

Introduction

We live in a pluralist, inter-racialist and multi-faith society and the need to understand one another is greater than ever before. Much misunderstanding arises from racialism and nationalism and could be avoided if people knew more about the beliefs and practices of one another. It is hoped that this book will make a contribution to a better understanding and sympathy with those who differ from us in race and creed.

Another aim is to try to dispel the idea that religion and science are in conflict with one another. Some scientists do hold that religion is grounded in superstition and belongs to a 'primitive' stage of mankind whereas science advances and provides remedies for modern problems. But others recognize that religion is asking different questions than science and is still needed for living the good life and giving meaning and purpose to existence. In order to clarify some of the issues there are a number of chapters devoted to science and its relation to religion. But many people are concerned with social problems, deprivation, injustice and imbalance of wealth throughout the world and subscribe to belief systems intended to bring about change in the human conditions. Hence there is attention to two of the most influential: Marxism and Humanism.

Some scholars have insisted that such movements which are normally designated as secular are religious because they understand religion in a broad way. Usually they operate with a functional definition: religion does something in and for a society. But it can be argued that while this is true, it is a somewhat limited idea of religion. Alternatively, some scholars have

sought to distil the essence of religion from the study of religions but it has not proved to be possible. The way chosen here is to examine six religions and note characteristics or aspects of religion which appear in them in order to try and advance beyond the functional to something more substantial. The six religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, usually known as the Semitic, and those that developed in an Indian context, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

With regard to the method of studying religions, writers follow a pattern of discussing religions separately rather than a thematic approach. The latter option is followed throughout the book for a number of reasons. First, we want to compare and contrast the various themes and make it easier for the reader to detect similarities and differences. Second, the approach may help students and the general reader to remember more easily what is being taught on major themes. Students of world religions say that while a course which deals with each religion individually is helpful, it often happens that when they have reached the sixth one they have forgotten what they had learned about the first! Third, since examination questions often refer to a particular theme and require it to be considered in relation to two or even three religions, a thematic study should be helpful in at least giving direction. Ideally, if the thematic and the detailed study of each religion separately can be combined, it should enable the reader to get a good grasp of essentials.

It would also help to counter the objection that the thematic neglects the fact that religions emerge in an historical context. For, in this book the historical has been taken into account to show how religions have developed and the divisions which have ensued. In describing the religions the attempt is made to move from the concrete – what is visible and happening in an everyday context – to the abstract – the reasons why people believe. It begins with rituals, use of scripture, moral behaviour, and the activity of women in religion, before moving on to the beliefs. Visits to places of worship can be helpful, because in considering the architecture of the buildings, furniture and decoration, and listening and participating in the services, questions soon arise as to why people behave in this way.

We continually encounter on the streets of our large cities, Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Christians and Buddhists. In describing and analysing what they believe and do we will not try to establish what is of more value in one religion than another or to judge from a particular standpoint. But comments will be made on what seems inconsistent with modern knowledge or lacking in relevance. Religions do change as they develop in their context and the question will be raised of whether the changes which have taken place accord with their origins.

Because of the extent of the areas considered, these matters could only be dealt with in a limited way, but it is hoped that the attempt will stimulate discussion. God does not have a gender, but it is impossible to write about the concept without using gender-specific terminology. I have used the masculine pronoun with reference to the deity except when writing about the Hindu Brahman which is normally referred to as neuter. I have also tried to alternate between 'he' and 'she' but it may be noted that 'man' includes male and female.

I would like to record my appreciation of the dialogue with students in various parts of the world and show gratitude for the questions that they have raised. I also owe a debt not only to the authors of the books mentioned in the footnotes to each chapter but also to the writers of Open University materials. The educational outreach of the University not only in the UK but elsewhere has been a great success and there are thousands of people throughout the world who acknowledge their debt.

I have tried to acknowledge any quotations or ideas derived from others but wide reading may mean that I have missed an acknowledgement and if this is so I would apologize in advance. I would also like to thank the Editor and staff of Routledge for their interest in and the publication of the book and those colleagues who read the manuscript and made suggestions.

