

Téma: *Interpretace náboženské skutečnosti*

There has been since World War II, and in particular since the mid 1960s, a great flowering of the study of religion. There has been great growth in institutions offering courses in religion in the English speaking world; while in Continental Europe and Scandinavia there has, in the period since 1945, not only been a restoration to vigour of the faculties of theology, but also a modest but significant advance in the history of religions, partly in the context of a widened interest in non European cultures. At the same time, work in the social sciences has increasingly converged, in matters related to religion, upon the work of comparative religionists.

But though we may live during a period when old-fashioned rationalism is declining, and when the importance of the study of religion is more widely recognized, there is not always much clarity in the assumptions brought to bear upon it. Or at least there is much divergence of aim and method in the way in which it is approached.

This is partly because the subject is considerably shaped by the institutions in which it is embedded. Thus the existence of faculties of Christian theology imposes certain categories upon scholarship—for instance the division into such branches of enquiry as New Testament, patristics, church history, systematic theology, philosophy of religion, comparative religion (or history of religions). This builds into the subject already an asymmetry in the way in which Christianity is treated as compared with other religious traditions. This of course reflects the history of scholarship and the fact that classically the study of religion has been tied for the most part to the training of clergy and other specialists; and so the modern universities of Europe and America in some degree inherit the cultural assumption that Christianity should have a privileged place in the curriculum. Conversely, worry about such an arrangement sometimes leads to the exclusion of theology from the secular university. It is not my task here to enter into the controversies surrounding this matter: but rather to look to the way in which the history of the subject affects approaches to it. Undoubtedly for many scholars there remains the assumption that their task is to be understood in the light of Christian (or Jewish or other) truth: that is, in one way or another commitment is relevant to study. We can in respect of all this point to a number of differing models.

First, there is the full-fledged model of what may be called constructive traditionalism. That is, there is the approach to the study of religion from the perspective of a given tradition—most frequently Christianity, and in particular some variety of it (Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, etc.). Ultimately here the exploration of texts, the undertaking of a critical evaluation of them, the processes of hermeneutics, the systematic exploration of doctrines and so on are geared to the constructive presentation of the tradition as expressing spiritual and intellectual truth. Ultimately the task is one of expressing rather than describing. Thus the work of such figures as Barth, Kung, Bultmann, Kiisemann, Tillich, and John Robinson—to put together a variegated selection of recent theological and Biblical scholars—is in the last analysis concerned with working out Christian truth, rather than simply doing history or even debating on both sides of the question (as might happen in the context of the philosophy of religion).

Second, there may be an attitude of seeing the study of religion as primarily concerned with issues in philosophical theology—that is, with the questions arising concerning the nature and existence of God (or of the Ultimate, to use a wider-reaching term) as perceived in the light of the history of

religion, etc. This orientation may be called pluralistic theology. The accent is primarily on questions of truth in religion rather than on truths concerning religion.

Third, the theological tradition may be treated positivistically: that is the essential task of the theologian is to explore and describe the history of the faith independently of truth judgments about the content of faith. Still, it is naturally the case that such an approach has its agenda set by some implicit evaluations—for instance, about the importance of particular periods and aspects of Christian, or other, history. We may call this approach theological positivism. The fact of positivism does not preclude such an approach from being critical, and making use of the various tools of modern critical historiography.

It is clear that looked at from a planetary point of view there are questions arising about such models of theology. For one thing, the very word 'theology' is a western one. What does one use for Buddhism? Should we talk of the Buddhologist? Moreover, not all traditions are as hospitable either to pluralism or to critical positivism as is the modern western tradition. Nevertheless, historians of religion have opened up critical questions about the various traditions. I do not wish to argue the point here, but it seems to me clear that every tradition will inevitably have to come to terms with such scrutiny. It matters, of course, less in some faiths than others. For instance, Buddhism is not quite so tightly wedded to history as is Christianity or Judaism, while the facts of early Islam are less in doubt than those of these other religions. But naturally the critical positivist questions necessarily raise issues of truth in the context of what we have dubbed pluralistic theology and thus are liable to generate new approaches within the various forms of constructive traditionalism. Thus neo-Hindu theologies (such as those of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan) can be seen as ways of coming to terms not merely with western culture but also with modern methods of scholarship, concerning India's deep past.

