

**Téma:** *Náboženství a adaptace: náboženství jako součást adaptačního procesu*

**Against** expectations, religion has, in the 1990s, become a topic of everyday conversation and concern. Whether or not the war in the Gulf was about oil or colonialism or something else, it was dubbed by one of the protagonists a jihad, or holy war. "Is this your civilization?" asked one of the survivors of the bombing of a Baghdad bunker in which hundreds of civilians were killed, when confronted by a Western TV journalist. He might as well have asked, "Is this your religion?" Even though the Islamic nations of the Middle East and elsewhere were divided about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or the Israeli occupation of the West Bank of the River Jordan, there is little doubt that anti-Christian and anti-Jewish sentiments were revived among the Islamic people of the Middle East as a result of the bombing of civilians in Iraq, and old wounds were reopened. In the former Yugoslavia, too, "ethnic cleansing" has taken place not only on national and linguistic grounds but also along religious lines, again primarily between Christians and Muslims.

Why religions? Why do religions go on? What makes them persist?

Cannot modern secular states look after themselves? Are they too weak? Why do modern governments look to God, to Allah, for support? Why do Indians join fundamentalist Hindu parties in which naked ascetics share the platform with politicians? The modern state insists on a birth certificate: it wants to know who has been born. It insists on a marriage certificate: it wants to know who marries whom. It insists on a death certificate: it wants to know who can be struck off the books. With all this knowledge, why does it also turn to God? One of the reasons is historical. The state was not always distinct from the church; at one time not so very long ago religious institutions had political and economic power in England, Scotland, and Wales. They still do in the Middle East, where Islam and the state are indivisible. Are we, then, just seeing the past lingering on into the present? No. There is more to life, it seems, than the secular state can encompass. People want religion and faith; many of them could barely imagine life without these things.

The place of religion in the modern world is as fascinating as it is difficult to account for. On the one hand, people the world over are modernizing, either rushing or crawling toward the Western style of living if they possibly can. In Asia Westernization has proceeded apace. In Africa it has yet to happen in many areas, but the desire is there. Yet even where Western ideas have caught hold with a vengeance, as in Japan, religions have maintained their existence, even multiplied and spread. What are they doing? We shall explore this matter in detail, expecting to find religions right at the heart of the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Reader, you may not be "religious." That is a matter with which we shall not be concerned in this book. To be religious is to believe in some supernatural power, something that may not make itself manifest, once or twice in a lifetime, or every minute of every day. We may call it God; think of it as a vaguely apprehended essence, as in the Bhagavad Gita of the Hindus; or have very precise, well-defined ideas about it, perhaps derived from the Old and New Testaments or the Koran. To be religious is to be a certain kind of person, one who subjects his or her thoughts and actions to critical appraisal in terms of a set of ideal values, who feels beholden, observed, unalone. This can be a comforting feeling in times of crisis and a worrisome one in times of moral uncertainty.

To be religious or irreligious is a choice available to people in the Western world, something that some people think about a lot and others not at all. We know whether we are religious or not. We may, from time to time, feel that we ought to be more religious than we are, or we may be strongly atheistic. This is very much a Western phenomenon. Most people the world over are in some sense of the word religious; they readily accept (or at least do not deny) the existence of things supernatural, hold superstitions, accept some aspects of astrological prediction, or believe in good and bad luck. Some Westerners prefer to call themselves agnostic and would not accept the label of atheist. To be an atheist is to claim knowledge about the nature of the universe that one can scarcely justify at a time when astronomers and physicists themselves are constantly writing about God and the Creation. The atheist says, "I know better than that; I know there is nothing but matter in the world." This, if anything, is a statement of faith. It is safer and intellectually humbler to be an agnostic.