Robert Crawford

1 Can religion be defined?

When someone is asked ‘What is religion?’, they usually point to a mosque or church or Hindu temple or Sikh gurdwara and say that people who go there have ‘got’ religion! But this is drawing attention to the places of worship and members of the various religions, it is not telling us what religion is. Can it be distilled from a study of these religions? Some scholars have tried to do it but an essence of religion fails to appear so most seek to understand its effect on society. We will begin with stating some definitions and then go on to comment briefly on them:

The cosmos is a gigantic flywheel making 10,000 revolutions a minute. Man is a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on it. Religion is the theory that the wheel was designed and set spinning to give man the ride.

(H. L. Mencken)

Religion masks the face of God.

(Martin Buber)

A system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life.

(J. M. Yinger)

A belief in spiritual beings.

(E. B. Tylor)

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Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness . . . institutions, churches, rituals, bibles, codes of behaviour, are the trappings of religion, its passing forms.

(Alfred North Whitehead)

Any beliefs which involve the acceptance of a sacred, trans-empirical realm and any behaviour designed to affect a person's relationship with that realm.

(Peter Connolly)

It is the presence in the world of something spiritually greater than man himself . . . man's goal is to seek communion with the presence behind the phenomena.

(Arnold Toynbee)

It is an emotion or morality touched by emotion.

(Matthew Arnold)

Ancestor worship is the root of every religion.

(Herbert Spencer)

Religion is an illusion.

(Sigmund Freud)

Religion is not born out of speculation or reflection, still less out of illusion or misapprehension, but rather out of the real tragedies of human life, out of the conflict between human plans and realities.

(Bronislaw Malinowski)

It is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, the soul in a place without a soul; it is the opium of the people.

(Karl Marx)

Religion is a virus.

(Richard Dawkins)

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and for-

bidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single community called a church, all those who adhere to them.
(Émile Durkheim)

It is a way of life.

(Most religions)

A religion is a seven-dimensional organism, ritual, doctrinal, mythical or narrative, experimental or emotional, ethical or legal, organisational or social, material or artistic.

(Ninian Smart)

Religion is a revolutionary urge, a psycho-social impulse to generate a new humanity.

(Aloysius Pieris)

Religion is a sense of the numinous, the 'wholly other', the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

(Rudolf Otto)

These definitions reflect the perspective of anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, biologists, theologians, historians, scriptures, and show that there is no universally accepted definition of religion. The experts differ even with regard to definition! So much so that a feeling of despair is created. John Hick writes:

Religion is one thing to the anthropologist, another to the sociologist, another to the psychologist (and again another to the next psychologist!), another to the Marxist, another to the mystic, another to the Zen Buddhist and yet another to the Jew or Christian. As a result there is a great variety of religious theories of the nature of religion. There is, consequently, no universally accepted definition of religion, and quite possibly there never will be.¹

The anti-religious strain is clear when defined by Freud and Karl Marx and more recently by the biologist, Richard Dawkins, who compares religion to a computer virus passed

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from one brain to another. Dawkins reacts to any 'wheel of design' in the cosmos: we are here because of a random process. The definitions also raise questions: How can religion simply be a private affair since it develops in communities and has an impact on social and political life? If it is a way of life how can we keep it private? But how can it be demonstrated that it has contact with the sacred or supernatural or something greater than ourselves, as Toynbee said? And what is it that religion is pointing to, since the presence of God has different forms in the religions? Perhaps it would be easier to think of religion as emotion and morality with Matthew Arnold, but would that not make it so subjective that validation would be difficult? If it is a way of life there must be some beliefs connected with it.

The definition which relates religion to ancestor worship impressed itself upon me when teaching large numbers of students in Africa. They told me how they venerated their ancestors, had a special place in the home where they went to consult them before an important decision, and generally showed that respect for them was akin to worship. So was Spencer right when he saw the origin of religion in ancestor worship? It is largely discounted today as applicable only to certain tribes and we cannot simply define something by its origins and fail to notice its development. The African students were mainly Christian yet held on to this belief. Perhaps some of their respect for the dead and the living would be helpful in Western society today.