The modern period has of course seen the opening up more richly than in the past of contacts and conversations between religious traditions. The exchange of insights between faiths has come to have the name of dialogue. It is true that dialogue could simply be a method of exchanging information and so just be a tool of historical research: but more pregnantly it has been a particular style of pluralistic theology, a kind of cooperative spiritual exploration of truth. Because however it does differ in style and tradition it may be useful to have a different name for it. I shall call it constructive dialogue. But none of all this so far is what may be thought of as the scientific study of religion. It is quite true that sometimes so-called scientific studies of religion (say in sociology) conceal value- or truth-assumptions which are of an essentially theological or philosophical nature (e.g., projectionism makes certain assumptions about the truth of religious belief, typically). It is quite true also that pluralistic theology, constructive traditionalism and so forth may in fact use scientific methods in the course of their enquiries. Certainly, such great theologians as Karl Barth made use of much plain historical material and critical method. But the main thrust of their concerns was not descriptive and scientific but expressive, proclamatory, philosophical: presenting a faith-stance or a worldview.

It may be thought that there is a 'science of God.' In a sense perhaps there is (and to that sense I shall later come). But I think in a more obvious way the idea that there is a 'science of God,' a kind of theological science, uses the term in a Pickwickian way. Belief in God is highly debatable, only indirectly (at best) testable, a question of reaction and commitment, much bound up with value questions. Since the alternative views of the Ultimate are so various, and even include the view that there is no Ultimate, it would be rash to define a theological science by postulating to start with a personal God. At best we might think about a 'science of the Ultimate.' Now it is clear that some men claim to experience the Ultimate, and it would be wrong to neglect such experience. But because of the vagaries and strangenesses of issues about interpretation it would be better in the first instance to confine the use of the word 'scientific' to the relatively neutral investigation of phenomena, including those comprised by religious experience. In brief, then, I think it is reasonable to say that the various models I have listed above (constructive traditionalism through to constructive dialogue) do not fall, essentially, within the purview of what may be called the scientific study of religion, though they may overlap with it.

Those overlaps actually are important. How can one really get the feel of a faith except by mingling among its adherents? A religion is more than texts, and the past: it is living history. This being so, a kind of dialogue with people is necessarily part of the fabric of enquiry into religion, whether scientific or otherwise.

Again, the philosophical skills which are fashioned in the philosophy of religion are important in the empirical investigation of religion. For one thing, descriptions have to be scrutinized for assumptions. Often our categories come not in utter nakedness but trailing clouds of theory, often inappropriate theory. Again, philosophy is much bound up with questions of verification and method. Moreover the whole enterprise of hermeneutical enquiry is one which requires philosophical debate. So it is idle to think one can simply do the history of religions, or the sociology of religion, or whatever, without in fact bumping up against philosophical and conceptual problems.

Moreover, the processes of critical history concerning, for example, Christian origins, vital in the task of constructive Christian theology, are relevant to other areas of religio-historical enquiry. In brief, there is an overlap between the value-laden models for the study of religion and the relatively value-free scientific study of religion.

One has, however, to be clear about this notion of the relatively value free. It is sometimes said that it is not possible (or even desirable) to be perfectly value-free, perfectly 'objective.' The term 'objective' is an unfortunate one, because actually all science and all unravelling of the world involves a kind of interplay, a struggle even, between the inquirers and that which they are concerned to understand. Nature is mean about her secrets. The right questions have to be posed: and she is a great slaughterer of theories. Objectivity is important only in two ways—one being that by being relatively free of prejudice the inquirer may show imagination in developing new questions to pose to nature; and secondly objectivity implies the acceptance of the possible death of one's pet ideas. One should be adventurous and sagacious, but also stoical in defeat. When we come to the human sciences, however, there is a difference of a profound kind: for it is no longer a mute nature that addresses us, but living and communicative beings. Empathy becomes important. And that means somehow adopting the American Indian proverb: 'Never judge a man till you have walked a mile in his moccasins.' Or rather: 'Never describes a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins.' The term 'objectivity' is not usually taken to include much in the way of feeling or empathy.

