpretations of Mosaic law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philistine</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the Old Testament, a member of a gentile people group often at war with the Israelites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>praise</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>adoration toward a deity as an act of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expression of approval or esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>an expression of approval or esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pray</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to appeal to a deity or power for assistance or favor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preach</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to deliver a public religious or moral exhortation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promised land</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the Old Testament, the land of Canaan, promised by Yahweh to Abraham and his descendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prophet</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a divinely inspired person who is believed to know and reveal the will of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proselyte</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a gentile covert to Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redemption</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>deliverance from sin through faith in Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>pious or devout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resurrection</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Christ’s return to life after his crucifixion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revelation</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a communication to humans by divine means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the seventh day of the week (by modern reckoning, Saturday: today often observed on Sunday, a day set aside for rest by the Israelites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saint</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a person canonized by the Christian church or, a Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salvation</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the divine preservation of the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samson</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>an Old Testament prophet characterized by his strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>savior</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a reference to Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sermon</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>a religious public discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheep</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>a small domesticated animal prized for its wool (from Old English <em>sceap</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shepherd</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>one who tends a flock of sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shibboleth</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from Judges 11: 4-6, the word used to detect the enemies of Israel, who could not pronounce the initial <em>sh</em> sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sister</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>a daughter of shared parents (from Old English <em>sweoster</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skeptic</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>a member of a particular school of Greek philosophers characterized by a their hesitation to believe assertions by hearsay without evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodom and Gomorrah</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in Genesis, two wicked cities singled out by Yahweh for destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in the Old Testament, a king characterized by his wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirit</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>the animating aspect of man, as opposed to the merely physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thorn in one’s side</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from II Corinthians 12:7; Paul mentions that Satan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
has put a thorn in his side; it is unclear what exactly this thorn refers to, but is understood to be a personal hindrance or burden

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>thou shalt not</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in Exodus, the phrase beginning many of the Ten Commandments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tithe</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>one tenth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>transfiguration</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>the change in appearance of Christ on the mountain in the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>trinity</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>in Christian theology, the manifestation of one God in three persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>turn the other cheek</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’s exhortation to turn the other cheek when stricken; that is, not to seek retribution when wronged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>walk on water</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>from the New Testament miracle in which Jesus walked over a stormy sea to reach his disciples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>word</strong></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>speech or an utterance (from old Saxon word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>worship</strong></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>to honor or adore a supernatural being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>to show honor or adoration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>thou shalt not</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>used as a phrase marking a prohibition, often jocularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tithe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>a standard portion of income dedicated to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>transfiguration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>a change in appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>trinity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>an entity that is three in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>turn the other cheek</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>an expression indicating long-suffering and patience under unjust persecution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>walk on water</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>a reference to an amazing and seemingly impossible feat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>word</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>a divine communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>worship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>both senses are recorded in the 1200’s A. D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORKS CITED


Fong-Torres, Ben. 26 July 1969 “Christ, They Know It Ain’t Easy.” *Rolling Stone*.


Townshend, Pete. 1969. “Sensation.” MCA.