Some of the definitions are functional, stating what religion does, but others are substantive, stating what religion is. If we say that religion unites or separates people or comforts those who suffer and so on, then we are thinking of it in a functional way. Functionalism is a theoretical perspective in sociology but function refers more to the role of an institution in society. A substantial definition seeks to highlight key features of a religion such as belief in God. Durkheim appears to supply both a functional and substantive definition but his beliefs do not include what those who want a substantive definition consider crucial, the supernatural dimension. Religion concerns only the human: a creation of society. His view has been followed by many modern scholars.

We will look at the sociological approach to religion in the next chapter but note here that the functional approach can lead to disagreement. Some conclude that religion has declined as religious symbols are less important, supernatural causes are not acceptable, and religion has little to say about society. A demystification of the world has taken place with a fall in attendance at places of worship. The sacred and magical have little place in civilized societies and religious values are being steadily eroded. Religion in any vital form, it is argued, survives only in the cults.

But other sociologists disagree, contending that it is based on the assumption that past communities were more religious than today. A consideration of history does not support the assumption since even the domination of Christianity in the Middle Ages did not prevent paganism and mass superstition. Today global religion is flourishing. For example, in the United States the majority of Americans believe in God and there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism. It believes in a return to tradition, certainty, community, sanctification of politics and commitment, and opposes the modernity characterized by relativism, individualism and bureaucracy. Religion has not kept out of politics but has supported freedom movements to abolish injustice and exercises a world-wide influence.

If we estimate the world's population at about 5400 million, there are 4333 million in the various religions – approximately 80 per cent.² And there is a mass of people who are not members of religious communities but say that they are religious. All sociologists recognize the growth of religious cults, with the British media in 1998 reporting that science's popularity was waning and that there was a boom in New Age mysticism and spiritual belief. Books on chemistry and physics showed a drop in sales of more than a quarter but New Age titles and books on Eastern and minority faiths published in Britain shot up by 75 per cent.

Whitehead's definition stresses individualism which figures in religions, but usually there is a community to which one belongs and receives help. John Wesley said that there was no such thing as a solitary Christian and organized his movement on a communal basis. Whitehead understands that the trappings of religion, churches, rituals, institutions, bibles and

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ethics are the passing forms, but would the religion not disappear without these? Of course, if they are being used as a substitute for a change of heart then he would have the support of Wesley, the Hebrew prophets and some of the founders of the religions. It is true that visions of God often occur in 'solitary' quiet places away from not only secular affairs but also the performance of religion.

Marx's definition means that religion is the compensator, justifier and concealer of exploitation. It endorses the status quo by enabling the poor to accept their inequality and teaches that the capitalists' power was God given. But Marx also saw it as a protest and would surely have endorsed the stand of Gandhi, Martin Luther King's civil rights movement and Liberation theology in Christianity. Christians and Marxists joined together in Latin America with the common goal of defeating injustice. Protest ceased to be passive and became active resistance. Neither Marx nor Freud studied religions other than Christianity but Max Weber did, and he argued that religion could spearhead change in society.

It may be that the definitions are complementary rather than contradictory and that elements from each might be combined to form a satisfactory definition. If broad, it would allow secular belief systems, such as Marxism and Humanism and new developments like Transcendental Meditation, to be termed religious. In the latter, members claim that there is a field of consciousness which can be tapped into in order to exploit our inner energy and reach maximum intelligence. A deep relaxation is induced to reach subtle levels of the mind and eventually transcend it altogether. It is believed that we can then contact the source of thought. What this is, however, remains somewhat vague and there is little indication if it is natural or supernatural.

Definitions can be too broad, including what dominates or appears of ultimate concern: work, home, children, entertainment. Some of these have rituals which are similar to those of religion. Football has its assemblies with crowds displaying ecstasy and wonder at their team's performance. There is the hallowed turf, the flags and banners, the hymn singing, and so on. Nationalism also extols the flag of the nation, and some lands are so sacred that they must be defended at all costs. But

all of these consist of visible objects whereas religion, while having outward signs, refers to the invisible.

