The Notion of Meaning and Salvation

in Religious Studies

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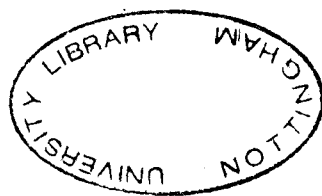
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by

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The Notion of Meaning and Salvation in Religious Studies.

An Abstract.

As an exercise in hermeneutics this study explores
the relation between various concepts of evil and their
associated forms of salvation. A definition of salvation
is offered in terms of that aspect of the sociology of
knowledge which might be called plausibility theory.

The major academic traditions of history,sociology,
phenomenology, and anthropology of religion are shown to
have been concerned with the question of 'meaning' and
it is proposed that a general paradigm of meaning has now
replaced the nineteenth century evolutionary paradigm.
This approach eliminates the necessity of having to adopt
theological terms from one religious tradition when
studying other traditions. To show that the distinction
between world religions and primitive religions is
misleading some comparative study and analysis of
some African tribal religions, the Sikh, and Mormon
religions is presented in terms of the paradigm of
meaning. A philosophical consideration of the nature
of man is employed throughout the argument to suggest
the appropriate level of analysis that each discipline
should adopt, and to evaluate the methodological issue
of reductionism.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

It might appear to the layman that studies in the history of religion devote as much time to discussing what ought to be done as to actually doing it. This academic self-consciousness is, however, no erudite obscurantism, rather it is born of the profound awareness of the complexity of those religious phenomena constituting its subject matter, coupled with the fear of reductionist explanations advanced by disciplines of a more distinctive and established position.[1]

This thesis is primarily concerned with the problem of method, and in particular with the contributions made by anthropology, sociology, phenomenology and history of religion to understanding the major themes of religious thought on evil and salvation. It seeks to identify the underlying similarity of these apparently diverse perspectives and in so doing to provide something of a unified view of the phenomenon of evil and of processes of salvation. This is not an attempt to merge theories but to show that they have been concerned, each in its own way, with very similar phenomena. Theories of evil and salvation may thus be seen to bear a family resemblance to each other even when they are drawn from widely differing academic traditions. Throughout the discussion attention is drawn to issues which relate directly to theology, or which involve questions requiring theological consideration, but at the same time care is taken to avoid the use of technical terms from one religion in the analytical study of another. One aim of this study is to offer theoretical frameworks for interpreting some central issues in religion by developing and applying concepts from the social sciences to them. This involves a consideration of data at a high level of generalization as well as at a much more pragmatic level. Indeed, one of the hazards

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1. Eliade, Mircea and J.M. Kitagawa 1959.

facing modern studies of religion is that of erring too much in the direction of either over-generalization or too specific concern with a restricted case.   Consequently the present study seeks to relate theoretical speculation to actual studies of religion whenever possible; some of the ethnographic material is drawn from the general anthropological corpus but most of the data on Sikh and Mormon religious traditions come from the writer's own researches.

This attempt at an interdisciplinary study of salvation and evil is open to the fundamental criticism that it is not sufficiently rigorous in terms of each specific discipline.   While such a comment is likely to be true it may, nevertheless, be countered by the fact that the degree of insight which a new perspective adds to already familiar material is worth the risk of not demonstrating a theory to the requirements of a purist.   More than this, it is the case that when more than one tradition is brought to bear upon a body of facts certain elements become visible in novel ways.   It is also true that theoretical perspectives of one discipline require of another that it reconsider certain of its otherwise unquestioned assumptions.   Such mutual criticism can serve a positive function seeing that questions arise from their very interaction which might otherwise not be asked. An example of this is provided in a discussion of the idea of mission in both Sikh and Mormon traditions, which shows that the real issue is one of self and group identity and not one of the proclamation of religious truth.

Another advantage of an interdisciplinary approach lies in the fact that the data themselves cannot in any simple way dictate the manner in which they are analysed.   The case of Ernst Troeltsch and his notion of 'sect' provides an interesting example of what can happen

within an unwary and established way of looking at a problem.[1]   He
used the term 'sect' to describe an institution of antithetic character
to the 'church'.   This 'church-sect' dichotomy gained the status of
sociological orthodoxy such that many subsequent studies followed the
same idea applying it to cases for which it possessed but little
applicability and hence little validity.   It was in order to avoid the
essentially Christian restrictions associated with such a typology that
Bryan Wilson adopted Weber's notion of a religious group's orientation
and response to the world, which enabled him to engage in an analysis of
non-christian and non-western religious movements.[2]   A similar
reconsideration of apposite features of a phenomenon may be found in the
very definition of religion offered by John Bowker which is discussed
later.[3]   The creative aspect of interdisciplinary study consists largely
in this kind of shift of emphasis from the normal, traditional or
customary manner of viewing ideas or phenomena to one made possible by a
new theoretical perspective.

Since in this study no specific theological or philosophical stance
has been adopted in an a priori fashion, and since several disciplines
are drawn into the discussion it has been as necessary as it is desirable
to examine the presuppositions of arguments encountered within each
tradition of scholarship.   When it has been found necessary to ignore the
established categories and assumptions of a tradition the reasons have
been adduced at some length since the very fact that such a change has
been merited usually indicates the presence of some interesting point
hitherto obscured or unseen.   A good example of this is provided in the
discussion of the relationship between preliterate religions and those of
developed societies, where itis argued that no difference of kind ought

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1. Troeltsch, E. 1931.

2. Wilson, B. 1973 :17.

3. Bowker, J. 1978 :244.

to be marked between them as is usually done in studies of salvation and in the lesser acknowledged areas of evil. The inclusion of an extended study of African witchcraft reinforces this point of the essentially similar processes of religion in societies of differing technological status.

The fact that a certain consensus of perspectives emerges as this study develops will be discussed in the conclusion, here it suffices to say that the kind of general communication theory adopted is one which appeared to demand acceptance in order to make sense of the complexity of material rather than being one artificially imposed from the outset. Before going any further, however, some validation must be sought for adopting this perspective as an attempt at introducing an orderly approach to the near bewildering complexity of religious phenomena.

Theoretical Developments

The fact that the study of religion is located within so many disciplines presents significant problems for any discussion of the theoretical development of religious studies. Many authors merely enunciate the variety of perspectives by listing scholars along with their contributions, as for example E.J. Sharpe in his history of comparative religion. He demonstrates fundamental divergences of approach by means of an accurate and detailed consideration of the many positions adopted in the history of religions, phenomenology, anthropology and psychology of religion. This volume is instructive for another reason also inasmuch as it very largely avoids the sociological tradition and is itself bounded by the concerns of those who are members of the International Association for the History of Religions. Here there is no escaping the fact that a certain professionalism, by which we mean Sharpe's association with a particular

learned society, has markedly directed his discussion. This is no damning criticism for no writer is freed from restraints of such association, whether of the personal or intellectual friends he keeps. Sharpe, for example, spends a limited time on Durkheim, only a few paragraphs on Max Weber and practically nothing on the subsequent sociological tradition of religious study in the west; and he admits that 'developments in sociology lie outside present objectives'.[1] This means that Peter Berger on the general theoretical side, Glock and Stark and many others on the more statistical side of American studies, and even Martin and Wilson with their British contributions to the great themes of secularization, are omitted.[2] This particular comment on Sharpe has been introduced to illustrate a process in theoretical transformations which must be considered before proceeding to the main task of the thesis in analysing the processes of perceiving evil and responding thereto by means of institutions of salvation.

Some help in elucidating this somewhat confused area of methodology in religious studies may be gained from Thomas S. Kuhn's work on the structure of scientific revolutions. Firstly Kuhn's general theme of paradigms. In the second edition of his influential volume Kuhn sought to clarify his use of the term paradigm in order to distinguish between the general notion of the intellectual consensus of a group over a particular subject and a more specific meaning in terms of particular theories or principles used by that group.[3] These two problems are obviously closely related. In terms of specific theories we may say that scholars in the last quarter of the nineteenth century applied the idea of evolution to religious phenomena; at least a significant number

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1. Sharpe, E.J. 1975, pp.82-86, and 177-78 respectively.
2. Berger, P. 1969. Glock, C.Y. and Stark. R, 1965, 1967. Martin, D. 1969, 1978. Wilson, B.R. 1966.
3. Kuhn, T.S. 1970.

of anthropologists, historians, philologists, philosophers and some theologians did so. What might be called the study of religion in the later nineteenth century was thus basically influenced by the evolutionary paradigm which was used to explain many kinds of religious phenomena. The debate of primitive mentality was a case in point where conceptions of spirits and gods presupposed a mental development leading to increasingly complex and abstract notions of god. From the idea of mana, through taboo to beliefs in spirits, pantheons and finally monotheism there was postulated a developing idea emerging under evolutionary principles, and this could be exemplified in the work of numerous Victorian anthropologists and others.[1]

The abandoning of evolutionary models in the more pragmatic studies of fieldwork anthropology in the early twentieth century was due in large measure to the rise of the new functionalist paradigm, and one important consequence of this was the growing divergence between anthropological interests and those of philologists, philosophers and historians of religion. The field of sociology was also experiencing transformation in a growth of survey and statistical methods focusing on the somewhat abstract notion of society. Again, the emergence of psychology with its own paradigm of mental structure and operation, especially that of Freud, which, despite its tenuous links with evolutionary schemes was firmly located in contemporary activity, led to a broadening of interest in religious phenomena. In the light of these developments it may be suggested that the decline of the evolutionary paradigm marked the end of a unified study of religion. If this is an accurate assessment of the historical changes we may go on to note one aspect of the study of religion which has largely been ignored, namely, that in the late

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1. Davies, D.J. 1975.

nineteenth century there was, to all intents and purposes, a unified study of religion.

One possible reason why this phase of study has been misidentified is that academic events and expectations ran contrary to each other as the twentieth century entered its first two decades. The expectation of academic communities is of a cumulative development in theory rather than of significant and disruptive advances in thought. Such expectations and processes have been adequately discussed by Kuhn and, as he suggests, they ought to be seen to be as much a part of the development of the humanities as of the sciences.[1] This is certainly true for religious studies, for instead of a further growth of Victorian intellectualism there was a rapid decline in power of the evolutionary model with a concurrent adoption of not one, but a series of models each serving a growing apart tradition, of anthropology, psychology, sociology, philology and linguistics without mentioning history and philosophy. The hopes expressed in the eighteen seventies and eighties for a unified science of religion might be regarded as self-fulfilling in the work of scholars of the calibre of Max Müller and F.B. Jevons.[2] What was certainly the case, however, is that their kind of comprehensive analyses of religions became impossible after the turn of the century so that J.G. Frazer's later work is something of an anachronism as is that of R.R. Marett.[3]

It is in the light of these considerations that Kuhn's second major

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1. Ibid,p.180.

2. Müller, M. 1882, 1889.   Jevons, F.B. 1896, 1908.

3. Frazer, J.G. 1922.   Marett, R.R. 1909.

    Some comment on the influential negative criticism of many nineteenth century scholars of religion made by E.E. Evans-Pritchard in his Theories of Primitive Religion published in 1965 might be apposite. It suffices to say that caution is required in accepting all his criticism especially when some of the positive contributions of these scholars is lost amidst denials of the validity of evolutionary ideas.

contribution becomes significant. In this he argues the importance of the scholarly community in determining the kind of theory which is acceptable as the basis for its endeavour. The essential point has already been made as far as religious study is concerned inasmuch as new groups of scholars entered the field and thereby subdivided it. A variety of paradigms now became available and heralded half a century of intensive and detailed scholarship. To look upon the twentieth century simply as one of methodological confusion is to fail in seeing the possibility of creativity which followed the diversification of the study of religion. It is, perhaps, an instructive'thought to see that it is those scholars who have maintained something of the universalist stance of the nineteenth century who most lament methodological variation and who spend much time devoted to its potential restoration. This generalization can be made clearer by reference to the International Association for the History of Religions.

One reason for mentioning Sharpe's omission of sociological sources was to point out his own membership in this Association and to show how this had influenced the material he regarded as worthy of consideration. The International Association for the History of Religions, which quite significantly has its own history retold in Sharpe's final chapter, was founded in 1950 and provides an arena for discussion for those more interested in the historical, philological and philosophical aspects of religion than in anthropological, sociological or psychological ones. It might be said to consist of those actuated by an academic liberal humanism focused upon the essential nature or spirit of man. Even a generalization of that order will not completely satisfy the case for there are those like Rudolph Otto and Friederich Heiler who have exerted much influence and who stress the necessity of studying the essential religiosity of man. Indeed, if paradigms were being sought for the

Association that which regards man as Homo religiosus would be among the chief contenders. It is, perhaps, significant that the very term Homo religiosus which has gained wide currency in religious studies itself, originated in Marett's Gifford Lectures of 1932, and marks his closer association with the unified perspective of the nineteenth century, desired by many modern historians of religion, than with contemporary anthropologists.[1] The desire to establish a single characteristic of man identifying him as religious appears to be a major concern of this tradition and is closely associated with the issue of a growing unity between world religions. ' Another question of no small import follows from this and asks whether the history of religions is, essentially, a religious endeavour? Sharpe is deeply aware of this point as an aspect of religious studies and refers to it as 'the perennial choice, the either/or which has faced the comparative study of religion from the very beginning. Scholarship has had the choice of being 'pure', striving after a historical and analytical understanding of religion as a human phenomenon; or of channelling all its energies into its own religious quest, thus becoming an 'applied' science almost to the verge of soteriology'.[2] The problem of methodology in the history of religions remains intransigent for precisely these reasons which Sharpe has clearly outlined, and shows how much care needs to be taken in discussing the presuppositions of any study in the field of religious studies. Not least important is the intricate and intriguing question of how academic groups are organized in relation to specific problems, and of how it cannot be avoided as though all arguments and ideas were ideal abstractions existing in isolation from human minds and groups.

Because of the influence of such underlying factors particular

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1. Marett, R.R. 1933.

2. Ibid. p.268.

attention is given throughout this thesis to the relation between the object of study and the mode of study. In the remainder of this introductory chapter a more immediate and necessary argument must be advanced which will provide the basis for later discussions on the particular contributions and perspectives of the variety of disciplines considered, while also enabling them to be related to a common theme. The real issue is whether a unified study of religion is again possible as a result of the acceptance of a new paradigm.

The Choice of Paradigms

Despite the fact that the notion Homo religiosus holds an established position in the history of religions especially for those like Eliade, Otto and Heiler who emphasize the individual perception of the sacred, it remains impossible to adopt it as a general paradigm in religious studies for two reasons. Firstly, it affords major difficulties to scholars who are themselves non-religious, and who see it as presupposing some kind of deity, so that if history of religions wishes to be included in a faculty of arts such a theistic presupposition would be hard to justify. Secondly, and more importantly, the term is not easy to explain in terms of specific belief systems, so that Christian and Buddhist scholars, for example, might well differ over the significance attributed to the essential nature of man, and this would make the term awkward to use in a department of theology.

This is a reminder that the precise intellectual location of a study must be related to the methodology adopted, including the status of its presuppositions, which means that while a history of religions could be constructed according to the theological presuppositions of say a Christian, Islamic or Sikh theology, which would make it a confessional analysis, it is also possible to adopt a non-credal basis as the starting point of discussion Where no specific theological stance is adopted it is difficult to see what precise content can be given to the notion of human religiosity if this

involves either implicitly or explicitly an acceptance of the existence
of a god as a necessary aspect of religion, or as the subject in relation
to which human religiosity is the object. This is not to say that the
assumption of a divine factor in human religiosity is unwarranted, but
that if such a view is taken then its status should be carefully considered
to see whether or not the entire exercise is one of a theological type.
This point has been laboured because scholars of religion are often
churchmen while the canons of academic thought are seldom specifically
theistic.

Because this thesis is not, primarily, a confessional and theological
study it does not presume the existence of a divinity as a necessary
precondition for analysing human religious behaviour. In accord with
basic phenomenological method such an existence is not brought into
question; this also means, of course, that the existence of the deities
who occur throughout the thesis is not discounted, but is merely treated
as an irrelevance. The level of analysis which has been adopted
necessitates that all religious claims have equal status and be treated
in the same way. It is precisely such an equality of evaluation which
it is difficult, if not impossible to carry out within a theological study.
If this means that the paradigm of Homo religiosus is unacceptable might
there not be another which would both serve as a unifying focus for the
study of religion and also be theoretically appropriate in terms of a
non-credal perspective?

The Paradigm of 'Meaning'

This thesis attempts to describe just such a different paradigm, and
this on two rather different levels corresponding to Kuhn's two senses of
the term paradigm. The first applies to a general perspective already
alluded to as a 'general communication theory', and which can be called
the paradigm of meaning, while the second is more specific and might be

identified as plausibility theory.[1] Scholars of religion seeking a
general view of religious activity as but one aspect of human behaviour
are increasingly concerned with the former, while the latter notion
specifices processes operative in bringing about man's intention of
understanding and of acting in the world.

A fundamental criticism of this position is that it is too general,
saying nothing specific about man or the processes at work within him.
While this may be largely true for the general expression of the paradigm
as an orientation of a group of scholars towards certain phenomena, it is
completely untrue inasmuch as it can be applied to man as the creator
and integrator of various systems present in his environment. This
point is elaborated towards the close of the thesis in the light of
General Systems Theory. On the more specific side of plausibility
theory it will be possible to demonstrate the utility of this approach
through concrete examples, such as those of phenomena of evil in both
Sikh and Mormon religion, as well as in cases of African religiosity.

While it would be improper to talk in terms of a revolution of
theoretical perspective in religious studies in recent decades it would,
nevertheless, be true to say that a positive and general trend has been
witnessed. As well as abstracting a general character of this trend
from various contributors this thesis advocates a specific theory of
plausibility in relation to phenomena of evil and processes of salvation.

The rationale of the following chapters might be explained if we
take as an analogy recent anthropological interest in structuralism.
As a strict theory structuralism is hard to define, and while reference
can be made to its origin in linguistics or to that structure of mind
which operates by means of binary opposition grounded in an essential

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1. Davies, D.J. 1978:89.

category distinction between nature and culture and extending to all aspects of human endeavour from myth-making to meal-eating, it is nevertheless in the actual application and analysis of things that its utility can be seen. In this sense structuralism is more a method than a theory. This corresponds to Kuhn's general notion of a paradigm as a shared perspective, and is of more than a passing interest in the present context since structuralism itself has gained wide popularity in a variety of disciplines including architecture, psychology, and even to a limited extent in theology. Indeed, structuralism might be thought of as a suitable alternative paradigm in religious studies since its heuristic power is extensive, as the present writer has shown in the case of old testament sacrifice.[1] The main reason for not so elevating it lies in the fact that structuralism finds easy inclusion as a sub-type of meaning construction process. So it is that this thesis adopts the procedure of studying particular cases in the hope that such concrete applications of the basic paradigm of plausibility theory will ultimately demonstrate its validity, and further establish the potentially unifying approach of the general paradigm of meaning.

Before going on to consider the emergence of the meaning paradigm it will be useful to identify more clearly the difference between the more anthropological perspective of this thesis and the more common perspective of the history of religions. J.A. Saliba has aptly described this kind of difference when he contrasted the 'descending' approach of the historian of religion with the 'ascending' approach of the anthropologist. Historians of religion assume the existence of the sacred and of the divine process of revelation, whereas anthropologists accept, for the purpose of analysis, only the reality of man and of men's reported experience and beliefs.[2]

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1. Davies, D.J. 1977.

2. Saliba, J.A. 1976 :41.

Saliba himself holds the opinion that the history of religions can serve as a discipline mediating between anthropology, with its conceptual basis in social science, and theology and philosophy with their background of speculative thought. But this is not likely to be a fruitful way of understanding the task of the history of religions. If there is ever to be any final and all embracing argument it is more likely to be found within a theological or philosophical system which possesses firm a priori assumptions than as a conclusion of a discipline composed of many traditions. Evidence presented by the historian of religions, and this would include the meaning paradigm argued in this thesis, may well be taken and utilized according to some theological or philosophical scheme; but in itself it is only a partial explanation, even though it may be sufficient as far as a particular discipline is concerned. In other words, final assertions about ultimate truth pertain to religious systems. This does not mean that systematic theologians and scholars of religion ought to have no dealings with each other: on the contrary, the very fact of difference of method, as of the variety of religious phenomena itself, can serve the theologian in his task of self-criticism, just as it can enable the anthropologist to resist those wilder speculations which the religious believer can temper by means of his own internal observer's model.

Paul Tillich offers an interesting example of a theologian who saw the implications of studies of non-Christian religions for Christian theology itself. For him, the essential act of self-judgment in which, paradoxically, the Christian religion has to condemn the pagan religiosity of itself, can be facilitated through a knowledge of the history of religions.[1] Similarly Charles Davis points out the debt owed by Christian mysticism to teachings of other religions, and it might be added as a

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1. Tillich, P. 1963:93

comment on his work in Christ and the World Religions that Christology

itself is the one doctrinal area which has benefitted from the challenge

of other religions.[1] The theological influence upon anthropology, by

contrast, has been less marked, though as Evans-Pritchard showed in the

conclusion of his Theories of Primitive Religion the question of the

existence of God does raise significant issues as to the level of

anthropological explanation which can be accepted as satisfactory.[2] A

similar constraining factor will be seen in Berger's argument as also

in that of Bowker.

The fundamental difference of approach between these two

identifiable traditions can be clearly seen in the notions of projection

and revelation. For if the idea of a revelation of the divine or sacred

be said to characterize the history and phenomenology of religion, then

the functionally equivalent notion in the social scientific approach

would be that of projection. An outline history of the use of this term

in a variety of non-theological disciplines will make this point clearer

and will also help to pose the questions which arise for theological

study in the light of the meaning paradigm lying at the heart of projection

processes.

Projection

The idea of projection has almost attained the status of a category

in twentieth century discussions of knowledge. Not only does it relate to

the means of knowledge or the method of generating ideas, but it also

involves the question of the status and validity of that knowledge. It is

in respect of the former, origin of knowledge, that projection is a concern

of sociology and anthropology, and of the latter, validity of knowledge that

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1.   Davis, C.   1970:128.

2.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1965:120.

it enters the field of philosophy and theology.

It is somewhat ironic that one of the clearest exponents of the projectionist thesis was the theologian Ludwig Feuerbach. His critique of religion required that a philosophical anthropology should replace theology since the essence of theology was merely a projected idea of man. By a mechanism he never explained Feuerbach believed that the mystery of religion consisted in the fact that 'man projects his being into objectivity and then makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject'.[1] Because of this psychological theory Feuerbach could argue that 'religion is man's earliest and most indirect form of self knowledge', the apparent object of knowledge, the divine being, is in fact 'nothing else than the human being freed from the limits of the individual, made objective'.[2] While this kind of study was, clearly, an exercise in demythologizing, of interpreting supernatural statements in terms of the natural and rational, it may be seen to serve the additional function of providing a way of talking about man's self-knowledge. In one sense it was a theory of meaning, even though Feuerbach's intention was basically polemical. As far as he was concerned the ordinary man had deceived himself with respect to the true nature of his discourse and needed the higher level of criticism of the philosopher in order to understand the real significance of religious language. This denial of any supernatural reality with a corresponding emphasis upon man resembles the later argument of Émile Durkheim in his sociological theory of knowledge. The advantage of Durkheim's position lies in the provision of an explanation of the mechanism by which mental categories were constructed from man's experience of social life, and this

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1.   Feuerbach, L.   1957:29.

2.   Ibid., p.14.

also provides a sounder basis for the idea of consensus in the notion
of God. The shift which takes place between these two men is one from
an individualist to a social origin of thought. While Feuerbach speaks
of man his prime concern is with the individual rather than the social
group even though his argument applies to mankind as a whole. Durkheim's
scheme is more acceptable within the rationalist tradition simply because
he is able to provide an explanation of how the act of projection works.
It is not the self but society which is projected as the notion of God.
Evil beings too 'are nothing other than collective states objectified:
they are society itself seen under one of its aspects'.[1] Not only in
his Elementary Forms of the Religious Life published in 1915 but also
in an earlier work with Marcel Mauss entitled 'Primitive Classification'
he was engaged in showing how the ordering and classifying activities of
man, which result in ideal schemes, are based on social experience and
social facts. [2]

In 1913, when Primitive Classification was published, another
author produced a volume arguing a specifically psychological theory
of projection. Some care is required in interpreting this contribution
of Sigmund Freud for he uses the notion of projection in both a specific
and general sense though both are related. Generally speaking man 'turns
his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and
meets his internal mental processes again outside himself', so it was that
primitive man 'transposed the structural conditions of his own mind into
the external world'.[3] This usage might, for clarity's sake, be called
the process of exteriorization. The other, more specific usage, views

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1.   Durkheim, É.   1976:412.

2.   Durkheim, É. and Marcel Mauss, 1963.

3.   Freud, S.   1960:92.

projection as a transferring of personal hostilities onto other persons. In a more specifically religious sense Freud's Future of an Illusion makes the same point that the idea of God is a personification of human wish-fulfilment, and just as Feuerbach questioned the validity of theological statements so Freud saw no future for truth statements which, in essence, were mere wish fulfilments.[1]

These brief comments on Feuerbach, Durkheim and Freud serve to show how the human attribute of ascribing reality to verbalized and other symbolic constructs has occupied an important position in the intellectual treatment of religion for the last century and more and this in a wide variety of academic circles. Not only philosophers, sociologists and psychologists but also philologists and historians of religion such as Max Müller have seen the process of ascribing an independent reality to human ideas as a central issue in understanding the nature of religion. It might even be suggested that along with the evolutionary paradigm that of projection constituted the fundamental methodology of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and that whereas the evolutionist notion fell into disuse that of projection was maintained and its use made more sophisticated. In the following chapters the notion of projection itself is considered as one aspect of meaning construction and is, thus, subordinated to the general meaning-paradigm.

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1.   Freud, S.   1973.

Chapter One   The Sociology of Knowledge

The debate on the problem of knowledge, which has actively engaged the attention of anthropologists and sociologists in the twentieth century, is of particular interest to historians and phenomenologists of religion inasmuch as it is directly related to the structure and function of religious systems, and not least to the idea of salvation. This chapter traces the emergence of social scientific concern with religions as meaning systems, and provides a working definition of salvation at a high level of generalization expressed in terms of plausibility theory. This abstract notion is then utilized in subsequent chapters as the basis for concrete consideration of phenomena in both preliterate and world religions.

Whilst epistemology had largely been the object of philosophical and theological concern, the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid growth in anthropological interest in the question of how men thought. The rise of anthropology as a significant intellectual endeavour and the fascination with the thought processes of exotic societies cannot be separated, and even when the evolutionary presuppositions of the nineteenth century argument on the nature of primitive mentality were abandoned the substantial issue remained, albeit in the form of the nature of rationality.[1]

The obvious diversities in culture which the ever increasing exploration of Africa and the colonies brought to light provided the basis for questioning whether all men, 'civilized and uncivilized', were essentially similar in their thought processes. Under the sustained influence of evolutionary principles it was presumed by many, and Lucien

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1.   Wilson, B.R.   1970, a.

Lévy-Bruhl is usually singled out as the advocate of the idea that primitive man possessed a 'pre-logical mentality', one that resembled the thought processes of civilized children but not that of adult european rationalists. As one has shown elsewhere he reflected a trend of opinion, but he was never firmly convinced as his later writings make clear.[1] The significant point is that while early anthropologists viewed man and society as dynamically evolving entities they paid but little attention to the interaction between individuals and their social groups in the present. Though Karl Marx was indeed one exception to this generalization, emphasizing as he did the dialectical relation between social group and mode of thought, his approach gained but little attention among anthropologists. Acknowledgement of the interrelation between individual, society and environment with respect to structures of thought was not to occur until the opening decades of the twentieth century when Bronislaw Malinowski and E.R. Radcliffe-Brown established the functionalist method based in intensive fieldwork studies. But even this period did not focus in a methodologically appropriate way on the issue of meaning, it merely emphasized the contemporary nature of social analysis as it eschewed any form of evolutionary conjecture. The notion of the individual almost vanished from consideration while the emphasis was placed upon the rather abstract concept of social institution. The transition from this functionalist perspective to what might be called the 'weak' version of structuralism took place in Britain through the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard and grew out of his Sudanese fieldwork. His interest in the work of L'Année Sociologique ought not to be forgotten

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1. Davies, D.J. 1975.

as a major influence upon his thought, especially when it is recalled

that both Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss had already published a

significant work on the structure of human thought and conceptual

categories.[1] The change in emphasis in Evans-Pritchard's work was

away from the function of institutions to the significance and

meaning of actions for actual people set amidst their particular value

and belief systems.

In the second of his major studies, The Nuer, published in 1940

some three years after Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande

which will be discussed in the third chapter, Evans-Pritchard described

Nuer society in terms of their own linguistic usage. He regarded it as

an 'exploration of ideas' and as a descriptive interpretation of Nuer

ideas and practices, a methodology which became more explicit and

directly related to religious questions in Nuer Religion published

in 1956.[2] In this latter book he was not content merely to compare

certain Nuer words and ideas with apparently equivalent western notions,

but he presents a full reconstruction of the Nuer world-view as a totality

and as a means of expressing the Nuer conception of kwoth or spirit.

At the descriptive level this work is perhaps the first anthropological

treatise which could in any sense be deemed phenomenological, even though

it neither claims to be such nor does it explicitly use such a terminology.

Despite Evans-Pritchard's contribution to the problem of knowledge

the anthropologist who is generally regarded as having established the

area of man's mental relation with his social and natural environments

as a primary topic of study is Claude Lévi-Straus. In his earlier work

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1.   Douglas, M.   1970:xv.

2.   Evans-Pritchard,E.E.   1937; 1940; 1951; 1956:143.

Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté, in which he considered the value of kinship structures as systems of communication, and in the later volumes on mythology, his dominant interest lies in the dialectical process existing between mind and society.[1] This form of 'structuralist' approach to anthropological material, which presupposes a theory of mind involving a process of binary analysis of phenomena, has been utilized by many scholars including Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, and Rodney Needham among British thinkers some of whose work is considered later.[2] Despite a general intellectual interest in structuralism, with its implicit theme of human creativity in the constructing of cultural systems of meaning, something of a dichotomy based to a certain extent upon academic insularity has been maintained between anthropological and sociological concerns with the problem of meaning. The former have tended to restrict their study to specific cultural groups whereas the latter have focused more upon western man within the same cultural tradition as the scholar. This inevitably meant that the problem of meaning was understood differently by both and means of analysing areas of interest were chosen accordingly. Added to this is the fact that British anthropology,largely influenced by Durkheimian assumptions, emphasized the significance of group activity in ritual and religion, while sociologists either focused on individual activity or else engaged in rather high level theorizing with respect to religious sects and the wider society.

Durkheim, who has already been mentioned as a significant influence on Evans-Pritchard, is particularly worthy of comment inasmuch as his theory of religion is inextricably associated with the notion of human nature and with the systems of knowledge generated by man from

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, C.   1949; 1955; 1963; 1964.

2.   Douglas, M. 1966;1970. Leach, E. 1967;1976. Needham, R. 1972.

his social experience. In the opening section of 'The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life' he discusses what he calls the theory of knowledge arguing that the very categories of thought originate not in some innate human understanding but are derived from social experience itself. For Durkheim, and here his position is fundamentally different from that of the nineteenth century intellectualists like E.B.Tylor, J.G.Frazer and Andrew Lang, religion was 'a permanent aspect of humanity' essential to the very nature of man.[1] It was no mere passing phase and it was not grounded in errors of judgement or logic. While Durkheim did not argue any thesis which emphasized meaning as an explicit drive in man (for in his day this way of expressing the problem had not emerged) yet his fundamental interest lies in how man comes to understand and express the forces and apparent realities impinging upon his life. A major distinction introduced by Durkheim was that the reasons given by the faithful and the actual state of affairs discovered by the scientist for religious phenomena were often very different. This indicates the two levels of meaning which are involved in religion for Durkheim and which might still be argued within the paradigm of meaning; for while the faithful may act towards the ultimate expression of truth as to a divinity the analyst might assert that such a deification of validating systems is merely a natural human process, or as Durkheim would have expressed it a social one. This dichotomy will be raised again in the context of presuppositions appropriate to scholars of religion respecting ultimate entities. The fact that Durkheim makes his method quite clear is instructive with respect to subsequent scholars and the way the tradition of scholarship has developed, especially in the anthropological dimension, and specifically in terms of projection processes.

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1.   Durkheim, É.   1976:2.

Within the specifically sociological tradition the question of meaning had, even before Durkheim, been of paramount importance in the manner in which it was advocated by Karl Marx. Yet his view that man's perception of life was inextricably associated with and derived from his precise social location, in terms of social class and involvement with the mechanisms of production, was of minor significance in the development of the study of religion in Britain. This was due perhaps to the political implications of his theory of dialectical materialism. In any event, his level of analysis was not sufficiently rigorous with respect to its own presuppositions to appreciate the problem of meaning implicit in religious phenomena.

In terms of the sociology of knowledge it was Karl Mannheim who helped make such issues clear and developed theoretical and more philosophical arguments for this purpose. Mannheim did not think that Marx had achieved a satisfactory sociology of knowledge despite his keen awareness of the relation existing between members of capitalist society and the mechanisms of its operation in respect of structure of consciousness. For Mannheim the Marxist failure in theory lay in its inability to see that its own ideology was also related to specific social factors as though there was an unconscious reluctance to admit the relativity of all ideas. He was committed to the importance of acquiring a sense of historical and social perspective as a pre-condition for the sociology of knowledge, yet he did not direct his attention solely to a form of historical or social relativity . By contrast he urged a form of relational perspective which did not assert any 'static ideal of eternal unperspectivistic truths independent of the subjective experience

of the observer'.[1] The role of the individual thinker in relation to styles of thought and objects of thought he had learned from Husserl and Scheler. Even so Mannheim's work, as to a certain extent is also true for Karl Popper's answering argument, has remained at a fairly high level of generalization with little relevance to the more pragmatic studies of religion in sociology and anthropology.[2]

A similar point can be made, with reservations, concerning Max Weber's sociological work on the relation between idea systems and the resulting action engaged in by religious believers. His concern does embrace the meaning of a religion for a practitioner but more in the sense of a motive for action than as a reason for living. A qualification is necessary; for, as will be shown later, his discussion of types of salvation does indicate an awareness of the variety of meanings sought by different categories of persons. Yet his intention is rather different from that of Alfred Schutz, for example, whose work facilitated an application of Husserlian phenomenology to sociology. This can be seen more clearly if we consider Schutz's achievement.

The work of Alfred Schutz was enormously important in the development of the study of religion. In the first place, he was one of Berger's intellectual mentors and Berger in his turn has been so very influential over the broad field of religious studies. Secondly, and this is more important, Schutz offers a distinctive perspective upon the question of meaning as such. This view of meaning has to do with the level of self-awareness manifested by a subject and this, we might argue, is different for the phenomenologist and for the person he observes. Nevertheless this distinction should not be allowed to obscure

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1.   Mannheim, K.   1966:271.

2.   Popper, K.   1966.

an underlying similarity between the meaning construction which is
fundamental to all human activity, and that which is deployed at the
level of phenomenological analysis. It is precisely these two levels,
both of which involve processes of meaning construction, which require
clarification before the paradigm of meaning can be seen in its full
heuristic strength in the study of religion.

The ordinary person inhabiting his life-world participates
naively in many finite universes of meaning, and little self-reflection
need be involved in this. Schutz does discuss what he calls the 'in
order to', and the 'because motives', maintained by ordinary subjects
as part of the routine of social interaction, but these also need not
involve any self-reflective attitude. There is, then, a fundamental
distinction to be drawn between the 'wide awake' state in which
attention de la vie is at its most intense and the subject most
active in the world, and the reflective attitude of the phenomenologist
set at a distance from the behaviour of others.

The phenomenologist sets himself apart from those he observes,
in Schutz's terms his actio or action in progress, is directed towards
the actum or the performed act of the subject.[1] Meaning for Schutz
results from the phenomenologist's actio as it seeks to understand both
the nature of the interior activity and the intersubjective action of
subjects set within the life-world. The operational structures of the
life-world are accepted as normative for philosophical analysis but with
the proviso of an addition of self-reflection at a high level of
abstraction. One significant aspect of the difference between the ordinary
inhabitant of the life-world and its critical analyst lies in the fact

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1.   Schutz, A.   1973:214.

argued by Schutz that 'I can look at my own self only <u>modo praeterito</u> and then grasp merely a partial aspect of this my past self, myself as a performer of a role'.[1] What this means for the methodological difference between Schutz and Berger is that the non-reflective actor lives permanently within an entirely plausible system, which Berger documents at length, while the phenomenological analyst, and he is the concern of Schutz, engages in an act essentially different from any performed in the ordinary life-world. Being aware of these issues Schutz represents the stance of the ordinary man in terms of the 'epoche of the natural attitude' in which no doubt is thrown upon the reality of the structure of everyday life. By contrast, the phenomenologist utilizes the notion of epoche in a formal and self-conscious way.[2]

The significance of this difference ought not to be undervalued for it relates directly to the important concept of 'meaning' in Schutz's work and also underlies much of the argument contained in the following chapters. The basis of the difference consists in what might be called the locus of meaning which varies from phenomenologist to layman, and will become clearer if we expand upon Schutz's use of the term 'meaning'.

Schutz abandoned William James's use of the concept sub-universe of reality because it implied an ontological reality, or we might say an external locus of meaning, which confronts an individual in the process of perception. He preferred the term 'finite province of meaning' in order to reflect the subjective locus of reality, 'because

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1.   Ibid, p.221.

2.   Ibid, p.229.

it is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of objects which constitutes reality'.[1] So meaning in the sense of 'how man, in the natural attitude of daily life and common sense, can understand another's action at all, is the primary concern for Schutz and he analyses it in terms of structures of self-knowledge and its relation to others as generated in the inter-subjectivity of social life. Meaning is thus a term descriptive of the taken for granted outlook present to and gained within everyday life.

While the activity of the phenomenologist is different from that of the layman, as indicated by the terminology of actio and actum, there remains an underlying similarity, a point which Schutz stresses when he discusses the theoretical justification of the social sciences. For he argues that despite the disparity in levels of self-awareness between layman and phenomenologist, both are concerned with meaning structures and it is because of this that 'the empirical social sciences will find their true foundation not in transcendental phenomenology but in the constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude'.[2] This means that the phenomenologist realizes that he is engaged in the same enterprise as the ordinary person, but that he is aware of his activity. So while the task of phenomenological analysis of behaviour can be seen to resemble the phenomenon itself the fact of self-conscious awareness and reflection at a higher level of abstraction serves to differentiate between a man naively engaged in the epoche of the life-world and one formally adopting the outlook of epoche as a methodological procedure.

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1. Ibid, p.230.
2. Ibid, p.149.

To speak of a paradigm of meaning is thus to identify an aspect of social reality which lies absolutely central to the phenomenological enterprise. The following chapters seek to show how religious phenomena also exemplify the process of meaning construction and care is taken to establish the two levels at which the notion of meaning may be seen to operate, on the one hand as agiven aspect or characteristic of human life, and on the other as a specific method of analysis. The paradigm of meaning might thus be viewed as a discussion of meta-meanings, as a study in the meaning of meaning in religious phenomena.

In collaboration with Thomas Luckmann, Berger developed Schutz's phenomenology in a study entitled 'The Social Construction of Reality', which was conceived as a contribution to the sociology of knowledge.[1] It sought to explain how individuals and groups attained a sense of meaning and security by analysing the processes which lead to the establishment of objective and subjective systems of identity. Central to the argument was the notion of legitimation defined as a kind of second-order objectivation of meaning. It is a function of religious and perhaps also philosophical paramount universes of meaning and serves to 'integrate meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes'.[2] Such legitimation processes which produce a sense of certainty and plausibility about how things are and should be in the world, vary from the implicit legitimations effected by the very language used by a group, through the level of folk-beliefs, proverbs and general maxims to more explicit propositions of a scientific and

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1.   Berger, P.L. and Thomas Luckmann, 1966.

2.   Ibid, p.110.

philosophical kind which finally are embraced by theological or other

ultimate kinds of philosophical schemes. Berger and Luckmann see the

entirety of human existence as involving a search for meaning and set

about identifying the social processes which constitute the mechanics

of the endeavour. In so doing they provide an application of Schutz's

phenomenology of everyday life, which centres upon the notion of

legitimation. The ordered sense of reality emerging from legitimation

processes they identify as the 'nomic function' and this may be said

to represent and express the central use of the term 'meaning' in Berger

and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge.[1]

Berger continued this general form of argument in 'The Social

Reality of Religion' which developed one aspect of the earlier and joint

work away from Luckmann's perspective. While Berger views religious

phenomena as similar but not identical to the general human activity

of meaning construction, Luckmann argued that religion is but one

aspect of the ordinary human enterprise of transcending biological

nature through cultural systems. Berger can be seen to follow the more

traditional perspective of religionswissenschaft in identifying the

sacred, a category embracing ultimate explanatory systems by referring

to a supernatural dimension, as the category which enables religious

phenomena to be differentiated from other systems of meaning. One reason

for his adopting this category as a distinctive feature lies in the fact

that Berger sees Luckmann's identification of religious systems and other

systems as involving the loss of any heuristic power in specific explanatory

categories.

Following Rudolph Otto, and to a certain extent Mircea Eliade,

Berger interprets the sacred as 'a quality of mysterious and awesome

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1.   Ibid, p.115.

power other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects or experience'.[1] It is the perception of this quality of experience as associated with schemes of legitimation which invests legitimation with 'an ultimately valid ontological status', as can be seen in the Egyptian idea of ma'at , the eastern notions of Tao and rita , and the Christian doctrine of creatio ex nihilo .[2] One of the major contributions of religion to the mental development of man, according to Berger, was the way it facilitated the process of symbol construction. The ability to form mental constructs and abstractions was thus part of the development of religious thinking and, as far as Berger is concerned, was also a necessary step in all thought processes. This rather evolutionary argument, which is similar to some of the points already raised in discussing projection, is but conjectural; since it does not bear significantly upon the rest of his argument its particular weakness may be ignored for present purposes.

