

Téma: *Náboženství a lidská přirozenost*

To the student of religion, in particular the historian of religion, the mere hint of a religio-ecological approach may be challenging and provocative in a negative sense. Is there not sufficient testimony that religions, more than any other segments of culture, are part of the traditional heritage of mankind and as such can only be understood against their historical background? Moreover, are not religious data too subtle to be dealt with from ecological points of view? Indeed, what has ecology as a whole to do with religion?

Criticism of this sort that has crept up now and then following the publication of my first articles in the subject is understandable. A research program like ecology of religion undoubtedly sounds like a *contradictio in adiecto*. Still, properly seen it is not unrealistic. The critics omit the fact that religions, in their formal manifestations, make use of environment and adapt themselves to it. This is exactly what ecology of religion is about: the study of the environmental integration of a religion and its implications. Superficially, this aspect of religion has little importance, touching only the peripheral stones of the religious edifice. If we look closer into the issue however we soon become aware that new forms of access offer themselves to the understanding of religion. Ecology of religion is, as I see it, not the alternative to the historical or phenomenological approaches, but a way of securing new information for these approaches.

At this point we may return to the critical views, presented above. The objection that religious data should only be handled in their historical framing can easily be dismissed. The historical nature of religions is a matter of course. However, this in itself does not rule out our other lines of inquiry than those of history. There is as we know the psychology of religion, and the systematic comparison of religious elements that we call phenomenology of religion; and there is the anthropology of religion with its efforts to apply functional and structural points of view to religious data. Similarly we now have the ecological approach, which, as was just pointed out, may enrich our historical understanding

Ecology of religion is concerned with forms of religious expression, and specific religious contents motivated by these forms, but not with the communication of ultimate meaning and value. In my understanding, at least, conclusions as to the latter are not allowed by the ecological approach.

Ecology is today a theme of paramount importance not only in contemporary science but also in the practical outlook on life, in planning for the future and in the struggle for the conservation of natural resources, a meaningful milieu for mankind and, indeed, the survival of man. It seems to be part of the ecological reawakening that man's religions should also be fitted into this total scheme. Two approaches offer themselves here to the student of religion: one is, research on man's experience of his environment, and his ideas of Nature; the other is, the analysis of the environmental integration of man's religions.

The former approach presents us with a world view which may be religious in certain instances, but not always, and definitely not in our modern society. (1) It is a kind of investigation that is not ecological *stricto sensu*, since the concern is not with the relations between religion and environment, but with man's opinion about these relations. Much work remains to be done in this field.

One problem is, for instance, to what extent human beings outside our western civilization, and inside it in the pre-Rousseau days, have paid attention to the beauty of Nature as an expression of divine order. It seems certain, anyhow, that even the most impressive phenomena of Nature fail to leave a lasting stamp on the imagination of primitive peoples if they belong to the regular pattern of events. (2) On the other hand, natural actions that disrupt the ordinary pattern, or seem to do so, fire the imagination of man, and may actually change the religious order. (3)

It is the other approach, which is more truly an ecological approach, which will concern us here. Briefly, it is moderately environmentalistic in the sense that it attributes a decisive influence to environment in the organization and development of religious forms. In this context environment means the natural surroundings, topography, biotope, climate, as well as the demography and the natural resources which may be measured quantitatively in a culture. It is too often the case in ecological debates that only the latter, economic aspect is observed. Even analysts of religion have interpreted environment in such narrow terms. (4) However, an accurate application of ecology in the study of culture and religion should imply the whole range of ecological phenomena. The religio-ecological approach investigates religion in its general environmental framing and should not be evaluated as a tool for economic determinism. The question may then be asked what gain we have from an approach so all-embracing and vaguely defined. More specifically, in what way may such a complex as the Protestant creed in Northern Europe be illuminated by the ecology of religion? The answer is of course, very slightly indeed, if at all. The religio-ecological approach is primarily a key to the study of those religions whose cultures are dependent on the natural environment, that is, the so-called primitive religions. As human culture has evolved, its dependency on nature has successively diminished. Religion, being tied up with the cultural development, has, in its process of evolutionary growth, increasingly become independent of the ecological factors that once held it in their grip. If we turn to those religions that have not been affected by urbanization and industrialization' they evince both directly and indirectly a remarkable impact by the environment. This is why we may talk of hunting religions, agricultural religions, pastoral or herding religions, etc. Since religion has a conservative tendency, religious features that were adjusted to earlier ecological patterns often remain in later religious constellations. For instance, in agrarian cultures the spirits of the field appear in animal disguise, most certainly a left-over from the hunting cultures.