One reason why many of us in the West are atheists or agnostics is that we have personally experienced the failure of our religion or its ministers to meet our needs or answer our questions at times of crisis. This is due, in part, to the rapid rate of change in modern Western society. One of the interesting features of the major religions, to which we shall return from time to time, is their relative conservatism, their apparent slow pace of change, the difficulty they have in adjusting to the world (to which, in the end, they do adjust). Old religions are full of anachronisms and irrelevancies in a fast-changing world. Why, we shall ask, are they relatively slow to change? Why, for example, can there still be a lively theological debate about the Virgin Birth in Great Britain in the 1990s? On the face of it, it seems absurd. Among mammals (of which *Homo sapiens* is one) virgins cannot give birth because female mammals do not produce sperm, without which fertilization of the egg cannot occur, and so the process leading to a new individual cannot get started. Yet bishops and archbishops argue about this. Why? The answer has to do with the question not of virgins but of faith. Similarly, orthodox Moslems believe that the Koran is the word of Allah. To accept the Virgin Birth, or to believe that Allah dictated the Koran, is an example of accepting articles of faith within the Christian and Islamic traditions. Faith is important in two ways. First, it is important to the organized church because it ensures the survival of institutional structures and the adherence of their followers. Here we can develop theories of religious organizations acting competitively in the free market to win over faithful adherents, rather like firms vying for customers in the economic sphere. Second, it is important to the adherents because of the calming and psychologically satisfying feeling it imparts to some, or the practical course of action it imparts to others, in an insecure world.

Anthropology promotes a relativist stance in such matters. Humans have evolved from animals and have created cultures. Different cultures have various ways of approaching the same questions. The panoply of religions found in individual countries and cultures of the world is a colorful and impressive display of symbolism. Quite apart from the question of whether or not God exists, religions have provided the context for some of the most beautiful music ever composed, the noblest works of art and architecture, and the most colorful dances, rites, and rituals. Here, in these joyful and anxious expressions, we see the human spirit reaching out to acknowledge, to give thanks, to worship, to praise, to honor a deity.

At other times, when he or she is angered by human evil, the deity may need to be appeased. In Africa, in subsistence economies, people accept the possibility that the deity may bring drought; in ancient Greece Sophoclean drama implied that the gods brought sickness to the Thebans as a consequence of Oedipus' incest; in medieval England the plague was attributed by theologians and commoners alike to the sins of all, and princes in particular. In all these cases, it is necessary for people to make sacrifices to appease the angry god or gods. The process of sacrifice is also intelligible as a mechanism by which worried, perplexed, or frightened people grapple with immense natural forces such as earthquakes and floods. Religious wars are also a form of response:

If the threat is social rather than natural, holy wars occur. From preaching love and peace, religions like Christianity and Islam start preaching the virtues of death in a just cause, the moral obligation to defend the faith, to kill the enemies of God. In today's world the West is viewed as "satanic" by some Middle Eastern Moslem fundamentalists. What lies behind the ideological conflict? Some would say it reflects political competition for the most valuable resource in the world-oil-which lies buried below the Islamic countries of the Middle East yet is essential to the continued functioning of the Christian West. If true, this would be an example of religions articulating practical, secular, materialist concerns. One of the main objects of this book is to demonstrate over and over how religions do just this.

### **Religion and the Physical World**

It should not be thought that by the physical world we mean only the soil, the air, the elements, houses, food, and other such aspects of the universe. Far from it. Life itself is physical and material. Whether or not we believe that God instills a breath of life in each living thing, or that we humans (and animals too, as the Northwest Coast Indians of North America and the Eskimos believed) have souls, there can be no doubt that people and animals are physical beings. They are made of bones, fat, water, protein, and so on. They have weight. They are subject to gravity. In other words, we have bodies. Now it might be thought that this "body" aspect of humanity is the aspect of least interest to religions. Surely, they are more interested in spiritual qualities than physical ones? Is it not precisely this fact that marks religion off from, say, medicine or biology? Our answer is negative. Religions, the world over, are concerned with human physical existence, human bodies, what they may and may not do, when they may and may not do it, how they should be conceived, born, fed, cleaned, dressed, and buried. \* Religions want to get involved with our sexual behavior and with menstruation, which is the subject of religious taboos on both women, who often have to hide away, and men, who may not have sex with them at this time without risking pollution.