Throughout The Social Reality of Religion Berger presented a heavily sociological analysis of the nature and function of religion combining the Durkheimian emphasis upon the social structure and its determination of conceptual categories with the phenomenological understanding of socialization and world building derived from Husserl and Schutz. The resulting picture of man seemed to leave no possibility of human freedom in religious activity. So sociologically dogmatic was its its tone that Berger was impelled to write A Rumour of Angels as a complementary volume to offset the possible 'counsel of despair for religion in the modern world' which the earlier book seemed to imply

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1.   Berger, P.L.   1969:34.

2.   Cf. Mircea Eliade, 1979:91.

if not actually to advocate.[1] Far from being a mere recitation of caveats this later volume, subtitled 'modern society and the rediscovery of the supernatural', is a creative attempt at relating sociological and theological enterprises. The major theme of Rumour of Angels is that of transcendence, a notion which may be singled out as one which most clearly identifies the inherent contradiction between the ideas of projection and revelation which themselves indicate a major methodological and ideological distinction between social scientific and theological disciplines. It might be said that Berger engages in a kind of natural theology originating in the notion of transcendence. He offers five arguments as suggestive of the actual existence of a transcendental realm beyond that of human life, but which originate in the every day life world. These arguments which are reminiscent of the classical arguments for the existence of God are, thus, clearly the product of the phenomenological method and also bring together several descriptions of human nature provided by the human sciences in recent decades. They are particularly apposite to the present discussion inasmuch as the first one is called the 'argument from ordering'.[2] Both in this basic theme and in the very language he uses to describe the religious expositions of what he calls 'signals of transcendence' the paradigm of meaning can be seen to be of primary importance for Berger since these signals convey a message concerning the ordered nature of reality. The core of his argument can be stated by saying that 'in the observable human propensity to order reality there is an intrinsic impulse to give cosmic scope to this order, an impulse which implies not only that human order in some way corresponds to an order that transcends

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1.   Berger, P.L. 1971.

2.   Ibid, p. 72.

it, but that this order is of such a character that man can trust himself and his destiny to it'.[1]

Along with the argument from ordering are those from play, hope, damnation and humour which together provide the basis for an inductive faith which fully appreciates the historical and sociological issues of relativity yet which seeks to do full justice to the human nature of man as it appears to the phenomenological analyst. Berger is careful in his suggestions for theological study being well aware of the fundamental difference between sociological and theological frames of reference. While he asserts the importance of 'what appears as a human projection' in the former kind of study, as exemplified in The Social Reality of Religion , he wants theologians to recognise the fact that the same phenomena may also be identified 'as a reflection of divine realities. The logic of the first perspective does not preclude the possibility of the latter', and this explains the rationale behind his writing A Rumour of Angels, which is to encourage theologians to utilize the perspective of the sociology of knowledge within their theological exercises. This intention reasserts the importance of the projection model of analysis in religious studies but goes further in suggesting a relation between human projections and 'reality as such'. His suggestion is that 'what is projected is itself a reflection, an imitation of ultimate reality. Religion , then, is not only (from the point of view of empirical reason) a projection of the human order, but (from the view of what might be called inductive faith) the ultimately true vindication of human order'.[2] Such an assertion is not, of course, necessarily true and involves an

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1.   Ibid, p.75.

2.   Idem.

a priori assumption about the nature of reality. This differs markedly from position of Schutz yet it offers a distinctive method of study and one which has already been taken up by John Bowker in his Wilde Lectures.

What this suggestion does imply, however, is that the objective existence of certain phenomena be taken into account when discussing the process of projection. This itself involves a change in the way projection is understood and introduces another theoretical perspective which, in its turn, leads to the establishment of a distinctive model which could be called the cybernetic or communication theory model. Reference to this model will be made throughout the following chapters before a final assessment is made of it in the concluding chapter. Mention of it here has been necessary in order to justify the more philosophical stance adopted in some of the cases studies later. The basic issue in this model is that there exist systems of various kinds which interact with each other, constraining each other and causing responses which might not otherwise have occurred. Human systems of religion are thus seen as resulting from an interrelation between man's endeavour to achieve meaning and those phenomena which demand explanation or which frustrate the processes of meaning construction.

It is in this context that Bowker criticizes Berger's use of the notion of legitimation in his sociology of knowledge, for while the latter argues that the process of meaning construction involves a dialectical relation between individual and the world, he over-stresses that part of the relation which he describes as man pouring out meaning into the world, and underestimates the fact that external stimuli might actually be causing man to react in a particular kind

of way. Bowker's central point is that there are 'cues of meaning' provided for man by the world and which enable him to make sense of it.[1] In many respects both hold very similar positions and differ more on where they place the emphasis than on matters of substance. This is clear from the key expressions they use to focus their arguments, for while Berger's signals of transcendence indicate the human source of meaning construction, Bowker's cues of meaning assert the importance of extra-human factors feeding into the human processes of nomization.

The theoretical questions involved in the interrelation of meaning systems will be discussed in detail only in the concluding chapter. First we must take up the more pragmatic aspects of man and society and their mutual relation with nature, inasmuch as such processes of interaction relate to religious phenomena. What has, so far, been established is the significance of the paradigm of meaning in its various forms as a potential unifying perspective in religious studies, following the fragmented state of the field after the demise of evolutionary theories in the human sciences. The relevance of the notion of meaning has also been seen by Robert Bellah and Zwi Werblowsky to mention only two scholars who might be said to represent the sociological and more explicitly history of religions traditons respectively.[2] The objective of this thesis is to show how the paradigm of meaning can be applied to a wide variety of religious phenomena, and in particular to show how the sociology of knowledge can be utilized in discussing the central issues of evil and salvation by means of what might be called plausibility theory.

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1.   Bowker, J.   1973:45.

2.   Bellah, R.N.   1970:9.

        Werblowsky ,R.J.Z.   1976:108.

Chapter Two   Plausibility Theory and the Problem of Evil

In the light of what has already been said about the
phenomenology of the everyday life-world we can easily understand
Berger and Luckmann's assertion that a 'plausibility structure is
the social base for the particular suspension of doubt without which
the definition of reality in question cannot be maintained in
consciousness'.[1] Furthermore this quotation provides a useful
definition of plausibility theory inasmuch as it refers to three
major phenomenological ideas which require further comment and which
together imply a fourth notion, that of evil, which is taken as the
central theme of this chapter.

In the definition of plausibility the first significant point
is raised by the phrase 'social base'. Its precise importance for the
present argument lies in the fact that both cognitive and affective
factors are fundamental constituents or aspects of social institutions
whether economic, political, religious, or pertaining to kinship or
even to leisure. Plausibility theory, when applied to religious
phenomena, does not only concern itself with doctrinal schemes or
philosophical systems of abstract forms, but also pays due regard to
the emotional elements entering into religious conceptions and to the
manner in which people hold to and maintain their beliefs. The fact
that western scholarship tends to eliminate affective aspects of life
in its use of the notion of reason is to be regretted, as Tillich and
others have remarked. So the importance of affective aspects of social

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1.   Berger, P.L. and Thomas Luckmann, 1967:175.

bases will be presumed and incorporated into the following studies of religious groups.

The phrase 'suspension of doubt' indicates the second phenomenologically important notion, that of the natural epoche in which most men live most of the time. The entire process of socialization is conducive to this state: yet, as will be shown below, this condition is not beyond question for it involves a certain fragility which is also to be interpreted in terms of the notion of evil. The suspension of doubt is possible, however, because of the power exerted by processes of legitimation which, in terms of the third phrase, provide a 'definition of reality' for people. Despite the fact that within a social group people find it possible to suspend doubt in the light of given interpretations of reality there are moments when crises of the given plausibility take place.

The precise way in which the relation between plausibility structures and processes which militate against them is discussed is instructive with respect to the status given by a writer to both phenomena. Berger tends to reify what he calls 'intrusions of the anomic phenomena of suffering, evil and above all of death' and the 'forces of chaos' which 'threaten' humanly constructed worlds of meaning.[1] Perhaps such reification is inevitable when discussing a phenomenon which is so inextricably part of the human, and thereby personal, awareness of the world. In any case, Berger establishes 'the problem of theodicy' as a central aspect of the maintenance of religious plausibility, being careful to say that his specific

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1.   Berger, P.L.   1969:61.

meaning varies from that adopted and customary in theology. For him theodicy focuses upon the human task of legitimation rather than upon any questioning of the purpose of an almighty and beneficent deity in the light of evil occurrences. It sometimes appears that Berger espouses and voices a form of existentialism which sees the world as essentially fragile and tending more to dissolution than to a robust perpetuation. 'The worlds that man constructs are forever threatened by the forces of chaos, finally by the inevitable fact of death.'[1]

A much less personified conception of negative features in religious structures is offered by John Bowker in his Wilde Lectures. These argue in some depth a theory of religion which, while similar to Berger's ,, is by no means identical. Religions are taken to be 'route finding activities, as homeostatic and conservative life-ways, through which as a whole human lives are made significant, and in which the meaning of their lives and of the universe is able to be discerned.'[2] The similarity to Berger's position and the significance of Bowker's thesis for the present argument lies in the emphasis upon that 'meaning' and 'significance' which religions are said to confer. Yet Bowker's perspective is more powerful than Berger's because it is essentially more analytical and operates at a higher level of theoretical abstraction. While the importance of this will be taken up at the end of this study it must be mentioned here that Bowker is asserting that religions are one kind of communication system set amidst other systems. In other words he does not follow Berger in accentuating the autonomy of

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1.   Ibid, p.87.
2.   Bowker, J.   1973:82.

human thought in processes of meaning construction. While man does impose significance upon external reality, as Berger powerfully argues in his notion of exteriorization, there are also sources external to man which influence his conceptions. Now Berger does admit the fact that external phenomena exert an influence on man and he handles the fact by means of the socialization processes of internalization ; but, and this is where the two scholars differ, the external influences were themselves creations of society. For Berger it is external social reality which exists in dialectical relation with succeeding generations; for Bowker there are important external influences which are not of social or human origin. One caveat might, perhaps, be introduced into this criticism of Berger inasmuch as society may itself be conceived of as a natural phenomenon as it was by the Durkheimian tradition in French sociology. Even allowing for this there remains a basic difference of approach, and in the following chapters the outlook of Bowker is regarded as at least a possibility.

One issue which is not directly stated in Bowker's quotation on religions as route finding activities but which is important for his argument as a whole, and which demonstrates the closeness of his thought to that of Berger, is the question of negative factors in experience. Berger's notion of theodicy is represented in Bowker through the notion of 'compound of limitation' and denotes those factors which hinder legitimation processes. The emphasis in Bowker is upon the positive aspect of meaning construction, on the fact that human society tends more in the direction of a firm cosmos than it does towards chaos. One reason for this lies in his belief that what he calls 'cues of meaning' are not all socially derived, as they are with Berger. Religions

are rather like evolutionary systems which have survived because they have discovered or developed patterns of behaviour which facilitate life which is, itself, associated with many problems and hazards. Religions are thus routes through the difficulties but they are supported in their work by factors emerging from the external world which is at the same time the very source of difficulty, or as Bowker expresses it, 'there are enough cues in the universe to support the plausibility of an eventual way through'.[1] The world is thus not as fragile and tenuous a structure as Berger makes it out to be. The problem which has been identified in this brief comment on two scholars will recur throughout the following chapters and will also be discussed in terms appropriate to academic traditions of others whose work has yet to be reviewed. For the moment this problem of evil needs to be further described in terms of the phenomenological concepts already introduced and which relate to the basic model of meaning.

· The maintenance of a plausible world view may be seen to depend on two different kinds of mental perspectives. The first is that of the natural epoche which involves the suspension of doubt about the given legitimating structures provided by both society and universe, and here we may combine the position of Berger and Bowker and thereby include both realities. So much we have already considered and may now describe as a naive structure of consciousness which may be differentiated for the purpose of the present argument from the second perspective, that of a fully conscious and directed state of mind which is aware of the particular problems posed by the world. The difference between these states is one

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1.   Ibid, p. 78.

of explicitness and of the level of articulation of the perception of negativities found in particular groups. The significant phenomenological point is that there emerge conditions in which the normal suspension of doubt becomes impossible. Those circumstances which lead to questions of theodicy are precisely those in which doubt cannot be suspended. We may then say that the problem of evil, phenomenologically speaking, is a question of identifying those areas or aspects of life which call the natural epoche itself into question.

The following studies of particular religious movements will exemplify the kinds of factors which serve such negative functions, what is true for them all is that man operates rather differently under what might be called routine challenges to epoche on the one hand and under critical challenges on the other. The first kind is met with the naive, non-directed style of epoche, while the second involves a far more specific and explicit kind of legitimation. These differences are of degree rather than of kind so that the basic processes operating in the everyday life-world are also observable, albeit at a more intense level of operation, in periods of crisis. Berger argues in this kind of a way for a view of theodicy proper as but an application of a general human attribute.[1]

So it is that meaning assertion as the characteristic activity of man is no neutral activity but takes place in a context of perceived implausibility. It is this perception of implausibility or of what might be called an inadequacy of meaning in the world that constitutes the starting point, logically at least, for the study of specific

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1.   Berger, P.L.   1969:63.

religious movements. The advantage of adopting a paradigm of meaning in respect of implausibility lies in the fact that if such a paradigm is set within the context of a communication-type theory, then the issue of whether the sense of evil precedes the salvation response or merely results from the message of salvation is made redundant. Such a cause and effect rationale is replaced by the notion of interrelated systems involving mutual changes and no immediate given priority either to the anomic or to the legitimation processes. Phenomenologically speaking this means that the notion of salvation, like that of evil, is grounded in human perception of the particular context of life in which a person finds himself. Both contexts and perceptions of life change and as they do so the relative significance and meaning of salvation and evil alter in relation the one to the other. If this is the case then it is possible to suggest a working definition of salvation which focuses more upon the mechanics of plausibility processes than upon any specific doctrinal schemes of belief in gods or the like.

Salvation as Plausibility

I have already argued elsewhere that it is desirable to adopt a working definition of salvation in religious studies which is not the direct product of any one religious tradition, and that the sociology of knowledge is precisely the kind of theoretical source which can help rid overly theological descriptions of their religion-specific significance. So, in the light of what has been said about plausibility theory a definition of salvation as a theoretical construct may be suggested as the basis for subsequent analyses of widely differing religious movements. The benefit to be gained from an

essentially non-theological definition of salvation lies not only in the fact that if the religious sense of one tradition were adopted then the argument would tend towards a dogmatic perspective, but that if a fundamentally different notion is assumed at the outset then very many theological and religious phenomena may be illuminated by the critical view brought to bear upon them 'from the outside'. What this implies is that the dominant outlook of this study is more that of the historian and phenomenologist of religion than of the theologian as such. This point needs to be made clear if only to prevent a confusion of aims and to avoid misdirected criticism. Werblowsky has argued the necessity of making clear whether a study of religious phenomena is carried out from the position of religious commitment or from that of academic detachment from a particular dogmatism. This study does not espouse a confessional basis which is why its central criteria have been drawn from the social sciences.[1]

  Accordingly we may say in general terms that 'salvation is a state of cognitive and affective well-being within the currently available system of world interpretation'. More formally we might say that 'salvation is that state of sufficiency of plausibility existing for an individual or group, under given ideological and social structural conditions, such that no alternative is sought'.[2] One important implication of the phrase 'given...conditions' , as far as the whole argument of this study is concerned, is that it permits a religion to be understood as one system amongst other systems, in other words it admits the importance of arguments from general systems

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1.   Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi.   1976
2.   Davies, D.J.   1978:91. Cf. P.L. Berger 1977:216.

theory which will be discussed at length later. What must also be emphasized is that such given conditions always involve the negative aspects of reality which, as has already been shown, are identified by Bowker as those compounds of limitation through which religions establish themselves as route finding activities. These compounds of limitation along with Berger's notion of anomic intrusions constitute a phenomenological category of structures of implausibility. This will serve to express in terms of a simple paradigm of meaning the various ideas of evil held by scholars in different disciplines. This means that the term evil, like salvation, can be used in a way which stresses no specific theological meaning belonging to any particular religious tradition, but as a phenomenologically descriptive category indicating that which contradicts plausibility in any given context. While most perceptions of implausibility are related to and contained within major religious traditions, so that salvation systems might be said to contextualize evil, there will be occasions when the sense of implausibility leads to a fundamentally different kind of response and explanation. There are, then, periods in the history of religions when plausibility is no longer durable enough to withstand the forces of negative questions. Such 'questions' can be of a strictly philosophical or scientific kind, as was the case of Darwinian evolution in the nineteenth century or Durkheimian sociology in the twentieth, or they may result from life experiences and periods of social or autobiographical change as will be shown in the cases of Mormonism and Sikhism. It is precisely because religions are themselves systems of meaning construction set within ever changing social contexts that

religious doctrines and rites must be viewed not as static phenomena but as dynamic interpretations of and responses to the external environment. It is just such a perspective that a general systems theory approach can justify at the theoretical level. A fundamental presupposition of this view is that analyses of religious phenomena ought not to engage in simplistic reductionist arguments with a strict cause and effect mechanism seen as underlying religious 'responses to social pressures' and the like; but ought to be considered as creative systems in relation with, responding to, but also causing other systems to respond to it. Religious systems are thus taken to be self-regulating in respect of certain goals which vary from group to group, and as influencing other institutions in the society concerned. To be self-regulating is not, however, to be autonomous inasmuch as once a general systems theory approach is adopted the only sensible way of talking about religions is that of one system amongst others. It is only because one system coexists with others that it may be said to possess any basis for its own continued existence. Sociological deprivation theories of religion, for example, tend to elevate one principle of explanation above any others, and the available data are then interpreted by means of that single perspective. Once a religious movement is subordinated to other social processes as far as explanation is concerned it becomes easy to overlook the influence of that movement on other institutions. As will be shown below,the methodological predilection of historians of religion to evaluate religious phenomena in terms appropriate to them can be seen to be in accord with the general systems theory approach, and also resembles the method adopted by phenomenologists which has already been discussed.

These general comments lead to the question of what factors do enter into the perception of evil and of salvation. Berger and Bowker provide a useful starting point in answering this question and serve to show how academic and philosophical presuppositions cannot be ignored when evaluating scholarly contributions to religious studies. Bowker, for example, in his desire to emphasize the external origin of cues of meaning fails to appreciate fully the fact that the need for meaning, which underlies the process in which man utilizes external cues in constructing meaning systems, lies in man and that it is the very mental process of man which results in plausible frameworks. Berger, by contrast, follows Durkheimian orthodoxy in understanding man's category construction and religious conceptualizations as originating in social experience. The most interesting theoretical difference between these two authors lies in their respective attitudes to the stability and instability of man's worlds of meaning. Bowker's position follows that of a general systems approach and presumes order rather than chaos, while Berger reflects more of an existentialist belief in the tenous nature of life and uses sociological arguments to show how chaos is avoided. It is hard to say to what extent Bowker's position may be influenced by belief in God, what is certain is that he wishes to include the reality of God as one system interacting with all others. It is, perhaps, instructive to see that Bowker stresses implausibility not in the structures of general life activities but specifically within religious boundaries by recognizing that 'crises of plausibility ... occur far more frequently ... within theistic traditions themselves than being imposed from outside'.[1] Here he is not

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1.   Bowker, J.   1973:84.

being sufficiently analytical and instead of considering the wider contexts of social institutions he chooses to focus on the kind of intellectual questioning which, while it does arise in some movements, need not affect the majority of members. He is advancing the notion of plausibility-implausibility in terms of the Christian theological perspective of the relation between faith and doubt. That doubt is related to faith is true in many types of Protestant theology, especially those involving an existentialist perspective; but to extend the idea to make it of universal application is hazardous. 'This doubt about the plausibility of projected ways', which Bowker says, 'is possible at any time, even in so called ages of faith', is a different concept from the phenomenologically defined notion of evil used in this study.[1] In constructing a phenomenologically descriptive system of religions it would be true to say, with Bowker, that the kind of perceived implausibility found in a group will be directly related to the process adopted to overcome it, but it would be untrue to say that evil itself,or the compounds of limitation themselves, are necessarily part of the transcending process.

Christianity can provide an illustration of this contention inasmuch as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science and Mormon movements do not admit the element of doubt to their notion of faith. Some qualification could, inevitably, be made of this assertion since certain groups of Mormon intellectuals, for example, are prepared to acknowledge the role of doubt and uncertainty in their attitude to certain doctrines, but this type of questioning is seldom found among the mass membership. While this kind of intellectualism can be maintained

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1.   Ibid, p.72.

among small groups who continue to act as ordinary believers it

is far removed from the normative stance of the majority for whom

doubt is antithetical to faith. The very fact of conversion in sect

groups emphasizes the difference in that converts are those who have

been in a state of confusion and doubt prior to their membership and

who have now passed into a new life of certainty characterized by the

sectarian affirmation which does not merely say 'I beleive', but

'I know'. The universe of meaning which is constituted by sectarian

institutions is one of complete and completed significance. It owes

its very existence to the fact that available systems of world

interpretation are found by some to be insufficient in terms of the

explanation of life as well as motivation for living. So it is that

the notion of doubt as belonging to the structures of faith has

tended to emerge in traditions which stress intellectualism and

undervalue emotional factors, as in Anglicanism and some types of

Reformed Protestantism. But this is certainly not a universal

feature of religiosity and while the theoretical possibility of a

co-existing faith and doubt structure must be entertained, the

general location of doubt as a manifestation of implausibility ought

to be in the world outside the religious plausibility system. In one

sense there is but little point in making this criticism too strongly

since the important factor is the recognition of negative features

in religious concerns and this Bowker has done well. The real basis

of the criticism lies in an attempt to reinforce the point that no one

religious idea should be used as the basis for academic categories

employed in religious studies, as has already been argued for the terms

salvation and evil.

Having already commented on what both these terms can mean
in a phenomenological sense it will now be useful to introduce an
hypothesis which will facilitate the following discussion of
religious phenomena and which deals with the notion of the durability
of plausibility. To do this we must refer to the work of Claude Lévi-
Strauss in structuralist anthropology and to his suggestion that
'in any society communication operates on three different levels:
communication of women, of goods and services, and of messages'.[1]
These different forms of communication are all of different orders
of reality and may be said to vary in their level of symbolic expression.
For example, in kinship, that which is exchanged and those performing it
are the same for men exchange women but both are human beings. In the
case of language, by contrast, the words used are of a high level of
symbolic association bearing little resemblance at the material level
to the things they represent. Moreover the actual time taken to
perform a communication event varies from a rapid exchange in the case
of words to the passing of entire generations in the case of kinship.
If this notion of communication is used in conjunction with Berger
and Luckmann's analysis of socialization, which stresses both the
linguistic and non-verbal aspects of human life, then the suggestion
may be made that what might be called the speed of communication and
the durability of plausibility are inversely related so that the faster
the communication event the less durable will be the plausibility
conferred. The higher the speed the more abstract the message conveyed
and the less likely it is that the message will result in bringing about
an emotional response on the part of the receiver. This hypothesis has
obvious significance for a paradigm of meaning concerned with religious

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, C.   1963:296.

phenomena; for it provides a broad theoretical perspective for describing ritual, symbolism and myth. To use the verb 'describe' in this context might be thought odd inasmuch as the application of this notion of durability suggests a measure of explanation as well as mere description. This is indeed so and the communication model underlying the notion of durability does possess explanatory power while also facilitating phenomenological description.

One particularly important aspect of the idea of speed of communication lies in the fact that it may seem to emphasize the fact that the notion of meaning applies as much to the affective dimensions as to the cognitive processes of human life. This hypothesis can thus be expressed in terms which assert that the higher the speed of communication and the less emotional is the affective component then the more dependent upon 'reason' does the communication event become. More than this, it may be said that whenever the intellectual element comes to predominate to an inordinate extent then the plausibility conferring power of the communication is reduced. This is not to say that philosophical arguments are devoid of non-rational or emotional roots, for the motif of all metaphysics is an emotional motivation, but it does argue that the power of ideas is likely to be maintained only if there is a group or community committed to them. In the following chapters the plausibility model will be drawn upon to show how the phenomenon of evil and the ways of dealing with it have been conceived, while the notion of speed of communication and of the durability of plausibility will be shown to constitute one facet of the general paradigm of meaning.[1]

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1.   Davies, D.J.   1978:97.

The Perception of Evil

In coming to emphasize the centrality of the perception of evil for religious studies one is identifying an area in which theological, philosophical, and phenomenological interests converge. In one sense this fact illustrates what has already been argued with respect to the paradigm of meaning, for the very fact that negative features of existence are established as problems in these various disciplines attests to the power of the desire for meaning which is thwarted by these very phenomena. As already argued above, the mutual relation of meaning and non-meaning ought not to be ignored and, what is more, both aspects require to be taken together as constituting the paradigm of meaning at the pragmatic level of religious phenomena. To argue either the priority of meaning over non-meaning as Berger does, or of negative factors of positive ones as I have done elsewhere is somewhat misguided.[1] Bowker adopts a more theoretically satisfying view in which negative factors - his compounds of limitation- coexist with and in relation to the positive aspect of religion as a route finding activity. It is precisely because of this close interaction that ideas of evil and of salvation change so specifically in terms of each other. Both Mormon and Sikh religions provide apt illustration of this fact as we show below.

For the present a more abstract point must be made, namely, that differences in ideas of evil and salvation may often be seen to express the degree of externalization or internalization present in a group. Both the way of conceiving evil and the methods adopted for its resolution

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1.   Ibid, p.92.

vary according to the degree of personification and abstraction engaged in with respect to negative features. It is not possible to construct any simple continuum with a clearly personified and externalized source of evil at one end and a highly subjective and internalized source at the other, and then to apply to apply it to eastern and western forms of religion. While this is the case it remains true that eastern forms of religiosity often do stress the subjective consciousness aspect while western forms of Christianity assert the external ontological status of evil. But since there are so many qualifications which would have to be made of such generalizations they must be left simply at the level of helpful label- categorizing trends rather than rules.

One western philosophical study which clearly demonstrated the complexity of these issues is provided by Paul Ricoeur whose <u>philosophie de la volonté</u> shows how far the internalization of the notion of evil can be taken in a western work. His second volume of <u>Finitude et Culpabilité</u> entitled <u>La Symbolique du mal</u> is particularly useful in the present context showing as it does the variety present in man's awareness of evil, as well as illustrating the contribution made by this existentialist philosopher who, as John Rogerson suggests, shows similarities with the phenomenologists.[1]

Ricoeur argues that the three notions of defilement, of sin, and of guilt (souillure, péché, culpabilité), have emerged, the one from the other, in a kind of historical development which demonstrates an increasing internalization of negative self-evaluation. The religious sense, which of all kinds of awareness is the one most particularly involved in this act of self-judgement, operates in many spheres of life

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1.   Rogerson, J.W.   1974:128.

and especially in confession to bring man to an acknowledgement of his true plight: 'cet aveu est une parole qui l'homme prononce sur lui-même'.[1] As a later discussion of Aboriginal religion will show it is quite possible for a people to possess such a megative self-evaluation without having to express it in terms of sin or of a status which presumes the existence of a god. Though Ricoeur's analysis - naturally enough - reflects a particular western theological outlook which has its own limitations, yet the descriptioh of life which is provides there offers a scheme which can be matched in form if not in actual content by data from non-christian cultures.[2] The question of myth occupies much more of Ricoeur's argument than might be expected in the work of a philosopher for he sees myths as among the most

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1. Ricoeur, P. 1960, Vol.ii, p.11. In his volume L'homme faillible Ricoeur expresses this enigma of existence by saying that in the world of myth man's world is represented to him as already fragmented, while man himself is often characterized as being in a state of internal division of the self. 'Ce caractère global - le concept de faillibilite - consiste dans une certaine non-coincidence de l'homme avec lui-même',Vol.i,p.21. It could well be added that what moves Ricoeur to take this view is his own sense of dividedness as simul iustus et peccator. However, the origin of Ricoeur's position is not what concerns us at the moment.

2. Cf. Ibid, p.155. 'Plus fondamentalement encore le mythe veut atteindre l'énigme de l'existence humaine a savoir la discordance entre la réalité fondamentale - état d'innocence, statut de créature, être essential - et la modalité actuelle de l'homme, en tant que souillé, pécheur, coupable'.

fundamental modes of expression capable of dealing with the enigmatic nature of human experience. J.W. Rogerson has aptly characterized myths as functioning as symbols in Ricoeur's work, in the sense that while they refer to certain ideas they cannot be fully interpreted in terms of those ideas in any purely intellectual way.[1] This point can be clarified by recalling Lévi-Strauss's argument that myths can be translated without serious loss of meaning.[2] To use the words 'interpret' and 'translate' indicates the centrality of myths in the question of meaning and also pinpoints the necessity of firmly establishing the status of myths as units of communication. Both Ricoeur and Lévi-Strauss regard myths as conveying a kind of knowledge which cannot be gained in any other way : and the same could be said of Eliade in the history of religions and of Stanner in anthropology. So while a myth may be translated into the language of another culture and stillelicit an appropriate response, it cannot be interpreted by non-mythical intellectual means and still function as myth.

This brief comment on myth shows the significance of the paradigm of meaning for this area of religious studies. In discovering the meaning of myths as they are found among religious believers and where they function as legitimating phenomena, the scholar sees how 'meaning' possesses more than a simple logical or reasonable significance. For Ricoeur as for Lévi-Strauss that which is explained is nothing less than the human condition, with the former emphasizing the moral imperfection of man while the latter underlines the perceived dichotomy between nature and culture as man's basic concern. These emphases apart,both identify myth as THE area of communication in which man

1. Rogerson, J.W. 1974:135.

2. Lévi-Strauss, C. 1963:206 ff.

attempts to solve the most basic problems of his perceived reality.
What is more the resolution of these difficulties need not, and usually
does not, take the form of any fully rational explanation of things.
A rather similar point is made by the historian J.B. Russell in his
analysis of 'the perception of evil', where his major concern is with
the idea of 'understanding' the work of the devil. Russell is less
bothered by the idea of evil in itself than by the experience of evil
encountered by human beings. The notion of understanding evil thus
relates to the way in which evil experiences are 'assimilated and
integrated' into a person's life such that he knows how to cope with
the problem, rather than to any fully logical mode of explaining the
nature and source of the problem. Russell's study is an instructive
contribution to the descriptive phenomenology of evil because it
stresses the personal focus of the phenomenon : evil is 'sensed as
hurt deliberately inflicted, it is perceived as personified and is
never abstract'.[1] What is more, and here his argument supports the
burden of this study, 'the perception of a flawed world is as
widespread as any that can be ascribed to mankind'.[2]

To talk about how evil is coped with is to become involved in
the question of the appropriateness of forms of understanding to specific
types of problem, a question that has received much attention in the
longstanding anthropological debate over primitive mentality. From the
nineteenth century issue of whether a pre-logical mentality existed
in primitive tribes which differed significantly from the logical
inclination of Victorian intellectuals to the twentieth century interest
in rationality anthropological opinions have varied greatly as I have
shown elsewhere.[3] One question which may be usefully extricated from

1.   Russell, J.B.   1977:11.
2.   Ibid, p. 21.
3.   Davies, D.J.   1975.

this rather intractible debate is whether the central emphasis ought to be placed less upon the notion of kinds of mentality than on styles of thought, frames of mind, or in more phenomenological terms upon tensions of consciousness: those mental sets that are adopted for and are appropriate to specific kinds of task. If we do this it becomes easier to talk of the fact that, for example, primitive peoples are as markedly pragmatic in certain aspects of their life as some western urban folk are devotionally mystical. Mythopœic' thought can then be viewed as a universal mode of mental operation in the same way as is pragmatic thought, or any other outlook which is determined by the object of perception and the goal of discourse. The oft repeated problem of the primitive mentality debate lay in the fact that religious endeavours of tribal peoples were compared with the scientific activities of western men. Once a correction is made for this inappropriate comparison many of the apparent difficulties are removed.

Other problems of a more profound nature still remain but are beyond the scope of this present study. Not least among these are the psychological issues associated with mental processes. For example,while it may be possible to agree with Lévi-Strauss that 'the same logical processes operate in myth as in science', one ought not not to presume that logical processes and tensions of consciousness can be equated.[1] Modern studies of meditation alone would provide sufficient evidence to suggest that different mental activities are associated with different modes of neural activity and result in altered states of consciousness.[2] This is not to say that if myth is a <u>sui generis</u> category then it will

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, C.   1963:230

2.   Benson, H.   1977.

always generate a particular experience in the hearers, but since that is at least a possibility it suggests the necessity of exploring the function of this phenomenon which may be peculiar to itself. Lévi-Strauss affords a suggestive insight into the nature of myth in asserting that 'the intellectual impulse' which produces myth may well be exhausted before any true logical resolution of perceived contradiction is attained.[1] In terms of plausibility theory this could be expressed as the participant achieving a level òf sufficient plausibility apart from exhaustive logical explanation. This level of meaning would result as much from affective ritual involvement incorporating the myth as from deliberative reasoning. So the rationale of the mythic solution may well take one form for the practitioner who might even regard the myth as being historically true and affording a concrete explanation of things, and another for the analyst who has to locate the function of myth alongside its apparent content. It is precisely in acknowledgement of the complexity of religious phenomena which contribute to a sense of meaning for men that the phenomenology and history of religions have been acutely aware of the hazards of reductionism in explanation, and it is for this reason that emphasis has been placed upon the possibility that myth is a category irreducible to another. A similar argument will be advanced later for aspects of ritual which contribute to religious meaning for the practitioner.

In logical if not in chronological terms, then, the mastery of evil begins with a categorizing of it within each religious tradition. Its paradoxical presence is then approached by means of ritual acts and mythical expressions in an attempt to remove or to attenuate it. As far

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, C.   1963:229.

as most religions are concerned at the level of popular devotion
and spirituality philosophical problems of evil are subordinated
to the task of coping with the very experiences which give rise
to abstract theorizing over their origin. In practical terms
this means that perception and categorization of evil are processes
which are closely associated with those of salvation which counter
the perceived power of evil. This obvious point has been made by
many scholars, not least by Sigmund Freud who identified the
'threefold task' of the gods as exorcizing the terrors of nature,
reconciling men to the cruelty of fate especially in the form of death,
and of compensating them for the sufferings and privations imposed by
civilization.[1]

The wide variety of ways in which religions identify evil
and set about its resolution makes a theoretical perspective such
as that of plausibility theory all the more necessary as a means
of establishing phenomenological order. The definition of salvation
given above along with the discussion of evil as a flaw in plausibility
structures will be seen to be advantageous in analysing specific cases
of African tribal, Mormon, and Sikh religions. To this task we now
turn before going on to consider further developments in the general
paradigm of meaning, especially the notion of identity as an aspect
of meaning.

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1.   Freud, S.   1973:14.

Chapter Three   Evil and Witchcraft

Reference has already been made in the first chapter to the theoretical

significance of E.E. Evans-Pritchard's anthropological work as marking and

effecting a change from functionalism to what might be called a weak form

of structuralism.   This is not the strong form of Lévi-Strauss's work,

which itself marks the foremost French contribution to a paradigm of meaning

in the study of man.   Though it presupposes a theory of mind and mental

operations it is more pragmatic in seeking so to analyse social phenomena

as to allow their inner structure to be fully manifest to the anthropologist.

'The anthropologist seeks to do more than understand the thought and values

of a primitive people and translate them into his own culture.   He seeks

also to discover the structural order of the society, the patterns which,

once established, enable him to see it as a whole, as a set of interrelated

abstractions'.[1]   In his most influential early work on witchcraft among

the Azande of the southern Sudan Evans-Pritchard demonstrated how this

structural order could be identified and communicated to a reader unfamiliar

with the native context.   The wide significance and influence exerted by

this study can be assessed from the fact that the 1968 meeting of the

Association of Social Anthropologists was devoted to the theme of witchcraft

and the ensuing volume dedicated to Evans-Pritchard.   In the Editorial of

that volume Mary Douglas emphasizes the importance of Evans-Pritchard's

work, commenting significantly that Witchcraft and Oracles among the Azande

was, in effect, a study in the sociology of knowledge.   Because

anthropologists had tended to read it as some kind of functionalist analysis

Mary Douglas felt it necessary to 'establish that the study of Azande

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.D.   1962:22.

witchcraft was indeed offered as a contribution to the sociology of perception'.[1]   Similarly in The Nuer and Nuer Religion his concern with issues of social values, experience and mind is obvious and in this his intellectual affinity to Durkheim is marked as he seeks the abstract system of thought underlying native culture.   Yet he does not present any abstract set of models expressing the rationale of indigenous thought: 'interpretations are contained in the facts themselves, for I have described the facts in such a way that the interpretations emerge as part of the description'.[2]   The 'purposive description' presented by Evans-Pritchard is, perhaps, one of the most sophisticated social scientific examples of the paradigm of meaning to be found in ethnographic literature, for in his description of Zande life Evans-Pritchard sets forth the 'how', or the indigenous rationale, of life-phenomena but he does so in a way which itself presupposes, at an academic level, that the culture as a whole possesses a meaning which can be understood by his readers who do not begin with Zande presuppositions.[3]

So it is that Evans-Pritchard discusses the subject of witchcraft as one aspect of the problem of explanation as such, asking why any metaphysical system should be accepted.   In an interesting way his basic question is the opposite form of Berger's interest in the nature of social reality: the latter views problematic areas of life as the major tensions on plausibility systems while Evans-Pritchard is more occupied with the constraints supporting belief in a system of explanation. Mary Douglas identifies three elements of the Azande study as having been significant for later work and which demonstrate the significance of

1.   Douglas, M.   1970:xiv.
2.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1937:5.
3.   Ibid, p.4.

witchcraft as a plausibility maintaining process. In terms of this thesis these elements also demonstrate the way evil, defined as implausibility, can be viewed and dealt with apart from reference to transcendent sources of evil. In the first place witchcraft accusations 'allowed grudges to be brought out into the open and ... provided a formula for action in misfortune'.[1] Secondly such accusations were clearly associated with areas of life and persons involved in conflict and rivalries, while, thirdly, the witch beliefs were directly related to the moral code inasmuch as witches were characterized as possessing anti-social features of behaviour as of physical appearance. While this kind of analysis is open to criticism focusing on functionalism of too static a kind it nevertheless shows how witchcraft operates as a kind of homeostatic device for social friction. In addition it provides an explanatory framework for evil experienced in social intercourse 'based on the idea of a communication system'.[2] Even when other anthropologists such as Marwick, Middleton and Turner developed witchcraft studies in directions other than a functionalist-like way they, nevertheless, utilized Evans-Pritchard's insight that witchcraft was, primarily, 'essentially a means of clarifying and affirming social definitions'.[2] Whether witchcraft processes led to the maintenance of social relations or their disruption they served the purpose of fostering a system of plausibility.

As far as the Azande study is concerned witchcraft demonstrates clearly that plausibility is a notion relating to both intellectual and emotional factors, and Evans-Pritchard goes to pains to show that the emotional and experiential dimension may even predominate inasmuch as

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1.   Douglas, M.   1970:xvii.
2.   Douglas, M.   Idem, p.xxv.

witchcraft is a method of actually coping with a problem in terms of action rather than one of elaborate intellectualizing upon a problem. 'In truth Azande experience feelings about witchcraft rather than ideas, for their intellectual concepts of it are weak and they know better what to do when attacked by it than how to explain it. Their response is action and not analysis. The Zande actualizes these beliefs rather than intellectualizes them, their tenets are expressed in socially controlled behaviour rather than in doctrines'.[1] The fact that the Azande do not possess an entirely coherent and systematic logic of witchcraft, that they not merely have an uncompleted system in western terms of system or rationality, but know and feel it to be 'peculiar' and one they do not 'profess to understand entirely', in no sense appears to reduce the plausibility conferred by the beliefs.[2] For the rites performed by the Azande appear to them to achieve the desired end, whatever is wrong is righted; and since the very implausibility exists at the level of experience it is at that same level where the resolution occurs.

The Azande case makes clearly the point that not only will postulated solutions vary according to the nature of evil in particular groups, but that pragmatic causes are assignificant as intellectual ones in some instances. Evans-Pritchard is remarkably clear on the way in which Azande attain satisfactory levels of meaning in life, telling of how, in his own participant observation, he adopted their mode of coping with problems and decisions making. In attempting to 'think black', or as he corrects himself, to 'feel black', he found it an effort to check his 'lapse into unreason' when using magic oracles

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1937:82-3.
2.   Ibid, p.99.

in daily life.   Yet he urges acceptance of the fact that Azande methods
possessed an intellectual consistency when viewed in context, and when
it is appreciated that their coherency is to be evaluated as a product
of particular cultural contexts.   The beliefs in witchcraft, oracles
and magic relate to one another as 'loose associations of notions' which
operate 'in bits, not as a whole', with the'plasticity of beliefs'
resulting from or being the function of situations and not 'indivisible
ideational structures'.[1]   It is likely to be true that this kind of
situation obtains for practical religion in all societies even though
formal theologies advanced by religious specialists tend to ignore the
fact.   As a type case the Azande material would suggest that the notion
of sufficiency of plausibility might well be applied to ritual as to more
theoretical means of dealing with life's misfortunes in situations where
there are no fully systematized and comprehensive schemes of knowledge.