Fundamental to the religio-ecological approach is the insight that nature not only restricts and impedes, but also stimulates cultural processes. The early anthropogeographers and students of human ecology took the positive, change-promoting power of environmental influence for granted

The ecological approach to religion is not new. It was part of the older procedures in human ecology, it was practiced in the religio-historical analyses of Near Eastern religions, and it was implied in the doctrine of the older evolutionists that experiences of Nature provided man with gods and myths. We do not say today that volcanoes gave birth to gods, but we recognize that they formed, or contributed to form, the expressions for the beliefs in gods attached to such mountains. Today the ecological ideas of the past reappear refined and modified, at the same time as we have become conscious of them and their

methodological importance. In this sense the religio-ecological approach is new in the study of religions.

We shall now see how it may be used, and to what conclusions it may lead us.

2. First of all, new insights into a particular religion, its pattern and functioning may be gained by an ecological analysis. It is very common today that religions are interpreted via an investigation of the social system. However, the social system is in a high degree dependent on, yes, even an outgrowth of, the ecological system. For instance, a vegetational area is the natural habitat of an agricultural people, the woman, once a collector of plants, is the cultivator of the soil (the man being the hunter, a heritage from a preceding hunting culture), matrilocality and uxoriolocality becomes the convenient rule, and, as Murdock and others have proved, a matrilinear social organization is built up on this foundation. This may seem to be a very simplified scheme, but it indicates how the process mechanism in social evolution has a primal driving force that, in this case, is ecology.

Now, the observation that a religion, or part of it, may be described in ecological terms does not involve any "reductionistic" attitude. We do not touch the religious values as such—they have their anchorage in the psychic equipment of man. We find, however, that the forms of a tribal religion may be meaningfully described in their interactions with the ecological adaptation of the culture as a whole, and, as a matter of fact, that they are partly produced by this process

Religion is in most respects a creation of man's psychic experience and cultural tradition. In particular this is the case with mythology and other epical religious traditions, although their setting may be colored by the physical environment. Also more abstract notions, like soul and beliefs, are usually part of a traditional pattern that is validated by individual psychic experiences. In some important aspects however religion is tied up with the cultural structure and thereby, in some religions, with the ecological foundations of culture. In other aspects it reflects the environment more directly. We can say that ecology acts creatively on these religions—the "primitive" religions—by enforcing or stimulating cultural and religious adaptation through a filter of technological possibilities, value patterns and belief traditions. It is possible to arrange the levels of religio-ecological integration according to the following scale, which is purely functional and should not be mistaken for an evolutionary diagram:

Primary integration: environmental adaptation of basic cultural features, such as subsistence and productive arrangements, technology etc. and behavior patterns associated with these features, such as certain social and religious attitudes. Steward calls this constellation of features a "cultural core," an appellation that may be accepted here. To the cultural core belong such religious beliefs and rituals that are, as it were, part of the subsistence activities. So-called animal ceremonialism, or rituals around the slain animal in a hunting culture, and the calendar cycle of rites around the crops in an agricultural milieu, belong to these "subsistence rituals." In their exact appearance they are influenced by historical factors, such as diffusion and inheritance of specific forms; in their general pattern they reflect ecological adaptational processes.

An important instance of primary integration exists in those cases where the religious value system is structured to correspond with subsistence needs. Thus, the Naskapi of Labrador have developed a complex divination system in order to be able to locate the game in times of severe cold and scarcity of food. Indeed, their whole religion can be defined as one of divination. (6)

Secondary integration: the indirect adaptation of religious beliefs and rituals. The latter are organized into a framework that takes its forms from the social structure, which is, in its turn, a model suggested by the economic and technological adaptation to

environment. It is a well-known fact that a complicated, stratified pantheon only occurs where there is a stratified social structure that owes its existence to a rich agricultural environment, an environment that allows a surplus economy, a dense population and professional specialization. Again we are talking about patterns and structures, not about specific beliefs and specific rites that have historical accidental circumstances as their cause.