So though the scientific study of religion should be relatively value-free, it has got to enter somehow into the world of values. This is part of what has come to be called the phenomenological method, as practised by for instance Kristensen and van der Leeuw. However, it happens that partly because of its particular philosophical origins in the tradition of Husserl, phenomenology of religion has also come to be bound up greatly with the search for essences: that is, with describing types of religious phenomena, and classifying them. This is to be seen in *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* and in Widengren's phenomenological work, and represents part of the whole enterprise known as the comparative study of religion. It is thus probably useful for the sake of clarity to distinguish between what I have referred to above as the phenomenological method, which involves 'entering in' to the thought world of the believer, and typological phenomenology, which is an attempt to anatomize the forms of religion in a comparative manner.

The use of the term 'phenomenology' implies, as it is usually employed, a suspension of belief, a prescinding from the worldview which the investigator may happen to hold, except in so far as he may think that the investigation of religious phenomena is important, which may imply something about a world view, though at a higher logical level. (It is in general important to pay attention to levels: thus to say that we should use empathy to enter into people's various positions is a position about positions, i.e., it belongs to a higher level.) This sometimes obscures the fact that structures are important as well as empathy. That is, since the believer views his activity against the background, (or should we say from within the background?), of a whole web of beliefs and resonances, the person who wishes to understand the meaning of his action needs to unravel that structure or web. For instance, what are we to make of the Buddhist laying a flower before the statue of a Buddha in Sri Lanka? To understand her it is necessary to understand her understanding of the world, and that constitutes quite a complex structure. So empathy has to be more than imaginative feeling: it has to include a delineation of structures. So there is a certain tension between the phenomenological method or structured empathy, and typological phenomenology, which tends to try to cut through the organic particularities of a given cultural milieu.

This tension is something which runs deeply through the territory of the history of religions. For while some of the scholars in the field are more concerned with the comparative

study of religion (a phrase which comes in and out of vogue-out of vogue in so far as comparisons could be thought to be odious, and redolent of whiffs of western imperialism and Christian superiority, the phrase falls on evil days; yet in vogue in so far as we wish the study of religions to make use of the opportunities for comparison and contrast, opportunities which are useful in testing various hypotheses about religion)-others again are concerned more with the history of a given tradition or culture. Thus the study of religion contains among other things the histories of various traditions, which mayor may not be at one time or another in mutual historical interaction; but it also contains attempts at comparative treatment, which is necessarily cross-cultural. It is at different times important to stress uniquenesses of historical development and similarities of phenomena and elements in differing cultures. The danger of separate histories is that each may fail to see certain aspects of the dynamics of religion which can be gleaned from cross-cultural comparison. The danger of the comparative study of religion is that it may crassly bulldoze the particularities of the traditions.

Basically the comparative study of religion as it is practised tends to comprise first an attempt at a world history of religions; and second various kinds of typological phenomenology (for instance the comparative study of mysticism, sacrifice, worship and so on). To complicate matters, it has become usual to substitute the phrase history of religions for the comparative study of religion. Sometimes, as in the work of Eliade, such history of religions includes a special scheme of typological phenomenology. Actually Eliade's scheme has been remarkably fruitful, especially in raising issues about the religious and human meaning of space and time. But in addition Eliade's work, like Otto's and Wach's to name two important forerunners-includes a general theory of existence: a kind of philosophy, one might say, compounded out of various sources including Eliade's own historical experience. Thus his typological phenomenology, especially in regard to views of history, is in part determined by a kind of philosophical theology. This does not mean that we have to discard the typology, but it does mean that we have to be aware, critically, of assumptions open to question and lying behind the more empirical presentations of the data. It would perhaps be ironic if having escaped from theological dogmatism as inappropriate for the scientific study of religion we met it in new and more heavily disguised form in a philosophy of existence unquestioned behind the shamanism. The point is that the science of religion should welcome imaginative ways of looking at the data, including Eliadean ones, Marxist ones and so on; but that is not to say that what counts as the scientific study of religion should be determined and defined by anyone theory. For each theory should be testable in relation to the data in the field. Assuming anyone theory to define the field destroys its true testability and gives it a spurious authority.