Witchcraft and oracles are, then, institutions which, according
to the basic argument of this thesis, pertain to salvation, inasmuch as
they serve to interpret phenomena of evil to the Azande and go on to
help validate the nature of reality by means of ritual processes which
serve to overcome the perceived implausibility of the Zande world.
What is more, these institutions are in no direct sense associated with
the Zande concept of God, which itself is no single and uniform notion.[2]
Witchcraft is a physical characteristic of certain persons and is inherited
by unilineal descent, the substance causing it can even be located within
the dead body of a witch at an autopsy.[3]   This witchcraft or _mangu_ causes
illness and disease of all kinds with only two exceptions which beset
infants and which are usually fatal.   These infant diseases are vaguely

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1.   Ibid, p.540.
2.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1962:162 ff.
3.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1937:22.

thought to be permitted by the supreme being but do not result from witchcraft. As Evans-Pritchard suggests these babies are scarcely social beings and so are hardly susceptible to witchcraft when it is interpreted anthropologically as the result of social friction arising between established social persons; further than this, as far as the Azande are concerned the child has only recently arrived and his soul may well soon return whence it has come. For adult persons a different rationale is employed which ascribes all misfortune to witchcraft, and while it possesses a supernatural mode of operation its source is not the supreme being but in man himself. This is a significant point for the present study for it indicates that even when a phenomenon is not attributed to a diety there may still be a folk explanation which a western observer might regard as supernatural, the fact that mangu is of human origin yet operates supernaturally shows that much care must be taken in applying the generalized ideas of plausibility to concrete cases.

At the folk level of a paradigm of meaning the Azande might be said to engage in the maintenance of a pragmatic plausibility, one which seeks to rectify life's misfortunes in a practical way as the case of death will demonstrate. All Zande deaths must be avenged by kinsmen for all death is believed to be the outcome of witchcraft. The way in which vengeance is enacted does not, however, cause further social strife but leads to a sense of satisfaction on the part of the bereaved kinsmen. This is so even though the apparent logic of vengeance ritual, which involves the death of the offending witch and the questioning of oracles to see whether any recently dead person was

that witch, leads to yet another round of magic on the part of the newly deceased's kinsmen. A death brings to an end the questioning of the first group and satisfies them, for at the pragmatic level the issue of death and of man's response to it has met with action deemed appropriate and justifying. Evans-Pritchard emphasizes the intellectual consistency of Azande at the pragmatic level of thought as well as stressing their lack of co-ordination and systematic logicality in magic as a whole.

The case of the Azande affords an interesting example of western academic approaches to the question of thought inasmuch as studies of their religion have produced integrated systems where none, as far as Evans-Pritchard's extensive ethnography is concerned, seems to exist in the minds of the people. References to prayers used by Zande to Mbori or the supreme being have been organized into theological systems by western commentators whereas 'in real life they are never so presented but are dissociated phrases evoked in situations of grief, anxiety and fear'. In such contexts they possess an 'emotional rather than conceptual significance'.[1] Indeed Evans-Pritchard in criticizing over-schematizations in interpretations of Zande thought expresses the opinion that the 'Azande do not have any clear doctrinal opinions, for they actualize their beliefs, expressing them in rite and prayer rather than intellectualizing them in dogma and myth'.[2] The important feature lies in the 'logico-emotional dependencies between religious categories'.[3] The form of this dependency is what constitutes the system of plausibility and the relative balance of logical and emotional factors the sufficiency of plausibility for Azande. Their interest in cosmology, or rather their

1. Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1962:172.
2. Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1937:196.
3. Ibid, p.197.

lack of it, is complemented by the great attention paid to social relations and the factors underlying them. Plausibility is generated against the social background rather than against a cosmic or even divine-satanic scenario.

By contrast with the Azande the Nuer, another Sudanese tribal people, direct their thinking about evil by means of the idea of spirit or kwoth. Spirit, unlike mangu, does not originate in man but belongs to another order of reality, and it is with respect to that other order that Nuer direct their religious activity. This particular emphasis permits mention of a theoretically important idea which Evans-Pritchard raises in the concluding section of his Nuer Religion, and which bears directly on this thesis. In reflecting on the lack of theoretical development in the study of primitive and, one might add, advanced religion he suggests that what is necessary is a comparative study of what he calls primitive philosophies, of the weltanschauungen which include elements which might not normally be regarded as religious. As a basis for such comparison he proposed that the 'dominant motif' of each culture be identified; but since there are so many potential motifs Evans-Pritchard went on to make the significant suggestion that 'the test of what is the dominant motif is usually, perhaps always, to identify that to which a people attribute dangers and sickness and other misfortunes and what steps they take to avoid or eliminate them'.[1] While this criterion might be thought a particularly appropriate choice of topic for Evans-Pritchard to make given the predilections of Azande and Nuer thought, it may well have an application of much broader scope as Evans-Pritchard hoped and as this thesis hopes to establish for groups

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1956:315.

outside the African culture area.

One area of weakness in religious studies requires some comment in the light of this expressed hope, especially as it is one which Evans-Pritchard himself saw clearly. It is the way in which primitive religions tend to be treated as different in kind from the so called world religions. In criticising the late nineteenth and twentieth century intellectualist, emotionalist and projectionist scholars of religion Evans-Pritchard expresses regret that they did not pay attention to contemporary forms of the world religions. Had they investigated the actual functioning of these religions rather than studying only the texts, creeds and formal systems then their relation to primitive religions would have been more obviously apparent and similar, and the primitive religions would not have been treated 'as something so unlike the religions of civilization that they appeared to require a special kind of interpretation and a special vocabulary'.[1] The evolutionary presupposition which directed much of this divorce between kinds of religion has already been considered, and it remains to say that in subsequent discussions no essential difference is postulated in the practical expression of religions. The paradigm of meaning implies that religions are engaged in the basic task of plausibility generation in the context of perceived evil and that this process can be identified despite culturally different expressions of evil and salvation. To reinforce this perspective a rather hard test case will be considered from the field of African ethnography, one which might almost serve to disprove the plausibility generalization.

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1. Evans-Pritchard, .E. Ibid, p.314.

The Mbuti pygmies of the Ituri Forest in the Congo do not possess any witchcraft beliefs or techniques, neither do they entertain any cosmological explanation for misfortune and evil.[1] This unusual combination contradicts S.F. Nadel's compensatory theory of witchcraft which argues that witchcraft will be employed as an explanation of evil if there is no cosmological or 'scientific' account of it readily available. Mary Douglas's comment on the Mbuti ethnography, that 'people can do without explanations of misfortune. They can live in tolerance and amity and without metaphysical curiosity', is quite critical for the paradigm of meaning offered in this thesis in terms of plausibility theory. Yet this is the very exception which proves the rule; for Douglas goes on to say that the apparent precondition for this state of affairs is that the Mbuti 'should be free to move away from each other whenever strains appear. The price of such a benign cosmology is a low level of organization'.[2]

In different terms the Mbuti could be described as exhibiting a developed form of pragmatic plausibility which shows the necessity of making explicit reference to affective factors entering into the construction of a world of satisfactory meaning. This pragmatism operates as much at the level of supernatural beliefs as at that of social organization, for as C.M. Turnbull had adequately demonstrated in his extensive ethnography of the pygmies they have no elaborate conception of any world of gods, and even regard abstractions about a future life as without adequate foundation in human experience. Some of the systematized accounts of Mbuti theology which have been constructed Turnbull regards as more the result of western desires 'to present a

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1.   Turnbull, C.M.   1965.

2.   Douglas, M.   1970:xxxiii.

picture of a system applicable to all Mbuti' than as an accurate assessment of the actual state of affairs.[1]   In his criticism of Father Schebasta's over systematizations Turnbull resembles Evans-Pritchard's regrets with respect to similar exercises performed on the Nuer and Azande.   The Mbuti supernatural pragmatism, if it might be so called, is manifested in the fact that the forest itself, which is an immediate phenomenon, rather than some abstraction of it, lies at the centre of all their thought and action.   Just as the Azande enact their attitude to misfortune through the rituals of witchcraft and oracles so the Mbuti act out their attitude to life and reality in their forest nomadism.   Some comment on the perception of evil is required for the Mbuti since their case appears to be so exceptional.

Perhaps Turnbull's study of the Mbuti provides one of the best examples of a functionalist approach to witchcraft for it not only demonstrates how the pygmies who normally live in the forest itself have no witchcraft ritual, as already mentioned but goes on to show that the tribal villagers, with whom the Mbuti engage in economic exchange, do practise both witchcraft and sorcery, which serve to dispel the social frictions and conflicts engendered by village life. Witchcraft here is 'a concept employed usefully to bring to light hidden sources of dispute and to publically shame troublemakers'.[2] In the social life of the village, as symbolized and expressed in witchcraft, the Mbuti encounter that which is 'totally outside their forest-world experience, conscious malevolence'.[2]   This is not to say that the life of pygmy hordes is always calm and illustrative of that lack of noise which they regard as the best way to live in , and

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1.   Ibid, p.246.
2.   Turnbull, C.M.   Ibid, p.59.

without disturbing, the great forest itself.   Friction does take

place but the social response to it lies in the intentional division

of the group with the offending parties withdrawing to different parts

of the forest.   This response to what must be regarded as a perception

of evil as social conflict is an example of the Mbuti pragmatic outlook,

and is possible because, as Mary Douglas rightly says, they possess a

low level of social organization.   This response is not open to the

villagers in the same way, for they live under the restraints of having

to build houses in jungle clearings which cannot be abandoned just because

trouble arises among neighbours.

The normal absence of crisis among the Mbuti results from their

expertise as forest livers in an environment which is essentially

benevolent, and which makes the basic nature of life appear to be good.

They know how to cope with practically all problems they encounter, and

illness in particular is something they know how to treat though the

basic healthiness of their environment makes this less of a problem

than it might be.   Turnbull goes so far as to say that there is not a

'solitary instance to show the belief in a malevolent power against which

protection must be sought':   there is, rather, an intimacy of relationship

between the individual Mbuti and the forest which is his father and mother,

the source of his life and all his good.   The one obvious exception is,

inevitably, death itself.   Yet unlike the Azande and the jungle villagers

the Mbuti do not regard death as caused by the evil intention of one of

their number.   Witchcraft accusations never follow death, it being

accepted as perfectly natural and in accord with the processes which are

forever at work in the forest.   There is, nonetheless, the feeling that

death is 'the one really imperfect thing in life', and death rites

as with those of mourning, serve to restore the normality of life as

quickly as possible.[1] The Mbuti would thus appear to present a case

in which evil as such, or where perceived implausibility, is not a

significant concern as far as the entire scheme of life is concerned.

What they do present, however, is the desire to maintain that level

of plausibility which forest life makes possible and which is

interestingly expressed in the ideas of sound and noise.

Noise, especially loud noise, is said to be disturbing to the

forest as such. This is as true of natural noises as of noises made

by quarrels, and as far as the Mbuti are concerned one might just as

easily express the notion of social friction as social noise as in any

other way. It is better, they say, to disperse than to have such noise

in the forest. Quiet, by contrast, is good and pleasing to the forest,

its social expression through sound is in song. Song is, in terms of

their conceptual classification, a form of quiet inasmuch as both quiet

and song are 'cool' phenomena whereas noise is 'hot'. As might then

be expected song rituals occupy a central place in rites of crisis such

as death, and serve to attract the attention of the forest itself to

their needs which helps restore the coolness of good order which itself

is a feature of normal times. From this it can be seen that Mary

Douglas's assertion that people can do without explanations of misfortune

is both accurate and misleading; accurate inasmuch as the Mbuti do not

have elaborate accounts of why disruptions occur, but misleading since

they do possess ideas of what to do when quarrels occur. It is this

action framework which characterizes both Mbuti and Azande religiosity,

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1.   Ibid, p.147.

and it might be supposed that similar religious responses obtain much more widely. One way of understanding folk religion in any context is to regard those abstract theorizings which have been the focus of study for scholars of the world religions as less important than usually they are assumed to be, and to consider in more depth the pragmatic responses taken to various life circumstances. The great divide between primitive religions and the 'village' manifestation of the world religions would then assume radically different proportions.

A postscript to this notion of pragmatic plausibility may be provided by drawing from another study of Turnbull, one which offers another rather paradoxical test of the paradigm of meaning. In fact no greater contrast with the Mbuti could be found than that provided by the Ik tribe of Uganda which, because of particularly bad climatic conditions, was forced into surviving against the pressures of overwhelming hunger.[1] This later study of Turnbull, which is as much an autobiographical essay on the nature of man as it is an ethnography, illustrates the growing irrelevance of religious belief and ritual practice under conditions of social disintegration resulting from an increasing individualism itself made necessary to obtain food for personal survival. Even witchcraft accusations which might have been expected to increase in number as social conflicts multiplied came to be used more as a form of abuse than as a social corrective. This would appear to reinforce the essentially Durkheimian view of religion as a social phenomenon concerned both with corporate morality and the classification of the world. No morality remained among the Ik, and social classifications as expressed in religious forms had virtually

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1. Turnbull, C.M. 1973.

been abandoned. It appeared to Turnbull that they had come 'to a recognition of what they accept as man's basic selfishness, of his natural determination to survive as an individual before all else'.[1] Not only was there no attempt to improve conditions by ritual means, for actual physical conditions were acknowledged as having passed all bounds of reversal, but the basic categories of good and evil were themselves made redundant. In this world of social fragmentation all values were reduced to insignificance beside that of possessing food for oneself.

This example demonstrates the necessity of appropriate constraints in any society conceived as a communication system and in which processes of plausibility generation may operate effectively. The extreme environmental conditions made social existence a practical impossibility and what is witnessed is human life apart from its normative social context. Precisely because of this the social nature of plausibility theory is underlined and the general paradigm of meaning established as a normal human endeavour.

Evil and Sin

With the exception of the Ik ethnography, anthropological and phenomenological studies of religion have functioning social groups as the object of their analysis, and in them can be discerned systems of religious communication involving ideas of evil and methods for its resolution. Because this thesis urges that the idea of evil be interpreted non-theologically and in terms of plausibility theory some further thought must be given to what is implied in this use of terms. Some distinction must be drawn between the term evil when used in the

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1.   Ibid, p.182.

sociological sense of implausibility, and sin when employed theologically to refer to a transgressed divine imperative. The necessity of such a distinction, one which will facilitate analysis of 'negative' religious phenomena, becomes quite apparent in the light of an important anthropological contribution to this whole area namely Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf's Henry Myers Lecture delivered at the British Academy and entitled 'The Sense of Sin in Cross-Cultural Perspective'. His conclusion that 'the concept of sin and with it the sense of sin cannot be common to all branches of humanity' would appear to undermine a central theme of this thesis, namely that the perception of evil is the primary process in religions.[1] After a clarification of terminology this will be seen not to be the case.

Once the suggested distinction is drawn between evil and sin it is possible to agree with Fürer-Haimendorf that 'many societies lack a developed sense of sin and the belief in supernatural sanctions for transgressions of the moral code', and to agree with his further assertion to which he wishes to give a near universal status, that men have had to acknowledge that they have to 'struggle in a world beset by evil and imperfection'.[2] This point he elaborates even more in saying 'that the feeling that man was born for a fate better than his present condition is found among populations of all economic levels'.[2] Evil as perceived implausibility in the nature of things is the category which could be used to interpret this universal sense of imperfection, while sin would be a category relating to particular theological interpretations of imperfections including moral transgressions. While this is a far from perfect distinction inasmuch as different

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1.   Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von.   1974.

2.   Ibid, p.555.

theologies require more particular distinctions to be drawn between kinds of 'sin', it does allow an initial phenomenological description to be made which is itself not grounded in any theological definition.

A positive contribution made by Fürer-Haimendorf lies in the final assessment that there is no universal correlation existing between types of social structure and the kind of sin identified by a society; there is no direct or indirect association between social and economic levels of development and the form of sin experienced. If the distinction between evil and sin is adopted after the plausibility model it would be easier to make this point and to say that while sin is not a universal feature of human experience evil is, everywhere, a part of man's self-evaluation. Even such a simple redefinition would make one of Fürer-Haimendorf's concluding generalizations more intelligible in the light of his own preceding argument. 'Like other religious beliefs', he suggests, 'the sense of sin is a phenomenon sui generis which intertwines with social and economic phenomena but has an existence of its own not determined by conditions in secular spheres'.[1] This must be interpreted as saying that it is the sense of evil as perceived implausibility which is the sui generis element rather than the phenomenon of sin as transgressed imperatives which he has already shown to be absent from certain cultures including the Chenchus of the Deccan.

What is particularly significant in Fürer-Haimendorf's position is the ascription of a sui generis status to the sense of sin. While this presumably refers to a phenomenon which is not reducible to other aspects of social structure he seems to offer the idea as a way of describing that which is widely present and yet is not determined by

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1.   Idem.

particular features of a social structure. Indeed, he makes it quite clear that anthropologists as anthropologists can make no philosophical or religious assertions about the ultimate nature of reality, and he cites Evans-Pritchard's closing and provocative words in Nuer Religion as 'at this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist'.[1] While Fürer-Haimendorf's argument remains ultimately undefined its intention is perfectly clear and is that of asserting the universality of the 'fact of human imperfection'.[2] His desire is not to explain 'the ultimate roots of evil and sin' but merely to describe, in a manner which might even be called phenomenological, how various cultures identify the negative features of their existence.[3] His disinterest in engaging in any philosophical debate on the nature of this evil is characteristic of the pragmatic character of British anthropology, yet the very fact that he wants to establish a sui generis status for the negative phenomenon which 'has an existence of its own not determined by conditions in secular spheres', shows the impropriety of termination the discussion at the level of description. This thesis seeks to show that this kind of anthropological analysis is not the final one as far as religious studies are concerned.

One reason why Fürer-Haimendorf does not argue for a universal notion of sin, in his sense of the word, is because some tribes lack appropriate words to describe it. To what degree latent Christian ideas have influenced his search for words corresponding to those expressing guilt and penitence it is hard to say. Once, however, any directly Christian model is eschewed, as in the perspective of plausibility theory, it is much easier to see how the perception of negative features is

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1956:322.

2.   Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von.   Ibid, p.556.

3.   Idem.

categorized in world cultures. This would establish the awareness

of a lack of perfection as the basis for the _sui generis_ category of

evil, which might or might not involve a notion of human imperfection

in any one social group. In the case of the Mbuti there would be no

such indigenous notion of human evil while in most religions of the

great traditions there would be such a factor. Some attention must

be given to the way in which particular religious traditions develop

their idea of implausibility if only to show that to talk of a _sui_

generis category is impossible without relating it to concrete instances

which both help identify the nature of the general category and assert

the distinctive difference of various cultural expression.

W.J. Boyd has carried out a useful study in this area showing

how man's experience of evil is expressed in mythical form. Making

considerable use of Rudolph Otto's categories of the holy he begins

from an existentialist standpoint to show how Buddhist and Christian

frameworks have developed ideas of evil explaining human experience.

Christianity is evaluated as maximizing the externality of evil and

the _horrendum_ aspect of it, while minimizing its _fascinans_ element.

Buddhism, by contrast emphasizes this element of fascination which he

links with the notion of bondage to _samsara_, or the repetitive existence

of the unenlightened being. The points of greatest similarity are

those which manifest a _numinal_ quality attributed to symbolizations

of evil, Satan in the case of Christianity and _Mara_ in that of Buddhism.

Precisely what is meant by numinal quality is hard to say. Boyd

describes it as 'an overplus of meaning eluding conceptual analysis',

and seems to be expressing the idea of the power and compulsion

experienced in and through the symbols of evil as most dramatically portrayed in the phenomenon of possession by _Mara_ or Satan.[1] What constitutes this power as evil is its disruptive aspect, the way it opposes what Christians and Buddhists regard as the truest expression of the ultimate. This positive goal or pattern of ideas Boyd identifies as the holy and true and while their specific meanings are determined by the respective traditions he, nevertheless, regards them as correlates within these traditions.

Analysing Boyd's usage, evil might be said to be a term which identifies the disruption between good and evil, a kind of statement asserting that the holy and true is not easily attained. It does not provide any comment on the specific content of categories of evil. In this approach follows Ricoeur's analysis of evil as a shattering of man's grasp upon the sacred. As far as the present argument is concerned Boyd does not commence his description of evil at a sufficiently early period in the process of religious perception; for it is not necessarily true that 'the meaning of evil is derived from the meaning of the sacred'.[2] While it is impossible to arrive at any knowledge of whether mankind identified evil before identifying good, it is at least feasible to discuss the interrelation between notions of good and evil in any one religious tradition conceived as communication system. In so doing no priority is given either to the notion of good or evil, both being regarded as necessary for the very rationale of that religious system of salvation to make any sense.

One of the most significant and influential studies to have addressed itself to these central categories of good and evil in an

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1.   Boyd, W.J.   1975:150.

2.   Boyd, W.J.   Ibid, p.165.

essentially non-theological way was William Robertson Smith's

<u>Religion of the Semites</u>.   In the fourth of these Burnett Lectures Smith

began his theoretical analysis of religion in earnest by identifying the

central categories without which he felt a study of religion to be

impossible.   The most important of these he calls 'the distinction

between what is holy and what is common'.[1]   But Smith - and here his

caution is at a premium and rather unlike the attitude of many other

nineteenth century intellectualists - adds that the precise meaning of

the terms holy and common is not easy to establish since it varies from

religion to religion and also within any religion over the course of time.

Here Smith seeks to identify a general feature in religious

phenomena which can be established in any particular case and yet which

need not be of any particular kind.   He is postulating the existence of

religious structures rather than of any particular content.   He exemplifies

the principle by asserting that while holiness implies an ethical factor it

did not do so in early Semitic religion.   The notion of holiness he likens

to electricity and to electrical discharges which might be associated with

specific places or persons.   A fundamental aspect of the category holy lay

in the fact of relationship, indeed holiness is the most general notion

that governs the relationship between the gods or the divine and human

beings.[2]

Inasmuch as holiness has to do with this interaction there may be

said to exist rules governing it.   These 'rules of holiness' Smith

identifies with schemes of taboo, with those 'rules of conduct for the

regulation of man's contact with deities'.[3]   Not only does he conceive

of a positive taboo associated with divinities, but he emphasizes the

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1.   Smith, W. Robertson.   1894:140.

2.   Ibid, p.142.

3.   Ibid, p.152.

importance of negative taboos relating to man's encounter with evil

spirits and powers, and these taboos he identifies with rules of

uncleanness.   In practical terms there is a problem in Smith's scheme

since the notions of holiness and uncleanness can function in a very

similar way in some societies, for what the rules associated with them

are essentially concerned with is man's contact with, or access to,

sources of power and influence.

Smith did not appear to recognise the difficulties introduced by

his categories of holy and common; for while arguing the case for the

difference between positive and negative taboos he makes the point both

that 'in most savage societies no sharp line seems to be drawn between

the two kinds of taboo', and that 'in the Levitical legislation the law

of clean and unclean may be brought within the sphere of divine

ordinance on the view that uncleanness is hateful to God'.[1]

If it be asked what level or kind of analysis Smith is here

engaged in, the response would have to acknowledge a certain confusion

in his entire scheme.   While he is doubtless more concerned with man

as a social being than as an individual consciousness he finds difficulty

in handling a discussion on the social nature of man.   The result of

this lack of conceptual apparatus was the temptation to make unfounded

statements about primitive man.   For twentieth century social scientists

these are a priori and not a posteriori statements.   Again, his perspective

is decidedly evolutionary, not in the concrete sense of Frazer, for example,

who postulated distinct phases through which human society had passed, but

in a more general sense of periods and trends through which various ideas

had been developed.   This emergence of religious conceptions was not in

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1.   Ibid, p.153.

Smith's thinking necessarily a positive and beneficial process. One of the best examples to the contrary is furnished by his belief that ancient religion was in some way more pure because less tainted and influenced by the idea of property in relation to sacrifice and the gods. Here, perhaps, lurks Smith's inherent protestant evaluation of religion in the sense that he disliked the idea of a powerful priesthood whose status was derived from sacrificial ritual.

While Smith is unconcerned about the individual level of religiosity he, nevertheless, presupposes states of religious awareness in the early and later phases of religion. There is a certain methodological confusion in this too for Smith is never able to formulate clearly the nature of the relation between the individual and the group. His constant concern with processes of human thought resembles the general nineteenth century anthropological involvement in the issue of primitive mentality which was not settled satisfactorily. It is for this reason that some of the crucial sections in the Religion of the Semites are notoriously difficult to interpret, as, for example, in this representative quotation from the ninth lecture dealing with sacrifice. 'In the beginnings of human thought, the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual were confounded, and this confusion gave rise to the old notion of holiness, which turned on the idea that supernatural influences emanated, like an infection, from certain material things'.[1] A major problem in such sections lies in deciding whether Smith wanted to refer to states of mind or to modes of thought, to kinds of feeling states or to systemsof logic. It may be closer to his intention to say that both were included so that the mode of experiencing and the understanding of

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1.   Ibid, p.395.

what had been experienced combined in the lives of early man. What
is clear is that Smith had simply not discovered an adequate methodology
and theoretical perspective which could have made his work more subtle
and penetrating.

Émile Durkheim, whose work was fundamentally influenced by Smith,
was able to achieve greater clarity and precision over the basic
classification of humanly perceived reality through his sociological
method, though as far as religious studies in the broadest sense is
concerned and apart from sociology in the stricter sense, this was at
the expense of a complete sociological reductionism. To make religion
a mere epiphenomenon of social interaction, albeit a radically important
creation of society, would not have satisfied Smith who forcefully
argued for an adequate treatment of the supernatural element in
Christianity, and who maintained a practical attitude of piety, which
witnesses to this dimension, until his death.[1] But this is of
secondary importance here, for what is true both of Smith and Durkheim
is that the idea of a basic dichotomy, Smith's holy and common, expresses
both a perception of phenomena and a means of classifying them. It
relates both to the description and identification of experience, and
more especially to experience gained within social contexts rather than
in isolation. It was precisely this relational perspective which
Durkheim developed in his study of The Elementary Forms of the Religious
Life.[2] There he showed that the source of religiosity lay not in sacred
places but in the community itself, not in any awesome power of a sanctuary
but in the dynamic of society which itself generated religious power
experienced by the participants as something completely different from

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1. Black, J.S. and G.W. Chrystal. 1912 a. p.109; 1912 b. p.572.
2. Durkheim, É. 1912.

their mundane existence, indeed for Durkheim this was 'the real characteristic of social facts, their transcendence over individual minds'.[1]

It is quite clear that Durkheim followed Smith in assuming the fundamental significance of a dichotomy in the classification of reality, but Durkheim is much firmer in his grasp of the way in which these categories originate in social life. For him all categories of thought are generated from social experience and in his opening chapter on 'religious sociology and the theory of knowledge' he provides a classical expression of a sociological theory of knowledge. Behind all categories of mind lies the primacy of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, terms developed from Smith's holy and common, and which are so profoundly different that in the whole history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so radically opposed to one another'.[2] In accounting for the basis of this difference Durkehim grounds it in the nature of social reality as opposed to individual reality, of social goals and private goals. Accordingly magic is classified as profane inasmuch as it works antisocial ends as it achieves some selfish benefit for an individual. In this Durkheim may be seen to clarify one point of confusion in Robertson Smith, namely, that positive and negative taboos are of an essentially different kind. Without any explicit reference to Smith, Durkheim makes the point that even the traditional opposition of good and evil is nothing beside the sacred and profane dichotomy, thereby implying that positive and negative taboos ought not to be classified as members of the same class. Durkheim's obvious and explicit respect for Smith's work is less likely to be the

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1.   Ibid, p.231.

2.   Ibid, p.38.

reason for his not arguing directly against his scheme, than the fact that Durkehim continues the argument of The Elementary Forms with very few direct references to or confrontations with other scholars.

Since Durkehim regarded his study of religion as one which laid bare the essential features of religion, and since he saw the sacred and profane as the most fundamental features it might seem surprising that he did not go on to discuss, or at least refer to, the idea of salvation. For the sake of the theoretical development of religious studies it is worth commenting upon this omission because it has influenced, albeit after the fashion of an argument from silence, the way scholars have related primitive and advanced religions. Durkheim appears not to have conceived of Aboriginal religion as even possibly containing elements of the idea of salvation, and the sacred-profane dichotomy which might have served as a basis for discussing the phenomenon of evil and the human response to it, is restricted for use in analysing the social nature of religiosity. Whether his avoidance of the idea of salvation results from his sociological rather than theological intention, or from the evolutionist assumption that to discuss the notion with respect to so primitive a level of society was a fruitless task since it was only in later phases of development that such phenomena emerged, it is impossible to say with certainty. It would, nevertheless be true to say that the explanatory framework adopted always determines not only how description and analysis proceeds, but also what is perceived as an appropriate object of study, and not least is this true for the idea of salvation. On the whole it would seem that Durkheim falls into the position held by Fürer-Haimendorf who regarded saviour and

salvation motifs as the products of relatively advanced social systems, advanced in terms of economic and cultural technology. This kind of perspective is markedly different from Evans-Pritchard's studies of equally undeveloped societies for he admits the possibility and importance of another dimension to the life of, for example, the Nuer, one which could not be completely explained in terms of any single social scientific theory. This emphasis upon the individual's perception of his relationship to a divinity, noted but not analysed by Evans-Pritchard, marks a significant difference in the way he sees the individual relating to society compared with Durkheim's rather more abstract considerations, this difference is to be understood, in part, in the light of the fact that Durkheim never did study a group in the field.

In terms of the plausibility model of salvation it is possible to interpret Durkheim's study of religion as one which is very much concerned with the reality of salvation even though Durkheim did not see the issue in this way at all. Given the sound rejection of the ethnographic accuracy of <u>The Elementary Forms</u> by modern anthropology, the main reason for focusing on it now is to show how theoretical perspective can alter the entire significance of the religious phenomena studied.[1] If, then, the category of the sacred originates in the intensity of social experience, salvation can be identified as the state of maximum social involvement experienced by each participant member of a society. It is, as Durkheim says, the state of transcendence resulting from ritual activity in which the power of society is encountered but only as perceived in the totems and other sacra.[2] Again in terms of plausibility theory, the profane would represent states of disintegration when the unifying forces of

1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1965:53ff.
2.   Durkheim, É.   Ibid, p.215.

social relationships are no longer present or effective, a condition which indicates Durkheim's evaluation of man whose religiosity is not only a function of his sociality but is actually identified with it. Durkheim describes man as Homo duplex with the two components of individuality and sociability producing the whole. Yet as far as he is concerned man is only fully himself when caught up in the central totemic rites which serve to reinforce the individual in his social role, once separated from community interaction the sole person declines from a full measure of humanity. The real significance of what Durkheim is here suggesting can be appreciated only when it is realised that he does make a full equivalence between god and society. Total dependence on god, or god as that which is ultimately significant, is what Durkheim sees society to be in relation to its individual members, so that to be in a state of salvation is to be a fully participant member of society, for outside affective society there is no salvation.

To think of religious ritual only in terms of psychological excitement would, however, be incorrect, an error of understanding which can be rectified by a consideration of Durkheim's analysis of knowledge, and the fundamental premise that true knowledge is to be equated with impersonal reason which itself is a product of historical and collective processes. Durkheim forces the point that all personal and subjective elements must be 'rooted out' of collective representations 'if we are to approach reality more closely'.[1] The means by which the personal factor is eliminated is that of corporate agreement, a form of social consensus which establishes basic ideas while ignoring idiosyncratic elements of thought. Durkheim's reification of the notion 'society'

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1.   Durkheim, É.   Cf. 1976:13 ff.

underlies this kind of argument and enables him to believe that what is

produced by social action is different from that resulting from

individual cogitation.   For Durkheim, then, reason itself is a social

phenomenon, a social product divested of both personal and collective

emotionalism while religious phenomena retain as a basic attribute high

levels of affectivity.   Religious 'knowledge' and rational knowledge

can be seen to occupy different positions in Durkheim's thought such that

the categories of thought are, themselves, ever present with individuals

whereas religious knowledge or awareness cannot be maintained except on

the basis of repeated reinforcement.   This means that any notion of

salvation as far as Durkheim is concerned would, necessarily, have to

involve affective factors as well as a reasonable, that is, a non-

emotionally based explanation of what takes place in the ritual process.

Interestingly this emphasis on mind and affectivity though rather

different, is the thrust of another nineteenth century scholar, Max Müller,

whose Hibbert Lectures of 1878 are a model of clear thinking in the history

of religions.   Mention of Müller serves not only to acknowledge one who

has been called 'the father of comparative religion', but also to make the

more substantial point that the later nineteenth century and early

twentieth century scholars were much given to issues of mind, perception

and the true nature of things.[1]   In Müller's case, as in that of Durkheim,

there is no interest in the question of salvation or evil in any analytical

sense.   Müller is fundamentally as evolutionist preoccupied with the

problem of how notions of supernatural entities developed from the growth

of language.   It is, however, to be regretted that he is usually only

remembered for his infamous 'disease of language' theory of the origin of

divinity which results from the ascription and subsequent reification of personal names and attributes to natural phenomena.

In the first of his lectures a section is devoted to the question of 'religion as a subjective faculty for the apprehension of the infinite'. He takes up a definition of religion presented in 1873 in a lecture to the Royal Institution. The substance of this definition involves the notion of a mental faculty: 'religion is a mental faculty or disposition which, independent of, nay, in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names and under varying disguises'.[1] By contrast with Durkheim's social emphasis Müller's argument clearly demonstrates the philosophical and individualistic concern of the intellectualist anthropologists, philosophers and theologians of Müller's period. Yet the dichotomy of emphasis between Durkheim's social processes and Müller's individual dimension should not be allowed to obscure their mutual interest in mind and the structure and origin of religious consciousness. Müller makes perfectly clear with respect to his definition of religion, and to potential criticism of it, that he does not intend saying that the term 'faculty' involves the notion of 'a substantial something', for there is 'but one self and one consciousness' with no 'separate consciousness for religion'.[2] What differentiates religious awareness from any other kind of mental state is the object of consciousness, so the notion of faculty designates a mode of action in relation to an object of general consciousness and for religion this is the most general of all categories, the idea of totality, of all that transcends sense and reason.

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1.   Müller, M.   1898:22.

2.   Ibid, p.21.

While it would be possible and interesting to show the intellectual affinity between this view, which focuses upon the relation between consciousness and the object of consciousness, and that of William James in psychology along with subsequent phenomenologists and their notion of intentionality, it is much more appropriate as far as the present argument is concerned to indicate the way in which Müller is attempting to handle questions of meaning through the study of the notion of totality. When he says that 'the history of religion is a history of all human effort to render the Infinite less and less indefinite' he was engaging in the highest level of generalization of a specifically philosophical kind, and in that was but little concerned with practical aspects of religion which might, at the more affective dimension, work towards the elimination of indefinite factors, yet he thereby demonstrated, albeit indirectly and by implication, that religious studies could not ignore the fact that men perceived the world as other than they desired it to be.[1] Later unpopularity of Müller's theory of language and mythology, along with the evolutionistic dimension of his speculative thought, has obscured the basic similarity of intention between Müller and the much more recent work on the paradigm of meaning in religion, especially, perhaps, that of Hans Mol.

Meaning and Identity

Mol's recent study, Identity and the Sacred, is particularly important as far as the paradigm of meaning is concerned because it positively advances the status of affective phenomena within the entire process of meaning construction.[2] In short this change can be typified in the very terms use, from meaning to identity, where the very notion

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1.   Ibid, p.36.

2.   Mol, H.   1976. Cf. 1978.

of identity presupposes an emotional dimension to the human sense of significance. Mol describes this work as a sketch for a general social scientific theory of religion, 'yet one which seeks to avoid the general sociological tendency to relativise the phenomena under consideration by absolutizing the theory adopted'.[1] The desire to avoid reductionist forms of explanation has a dual basis, for Mol is both convinced that vital religiosity is more important a human phenomenon than is theorizing from an absolute position, and that to do so is to fall foul of a central tenet of his own theory. For, as far as he is concerned, absolutized theories, or explanations which claim ultimate validity, are potential religious phenomena themselves.

Mol regards all men, including members of primitive society, as engaged in a 'search for identity', which as part of man's nature as an evolving species implies a contrasting and paradoxical tension through the process of change in which he is involved either as a recipient or instigator.[2] There exists in man a dialectic between 'adaptation and identity, between differentiation and integration', a dialectic which may be evaluated not only in terms of social values and expectations as in Durkehim, but also psychologically at the level of the individual. It is precisely this concern with the individual which leads Mol to emphasize emotional aspects of life associated with the construction of a personal identity, and therein a sense of meaning. He categorizes what might be called this affective dimension of plausibility subsisting in the phenomenon of personal identity as the element of 'commitment', or the 'emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity' which serves the religious individual as the 'pivot of articulation between the

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1.   Ibid, p.x.

2.   Ibid, p.2.

transcendent and the mundane'.[1]   It is precisely the overemphasis on

rationality in scientific method and much philosophy which has lead to

the inability of science 'to anchor meaning emotionally'.[2]

Mol follows Talcott Parsons' idea that it is commitment

demonstrated in action which makes a religion out of a mere philosophy,

but commitment of that kind presupposes the worthwhileness of the endeavour

and assumes that a creed or set of values is worthy of implementation on

the part of the religious person.   This leads the argument to Mol's central

thesis that an idea system which provides a definition and explanation of a

person's life will tend to be sacralized, and that such sacralized

ideologies constitute a religion.   In other words and by the way of

definition he says that sacralization is a 'process by means of which

on the level of symbol systems certain patterns acquire ... (a) taken for

granted, stable, eternal quality'.[3]   So it is that the sacralization

process possesses the function of 'objectification', the 'tendency to sum

up the variegated elements of mundane existence in a trancendental point

of reference', while also engendering a commitment to the focus of identity

located in the objectified structures.[4]

Much of this language and material follows the general outline of

plausibility theory and Mol acknowledges his debt to Berger through whom

most of Mol's phenomenological material, deriving ultimately from Alfred

Schutz, has been mediated.   Mol's emphasis upon the integrity of the

personality in the process of emergent identity leads him to consider the

significance of general affective dimensions and to place less emphasis

upon language than does Berger for example, this is a useful corrective

to Berger's phenomenological sociology.   One reason why Mol's discussion

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1.   Ibid, p.11.

2.   Ibid, p.126.

3.   Ibid, p.5.

4.   Ibid, p.11.

of personality is particularly significant for this thesis emerges from his belief that there are processes operating against the integrity and identity of the personality of the individual and also of groups. These negative factors are located in, or arise from, both the human being as an individual and the social processes of evolution. The inevitable changes influencing man as he faces new environments, both natural and social, present a perpetual challenge to whatever state of equilibrium obtains, this 'inexorable tendency towards change and differentiation' is, for Mol, to be seen as inevitable because of the very fact of human being in the world.[1] This rather philosophical expression is only a gloss on the basic reality of man as a biological and social creature set within an ever changing and dynamic environment, as part of this environment may also be added the changing understanding of philosophical and theological kinds which call the intellectual status quo into question. This is a somewhat better explanation of the immediacy of 'alienation and disorder' than that offered by John Bowker and his notion of religions as route finding activities set amidst compounds of limitation. At least it provides a more adequate theoretical context for discussing the phenomenon of negative features.[2] In another respect the evolutionary context even aids Bowker's form of argument, for it is primarily concerned with processes of interaction between entities in the present and which may be seen as working towards a homeostatic equilibrium of a dynamic kind. That is to say that Mol's use of evolution is less that speculative developmentalism which has already been criticized in the nineteenth century scholars than another way of expressing what has already been applauded in the communication theory approach of general systems theory. While Mol

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1.   Ibid, p.262.

2.   Ibid, p.265.

does not emphasize the negative aspects of the interaction between man
and environment, indeed he stresses that his concern lies on the side
of the positive sacralizing processes, their significance remains quite
considerable inasmuch as man is seen to be engaged in ascribing
differential values to the world in which he is set.

For Mol religion is a term which defines an ideology as ultimate,
an idology which itself necessarily defines man's status and condition
to him including an evaluation of negative features. Moreover 'religion
sacralizes any identity', it 'defines man and his place in the universe',
functions which are of a positive nature and which symbolize man's
'proclivity for order'. Here meaning and order can be seen to be more
objective and impersonal notions while identity serves a more subjective
and personal end. Hence sacralization of identity presupposes the
affective element in any paradigm of meaning, it is a quality perceived
in a proposition about the nature of things.[1] To relate Mol to Müller
one might say the former is not content merely to show how man comes to
understand the Infinite, but how he comes to relate himself, in action,
to it. Religious beliefs are placed beyond doubt, as far as practical
action on the basis of them is concerned, when they are sacralized, their
self-evident and compelling nature determines how men relate to them.
Here Mol's notion of validation closely resembles Berger's use of
legitimation processes. Mol is not so acutely aware of the problem of
evil as was Berger who emphasized factors which challenged legitimizing
processes, and also Bowker in his argument that religious systems are
those explanatory modes which are expressly directed towards particularly
intransigent problems of meaning experienced by man. Mol's particular

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1. Ibid, pp.63, 70.

contribution, despite his underemphasis on negative factors, lies in

identifying the quality of the sacred as inhering in statements of

identity and of definitions of ultimate reality.   Unlike Durkheim Mol

did not see that ultimate religious reality, as far as a social scientific

perspective is concerned, necessarily involves the profane along with the

sacred, the only reason for labouring this point is that Mol's own

explanation of objectification processes is hindered by the perpetual

accentuation placed upon the sacred.   His reference to the notion of

maya demonstrates the disadvantage under which he has placed himself.

Arguing that objectification 'is the tendency to sum up the variegated

elements of mundane existence in a transcendental frame of reference

where they can appear in a more orderly, consistent and more timeless

way', Mol offers several examples of notions which he orders in a ranked

manner on what might be described as a basis of the distance of the

phenomenon from the mundane world.   Thus mana is categorized as a

'supernatural power concretized in persons and things', and appears

'only one step removed from the mundane' and hardly distinguishes between

the transcendent and the immanent.   Maya, by contrast, is further removed

constituting the 'utmost universalization of mythic being...unified into

a single interpretative system'.[1]   In order to make these assertions which,

if true would exemplify and substantiate his argument, Mol finds it necessary

to engage in some reinterpretation, firstly by taking recourse to the

'original' meaning of maya as supernatural power rather than to its more

usual sense of cosmic illusion, and secondly by identifying maya with the

Brahman-atman doctrine which he says represents the notion of cosmic

identity.   In this double elimination of the notion of maya in its sense

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1.   Ibid, p.206.

which might easily be interpreted in terms of plausibility and negativity
Mol says that the 'profane is relativized', a relativization which has
'a balancing effect on the mundane'.[1] The consequence of this exercise
is that Hinduism comes to be evaluated as possessing 'a weak potential
for active motivation; and as encouraging an 'essentially negative
world-view', though exactly why this should be Mol does not say.
Similarly in examples from Judaism, Islam and Christianity finds himself
having to provide explanations in order to avoid categorizing sacred
entities along with profane ones.   If once it is admitted that both
sacred and profane entities can be sacralized then this problem is
removed.   To say that the profane can be sacralized is to employ Mol's
terms and means that men act towards the profane in a particular way, it
is not to equate the sacred and the profane in terms of their content.