Morphological integration: the covering of religious features with forms taken from the physical and biological environment. Religious concepts and rites are by their very nature traditional but borrow their formal appearance from phenomena within the actual biotope. Thus, the hunter's spirits show themselves in animal disguise, the shaman dresses himself in deer attire, the offerings are performed in sacred groves, etc. The choice of forms is not arbitrary

but is related to the symbolism that is inherent in them. For instance, the bird dress of a shaman tells us of the bird-like supernatural powers of the shaman or his assistant spirits. It has already been pointed out that myths often depict the natural environment in the area where they are narrated.

It should be obvious that the interaction between environment, cultural core and traditional factors gives us a most useful key to the understanding of religious forms and religious process. We realize that it is not enough to analyze an exotic religion by referring to cultural index, cultural history and social structure; environment is also a factor to be taken into account. In particular we can assess those religions in ecological terms whose cultures are most exposed to the forces of environment. In technically more advanced civilizations the ecological factor is negligible, but some of the religious symbols that have been transmitted historically still reveal an origin dependent on ecological adaptation. In Christianity, for example, the good shepherd and the lamb of God are symbols taken from a pastoral environment

3. A second target for the religio-ecological approach is the phenomenological comparison between religions and religious traits. As we know, phenomenology of religion tries to identify types which have a universal or regional representation. The scientific control of the investigated materials for the establishment of such types is of course more rigid and reliable in restricted regional areas where the researcher is a specialist. Such areas are usually defined as historical- geographical units, the ethnologist's "culture" or "culture area." In principle, at least, such cultures represent a certain degree of environmental adaptation; the culture-area designation is however more inclusive (cf. for instance the Southwest of North America). Cultural ecology and ecology of religion provide us with a new operative concept that allows bolder comparisons, a type concept relating to whole cultures and religions.

Again we turn back to Steward and his concept of the "cultural core." As we remember, the cultural core is the constellation of basic features in a culture. If, now, we find similar cultural cores in other cultures, and they have "similar functional interrelationships resulting from local ecological adaptations and similar levels of sociocultural integration," we arrive at a "culture type." (7) "Level of sociocultural integration" means here the form of society involved in the ecological process, such as the family unit, or band, or village, or nation, etc.; different cultures are organized on different social levels. The cultural-type concept thus transcends the culture-area concept with its continuous and limited extent

Just as we may identify a cultural type cross-culturally we may, I think, identify its religious correlate, the "type of religion," in the same perspective. Of course, there is a major difference between the two type concepts: one refers to the cultural core as a whole,

the other to the religious and magic behavior associated with the main features of the cultural core (or primary integration, as it has been called above). Furthermore, where Steward talks of levels of sociocultural integration I should like to emphasize subsistence activities as the most important means for identifying a cross-cultural type of religion ...

4. A third goal for the ecology of religion is to arrange the types of religion into historical strata. The gain of this procedure would be that religious traits that can be interpreted ecologically will be referred to particular historical configurations. The historian of religion will be aware of the fact that theriomorphic spirits have their natural beginnings in hunting religions of a very early date, or that priests attending to idols and sacred bundles make their first appearance in agricultural religions of a later date. I am here referring to a relative chronological order, to the general succession of forms, not to specific cases; for in the actual cases some hunting cultures may be younger than agrarian cultures, or they may have adopted a hunting existence after having been agriculturists, as the Cheyenne Indians did in the 18th century. In other words, our perspective is here "evolutionistic." ...

Anyhow, the ecologically motivated coupling of particular idea or rite complexes to particular religious types enables us to relate them to the succession of cultural stages as defined by prehistorians and ethnologists. In particular that will be possible when the cultures that are discussed are independent, that is, not organized within the wider framework of a technically and socially more complex culture.

Here we can proceed one step further. Provided that religious patterns and their cultural setting constitute a holistic unity, or nearly so (there is no such thing as a complete integrative culture with all parts functioning positively), we may establish credible hypotheses concerning prehistoric religions. I say hypotheses, for what is not revealed to us by documents cannot be empirically verified. Most hypotheses on prehistoric religions proceed from the concept of analogy: one reconstructs a possible religious situation by adducing religious facts from contemporary primitive societies. By anchoring the interpretation in a religio-ecological approach we may restrict the selection of analogies to those which conform with the cultural type of the prehistoric remains. The method presupposes that we know the cultural type, including the probable pattern of social organization, from the analysis of settlements, graves, temples, rock-drawings, etc. As we know, modern archaeology is striving to reach results in these complicated matters.