Humanity is one, and all of us have much the same preoccupations with the welfare of our parents and children, with keeping healthy, with forming friendships and managing enmities, with love and sex, with status and esteem, with getting food, a place to live, a bit of leisure time to relax and have fun. Religions have things to say about how we should accomplish all these things, as we shall see in the course of this book.

There is also that other preoccupation we have already mentioned, with answering the deeper questions, about, who we are and where we come from and where we are going. These are the questions religions specialize in and it is in regard to these deeper questions that religions claim to have exclusive and particular access to the truth. "Jesus saves," proclaimed from a billboard, is not a relative statement. It implies that the way to salvation is through Jesus and not through any other route. If we seek to be saved, then we have to decide whether to give our souls to Jesus or to turn away unsaved. Most people in modern Western cities turn away; they regard the whole thing as some kind of spiritual con game, operated by a sect or a church trying to increase its membership, and indeed there is an element of truth in this perception. Yet despite the impact of Westernization, spirituality survives, not always in an orthodox form but often, as in the United States and Japan, in the form of a plethora of small sects or even cults that meet or even live together to emphasize the spiritual side of life. And in some parts of the modern Western world Christianity is on the increase; for example, the Mormon form of Christianity emanating from Salt Lake City in Utah is spreading rapidly and promises to be the mainstream form of Christianity in the United States. Nevertheless, it is especially in the West, with its technoscientific culture, its all-pervasive commercial consumerism, that the values of Christianity have been disregarded and downgraded. They don't allow you to earn enough money, indeed they threaten to turn you into a pauper if you take the

gospel of Christ too literally and seriously question materialist assumptions. There is, however, a constant interaction between religious ideas and those of secular society, and this interaction requires much further study. Commercialism and orthodox religions have always coexisted among the mass of the populations of, for instance, India or Peru, Thailand or Kuwait. Secularism and profane values may at times war with, but can also come to terms with, religious values. Atheism does not inevitably triumph: Communism bid fair to eliminate religion from the world; it failed, and the old orthodox religions of Eastern Europe and Russia resurged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as soon as the stranglehold exerted on them by Communist states was relaxed.

This book isn't about anyone religion, nor is it proselytizing. We do not want any reader to convert to some new kind of religion we are here about to offer. Rather, we write about religion as an interesting subject. We look at "religions" in the plural rather than "religion" as an abstract concept. We ask the following questions: "What are religions doing in the world?" "What are they interested in?" "Why are religions still thriving, even resurging, in this secular, scientific age?" We acknowledge that there are answers in the mystical or spiritual sphere, but religions go further than that. It is rather too easy to reply, when asked about religion, that it is concerned with all the things that technology and science cannot deal with, man's spiritual and moral nature. That is true, but it is only part of the answer. Religions are also down to earth, and we believe it is this contact with the material world that explains the continued existence of religions in all countries, why they have survived and multiplied during history, and why they are a very real force in the world today.

#### Religious Experience

This is not a book about religious experience as such. Anthropologists such as Nadell believed that the "thrill" associated with religious experience was one of the most important reasons for its powerful hold over people. Others have written movingly about the numinous, the ineffable or inexplicable. Alister Hardy<sup>2</sup> collected a very large number of accounts from ordinary people from all walks of life in Great Britain concerning mystical experiences they had themselves had (see the analysis by G. Allern).<sup>3</sup> Often such experiences involved seeing a dazzling white light, and a dearly beloved, now deceased person who appears and speaks. Contact with the dead is the essence of some spiritualist movements. Speaking in tongues, or glossolalia (see Goodman),<sup>4</sup> and other phenomena such as automatic writing have attested to the fact that people can be moved in ways quite inexplicable to conventional science. For most religious people, religious experience is the central core of their belief; it may have a cleansing or purifying effect, and it provides for them the proof (if any were needed) of God's existence. Music has often been held to engender such feelings of sublime elation associated with religious experience. It has also been the case that in quite recent times large numbers of ordinary people have seen visions of the Virgin Mary; for example, she appeared to them over a period of several months at Medjugorje, a village in Yugoslavia, as described by Jackson's

In recent times, neurophysiologists and neuropsychologists have shown changes in the levels of brain hormones, or endorphins, to be associated with such experiences. This has raised complex questions of the relation between religious experience and other out-of-body experiences such as those of the mentally ill and of people affected by drugs.