If the definition can be too broad, it can also be narrow and miss something which is essential. In an effort to distinguish between sacred and secular it may be defined by reference to sacred persons or places or rituals or relics. But, while these can be a focus, the religions insist that God is everywhere and cannot be confined to one place. He pervades the world and hence the secular and sacred cannot be kept apart. But if 'God' is essential in any definition then what about Buddhism which in its early beginnings moved away from the Hindu gods? This question has often been raised about Buddhism and we will attend to it in later chapters.

Ninian Smart opts for a broad understanding of religion by reflecting on the characteristics of religions in his seven dimensions. But why only seven? He does not mention the political which was very prominent in the last century, with religion protesting about apartheid in South Africa, poverty in Latin America, and injustice in the United States. What is it that makes Smart's dimensions religious? It would seem that he is operating with some definition of religion, a broad one, so as to include Marxism, Humanism and Nationalism. Smart thinks that the search for an essence ends in vagueness, for we have to go on and define the supernatural or the ultimate or the transcendent Being. There is pluralism within traditions and he looks for patterns by considering the dimensions. If a movement has these seven dimensions he thinks there is a religion so there is no need to define it.³ But some religions in their beginnings did not have the material dimension of buildings, and he admits that non-literate societies are weak on the doctrinal dimension and the narrative one is absent among Buddhist modernists.

Perhaps it might be helpful to consider where the term religion originated. *Religio* is a Latin word originally meaning a kind of superstitious awe. It developed into scruples or conscientiousness implying religious feeling and worship of the gods. The awe-inspiring nature of deity has been captured by Otto who pointed to the experience in all religions of the phenomena. His view has been very influential but is opposed by those who see religion as an illusion and man-made. Whatever

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the source of religion it soon developed a cult of sacred things and persons forming a religious system. Thus the definitions that emerge try to embrace these elements or concentrate on one of them.

Religion can also mean to bind a worshipper to the deity by the observance of cultic ceremonies and acts of devotion. Perhaps if we consider the particular expressions of religion as found in six religions it may be possible to arrive at a definition. In so doing we will be taking Max Weber's advice that trying to define religion at the start is a mistake.⁴ Indeed it is rare for a contemporary sociologist of religion to do so at the beginning of the investigation.

One of the difficulties is that religion is so mixed up with other things that it is not a distinctive category and it varies in different places and at different times. Hence some, like D. F. Pocock, prefer to talk about beliefs rather than religion.⁵ William James remarked that there were so many definitions of religion and so different from one another that the word cannot stand for any single principle or essence but is a collective name. However, we will see that each religion has its own particular distinctiveness; and it is possible to see signs of it in other belief systems that purport to give some meaning and purpose to life and supply some answers to the ultimate question of death. Are they religions or surrogates for religion?

Some of the proposed definitions will receive more attention in the next chapter as we seek to understand the different approaches to the study of religion.

2 How is religion studied?

There are various methods of study and we begin with the evolutionary approach which developed in conjunction with anthropology. Societies evolved from the lower to the higher. 'Primitive' man saw his world in terms of magic and impersonal forces (animatism) and then came to think of spirits dwelling in trees, mountains and rocks (animism). Animals were worshipped as the symbol or emblem of a tribe (totemism) and the spirit of an eminent chief would be venerated with sacrifices. His grave became a shrine (ancestor worship). A sense of awe in the presence of nature led to the worship of nature gods and this polytheism became the religion of ancient Greece and the Romans, and is still a feature of Hinduism.

Scholars in the nineteenth century believed in a progression from animism, totemism, polytheism to monotheism, a belief in one supreme God. Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the father of sociology, detected three stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific. In the first, things were explained by a supernatural cause, in the second reason took over, and in the third by a scientific understanding of natural causes. Despite his scheme, Comte saw the need for religion and founded the Religion of Humanity which was shortlived. Soon exceptions to the evolutionary development were noted, for progress is not so simple and straightforward. The scenario was too tidy and neat and did not allow for deviations and complexities. Tribes were discovered worshipping one God when they should have been committed to many. Andrew Lang (1844–1912) referred to it as the 'High God among Low Races'. Many of

the investigators were 'armchair anthropologists' who had not ventured into the field and wanted to see everything as part of a grand evolutionary plan.