Because of the institutional evolution of the subject the comparative study of religion has not always existed in close relationship to such scientific or social-scientific disciplines as the sociology of religion, anthropology of religion and psychology of religion. True, in the late nineteenth century especially the influence of anthropology was very considerable, partly because it was fashionable to speculate about the origins and evolution of religion and 'primitive' cultures were thought of also as somehow primeval and so containing clues to the earliest phases of human culture and spirituality. Actually there seems no intrinsic reason why the history of religions and the sociology and anthropology of religion should not be treated as a single investigatory enterprise. The divergences are somewhat fortuitous. Thus the difference between sociology and anthropology represents a crude division between large- and small-scale societies, a difference of style of founding fathers and gurus, and a certain distinctness of methodological emphasis. But as for the scale question, this is hardly in the last resort relevant to overall theorizing about society; as to the styles, well, they add up to differing and often competing theories which have to be tested in the same empirical marketplace; and as for methods, differences are to do with feasibilities-cancer research may employ different techniques from research into the brain, but we do not thus artificially divide human functioning. Further, though obviously the concern of the social scientists is primarily with social relationships and dynamics, this is after all a major aspect of a religion and its cultural expression and milieu, so that there is in principle no absolute divide between history of religions and the social sciences of religion.

Similarly one may see history of religions as somewhat like economic history: the latter is history with the accent on economic aspects of existence, and the former is history with the accent on religious aspects of existence. It would be as artificial to deal with the economic history of 1979 without mentioning Khomeini as it would be to treat of the religious history of the Amish without dealing with the economics of small-scale agriculture.

It may be noted also that some of the major figures in the sociology of religion have also been concerned with typology. To take two examples:

Weber and his theories of the relationship between religious and socioeconomic development; and Bryan Wilson and his attempt to classify various sects and new religious movements. This work is relevant to the often neglected point that one can have a typology of historical changes-e.g., what happens in cases of culture contact.

Though one might consider, reasonably, that the difference between the various disciplines (history, sociology, anthropology of religion) is somewhat artificial, it does create one advantage, in that the institutionalization of differing approaches leads to effective intellectual lobbies against the neglect of certain areas. Thus it is easy to do the history of religions in a rather textual and 'unliving' way. The social scientists pressure us to restore balance here. A result is the renewed modern interest in the sociology of early Christianity, the attempt to look at Buddhism from the perspective of modern Asian societies, the need to analyse rites of passage in context and so on. The same can be said about some recent and rather adventitious developments. Thus in North America especially the advent of women's political activism has resulted in a burgeoning of women's studies and with that a renewed interest in the female in religion; likewise recent concerns about Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans have led to something of a revival in the study of the religions of these people.

One major methodological issue arises especially in regard to the sociology of religion, and in a differing form regarding the psychology of religion. The tendency in these fields is for theories to be developed which are in general projectionist. Thus God and the Ultimate and the lesser entities and symbols of religious belief tend to be seen as unconscious or social projections, which then act reflexively upon society and individuals. 'Thus a highly sophisticated modern form of projection theory is to be found in Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (British title: *The Social Reality of Religion*), in which he claims to espouse 'methodological atheism.' It is taken as axiomatic that a scientific approach to religion cannot accept the existence of God. But the non-acceptance of the existence of God is not equivalent to the acceptance of the nonexistence of God. What should be used in approaching religion is not so much the principle of methodological atheism as the principle of methodological agnosticism. It is not useful for the investigator of religion to begin by imposing assumptions drawn from his own worldview upon the subject matter. Thus the suspension of belief here required is a kind of higher-order agnosticism. Thus God or the Ultimate need neither be affirmed nor denied, but seen as something present in human experience and belief, wherever it is so present. It is only in this sense that there is a 'science of God.' It is important that the power of religious experience and belief and the way God serves as a focus of human activity and feeling should be recognized as factors in history and society and in individual psychology. Often the power of the Ultimate-as-experienced is underestimated by modern rationalist historians and social scientists. How important it is not a question of validity of experience, but a matter of empirical impact. Conversely it may be that on occasions religionists have overestimated the actual impact of the Ultimate-as-experienced. So though there is not a science of God there is a sort of science of God-as-experienced. This is the advantage of speaking of religion as a phenomenon.