Despite these criticisms Mol's study stands as a clear example of
how the paradigm of meaning can be seen to underlie modern religious
studies, most particularly it shows how high level generalizations about
the nature of thought and interpretative categories can be related to the
actual commitment of ordinary religious practitioners.   It is just this
kind of perspective which will be adopted in looking at particular cases
of sectarian religion and Indian religion in following chapters.   Before
that, however, attention must be turned to another aspect of the paradigm
of meaning which can best be described as hermeneutics.

Chapter Four   Anthropological Hermeneutics

The central concern of this chapter is that of reductionism as a characteristic feature of social scientific explanations of religion. More than many others religious phenomena are subject to a great variety of interpretations at a number of levels of analysis. Both scholars from many disciplines and religious men themselves seek to identify the essential reality of religion, and this has led to competing and alternative forms of explanation. In this chapter we explore some of the central problems associated with explanations that presuppose such an essential element in religion, and suggest that some forms of argument which assert that man is Homo religiosus are as open to the charge of reductionism as those that would explain religious behaviour in terms of society or psychology. Because this study is not an exercise in systematic theology no attempt is made to contribute any confessional views on the nature of religion. The contention is rather that the critical evaluation of methods used in religious studies to evaluate the nature of man's religiosity is a necessary preliminary act to such an endeavour.

In the earlier discussion of the sacred-profane dichotomy it was argued that all theorizing operates upon certain fundamental principles which soon become established and difficult to abandon even though further evidence becomes difficult to manipulate by the old means. The issue which this now raises is whether the data themselves should be allowed to influence the manner of their own interpretation.

What then does this issue mean for anthropological hermeneutics
It obviously does not mean that the observer, whether anthropologist
or theologian, must come to accept the religious claims made by the
movement he studies; neither, however, does it demand that he seek
to disprove whatever claims to truth are made. While most sociologists
and anthropologists would not explicitly engage in any such a
destructive task - indeed they often assert that truth claims have
nothing to do with them as analysts - it remains true that the form
of their interpretation often presupposes the error of religious
assertions, by demonstrating that the significant facts of a religion
are to be discovered through the way it reflects the social structure
or the like. Having said this it is only proper to add that some
historians of religion   presuppose the ultimate veracity of
religion as the basis for their studies, this is dangerous when
they ignore their own 'religious reductionism' while deploring
the sociological reductionism of others. If we now turn to the
paradigm of meaning it may be possible to demonstrate a certain
similarity of approach between anthropologists and historians of
religion while also placing the issue of reductionism in a
broader perspective.

Wilhelm Dupré in his study of ethnophilosophy argued in
much the same vein as Hans Mol, viewing religion as a unitary
phenomenon grounded in man's universal solidarity in the search
for meaning. Religion becomes an 'intensive quality of the process
of symbolization in general ' and as such may be regarded as a
symbol of symbolization, thereby representing 'the culmination of
life in general' in which meaning may be said to be concretized.[1]

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1.   Dupré, Wilhelm.   1975:139;131;138.

This line of thought resembles much of what has already been said about the paradigm of meaning and it lead Dupré to the obvious point that the study of religion must 'evolve out of an analysis of culture and man', by means of what he designates as an 'unconditioned functionalism'.[1] More perceptively it helped him to realize that indigenous terminology should be retained as a reminder to the scholar of his 'hermeneutic situation'. He fully acknowledges the fact of cultural diversity, as the retention of native terms shows, but he also believes in a fundamental human unity manifested in the 'quest for meaning'.[2] It is as a result of this paradox of human unity and diversity that Dupré's passing comments on hermeneutics lie in need of further elaboration.

A primary question concerns the very word 'meaning'. This metaproblem -the meaning of meaning- assumes anything but a trite significance once it is realized that some cultures hold different notions of what ideas and values are worthy of social recognition and validation. How then can the term be so used as to make it viable in cross-cultural contexts ? We shall return to the issue of the status of the word 'meaning' in the concluding chapter, but for the present the simplest answer results from distinguishing between the form and content of the notion of meaning. By form is intended the presupposition that men and cultures seek an ordered and intelligible world, while content refers to the specific cultural set of values in the light of which order is persued. To distinguish between form and content is thus to raise again the issue of

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1.   Ibid, p.120.

2.   Ibid, p.119.

external and internal observers' models, and to admit that the meaning of a culture established by the anthropologist may differ from the indigenous form of understanding. When such a difference occurs it will, usually, be because the observer is engaging in some higher level - and probably reductionist- mode of interpretation. So the question of meaning is rather like the definition of religion, inasmuch as any term which is used cross culturally must possess both general and specific attributes.

At the most pragmatic level it might be argued that the form of the notion of meaning derives from man's biological and social relations through which he orders his environment for the purpose of survival. Its particular features will vary from the kind of content furnished by the forest life of the Mbuti to the urban complexity of many western Sikhs and Mormons. All are set upon survival even though the precise mechanics of that motivation vary to a marked extent. It is in this connection that accurate descriptions of social and religious phenomena become invaluable inasmuch as they do not prejudge the content of indigenous value and meaning systems, and seek only to permit whatever native structures of significance there are to manifest themselves. This shows the need for the phenomenological act of epoche in the task of description, as well as for as full a description as possible, since it may only be at a late stage of observation that otherwise insignificant factors assume a major place in the broad system of meaning.

If the first stage of study consists in this kind of phenomenological description the second is even more difficult to discuss and to name, for while the term 'analysis' suggests itself it rather begs the question of criteria, while 'understanding' in the sense of <u>verstehen</u> appears at first to be too vague. What Dupré seems to suggest as desirable is an analysis which is grounded in the facts themselves, an understanding emerging from the indigenous phenomena. He presumes that the observer will perceive a kind of intellectual <u>gestalt</u> amidst the diverse material that will enable him to identify several key ideas which can then be utilized in interpreting less obvious data.

Dupré introduced the notion of 'constitutive analysis' to embrace this kind of study, it is an 'analysis of the particulars that receives its logic from the whole which bears them in their particularity'. [1] In actual fact he is advancing no further forward methodologically than the point reached by Evans-Pritchard and discussed above, except, perhaps, that Evans-Pritchard engaged in the task rather than explore the nature of identifying and categorizing what he was doing. It is probably significant that the one reference to him in Dupré's work is to an attempt at integrating meaning and ritual. This suggests a rather partial reading of Evans-Pritchard which can, in fact, be seen as a practical example of both descriptive phenomenology and constitutive analysis without claiming to be either.. In both the Nuer and Zande studies he uses the data themselves to provide the framework for analysing the indigenous rationale of thought.

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1.   Ibid, p.119.

This lack of appreciation by Dupré of Evans-Pritchard's work may be excused since it is only recently that anthropologists themselves have given it theoretical reappraisal. It does not, however, lessen the importance of the point he is eager to make, and which Evans-Pritchard made implicitly, namely that any religious phenomenon set within a cultural context must be interpreted in the light of that culture. The system of logic, or pattern of thought, relative to a culture must be discovered and described whether or not it bears a resemblance to any other system of thought. This is a major methodological safeguard against postulating a primitive or any other kind of mentality to social groups .

It also safeguards against another methodological fallacy which might be described as the Platonic fallacy of approximation, or in other words the ascribing to mankind essential features or attributes on the basis of observing different levels of manifestation of a phenomenon such as religiosity in a number of different cultures. Observations based on a limited, restricted or selected group of cases could easily present a wrongly balanced evaluation of the nature of man in terms of any one aspect of his constitution be it religious, economic, psychological, or biological.

Homo religiosus

In the context of this chapter it is particularly informative to observe that the very title Homo religiosus was first suggested as a substitute for Homo sapiens in an argument centred on the problem of interpretation. R.R. Marett, who coined this phrase in his 1932-3

Gifford Lectures, was well aware of the critical nature of cultural diversity as far as its analysis and interpretation were concerned, and he identified the choice between using european words to describe the thoughts of the uncivilized which might be misunderstood, or those of the natives which might not be understood at all, as the 'dilemma of anthropology'.[1] Marett believed in the unity of man as far as his essential constitution and mental faculties were concerned, preferring the 'old fashioned assumption of the absolute homogeneity of the human mind' to the position he saw represented in Lévy-Bruhl which regarded man as possessing 'as many distinct mentalities as there are distinct social types'.[2] His criticism of Lévy-Bruhl and of the Année Sociologique -which he otherwise tended to favour- resembles the methodological criticism raised later in this study with respect to Rodney Needham's work on mentality, inasmuch as Marett reasoned that 'if the mentalities of different men at different levels of culture are in all respects as incommunicable as their passing dreams then Social Anthropology would be utterly inconceivable'.[3]

For Marett anthropology was an eminently conceivable discipline as long as its subject matter was clearly identified and given an intelligible status. It was in attempting to denote the nature of the study that he disagreed with the Durkheimian emphasis upon rather reified notions such as 'sentiment' , for Marett saw that reification which viewed the products of psychological states as 'things' in themselves as part of a process which reduced the significance of the individual as such in the entire system of explanation. It was for this

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1.   Marett, R.R.   1933:3.

2.   Marett, R.R.   1929:174.

3.   Ibid, p.175.

reason that Marett advocated a social psychological approach, one

which accommodated the individual to the group and <u>vice versa</u> . As

far as the historical development of anthropological theory is concerned,

and in terms of the study of religion the implications of this are

significant, Marett's paper of 1908 entitled 'A Sociological View

of Comparative Religion' is important because in it he avers that

British anthropologists would 'one and all, if challenged, declare

(their) method to be, broadly speaking, psychological'.[1]

Marett's concern was with the problem of reductionism and it

was this which led him to criticise both what he called individual

psychology with its general philosophical emphasis upon the discrete

existence of the single self, and the 'social morphology' of the

L'Année Sociologique tradition which he saw as reducing the status of

the individual by subsuming it into that of the social body. There is

a kind of pragmatic focus upon the individual in Marett's work which

is more reminiscent of the stance of phenomenologists and historians

of religion than of most subsequent anthropologists who tended more

in the direction of the social nature of human life. It would certainly

be true to say that apart from occasional contributions of recent

British anthropologists such as Ioan Lewis the continuing tradition

in Britain has not regarded psychological considerations with favour.[2]

It will be necessary to return to this issue of psychology later since

the very model of meaning can hardly be discussed apart from it. For the

present it suffices to say that Marett not only presumed that men were

universally similar in thought processes, but regarded religious factors

as basic to the constitution of human life itself.[3] Religion is what

enables man to face the unknown and to deal with it optimistically,

1.   Ibid, p.124.
2.   Lewis, I.M.   1971 , 1977.
3.   Marett, R.R.   Anthropology , undated.

especially in periods of crisis. So, asserting the pragmatic quality of primitive thought and action, and being fully aware that primitive and advanced men are similar in many mental characteristics, Marett identified the religious factor as a certain attitude to the world which he characterized as being associated with the sacred. Crises and other events may elicit from man a feeling of awe and a sense that he is involved in a realm quite different from that of the workaday world. It is precisely this 'supernormal' dimension and the attitude of sacredness which attaches to it which constitutes Homo religiosus for Marett.

In his paper on 'The Conception of Mana' he takes up this problem of definition of religion and the sacred by suggesting an alternative minimal definition of religion to that offered by Tylor, it involved a necessary complementarity of the notions _mana_ and _tabu_. Marett shows himself clearly aware of the delicate decision to adopt alien terms in the field of what he calls comparative religion, but feels that the variety of phenomena which can be embraced by the two terms is sufficiently wide as to benefit from the description. _Mana_ designates the 'positive aspect of the supernatural, or sacred',and describes those events or experiences which 'differ perceptibly from the order of ordinary happenings' ; _tabu_ , by contrast, serves to identify the negative aspects of such experience.[1] Marett then goes on to distinguish between the essential nature of these experiences and the diverse ways in which they are expressed accross cultures.

In certain respects this anthropological stance resembles the outlook of Mircea Eliade in the history of religions, particularly in

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1.   Idem.

the way the sacred as a category, is thought to be prime as far as the ultimate quality of human perception is concerned. It would also, be possible to compare and contrast Marett's general categories of _mana_ and _tabu_ with Rudolph Otto's conception of the holy as embracing attracting and repelling elements. Again, the similarity between these ideas and those of Robertson Smith on holy and common factors on the one hand, and of Durkhiem on sacred and profane entities on the other, is quite striking and raises again the question of how data are related to the categories constructed to handle them. The obvious fact that Marett was familiar both with the work of Robertson Smith and Durkheim is less valuable than the suggestion that in order to accommodate his argument to the data as he found them it was necessary to adopt a twofold classification.

If Dupré's notion of constitutive analysis be recalled here it could be suggested that the information gathered in religious studies has influenced or directed the way in which categories have been constructed to cope with it. If this is so then the fundamental dichotomy represented by the various opposed terms of sacred-profane etc., might be said to correspond to the actual world of religious perception. Were that the case then what might be called the family resemblance between these descriptive categories would represent scholarly attempts to render intelligible a diverse mass of material which, despite its volume and extent, appears to disclose a certain polarity of basic phenomena. To say this is to move into more philosophical areas which will be explored more fully in the final chapter. To raise the issue in the present context of hermeneutics is quite proper, however, since these brief comments on Marett show that, contrary to many recent

anthropological expectations, it is not improper to ask questions about the basic nature of man and his relation to his complete environment which might include a supernatural dimension.

In terms of the paradigm of meaning there is, however, an even more pressing question raised by what we have identified as categories bearing a family resemblance grounded in the positive and negative polarity. Both at the level of folk religiosity and at the more abstract level of scholarly analysis there seems to be a consensus as to the twofold nature of human experience. This duality of perception both of plausible and implausible features of life and of the inner duality of religious phenomena reinforces the point made earlier that both scholarly and non-reflective considerations of the human condition aggree on the general mode of meaning construction even though the manner of expression varies. The fact of this polarity also reinforces the argument that identification of the sources of implausibility constitutes, in terms of structure at least, the basic element in the process of salvation. To say that there is a group of categories relating specifically to good and evil is to say that the process of meaning construction shows a certain unity in the field of religion. When such categories are also constructed in differing disciplines they may be said to mark the trend of the paradigm of meaning as a unifying approach to the study of religion.

Perhaps the best known anthropological contribution which could be drawn upon to reinforce the argument on meaning is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss and his structural analysis of myth. Although

it is not intended to embark on any significanct discussion of the
Levi-Straussian corpus it is necessary to make several observations
which are apposite to the idea of categories embracing fundamental
polarities of existence, and to the pervasiveness of the notion of
plausibility.

Firstly it should be observed that Lévi-Strauss is concerned
to show that all men, irrespective of their so called level of
cultural development, exhibit the same kind of mental alacrity and
facility in ordering the world in which they find themselves, and in
the face of the paradoxes of experience they encounter.[1] This implies
that all men are engaged in the search for meaning and that it is not
significantly different in form even when cultural content varies
quite considerably. Emerging from this indirectly is the question
of how the mythologist differs from the myth teller. Indeed it became
fashionable in reviews and critiques of Lévi-Strauss to suggest, for
example, that 'in the final analysis, the intellectually reflective
and scientifically deliberate study of the infrastructure and hidden
unconscious reality of myth "is itself a kind of myth" '.[2] But to make
such comments is not even to score a cheap point: it is, rather, to
ignore the fact that both man and anthropologist are human. While Lévi-
Strauss is not concerned to argue any explicit phenomenology of the
status and function of the anthropologist he is aware that the basic
human processes are at work in him as his autobiographical volume
Tristes Tropiques amply indicates.[3] So Lévi-Strauss's work could

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1.   English usage tends to make man the actor rather than the one
      acted upon. Godfrey Lienhardt's notion of passiones is relevant
      to a more phenomenologically neutral way of discussion perception.
      Lienhardt, Godfrey. 1961:151.

2.   Scholte, Bob.   1970:148.

3.   Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1968.

itself be advanced as an example of the way in which the paradigm of meaning operates both in the producer and analyst of culture, albeit at varying levels of insight into the very motives for and processes of meaning construction.

The second major issue raised by Lévi-Strauss's approach is that of the nature of the perceived polarities he believes to be present in many different kinds of culture. It is well known that Lévi-Strauss presupposes that 'mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions towards their resolution', by means of sets of binary oppositions which serve as mediating notions between the initial distinctions.[1] These primary oppositions are not . necessarily those of good and evil in any simple moral sense, they relate rather to the essential ontological awareness of man that he is a creature of nature whilst also being a person of culture. To what extent this distinction could be related to the Durkheimian opposition of sacred and profane, or to the other categories we have considered, it is difficult to say. What is certain is that Lévi-Strauss finds that he cannot engage in his anthropological analyses apart from this conceptual distinction underlying man's self awareness. Here then is shown the power of the evidence itself in compelling the anthropologist to pay due regard to the internal observer's model provided by indigenous informants. This he has done in his classic study of Totemism where he emphasizes the point made by E.B. Tylor that 'it is necessary to consider the tendency of mankind to classify out the universe'.[2] The fact remains that

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, Claude.   1963:224.

2.   Lévi-Strauss, Claude.   1962:13-

Lévi-Strauss pays the closest attention to the ways in which tribal peoples work out their ideas on the realities they experience in life by means of mythological study. The category opposition of nature and culture usually embraces the more obvious distinctions between death and life, earth and heaven, and the like.

The final idea in Lévi-Strauss which bears directly upon the present argument concerns the personal level at which meaning is to be sought and which includes an affective dimension. Lévi-Strauss is quite explicit in identifying anthropology as a 'semiological science' which takes 'as a guiding principle that of 'meaning' '.[1] He is not only saying that both myths and symbols operate at cognitive as well as affective levels as far as the native is concerned, though the fact that he has been criticized for overstressing the unconscious mind demonstrates that he has a real interest in both dimensions of being. Rather he is suggesting that the anthropologist himself must not ignore the existential dimension of those he studies or, indeed, of his own life. So it is that he associates anthropology more with 'humanistic studies' than with the social sciences of economics and demography which, he thinks, resemble the natural the natural sciences.[2] This same emphasis can be further exemplified in the work of a lesser known anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner, whose contribution to the study of religion possesses a direct significance for the question of anthropological hermeneutics and reductionism.

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1.   Lévi-Strauss, Claude.   1963:364.

Reductionism and Elementary Forms

The problem of reductionism is central to any consideration of how analysis and interpretation should proceed, and it is also directly related to how the anthropologist views himself. A total reductionism is only possible when the observer and the observed are thought of as belonging to essentially different orders of reality. The style of functionalist anthropology which treats of social institutions as entities independent of the observer is perfectly proper, but some phenomena tend to implicate the observer from the outset. The moment the observer is himself seen as part of the same field as his subjects, or is under the influence of similar restraints, then it becomes impossible for any complete reductionism to take place.

Although anthropologists of religion have been well aware of the problem of ethnocentricity for many years, and while historians and phenomenologists have acknowledged the necessity of understanding alien religiousnotions in terms appropriate to them, the power of systematizing western intellectual traditions has, nevertheless, tended to impress itself upon analyses of other cultures.Stanner is particularly aware of this because his own field of interest,that of Aboriginal religion, has attracted varying degrees of culture-boundinterpretation for over a century. Durkheim's classic work on the nature of primitive religion is an obvious case of a study which influenced later traditions in this area, and simply because it is so well known may serve as a constant comparison of the difference in intention between that author's theoretical stance and that of Stanner.

While in no sense following either an implicit or explicit phenomenological approach Stanner sets out 'to try as far as possible to let Murinbata religion exhibit itself'.[1] He interprets his data in terms of its own inner logic, in terms of the messages conveyed through myths and rituals, foras he says, 'if the main functions of myth are not cognitive I wonder if we can understand them at all'.[2] This is not to say that mythic functions are only cognitive, he argues against this position, but that they are at least intelligible to other men beyond the group in which the myths are found.

Stanner reversed Durkheim's theoretical approach by avoiding making religious facts of primary concern and social ones of secondary significance.[3] In other words he did not engage in an a priori reductionism, with religious phenomena being interpreted in terms of social structures and processes. This was the case because he came to the conviction during his fieldwork that the Aboriginal religion could not be understood unless it was first assumed that it possessed particular and distinctive features which might be said to impress themselves upon the researcher. Stanner describes the groups studied as possessing 'overwhelming convictions about ultimate values', so much so that Aboriginal man might be called Homo convictus.[4] If it be said that Durkheim evaluated Aboriginal religion in terms of emotional release, then Stanner might be regarded as shifting the emphasis more to the philosophical dimension. While it

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1.   Stanner, W.E.H.   1959:107.

2.   Ibid, p.50.

3.   Ibid, p.28.

4.   Ibid, p.27.

is true to say that Durkheim did deal with the question of the
problem of knowledge and the construction of logical categories
in association with social organization and structure, it is
equally true to say that he remained largely unaware of the
meaning of the religion to its Aboriginal practitioners, and it
was this which Stanner set at the forefront of his concern. This
meaning is the meaning which exists for the practitioners and not
primarily for the analyst, it represents the inner logic of the
religion.

Stanner is implicitly disagreeing with any procedure which
allows privileged access for the anthropologist to the real meaning
of a phenomenon whilst the participant members of a group only
possess some other level of meaning of lesser significance. His study
of MurinbataSociety is instructive both for the ethnographic data and
for the way he shows how academic analysis entertains certain
presuppositions with respect to religious ideas and their configurations.
For the purposes of this chapter it will be convenient to focus on
one of the many rituals discussed by Stanner, that which concerns
initiation from boyhood into manhood and is called the punj ritual.
Through this rite of passage the young males are brought into direct
contact with the basic symbols of Murinbata society, and it is precisely
the question of how the individual comes to understand himself and
his society through these rites which Stanner takes up with some ardour.
His intention is to emphasize the profound significance of initiation
rites in this tribe as far as the psychological and intellectual
dimension of the youths' lives is concerned. By contrast with most

Aboriginal studies, as he readily admits, he is concerned with 'metaphysical problems' because he sees the data as themselves expressing concern over metaphysical themes. By the term metaphysical he denotes an awareness of non-empirical realities which is related to man's life-pattern in the midst of the empirical world, and which help man in making sense of that world.

This all-embracing reality might be described as possessing two aspects, one which could be denoted as the dimensional and the other as the qualitative components of life. The dimension of reality is the notion of time, which for the Murinbata does not possess a linear significance as it does in the Judeao-Christian tradition or even the more cyclical meaning form of the broad Hindu-Buddhist context. Rather it is to be evaluated in terms of the second aspect just referred to, and which is best described as a quality perceived in the present, a quality which results from a direct participation in the life of the group. This is not as abstract a comment as might first appear since every culture defines its present in terms of something, the western world in the twentieth century is heir to the nineteenth century emphasis on history and therefore defines the present in terms of an historical past and in the hope of an 'historic future'. What Stanner suggests is a different mode of evaluation in which the present is best understood as a quality of life rather than as a moment in the passage of time. The Murinbata myths, for example, refer to no golden age, and there is no notion of perfection as such either in 'nostalgia for a past or yearning after a perfected futurity'.[1] That to which the myths do refer is to be

1.   Ibid, pp.45,58.

found in the present and is expressed by ritual: it is the

awareness of the meaning of man's self-reflective life set

amidst the reality of social-life. So it is that the physical

hole or hollow in which a central part of the punj ritual

takes place is referred to both as a nest and as a wallow, that is,

as a place of comfort and refuge expressed in the imagery of a nest,

and as the site of discomfort and pain expressed as a wallow. The

sacred space of the punj rite thus 'denotes what seem like positive

and negative statements of the same truth about life', for standing

at the centre of society this focal point of ritual announces the

dual truth of reality - 'refuge and rottenness'.[1] Stanner refers to

this paradoxical message of the rite as the 'covenant of duality'

into which the emerging generation is initiated through symbols of

life and of suffering.[2] In this process each initiate is 'taken out

of his empirical and social self as though to meet something of his

essential self', while the connection which is established between

this essential self and the equally essential nature of the life

he has to lead in society and the natural world is portrayed as one

which is inherently implausible. Concrete existence is shown to be

mixed and the initiate is brought to a position from which he may

obtain an 'intuition of an integral moral flaw in human association'.[3]

The reality which exists beyond any individual and yet in which all

participate is one of 'perennial good-with-suffering, of order-with-

tragedy'.[4] It is precisely because of the mixed and uncertain nature

of the world that the young men are taught through the rites to depend

on the positive features despite the reality of their negative pairs.

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1. Ibid, p.44.
2. Ibid, p.56.
3. Ibid, p.44.
4. Ibid, p.70.

It might be argued that through the punj ritual certain

'elementary forms' are manifested and experienced in the sense

that the initiates are confronted with events which demonstrate

the nature of reality as understood by the Murinbata. These are

internal observers' models and not those of the anthropologist,

yet they furnish the very evidence that underlies his analysis of

what is happening in and through the ritual. The significant

point of Stanner's argument is that he is attempting to extend or

develop the level of philosophical awareness of the anthropologist

himself, in the hope that certain of the indigenous elementary forms

will be viewed as essential categories which cannot be fully under-

stood by means of being changed into another kind of expression

through some reductionist explanation. What this means, in part at

least, is that the scope of anthropology is broadened to embrace

those philosophical issues which have normally been beyond what

has been regarded as the proper concerns of the disipline. Such

a philosophical anthropology is inevitable once a discussion of

meaning is proposed - even though it might be regarded by some

as too speculative and too far removed from the more pragmatic

debates about social structures. As far as most British studies

of anthropology are concerned it would probably be true to say that

they have, as it were, been satisfied with a middle range of

ideological argument. Since it will be necessary to refer to this

point later it suffices to say that any anthropology whic is to

contribute to a broader study of religion through dialogue with

the history and phenomenology of religion will, inevitably, have

to comment on the nature of man in terms other than those of

social determinism. This is what Stanner attempts to do in suggesting that in myths man finds a way of expressing a set of meanings which cannot be directly interpreted in terms of any other system of explanation. The full meaning of myth cannot, therefore, be explained by means of propositional statements, by iconographic or other means. If this is true it means that the kind of final analysis sought by scholars is likely to elude their grasp, at least in terms of the existential significance of myths to those using them. It also means that myths must be accorded a certain autonomy as discrete categories of religious phenomena, and to admit this is to comply to a great extent with the goals and intentions of historians and phenomenologists of religion in viewing religious phenomena as independent variables and not as sociologically or psychologically dependent variables.

As far as hermeneutics in the anthropology of religion is then concerned it would be necessary to consider not only the culturally different values of social groups but also that ultimate point of significance which the anthropologist can only identify as being present for a people, without claiming to grasp from the inside. This is, inevitably, a hazardous area of debate inasmuch as the question of knowledge is seen as involving the factor of commitment. To understand the structural relation of ideas within a culture is the ordinary task of field anthropologists, and the analysis which relates that structure to other aspects of the social world is what is usually presented as a study of a culture. The fact that these patterns of meaning also carry with them the weight of personal

commitment involves what might be called a personal equation

which the anthropologist, by the very fact that he is an observer -

albeit a participant observer- cannot make. Of the many implications

which follow from this one of the most important is that a reconsider-

ation of the question of primitive mentality and myth should take

place. This is so because the question of the logic of mythical

structure cannot be divorced from that of the degree and manner

of commitment which exists between individuals and their social

mythologies. In other words, it may be less of a question of kind

of thought involved than of the nature of commitment to the beliefs

and values enshrined in the myth, or in the power the myth brings

to bear on people who are themselves adherents to the truth it

expresses. When that truth diverges from the normative perspective

of the analyst it is quite possible that he will regard the whole

mythic context as absurd, archaic or perhaps even prelogical.

One of Stanner's most important suggestions is that the

system of Murinbata symbols communicates messages concerning the

nature of personal reality to each individual in a way which

cannot be explained in terms of strict logic. The very fact that no

independent stance could be adopted to describe analytically what

the symbols did is indicative of what they actually do for the

committed individuals concerned. Once a paradigm of meaning is

adopted by the student of religion it becomes possible to refer

to the fact that such personal meanings are communicated, and even

to detail aspects of their content, while still admitting that the

level of individual significance must elude full observation. It was

just this kind of anthropological awareness which Evans-Pritchard

expressed in the last chapter of <u>Nuer Religion</u> , in referring to

the 'intuitive apprehension' of the phenomenon of Spirit by

individual Nuer , and in the assertion that 'Nuer religion is

ultimately an interior state'.[1] To say this is not to deny the

power of anthropological explanation with respect to the ritual

data drawn from the field of social life, but it is to say that

anthropological hermeneutics can, justifiably, be related to the

mode of discourse employed by historians and phenomenologists in

discussing myth and ritual. In the final analysis, as Eliade says,

'reductionism...is irrelevant as a hermeneutical tool'.[2] The

positive acceptance of the paradigm of meaning by these disciplines

also involves a further fact, that the emotional dimension of belief

is fundamentally important and that it is part of the personal

equation mentioned above. The necessary consequence of such a

factor is precisely that a degree of irreducible personal

significance be identified as part of religious processes. If

both myth and some rituals also serve the function of correlating

diverse aspects of life in the process of meaning construction then

it will be true to say that such phenomena which serve unifying

purposes can hardly be analysed critically in terms of any one

aspect of reality without suffering loss of their central nature.

Stanner does so regard symbols, for example, as uniting 'several

distinct structures of existence, including the cosmological,

social and ecological' aspects of life.[3] What can be said in

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1956:321-2.

2.   Eliade, M.   1973:xvii.

3.   Stanner, W.E.H.   1959:167.

analysing religious phenomena is that they facilitate meaning, but this generalization cannot be completely explained at all levels as far as the individual is concerned. It is the form of meaning which can be guaranteed rather than any specific content. So the punj ritual may be described as a rite which maximizes plausibility in the context of hostile features present in both natural and social environments, while the precise manner in which this meaning is appropriated by individuals must be said to be beyond academic access.

To support the idea that religious phenomena such as symbols and myths may not be completely transparent to critical analysis is not, necessarily, to agree with historians of religion who assert the complete distinctiveness and sui generis character of, for example, the idea of the holy in Rudolph Otto's work, the sacred in Eliade, or that of prayer for Heiler.[1] While such scholars find it easy to chide the reductionist tendencies shown by some sociologists of religion they fail to appreciate that a similar kind of tendency can be discerned in their own work. Indeed in those cases where scholars assert the importance of a specific religious category it would not be improper to speak of religious reductionism. Once any such a phenomenon is established as an independent variable it becomes incumbent upon the analyst to take care in devising schemes of causation.

The particular strength of, for example, Durkheim's theory of religion lay in the complete reductionism which he openly

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1.   Eliade, Mircea.   1957.
       Otto, Rudolph.   1924.
       Heiler, Friederich. 1932.

espoused in the belief that his sociological understanding of

the nature of man was actually correct, and was the inevitable

perspective for anyone hoping to gain insight into the real

nature of the human condition. The fact that Durkheim also

believed that social phenomena could be treated as discrete

entities facilitated his work whereas, for example, Dupré

asserts quite categorically that an 'objective description

of religious phenomena is a factual impossibility'.[1] The

nature of this impossibility is derived from a form of

existential awareness of the hazards involved in attempting

to discuss the inner meaning of ideas for another person.

The difference in emphasis between these two authors can

usefully be drawn from their respective definitions of

religion. Whereas Durkheim's definition is eminently

sociological and focuses upon the more institutional aspects of life

involving systems of ideas so that;

> 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and
> practices relative to sacred things, that is to
> say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs
> and practices which unite into one single moral
> community called a Church, all those who adhere
> to them ',

Dupré's perspective shows a clear understanding of the context in

which the scholar is himself set, and manifests an existential

dimension quite alien to Durkheim.[2]

> Religion is 'an achievement through which man
> becomes capable of bearing the burden of
> existence. Birth and death, suffering and joy,

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1.   Dupré, Wilhelm.   1975:2.

2.   Durkheim, É.   1976:47.

> failure and success, threat and trust, all
> these instances of human life are mediated
> with one another in the ultimate symbols of
> myth, cult and life itself. Religion in this
> sense renders meaning to man under the
> conditions of the life community. It enables
> him to accept the necessities of life as a
> human being. Religion is to be understood
> as the symbolic structure in which the
> humaneness of man receives lasting expression.
> As such it shares in the truth of man as a
> human being'. [1]

There is no difficulty in showing how Dupré's outlook manifests

the general notion of meaning, what needs simple outlining is the

fact of the personal philosophical dimension of his argument. The

question is not just that of social systems of an integrated kind

which confer meaning upon man - a view which could be read into

Durkheim's perspective - it is, rather, one which presupposes

that the issue of meaning has a direct personal significance.

The existential dimension of Dupré's thought is also clear in

a statement which shows how his concerns approximate to those

in this study with respect to the idea of evil: he says that

'in addition to (the) experience of evil as the negation of

meaning in the objectivity of consciousness, there is also

its affirmation in the subjectivity of conscience'. [2] This

definition of religion could easily be applied to Stanner's

view of Murinbata religion. What it means for hermeneutics,

however, is that care also needs to be taken lest an overly

philosophical bias leads to what might be called an

existentialist reductionism.

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1.   Dupré, W.   1975:334.

2.   Idem.

From what has been said about this variety of possible reductionisms it will be obvious that the very idea of 'elementary forms' is far from being a simple one. The nature of elementary forms, or those essential features which may be said to be : the fundamental units of religion, will change from system to system of explanation depending upon the dominant theory adopted in them. It cannot be presupposed from some archemedic point that any particular religion will demonstrate a specific feature of belief or practice. Once it is accepted that cultures may themselves possess interpretations of reality which differ the one from the other, and once it be admitted that the autonomy of a culture is a proper notion to entertain in religious studies, then the question of interpreting the sense of any religion in terms of the cultural perspective of the analyst becomes quite critical. This is especially true with respect to the question of understanding and commitment. The act of making available to members of one culture data pertaining to another, particularly on religious matters, is an act of translation which emphasizes the conceptual and verbal dimensions of religiosity. It is, _ipso facto_, impossible to communicate the sense of native commitment to value systems apart from the experience of actual commitment. This fact is an implicit assumption of anthropological work but needs to be made explicit in inter-disciplinary religious studies inasmuch as the study of religions in the west has often proceeded along the lines of historical and textual analysis. The reason why the hermeneutical problem has tended to be implicit in anthropology

lies, perhaps, in the experience of fieldwork and in the intuitive, non-verbal, sediments of knowledge accumulated by the scholar during his personal contacts with people. When one anthropologist reads an ethnographic study of another he reads it in the light of this experiential dimension and, almost unconsciously, makes the necessary provision of the affective dimension to complement the social-structural account presented in the study itself.[1]

In one sense it was just this process of understanding that allowed anthropologists to be content with the kind of explanations which were provided by their ethnologies. It is when anthropological studies become the basis of discussions engaged in by historians or phenomenologists of religion that a more explicit account of method is required, and this is the reason for having devoted so much of this chapter to the issue of anthropological hermeneutics.

Having alluded to religious reductionism as well as to existential reductionism and the more often cited sociological variety, it remains to say that the accusation of engaging in reductionist explanation can become a tedious and ill-advised repetition, since any kind of explanation can be subjected to its pejorative tones. The problem of an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of religions is one of accommodating different traditions of interpretation to each other, and this involves bringing scholars to see their own conventions as

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1. The importance of fieldwork as a means of affective change in the anthropologist should not be overlooked in this context. Cf. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1968:346 ff. And Sol Tax, 1964:248 ff.

potential stumbling blocks to others. One function of the paradigm of meaning is to permit each tradition to contribute its theoretical perspective upon one or another level of meaning present in a social group. It may well be that the level and kind of analysis that satisfies anthropologists will not appeal to historians of religion, while theologians set within a confessional framework will probably require yet further levels of explanation. While the notion of paradigm of meaning is advocated here as a basic outlook which seems to be emerging in many disciplines, it it is not suggested that each approach should be turned into an attenuated version of itself with the intention of resembling others. The paradigm is presented to show that the notion of meaning admits of many variations while also arguing the fundamental theme of plausibility and implausibility as the polar oppositions by means of which the problem of evil and salvation can be fruitfully dealt with in a theoretical manner.

Chapter Five   Hermeneutics in the History and Phenomenology
of Religion.

If indigenous groups studied by fieldwork techniques of
participant observation characterize the anthropological perspective,
and if that kind of critical discipline can permit the data to
influence the final analysis, then the history of religions which
studies the great religions of the world, largely in their classical
and systematic expressions, and through philological and historical
means, ought to have less difficulty in so doing.

The main question raised in this chapter concerns those
presuppositional restraints found in the history and phenomenology
of religions which both facilitate and hinder the approach to
religious phenomena adopted by social scientific disciplines being
accepted by historians and phenomenologists. In particular we
shall consider how applicable the general paradigm of meaning is
to the work of selected historians and pheneomenologists.

No extensive attempt is made to differentiate between the
history and phenomenology of religions inasmuch as those who
emphasize either the historical critical method or the identification
of the essential features of phenomena often utilize aspects of the
other view when occasion demands it. (In general terms in might be
said that the history of religions is to phenomenology what
nineteenth century anthropology with its emphasis on stages of
development is to twentieth century anthropology and its concern
with the relations which may be seen to exist between phenomena).

Because of the difficulty attendant upon generalizing
over academic disciplines covering a wide area we shall consider
the approaches of several specific historians and phenomenologists
of religion to see how they develop their methodology, especially
in terms of the question of evil and salvation, and in the light
of what has already been said about the general paradigm of meaning.
This is all the more necessary because of the avowed anthropological
commitment of the history of religions despite which significant
differences have remained between the respective traditions. The
declaration signed by Mircea Eliade, J.M. Kitagawa and others in
1958 to the effect that history of religions 'is an anthropological
discipline studying the religious phenomenon as a creation, feature
and aspect of human culture' is, itself, indicative of the
awareness of differences between the respective traditions.[1]
Hultkrantz commented on this declaration that despite the fact that
'no definite barrier' existed between anthropology and the history
of religions there still remained 'an important difference of
orientation'.[2] As has already been mentioned this difference
originated largely, though by no means exclusively, in the change
of attitude to evolutionary perspectives over the turn of the
nineteenth century. Personal ideological commitments on the part
of individual scholars have also been influential in maintaining
a different perspective as the case of Eliade will amply demonstrate.

Mircea Eliade was born in Bucharest in 1907 and having studied
in India with Dasgupta returned to the west working in England, France

1.   Schimmel, A.M.   1960:236.

2.   Hultkranz, Ake.   1970:338.

and America. Through this international contact, and as a result of his prolific publications in both academic and popular areas Eliade came to exert a wide influence as an authority - if not the authority - in the history of religions. We are not here concerned with any real evaluation of Eliade's corpus and the biographical points mentioned serve only to emphasize his pervasive influence in religious studies. But it is important to consider Eliade's central notion of the sacred because it is a constant theme of his work and because it has influenced others to a marked extent.

Eliade sees the purpose of his writings as that of influencing western man's fundamental outlook and attitude to the world. History of religions aids man's understanding of his true nature and is no mere neutral discussion of natural phenomena. It cannot be a 'detached' discipline in any sense of the word because its very existence effects a change in personal attitude. So radical may this change be in the scholar that Eliade has described the history of religions as a 'saving discipline'.[1] It is a 'total hermeneutics' applied to 'every kind of encounter of man with the sacred from prehistory to today'.[2] This particular quotation pinpoints Eliade's central notion of and overriding concern with the sacred as that phenomenon with which man is inextricably associated. This approach can well be described as relational inasmuch as it is neither the object in itself nor the essential nature of the subject which alone determines the character of a religious phenomenon, that is the result of how they are related in the entire life experience.[3]

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1.   Eliade, M.   1978:296.

2.   Eliade, M.   1965:5.

3.   Bettis, J.D.   1969:199.

Eliade is not concerned with discussing this process in any

strictly philosophical sense and makes no serious use of

phenomenological notions such as that of intentionality. Yet

in practical terms he is much taken up with this area of

perception, for through the very study of the history of religions

a growth in personal understanding is said to take place. Indeed,

'the degree to which you understand is the degree to which you change'

for each individual is modified through his increased understanding,

what is more this is 'the equivalent of a step forward in the process

of self liberation'.[1] As far as Eliade is concerned western man

lies very much in need of such a transformation because the Judaeo-

Christian tradition led to the denial of the sacred quality of

earthly phenomena. In saying this he is largely in agreement with

the argument of Max Weber on the progressive demystification of the

world consequent upon an increase in rational procedures fostered

by puritan forms of theology, and also with Harvey Cox's more

radical argument that the origin of secularization is in the

old testament view of God.[2]

So accordinging to Eliade the history of religions possesses

'an awakening effect' enabling man to perceive an aspect of reality

which has largely been lost to him.[3] It awakens the sense of the

sacred which western life has done so much to attenuate, and which

for Eliade constitutes the prime nature of religious man, and

therefore of essential humanity. This notion of the sacred resembles

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1.   Eliade, M.   1978:296.
2.   Cox, H.   1968.
        Weber, M.   1976.
3.   Eliade, M.   1978:233.