The nineteenth-century idea that we were morally and spiritually better than previous generations, moving upwards and 'letting the ape and tiger die', received a devastating blow in the two world wars of the twentieth century. So-called civilized nations behaved in a savage way and released weapons of inconceivable destructive power. Science and technology can be misused and there is no guarantee that an advance here will be accompanied by ethical progress. While it is not denied that religion does develop in its understanding of God, humanity and the world, the so-called 'primitive tribes' can surprise with subtle ideas about spirituality. Societies must be studied in their own terms, not placed in a higher or lower level, or placed in frameworks that we erect. Eric Sharpe points out that some anthropologists refused to go and look at the Palaeolithic cave paintings in France because such artistic expression did not fit into their views of 'primitive' culture! Such prejudice is not acceptable in any area of study.¹

Historical

The history of religion approach relates what has happened and tries to interpret it. It examines primary sources such as literary and archaeological material (inscriptions, monuments, artefacts, etc.) connected with a religion and compares its development with other religions without any thought of one religion being superior to another. Secondary sources are considered but not treated with the same respect as the primary. The question of truth is usually left to the philosopher, though judgements of value often occur. The methods used are scientific and objective and the sacred books of the faiths are treated like any other book. Thus an historian writes concerning Sikhism that little can be known about its founder, Guru Nanak. Sikhs join Jews and Christians in deploring the radicalism of some scholars in their approach to the scriptures.

But one of the difficulties is that the sources are the response of believers and are considered subjective. There is little attempt to relate events to the contemporary culture or the

forces that moulded the religion, so the conclusion is that they are theological rather than historical. We shall return to the problem when discussing the scriptures of the various faiths but comment here that the writings, though often related to history, particularly in the Semitic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), do not stress it. They are doctrinal, philosophical, impressionistic and imaginative. Such narrative does convey truth and therefore the historical must be wedded to other approaches to understand the significance of the writing. The theologian may fasten upon the patterns which the historian discovers in history and speak of the purpose and revelation of God, but the historian is likely to think of it as showing a progressive understanding by humanity.²

The history of religions developed in the nineteenth century with the desire to compare different religions. But it was based on the evolutionary idea from the false to the true instead of a concern with religions per se. And it was the policy to compare other religions with Christianity to show their limitations, but such a procedure is not acceptable today.³

Theological

There are many theologies in the various religions based on the sacred writings and traditions. Doctrines may be explicit in the scripture or implicit. Thus, it is contended that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, while not in the Bible, can be deduced from various statements of the relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Unitarians and Muslims believe that such a deduction is not valid and it becomes a point of issue in inter-faith dialogue. Theology is derived from *theos*, meaning God, and it tries to explain and validate His existence and revelation. Doctrines are established which form the basis of the ministry, sacraments, authority and organization of a religion. They can cause divisions within the community and discord with other religions.

Theology produces creeds and confessions of faith. To take Christianity as an example, there is the Nicene (325 CE), which is concerned with the status of Jesus Christ, and Chalcedon (451 CE), dealing with his human and divine natures. Confessions of faith are the Thirty-Nine Articles (1574) and the

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Westminster (1643), which clergy of the Anglican and Presbyterian Church subscribe to but today are signed with mental reservations. In each faith there is a theology which is theoretical and practical, with the latter trying to understand the devotional and mystical writings. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism pay little attention to creeds and see religion as a way of life.

The theological approach traditionally rested on a given faith position, but during the last two centuries has adopted a more liberal stance with a freer interpretation of scripture and a much greater interest in religions other than Christianity. But revelation in its various forms – free inquiry, truth claims – continues to be a subject of debate. An impact on theological methodology has been made by the rise of Religious Studies which considers religion in general and each religion in particular and uses the various approaches that we are describing in this chapter. Religion is seen as part of the history of ideas.