We can distinguish three states of mind associated with religious observances, in order of intensity: meditation, trance, and ecstasy. There is a considerable literature on each of these, and useful summaries of what is involved in each can be found in Lehmann and Myers' *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion*.<sup>6</sup> A variety of studies have shown that meditation can lead to changed behavior, restructuring of consciousness and of our understanding of the realities of the world around us. Trance goes beyond meditation in that it is a clearly defined and structured departure from the normal state of being in which the individual considers himself or herself to be, and is considered to others to be, involved in another world. Ecstasy is the state of mind of the person in trance.

Our brains, as part of our bodies, exist within a cultural context, and each culture has its own preconceptions about which brain states are normal and which are abnormal. Meditation, brought in to Western cultures from the Oriental religions, is incompatible with normal activities at the workplace but is becoming more popular as a way of relaxing and regaining a sense of proportion in our own culture. Western cultures put a premium on alert states of consciousness for people in most public contexts and frown upon states of delirium or ecstasy except in specially defined private circumstances. In other cultures, for instance among the Yanomami of Venezuela, such states were part of the normal life of adult men, induced by the use of drugs. Religious specialists, often called shamans, use drugs or intoxicants in a variety of cultures to achieve cures or contact with the spirit world. Among many African peoples, spirit possession enabled the person in trance to know what his ancestors were thinking.

Meditation is not a single, clearly defined state of mind. Sanskrit, the religious language of Hinduism, identifies more than twenty-two different states of consciousness, (see Schuman). Meditation has been defined by Shapiro<sup>8</sup> as a family of techniques which have in common a conscious attempt to focus attention in a nonanalytical way and an attempt not to dwell on discursive ruminating thought. Attempts to study the neurophysiology of the meditative state by comparing it with that of resting controls have been criticized by Holmes;<sup>9</sup> in general it appears that different individuals show different neurophysiological patterns when meditating, and the whole experience is very personal and specific to the individual. However, there is evidence that both alpha and theta wave activity is changed by meditation and that these features are associated with subjectively felt serenity and happiness.

Some meditative sects use the method to obtain enlightenment, and indeed some Indian Sadhus have been shown to achieve a remarkably low metabolic rate and to go without movement, food, or drink for many days while meditating. The state of mind of people in such deep meditation remains a mystery, however. The rhythmic repetition of a verbal mantra is enjoined in some religious forms of meditation, for instance in Zen Buddhism, and this evidently has a rhythmic effect on neural functioning and achieves the calming function this provides.

All the literate religions have developed meditation as part of their methods for personal betterment. Manuals for meditation exist in them all, and well-known saints in both Christianity and Islam have practiced and publicized their own particular methods. For example, the Islamic method of Al-Ghazali gives great importance to personal cleanliness as a necessary prerequisite to successful meditation. This mirrors the Islamic emphasis on washing before prayer.

Trance has been defined by Shorlo as "a state in which there is functional nonawareness of the structural frame of reference ... which supports, interprets, and gives meaning to experience." In other words, the person in trance is in a structured situation, possibly devised especially for the purpose; he or she is unaware of this situation while in trance, but the people watching give his or her actions and words special meanings. Trance is also known to be infectious—one or more people watching a "possessed" person may become possessed themselves. The classic state of possession is seen in the Voodoo cults of Haiti, where this state of mind is linked to witchcraft and can lead to madness and even death. Witchcraft is also found in many parts of Africa at the present time and is associated with trance and possession of various kinds, involving demons and other occult beliefs. In other contexts, trance may be much less associated with evil.

Among the Navaho, individuals could make Contact with spirits through trance, while among the now extinct Mandan Indians young men in bygone times practiced severe forms of self-mutilation and masochism in order to discover their tutelary spirits. Trancelike states are also found in Christianity, for example among the Shakers and early Quakers, and some Pentecostal and other fundamentalist movements at the present time; in all cases it is the entry of the spirit into the person that accompanies the trance. Trance connects with meditation in the form of "transcendental

meditation," which is a form of self-hypnosis involving sensory deprivation. At the neurophysiological level there appear to be no distinctive correlates of trance.