Rudolph Otto's concept of the <u>sensus numinis</u> and, in fact, Eliade makes many references to <u>The Idea of the Holy</u>, though he criticizes Otto's lack of methodological rigour and especially his avoidance of the question of myth and mythopoeic modes of thought. This is important for Eliade because he believes the sacred to be 'an element of the structure of consciousness and not a moment in the history of consciousness', in other words, man's essential nature possesses the faculty of perceiving a discrete category of phenomena different from those resulting from everyday encounters in the world.[1] The dichotomy inherent in this view of sacred and profane lies at the centre of his understanding of human nature and is directly related to a cognate notion, that of hierophany. A hierophany is any phenomenon by means of which the sacred is manifest, the history of religions is itself 'constituted by a number of important hierophanies from the most elementary manifestation of the sacred in a rock or tree to the supreme hierophany, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ'.[2] From these brief references it can be seen that the notion of the sacred possesses the two dimensions referred to when we commented upon the relational nature of Eliade's work. The first is a function of the phenomenon experienced while the second pertains to the act of experiencing itself, so both the subject perceiving and the object disclosing constitute the realm of the sacred. It is important to appreciate this complementary constitution of the sacred if Eliade's discussion of modern western man is to be understood, for despite the fact that sacredness is viewed as so significant a component of human life he asserts that

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1.   Eliade, M.   1979:xiii.

2.   Eliade, M.   1968:124.

european man has virtually lost his sense of the sacred. The pragmatic world of empirical causalities has robbed man of this dimension so that he lives in the absence of the sacred, in a state of what might be called profanity. Herein lies the justification of history of religions for it provides such people with ethnographic and historical materials which serve as the requisite hierophanic focus which itself may trigger off the sacred response in man.

It might be argued that Eliade has so over-valued the notion of the sacred that he defines human nature in terms contrary to much of the evidence suggestive of man's basic secularity, or that he is not prepared to conceive of the possibility of a change in human consciousness in the course of history such that the sacred component is removed. However, the intention of the present discussion was merely to show how Eliade uses the notion of the sacred and also how he understands the function of the history of religions as an academic and human discipline. One illuminating point emerging from all this is his lack of reference to Durkheim's use of the categories sacred and profane. He virtually ignores Durkheim's usage despite the fact that it was the French sociologist who popularized the idea. Eliade is, of course, perfectly familiar with Durkheim's work in the Année sociologique as with Les Formes élémentaires , but it seems that Durkheim's completely reductionist position made him disagreeable to Eliade. Indeed it would seem to be this distaste which led Eliade to make the rather academically eccentric assertion that Les Formes élémentaires 'does not

properly speaking represent a contribution to the sociology of religion'.[1] While the strictly anthropological criticisms of that work are well known and quite devastating as far as the erroneous arguments on totemism and clan structure are concerned, yet even the most scathing critics have praised its general insights and contribution to sociological thought. But Eliade decries Durkheim's endeavours for the very reason that he praises those of Otto , for the former discourages commitment to the sacred by explaining its origin in the social interaction of ritual, whereas the latter locates it in the divine. In fact such a simplistic evaluation hardly does justice to Durkheim for whom the idea of God is no less significant in practical terms because it is viewed as a social product than if it was actually derived from a self-existent being: but that kind of feat of intellectualizing does not appeal to Eliade. It might have been more to Eliade's credit if he had been prepared to consider Durkheim's totemic ritual as hierophanic material, but his dedication to establishing the history of religions as a means of religious awakening hardly permitted the use of reductionist sociology which that exercise would have entailed. What would have accorded more with his particular desires would have been a closer study of Robertson Smith's original use of the notions sacred and common, for he, at least, entertained no reductionist notions in his <u>Religion of the Semites</u> , the book on which Durkheim's study of religion was based. In fact Robertson Smith is mentioned very briefly and only in passing, for Eliade's final judgement is

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1.   Eliade, M.   1969:15.

that this kind of sociological hypothesis, such as was also
espoused by R.R.Marett, Andrew Lang, J.F. MacLennan and
Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, has had no 'lasting influence on historico-
religious studies'.[1]

The framework within which Eliade thus works emphasizes
the central opposition between the sacred and the profane which
must itself be seen as a way of conceptualizing the state of
human life. Because the sacred and profane - whether in the forms
of space and time it does not matter - correspond to the 'two
modes of being in the world' it is difficult to discuss the
notion of salvation in Eliade's work despite the fact that it might
be said to be the central concern of all his work. Primarily
salvation would seem to refer to the quality of life which he
identifies as the sacred and which admits of many dimensions. For
the primitive this involves the belief that the cosmos was made by
the gods and is still a place of transcendent significance and power
which man experiences through his own initiatory rituals and the
more regular cultic activity of his society. The modern, urban
Christian, by contrast, has lost the sense of cosmic dimensions and
for his salvation depends upon a more private and personal
relationship with God.[2] Throughout Eliade's work the problem of
meaning appears in the form of a problem of being. This is why his
notion of salvation is hard to define with any precision, for being
admits of many degrees and levels of attainment. Eliade thus arrives
at a position not dissimilar from that of the paradigm of meaning

1.   Eliade, M.   1957:231.

2.   Ibid,   p.179.

once it is appreciated that for him the notion of meaning is
allied with that of transcendent significance. It is the level
of awareness of the sacred which constitutes the full category
of meaning for him, and this involves the experiential dimension
to a large extent.

Eliade's methodology follows that history of religions
perspective which concentrates more upon the 'essence' of
religion than upon its historical context. This distinction is
one which Eliade himself makes and it is critical for hermeneutics
in the history of religions. He sees historians of religions as
being divided 'between two divergent but complementary orientations' -
those who focus upon the typical 'structures of religious phenomena
seek to understand the essence of religion' while those who prefer
to analyse the 'historical context' desire to 'discover and
communicate its history'. [1] Occasionally, however, he uses the
notion of essence in a confusing way as in the rhetorical question;
'does the fact that we cannot grasp the essence of religion also
mean that we cannot grasp the essence of religious phenomena ?'. [2]
Here the distinction between the two types of essence is similar
to that which in terms of anthropological analysis could be expressed
as the difference between the origin and contemporary structure of
a phenomenon. While it may be quite impossible to discover the origin
of religious consciousness it is possible (and Eliade's work shows
this) to ascertain the way religious phenomena function in religious
groups. This functioning can be studied not only in contemporary

1.   Ibid, p.232.
2.   Eliade, M.   1964:168.

contexts but also in religions of the past, for there is a
theoretical distinction to be drawn between historical conjecture
of the evolutionary style of nineteenth century anthropology and
the approach of the history of religions which traces the development
of religious doctrines, practices or, for example, iconography.
Criticism of Eliade will always be influenced by the fear that in
such historical analysis, as in any discussion of contemporary
phenomena, his preoccupation with the notion of the sacred will
lead to an undue bias over the importance of commitment on the
part of the historian of religion.

This desire to establish the history of religions as
something more than a neutral academic discipline is also shared
by Wilfred Cantwell Smith whose influence in the field, while not
so widespread as that of Eliade, has been quite prominent. For Smith
the history of religions should not only study the religious life of
mankind but should also contribute to the religious and moral life
of man, for 'every time a person anywhere makes a religious
decision, at stake is the final destiny and meaning of the human race.
If we do not see this and cannot make our public see it, then what-
ever else we may be, we are not historians of religion '.[1] To think
in these terms, let alone to express them in such strong language, is
to make perfectly clear the approach adopted to religious phenomena.
The goal of the discipline as he sees it is twofold: to turn our
nascent world society into a world community, and to help individuals
find meaning in their lives. These goals, which exemplify his sense
of commitment to the task of the discipline, are reflected in a

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1.   Smith, W.Cantwell.   1968. Cited in E.J.Sharpe, 1975:284.

major contribution Smith makes to the history of religions through
his suggestion that the very word 'religion' be eliminated from
general usage and be replaced by the notions of 'cumulative
tradition' and 'faith'.[1]

Smith resembles Eliade in seeking to avoid any type of
reductionist explanation of religious phenomena and it is this
motive which led him to examine the change in meaning of the
word 'religion' through history and to show that it is a most
inappropriate description of what actually counts as significant in
the religious lives of men. The word has tended to be used of the
actual doctrinal system of religious traditions rather than of the
personal life of faith in individual cases. For this reason it is
wiser to separate these two aspects of religiosity, with the tradition
as an historical development with sets of teachings, rites and forms
on the one hand, and the personal life of faith at which the religious
tradition becomes meaningful for the individual on the other. It is
also at this level that it is possible to talk of truth, he says,
inasmuch as religious systems ought not to be discussed as abstract
sets of propositions whose validity requires verification by
philosophical analysis. Religious beliefs thus become true in
individual lives in concrete life contexts. While this argument does
not impress some philosophers of religion such as John Hick - who
wishes to emphasize the question raised by contradictory truth
assertions in religions - Smith feels that it does more justice to
the complex realities of religious phenomena at the level of daily life.

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1. Smith, W. Cantwell. 1963:17.

Smith presumes some idea of meaningfulness for the religious believer without attempting to discuss it in any detail. What is clear is that he regards the formal system of doctrines in each religion as becoming significant for the historian of religion only after it has become vitally related to the actual life of individuals. Meaningfulness therefore has something to do with the intuitive apprehension and application of traditional teachings to personal and contemporary events, while salvation is the state in which these traditional formulae of spirituality are actualized. Smith thus outlines an argument which he believes can embrace any religion. The precise content of the traditional formulation of doctrines is not important, and their comparison ought not to be regarded as the central concern of the history of religions. What is more significant is the way in which traditional forms are related to present realization; it is precisely because religious studies have 'analysed the externals but missed the core of the matter' that a redefinition of method is required.[1]

To complete this comment on historians of religion who see their task as one of discussing religion as an essential part of life it will be useful to refer to Joachim Wach who viewed religionswissenschaft as a discipline opposing secular tendencies in the modern world, and which could serve to reinvigorate personal religious values. The following quotation demonstrates how different the approach of the historian of religion is from that of the social anthropologist.

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1.   Ibid, p.7.

'To view the multiplicity of religious life and
expression, to discover similarities and
relationships need not as some fear have a
sobering and paralysing effect on one's own
religiosity. On the contrary it could become
a support and aid in the battle against the
godless and estranged powers, it ought to lead
to the examination and preservation of one's
own religious faith'. [1]

Religious phenomena should thus, argues Wach, be interpreted in

terms of their own logic and rationale, and in saying this he is

completely in accord with Smith's view that methodology must be

appropriate to the object of study.[2] Reductionisms of sociological

or psychological kinds are inadmissible as is historicism. When

studied in terms of specifically religious schemes the subject

matter of the history of religions will broaden and deepen the

sensus numinis rather than detract from it.

To admit that the subject matter of a study be allowed to

dictate the terms of analysis is to introduce a potential hazard

into methodology; but as long as it is possible to state clearly

which elements and ideas are so accepted as guidelines it remains

a possible way of proceeding. The great difficulty, however, lies

in this very point concerning specificity of indigenous categories,

a point which becomes clearer when Oxtoby's criticism is recalled

to the effect that the phenomenology of religion has tended to

'endorse religion in general as compared with secularity'.[3] In one

sense the historian or phenomenologist is doing nothing different

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1.   Wach, J.   1968:128.
2.   Smith, W.Cantwell. Ibid, p.6.
3.   Oxtoby, W.G.   1973:32.

from the anthropologist of Stanner's persuasion who seeks the essential and intrinsic pattern of ideas present in an indigenous culture. The difference lies in the fact that the western historian of religion already possesses his own native concept of religion as a general category and it is this which can, so easily, be brought to bear upon and to endorse religion in general. Yet Oxtoby's criticism would not hold for all scholars as the case of J.M. Kitagawa exemplifies. His brief for the history of religions focuses upon the dimension of religious experience and its diverse manifestations in history studied in a historical critical way as opposed to a 'theological history of religions' which makes presuppositions about religiosity.[1] Kitagawa acknowledges the great difficulty of studying religions while seeking to avoid the influence of one's own tradition and suggests that one way of coping with the problem methodologically is to maintain an explicit tension between one's own religious background -along with its own theological evaluation of other religions- and the more neutral academic study of religion as such. Here Kitagawa can be seen to resemble Eliade, Smith and Wach since their statements about the commitment aspect of the discipline could also be said to apply specifically to the ultimate and final level of analysis. In the initial stages of work they, too, desire the neutral observation and documentation of religious phenomena, with formal religious apologetics coming in at a later stage of the argument. It is just this later stage which is absent from anthropological analysis and marks the real difference of approach and intention.

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1.   Kitagawa, J.M.   1959:28.

It would be incorrect to infer from these comments on the apologetic aspect of the history of religions that it constituted the unifying factor in the discipline, though that would be an attractive proposition. We have already shown that for Eliade the history of religions was a 'total hermeneutics' of man's encounter with the sacred, but he went further than this to say that historians of religion did not, as a matter of fact, construct any unified perspective on this basis. On the contrary he sees the history of the discipline as a growth in a defeatist attitude emerging 'precisely in an epoch in which knowledge concerning man increased considerably' through contributions from psychoanalysis and phenomenology, and at a time when knowledge of the eastern world was developing rapidly. The decline of the evolutionary paradigm contributed significantly to this change as we have already argued, so while Eliade might well regard the change as 'tragic' it was neither 'paradoxical' nor unintelligible, at least in retrospect.[1] The non-paradoxical nature of the change lies in the fact that as a greater wealth of material emerged so the growing and differentiating disciplines developed increasingly distinctive methods of dealing with it. When Eliade argued that the history of religions ought not to conform to models drawn from natural sciences, or in other words ought not to follow any one of these newer approaches, he not only articulated the problem but also demonstrated the problem of the complexity of understanding in religious studies. In part it is this recognition of complexity which has made any kind of reductionism abhorrent to historians of religion. But there is also a personal

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1.   Eliade, M.   1965:5.

factor involved in this complexity and concerns the tension between intuitive understanding and critical understanding. The former is the result of the private history of a man and embraces his cultural background, a factor of obvious importance to Eliade's own self-understanding involving a deep lying eastern european folk religiosity expressed in his autobiography, while the latter represents the academic tradition to which he is heir and which occasions the central problem of deciding upon presuppositions for study. For Eliade there is a further difficulty involved in this tension not only because it is hard to identify his specific intellectual perspectives but because he finds the broad liberal humanist outlook unacceptable. This has meant that his own work has tended away from abstract neutrality in historical study to a position which is rather distinctively his own. That form of the history of religions which endorses religion in general is one which Eliade has done much to foster and develop, but because of its somewhat idiosyncratic perspective it was inevitable that he should find himself at variance with just those other academic disciplines whose views he could not completely accept. This assertion is not quite as tautologous as might first appear for Eliade does talk in terms of wishing that a more unified study of religion will come about while apparently failing to see that it is precisely because these methods were unacceptable to him that he set about constructing his own position.

It is impossible to resolve this difficulty as long as some scholars feel the need to assert the significance of personal religious factors in the actual study of religion. Before looking at this problem in the case of Gerardus van der Leeuw as an established phenomenologist of religion, it will be instructive to

see how a similar problem has been acknowledged in anthropology.
By introducing this comment here rather than in the former chapter
it will become even clearer that the entire breadth of disciplines
dealing with religious phenomena is beset with similar difficulties.

One of the best known anthropological comments on this problem
is that of Evans-Pritchard in the conclusion of his survey criticism
on theories of primitive religion where he asks what kind of
understanding has been gained from the classical theories of religion
which is of any use in helping to explain the nature of personal
religious experience. He is clear in asserting that as far as a
discussion of religion in the social life of a group is concerned it
makes no difference whether the anthropologist is a believer or not,
but that once he wishes to go beyond this level of analysis then
personal religious preferences do become significant. Evans-Pritchard's
quotation from Wilhelm Schmidt to the effect that 'if religion is
essentially of the inner life, it follows that it can be truly
grasped only from within' is an expression of his own view of the
significance of religiosity for the interior life of individuals.
A similar point is made in the closing paragraphs of his <u>Nuer Religion</u>
where the essentially personal aspect of religious experience is
emphasized.[1] But these tantalizing comments are nowhere explored
and developed: they merely stand as a testimony by a great
anthropologist to the fact that even thorough analyses of social
structures do not exhaust the complete meaning of religion.

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1.   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1965:121.

A more extended discussion of the personal values of
anthropologists is found in Raymond Firth's essays on religion
and anthropology.[1] His position differs from that of Evans-
Pritchard inasmuch as he is not a religious believer himself but
is much concerned with the issue of motivation in religious analyses.
He gives as an example the case of witchcraft which anthropologists
normally interpret in terms of social tensions, and says that if they
actually believed in the existence of malevolent power distinct from
the influence of man on man then the interpretation would have to be
radically different. The question is one of the status of the final
referent. Firth is particularly useful an example to discuss in
this context of hermeneutics since he devotes some time to the
question of meaning, and regards the issue of orders of meaning as
central to the quest of religious studies. In asserting that
'religion is man's ultimate answer to the problem of meaning' Firth
shows how much he is taken up with the notion of social realities
as conferring a sense of order upon individual lives.[2] Unlike many
British anthropologists Firth wants to analyse the relationship
between the level of meaning which operates for and within the
individual on the one hand , and that which functions at the level
of society at large on the other. While it is not possible to
develop Firth's argument here it is necessary to say that his
concern with the personal level of meaning is directly related
to sociological issues through the influence the individual can
exert within religious movements. While he offers no particular
scheme for interpreting systems of meaning construction he makes it

1.   Firth, R.   1964.
2.   Ibid,   p.232.

quite clear that such systems are as much emotional as intellectual
in nature.[1] In terms of a general paradigm of meaning no more
appropriate anthropological an author could be sought than Firth
even though the problems he raised are far from being solved, they
serve, rather, to indicate the rather similar group of
hermeneutical difficulties also shared by the history and
phenomenology of religions.

It is to the more specifically phenomenological issues
that we must now turn in concluding this chapter, and in particular
to the influential study of Gerardus van der Leeuw entitled
Religion in Essence and Manifestation and first published in
1933 as Phanomenologie Der Religion. Van der Leeuw's contribution
to the phenomenology of religion is both a classic example of how
descriptive phenomenology with its schemes of classification can be
applied to religious entities, and also of the problem of
presuppositions. This latter issue becomes even more problematical
in the phenomenology of religion than in the history of religion,
since the phenomenologist reckons to maintain himself in a state
of suspension of doubt over the nature of the reality and validity
of phenomena under consideration in the hope that the essential nature
of these objects, rites or beliefs will become apparent through the
act of description. Van der Leeuw asserts at the outset that
'no imperiously dominating theory' lay behind his study, yet in the
hundredth chapter - the section dealing with 'the religion of love'
which is his typological description and categorization of Christianity-
he says that both that chapter and all that have gone before it had

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1.   Ibid, p.234.

been written from the Christian viewpoint.[1] How it is that he can achieve the 'attitude of complete intellectual suspense' whilst also including his personal religious standpoint it is difficult to see. It originates in his conception of the phenomenology of religion as a total activity, and presumes that personal bias will be incorporated into the endeavour. Van der Leeuw hoped that by making public the fact of these private dispositions they could be included in the final evaluation.

The basis of van der Leeuw's objection to the notion of the supposed neutrality of scholarly study lies in the fact of man's historical facticity. It is impossible, he argues, not to be ideologically inclined in some direction or other, and to attempt an unprejudiced stance is only to adopt some 'interpretation of religion borrowed from some liberal western european Christianity, the deism of the Enlightenment or the so called monism of the natural sciences', but without acknowledging the fact.[2] So he too follows Eliade and Wach in advocating a committed perspective of a personal kind as a basis for religious studies. At least he is explicit about it and, as far as most of <u>Religion in Essence and Manifestation</u> is concerned, this emphasis does not seem to be of very great importance to the interpretation offered. It is only when the more descriptive categories have been established that he progresses to an abstract consideration of the idea of salvation and imposes his Christian belief. Christianity is taken to be 'the central form of historical religion', and the gospel as 'the fulfilment of religion in general'.[3] The theoretical tension

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1.   Leeuw, G. van der.   1938:10.

2.   Ibid, p.644.

3.   Ibid, p.646.

between religious commitment and the epoche of phenomenology which is present here has been noted by E.J. Sharpe who observes that for van der Leeuw 'phenomenological scholarship was not to be sharply differentiated from metaphysics or from theology'.[1] This unresolved tension is almost a distinctive feature of the work of the religiously committed involved in religious studies, and the factors influencing van der Leeuw can be discerned in many studies of religion. The particular significance of this for the present argument lies in the specific content he gives to the notion of meaning - one which is religiously informed. The power of the paradigm of meaning is that it can help avoid the doctrinal ethos or ideological set of one tradition affecting the way others are studied. It is possible to be committed to the idea that all religious systems are essentially concerned with the process of meaning construction without having any fixed idea as to the precise content of a particular case, in other words one can have a formal notion of meaning without any material concept of it. It is when an author allows his own particular material notion of meaning to direct his study of other groups that difficulties are likely to arise. It is, for example, the Christian theological predisposition to positive resolutions of life problems which has led van der Leeuw and others into an over-evaluation of the positive and creative aspects of religious phenomena.[2] This contrasts with the more essentially phenomenological outlook of Stanner which unashamedly documents the opposing realities in the life-world of the Murinbata.

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1. Sharpe, E.J. 1975:234.

2. Cf. Alfred North Whitehead, 1930:7 ff. 'In considering religion, we should not be obsessed by the idea of its necessary goodness. This is dangerous delusion'.

Van der Leeuw's study of salvation exemplifies some of these points but also contributes to the paradigm of meaning because of its distinctive use of the notion of power. He begins with the theoretically important point that equivalent terms are not always easy to find in the comparative study of religious concepts. Even when translating between German, French, and English there are problems with the idea of salvation. The German heil , for example, which can be rendered as salvation also means deliverance, while its derivatives, heiland or saviour, heilig or holy, heiligtum or sanctuary, and heilsgeschichte or salvation history, all serve to broaden the notion and thereby prevent it from being restricted to what he regards as the 'accepted but definitely limited English significance'.[1] Van der Leeuw thinks that such a breadth is useful inasmuch as he does not wish to restrict the notion of salvation to explicitly Christian doctrinal terms. This admirable intention is but relatively short lived, however, because he proceeds to a definition of salvation in terms of power, and of an awareness of a positive force in the self or in the external world - a force possessing a positive moral aspect , for 'salvation is ... power experienced as Good'.[2] He then describes the emergence of this power and its identification with phenomena like water, certain animals, and the season of spring prior to its portrayal in saviour figures.

The theme of evil and demons is developed to account for the fact that power may also be experienced as 'terrifying, devastating and incalculable'.[3] Similarly the notion of the incomprehensibility of perceived evil is emphasized to demonstrate that affective

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1.   Leeuw, G. van der.   1938:101.

2.   Ibid, p. 102.

3.   Ibid, p. 134.

dimensions of religious traditions cannot be ignored in theoretical works.

> 'Beliefs in demons does not mean that chance rules the Universe, but rather that I have experienced the horror of some power which concerns itself neither with my reason nor my morals it is not fear of any concrete terribleness, but vague terror of the gruesome and the incomprehensible, which projects itself objectively in belief in demons.'[1]

In this scheme evil is the emotional response to intellectual uncertainty, it is not simply ignorance but the context of unknowing which results in the potency of the negative sense of power. In terms of plausibility theory the notion of power can be said to include both the cognitive and affective dimensions with the latter serving as the context for the former. What is quite clear is that in van der Leeuw's scheme the notions of meaning and power are closely aligned, so that his basic assumption about religiosity is that 'man does not simply accept the life that is given to him' but 'in life he seeks power'.[2] Power has to do with understanding the nature of reality in order to have it firmly under control for 'Homo religiosus betakes himself to the road to omnipotence, to complete understanding, to ultimate meaning. He would fain comprehend life in order to dominate it'. Power is not simply the desire for status and prestige - in the sense in which E.R. Leach postulated that 'a conscious or unconscious wish to gain power is

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1.   Idem.

2.   Ibid,   p.679.

a very general motive in human affairs' , where power means the
seeking of recognition 'of access to office as social persons,
the gaining of esteem' - but is the general category of man's
response to a world which challenges his own superiority.[1] It is
in the process of attaining to full power and mastery that man
experiences salvation even though during his actual life-time
he does not achieve that full sense of power which he so much
seeks. Van der Leeuw uses the notion of ahnung to describe
this firm sense of conviction of the nature of things which still
lacks the full grasp of them.[2] Man is thus engaged in a process
of becoming, of endeavouring to possess a full sense of meaning
but without actually attaining to it. So it is that the religious
life is not essentially different from the rest of cultural life
which is also a pattern of constructed meanings and power, yet it
is the natural conclusion of other aspects of cultural life. 'The
religious significance of things... is that on which no wider nor
deeper meaning whatever can follow', says van der Leeuw, an assertion
which resembles the position adopted later by Hans Mol and which
will be considered in due course. The distinctive feature of van
der Leeuw's argument lies in his view that man comes ultimately
'to stand at the very frontier and perceives the ultimate
superiority he will never attain', which as far as meaning is
concerned implies that 'the last word is never spoken' and that
full power is never achieved.[3] But it is just at this point when
van der Leeuw has brought man to the limit of his self-perceived

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1.   Leach, E.R.   1954:10.
2.   Leeuw, G. van der. I938:660.
3.   Ibid, p.680.

boundary of power and meaning that he talks about salvation. Salvation is that desired, though unattained, state which directs human endeavour and which exerts a present influence upon those who are seeking it. The religious quest is thus set within the context of the unknown goal so that in Rudolph Otto's terms it might be said that the 'wholly other' is the determining feature of the searching spirit of man. It is as the ultimate is then being sought that the 'numinous' is experienced. There is yet another aspect of the context of salvation which merits attention, for it shows the similarity between van der Leeuw's thought and that of John Bowker whilst also exemplifying one of the central concerns of this study, namely the problem of evil in religious studies.

There is, says van der Leeuw, a fundamental limitation or restriction experienced by man as he persues his path to power. It comes when man experiences the boundary separating him from full awareness and from the sense of possessing the entire meaning of his life and destiny. This knowledge of limitation involves a 'devaluation of all that has preceded it', and an experience of 'the malicious inadequacy of all that happens and the irrationality at the basis of life itself'.[1] The precise meaning of limitation in van der Leeuw is not, however, the same as Bowker's notion of compounds of limitation. For Bowker such limitations are the very facts of life which religion serves to overcome while for van der Leeuw they are intrinsic to religious processes as such. For example,

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1.   Ibid, p.681.

the idea of the demonic which is but one manifestation of the 'inadequate' in religion has been conceptually related to, and has come to be contained within the very concept of divinity. ' In the very concept of God the demonic continues to proclaim its presence, whether as absolute incalculability (predestination) or as inestimable mercy.' [1] But such assertions are to be understood more as van der Leeuw's passing comments than as central concepts. In context they occupy a relatively insignificant place and they have been mentioned here only because of the theoretical importance placed upon negative features in the present study. What is evident from these comments on van der Leeuw's work is that his notions of power and limitation permit an easy application of the paradigm of meaning to his entire scheme, this demonstrates how hermeneutical exercises in the phenomenology of religion are not very far removed from those in both the history and anthropology of religions.

This does not mean that a general paradigm of meaning can now be safely accepted in religious studies, or that an unquestionable uniformity has emerged amongst scholars. A consideration of the important study by the anthropologist Rodney Needham of the notion of belief will make this problem clear. This particular study, Belief, Language, and Experience, has been chosen as the focus of criticism for the concluding of this chapter not only because it offers a contradiction of the paradigm of meaning but because it raises the most fundamental questions concerning religious phenomena which bear direct relevance to the theorists already discussed. [2]

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1.   Ibid,   p.140.

2.   Needham, Rodney.   1972.

The criticism directed against the lack of philosophical sophistication in anthropological studies in chapter four would be completely inappropriate as far as Needham's study is concerned. As a work it is both profoundly anthropological -inasmuch as it treats of those categories which pertain to religious institutions- and at the same time profoundly philosophical in the Wittgensteinian tradition of linguistic analysis. The fact that Needham devotes the opening paragraphs to an explanation of the inter-disciplinary nature of his discussion, saying that he wanted to 'attract the attention of theologians, linguists and psychologists' as well as anthropologists and philosophers, shows the breadth of intention and intimates the possible scope of its influence.[1] Despite the fact that but little response has, as yet, been forthcoming from these quarters, Needham's analysis of the relationship between statements expressing belief in religious entities and inner feeling-states which might be thought to correspond to them stands as an unavoidable demonstration of the crucial issues which must be encountered by those interested in theoretical problems of religious study, and most especially in hermeneutical tasks.

In sympathy with the general approach outlined earlier for the paradigm of meaning Needham explains the desire of the anthropologist as philosopher 'to discern a constant order in the world, and... to make an orderly determination of the true nature of man'.[2] This hope has not, however, come to fruition; for 'from the confident and universal programme of Comte' to his own

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1.   Ibid, p.xiv.

2.   Ibid, p.243.

tentative and particular study there has been nothing but

'a series of setbacks and disillusionments' which has removed

any 'ground of absolute knowledge'.[1] His own contribution has

a sense of finality about it, at least methodologically, inasmuch

as the finding of order depends upon language, and his study has

demonstrated only the 'phantasmagoric variegation of the collective

forms of significance, in grammar and classificatory concepts' which

reflects the essential relativity that marks all ideas about the

meaning and determination of human experience'.[2] This leads Needham

to an increased scepticism and to a sense that no ultimate

knowledge of the meaning of human life can be attained. It is no

longer a question of the necessity for deeper or more extensive

research, for the very idea that success is possible must itself

be abandoned. He repeats this idea several times because he sees

the essential problem as lying in language itself, a problem which

is reflected in other areas of human thought. For the fact that

there are words which clearly do signify certain things conduces to

the conclusion - and Needham thinks it a false conclusion - that

meaning is possible in any area given a suitable precision in the

use of words. His study is an attempt to 'determine (man's)

relationship to reality' and his conclusion is that language, far from

helping to clarify this problem, only further obscures it. [3] He

argues that language, by its very nature, cannot be relied upon to

furnish accurate descriptions of the human condition; but since

language is the only possible medium of analysis it follows that

there can be no final and true word spoken on the nature of human life.

No 'order of orders' is possible with the result that 'only shifting

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1. Idem.   3. Ibid, p.236.

2. Ibid p.244.

relativities remain'.[1]   This assertion is, inevitably, unpalatable

to scholars who depend upon words, but it also lays bare the

implications of the paradigm of meaning. In other words the

general human desire for meaning can be seen as consonant with -

if not actually the result of- the general attribute and function

of language as implying that a full meaning can be found for any

phenomenon. And Needham reckons to have shown that this is not

the case. This obviously merits further attention.

Needham's actual emphasis upon the notion of belief followed

less from any desire to study religion than from the wish to show

that notions of a psychological type could not be given any full

and specific verbal expression. In providing a thorough comparative

study of this one term he thinks that a sound case has been made

for the unreliability of psychological category terms in actual

philosophical arguments. Needham appreciates that this finding is

unsettling to intellectual pursuits which depend upon the reliability

of verbal constructs. He resorts to a figurative passage replete

with topographical metaphors to convey the sense of 'conceptual

instability and the loss of location' which follows the necessary

acknowledgement of 'the precariousness of our delineations of the

human condition'.[2]

It is particularly instructive to note this use of the word

'precariousness' inasmuch as it is also emphasized in Berger's work.

The exaltation of the phenomenon of language in both cases is

largely to blame for their negative evaluation of the human condition.

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1.   Ibid, p.243.

2.   Ibid, p.235, 236.

This is an important point for the extreme emphasis on language is a methodological stance to be borne in mind when evaluating Needham and Bowker's hermeneutical perspectives. What is clear is that they favour the cognitive and logical dimension of life, omitting the affective realm to a large extent. One illuminating consequence of this, in the light of the position which many historians and phenomenologists of religion adopt, is a clear glimpse of the way sociologically inclined thinkers differ from those emphasizing the transcendental aspects of human life. Rudolph Otto, for example, is supremely confident that attributes of God can be 'grasped by the intellect...analysed by thought (and) admit of definition', in similar vein he is sure that 'mere feeling' apart from precise verbal expression is useless in religion.[1] The fact that Otto proceeds to an analysis of personal and affective dimensions does not detract from his commitment to the importance of clear definitions. In fact the ensuing descriptions of the sensus numinis witness to his sense of security in employing language to render profound experiences intelligible to all.

It is precisely this sense of security which merits comment for it depends less upon any theory of language which Otto possessed than upon his own general religious certainty of the ultimate existence of the realities with which he is concerned. In this sense Joachim Wach is just in evaluating Otto as one whose implicit religious convictions are not 'matched by an articulate statement of the methodological aspect' of his analysis of religious phenomena.[2] Needham, by contrast, is all too clear as to his

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1. Otto, Rudolph. 1924:1.
2. Wach, Joachim. In J.M. Kitagawa, 1968:71.

methodology and pushes its consequences into those very areas
where they are sensed as unwelcome. This reasserts the point that
theoreticians are not exempt from the inclinations of their fellow
men in the desire for security and certainty in the world. Mary
Douglas has aptly observed that the notion of relativity is the
'philosopher's bogy' which seems 'to sum up all the threats to
our cognitive security'.[1] To follow a strictly sociological
understanding such as that of Durkheim necessarily involves
abandoning any 'comfort of stable anchorage for his cognitive
efforts' , Needham demonstrably achieves this and thereby proves
the consistency of his hermeneutics and shows that once the subject
of study is the nature of human life and religiosity then the
personal perspective of the scholar cannot be ignored, whether it be
that of transcendentalism or relativism.[2]

One further consequence of Needham's argument which relates
to our present consideration of reductionism concerns how private
states are to be related to public expressions of religiosity.
Towards the close of his book Needham uses Alastair MacIntyre's
notion of 'opacity' in describing the individual personality.
It is inevitable that religious studies face the issue of how
the individual relates to the group even though from the work of
Robertson Smith in the nineteenth century through the growing
sociological approach of Durkheim to the modern studies of Bryan
Wilson the individual has received scant attention.[3] Just as the
power of the sociological tradition tended to reify the notion of

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1. Douglas, Mary. 1975:xvii.
2. Idem.
3. Needham, Rodney. 1972:245.

society with a corresponding reduction of concern with private persons, so the history of religions tradition, from Max Müller to Eliade, has tended to reify a broad category of the sacred dimension which also offered no real analysis of the role of religiosity in the personal life. This comment might seem to contradict the actual evidence of , for example, Rudolph Otto, but the point is that the individual is presented as an ideal typical case of one in touch with the sacred. If Needham's analysis is correct, then the relationship between the private apprehension of religious phenomena and the public expression of the same cannot be ignored as a factor in the meaning of religiosity itself. While it is possible to agree with him that individuals are 'subjected to opacity' in their mutual relations, it does not necessarily follow that an essential 'misunderstanding' attends all human communication.[1]

It can be argued phenomenologically that this opacity is necessary because each individual is a unique centre of creativity and not simply a _tabula rasa_ programmed by socialization and largely through language. Language might better be understood as serving to unite discrete persons in as common a group as is possible given the individualistic basis of human life on the one hand, and the necessity of social interaction for co-operative life on the other. If it becomes apparent that there is a resistance to language when it is used to investigate private psychological states, then it is quite possible to adopt a positive interpretation of this

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1.   Ibid, p.246.

fact in terms of the uniqueness and intransigent creativity
of the self, rather than embrace a sense of hopelessness of
ever understanding anything about man. Theoretically speaking
it may be said that the opacity of the individual is but one
restraint acting upon language as a tool of analysis. Language
can indeed more easily be used to further the ends of a rational
discourse than of emotional awareness, but poetry, for example, is
one of several literary genres which encourage care in such a rash
assertion. Thus it is important to give some place to symbolic and
ritual acts when evaluating an overall study of religious phenomena,
though care must be taken as much over the interpretation of ritual
as of language for implicit assumptions can easily pass unnoticed.
At least Needham's presuppositions are clear and open to critical
evaluation which is not always the case in the study of religion.

Ernst Benz, for example, in a paper which shows fine insight
into the problem of translating from one language to another falls
foul of the tendency to assume a general religiosity on the part
of mankind. The problem of lecturing through a Japanese translator
he compared with being assailed by an enemy. In the lesser task of
translating from German to English he 'found that the very
structure of language itself seems to impede understanding'.[1] This
sentiment resembles Needham's basic hypothesis but Benz leaves the
issue unexamined. It is his final comment that is note-worthy for
he comforts himself with 'the thought that we carry within ourselves
the most essential condition for the understanding of other religions'.

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1.   Benz, Ernst.   1954. In Mircea Eliade and J.M.Kitagawa
                          1959:117.

This intuitive faculty turns out to be nothing less than 'a tradition of earlier forms of religious experiences and of earlier stages of religious consciousness'. By some means which remains unexplained this primal knowledge is located in 'the structure of human personality', and serves as the means by which one religious man from one culture can grasp the religiosity of a person from a completely different cultural background.[1] As far as hermeneutics is concerned this sort of assertion is useless and leads to the anthropological refusal to treat history of religions seriously.

A much more satisfactory argument over the relation of the individual to the group has been offered by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and has already been alluded to earlier. In returning to his hypothesis that a distinction should be made between the cumulative tradition of a religious movement and the personal faith of individual devotees, emphasis is placed upon Smith's view that it is the individual who is confronted by and who is 'the locus of an interaction between the transcendent, which is possibly the same for everyman, and the cumulative tradition which is different for everyman'.[2] Why the transcendent should be the same for all men is difficult to judge apart from the fact that Smith operates from an implicit Christian tradition which postulates an essential uniform character of God. Be that as it may, the prominence he gives to the faith of the individual which is 'unfathomable, too profound, personal and divine for public exposition ' provides

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1.   Ibid, p.130.

2.   Smith, W.C.   1963:186.

a valuable basis for considering the problem of meaning and significance in religious persons.[1] Smith is certain that there are differing aspects of religiosity, some being essentially private whilst others are open to the observer for inspection, but he is content merely to assert the fact of the private dimension without having to lay it bare or to regret that it is inviolable. His view can be seen to be similar to that of the phenomenologists of knowledge, at least in the way he describes the process of growth in understanding, and his notion of cumulative tradition could, itself, be interpreted in terms of the notion of the 'stock of knowledge' in plausibility theory. The fact of individual creativity which justifies human opacity is well exemplified in his assertion that 'each person is presented with a cumulative tradition. From it and out of the capacities of his own inner life and circumstances of his outer life, he comes to a faith of his own'.[2]

These deliberations serve to show that the problem of interpretation in religious studies is inextricably associated with the level and kind of analysis which is deemed proper within each academic tradition. Perhaps the most fundamental difference in orientation which has been encountered concerns this emphasis upon individual and group. It is a major problem in this present study inasmuch as the question of salvation needs to be expressed in terms of its sphere of operation. Is the notion of salvation to be understood as a personal and private experience, or is it

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1.   Ibid, p.170.

2.   Ibid, p.187.

restricted more to the ideals of a social group and with the
co-operative action initiated to bring about the desired state
of affairs ?

Needham's study was introduced as a test case of the
notion of plausibility on the grounds that if no sense of meaning
and reality could be posited for the individual, then the notion
of plausibility and of salvation defined in terms of it would be
severely impaired. The argument brought against Needham has
suggested that there is no serious challenge offered to the
general paradigm of meaning by his analysis of psychological
states and their relation to public concepts. As long as a
difference is maintained between the significance of private
and public states of meaning, or kinds of meaning, there is
but little difficulty. A problem only emerges when an
analytic device is used in realms where it is basically
inappropriate, and in this connection it has been argued that
the notion of human individuality and creativity provides a
sound basis of defence against any expectation that a univocal
relationship between public and private concepts ought to exist.
As far as the history and phenomenology of religions are concerned,
and the same point needs to be made for anthropology, the prime
object of study is the sphere of inter-personal relationships
within which language does serve positive functions. It will
be perfectly legitimate to develop categories to accommodate
states of private sensations even though it will be impossible
to elucidate upon their precise nature. This has well established
precedents in the history of religions - in the case of Buddhism

for example, where there have been many discussions of the notion of enlightenment even though it is acknowledged that any full comprehension of the state can only be obtained by one who has attained it.

One aspect of Needham's argument merits a final comment for it adds a further dimension to the general paradigm of meaning, albeit unintentionally. In the light of his analysis of language and concept formation Needham's final evaluation of man is that the solitary individual is 'divided within himself by his very self-consciousness, yet with no guarantee of his own integrity'.[1] This assertion is not unlike the Murinbata model of man considered earlier, and it raises again the question of whether the ultimate notion of meaning can incorporate an element of doubt. Needham's assessment of the role of language in self-understanding tends to be nihilistic: whereas the Murinbata appear content with the knowledge that reality offers conflicting statements which admit of no resolution, Needham reacts in a kind of philosophical desparation. This re-emphasizes the need to understand meaning as possessing both cognitive and affective factors. Although Needham is careful in his analyses of affective states it still is the case that priority is given to the dimension of reason. This study, by contrast, has argued that from a phenomenological perspective it is perfectly proper to assert the necessity of meaning in human life and religiosity in the full realization that the affective dimension of ritual, myth and symbolism can produce a sufficient level of durable plausibility

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1. Ibid, p. 245.

despite the fact that no perfectly consistent logical explanation of problems is forthcoming. This being the case something must be said on the logical status of the term 'belief' as a justification for some of the studies engaged in by historians and phenomenologists of religion.

Basic categories used in religious studies must be able to incorporate both the historical development aspect and the phenomenon of individual religious virtuosity, which is but one form of the public and private division of religious phenomena. This does not mean that a simple construction of paired terms such as Cantwell Smith's tradition and faith is all that is required. It means that whatever terms are employed should be able to withstand the demands made by both dimensions of religion. Needham's study is a classic example of how to analyse a concept which 'straddles the border between private states and public appraisal'.[1] It is just such straddling terms which require careful identification because they can be expected to manifest peculiar properties such that they may not admit of rigorous explication when viewed soley in the context of either private or public life-worlds. The word 'belief', for example, may be reduced to a complete lack of specificity by means of linguistic analysis, yet it possesses a remarkable power in its normal usage. This not only means that philosophers of language make demands on a particular word which it is not required to bear in ordinary usage, but that its very significance lies in the power to unite person and group within a single

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1.   Ibid, p.235.

communication event. The very word 'belief' can thus be seen as charged with emotive significance which alone enables it to fulfil its task. Needham sees his argument as having uncovered the confusions introduced into man's thought by words themselves. Talking of words he says that 'we cannot think without them, but they make it hard for us to think with them'.[1] The confusion which some words seem to introduce into discourse may, in fact, be necessary as a blurring of concepts apart from which a particular activity would be impossible. Most especially might this be true as far as religious phenomena are concerned.