Philosophical

Philosophy can consider the methods employed in the study of religion, evaluate the evidence and arrive at the truth or otherwise of belief statements. In the past, philosophy asked ultimate questions about the purpose in the world, the existence of God, evil, morality, immortality, and so on. These questions went beyond science and were called metaphysics. In reaction, modern philosophy emphasized observation, experiment and induction (moving from particular experiments to formulating a general law), so religious statements were often treated as meaningless. The logical positivist philosopher said: ‘I do not understand what you theologians are saying, it is non-sense because we cannot verify or confirm it by the senses’. In such a method there were difficulties too for morality and aesthetics. If I say, ‘You stole that money’, I am referring to a fact that can be verified by witnesses, but if I say, ‘You ought not to have stolen it’, I am merely expressing an emotion or moral disapproval. Moral approbation or censure statements were treated as ‘Hurrah’ or ‘Boo’ utterances.⁴

But within philosophy itself there has always been a scepti-

cism about the ability of the senses and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was driven to declare that there was a reality behind things (things-in-themselves) which we could not grasp. He distinguished between the world of appearance which we could observe and the world of reality which we could not. The question becomes: ‘Am I really seeing the world as it actually is or is it just an image or representation in my mind?’ The problem will surface again when we consider the Indian religions. But in reply it could be asserted that we could check one sense against another: it may look like cheese but taste will show that it is butter. With science, observations are checked by experiments.

But what of mathematics, which is not based on sense observation? The Greeks who did so much in this area (we all remember the horrors of Euclid at school!) spoke of an unseen dimension and an invisible world of ideas and forms. The reply of the school of Logical Positivism was that both mathematical statement and statements of logic were valid because of the acceptance of the meaning of numbers and concepts. Thus, ‘All husbands are married men’ is true given the definition of the terms. They are analytic statements, validated by analysing the words used. But the philosophy failed to do justice to the fullness of human experience, though it had drawn attention to the importance of language and meaning.

The enquiry into religious language came to prominence in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951). Language is compared to a bag of carpenter’s tools, each with its particular function and technique of use or with a range of games each with its own rules and equipment and criteria of success or failure. We have to understand these if we are to know the game. Language is social, it cannot be uprooted from the life of the community in which it originated. A stranger in a foreign country needs not only to master the rules of the language but also to study the culture, customs and traditions if he wants to fully understand the people. The language of religion is intelligible within a mosque, temple, church or gurdwara, and is subject to internal rules. It is personal and cannot be reduced to what is connected with objects.

This means that we cannot define religion as a private affair as it takes place in a community and has rules for the

interpretation of sacred texts and for the regulation of the behaviour of its members. The social dimension of religion must be recognized. Also, as Wittgenstein pointed out, while games have their own rules they need to be brought into relation with other games and similarities in language and rules observed. A religion needs to consider its relation to other religions and areas of knowledge for there are family 'resemblances' as well as family 'differences'.

Empiricism is not ruled out by many of the religions for they make the empirical claim that the sacred books are based on the evidence of eyewitnesses who kept company with the founder. It was the experience of the founder of the religion which led them to believe in God and pass on to others what they had experienced. The historian needs to sift out the kernel of experience from the later additions and the theological viewpoint of the writers of the Gospels or the Adi Granth or the Qur'an and so forth. While the development of religions shows change, we cannot imagine Christianity without Christ or Islam without Muhammad or Sikhism without Guru Nanak. Otherwise we make the followers greater than the founder himself! But all of this means that the philosopher has to turn to the historian to see what the critical interpretation of the texts is and he will find that they vary from the conservative through to the radical.

The language of religion has a great variety of expression: metaphor, simile, analogy, symbol, allegory. In speaking of God we are limited, for we are using human language to describe what is beyond the human. But this does not mean that such figures of speech do not impart information, for at times they can be more effective than literal statements, just as a poem can startle and arouse in a way that a factual statement cannot. We can sum up the problem of empiricism and verification by a simple example used by John Wilson. If I say, 'Mary is sweet', I am not going to confirm it by trying to taste her! But if I say 'Sugar is sweet', I can taste to verify. The two statements are different though having points of contact by the use of the same word. How I verify a religious assertion has some contact with empiricism, but there are other ways of verification.

Psychological

The emotional aspects of religion cannot be ignored so psychologists examined religious experience. Many psychologists treat religious experience like any other human experience and religious writers have followed the procedure by arguing that it is normal experience in depth. But some people contend that they have had extraordinary trances, ecstasy and visions. Ninian Smart thinks that a religious experience involves a perception of the invisible world or of some person or thing which reveals that world. Psychologists tend to be sceptical about this and explain such states as psychological conditions of the mind. The scepticism appears in the religions: Catholicism, for example, is distrustful of individual claims of conversion and direct communication with God and relies more on the sacraments of the Church and other mediating channels extended to the faithful. But much study is now devoted to mystical experience which appears in all the religions.