The procedure chosen by the ecologist of religion may take the following course. First, he tries to identify the cultural type, and the social organization as revealed by archaeological facts. Next, he associates the cultural core and social organization with a specific kind or type of religion, and perhaps a segment within this type of religion. The type of religion must have been defined before, as an outcome of comparative religio-ecological research on religions in contemporary primitive societies. It is therefore a necessary task for ecologists of religion to contribute to an index of religious types.(8) By relating archaeological data to an appropriate type of religion the researcher will be able to disclose the general nature of religious ideas at a certain site. Specific archaeological traits—a bear grave, a rock-drawing may communicate direct evidence for the general religious interpretation, and corroborate the religio-ecological operation.

Ecology of religion thus introduces a new way of dealing with the difficult subject of prehistoric religions. It cannot as such illuminate single beliefs and ideas, but it equips us with credible hypotheses concerning religious structures and patterns.(9)

5. The fourth and last contribution that the religio-ecological approach can achieve for us is to indicate an imminent process of religious change. If the holistic thesis holds good that phases of religious expression belong to the primary ecological integration of

culture, then changes in the basic structure of the cultural core should be expected to affect the structure of religion. Here again we must return to Steward's culture-ecological theory.

It is Steward's conviction that modifications in ecological integration are the most powerful factor in bringing about the evolution of culture, or, as he also calls it, cultural process or cultural change. He states: "Over the millenia cultures in different environments have changed tremendously, and these changes are basically traceable to new adaptations required by changing technology and productive arrangements." (10) This opinion seems to be justified as far as it concerns the primitive cultures, the cultures of the foragers, hunters, hoe-cultivators, nomads, etc., but has also some bearing on modern civilization. Its implication is that in the long run the organization of religious features will conform to the new state of environmental adaptation. In other words, once we know the changes in the basic features of the cultural core we realize that changes will take place in the religious structure. In some cases the direction of these changes can be anticipated.

6. It should have emerged from the foregoing how many new vistas will be opened by the application of a religio-ecological perspective. Such topics are illuminated as the interaction between nature and religion more important than was recently assumed-, ecological integration or convergence as an alternative to historical diffusion in the explanation of similar religious forms in different places, the interpretation of prehistoric religions, and religious change. It is important to remember that ecology of religion never supplants other methods, but offers more solutions.

Above all, ecology of religion helps us to achieve a deeper perspective on religious dynamics. We perceive that the forms and patterns of religion often depend on exterior conditions and that much of what we usually conceive to be genuine expressions of religious content are actually fortuitous manifestations. For instance, in the belief in an afterlife the realms of the dead mirror the environment of living man; the central idea is the faith in the next existence, whereas its forms are casual. It is often nowadays considered that some elementary religious symbols convey a universal import. Without denying this possibility I should like to point out that many symbols are in reality determined by social milieu or natural environment. It is therefore important to analyze the outworks of religion before interpreting its meaning.

Ecology of religion thus diverts religion of its fortuitous forms; it shows what is the casual expression and the genuine belief. By removing the external attributes of a religion, suggested by environmental adaptation and historical process, we may arrive at the basic ideas and values of that religion. A more profound view of the intrinsic values of so-called primitive religions will, I think, provide us with a key to the understanding of those great religious traditions that are dominant today.

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York, 1959), p. 179.
2. Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford, 1965), p. 54.
3. Hultkrantz, "The Indians and the Wonders of Yellowstone: A Study of the Interrelations of Religion, Nature and Culture," *Ethnos* 19 (1954), pp. 34-68.
4. See e.g. C. Meinhof, *Die Religionen der Afrikaner in Ihrem Zusammenhang mit dem Wirtschaftsleben* (Oslo, 1926).
5. Cf. H. and H. A. Frankfort, "The Emancipation of Thought from Myth," in H. Frankfort et al. eds. *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Mmt* (Chicago, 1946), pp. 363-73.
6. Hultkrantz, "La divination en Amerique du Nord," in A. Caquot and M. Leibovici, eds. *La divination, Vol. II* (Paris, 1968), p. 75.

7. J. H. Steward, *The Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana, IL, 1955), pp. 5-6.
8. An effort to create an acceptable index of culture types has been made by J. J. Hester, "A Comparative Typology of New World Cultures," *American Anthropologist* 64--5 (1962), pp. 1001-15.
9. Hultkrantz, "The Religio- Ecological Method in the Research on Prehistoric Religion," *Actes du 1er symposium international sur les religions de la prehistoire* (Valca Monica, 1975).
10. Steward, *op. cit.* in n. 11, p. 37.