Ecstasy is an abnormal state of consciousness in which the reaction of the mind to external stimuli is either inhibited or altered in character. The person so possessed may be impervious to messages from without and can sometimes feel no pain. Examples of the latter include barebacked Catholic men carrying bundles of cacti on their shoulders during a Good Friday procession in Taxco, Mexico, or whipping themselves with thorn-studded ropes in Manila, Philippines (also on Good Friday), while showing signs of experiencing great happiness or rapture.

Ecstatic mental states can also be induced by drugs such as LSD, magic mushrooms, or certain cactus seeds after protracted fasting. Equally, the same state of mind can be elicited in teenagers at a pop concert, who are in a very real sense "worshiping" their idols. As with trance, the neurophysiology of ecstasy is very complex and varies from person to person and from one kind of ecstasy to another. The phenomenon of ecstatic religions is treated at length by Lewis.

### **Complex Theologies**

A very different area of study, but one every bit as complex as that of the neurological basis of religious experience, is the field of philosophical arguments about whether God exists or not, and how to go about the matter of proof. These are issues not so much of religion as of theology and philosophy. How do such theological issues relate to the life events of the "common man"? The answer is, in direct terms, not at all. Theology disembodies faith and it is not the province of theology to deal with the everyday emotional and physical happenings of ordinary people, which are our object of attention in this book.

This matter of complex theologies raises an important point, which needs to be borne in mind throughout the discussion of religion and the common man. This is that for the ordinary individual in any society, religion involves a very different and much simpler set of ideas than it does for the priests and other officials of the institutions associated with the religion. The ordinary person may be imbued with faith, may be firm in his or her religious convictions, may have a good working knowledge of the names of the gods or prophets or other religious dignitaries, but is likely to be largely unaware of the debates, positions, arguments, and sectarian disagreements that have characterized the theological history of the faith. From the time of the Gutenberg Bible there has developed an ever widening gulf between those who study holy writ and those who try to live by religious principles. The points of dispute learned by the incumbents of high religious office in the course of their training may enable them to deal with arguments and disagreements that arise in the course of their ministry. But they are not taught as such to the faithful, who are, rather, given the "one true version." Practicing priests do not stand up in public and confound their congregations with opposing theological positions; indeed, they very often decry or at best ignore the views of opposing sects.

For the "ordinary" religious person (i.e., nonpriest, nontheologian) there are a faith, a set of beliefs, and a set of practices, some formal and some informal, such as a general attitude to the poor or the needy. At higher levels in the structure of what we may call the "church" or the "ministry" or the "temple" there are those in whose care are the religious texts, who study them and are aware of their complexities. In Roman Catholicism there are, for example, edicts and encyclicals carefully preserved, to which reference can be made in justifying a stand on, say, abortion or birth control. The careful Catholic scholar is aware that such edicts have, at different times, adopted different positions and that there is no unanimity in the church's history. For example, there were severe penalties for abortion before the twelfth century, providing for up to ten years fasting according to the age of the fetus (see Kelly) The Pope's medical adviser, who in 1621 was a priest, stated that the ensoulment of the fetus took place at fertilization. There are repeated debates in the Vatican, and

the Pope's statements of dogma are the result of such debates, in which he takes part. To the less educated public they are the words of God, which he transmits should they be listening or even feel it necessary to listen. Sermons have been described as being washed over by holy words. For such people there is neither time nor need for studying the edicts of earlier centuries, nor indeed of current controversies, since they are believers first.

Caution is thus needed in the approach to the role of religion in relation to the common man, the person in the street. The higher reaches of theology do not reach the people at all. Thus there is no possibility of taking theological arguments as indicative of the part played by religions in the world today. What religions do is bound up with the lives of ordinary people, with steering them through the phases of their existence, and not with arguments about, with whom a married man spends eternity after resurrection or whether or not the Prophet Mohammed traveled from Arabia to Jerusalem in a single night.