Many have written on religious experience. One of the most notable was William James (1842–1910) who thought it was better to believe in God since it often produced good results. This stemmed from his pragmatism which did not concern itself with the truth of a belief but its effect on our lives. Religion, he thought, is the belief that the world is part of a more spiritual universe and has the goal of achieving harmony with it. The result is a zest for life and a sense of inner peace. He distinguished between the religion of the sick soul which seeks salvation from sin and is reborn by conversion and the religion of healthy-mindedness which is less pessimistic about its spiritual condition and feels no need of conversion. There are the 'once born' and the 'twice born'.

Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) argued that the numinous or uncanny could be experienced, and that religious experience was beyond normal experience. It was a unique experience based on the awesome (*tremendum*) but attractive (*et fascinans*). It was the essence of religion and he had observed it in Hinduism and Islam as well as in Christianity. The awareness of the numinous results in a feeling of unworthiness, as Isaiah experienced in the Temple (Isa. 6), but it is difficult to describe in rational terms since it is super-rational. Otto does

not attempt to prove the existence of such a Subject or Supreme Creator since this is the rational way and does not make contact with the numinous. It was enough for him to conclude that the experience of the numinous conveys its existence.⁵ Such an experience could be evoked through nature, music, ritual, architecture, art, the use of a language which is mysterious and sacred, and chanting. Fear, majesty, energy, mystery, are all elements in the experience of the 'Wholly Other'. It would seem to imply a negative approach to God, since He is so unlike us we are only able to say what He is not, but Otto introduces the fascination or attraction of God and thereby agrees with Thomas Aquinas: 'We are only able to say what God is not if we also know in some sense what he is.' It can be experienced in nature as Wordsworth said: 'a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts'. But it can also be awakened by the Spirit of God in Judaism and Christianity and the suppression of the rational in Zen Buddhism to reach satori.⁶ It is done by enigma and riddles; for example, what is the sound of one hand clapping? There are questions which have no answer and the rational mind collapses in trying to solve them.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was not convinced and thought that such experiences can be explained psychologically. He wrote of God as an illusion or a projection of the father image whom the son respects but hates because he is jealous of his love for the mother. Repression of such ideas gives way to exalting the father into a divine figure. The theory may reflect more Freud's own experience, for it is difficult to establish it on a general basis. It could hardly apply to Muhammad since his father died a few days before his birth and his mother died when he was only six years old! Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) differed from Freud, seeing religion as having great practical value for it gave people hope and a happier outlook on life. Thus he would have agreed with William James. It was not an illusion but a natural function which affects humanity just as much as the will to power (Adler) or sexuality (Freud). He propounded 'the collective unconscious', images or archetypes which we experience in dreams and religion and the God image was one of them. He insisted that a religious outlook on life was essential.

In more recent times the question has been raised of whether drugs can induce a religious experience, but psychologists differ on this and produce many conflicting theories about religion. With regard to defining religion, most psychological attempts are rather negative, implying that it is based on fear or an attempt to escape from the demands of life or wish projection of a better time. Guilt is regarded as a neurosis which can be dealt with by realizing that we are the product of heredity and environment, so why blame ourselves? Problems of free will are often not attended to, nor are reasons given for the continuance of the fear of death.

The whole question of religious experience is important, and psychology is a useful and relevant tool. It can examine what has been called the religious instinct, the charisma of the religious leader, and the effect of suggestion in mass evangelism. But it is argued that the psychologist cannot settle the difficult question of whether or not there is a God or a transcendental dimension to which many think religion refers. But it must ally itself to sociology since religion is social as well as individual.