Along with the word 'belief' are several others which bear a family resemblance to one another in this respect. They include 'the sacred', 'transcendence', 'myth', and 'symbol'. Indeed the word 'religion' may itself share in the paradoxical quality of these words, a quality bequeathed by merit of the fact that they have to do with the most personal and private aspects of life on the one hand, and with the nature of the gods or of society on the other. To place the notions of god and society together is not, by the way, to engage in the Durkheimian reduction of the one to the other, but simply to draw a distinction between the internal life of men and the external realities they perceive as present to their consciousness. The word 'salvation' also belongs to this category for it too serves to unite personal sentiments and the doctrinal schemes of religious traditions. Both as a term used in the meaning ascribed to it by specific religious

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1.   Ibid, p.228.

traditions, and by plausibility theory 'salvation' remains
a means of linking public and private meanings. This category
of 'straddling' or 'bridging' words shares in the
characteristics of that group of terms called performative
utterances, at least to a certain degree. Needham refers to
performative utternaces but does so to demonstrate that the
assertion 'I believe' like such other usages as 'I promise'
does not refer to any special emotion or psychological state.
In other words Needham asserts the public nature of these
assertions and in this he is correct, but not entirely so.

Our reason for using the notion of performative utterance
is not that ploy mentioned by J.L. Austin in his original paper
on the subject when he bemoaned the fact that 'people are apt
to invoke a new use of language... to help them out of this,
that, or the other well known philosophical tangle'.[1] Rather
it is employed in an attempt to describe a category of
phenomena by means of analogy. It is not that the words 'belief,
religion, salvation, sacred, myth', and 'symbol' are themselves
performative utterances, but that the general category to which
they may be said to belong itself resembles the general category
of performative utterances. Austin's basic intention in coining
the name performative for this category of words was to stress the
fact that people actually did something by using them rather than
simply say something: an action is performed by means of the words
which describe the nature of the act itself, as in the cases of
' I apologize', or 'I name this ship'. What is more, this

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1.   Austin, J.L.   1961:221.

category is not concerned with issues of truth and falsity of assertions, even though there may be what Austin calls 'infelicities' associated with the use of performatives. The similarity between performative and straddling categories lies not only in the fact that their truth or falsity is not the prime concern of the scholar, although he needs to be aware of the appropriateness of context in which they are used including potential infelicities, but in the observation that, as Austin pointed out for performatives, there are utterances whose proper status is to be discovered more in their 'force' than in their strict meaning.[1]

It is precisely be**çau**se Needham avoids this distinction that he fails to do justice to the full effect of belief terminology. Needham pursues the **rat**her philosophical interest in 'the old doctrine about meanings' , as Austin labels this general position, rather than seeing the more significant 'new doctrine about all the possible forces of utterances'.[2] If this idea of force may be legitimately applied to the religious phenomena of myth, ritual, the sacred, salvation etc., they can then be described as performative phenomena. This new category can be directly related to the general paradigm of meaning for it marks the kind of inquiry which is appropriate to the phenomena themselves. In continually emphasizing the affective and cognitive dimensions of the notion of meaning throughout this study we have been, albeit implicitly, advocating this notion of force which is a characteristic feature of many religious phenomena, and without

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1.   Ibid, p.238.

2.   Idem.

which little understanding can be gained of the actual function

they effect both in religious traditions and in the personal

dimension of faith. One vital implication of this suggestion

is that it is unnecessary to adopt any particular religious

stance in order to emphasize the distinctive features of

religious phenomena in human life. The identification of

a category such as this one of 'straddling terms' can assist

in coping with notions which appear to demand a peculiar

response on the part of devotees. It also enables the observer

and analyst to maintain a more neutral stance. The mere

construction of a category does not, of course, reduce the

significance of questions concerning ultimate truths or of

the existence of God, but it does enable the phenomenologist

to attempt an adequate explanation of phenomena without

feeling that he has to subscribe to special doctrines. In other

words, some categories facilitate description by removing the

necessity of reductionism.

In the light of these hermeneutical considerations it is

now both possible and desirable to return to the earlier theme

of plausibility theory and salvation, and to apply these

theoretical arguments to actual cases of religious phenomena.

We first consider aspects of primitive religions to show that they

are not different in kind from the so called world-religions, and

then turn to one eastern and one western religious movement to

demonstrate that the general paradigm of meaning does possess a

significant hermeneutical power.

Chapter Six   Salvation in Preliterate Societies.

A major defect of most studies of religion, whether in the tradition of anthropology, phenomenology, or the history of religion has been the scant attention paid to the idea of salvation in primitive societies. In the case of nineteenth century scholars this fact is easily understood in terms of the predominating influence of evolutionary thought which viewed the religions of preliterate groups as representing a relatively undeveloped form of religiosity. Later forms of religion, especially the so called world-religions, were seen as the outcome of many phases of development which had resulted in the idea of salvation. It was assumed that one would search in vain for this late product in any early forms of primitive religion. Robertson Smith expressed something of this outlook in his Burnett Lectures of 1888 when he said that in its earlier stages 'religion did not exist for the saving of souls but for the preservation and welfare of society'.[1] In Max Müller's influential Gifford Lectures of the same year there is no concern over salvation at all, not even in sections devoted to the definition of religion.[2] A similar picture emerged in E.B.Tylor's treatment of religion and its emphasis on the nineteenth century specialities of soul, spirit possession, worship and sacrifice.[3] F.B. Jevons provides further evidence of the preoccupation with taboo, magic, fetishism, ancestor worship, and mythology, in his introductions to comparative religion.[4]

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1.   Smith, W.R.   1894:29.   3.   Tylor, E.B.   1958.

2.   Müller, M.   1898.   4.   Jevons, F.B. 1896, 1908.

Of the early twentieth century scholars Andrew Lang
in his <u>Making of Religion</u>, and Rafael Karsten in his
<u>Origins of Religion</u> , demonstrate a similar lack of interest
in salvation which is shared in addition by R.R. Marett.[1]
E.O. James, whose work extended into the nineteen sixties
and whose interests betray a resemblance to the somewhat
antiquarian concerns of the intellectualist scholars of the
Victorian period, did address himself to the subject of
salvation but did so less in order to explore its theoretical
significance than as a basis for approaching Indian religions.[2]

More recently W.G. Oxtoby has expressed surprise at
this general lack of theoretical interest in the notion of
salvation during what he calls the first phase in the development
of the history of religion up to 1915.[3] He suggests that the
term salvation was too theological for currency at a time when
theology was not a popular pursuit among academics, but as we have
already shown this is a less likely explanation than that which
sees the emphasis upon evolutionism as tending to reduce
expectations of finding such developed phenomena in primitive
structures. During the decade of 1960 there was a growth of
interest in the notion of salvation among historians and
phenomenologists but, as Oxtoby points out for the two key
volumes expressing this concern, it was more pragmatic than
theoretical.[4] The same criticism could be levelled against other

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1.   Lang, A. 1900. Karsten, R. 1935. Marett, R.R. 1929,1933.

2.   James, E.O. 1933, 1938, 1962.

3.   Oxtoby, W.G. 1973:32.

4.   Abel et. al. 1962.   Brandon, S.G.F. 1963.

standard works in the history of religion. Even the editor of one important collection of studies which represented the papers given at a world congress of the International Association for the History of Religion could admit that no theoretical scheme had been advanced or typology advocated.[1] While it is most appropriate that assent should be given to Oxtoby's observation that it was in the period following the first world war that a growth took place in religionswissenschaft and in the academic interest in salvation, it must be added that this concern was almost entirely philological or philosophical and was certainly directed towards the great religious traditions of the world. Where comparisons have been made they have usually followed the plan of discussing functional equivalents in the meaning of salvation ideas. There has been but little concern with more theoretical issues , a fact which may be explained by the tendency for anthropological and sociological studies which normally engage in more abstract theorizing, to follow different lines of interest from the history and phenomenology of religion which themselves favour discussion of the formal systems of thought of religious movements...

The very fact that the methods employed by these traditions vary reinforced the notion that primitive religiosity and that of world religions were of significantly different types. But the nature of this difference is not easy to establish in fact. Eliade in the history of religions and Lévi-Strauss in anthropology have both

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1.   Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. and C.J.Bleeker, 1970.

established powerful arguments to the effect that, as the former

puts it,

> 'the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world
> were not always formulated in theoretical language:
> but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express on
> different planes and through the means proper to
> them, a complex system of coherent affirmations
> about the ultimate reality of things, a system
> that can be regarded as constituting a metaphysics'.[1]

So if there is no essential difference in the ability to

conceptualize, there is a difference over the current content of

thought. In terms of Eliade's general thesis this could be expressed

as the essential sacred ethos of the life-world and therefore of the

thought world of primitives on the one hand, and the desacralized

world of western, urban man, on the other.

The fact that a more abstract consideration of salvation is

now possible results from the necessary association of anthropological

and history of religions perspectives in recent studies of world-

religions at their local level of pragmatic expression. In order

to see how such vital questions are forced upon the observer it

will be useful to begin with Kenelm Burridge's study of millenarian

movements. This work is quite exceptional in developing an abstract

notion of salvation for a preliterate religion but precisely because

it is not concerned with any world-religion tradition, it can serve

as an example of how to treat abstract ideas resulting from a

pragmatic context. In order to avoid an overly ethnocentric frame

of reference Burridge adopted a definition of religious activities

based on the idea of power relations in society. Accepting as basic

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1. Eliade, M.   1959:3.

postulates that men seek power and prestige, much as Edmund
Leach had done in his study of highland Burma, and that they do
so through systems of obligation in social interaction, he
defined religion as a ,

> 'redemptive process indicated by the activities,
> moral rules, and assumptions about power which,
> pertinent to the moral order and taken on faith,not
> only enable a people to perceive the truth of things,
> but guarantee that they are indeed perceiving the
> truth of things'.[1]

Here the notion of redemptive process serves as a broad
category applicable to movements from many parts of the world.
It is firmly located in the Durkheimian tradition of sociology
and avoids the older definitions of religion which stressed the
nature of belief and the objects of belief. It also implies a
shift of emphasis from more static functionalist models to a
dynamic conception of religious institutions. The particular
significance of this as far as the present study is concerned
lies in Burridge's assertion that underlying millenarian
movements there is a feeling of 'dissatisfaction with the
current system'.[2] In other words, we have here a phenomenon
which corresponds to the notion of perceived implausibility
and also a responsive movement which can be classified as a
soteriological response to evil.

The dissatisfaction once formulated and preached, usually
by a prophetic figure in the case of millenarianism, provides the
basis for the description of the forces and powers at work on men,

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1.   Burridge, K.   1969:6.

and which the ordinary member may grasp as a way of explaining

his own plight. A new redemptive process emerges as men act in

accord with the new system of power and prestige, but the new

order only becomes viable when the former state of things is no

longer able to carry the undivided approval of society. This

situation may well arise during periods of cultural contact

between groups as the processes of both westernization and

sanskritization demonstrate, and this we will show later.Burridge

argues that in periods of internal developement of society

people may feel their current pattern of beliefs is no longer

able to explain or to cope with the changing situation. In order

to maintain integrity and status as individuals they feel the

need to change belief so that they may act in accord with the

altered power relations of the new order. Burridge regards the

redemptive process as involving three major areas of life and

thought, the actual experience of social reality being the first,

the working assumptions about that reality the second, and lastly

'the assumptions we call faith'.[1] It is when the level of actual

experience is found to be in conflict with the working assumptions

or even more significantly with the basic beliefs, that a new

system is sought. Burridge's emphasis upon that period of a group's

history 'when faith belies experience' corresponds to the stress

we have placed upon areas of implausibility which constitute the

initial phase of religious change and of salvation movements.[2] In

terms of plausibility theory Burridge's reference to circumstances

under which there is 'an unsatisfactory redemptive process' would

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1.   Ibid, p.14.

2.   Ibid, p.5.

correspond to a state in which a sufficiency of durable
plausibility no longer exists.[1]

Burridge's distinctive contribution to the analysis of
the idea of salvation consists in his view that salvation has
to do with social obligations. Human life is social life and
as such inevitably involves many reciprocal obligations. The
redemptive process is one in which men seek to discharge all
their obligations: this is the essence of religious activity.
So salvation is understood in terms of unobligedness, and this
is regarded as being a future state which can only be experienced
during life to a very limited extent, accordingly Burridge identifies
the saved state with the notions of heaven and nirvana . In terms
of the history of religions this view could be extended quite
markedly to embrace present experiences of salvation in a more
realistic way than is possible when the prime focus is upon
millenarian movements which, necessarily, restrict the terms
of theoretical reference. It is because Burridge deals with
those movements that he is concerned with social change and
instability in power and prestige systems, the issue of obligedness
assumes a different and smaller proportion in societies of a more
stable kind. For these it is more appropriate to talk of salvation
as consisting in satisfactory expectations of mutual respect
grounded in established and maintained sets of values, but that is
a separate question. As far as Burridge's analysis is concerned
it would seem that his notion of power is cognate to the concept

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1.   Ibid, p.171.

of meaning which has already been extensively argued. The
similarities between the two notions are quite instructive
as far as the general paradigm of meaning is concerned,
inasmuch as power is used to describe a wide variety of
human activities and thereby demonstrates that religious
phenomena should not be sought in isolated spheres of human
life, but in the broad areas of social life. Further, Burridge
sees the search for power as associated with the process of
developing personal integrity as a social actor. In so doing
he makes the realm of psychological questions an open one for
anthropological analysis even though he does not himself pursue
it to any great length. He assumes that in the quest for power ·
and integrity human beings act in a basically rational way. This
agrees with the notion of meaning as a general goal in life, but
gives a useful redirection to it in the sense that to talk of power
is to refer to emotional desires and ambitions. To stress this is
to substantiate that aspect of this thesis which asserts the
affective dimension of the paradigm of meaning. Burridge sees this
assumption of a state of rationality among those studied to be in
accord with the similar assumption underlying sociological analysis
to the effect that social life is potentially intelligible.[1]

In slightly less theoretical terms the interesting feature
of millenarian movements is that the desire for meaning emerging
within a changing social structure is implemented by means of a
reconstructed social order. In developed societies, by contrast,
change in plausibility tends to occur relatively slowly and to a

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1.   Ibid, p.7.

limited extent. If a segment of the population requires a more
radical change -as the result of deeming their present conditions
unsatisfactory- then it may establish a new group or community
as the basis for the new way of life. Burridge's work is most
useful in emphasizing the relationship between between beliefs
and the actual social networks within which they are enacted.
Such restraints and lack of restraints upon change may well
explain in large measure the reason why some religious groups
have adopted the response of migration in association with the
growth of changing doctrinal perspectives vis-à-vis wider
society. For example, the nineteenth century emigration of
Mormon converts from Europe to Utah had the explicit and manifest
function of preparing souls for the second coming of Christ; but
one of its crucial latent functions lay in the possibility of
constructing anew a society of saints freed from the obligation of
interacting with gentile neighbours. In this case Burridge's
dictum that salvation is unobligedness can be seen as a quite
appropriate description of the process of Mormon adventism. But
Burridge's thesis requires qualification for the Mormon case is
also an example of many religious groups which stress the significance
of service and commitment to other persons. For these it is not the
case that 'redemption itself can only be realized at or after that
appropriate death which brings to an end an appropriate mode of
discharging one's obligations'. Burridge is not suggesting some
subtle reading of these words which might imply a death to self
and a new life of dedication to others: he is stressing the entire
processual nature of redemption which continues during earthly life.

Phenomenologically speaking it would be wiser to employ a more subtle understanding to enable the idea of service to be seen as an integral part of the state of salvation itself. What this involves is a twofold notion of power: one relative to the ordinary social world and the other directed towards the religious ideal of inversion of status. The New Testament concept of the first being last and the last first would furnish an example of this concept of power understood as humility.[1] It is then in the fellowship of the saints that the devotee experiences his new found sense of power and personal integrity, a perspective which is the complete opposite of his previous life. Victor Turner has, indeed, gone some way in considering this condition by means of his concept of humilitas.[2]

The desire for communitarian groups in the early phases of some sects expresses the rationale of attempting to unite in one entire and self-contained realm the practical aspect of living with the ideal of the doctrine. Utopias are willed because of the feeling that there should be no dichotomy between theory and practice. The ritual of millenarian movements is often the ritual of change, both the perception of the need for change, and the accommodation of belief systems to apparent changes. The trance, vision, and as far as the prophet is concerned, the ability to understand what others find confusing - these are the important things. The ritual of stable societies tends to be more redressive and seeks to relate the ideal and the actual states of religious

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1. Matthew 19.xxx.

2. Turner, V.W. 1969:166.

life within the context of existing social patterns, a function often fulfilled by sacrifice. At the level of religious functionaries a difference can be established between the prophet who calls men into a radically new form of life, and the priest who seeks to remove the dichotomy between spiritual ideal and the failure of life engendered by social interaction. A classic example of the association of prophets with change in social order under pressure from external sources is provided in Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer. There the priests are identified as the major religious functionaries and the prophets as relative latecomers emerging late in the nineteenth century in response to the disruption caused to Nuer life by Arab slave traders, Mahdists and by Anglo-Egyption rule.[1] It is during such periods of culture contact that the system of indigenous meaning and power is called into question, and what is clear from this is that religion is inextricably associated not only with the fundamental social structure, but also with human integrity at the level of the personality. It is precisely because of this fact that the notion of affectivity cannot be omitted from any model of meaning used heuristically for religious traditions.

The case of millenarian movements compared with religions of more stable societies demonstrates the sense of conflict present in the human perception of social relationships. Rather than supporting Burridge in his argument that redemption means freedom from obligation, a more widely applicable notion may be

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I .   Evans-Pritchard, E.E.   1956:309.

established if it is accepted that what men seek is a particular quality of relationship, rather than any relationship. The reference to Christianity and the notion of joyful service could be developed to show that it is the way service is understood that makes the difference between the sense of obligation conceived as an undesired necessity, and that service which is perfect freedom. As will be shown later the Mormon Church is a fine example of obligation as a central feature of salvation.

What Burridge's example clearly shows is that in the particular social world which engenders millenarianism there is a strong feeling of conflict and negative evaluations of reality which extends to social relations as to everything else. In other religious contexts a movement may maintain - and the basic argument of this thesis is that it will maintain- a strong negative evaluation of some aspect of reality. Just what factors are singled out for judgement is a question which has been taken up in the sociology of sects which will be considered in a moment. The millenarian example however can finally be referred to as a typical case of religious identification of evil. Peter Worsley's conclusion on Melanesian cargo cults affirms that the precondition for their emergence lies in 'a situation of dissatisfaction with existing social relations and of yearnings for a happier life'.[1] Such a generalization can, as might be expected, find application in religious movements other than preliterate ones, and so it is that Norman Cohn has demonstrated

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1.   Worsley, P.   1970:251.

that the millennium became the hope for many European groups
of socially deprived persons existing in a marginal relation
to a more stable society.[1]

This form of deprivation theory has been most clearly
expressed by Vittorio Lanternari in his analysis of messianic
movements which argues that it is when primitive societies feel
oppressed by the conservative pattern of social life that
millenarian responses occur. The sense of oppression meets with
a desire for new conditions and if a suitable prophetic figure
emerges, who is able to initiate a break with the past, then a
messianic movement is likely to occur. 'Salvation (is) the
purpose of all religions', says Lanternari, and freedom from
oppression is what constitutes a saved state.[2] While many
movements seek escape from tensions arising within their natal
societies as with the Tupi cults of pre-colonial Brazil, the
Tafari movement of Jamaica as well as the Mormons and Sikhs who
will be considered later, others result from culture contact and
pressure from outside sources as with the Moaris and North American
Indians along with the Polynesian cargo cults. Lanternari
identifies this response of 'religious escapism' with 'the quest
for a way out of the earthly confines' experienced by many for
whom it may be said that it 'is inherent in the nature of religious
experience that temporary evasion from the world can be achieved
while awaiting the final hour of redemption'.[3]

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1.   Cohn, N.   1970.

2.   Lanternari,V. 1963:321.

3.   Ibid, p.314.

Both to do justice to the wealth of religious data and to recall the general paradigm of meaning it must be said that Lanternari fails to see the implied critique of reality present in messianic movements as also a major component of non-messianic religions. He tends to presuppose that established, world religions which serve members of stable societies and which validate the lives they lead, do not serve a judgement of negative evaluation upon that world. While it is true that world religions are not usually religions of the oppressed they can be so, but what is more important is that they do contain within their cosmology or theology an analysis of evil. Lanternari is correct in wanting to argue that 'it is not possible to separate the world of the so-called primitive peoples from the world commonly described as historical', and if he had extended his theoretical perspectives in accordance with this view it would not be necessary to issue the caveat on this question of evil.[1]

Despite the fact that both Burridge and Lanternari entertain the notion of salvation for the very specific forms of religiosity they focus upon in preliterate groups, they imply that some significant difference obtains between those groups and others which belong to the traditions of the world religions. This is somewhat less true for Burridge but even so the way these studies have been presented has not exerted any significant influence upon the history of religions or upon the general corpus of theorizing in religious studies. As has already been implied this is unfortunate since Burridge's use of the notion of power and obligation, which may be interpreted as one application of the general paradigm of meaning,

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1.   Ibid, p.vi.

possesses wide theoretical significance both for sociological studies and for those of a more theological or phenomenological interest in the attributes of human beings. The way in which he adopts a non-theological perspective enables the whole study to inform theologians about a range of materials and human actions which they can, if they so wish, employ as part of their own theological discussion. This rather desirable approach differs significantly from that of Dhavamony who has commented upon the notion of salvation in primitive religion but whose approach, despite the fact that it is supposed to be phenomenological, appears to be influenced by Christian theology.

His particular systematic approach lead him to discuss the significance of the standard phenomena of religion for each major tradition and also for primitive religions. This means that it is likely that he had no particular interest in the notion of primitive salvation, or in the issues involved in discussing them, but simply that the structure of his study inevitably led him to comment upon the ideas of cosmic regeneration and cyclic fertility which is how he handles the idea of salvation among such peoples. His definition of salvation exhibits his theological bias:

> 'The fundamental structure of salvation seems
> to be a liberation from the senseless and
> never-ending play of human passions and desires
> and from servitude of sin, and a hope for
> reconciliation and integration with the divine,
> and an attempt to realize the divine. All the
> attempts in religions to remove the evil and to
> become united with the divine once and for all
> constitute the ways of salvation and the final
> attainment of this goal is salvation itself'. [1]

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1. Dhavamony, M. 1973:315.

Dhavamony makes no significant contribution in this
introductory volume and it is cited to show that even when the
subject of primitive salvation was raised in this phenomenological
context its discussion remained at the level of non-theoretical
interest. This shows how great the need is for a theoretical model
of the paradigm of meaning kind in the study of religion.

By way of contrast to the work of these anthropologists and
phenomenologists the studies of Max Weber in the sociology of
religion are even more theoretical and provide an important example
of material manifesting close affinities with the general paradigm
of meaning and which may assist in relating the more social
perspective of Burridge with the more individualistic outlook of
Dhavamony. This will be useful inasmuch as these two men may be
taken as representatives of those rather different, though
potentially complementary, approaches. The theoretical basis of
Weber's approach is grounded in the analysis of the variety of
responses to the world adopted by religious groups in so far
as they affect practical activity in the world.[1] This concern
with ideology and action lead Weber to construct a set of types of
responses espoused by world religions as a means of attaining
salvation. He postulated three central areas in which soteriological
action could be identified as a response to particular needs. The first
involved the disprivileged, or those who in terms of deprivation
theories turn to religious activities and other-worldly goals to
compensate for their lack of material satisfaction in the mundane
world. It is this category which embraces the case of millenarian

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1.   Weber, M.   1963:149.

movements since the experience of culture contact with those

possessing an abundance of desired goods results in a sense

of personal privation and in actions which seek to overcome it.

The second area relates to the middle classes who do not

experience any sense of lack as far as possessions are concerned,

but who seek a legitimation of their well-being. For such groups

the desired psychological reassurance that all is as it should be

makes blessedness of mere contentedness. It is to the third category,

however, that further attention must be given for it comes closest

to expressing the central theme of the paradigm of meaning.

Whereas the disprivileged and the middle classes seek salvation

in response to their life-experience in the world of action - so that

Weber can say that the concomitant types of salvation are 'products

of the practical way of life' - there is yet another type of person

possessing a distinctive style of thought which he calls the

'intellectualist' group.[1] This category denotes those engaged in the

life of the mind and whose 'metaphysical needs' drive them to

reflection upon ethical and religious questions. The basis of this

intellectual application is not one of social deptivation, nor does

it emerge from a psychological need for legitimation of the life

context. It is, rather, grounded in man's 'inner compulsion' both to

'understand the world as a meaningful cosmos' and to adopt an

appropriate attitude towards it. This particular need identified by

Weber might be said to subsist both at the level of thought and of

intentional action. Weber's sociology of religion can be seen as

an elaboration of this theme of world understanding and of the action

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1.   Ibid , p.117.

which it initiates, yet he seems but little concerned to analyse

the basis of the drive or to relate it to other theories of

knowledge. The very fact of meaning and the processes whereby it

is constructed are accepted on an _a priori_ basis. This aspect

of Weber's work is well known and constitutes a certain 'ad hocness'

as Talcott Parsons called it, yet it is offset by a weight of

erudition without which his discussions might appear far less

satidfactory. In the light of more recent studies in the sociology

of knowledge it is possible to contextualize the notion of drive

for salvation within a framework which can reduce the _ad hoc_ nature

of Weber's work. This is precisely what the notion of plausibility

theory sets out to achieve. The general paradigm of meaning suggests

that the response to sensed deprivation and the desire for legitimation

are not essentially different from the intellectualist pursuit of

meaning, once it is admitted that cognitive and affective dimensions

are necessary for any full notion of meaningfulness.

Alongside this drive for salvation must be included the

idea of what Weber called   'the problem of the world's imperfection'[1].

This is directly related to the present study and to its emphasis

upon the perception of evil as the basis of salvation processes. Weber

identified three kinds of imperfection which correspond to his three

categories of salvation. For the disprivileged imperfection represents

the state of desiring but being unable to obtain certain goods or

services, for the middle classes it is the fact that they desire

validation for what they already possess, while for the intellectualist

group imperfection is manifested in the lack of unity and total

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1.   Idem.

explanation of the world which they so desire. From this it can

easily be argued that the notion of imperfection, as a description

of a mode of perception of the world, relates both to intellectual

dimensions and to affective concerns. Weber distinguished between

these poles in terms of 'inner need' -experienced by the intellectual

who is also one of the privileged classes - and 'external distress'

thought to be more indicative of non-privileged classes. [1] Such a

strict dichotomy ought to be qualified in the light of earlier

discussions on the notion of meaning since both groups are ultimately

involved in both cognitive and affective dimensions. This point

must be emphasized because Weber writes as one who accentuates the

realm of thought by the very style of argument he chose to adopt.

A similar caveat could be introduced with regard to Talcott Parsons

who is well aware of the necessity of discussing affectivity both in

ordinary social life and in religious contexts, yet treats of what

he clearly calls the 'problem of meaning' in religious acts in a

way which subsumes emotional factors to intellectual ones. He speaks

of religious _ideas_ as answers to the problem of meaning possessing

'cathectic and evaluative ' levels of explanation.[2] It is just

this kind of emphasis upon the ultimate rational basis which makes

such sociological analysis unacceptable to historians and to some

phenomenologists of religion who regard it as a form of reductionism,

despite the fact that in its own terms of reference it is not so.[3]

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1.   Ibid, p.124.

2.   Parsons, T. 1970:367.

3.   Ibid , p.6.

So it is that the difference in kind which Weber tries
to establish between privileged and disprivileged groups in their
perception of evil and drive for salvation is more a difference of
the degree to which rational procedures are resorted in the
process of constructing a satisfactory explanation of the
mundane contradictoriness of life. While Weber is correct in arguing
that it is 'the intellectual who transforms the concept of the
world into the problem of meaning', he is not justified in his
implication that there is no problem of meaning for the non-
intellectual.[1] Existential questions of the broadest kind obtain
for all men even though they may be couched in symbolic, ritual
or mythic forms, as was shown in an earlier chapter for the Murinbata,
rather than as explicit philosophical arguments. Indeed philosophical
speculation may serve only to state problems in clearer form rather
than to solve them. Religious traditions, by contrast, attempt not
only to formulate the nature of evil -whether as a philosophical
argument or as a mythical account- but also to provide solutions
acceptable at the emotional level of action in the world.

Despite the fact that Weber himself was not concerned with
psychological factors in the strict sense he was preoccupied with
the way systems of thought related to the actions of individuals
and this is as true of religious actions as of any other type of
behaviour. The instructive aspect of his work lies in the fact
that he does not enter into that kind of individualism which was
seen in Dhavamony's study, nor does he reify a single concept
such as that of obligation as in the case of Burridge. His notion

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1.   Weber, M.   1963

of meaning, if qualified in the ways already suggested, marks a fundamental contribution to a general paradigm of meaning from the area of sociology. This contribution is to be seen in the influence of Bryan Wilson in areas of investigation which were not his own, notably the problem of salvation in primitive religion. From his earlier publications in the sociology of religion Wilson employed the notion of orientation to the world as a basic theoretical concept for analysing differences between religious institutions in the process of constructing typological classifications of sects.[1] It was in his later volume entitled Magic and the Millennium that the idea received a fuller treatment and was developed so as to apply to non-Christian religious groups.[2] A particulr feature of that study lay in the fact that Wilson explicitly associates the idea of orientation to the world with the notion of salvation. He assumes, again on an a prioristic basis that 'men seek salvation in a world in which they feel the need for supernatural help'.[3] This 'demand for salvation' is a human response to the world perceived as evil, indeed the fundamantal meaning of the word 'world' cannot be divorced from the notion of evil which is universally present and which men everywhere seek to overcome.[4]

One major criticism or qualification of Wilson's study is appropriate here despite the similarity between it and the burden of our own argument . It may be introduced through the sub-title

1.   Wilson, B.R.   1959.

2.   Wilsob, B.R.   1973.

3.   Ibid, p.19.

4.   Ibid, p.492.

of the study which refers to 'religious movements of protest among tribal and third-world peoples'. Here Wilson treats these movements as rejections of and protests against established cultural goals, much as sects used to be viewed as protest movements against the established church. This is a perfectly legitimate view to adopt as long as it is realized that those very established systems do themselves advocate a means of identifying and coping with evil. If the assertion that 'men apprehend evil in many different ways, and thus look for relief from it in different forms of supernatural action' and 'the various responses to the world embrace different conceptions of the source of evil and the ways in which it will be overcome', is taken to apply to all religious traditions then no objection can be raised.[1] But Wilson is not saying this: on the contrary he draws a firm distinction between the established cultural norms and those of protest groups. A critical passage will make his intention on this point clear.

> 'There appear to be eight basic supernaturalist
> responses to the dilemma which men face in asking
> how they might be saved. The dominant position is
> that of acceptance of the world, the facilities
> it offers, and the goals and values that given
> culture enjoins upon men. This orthodox response
> (whether secular or religious) concerns us only
> as a base-line. Concern with transcendence over
> evil and the search for salvation and consequent
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> rejection of prevailing cultural values,goals,and
> norms, and whatever facilities are culturally provided
> for man's salvation, defines religious deviance.'[2]

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1.   Ibid, p.21.

2.   Idem.

Wilson obviously makes some allowance for the existence
of processes of salvation within the established religion of a
society since he is counting one of the supernaturalist responses
to evil as the dominant one of cultural orthodoxy. Yet he says
that concern with evil, with its transcendence and with a rejection
of normal cultural values is what characterizes religious deviancy.
This seems to imply a qualitative difference of perception of evil
by those within the established culture and others who are set upon
a course of social protest. To what extent it is possible to press
this criticism it is difficult to say because Wilson admits that he
is not directly concerned with the established pattern of culture
but only with the protests against it. Even so Wilson appears to
treat salvation as a scarce commodity which is differently
evaluated by 'deviants' and by the orthodox. This is a question
which could be discussed at some length for each particular case
of protest but the point to be made here is that such protest groups
are not engaged in any significantly different endeavour, at least
as far as a general paradigm of meaning is concerned, from the
religious evaluations of orthodoxy. In terms of the definition of
salvation offered earlier such deviants merely find the institution-
alized formularies insufficient as means of conferring durable
plausibility. Wilson's interest may, however, lie in saying something
different which involves a qualitative judgement upon the nature
of the religious system against which protest is intended. It is as
though 'the very dilute thaumaturgy of Christian orthodoxy' which
has 'long been culturally accommodated' is viewed as having
forfeited its right to act as a religious process for men.[1] This

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1.   Ibid, p.503.

would apply not only to thaumaturgy but to all religious forms
of action, for Wilson sometimes writes as though the fact of
secularization must be accepted along with all its consequences,
including the fact that some established religions cannot be
treated with the seriousness they appear to demand. It was in
this spirit that he wrote of denominations and churches as
having fallen into a state of coolness and tepidity from one of
passionate love and fervour.[1] Having made this tentative
criticism of the possible influence of a particular concept of
secularization upon Wilson's study, it remains to acknowledge
the significance of his work, especially that of Magic and the
Millennium for its concern with the notion of salvation among
tribal and third world peoples.

Wilson's sociologically grounded approach frees his
classification from theological overtones even though the
dogmatism of secularization is not without significance. Even so
Wilson and Burridge have shown the necessity of attempting a non-
confessional position, and more than this have shown the
inevitability of engaging in discussion on negative factors of
perception. This is important for it shows that what might be called
phenomenologically descriptive accounts of the nature of religious
groups concur, to a certain extent, with the theological assertions
of religious traditions in emphasizing the significance of the
perception of evil, or of implausibility as a central motivation
in human thought and action. To this it will be necessary to return
in the conclusion.

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1.   Wilson, B.R.   1970:242

The major theoretical problem remaining with Wilson's
argument is one which must be mentioned in the light of this
generalization, and before we proceed to a case which would
be difficult to accommodate within Wilson's scheme. It concerns
the difficulty of relating the perception of evil in established
religions to the apparently more accute awareness of evil in
protest movements. The seven kinds of response to evil which
he identifies as typical of protest movements can easily be
read as a typlogy of evil, but this typology would not suffice
to handle the evidence of primitive societies. The reason for
this, theoretically speaking, is quite simple and rests upon
the tautologous nature of definitions. Wilson is concerned with
movements of revolution and protest whereas most primitive
religions documented in ethnographies are not in a state of
radical change or transformation. This is not to say that they
exist in some timeless realm of changelessness, but that the
transformations at work are natural to that particular society.

In terms of the three broad classes which embrace his
seven responses the 'objectivist' group of revolutionist,
introversionist, reformist, and utopian perspectives would seldom
apply to primitive societies for this particular reason. The
'subjectivist' group of conversionist outlook and the'relationist'
class of manipulationist and thaumaturgist views might, however,
be open to an interpretation which could admit of tribal cases.[1]
The Murinbata, for example, might be said to encourage a change
of outlook in the minds of initiates which befitted adult members
of their society. So too some of the features of witchcraft and

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1.   Wilson, B.R.   1973:27.

magic which have already been considered for the Azande could be regarded as possessing manipulationist and thaumaturgical elements. The theoretically important point here is that protest movements, whether they be tribal or part of urban, western societies, exhibit similar responses to evil which is conceived in a particularly emphasized manner. This is useful information because it provides another reason for advocating that primitive and advanced societies ought not to be distinguished in terms of fundamental differences in their religious structures. The real issue concerns the way in which evil is perceived within either kind of tradition during periods of ordinary social life on the one hand, and periods of fundamental social change on the other. This is why some caution was expressed over Wilson's emphasis upon evil in protest movements which suggested that it was a different species of evil from that found in the orthodox and relatively stable social context. The determining feature which governs the significance of evil in any movement is the degree to which the existing system of plausibility is able to contain the perception of negative factors on the part of its members.

Because societies are seldom completely closed systems there may well occur moments when external factors bring about a situation which cannot be met by the more normal means. It may even be the case that the evil which is regarded as operative upon people is of an essentially new kind. Millenarian responses of the cargo cult variety can be such noval reactions to formerly unheard of circumstances, but even when this is the case the underlying processes which work towards a new resolution, are the same as the ones for

ever active in stable societies. So the plausibility theory of salvation can be seen to be applicable in both cases.

The necessity for greater theoretical precision in connection with the idea of salvation will become even clearer in the case to which we now turn. It is an example which is all the more useful because it also demonstrates the problematic nature of another hermeneutical issue in religious studies, that of the relation between primitive and advanced religions. The case is that of Burmese village religion as studied by Melford Spiro and the precise problem of hermeneutics is how to relate a so called world religion to specific, local examples of the same.[1] These two issues of primitive and advanced religions on the one hand, and world and village religions on the other, are closely connected. We may suggest that village religion can be equated with the religions of preliterate societies which are completely unrelated to any of the major religious traditions of Islam, Christianity,Hinduism or Buddhism. In anthropology at least this would seem to be an acceptable assumption, as E.R. Leach makes clear in his editorial introduction to the significantly titled Dialectic in Practical Religion [2]. There he argues that grave misunderstandings had developed in the study of comparative religion because the distinction between the philosophical expression of a religion and the religiosity of ordinary believers had not been sufficiently recognized. Accordingly the pure and true form of religion, say Buddhism, was thought to be found in the classic texts and the philosophical exegeses of them, while the religious life of village Buddhists was said to be deeply influenced

1.   Spiro, M.   1967.

2.   Leach, E.R.   1968.

by animistic survivals or Hindu superstitions. The title
'practical religion' was used in order to emphasize the mundane
and pragmatic dimension of religiosity, and it would be true
to say that since the late nineteen sixties, when Leach's volume
was published, there has been a growing realization among
historians and phenomenologists of religion that this area is of
fundamental importance.

The significance of this distinction between what might be
called the world and village levels of a religion for the notion
of salvation will be immediately apparent, and Spiro's study will
serve to bring it into sharp focus. Spiro's ethnographic evidence
makes the question of the two levels of a single religion and their
relation even more complex because he finds that the village
Buddhists also embrace to a certain extent another form of religion
under certain conditions of their everyday life. This was a religion
involving the idea of spirits called nats hence the term Nat
religion. Arguing against the notion that Buddhism is merely a thin
veneer overlying indigenous animistic religion, Spiro seeks to
demonstrate that both Buddhism and Nat religion are important for
the Burmese villagers, and that ultimately Buddhism is given primacy
of place as far as religious power is concerned. He prefers to
describe Burmese religion as permitting 'dual religious adherence'
rather than manifesting some form of syncretism, and this duality
is related to the two central concerns of his study, namely the
idea of salvation and the fact of suffering. In analysing the
relations existing between these, both in theoretical and
theological, as well as practical and sociological terms, he

portrays an interaction between what he calls Burmese Buddhism
and Burmese supernaturalism. Buddhism is primarily concerned
with salvation while Nat religion is taken up with problems of
man's preoccupation with things causing him pain and difficulty
in his everyday life. This supernaturalist religion expresses
man's immediate existential concern which results in the desire for
a present solution to his problems. Spiro distinguishes between these
proximate goals and the more distant ones of Buddhism, the former
being contrary to Buddhist teaching which relegates the desire for
pleasurable states to an unworthy outlook which is antipathetic to
the true religious path and to its ultimate goal.

Spiro begins his analysis of Burmese religion by saying
that religions function to help devotees in their experience of
suffering both by 'offering an explanation for suffering, and by
providing techniques by which suffering may be avoided or its
burden diminished'.[1] It might be thought appropriate for him to
apply this statement to Nat religion in a direct and straight-
forward way such that its explanation of illness and the methods
of cure through offerings and exorcism might be regarded as a
central religious tenet. He does not do this, however, but chooses
to emphasize the idea that 'for the Burmese religion means the
Path to salvation, and the nats are totally and completely irrelevant
for even finding, let alone walking along the Path'.[2] Salvation is
thus taken as a notion pertaining essentially to Buddhism. Indeed it
is 'on the crucial dimension of salvation (that) the distinction
between these systems is absolute'.[3] 'As a religion of radical

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1. Spiro, M. 1967:2.

2. Ibid, p.267.

3. Ibid, p.266.

salvation ...the Buddhist attitude to the world is unambiguous, the world is to be renounced.' [1] Thus the realm of worldly existence, lokika, is for Buddhism the world of illusion and represents the sphere of samsara and recurrent rebirth which results from a persistent desire for things and for personal well-being. But this is also the very world of supernaturalism, it is the realm of the nat cultus, of witches, possession, and exorcism. Contrasting with this is Buddhism's concern with lokuttura, the reality grounded in escape from illusion, and with the extinction of desire in the attainment of nirvana. It is the world of lokika which is both the barrier to Buddhist salvation and also the dominant concern of the lay Burmese. At best their Buddhist religiosity seeks the attainment of a better rebirth in their worldly existence. 'Contrary to Buddhist teaching in which these pleasurable states are but temporary way stations on the Path to its ultimate goal, most Burmese take these stations as their ultimate goal.' [2] In interpreting the relationship between these forms of religion Spiro tends to accept as the central and determining feature of what constitutes true religion in this context the Buddhist notion of salvation. For an anthropologist this is an unwarranted assumption and demonstrates the continued influence of nineteenth century presuppositions about religious orthodoxy. It might be justified if the ethnographic data showed that interpretation was impossible without making such a claim, but on the evidence of Spiro's own material this can be seen not to be the case. He actually says that 'Buddhism in both its Theravadist and Mahayanist

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1.   Ibid, p.263.

2.   Ibid, p.269.

forms is never the exclusive religion of its lay devotees' and

that such as assertion can be accepted almost as a truism in

Buddhist cultures.[1] If this is so, and if, for example, rites

concerning spirit possession and exorcism are of positive

significance in the life of a people, then it is unwise to

enforce a conceptual orthodoxy upon them when other explanations

are readily available and which do not presuppose any religious

norms.