Since impacts are in principle measurable it is not surprising that much attention has been paid by some social scientists to statistical data: we can see one manifestation of this approach in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. One of the problems arises from the way in which a suitable wedding between this and more impressionistic but empathetic phenomenology can be achieved. We see a like chasm in the psychology of religion between much of the interesting work being done in typological phenomenology, e.g., over the classification of mysticism and other forms of religious experience, and the measurement of attitudes, etc., which occupies much of psychology-oriented psychology of religion. Frits Staal's sketch on how to deal with mysticism in

his *Exploring Mysticism* goes some way towards achieving a synthesis; but there remain important philosophical problems not fully resolved either by him or by others in regard to the ways to classify inner experiences—an issue much bound up with the important, but vexed, question of the relationship between experience and interpretation. Considerable conceptual problems enter into this discussion, which has recently been carried on in the context of philosophical analysis. Lack of concern with the problem has vitiated some influential works on religious experience, e.g.; by Stace and Zaehner.

For various reasons, the interplay between anthropology, depth psychology and history of religions has proved fruitful in the variety of ways myth and symbolism can be approached. There are certain congruencies between structuralism, Eliade, and Jung, which suggest that the analysis of religion may be a vital ingredient in any theory of human psychology. And this in turn raises an important question as to what the comparative and phenomenological study of religion ultimately aims at. Though it may be methodologically unsound to try to define the study of religion in terms of some theory within the field, and the data should be so far as possible presented in a way which is not theory-laden—for this would lead too easily and cheaply to 'confirmation' of the theory by the data, yet it may remain important for the history of religions to supply material which can be used theoretically. Thus the following are important, though difficult areas for speculation and research: Are there in fact archetypal symbols which are liable to appear independently in different cultures? If so, what kind of explanation of this would be in order? What kinds of patterns can be found in the processes of syncretism and the creation of new religious movements in the third world (as the many thousand in Africa) and in parts of the western world? If the mythic mode of expressing existential relationships to the cosmos and to society has been widespread among peoples in the past and to some extent in the present, what other changes are liable to accompany the erosion of this style of thinking? To what extent do non-religious ideologies function in similar ways to traditional religious belief-systems? Can any form of projection theory be empirically confirmed? Most importantly, the confluence of anthropological and religio-historical approaches may be vital in giving us a better modern understanding of human symbolic behaviour.

Curiously, though religions obviously have a vital interest in the arts and music, there has been relative neglect of the visual, musical, and literary dimensions of religious consciousness. This is perhaps in part due to the kind of training typical of western scholars—concerned often with texts as evidences, and fascinated often by doctrinal and intellectual aspects of faith. An interesting methodological question arises in regard to literature, in that novelists especially are devoted to a kind of fictional 'structured empathy' such as I described earlier. They bring out the feel of what it is like to be a given person looking at the world and at others in a certain way (consider, for instance the divergent expressions of attitude delineated by Dostoyevsky in the case of the brothers Karamazov). To what degree would new forms of literary presentation be relevant to the task of phenomenology? One thinks here of the novels of Eliade and Sartre as cases where more abstract analyses are clothed in particular flesh.

One can discover, in the evolution of the study of religion, a series of stages. One stage is represented by the discovery and decipherment of other cultures (I look here at the matter inevitably from the standpoint of the western culture which gave rise to the modern study of religion). This process is still going on. There are still large numbers of important texts not yet edited and understood, and the recording of oral traditions is still only very partial. Access to the records of differing religious traditions made possible the process of comparison. Classificatory comparisons form ideally the second stage in the study of religion as a human phenomenon. The third stage is where theories whether sociological (e.g., Weber), anthropological (e.g., Tylor) or psychological (e.g., Jung) can be formulated. We remain at a rather early stage in the development of theorizing about religion. Perhaps also we are at the beginning of a harvest, in which the many fruits of the extensive expansion of research since World War II can be gathered, and when the history of religions and in a more general way the study of religion—may enter a period of greater influence, in the broader world of learning.