Sociological

The approach tries to avoid personal commitments and prejudices and formulates hypotheses which can be tested empirically. It stresses that the understanding of another society requires knowledge of the culture which influences behaviour. Questions are raised: How does religion function in a society? Does it bind together or cause division? Will it last? Augustus Comte believed religion would disappear but his sympathy with it is shown by his tribute to theologians whom he thought were aware of what human nature was like. He commented that but for them, 'human society would have remained in a condition much like that of a company of superior monkeys'.⁷

Émile Durkheim's work based on the Australian aborigines showed that the totem, a sacred object, points to an impersonal force in objects and of the tribe itself. In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), he argued that religion is society itself and by its rituals cements social unity. It pertains to the sacred aspects which can be distinguished from the profane. Durkheim's definition of religion is both functional

and substantive: beliefs provide the substance and the practices are their functional aspects. But beliefs can divide as well as unify, and was he right in thinking that the sacred and profane are so distinct? The view is challenged in the religions, but even in such ceremonies as the coronation of a monarch or the swearing in of the President of the USA, nationalism and religion are blended. Durkheim was right in seeing religion as social but it can also be individualistic.

Max Weber opposed Durkheim, arguing that it was religion that produced social groupings. Capitalism owed much to Christian Calvinism which insisted on hard work and thrift as a sign of faith in God and His election. Ambition, saving and hard work were pleasing to God and since money was not wasted on dress or adornment or entertainment, the Calvinist invested it, leading to more capital. Sociologists are often limited in their findings because they concentrate only on the Christian religion, but Weber studied world religions and showed the nature of ethical and exemplary prophecy. The former encouraged social change while the latter held on to tradition. The traditional forms of religion supported the status quo whereas the sect could upset it. His work ranged over the area of bureaucracy and types of authority and charismatic leadership. While some of his arguments are regarded with scepticism by sociologists of religion, it is clear that his influence has permeated their writings today.⁸

Karl Marx followed Durkheim's view that religion was a human construction, though he went on to an interpretation which was quite different. It will be developed in a later chapter. More recent work such as that of Peter Berger refers to the sacred canopy: beliefs in the sacred providing an overall explanation of existence and supplying meaning in a confusing world. In his book, *A Rumour of Angels* (1971), he reacted to the general idea that religion is human in origin by pointing to signals of transcendence found in humour, hope, justice and play, and our sense of order in the world.

Sociologists are interested in how institutions react to changing circumstances: a religion founded by a charismatic figure can develop into an institution which seeks the power to consolidate and spread the faith. There are a number of examples. One is the peaceful religion of Sikhism, founded by Guru

Nanak, which developed a military style of organization called the Khalsa. Another was the development of papal power in Christianity, which sent the crusaders to take the Holy Land from the Muslims. A third is the military power of Islam, which developed from Muhammad's defence of his revelation to worldwide conquest. Even in normal times, religious organizational structure can exchange spiritual power for temporal with a diminishing of spontaneity and enthusiasm as arguments continue about ritual or beliefs or leadership. The worst scenario occurs when the faith fails to adapt to society and retreats into a religious ghetto with little social outreach. Conversely, the religion may so conform to the values of the society that the original message virtually disappears. Every religion is faced with conserving the best of its past with accommodation to the present. How it balances these factors is not easy.

Many Sikhs when they migrated to Britain abandoned their turban. The Punjabi word for turban is *sikhna*, meaning to hear, hence the Sikhs listen to the word of the Guru and are continual learners. When their wives and families arrived in Britain religious ties were renewed, and the turban reappeared. The first gurdwara (Sikh temple) was built in 1958 in Yorkshire and regular attendance observed. Where there was no temple a religious service (*diwan*) was held in the home. It was a social event as well as religious and helped to strengthen the Sikh ethnic identity. But with them and other religious groups such as the Muslims, there is often a tension between the values inculcated in the schools and their religion. The stress on individualism and choice comes into conflict with the family loyalties and the tradition of arranged marriages in accordance with parental control and religious belief. Racial discrimination is evident still in Britain and elsewhere, and a secular society makes little attempt to understand religious values. In connection with Sikhism, the transport authorities tried to force Sikhs to wear the regulation cap and it was a long time before Parliament agreed to Sikhs wearing their turbans instead of crash helmets when riding motorcycles. The wearing of the turban also reasserts the ethnic pride of the Sikhs in the face of white rejection of their colour and treating second and third generations of them as foreigners.