If the plausibility model of salvation is employed in this

context it makes better sense of Spiro's own material and in

particular of his assertion that 'man seeks for meaning even more

than he seeks for order'.[2] In terms of the Burmese Buddhist laity

this means that illness which is thought to be caused by spirits

and which can be cured by exorcism is what causes an immediate

loss of meaning in the world as far as a state of general plausibility

is concerned. It may well be part of the overall Buddhist scheme

of illusion; but the villager prefers to accept an immediate kind

of meaning than some abstract philosophical scheme of doctrine.

There may be a contradiction between the nat religion and that of

Buddhism propounded by the monks, but the villager opts for the

immediate relief rather than for a future state of bliss. What this

means is that the salvation they require or demand is not always in

agreement with what, in orthodox terms, they actually need. It is

more realistic to discuss the notion of salvation in one way for

the Buddhist laity and in another for the monks. The Buddhist goal

of relatively ascetic detachment and the attainment of merit

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1.   Ibid,   p.2.

2.   Ibid,   p.8.

sufficient to achieve nibbana is the prerogative of the sangha,
and in this context it is perfectly appropriate to employ the
orthodox religious notion of salvation. Then the plausibility
view of salvation can be applied to the doctrine as such with
evil being grounded in tanha , or the desire for things which
emerges from the perceived self, and salvation as the cessation
of this desire that itself causes pain and transmigration. So too
the sangha can be understood as that context within which the
necessary state of plausibility may be achieved. The total frame
of reference necessary to understand what Buddhism means for the
monks must include the role of the laity who actually support them.
Spiro's approach can be read as evaluating the laity as somewhat
parasitic upon the monks in terms of wanting to achieve merit from
them so that their own future lives will be happier. Even if this
is true, and the ethnographic evidence would suggest that it is, it
ought not to lead to a view of the laity as being failed Buddhists
who could not manage the life of renunciation. Rather it should be
seen as demonstrating a far more complex situation in which the
monks could only set about their duties directed towards nibbana
because the laity possessed such an attitude to merit that it
resulted in their supportive role. The fact that the laity could
be regarded as inconsistent Buddhists is quite irrelevant to
anthropological analysis. If the facts of the case are that the
belief in nats 'permits the Burmese to obviate the painful
consequences of a consistent belief in karma', the question must
be asked as to whether the notion of salvation can play any part in
evaluating the role of religion in their lives. In terms of the
plausibility model the answer is an unequivocal yes, for within

the limits of the social and ideological conditions in which
the Burmese find themselves they employ notions and rites of
the nat religion to complement aspects of Buddhism in such a way
that they possess a sufficient state of durable plausibility
such that no alternative is sought. The model of Buddhist
renunciation is ever present in the sangha, but the continuous
presence of pragmatic trouble is also experienced as a present
reality, and to that area of life, perceived as evil, Buddhism
has no immediate practicable solution.

This case throws into sharp relief the problem of what
might be called two dimensions of religion and what was earlier
referred to as the world and village levels of religiosity. The
reason why the distinction is especially prominent in Spiro's
case is because the nat supernaturalism appears to belong to
a different species of religiosity when compared with the
Buddhism of the sangha. Yet both dimensions coexist for the
Burmese layman in his life-world. If only the Buddhist dimension
is thought to be, potentially at least, capable of effecting
salvation, then the nat supernaturalism is categorized by default
along with other primitive religions, which offer no explicit
soteriological hope, as a phenomenon of an essentially different
kind. Yet what seems to be the case is that within a single
community different groups identify evil in such divergent ways
as to react to it in a non-uniform manner. To presuppose that
the religiously orthodox way is the right one is to import
evaluative criteria which should be alien both to the anthropologist

and to the historian of religion. What Spiro's case shows clearly is the tendency to classify the so called world - religions differently from religiosities which do not belong to such a clear historical tradition.

This methodological error has also been prevalent in similar cases but has been identified in rather different terms, namely those of 'the grand literary tradition' on the one hand, and 'village religion' on the other.[1] S.J. Tambiah's study on a similar theme to that of Spiro, namely Buddhism and the Spirit Cults -albeit in north-east Thailand- provides an admirable basis for considering this problem. After outlining the background to the theoretical problem Tambiah offers his own analysis of the inter-relation between kinds of religiosity in a way which is much more in accord with anthropological tradition and which also contributes to methodology in religious studies. Tambiah identifies the major contributors to the discussion as Robert Redfield and his Chicago school's approach which refers to the great-tradition and little-tradition opposition in Indian society on the one hand, and to Dumont and Pocock who utilize the notion of Sanskritic Hinduism and popular Hinduism on the other. Both perspectives presuppose that some kind of two-level distinction is necessary, they differ in the way they wish to relate these elements to one another. The fact that these authors are concerned with Hinduism while Tambiah was working on Buddhism presents no problem as far as the theoretical issues at stake are concerned. Indeed it accentuates the fact that when

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1.   Tambiah, S.J.   1970:367.

practical studies of religion involve the major religious

traditions of the world similar problems have to be dealt

with. Tambiah locates the various terminologies of this

debate very firmly in relatively recent studies, largely

from the nineteen fifties; even so the inherited perspective

of nineteenth century scholars still seems to exert some

influence upon what is thought to count as religion. If this

is so then the problem is less one of having to distinguish

between a discrete literary form of a religion and an actual

popular or village manifestation of it than it is one of

realizing that it has become customary to think in terms of

the two levels as a result of the two kinds of religious study

which now influence the approach of scholars of religion. In

Srinivas's work, cited by Tambiah, there is ample evidence of

the more classical style of Indology informing his conceptual

categories. At least this is a factor which must be entertained

as a theoretical possibility, for Tambiah cannot be completely

accurate in saying that the notion of two levels 'is a fabric-

ation of anthropologists which they have bequeathed to the

modern Indian consciousness', if only because scholars like

Max Müller stimulated Indian scholars to think of their own

religious history in terms of systems and texts.[1] Furthermore,

the existence of indigenous notions of religiosity cannot be

ignored, and both Hindu and Buddhist religions contain dynamic

traditions which are aware of their mutual distinctions. The

problem of levels of truth and religiosity cannot for these

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1.   Ibid,   371.

reasons alone be regarded as the product of anthropological study and theorizing. Indeed, this is something which Tambiah ought to have seen more clearly; for in arguing against the two-level model he admits that it is 'frequently inapplicable to the anthropologist's field data and experience'.[1]

Tambiah's wish is to treat the notion of two-levels in terms of the relation between 'historical religion and contemporary religion'.[2] Contemporary religion, which is the dimension of practical and lived religiosity, would include the historical factor in the sense of texts, ritual traditions of the priesthoods as well as temples. The basic requirement is to develop a way of handling the fact of continuity between the past and present. When the society concerned is of an homogenous type this approach will be relatively easy to adopt, but when there appear to be several sorts of religion present it becomes more difficult. Tambiah's analysis of the mutual inter-relation of Buddhist and Hindu functionaries in Thailand provides a model example of how to set about studying such a complex issue. The case is made more difficult still when one element in the contemporary religious life bears no direct relationship to the more distinctive historical tradition, as is the case with Buddhism and the spirit cults. Yet as far as the phenomenologist and historian of religion are concerned it would be methodologically improper not to treat all the elements present in a society with equal validity and seriousness. As far as the notion of salvation

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1.   Ibid, p.372.
2.   Ibid, p.374.

is concerned this involves a much more complex form of analysis. No single theological stance can be adopted when the evidence shows a variety of indigenous views on evil, as well as several responses to it. It is precisely in this kind of situation that plausibility theory is most applicable, for it would not be inappropriate to regard exorcism in the nat cultus, for example, as one aspect of the soteriological process directed towards the elimination of an immediately perceived ill, despite the fact that it might contravene orthodox Buddhist teachings. Such recourse to spirit agencies not only provides an explanation of troubles but also makes available the means for resolving them. This being so, it could be said that while the nats may be irrelevant for walking the nirvanic path they are more than relevant for making sense of the life-world of the Buddhist laity. In phenomenological terms the fact that the life of the monks is markedly different from that of the peasantry would suggest that different explanations and means of coping with problems might be expected.

Spiro agrees with this point indirectly for he views the supernaturalistic aspect of Burmese religiosity as one way by which that dimension of the Burmese personality which he calls the Dionysiac comes to be expressed in a form that permits Buddhism to remain uncontaminated by the non-renouncing excess of cultists. It is precisely in reaction against the ascetic ideal that the nat cult with its ceremonies involving emotional release and licence finds acceptance by the laity and, as Spiro says, 'permits the Burmese to obviate the painful consequences of a consistent

belief in karma'.[1] The actual life-world of the laity does not
easily fall to a simple analysis and Spiro himself provides
evidence which belies his rather rigid view which espouses
Buddhist norms. This becomes particularly clear in that part
of his work where he draws upon culture and personality
perspectives to aid his interpretation. The psychological
model he adopts views the individual as one seeking resolution
of inner conflicts and tensions resulting from frustrated
desires. Unresolved frustration results in states of unconsciousness
in which the personality is overwhelmed, while 'hallucinatory
and dissociational behaviour' is viewed as another 'defence
mechanism by which (this) inner conflict is expressed or
resolved'.[2] What this psychological model implies is that both
emotional and intellectual factors are involved in the relationship
between the personality and society, a dual factor which has
already been stressed as a fundamental presupposition of the
plausibility theory approach to the study of religion. The
postulated conflict can itself be seen as a form of implausibility
involving the emotional desire of the person and the cognitive
evaluation of those social norms which prevent its realization.
Rituals of exorcism and theories of witchcraft are thus
indicative of the attempt to remove the emotional dissonance
resulting from the clash of behavioural norms originating in
Burmese folk tradition, on the one hand, and Buddhist morality ,
on the other. It is precisely because they have plausibility
generation as their goal that these phenomena merit consideration
as soteriological phenomena.

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1.   Spiro, M.   1967:256.

2.   Ibid, p.169.

From this discussion it will be clear that if the notion
of salvation possesses any social significance within the context
of the world religions, then religious effects which may be
observed in societies not associated with them could also,
potentially at least, be discussed in terms of salvation if
those effects manifested similar functions. Since the function
of religious institutions as ... meaning construction devices is
postulated as of fundamental importance and since in the case of
Burmese and Thai religion the establishment of meaningful life-
worlds in the face of perceived evil is what is taking place, it
would seem eminently appropriate to expand the notion of salvation
to embrace religions outside the great traditions of the world.
Because this notion of salvation is not dependent upon any one
theological meaning, its sociological context, and the new meaning
in terms of plausibility which is being ascribed to it, must be
explored in some detail for particular examples of religious
phenomena.

In attempting this task it will be necessary to portray
what might be called the relational nature of the notions of
evil and salvation, or of plausibility and implausibility, in each
particular case considered. This point is often ignored. Yet it
lies quite central to the notion of meaning in religious systems,
especially when the approach is of a phenomenological kind. The
basic distinction which needs to be drawn is between the nature of
phenomena as they are in and of themselves, and the nature of
phenomena in relation to each other. If, for the sake of argument,
it be accepted that Western thought in general and Christian theology
in particular emphasizes the nature of things in and of themselves,

while, for example, Indian thought focuses upon the nature of

the relation existing between entities, then there would be available

between essentialist and relational definitions which could provide

the basis for a categorization of evil. What is thus being sought

is a phenomenological description of ideas including notions of

evil and salvation, which shows how they are related one to another.

Such patterns of ideas, or configuration of doctrines, may well

differ in content. That remains to be seen, but it is likely that

they will manifest similarity in form in terms of the appropriateness

of relation between perceived implausibility and the postulated

mode of its resolution.

Chapter Seven   Evil and Salvation in Sikh Religion

      Throughout the preceding discussion there has been a constant emphasis on this notion of evil and on the fact that the common experience of men is that the world is other than they would have it to be. For Turnbull it was 'the one really imperfect thing in life' as far as the Mbuti were concerned. Fürer-Haimendorf referred to it as the 'fact of human imperfection', while van der Leeuw saw it as the 'malicious inadequacy of all, the irrationality at the basis of life'.[1] Stanner in his study of the Aborigenes talks of the 'intuition of the integral moral flaw in human associations', while Worsley identified man's state as a ' situation of dissatisfaction with existing social relations and a yearning for a happier life'.[2] Max Weber simply refers to the ' problem of the world's imperfection'.

      The purpose of citing this list is to introduce the suggestion that, phenomenologically speaking, there are certain phenomena which may be called structures of implausibility. Any discussion of the notion of salvation must relate these structures to their complementary structures of salvation. The necessity of carefully relating the one to the other arises from the fact that a single phenomenon, and here we take the case of a single symbol as our guide, only comes to reveal its significance and full meaning when understood in the context of other complementary phenomena. To discuss the notion of salvation in its sociological sense of plausibility without also referring to the negative aspects in relation to which alone it makes sense is to commit a methodological error grounded in a lack of

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1.   Cf. cap. 2.

2.   Cf. cap. 4.

awareness of the context-dependent nature of phenomena. While

this is quite obviously true it has often been the case that

a significant variation of the assertion has often been ignored,

namely that to discuss the notion of evil, as exemplified by

studies in witchcraft, spirit possession and some forms of magic,

without also referring to its positive aspect or that goal towards

which it relates is to fail to appreciate the symbolic whole of

which negative features are but a part.

Why it is that experience of negative phenomena occurs in

the first instance is a question beyond the scope of the present

study.[1] Our immediate concern is less with the essential nature

of human imperfection, a question which must be answered from a

committed religious or philosophical standpoint, than with the

pattern of ideas of evil and good in specific societies. What

is more, it is precisely because such configurations of symbolic

expressions of positive and negative features vary significantly

from group to group that some kind of higher-order analysis is

required to help discover their basic rationale. Hence the recourse

to plausibility theory as a means of describing structures of

implausibility and their associated modes of resolution which may

be called processes of salvation.

Irrespective of why notions of negative factors emerge in the

first place it is true to say that they possess great power in the

lives of men. The earlier reference to the relational nature of man

becomes significant at this point in the sense that attention must

not simply be given to the way in which ideas of good are related to

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1.   Answers could be sought from a variety of sources from the
   realms of idealism through psychological debates on integrated
   fields of perception as advocated by Gestalt theorists to a
   pragmatism grounded in evolutionary ideas of the human animal
   seeking an orderly mental as well as physical environment.

those of evil, but to the actual life-contexts in which men
are related to, or perceive themselves to be involved with
negative phenomena. To say that man is related to evil is
only to describe his nature of relation to a class of
phenomena in much the same way as he has been described in the
numerous titles ascribed to him by the social sciences; he is,
for example, Homo economicus, faber, convictus, without mentioning
the more usual epithets of sapiens and religiosus.

This wide variation in the use of Homo nouns, as we shall
call them, indicates the breadth of man's relational nature as
much as it identifies any one essential attribute of his being.
This particular process of categorization proceeds by means of
isolating distinctive kinds of human activity, what the present
argument seeks is to perform a similar function as far as his
religious actions are concerned. This involves a more sociological
kind of phenomenology, more in the tradition of Alfred Schutz than
of Edmund Husserl, and means that the categorization of a phenomenon,
in this case evil, involves a consideration of human action as much
as of human perception.[1] It is precisely for this reason that
anthropological perspectives are taken to be fundamentally important
in determining the significance of religious phenomena. The
significance of this dynamic perspective will be explored at
greater length in the conclusion, but one consequence must be
stated here, and that is the supposition that a complex inter-
relation exists between sources of evil and the perceivers of evil.

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1.   Roche, M.   1973:33.

Like Peter Berger and John Bowker we argue that the
meaning 'poured into' or the 'cues' provided for man by
the external world are not always of a positive kind. We may
then suppose that the sense of evil which is so widespread is
the product of sources of implausibility which confront human
perception. These sources may change and need in no sense be
regarded as uniform, and it is certainly not supposed that they
provide any justification for arguing the existence of a devil
or any other theologically grounded concept of evil. If the
systematic theologian wishes to use such data for his own arguments,
in the way Bowker urges the notion of cues of meaning to imply the
existence of God, that is quite appropriate, but it would be out
of place in a phenomenological study.

These theoretical arguments should not remain at an abstract
level of significance, but must be applied to actual religious
phenomena so that their potency may become apparent. The first case
chosen for study is that of Sikh religion which will afford an
example of eastern religiosity, and the second is drawn from the
Mormon religion which presents a peculiar type of western religion.
The hermeneutical considerations of chapters four and five underlie
this present analysis, and in addition a firm historical perspective
is adopted so that the emergence of different configurations of
ideas of good and evil can be clearly traced.

Contemporary Sikhs possess an image of their own history
which serves a kind of mythological function within the Sikh
community. Sometimes this folk history is also used as more concrete

historical data by Sikh scholars and others which leads to the
inevitable question of validity and historical reliability.[1] To
say this is not merely to comment on contemporary issues in Sikh
studies but to bring to clear focus another more significant
point, namely, that there are elements of the past which Sikhs
regard as necessary for existence in the present. The problem
posed for Sikh scholars lies in the fact that certain of these elements
which are, at present, of deep significance to Sikh religiosity are
idealized and projected into the past as a form of history even though
it is practically impossible to establish them as historically valid.
It is often the case that the idealized notion of the past is very
different from that constructed by historical scholarship. There is
nothing surprising in this for similar divergences of view may be
found in most religious movements: it is mentioned here only because
the past is a most significant dimension in Sikh thought and enters
into the notion of evil as will be shown below.[2] It would not be
completely inappropriate to say that Sikh religion is historical
in a way that resembles the historical character of Christianity,
though care is vital in making this generalization since Sikhism
is not bound by any doctrine of historical incarnation, nor could
it be said to possess any form of salvation history in a direct
sense. Nevertheless, unlike its parent Hinduism it is committed to
its own past in a particularly concrete way.

The nature of this commitment is twofold, consisting on the
one hand in a devotional attachment to the historical gurus from
Nanak (1469-1539) to Gobind Singh (1666-1708) , and in a 'patriotic'

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1.   Cole, O. and P.S.Sambhi.   1979.
2.   Ling, Trevor.   1973:93. Ling suggests that such projections
        have been made with respect to the 'conversion' of Gautama.

zeal which binds the individual Sikh to his community,on the other.

The problem of historical criticism of Sikhism lies in the way the form of community which emerged during the lives of the last two gurus in particular, and which has contributed to the ethos of contemporary Sikhism, is projected into the earliest period and is regarded as normative even for guru Nanak. While this process could be identified in many religions, and in Christianity would take the form of folk religiosity assuming that contemporary Protestant practice was normative even in New Testament times, or that Martin Luther's spirituality was just like that of some contemporary church leaders perhaps even to the habit of tee-totalism, in Sikhism it possesses the distinctive feature of legitimizing present action. It does this by teaching the essential unity of all ten historical gurus, speaking of the first, second and third Nanak etc., as well as referring to them by their proper names of Nanak, Angad, Amar Das and so on, and by presuming that the essential truth incorporated in the identity of the first guru was transmitted to the others and was ultimately deposited in the continuing Sikh community. This khalsa brotherhood of 'pure' and initiated disciples along with the volume of sacred scripture containing the devotional poetry of the gurus constitutes the guru in the world today. So according to Sikh ideology the very nature of the guru, which itself constitutes the central element in Sikh thought, is now to be identified with the essential reality of the continuing community. The present cannot thus be understood apart from the past. Indeed, it gains its very meaning from the historical origin.

But the present also contributes to the earliest guru period of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century ideas which historical criticism cannot validate as truly pertaining to that era. This problem can be illustrated by the two models Sikhs use to describe their religion, or more correctly, the true characteristics of Sikh individuals. These models portray the Sikh as a 'saint' and as a 'soldier', but in the combined motif of saint-soldier. This kind of internal-observer's model provides an instructive insight into the self-evaluation of Sikhs in terms of the idea of evil and salvation, as well as offering a way of seeing how Sikhs interpret their own past. The period of the first five gurus is, characteristically, that in which the idea of a devoted band of pious disciples constitutes the picture of the Sikh religion.[1] It would not be truly accurate, however, to see this period from 1500, when Nanak's public ministry was beginning to be effective in creating a popular response, until the first decade of the seventeenth century, when, after the death of the friendly emperor Akbar, his successor Jehangir set about attacking the Sikh population which had grown in size and sense of identity since Nanak's day, as being a completely 'spiritual' age in which devotees hung on the sublime words of their gurus.

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1. The dates of the ten historical gurus are given as :

Nanak	1469-1539.	Har Govind	1595-1644.
Angad	1504-1552.	Har Rai	1630-1661.
Amar Das	1479-1574.	Har Krishan	1656-1664.
Ram Das	1534-1581.	Tegh Bahadur	1621-1675.
Arjan	1563-1606.	Gobind Singh	1666-1708.

Change inevitably took place and each of the early gurus contributed
to the emergence of that Sikh population which was later found to be
preadapted for a militaristic response to the new conditions of
hostility from both Muslim and Hindu sources. Nanak's teaching that
'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim', was without a doubt a
significant factor in providing an aspect of Sikh identity which was,
later, to constitute a fundamental element in Punjabi identity.
Kushwant Singh's admirable study of Sikh history is correct in
evaluating this ideal of nonconformity as being essential to the
rise of 'Punjabi consciousness and Punjabi nationalism', but it
required the political changes which followed long after Nanak to
make this latent feature manifest its powerful implications.[1] In
no real sense can it be argued that the political ideal was
dominant- and perhaps it was not present, in any significant sense,
during Nanak's lifetime. The same can be said for guru Angad's
enthusiasm for physical fitness and organized games among his
followers. While all this was far removed from military training
some sixty years later when such exercises became necessary under
the leadership of guru Har Govind the practice was not completely
alien to the Sikh outlook on life. Indeed it could be argued that
one of the features of early Sikhism lay in the provision of a pool
of potential orientations which served as a ready source for later
use, and which enabled subsequent Sikh generations to feel a sense
of continuity with former brothers in the faith.[2]

Inevitably, this first period of Sikh history saw the
emergence of many of its basic doctrines, and may be said to
have emphasized the more obviously religious factors which

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1.   Singh, Kushwant.   1977. Vol. 1, p.48.

2.   Davies, D.J.   1972:28. For idea of potential orientations.

would justify the accent being placed on the saint model as a description of the activity of this era. The third guru, Amar Das, established the institution of the free communal kitchen and dining facilities called the langar, which sought to establish equality of status among Sikhs as a contrast to the commensality prohibitions of the Hindu caste system. Guru Arjan, as fifth Nanak, provides one of the most clearly identifiable models of the saint figure after Nanak himself, and also serves to provide an historical marker, for after him conditions changed in a way which led to an increase in political activity. Arjan built the renowned golden temple at Amritsar which was to become the centre of Sikh religious life, and there in 1604 was installed the compiled writings of his predecessors. This work called the Granth Sahib not only expressed the devotionalism of the gurus' teachings, including those of Arjan, but also symbolized the relation between Sikh, Muslim and Hindu as one of spiritual amity. Nanak's religion had started as one example of the North Indian nirguna sampradaya or Sant tradition which stressed the attributeless nature of God and the necessity of meditating upon His reality through song and poetic recitation. Caste and idolatry had been abandoned for the free fellowship of likeminded seekers. With the establishment of the Hari Mandir or Golden Temple at Amritsar the religion attained to a significant level of institutionalization; and this temple, with its sacred book enshrined at its centre, constituted another example of preadaptation within the pool of potential orientations which was to prove invaluable as a means of organizing the Sikh community when

it finally abandoned the idea of living gurus. Meanwhile the saintly religiosity was concretely expressed by the devotion shown to the words of the gurus and to the ideal of life contained within them.

The change of emphasis which brought the soldier motif to the fore was a consequence of the change of political events in India. Just as the goodwill of Akbar had facilitated developments within the Sikh communities of the Punjab, so the malevolence of Jehangir his successor in the high office of Emperor, precipitated the emergence of the militaristic ethos among the Sikhs.[1] Guru Arjan serves as a kind of transition stage between these emphases of saint and soldier, which themselves involve rather different notions of good and evil, and this not only in an historical sense, but also in a structural way inasmuch as his imprisonment and death while in Muslim custody first initiated the idea of martyrdom in Sikh religion and culture. This category of religious action prepared the way for that of outright heroism and military gallantry which assumed its fullest expression in the last guru, Gobind Singh. From the moment of Arjan's death his son Har Gobind became the leader of the Sikhs both in the spiritual and political realms. Perhaps the clearest example of the transition in the ethos of Sikhism represented through his leadership may be observed in the fact that whereas Arjan built the Golden Temple as a focal point of Sikh religiosity and installed the scriptures in it, Har Gobind built another structure at the temple, namely the Akal Takht. Despite its meaning of throne

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1.   Binyon, L.   1932:.110.

of the eternal one, this edifice served a most temporal purpose
as political and military headquarters of the guru. Within it as
a throne-room the guru became increasingly more like an emperor
or district ruler with military intentions and resources. The
large number of Jat caste farmers who had entered the Sikh follow -
ship under Arjan's ministry were not slow to see the advantage of
serving the gurus in a military capacity, and from this time on the
question of a Punjabi community comes to the fore. As Kushwant
Singh says of Har Gobind, 'the change of emphasis from a peaceful
propagation of the faith to the forthright declaration of the right
to defend that faith by force of arms proved to be extremely
popular'.[1] The force of Mughal power, however, forced him into
retreat and after his death in 1644 guru Har Rai continued living
in the mountains of eastern Punjab. His son and successor in
office Har Krishan, had not escaped the attention of the emperor
Auranzeb quite so easily and died while under a not very strict
house arrest in Delhi. Tegh Bahadur had been named as the next in
line of guruship but, rather like Har Rai, was more of a saint
than a soldier, and it was only after Auranzeb began a programme
of destroying temples and removing Sikh organizations in the Punjab
that he was recalled to the Punjab from Bengal where he lived with
his family, and began to provide a focus and rallying point for the
oppressed Sikhs and Punjabis. As a result of this he was summoned
to Delhi, sentenced to death and executed. This act of martyrdom,
as it was understood by Sikhs, led to his son, Gobind Singh who
was then only nine years of age , becoming guru leader and, as it
turned out the absolute idealization of Sikh warriorhood.

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1.   Singh, Kushwant.   Ibid, p.66.

Gobind Singh led the Sikhs along with many other low caste groups against the Islamic powers, a first victory taking place in 1686 at Bhangani. The history of the next twenty years is complex but the significant outcome was that Gobind Singh ended the line of living gurus and transferred the guru authority both to the scriptures, which he edited to include the work of later gurus, and also to the community of the khalsa. In the dual concept of Guru Granth and Guru Panth is expressed the two-fold nature of Sikh culture, with the Granth expressing the saintly aspect and the Panth the soldierly nature of community commitment. It is only through a historical analysis that this dual expression of the notion of guru can be appreciated. While it might be argued that the Panth represents the older notion of sangat , or the assembly of saints in which the divine praises were sung, it is more likely to be true that it mirrors the later Sikh experience of that unified community possessed of a distinct identity which had emerged around the scriptures and ideals of the earlier gurus but which had come to a definite form only as a result of the pressure exerted by military hostility. The major new element which entered Sikh thought as a result of the seventeenth century hostilities was that of the identifiable community. The experience of the subsequent centuries, and particularly the bloody partition of the Punjab in the nineteen forties, has served only to reinforce this identity and to make the religious aspect of Sikh culture something different from what it had been during the earliest period of Sikh history.

Before attempting to show the precise influence of this historical development of Sikh society upon the notion of evil it will be as well to present an analysis of this notion from two other perspectives - firstly, in a way generally espoused by historians of religions, offering a formal description of evil as presented in the Sikh scriptures, and secondly, a view of evil from the more strictly anthropological perspective which demonstrates how the notion of evil is understood in a life-context. The first of these comments is from a timeless perspective of texts and the second from the rather timeless perspective of ethnography. Both dimensions find a place in the historical analysis which has already been initiated and a final comment on which will conclude this chapter.

Allusion has already been made to the spirituality to which guru Nanak was heir, this Sant tradition of North India, which rejected Brahmanic tradition in both scripture and ritual much as Gautama Buddha had done some two thousand year before, provided the all pervasive ethos out of which the devotional piety of Sikh religiosity was to emerge. The Sants , and in this too they resemble Gautama, rejected Sanskrit and used the colloquial languages for teaching their interested followers who were largely of rural, low caste status rather than the more urban elite group which constituted early Buddhism.[1] The Sants, and Kabir is often cited as an example of this outlook, insisted upon the freedom of the individual to grasp, through methods of devotion and meditation, the sense of a god who was nirguna, without attributes,

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1.   Ling, Trevor.   1973:59 ff.

but who could be experienced directly through an intuitive
love relationship grounded in meditative devotionalism. One
of the great facts of love, as the reflective knowledge
resulting from this union might be called, was that god was
but seldom truly found by men. The nirguna sampradaya
or Sant tradition , and after it the Sikh tradition, came to
possess what might be called a negative evaluation of ordinary
life, or at least of ordinary states of consciousness. Most men
were regarded as existing in an undesirable fashion -not only
the masses who paid but little attention to god but also the
priests and supposed religious virtuosi of Hinduism and Islam.[1]
Nanak's religion thus involved a radical critique of established
religion and advocated a path to salvation which depended more
upon the subjective state of a man than upon his social status.
In this too he resembles the Buddha's teaching. The one who
truly knows Brahm is the Brahman. Mere caste membership is not
to be relied upon.[2] Indeed, the Vedas themselves contribute but
illusion to the one not truly given to the inner praise of the Lord .[3]

In general terms the Sikh view of evil follows the broad
Indian notion of maya, and regards man as existing within a form
of consciousness which represented things as they appear to be
and not things as they really are.The best way of portraying this
phenomenon is by describing the way in which the self is related
to other entities. In other words, a relational mode of explanation

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* 1.   Adi Granth.   Siri Rag; mahala 111.1.Ghar.111.XXXV1. 3. (p.42).
2.   ..   .. V1. XX11   8. (p.94).
3.   ..   Gauri;   ..   1V.XX11.   1. (p.333).

* Bracket references to Ernest Trumpp's translation of 1877.

is best suited to a phenomenon which is itself concerned with qualities of relations between things. The self in Sikh though is called the man. This is the centre of individuality and includes both the dimension of thinking and of feeling and motivation: it cannot be divided into distinct cognitive and affective aspects.[1] What is more it cannot be defined in and of itself, but must always be seen in terms of that to which it is related. Accordingly mankind may be divided into two categories depending upon the object to which consciousness or the man is directed. The majority may be described as manmukh and are directed towards themselves in an attitude of self-will, self-love and pride. In this condition an individual may be said to be under the influence of haumai, a concept closely related to that of maya in Sikh religion.[2] It describes that condition which exists when the man is directed to objects and goals other than the ultimate and transcendent god or guru. It is the normal and usual condition of life in which most men live most of the time. As a state of life it is to be contrasted with that condition which comes into existence when the individual undergoes a change of attitude, in which the man becomes focused upon the true guru, and is said to be gurmukh . This transformation involves a reorientation to the world itself.

For Sikhism the world is not mayic in the sense that it is total illusion. It certainly exists as a reality to be dealt

1.   Adi Granth. Majh; mahala 111. XX111.XX1V.   7.(p.174).
2.   ..   Siri;   ..   1. X1V.   1.(p.29).

with but the view of it held by the manmukh person is
inaccurate and false, and only by a transformation into
a gurmukh status does a true perspective upon reality
emerge. The deceived manmukh individual becomes gurmukh
by means of disiplined meditation and the dwelling upon
the name of the true guru. In practical terms this means the
recitation of the words of the scriptures, but in the early period
of Sikh history before the compilation of the Adi Granth it
meant singing the compilations of the gurus themselves. Such
recitation is both private and public, and the public form is
particularly important since the sense of corporate fellowship
in pursuit of the divine union has been a central component of
Sikh spirituality from the earliest times. But the disciplined
activity of the devotee will not ensure freedom from haumai
unless the true guru, or god himself, admits the seeker into
the realm and court of his presence by an act of benevolent
incorporation. This notion of the grace of the guru, or
gurprashad , is central to Sikh notions of salvation, and
reinforces the point already made concerning the relational
nature of self-identity in the process of spiritual advance.

In classical Sikh thought those things are evil which
prevent meditation on the true name and which hinder that
divine union which in Sikhism, as in all bhakti religiosity,
is the ultimate goal of man. In one sense it is inappropriate
to refer to such hindrances, or indeed to any problem area,
as constituting a 'problem of evil' in Sikh thought, for that

phrase possesses such a specific meaning within Christian theology, particularly so since there is nothing which could be called a problem of theodicy in the strict sense as far as Sikhs are concerned. Responsibility for evil is firmly identified with men even though the very world of illusion in which they live is regarded as being part of the divine play and intention. It is for the individual to discover within himself the yearning after the Lord, and to set about finding that blessed union which the Lord will himself be pleased to consummate. It is quite improper to import as a hermeneutical device the Christian issue of whether salvation results from the labours of the disciple, or whether it is the free and unconditioned act of the guru. It is much more appropriate to see the issue in terms of a feedback or mutual interaction between the parties. So it is that Sikh thought does not recognize the category of natural evil, and in order to account for natural catastrophe , illness, death and misfortune, recourse is taken to the notion of karma - that cosmic process of merit accumulation or loss by which men receive in any one existence and life that which accrues to them from the experience of former lives. But Sikh religious thought does not simply hold to this rather impersonal model of causation, for it employs the idea of the divine will or hukam which introduces the element of freedom on the part of the true guru or god in his relation with men. In this respect Sikh thought follows Islamic rather than Hindu traditions, and probably marks the Sufi influence upon Guru Nanak and his successors.

The apparent evil which befalls man is thus to be understood both in terms of the dessert of the individual and of the will of god for him. In analytical terms it could be said that the personification of causation, whether in terms of good or evil, might be expected within essentially devotional traditions. Unlike the more logical schemes of Vedanta where personalized conceptions of deity are undervalued, the bhakti traditions operate on a model of relationships rather than one of conceptualizations. This being so it is perfectly natural for the Sikh tradition to speak of divine knowledge in human destiny. Whatever form evil takes, be it natural disaster, illness or moral evil, the ultimate Sikh recourse is to consciousness, and to the application of that mental intention to the words of the true guru. This characteristic response leads to a corresponding lack of interest in theories of material reality so that, for example, no theory of creation has been generated to any significant extent. Similarly it is not possible to talk of doctrines of creation and salvation in Sikh religion as in Christian theology. What Sikh thought does is to offer a practical solution to the implausibility of the life-world,through meditation and the focusing of life on god. The outcome of this is sahaj, or the psychological and spiritual fruit of union with the divine. To a person so settled in an awareness of the true guru, who is gurmukh, all circumstances can be borne with equipoise. What is required is such a transformation of the self that its view of adverse circumstances is altered in such a way that the

ultimate demands of being of god take the preëminence.

Again the main factor is the quality of relationship obtaining

in the partners involved in the act of perception. Perhaps the

simplest way to understand the nature of both good and evil

as it affects men is to specify the quality inhering in each

partner as they are related now in a context regarded as evil,

and now in one which is essentially soteriological.This clumsy

form of expression may be better understood through an example

which might be drawn from Christian theology. Faith on the part of

the Christian may be said to correspond to grace on the part of

God; they are attributes similar in kind and serving a particular

end. So too there are qualities of relationship in Sikh thought

both as far as evil and the saved state are concerned.

It is necessary to preface a further comment on _maya_

in this way because of the apparently paradoxical element in it

which locates _maya_ within the province of activity of god himself.

As W.H. McLeod says, 'maya is, of course, the work of God, for

it consists in the creation and is inseparable from it' ; but when

he goes on to add that 'even evil is from God and is to be regarded

as an aspect of man's opportunity', he slips into the essentialist

kind of definition which is ill-suited to an understanding of what

Sikh thought is striving to express.[1] The doctrine of _maya_ and its

cognate _haumai_ might be said to be a definition after the event,

in the sense that the essentially negative evaluation of the world

which it advances follows from the changed perspective of the one

who has achieved the enlightened union with god. This means that

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1. McLeod, W.H. 1968:187.

haumai in the individual life and maya in the world itself comprise a matching pair of evil categories which contrast with the positive categories of man as released from haumai and god perceived as entirely good and gracious. This last pair of categories is normally referred to only as the fact that the individual is gurmukh, in other words it emphasizes the union existing between the two partners. If the first pair is also seen in this relational way then the question of how god initiates maya never arises. Indeed so to phrase the point is to express the ethnocentricity of a Christian theology rather than truly to reflect the manner in which the Sikh scriptures portray the problem. That there are verses which assert that 'the infatuation of maya is made by the Lord' cannot be denied, but the whole context in which they are used shows that the question is not understood in terms of aetiology, and there is no developed issue of theodicy as a result.[1] That the world is deluded, infatuated, and encircled by maya is but one way of expressing the fact that individual men are themselves captive to haumai which is a kind of thirst, filth, and passion of the self.[2] The Sikh concern is always with the necessity of exchanging one set of these conditions for the other, rather than on seeking to explain the nature and origin of evil, or even of good.

This account of evil and salvation constitutes a classic expression of the way historians of religion approach religious phenomena. Many more texts and authorities could be cited to

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1. Adi Granth. Siri Rag; mahala lll. V. XXll. 1. (p.93).
2. .. .. .. V.XXXVlll.1.(p.43).
   Vll. XL. 1. (p.44).

demonstrate the formal system of thought underlying Sikh

notions of religious values, but these few will suffice. While

this kind of study is perfectly acceptable in itself it goes

only part of the way as far as a full understanding of evil

in Sikh religion is concerned. This is so because the phrase

'Sikh religion' embraces more than the texts and formal

explanations provided of them by Sikh scholars. So, in

accordance with the methodological arguments advanced earlier,

it is wise to give some account of the phenomenon of evil at a

more pragmatic level if any balanced description of the reality

of Sikh religion is to be forthcoming.

In 1974 P.S.Jammu published one of the first

anthropological studies of what might be called village Sikhism,

in the Journal of Religious Studies of the University of Patiala

in the Punjab. Both the content of that study and the identity of

the publishers are important facts in the history of Sikh religion

inasmuch as they herald an acknowledgement that Sikh religion

exists not only as some ideal form of religiosity, but as a rather

mixed practical religion. The influence exerted by respected Sikhs

on this act of publishing may be viewed as a significant step in

the direction of a more critical self-evaluation of the religion as

it is as opposed to what it is often said to be. The interesting

fact about Jammu's 'Religion in a Malwa Village', at least as far

as the present argument is concerned, is that while it is not

explicitly directed to the issue of evil as such, it still

possesses numerous references to evil phenomena.[1] In fact the

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1.   Jammu, P.S.   1974.

article could have been written with that as its focal point, or so its content would suggest. What this fact illustrates is that a study which set out to document a village religiosity could not avoid the people's concern with practical perceptions of evil.

The kinds of rituals referred to might be broadly classified into three major groups, with each reflecting a distinctive life-concern with evil defined in terms of implausibility. The first concerns death and the welfare of the deceased soul. After the death of elderly persons a week long reading of the Granth Sahib takes place, but after the death of childless or single persons -whose remains are buried under a tree- offerings are made to the dead by women.These rites of saptahik path, the recital of scripture, and marhi lippna, or the offerings, both serve to aid the progress of the dead and to protect the living from any evil influence exerted by the departed. The second group of rites relate to human well-being, this time in the form of avoiding illness. Here the rite of offerings made to the female deities serves to protect women from chhaya or possession by spirits, while that paid to gugga the snake deity serves to guard against snake-bites. The third and last group of rites concerns animal welfare and aspects of husbandry, factors which obviously relate to human success. The basarias rite, for example, is performed by women in offerings made to female deities for the health of cattle and for good milk yields. Other rituals which are not so much concerned with the above categories but which are directed more specifically at human

relations with spirits and spirit power also occur. Jammu briefly
mentions the <u>tara lahuna</u> and <u>sive jagauna</u> rites but unfortunately
does not provide sufficiently detailed ethnographic data to make
any real analysis possible. It must suffice to say that the latter
rite uses mantra chanting, a form of activity used in many Sikh
contexts,and which shows the dominant symbolic role of verbal
ritual in Sikh culture. This is largely due to the high evaluation
placed upon the sacred scriptures and the reading of them in
Sikh religion which, in turn, reflects the earlier respect paid
to Vedic scriptures. The precise extent to which Islamic emphasis
upon the Quran has affected such forms of rural Sikhism is hard
to assess, yet it can hardly be of an insignificant nature.

Another issue which anthropological study has brought to
light in the Punjab, but which bears no obvious relation to
classical and scriptural Sikhism, is that of ritual purity in
social relations between the sexes. Without developing Paul
Hershman's good ethnographic analysis mention should be made
of the two basic ideas he identifies as underlying Punjabi moral
and social values - firstly, that man is essentially pure while
woman is impure. The concept of impurity arises largely from the
physiological processes of intercourse, menstruation, birth and
lactation. Secondly, that fertility is a dominant concern of
Punjabis since it is only through birth that a woman becomes a
mother and achieves full status as a member·of society.[1]

What both these ethnographic studies clearly demonstrate
is the distance which might be said to exist between the formal,
doctrinal ideas of Sikh religion - as expressed in the systematic

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1.   Hershman, P.   In Ioan Lewis, Ed.   1977.

expositions of Sikhism- and that form of the religion which is
actually practised by members. This reinforces the point that
any satisfactory analysis of a religion ought to consider both
the classic and folk aspects of religiosity, for either taken
alone presents only a partial picture of the reality as it is.
That there should be a complex relationship between the formal
and pragmatic dimensions of religions is not surprising, but
that either one of these aspects should be omitted from
comprehensive studies can only be regretted in terms of
hermeneutics whether in the history or phenomenology of religions.
The abiding fact is that religions are historical phenomena, and
where that history is known then it must be incorporated into any
study so that the formal definition of the theological system,
which has usually emerged under specific historical conditions,
can be related to contemporary religious structures. It is
precisely because many preliterate societies did not possess
any documentary or archaeological history that their religions
were studied in a fundamentally different way from that which held
for the established and historic faiths.