Books such as *The Philosophy of Religion* by Mitchell<sup>13</sup> and *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* by Davies<sup>14</sup> concern themselves with falsification, verification, free will; whether God exists, whether it is reasonable to debate this, whether faith needs to be based on verifiable assertions or falsifiable ones; and so on. Arguments in this field are based on logic: there is no sense of the social significance of religion or its functions for individual human beings living in the real world. Philosophers of religion are concerned with arguments, proof, -reason, and belief. If we do not concern ourselves with these matters in the following pages, it is not because we regard them as irrelevant to the study of religion. They are highly relevant to the study of any religion. Our book, however, is not a philosophical one, nor are we philosophers. We leave those fundamental matters (which, philosophers agree, are unlikely ever to be resolved) to one side; we accept that many people believe in gods and spirits, and we work forward from there, to ask questions about what those beliefs are, how they affect people's thoughts and actions, and what their functions might be for individuals in the context of their social and physical existence.

Finally there are questions about the relation between religion and morality. Philosophers such as Helmis have debated whether morality arises out of religion or vice versa, and how rationality, humanism, and other secular bases for morality and ethics are related to the values embodied in religious belief and doctrine. Such questions are debated mainly in traditional terms, with reference to Christian culture and Western morality only, and have as a result only limited general applicability to a worldwide survey. For our purposes they tackle an interesting question in the modern, doubting world of the West. Mitchell's book is subtitled *The Dilemma of the Traditional Conscience*, which gives the clue as to how the author sees things: The problem at issue is how to comprehend a Christian approach to morality in an increasingly secular world, one in which moral judgments are increasingly being made on secular, non-Christian grounds.

This is indeed a problem for Christians, but it is not one for Moslems or the propitiators of ancestors living south of the Sahara. They may, of course, have equivalent problems, arising from the collapse of traditional life and the advent of Western secularization. We are interested in these matters, as the following pages will show. Religions, it appears to us, have to adapt to changing environments. In particular, what may be called "intensive growth" can change levels of real wealth in societies and lighten the struggle for existence for many people, one among several causes of the decline of religion in the West.

We see morality as prior, logically and evolutionarily, to religions. We derive morality from evolutionary processes operating on the reciprocal behavior of intelligent creatures living in social groups. In this we follow the ideas of Alexander. <sup>16</sup> There is thus no problem of priority; the matter is settled. Our position is that morality is "natural," and no doubt some philosophers will want to point out that this position is untenable in various ways. Nevertheless, it is buttressed by many sound arguments within biology, anthropology, and primatology into which moral philosophers have not yet extended their considerations.

One final note. Some people, when they hear the word religion today, point straight to the fact that religions have been the cause of wars throughout history, that we can no longer, in the modern world, risk the dangers of allowing religious fanaticism to cause rifts and wars and assassinations in the world. All too recently, Saddam Hussein, in an Iraq under siege, called for a jihad, an Islamic holy war, against the United States and its allies. And as we write, Moslem and Christian forces are fighting each other in what used to be Yugoslavia and in parts of the old Soviet Union. We acknowledge this side of religions. Religiously inspired armies can be terribly dangerous. The call by political and military leaders to their subjects to die a glorious death for their faith, as was repeatedly made by Iranian and Iraqi leaders in recent wars, is one of the strongest appeals they can make and is frequently heard in times of war. This indeed is the dark side of faith.

There are exceptions. Within Christianity certain pacifist sects, notably the Quakers, refuse to fight at times of war, whatever the circumstances and whoever the enemy may be. In Buddhism and Hinduism, passive resistance can be the religious response to attack, whatever the consequences. But in the main, religious institutions are closely linked with the political heart of their country and fall in line with political ambitions for conquest or political necessities in defense. War is a terrifying catastrophe, and hence the context in which religions play a large part. While deploring religious wars and the role of religions in war, we have to try to understand why things are so and not be dismissive. Just as religions concern themselves with birth, marriage, and death, so they also do with war. When religion supports expansionist aggression, it exposes its Achilles heel, and who can be blamed for rejecting it?