So far we have looked at the scientific study of religion as being plural in scope, for it concerns the many traditions and the plethora of forms of religion to be discovered on the planet and in history; and as being multidisciplinary—for it must include not just the techniques and processes of structured

empathy and typological phenomenology, but also methods drawn from history, sociology, anthropology, iconography, and so on. But there remain problems concerning the boundaries of the field. Notoriously an agreed and useful definition of religion is hard or impossible to find. Yet at the same time often scholars seem unnaturally confident as to what they mean by the study of religion. It is a real question as to whether the subject should consider the symbolic systems usually held in the West to lie beyond religion proper-e.g., nationalism, forms of Marxism, and so on. There does seem an incongruity in treating the Taiping rebellion (or revolution) in the category of the history of religions and Maoism in another quite separate category of political history. After all, both movements were trying to resolve much the same problem of China's national identity in a time of crisis, and they have many other properties in common. It is interesting to note that in the account of one of the discussions at the History of Religions Study Conference in Turku Finland (see Lauri Honko, editor, *Science of Religion Studies in Methodology*, (1979: 30) the following passage occurs:

Similarly picking up van Baaren's remark, he-sc. Zwi Werblowsky-suggested (not facetiously) that comparative religion ought also to look at the current process of formation of secular canons, e.g., the works of Chairman Mao.

What is interesting is the disclaimer 'not facetiously.' For it is a result of perhaps an ideological rather than a scientific divide that we put traditional religions in one basket and secular ideologies in another. My own plenary paper, 'From the Tao to Mao,' at the Lancaster Congress of the IAHR in 1975, was itself a protest against the rigid division between traditional and modern secular worldviews. It is after all ultimately an empirical matter to discover if theories worked out in regard to traditional religions also work in the case of their secular counterparts.

Thus there is an argument for saying that the scientific study of religion is non-finite-that is, there is no clear boundary which we can draw around it. It simply has to be discovered in practice how far theorizing goes beyond the traditional faiths. Incidentally it is quite clear that the methods of structured empathy are as necessary in the exploration of secular worldviews as in the case of religions proper.

Though there is increasing reason to hold that the scientific study of religion should be so far as possible value-free, save in so far as in the nature of the case it has to evoke values, via the processes of empathy and phenomenology, there is little doubt that it has a reflexive effect *upon* values. For one thing, the historical approach to scriptures is bound to (and has) affected attitudes to their authority, and can nibble at their contents. Similarly knowledge of other religious traditions is bound to affect attitudes to one's own tradition. Thus a lot of ink has been spilled on the question of the uniqueness of Christianity, since from the perspective of certain theologies there is a motive to stress the difference between Christianity and other faiths; while there is something of the opposite from the perspective of modern Hinduism. The question of Christianity's likeness or unlikeness to other traditions *in* this or that respect is strictly an empirical question (though it may remain a debatable one). In this way empirical theses may have evaluative consequences.

The fact that the scientific study of religion can have such effects *is* one reason why it takes a special kind of temperament to be devoted to its pursuit-a kind of passion for evocative dispassion. It is, though, one of the noblest of human enterprises to try to enter imaginatively into the feelings and thoughts of others. This is an ingredient in religious methodology which has many lessons to teach in the modern world and the multicultural ambience of the planet. This is one among a number of reasons why the study of religion and religions should play a widening part in the educated person's understanding of the world. Eliade is right to call for a creative role for the history of religions. Better, this role should be played not just by the history of religions, but more widely by the whole set of disciplines which in interplay make up the study of religion. All this is only perhaps a second-order way of saying that religious sentiments, ideas, and institutions remain a pervasive aspect of the human world. That so often the wider study of religion-what I have called the scientific study of religion-has been suspected from the side of faith and neglected from the side of reason has contributed to the lopsidedness of the human sciences.