But let us not end this chapter on a negative note. Let us return to our question "Why religions?" What is it that takes people to their local church on Sundays, leads them to fold their hands in prayer and speak to an invisible, half-understood deity? Why do Japanese followers of Shinto hang little pieces of paper with prophecies on the branches of a sacred tree? Why do Moslems kneel on floor mats facing Mecca and bow their heads low five times a day? Why do Hindus ring a bell to call up one of the local gods, and leave offerings of rice and flowers at his or her temple? Why do African villagers sacrifice a goat to propitiate their ancestors who are thought to be angry?

We must never forget the sheer complexity of our chosen topic. The outer forms of religious actions, and their underlying meanings, are as diverse as they could be. We seek in vain for one underlying meaning to explain them all. Anthropologists are humbled by the complexity of this subject. As Max Weber wrote in his book *Ancient Judaism*, 17 "It would require more than a lifetime to acquire a true mastery of the literature." And he was writing of Judaism alone. In the present book we are not concerned with the literature or the official theology of the world's faiths, but rather with what people do when they are acting in religious ways.

Again, the distinguished anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard 18 wrote, "Generalizations about 'religion' are discreditable. They are always too ambitious and take account of only a few of the facts. The anthropologist should ... restrict himself to religions of a certain type ... in favour of limited conclusions reached by inductive analysis of observed facts" (pp. 6-7). Nevertheless anthropologists such as Guy Swanson, i~ *The Birth of the GODS*,<sup>19</sup> after quoting both of the preceding warnings, pointed out that science proceeds both by careful descriptions of particular cases and by generalizations: "The movement of scientific knowledge requires both, and both should have the resources to play their equally indispensable parts" (p. viii). With this statement we are in agreement, and it forms the basis of the present work.

Swanson was concerned with the origins of religious beliefs, and his own generalizations followed a Durkheimian approach. This approach seeks to understand the origins of the forms of religious (or supernatural) experience in the forms and powers of society itself. Man is to society as a worshipper is to a god.



This is not our own approach, or the method of generalization to be found in the present work. Our approach is not concerned with the origins of religions so much as their functions. We relate and explain the force of religious ideas by reference to the needs of individuals in their everyday lives, not to society and its forms. If the Durkheimian approach can explain the forms religions take or the particular beliefs they emphasize, it does not seem to us to emphasize with sufficient force the real part played by religion in the lives of actual people. As a result of our investigations we have become convinced by the evidence worldwide that the function of religions is to respond to human needs, to help people at times of personal crisis (e.g., at funerals), or when they are undergoing a change of status (e.g., at weddings), or generally in relation to the everyday strains of normal life. Ours is thus a functional approach.

It is also, in the anthropological tradition, comparative. So many books and writings about religion in the Western literature concern themselves either with Christianity alone or with Christianity and impossible. The field worker who goes out to study a people in the heart of Africa or another part of the underdeveloped world finds immediately that the concepts of Christianity, or Judeo-Christianity, are either missing or greatly changed. There may be no churches, no priests, no concept of sin, no evidence of religious morality, no special time of day for "services," no actual "prayer," no universal god. Instead, parts of the landscape may be held sacred as in Australia, spells may be cast into the storm to calm the wind and the ocean as in the Trobriand Islands, crops may be unable to grow without prayers as in South America, and pregnancy may be, in part at least, the result of a spirit's entering a woman's belly (Australia again).

The comparative approach underlies the whole of this book. It does not explicitly compare one religion with another, or concentrate on its modern manifestations. It compares by juxtaposing the various ways different religions approach the same basic human situations. There is a great strength in this approach: All humans pass through essentially the same phases of the lifecycle. There is thus a common basis for comparison. We are born; we reach puberty; we encounter disappointment, disease, and death; and in due course we too die. Some of us remain single but most get married and have children, some get divorced, many are widowed. In short, there is a basic pattern to life everywhere and we have found that religions play their main roles in relation to this pattern.