What the historical study of Sikh religion shows is that its
emergence among a relatively small group of devotees of devotional
persuasion in fifteenth century Punjab led, after some two hundred
years, to a militaristic and relatively distinct cultural group which
may now be identified as the Sikh community. The implications of this
transformation are many and various, but one of the important issues
emerging from it concerns the change in the doctrine of evil which
accompanied the social transformations.

The essentially new element which entered Sikh thought as a result of the seventeenth century hostilities was that of the identifiable community. To say that it was essentially novel is to comment more on the qualitative nature of the group's self-identity than upon the existence of a group as such, for from the earliest days the gurus had possessed bands of devoted followers. But the very experience of aggression served to forge a sense of identity which had not obtained before and which in later years was to grow even stronger through events like the partition of the Punjab in the nineteen forties. Because of these changed social conditions the older Sant notions of evil expressed as haumai must be complemented by reference to the important fact that evil, again viewed as structures of implausibility, came to assume different meanings as the Sikh community grew and as political pressures were applied to it. This might be expressed in terms of the evil of oppression and the resulting response of desired freedom from such restraints. Accordingly, consideration must be given to the role of membership in the khalsa , to the potential evil in the sense of political aggression which this involved, and also to the responsibilities attendant upon such membership, if any sense is to be made of the relation of evil to salvation in later Sikh history. A useful way of doing this is by considering the question of ethics in the life of the Sikh community.

The emergence of the expanded Sikh community in eighteenth century Punjab led to an unprecedented interest in the question of social order, welfare, and ethics. One of the best exemples of this being furnished by the Prem Sumarag, a document written by a near contemporary of Gobind Singh and attributed to him. It outlines a

theory of society and social order applicable to, and needful for a Sikh state and, as J.S. Grewal has pointed out, its prologue seeks to encourage the khalsa in the defence of Sikh religion and resistance to external hostilities.[1] The treatise includes the moral duties of Sikhs, their attitude to those of other groups, to women and to caste, all of which are concerns indicating the dominant interests of a group gaining autonomy of political and social power, while also experiencing a far reaching search for self-identity. Nevertheless it was not until Ranjit Singh assumed power as Maharaja of the Punjab in 1801 that such ideals could find practical expression within an established and extensive Sikh community, for he supervised the development of a nation state from disparate groups of Sikhs. This newly ordered community in which the Maharaja maintained close relations with the ordinary people through the style of life he adopted, was thought of as built upon an authority vested not in Ranjit Singh's intrinsic power of conquest, but in the fact that he had been chosen by the panth khalsaji , or the venerable Sikh congregation itself, and acting upon divine principles of decision making. All of this is somewhat far removed from the simple sangat , or small groups of disciples surrounding guru Nanak and singing the divine praises which conferred enlightenment. This emergent society provided the basis of all future Punjabi political thought as well as the moral code of the individual Sikh to which it will be necessary to return later when discussing the notion of Sikh identity and the process of mission to the community.

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1.   Grewal, J. S.   1965.

In the light of this brief historical analysis it is possible to see that the Sikh internal observer model of soldier and saint can also be usefully employed by the non-Sikh student of the religion. Not only can this model serve, in its divided form of saint and soldier motifs, as an ideal typical expression of particular historical periods - with the saint element portraying the first five gurus and their disciples' style of life, and the soldier element the last five, with Nanak and Gobind Singh providing pivotal models of each type- but they may also be seen to express aspects of contemporary Sikhism. What is more significant as far as the present discussion is concerned is that they may be evaluated in terms of the notions of salvation implicit in each of them, ideas which are themselves not very closely related. In terms of the history of religions this is a point of some importance for it indicates how an idea of salvation can be subject to change under the influence of altered social conditions, conditions which ought not to be thought of as purely external influences. In the case of Sikhism such would be Mughal hostility or the earlier influence of Sufism, but as including internal factors which are the product of the change in structure of the institution itself. Thus the large number of Jat peasant farmers entering the guru's band during the late sixteenth and especially during the late seventeenth century resulted in a positive emphasis upon a more militant attitude and, ultimately, contributed to the emergence of an ethnic Sikh community. Once a movement attains such a status involving a fixed geographical homeland which can easily become the basis of a definite subculture then its interest in political activity is assured. In one most

significant sense this is what occurred in the Punjab, and it
heralded a quite new departure in Sikh history inasmuch as it
necessitated political involvement in social relations with other
subcultural groups as well as in its own future planning. This
meant that 'religion' which, for the early saint gurus and
Sikhs , was an endeavour carried out while one lived one's
life in the workaday world now became inextricably associated
with that world. In other words, the saint model of religiosity
presupposed a life-world within which the individual sets his
mind on gaining intuitive knowledge of God, while the soldier
model united that religious quest with the ordinary pressures
of daily life, including its political dimension. In the first
case religion and society are rather distinct entities, while in
the latter they merge together.

As far as the notion of salvation is concerned the most
significant difference between these types is to be found in
the fact that whereas the earlier tradition had presupposed a
personal commitment to the living guru, who taught as much
by his presence as much as by his actual words, it now involved
the individual as a member of an established social institution
which itself possessed goals other than the specifically pietistic
and supernatural. While it would not be completely true to say
that religious status in the former system was achieved while in the
latter it was ascribed, such as assertion would nevertheless be
suggestive of the way in which the notion of salvation was
developing in the emergent ethnic group of Sikh Punjabis.

This point must be made cautiously because it could be argued that both the saint and soldier models exist in contemporary Sikhism, and that they provide the parameters for religious and social action. It could also be said that they function as ideal types even for those who do not act upon them. So it is that contemporary ideas of salvation are related to earlier ones but with the addition of significant new dimensions born out of the social history of Sikh society. The dual nature of the contemporary Sikh ideal is clearly expressed in Punjabi gurudwaras or temples, especially the larger ones which serve as major religious centres. There the presence of armed attendants at the entrance represents the soldier motif whereas the granthis who read the sacred book represent the saint ideal. The ritual of initiation also presents a dramatic lesson to the young, with the five members of the khalsa who serve as initiators representing the historical first five members of the khalsa and incarnating the soldierly ideal. But at the same time the centrality of the sacred book draws attention to the devotional and saintly life of the Sikhs. It would thus appear that Sikhs have a choice which is always readily available to them and which is able to provide legitimation for different kinds of life activity. Political engagements, for example, can readily be validated by means of the soldier theme and in the politics of the Punjab this is done. Similarly in Britain and other peripheral areas problems of community identity, especially when related to opposition from the dominant non-Sikh culture, are readily couched in terms of military aggression. But at the same time these political

endeavours cannot be divorced from a religious meaning, for
they are often interpreted as the means of maintaining Sikh
cultural values, and thereby the truth of the sacred guru
teaching. In terms of popular Sikhism, for example, Gobind
Singh stands as the perfect guru and as the model for
imitation in every Sikh's life. Nowhere is this better seen
than in the literature produced for Sikh children in Britain.
In one of the best known little books published by the British
Sikh Missionary Society entitled The Saint-Soldier there is
an explicit identification made between the two priciples.
'Like Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh attached the utmost
importance to purity of life; but on a level with it he
placed brave deeds and devotion to the Sikh cause. There was no
higher duty for a Sikh than to die fighting in the defence of
his faith'.[1] Large pictures of Guru Gobind Singh are often found
in Sikh homes, and the values enshrined in them inform many
Sikhs in their sense of social responsibility. It might be said
that the pool of potential orientations of a religion is largely
constituted by the person of Gobind Singh as far as Sikh
religiosity is concerned. This source provides a ready supply
of differently emphasized doctrines which can be selectively
utilized as occasion demands. Political activism, community
concern, devotion to parents, love of the khalsa, sincerity, as
well as learning and knowledge, are all said to be found in Gobind
Singh's life. Indeed the children's book furnishes some hundred and
twenty six adjectives are provided as apt descriptions of this Guru.

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1.   Sidhu, G.S. et. al. 1974:56.

This discussion has thus demonstrated that the structures of implausibility which predominated in early Sikh tradition were those of wrong consciousness, and similarly that the process of salvation lay in gaining release from the illusion of self-will through meditation on the words of the guru. The company of disciples which constituted the institutional plausibility structure was merely a means of fostering the company of the guru and striving to attain the blessed state of union with God . The growth of the khalsa as a military power and then as an ethnic community brought about significant changes in this scheme so that evil came to represent not only the darkness of the mind but also the very existence of enemies who challenged the Sikh community. The various verses composed by Gobind Singh attest to this and address God as the sword who smites the enemy.[1] The notion of salvation thus experienced a shift in meaning and came to embrace a social dimension of group membership. In order to develop the implications of this assertion as far as plausibility theory is concerned it will be useful to consider the growth of the Sikh community in Britain, and to show how the notions of evil and salvation depend for their meaning upon the precise context of their usage. In particular it will be instructive to show that these notions bear special connotations as products of ethnic religions. In order to show the theoretical importance of such issues another and rather different case of ethnic religiosity will be drawn upon , that of Mormonism.Both will now be analysed by means of the phenomenological category of mission to make even clearer the meaning of salvation and evil understood in terms of a general paradigm of meaning.

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1. Radhakrishnan, S. 1960:270.

Chapter Eight   Identity and Mission in Sikh and Mormon Soteriology.

In this chapter we provide another example of how the idea of salvation varies according to the way in which evil is understood. But at the same time we develop the paradigm of meaning by showing how the important concept of identity is itself an aspect of the process of plausibility generation. Identity is the personalized aspect of plausibility, it provides the basis for individual legitimation and is thus inextricably associated with the state of salvation as we have defined it. Philosophically speaking one could say that identity is to ontological questions what plausibility is to epistemological ones.

Here we are investigating the ontological issues associated with membership in ethnic religious groups on the assumption that such groups are not unlike the closed societies of a preliterate nature. The concept of mission is explored to see how it can be related to the phenomenon of salvation in such groups, and in particular to see how it can be understood as a way of describing religious groups as systems of communication. Here we adopt both a historical and phenomenological perspective on Sikh and Mormon religions and utilize an anthropological concept, that of rank concession, to show that despite apparent differences between the groups very similar processes are at work in them which can best be interpreted through a general paradigm of meaning.

Despite the apparent differences between Sikh and Mormon religions in terms of their Eastern and Western origins their phenomenological similarities are striking. Each possesses an

identifiable charismatic leader, guru Nanak and the prophet
Joseph Smith; distinctive geographical centres in Punjab and
Utah serving as foci of subcultures, at the heart of which
exist important temples, at Amritsar and Salt Lake City. Both
possess sets of scripture believed to have come directly from
god and lacking any error due to scribal transmission -the Guru
Granth Sahib and the Book of Mormon. Both were founded movements
emerging in periods of religious zeal and have manifested
considerable change in prectice and belief during the five
hundred year life period of Sikhism and the less than two
hundred year duration of Mormonism. Other similarities will
now be considered as each religion is considered in some more
detail, and with particular regard to the phenomenon of mission
and ethnic salvation.

Mormon Mission

Conceived during the religious revivalism of New York
State in the eighteen twenties, and officially born in eighteen
thirty, this religious movement reflected the book-based
millennial ideals of several protestant parents as well as the
notion of priestly status, authority, and church structure of
Roman Catholic origin (for that church too was engaged in active
revivalist work on the American Frontier).[1] Not the least significant
family resemblance was that with American Freemasonry whose
initiatory ritual provided the basis for Mormon temple ritual at a
later date. For Joseph Smith and his successors these foundations

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1. Dolan, J.P. 1978.

of belief constituted the rationale for mission. The basic
proclamation involved the necessity of emigration to a place
appointed by the Lord for his imminent return to America. Temples
were built wherever the Mormon community happened to reside, and
as they were driven out by local popular opposition they built
new ones until they finally arrived in the relative security of
the Salt Lake Valley. These temples served as foci of the
adventist hope, and can be interpreted in terms of the idea of
sacred space which was intimately associated with sacred time.
During the last decade of the nineteenth century the Mormon mission ,
which had been established in Europe from about eighteen forty,
was producing far fewer converts, and of these fewer still actually
emigrated to the American Zion. The great stream of Scandinavian
and British converts which had largely populated Utah had now become
a mere trickle. I have shown elswhere how the doctrine of an imminent
return of Christ now began to be less influential at the same time
as many of the economic and social ills which had influenced many
a doubting convert to emigrate also declined in number and intensity.[1]
Some few Saints maintained a languishing Mormon community in Europe
but it was scattered and disorganized. The first great mission period
was over, but it had produced a flourishing Mormon sub-culture in Utah.

This picture remained largely unchanged until after the
second world war when a new mission programme, instituted as early
as nineteen thirty, was implemented by the sending out of pairs of
young missionaries to serve two year periods of evangelism in many
parts of the world. During the first quarter of the new century some

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1.   Davies, D.J.   1973.

central aspects of the millennial doctrine had changed so that the divine kingdom was no longer expected to descend from the heavens, but would emerge as the church extended its institutionalized structure accross the world. As a result of this the message preached by the missionaries was very different in effect from that of their nineteenth century counterparts. Converts were encouraged to remain in their homeland, there to establish holy Zion. The subsequent building of temples in Europe, New Zealand and elsewhere symbolized the shift in significance of the notion of Zion, for they represented the sacred space of Utah's Zion now located accross the world in the midst of the world's evil. In them the faithful received rituals which were of soteriological power having been performed by the Melchisedek priests.

Not only did this new mission venture result in revivifying the languishing Mormon communities and in creating new ones, but it also contributed most significantly to a revitalization of Utah Mormonism, inasmuch as the mission period served a kind of reflexive purpose in converting the missionaries themselves, in an affective way, to the very doctrines they preached to the so-called Gentiles. Many of these young missionaries came from rural Utah townships and could be called nominal Mormons who, through the process of mission and its attendant experience of opposition from those canvassed, as well as the equally psychologically reinforcing experience of seeing people come to faith, become convinced and converted Mormons. There, in turn, provided many of the personnel for the central church bureaucracy

and were totally convinced of the necessity of the mission period for the youth of the church.

The mission period thus served a major function in the process of creating a self-identity among the missionaries themselves, and this was inextricably associated with the phenomenon of salvation. It was often through this mission work that young people entered into a sense of the truth of their religion in an affective as well as an intellectual way. More than this, the mission period has served to establish the identity of the whole church as a missionary minded body. In 1978, for example, some 2,000 missionaries were operating in Britain with its Mormon population of 104,000 while accross the world there were 26,000 missionaries in the total church population of 4,000,000.

The phenomenon of mission in the Mormon religion can usefully be approached by considering the individual missionary as a phenomenological category. He or she, viewed as an ideal type, may be regarded in Victor Turner's phrase as a polysemic symbol, one which which expresses a series of meanings at different levels of abstraction and in different contexts.[1] At the family level the missionary represents the ideal son or daughter who puts the concerns of the gospel before any personal considerations in completing the two year period away from home. On returning home marriage tends to follow quite quickly and the young person assumes the status of husband and father, one highly desired by his own parents. The mission period is thought to prepare people for

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1. Turner, Victor. 1967.

marriage in the sense that it aids personality development
through the experience of bearing church responsibilities.
This experience also serves as preparation for office in the
home church, so the missionary bears a powerful meaning as a
potential leader in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy.
Not only at the ecclesiastical level but also in historical
terms the missionary expresses a basic aspect of the church;
for he manifests an activity (that of proselytizing) which has
been a major endeavour of Mormons from the beginning. This
traditional aspect has the further twist of significance in
that it represents a kind of reverse emigration, for whereas
their ancestors may have come from Britain to Utah it is to
these native shores that the missionaries now return to propagate
their message. In one sense, then, this activity is a kind of
pilgrimage for the young person.

In and through these levels of meaning the missionary
demonstrates the nature of Mormon spirituality. He may indeed
be viewed as an expression of what the idea of Homo religiosus
can mean for Mormons. This is especially true in mission areas
where the missionary is more socially visible and plays a larger
part in the running of services than he would in established areas
of the faith. Even in terms of body symbolism it could be said
that the well-groomed missionary manifests the submission to
the structured doctrine and authority of the church which
guarantees salvation to those who, likewise, will adopt that
identity which involves faithful acceptance of the church and its
'ordinances'. The identity of being a Mormon is much more specific

than of merely being a Christian. That aspect of sectarianism deemed to be exclusivist is fully operative in this case, for the revelation deposited in the church is quite unique and thought to be necessary for final salvation. To be saved in the eternal world involves being identified as a Mormon in the temporal world of temple ritual and ordinary social life. Enough has been said here to show that the sense of meaning which constitutes Mormon status cannot be divorced from the Mission process which involves a distinct sense of identity in terms of belonging to an exclusive group possessing access to a unique body of truth. It can thus be argued that the message and the messenger bear a particularly close relation to each other, so truth and self-identity are concepts which are inextricably linked in the entire scheme of salvation.

The nature of mission is determined to a large extent by the precise message and by the sense of self-identity obtaining among those propagating it. The phenomenologist needs to pay particular attention to the content of the message and to its means of propagation as well as to changes which take place in both areas. Having already shown how Mormon doctrine on 'the last things' changed we may now go on to analyse processes of mission by means of a communication theory, or in other words, by viewing those engaged in mission and their message as units being exchanged between partners. Indeed the way the various partners in mission are identified directs the kind of communication event they deem appropriate. The Mormon case quickly established

itself on an in-group, out-group basis of Saint and Gentile.
Initially at least this relationship was accompanied by aggression
and hostility as the Saints sought converts and as they migrated
to Utah. The Sikh example resembles this Mormon case in several
respects and it will be as well to document these before presenting
a final analysis of both religions.

Sikh Mission.

As in the case of Mormons, the Sikhs have also engaged
in a variety of relations with their geographical neighbours
during the course of their history to date. Some of these can
be interpreted in terms of the notion of mission, and more
particularly in terms of mission as an aspect of the development
of a self identity.

The social context of medieval Punjab was very different
from that of frontier America. The nirguna sampradaya or Sant
tradition which W.H. McLeod has done much to establish as the
basic soil from which Sikh religion emerged was certainly not
millennialist; the focus was upon the individual grasp of the
one god in an intuitive love-grace union.[1] If the activity of
guru Nanak is categorized as a form of mission then it ought
to be identified more as the mission of mystic necessity to express
a deeply located experience of god than as a vital proclamation to
be rapidly conveyed to men for their response and salvation. The
very notions of karma and samsara rather than the Christian notion
of one life after which comes judgement, introduces a significant
difference to the process and to the study of the logic of mission.

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1.   McLeod, W.H.   1968:151 ff.

In practical terms Nanak's mission led to the formation
of a group of seekers whose fellowship constituted the context
of religious experience of the divine. Whether his religion
would have become the birthright of an entire sub-culture solely
on the ethos and teaching of Nanak is questionable. What is
historically sure is that after the fifth Nanak, guru Arjun, and
the rapid growth in numbers of the guru movement due to the
incursion of large numbers of Jats its religious aspect could
no longer be separated from political issues of Moghul power
and Punjabi interests. By the time of the eighth, ninth and
tenth gurus, and especially after the formal establishment
of the khalsa warrior community in 1699, the message of the
gurus is as much a group demarcator of Punjabi culture as it was
a ship in which, by God's grace, the terrible ocean of existence
might be traversed. This brief background is necessary for
understanding the major aspects of Sikh mission to which we now
turn.

The trickle of emigrant Punjabis leaving India during the
British Empire period increased somewhat after the second world
war as single men, or married men without spouses made their way
to America, Britain, Canada and parts of East Africa. Seeking
the patronage of the host community in terms of jobs many
abandoned the turban, long hair and beards. Few gurudwaras
existed, but since weekly attendance at them was hardly an
established custom in the Punjab the British pattern of non-
attendance was hardly significant in evaluating changes in religiosity.

Despite the difficulties surrounding any attempt to categorize periods of history, the later nineteen sixties may be identified as one which marked a change in Sikh religion outside the Punjab, and especially in Britain. To a large extent this was due to the immigration of Sikh women and children coming to join their husbands who had arrived earlier. The immigration statistics for Indians, the majority of whom were Sikhs, demonstrate this change with the increased numbers of the mid-sixties representing incoming families of resident immigrants.[1] This period resulted in the establishment of Sikh homes which replaced the earlier and utilitarian 'dormitory' use of houses for workers. This demographic change resulted in an increase of Sikh social visibility, and resulted in a renewed sense of group identity. Indedd it was this factor which was so important in the apparently minor debate as to whether Sikhs should be forced to wear crash-helmets for driving in place of the customary turban which men were, by now, wearing more than previously.

At the same time growing numbers of <u>gurudwaras</u> provided centres of worship, instruction and political activity. They served as important community centres for the largely Punjabi speaking and tradition bearing womenfolk. These also found in them the therapy of a home-land institution amidst the potentially confusing new reality of urban Britain. The Sikh Missionary

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1. Number of Indian Immigrants coming to Britain.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1958	6,200	1965	18,800.
1959	2,900	1966	18,400.
1960	5,900	1967	22,600.
1961	23,800	1968	28,300.
1962	21,100	1969	12,300.
1963	1,800	1970	8,400.
1964	15,500	1971	6,600.

Society in Britain, founded in 1969, may serve as a clear expression of this new zeal for Sikh values and culture, and which resulted in language classes for the children as well as a growth of literature aimed at conveying the richness of the cultural heritage. This institution and others like the Sikh Research Centre of Canada, which was also founded in 1969, came to function as agencies of social solidarity and applied themselves to the question of how the Sikh teaching could be expressed in western, urban, contexts. The Sikh Students' Federation of Britain, for example, which was established in 1977 has taken up the issues of caste status, the elimination of marriage of convenience for immigration purposes as well as party divisions among Sikhs.

In all these issues the community is clearly the focus of concern, and it is just this self-directed factor which offers the clearest distinction between Mormon and Sikh notions of mission, understood as the planned diffusion of religion.[1] Theoretically it might be said that the focus and the object of the message are different in one important respect, namely, that while for Mormons the missionary is the focus and the gentile community of unbelievers is the object of the teaching, for the Sikhs the khalsa is both the focus and object of the guru teaching. In other words a relatively small number of dedicated Sikhs have sought to maintain their religion and culture amongst the larger number of resident immigrants. In addition to this direct service to the Sikh

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1. Heise, David. 1967.

community in an attempt to maintain it as a community with distinctive features of language and religion, there is what might be called an indirect service which members can provide through their relations with non-Sikhs, and that is by attempting to establish the status or identity of the khalsa in the eyes of the host population. In this aspect of mission there is no attempt to make converts to the religion - indeed, most Sikhs deny any intention of so doing. What is more, the very notion of a convert is difficult to handle in Sikh religious terms since Sikh life presupposes to a very large extent membership in Punjabi culture. A positive discontinuity in cultural attachment is involved in conversion as is aptly demonstrated by some American converts who have adopted Punjabi dress and language. This reference to white American Sikhs leads naturally to the second major aspect of Sikh mission, namely mission to non-Indians.

While only a few Britons have converted to Sikh religion America has seen a more substantial interest shown in the guru teaching, as might be expected in the wake of interest in eastern thought associated with the counter-cultural attitudes of the nineteen sixties. The establishment of Sikh Dharma, a religious movement grounded in the guru teaching and meditative practice, indicates this interest while also demonstrating some interesting features of American religiosity as such.[1] For example, one aspect of the rationale underlying the creation of Sikh Dharma in America was the belief that Punjabi Sikhism was

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1. The movement 'Sikh Dharma in America' publishes a magazine entitled 'Beads of Truth'.

entering a decadent phase under the impact of western materialism, and that just as Buddhism had emerged and virtually vanished in India to be continued elsewhere, so would Sikh religion vanish and reappear elsewhere. The American championing of the Sikh tradition made of it something quite new. On the one hand it produced yet one more religious group for people to choose if they wished. This exemplifies the denominationalizing tendency of American religion. On the other hand, it sought to cavass members from among unbelievers, a practice which conflicts with the more usual Punjabi reflectiveness in the religious life. But these are only aspects of a much broader and more significant issue, that of the relation between the idea of mission and that of ethnic religiosity. To this topic we now finally turn because it raises in another form the question of salvation as a state of sufficiency of plausibility grounded in a clearly identified group.

No historian of religion would ever think of discussion the notion of mission with respect to a primitive society and its indigenous religion, yet in many ways that kind of relatively closed society with its group related and restricted religiosity resembles groups which are normally viewed as ethnic communities but which are neither preliterate nor remote. While some of these ethnic groups are also not generally regarded as mission minded, as in the case of Judaism and also largely in Hinduism, there can be cases of ethnic mission. Both Mormonism and Sikhism offer interesting examples of what might be called mission processes, though some care is required in the way in which the term mission is used in each case.

When religion is one aspect of a total culture religious status and social status tend to be coterminous. It is for this reason that Judaism is as non-conversionist as Punjabi Sikhism, rural Utah Mormonism, or parochial Anglicanism. Conversionist movements presume that the world in which most men live is other than it should be. There is, in other words, a fundamental judgement served upon the generally accepted life-world, and this perspective is essentially different from that of ethnic religions which validate the way things are. Notwithstanding this difference, there remains an underlying similarity in the concern for meaning and the creation of a sense of identity in both types of religiosity. This fact makes it easier to understand the community validating aspect of the Sikh Missionary Society, as it does the conversionist outlook of American Sikh Dharma which is, essentially, an American conversionist perspective applied to an Indian meditative tradition. In this case, as is also true of the Hare Krishna movement, the question of identity lies with the converts who seek a personal sense of identity apart from the one immediately given them by their natal society. While mission could be said to serve the purpose of changing an individual's identity in conversionist movements, in ethnic groups it serves to reinforce the traditional identity. This is not to say that only conversionist religious movements bring about radical changes in individual lives. The earlier discussion of Aboriginal religion stressed the change which took place through the process of initiation, similarly the change in Mormon missionaries themselves could be paralleled

to the sense of growing commitment to the traditional ideals

of Sikh religion and culture which some Sikhs report in Britain

and the Punjab. Whether or not the same term -mission- should

be employed in discussing both ethnic and other religions will

remain a moot point; but the significant fact,which the present

argument wishes to bring to the surface by so adopting it for both,

is that there are similar processes operating in the direction of

creating a sense of identity which is itself intimately associated

with the state of salvation as already defined.

That salvation is a concept worth using for ethnic religions

will become clearer if we utilize the anthropological concept of

rank concession in a further analysis of mission and identity.

This concept of Martin Orans relates as much to psychological

as to sociological aspects of life and in this respect resembles

the width of application found in plausibility theory.[1] In the

present context the sociological dimension is stressed but only

because the object of concern is the way in which one social group

evaluates another.

Both mission as the action of a religious group and

conversion as the reaction of the proselytized population involve

the process of rank concession. In his ethnographic study of the

Santal tribe of India , Orans analysed the complex reactions of the

Santal to urbanization and rapid industrialization. In particular

he showed how they began by conceding rank to the superior and

dominant Hindu ethic and religion which resulted in the Santal

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1. Orans, Martin. 1965.

emulation of Hindu abstinence from beef eating and excessive alcoholic indulgence, an emulation which involved a radical rejection of the traditional Santal emphasis upon 'pleasure'. The Santal initially adopted what Orans calls an economic rank path, through which some individuals made considerable personal advantage at the expense of community solidarity. The political changes which were associated with movements towards Independence in India made it possible for the Santal to engage in concerted action for political status as a distinct group in the new government. This involved a switch from the economic to political rank paths. The change increased internal solidarity and facilitated the reconstruction of a tribal identity, a process which included the creation of an alphabet, codification of religious ideas and of former tribal customs.

We may now ask to what extent rank concession may be identified with religious phenomena. Primarily, it might be suggested in response, in the way one group evaluates the truth claimed by another and responds to it. As far as a conversionist religious group is concerned it tends to presume possession of a truth which confers upon it the right and duty to propagate a particular teaching and style of life. In doing this a lower status is ascribed to the target population, at least as far as religious ideas are concerned, though this act of devaluation may be extended to the economic and political life of the group concerned. The success of a proselytizing mission depends not only on this evaluation of the 'pagan' by the missionary, but also, and perhaps more significantly, on the way in which the target

population evaluates him. It is precisely in this context that the concept of rank concession becomes significant, for mission becomes feasible only when rank is conceded to the missionary; when, that is, the message and often the style of life associated with it are seen as desirable goals. According to Orans, concession of rank leads to the adoption of a particular rank path which enables the desired goal to be attained. Such paths vary in a complex way and involve several possible combinations of responses. The fact that rank has been conceded does not mean that only the path preached by the missionary will be followed -though Orans's basic postulate is that rank concession produces a tendency to emulation. Here the Santal ethnography is informative for it shows that the later, political, rank path adopted by them led the Santal back to their own culture and to the construction of a 'great tradition' of their own. This involved a strong assertion of their tribal identity against that of their neighbouring Hindus.

The implications of this example for both Sikh and Mormon religions are instructive. As far as the Sikhs are concerned the situation within the Punjab differ from that obtaining in Sikh communities elsewhere. From the period of Partition in 1947 Sikhs in the Punjab followed a political rank path with the goal not of emulating British, Islamic, or Hindu patterns of life, but of establishing a Sikh State. The historical fact that Sikhs already possessed the historical example and precedent of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century as one who ruled the Punjab

as a Sikh, made it difficult to concede rank in any submissive sense. The political rak path which they did adopt was more a reaction to the fact of lost power than any acknowledgement of basic powerlessness. Following the success of Indian Independence many Punjabi Sikhs became set on economic improvement and assumed an economic rank path. This was to be associated with that emigration of workers which has already been discussed and which resulted in much money being invested in the Punjab economy by those resident abroad. The fact that there has been no significant decline in Sikh solidarity in Punjab as a result of economic pursuits is probably the result of the proximity to Pakistan and to the aggression engendered over the period of Partition which resulted in a strong sense of Sikh community solidarity.

In Britain the process of rank concession with respect to mission is clearer. In the period of Sikh residence and work leading up to the nineteen sixties an economic rank path was assumed. The Sikh men conceded rank to the host community whose patronage was sought for work. In this process the life-style of the dominant society was emulated in the sense that turbans were abandoned and long hair was cut. From the mid sixties and following the advent of relatives and the consequent replacement by homes of mere dormitory-like accommodation, the nature of the rank path adopted changed significantly. Though money remained a major goal the issue of Sikh community identity in the maintenance of Punjabi language and social values led to the assumption of a political rank path. This was apparent in the erstwhile trivial

episode of whether Sikh should wear turbans while riding motor-
cycles. We suggest that the question was one of whether rank
should be conceded on this issue or not : by contrast with the
early Sikhs in Britain who shaved their beards, the general Sikh
opinion was that their present status should be respected and
recognized. As a result of this internal solidarity increased
and the whole process of mission came to represent a reinforcement
of Punjabi identity. That there was a strong emphasis on calling
the khalsa to live up to its high ideals cannot be doubted during
this period, and visiting holy men and politicians from the Punjab
fostered this vocation. Just as the Santal experienced a revival
of their traditional beliefs and practices following political
success, so the Sikhs came to focus upon their religious heritage
during this period of cultural integration. Indeed the major concern
of Mission was the solidarity and identity of the community. The
new situation was one in which a satisfactory level of plausibility
was experienced by khalsa members. It was a period and state of
salvation. This notion of self-identity in association with the
development of group solidarity resembles a process also to be
found in the Mormon religion.

From its inception in 1830 Mormonism has been preoccupied
with the question of its status and real significance as a social
movement. The preaching of Joseph Smith led to a rapidly growing
community of believers, and while Smith's initial concern was with
the simple preaching of a religious message he was soon taken up
with the problems attending the organization of an expanding social
group. This group was opposed by non-Mormons on many occasions for

the growth in Mormon power was thought to endanger the freedom

of the wider community. Throughout the nineteenth century Mormons

adopted a political rank path with respect to the American

government. Joseph Smith had been mayor of Springfield Illinois,

while Brigham Young had been territorial governor and church leader

simultaneously. The decade of eighteen eighty witnessed direct

political confrontation between church and nation, and was overtly

focused on the question of polygamy. It resulted in the formal

abandonment of plural marriage in 1889. Throughout this period

there was a growth of internal solidarity among Mormons whilst

they also greatly improved their economic status. In this case

it would appear that both economic and political rank paths entered

into the Mormon response to their immediately given social world.

The full significance of the corporate identity of Mormons for their

doctrinal system has yet to be demonstrated, but it may be said that

their notion of salvation is directly related to their view of

their own social structure. For the moment our concern lies with

the difference between Mormon and Sikh religious structures in

terms of rank paths. It is important to appreciate that Mormonism

did not develop dispersed groups of an ethnic type. Dispersed

Mormonism, if the world-wide congregations may be so called, was

largely convert Mormonism; and what differentiated these members from

their neighbours was their peculiar form of religious adherence.For

them the religion was the focal point of activity and life. It was

primary and did not possess the secondary function so central to

Sikh groups of establishing and reinforcing community identity. In

the light of this difference it would seem useful to make
a formal distinction between rank paths involving religious
features as a secondary concern and those in which religious
factors are of primary importance.

The central meaning of mission which has emerged from
this brief comparison of two traditions is that of the self-
conscious awareness of the religions in applying their
understanding of truth to their immediate social context.In
terms of the history of religions this might be expressed as
the desire to communicate the idea of the holy, the precise
nature of that notion being conceived in millenarian terms
by Mormons, and as intuitive union with god by Sikhs.Mission,
understood as the self-conscious action resulting from a notion
of having gained possession of a significant truth, is thus
inextricably associated with the process by which a sense of
self-identity is gained. The fact that in the Christian traditions
this process is often aligned with that of proclaiming the message
to non-believers should not prevent a similar process being
identified as operating in non-Christian cultures. Inasmuch as
the message possessed relates to the state of salvation it has
been shown that such a state needs to be maintained within a
group as well as being extended to others. When the notion of
salvation is interpreted in terms of plausibility theory the
maintenance of community or ethnic identity by reference to
religious ideas can be readily viewed as a mission by parts of
the group to the whole group, with salvation being the desired
state of total group integration. Just as the notion of rank

concession involves an act of judgement between parties concerned
(and in proselytizing mission this means that the proclaiming
group deems others to be lacking in certain fundamental respects)
so in ethnic communities it is possible for one interest group
to deem the community as a whole as being in need of transformation.
It is in this sense that the Sikh mission can be understood as a
mission process.

Finally we must consider the negative factors which are
associated with the process of identity formation and soteriology.
This necessity arises from the point just made that religious
groups serve various kinds of judgement upon the world, for while
this study has emphasized negative factors in religions the case
of Mormonism presents an apparently contradictory example. As it
stands Mormon theology presents a clear case of an optimistic
world-view coupled with a world-affirming way of life which seems
to contradict the basic proposition of this study. In trying to
explain this apparent exception in terms of plausibility theory
it will also be possible to show the necessity of such a
perspective in integrating one rather exceptional Christian
viewpoint with the broader tradition of its origin.

Theologically speaking Mormonism rejected the established
doctrines of both Catholic and Protestant traditions concerning
original sin, predestination and grace. Though the word 'Fall' was
retained Joseph Smith made no mention of the Pauline view of the
event in terms of shame and catastrophe. He developed the doctrine,
not as might have been expected in the direction of the felix culpa

theme, but in terms of man being offered the opportunity
for sense experience and fuller potential for enjoyment. Had
Adam not sinned by indulging in sexuality itself then no
children would have been produced, and pleasure would have
been impossible. The Fall itself thus served a positive end,
and the humanity resulting from it enables pre-existent
sould to prove their allegaince to god while they also gain
experience by inhabiting material bodies on earth. This too
benefits them in their own future state. Every living man comes
into an earthly existence because he has already demonstrated
his worthiness in the pre-existent world of souls. Man thus
begins life in the flesh with a history of success already
behind him. What is more, he is under no influence or
contagion of sin resulting from a historic fall of man from
grace. While the orthodox Mormon does believe in a historic
event through which evil entered the world this does not mean
that all the descendents of Adam are implicated in the evil
there perpetrated. On the contrary, Adam alone is responsible
for his personal act of disobedience, and that no evil consequences
befall other men is assured by the doctrine of general salvation.
To all men, irrespective of whether they seek it, there comes
the benefit of Christ the Redeemer's work, as a consequence of this
all men are free to live as they will.

Mormon theology inevitably finds itself in something of a
dilemma at this point in its soteriology since it wants to lay
claim both to human endeavour and to the work of Christ. While

this paradox is never truly resolved it is the case that in exegesis of the Bible and the Book of Mormon the emphasis is laid upon individual activism which is thought to be a worthwhile commitment of the individual because of the preparatory work of Christ. It is as though Joseph Smith saw a clear distinction between the doctrines of justification by faith and salvation through works, and desired to transform the former into a version of the latter. Accordingly each man was made responsible for acquiring for himself salvation from his personal sins by means of trust in Christ's work and the ritual processes of the church. Salvation results from 'obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel', as the third Article of Faith expresses it, and by ordinances is meant faith and the rituals performed in the temples without which salvation is impossible.

Even a brief consideration of some aspects of this ritual will clearly show how significantly different the Mormon religion is from practically all other traditions of Christianity when it comes to soteriological issues. This is largely due to a distinction drawn in Mormon theology between salvation and exaltation, a term which introduces a radically different element. In this complex notion is to be found a resolution of the paradoxical treatment of faith and works already referred to as one of Smith's central interests, but more significantly than this, in describing the ideas constituting the doctrine of exaltation it is possible to show how the entire Mormon system is a salvation process grounded in and arising from negative factors.

As is the case with any cultural system Mormonism is more than a mere sum total of its constituent parts, parts which were drawn from contemporary sources of religious activity. Protestantism is represented by the intense emphasis laid upon the written word which is thought to be devoid of any error because of the contemporary nature of divine revelation to Smith. By producing the Book of Mormon and later the Inspired Version of the Bible Smith circumvented that biblical criticism which fixed upon errors of translation and text and caused so many difficulties in Christian churches from the later nineteenth century. Moreover, his rewriting and rephrasing of certain paradoxical sections of scripture made the written word even more self-authenticating to the Mormon community which accepted that these changes were of divine origin.[1] Another fundamentally Protestant notion which he developed with much success was that of the priesthood of all believers. In Smith's formulation the essentially private and personal dimension of this doctrine,which asserted the immediacy of relationship conceived to exist between god and man, was transformed into a charter for operating within the church bureaucracy. Each person was given the right to inquire of god with respect to his role within the church organization. By means of this idea Smith retained his position as the foremost prophet, but permitted others an intimacy with god so far as their formally appointed office in the church required it. This example of Max Weber's notion of the routinization of charisma shows how Smith both protected his own status and allowed all church members a sense of immediacy of contact with god.

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1.   Inspired Version. 1965. Cf. John.1.i-iv. Hebrews.5.vi-vii.

Along with these Protestant motifs Mormonism came to contain some distinctively Roman Catholic features. Their inclusion tended to reduce the plausibility of Catholic criticism of the new movement and further validated it in the eyes of converts from Catholic and Anglican traditions who were taught to view these elements as aspects of their old religion which had been freed from error by the miraculous intervention of god through the ministry of Joseph Smith. Foremost among such factors was the idea of priesthood. This came to be the focal institution in the church and contained within itself both metaphysical and pragmatic meanings. It combined features of the Catholic doctrine of authority vested in men through the indelible power of ordination, with the immediacy of access to god already referred to as a basic protestant belief. The ritual of ordination was believed to have been restored to earth by the biblical figures of John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, and Jesus Christ, and it functioned on an ex opere operato basis. The context of its use came to be restricted to the temples and to the action of the Melchizedek priests, in fact the power of priesthood was thought to underlie the entire life of the church in this world and the next. The line of succession in the priesthood was carefully maintained and itself validates the process of salvation in which church members are involved. It also calls into question all other priesthoods and ministries possessed ny other churches. It is just this kind of act of censure which Smith passed upon the religions of his day which indicates the significance of negative features in the growth of the Mormon religion.

As far as Joseph Smith and those who first accepted his message were concerned evil could be defined as much in terms of the conflicting truth claims of the frontier religions as in the more accepted phenomena of moral and natural evil. Joseph Smith's own perception of implausibility began with his inability to decide which church preached the truth. His desire for salvation, whatever else it contained, included a yearning for an assured way of knowing the truth and of having a determined way of following it. Salvation and certainty were two closely allied notions for him, and in that fact is manifested the orthodox Christianity of his environment; for there was no place for doubt in the life of faith. Doubt constituted the unsaved condition and was represented by the competing truth claims of religions known to him. In personal terms this meant that Smith was not prepared to concede rank to any religious group in fact he did just the opposite and deemed them all to be imperfect. The fact that many of the elements he incorporated into his own formulation came from these very religions may be counted as an example of emulation, but one which involves a radical reinterpretation of the doctrines and rites so borrowed.

In the Mormon case there is, then, a twofold perspective which can be adopted with respect to the problem of evil. The one concerns the movement as a sociological phenomenon, while the other emphasizes the actual doctrines held by the church. As far as the former is concerned it can be seen that the problem of evil is no simple matter when any single religious movement is concerned. For in this case it is the very existence of ways of salvation, for that

is how the religious movements of Smith's day regarded
themselves, that proved to be the stumbling-block to him.
This example is not the only one of its kind. The analysis of
the emergence of Buddhism offered by Trevor Ling suggests that
the Buddha formulated his prescriptions for the enlightened
life not only in the light of the traditionally repeated
encounters he is supposed to have had with sickness and death
but also in the conflicting presence of competing truth claims
vested in the contemporary religious environment. [1] A similar
picture has been outlined for the early period of Sikh religion,
for Nanak often referred to representatives of Hindu and Muslim
religions as being deceived by their own religious lives and as
deceiving others. The teaching of Jesus is also not without
parallel as his denunciation of the Pharisees would suggest. [2]
This means that while Mormonism might appear, at first sight, to
be an exception to the rule that religions as salvation processes
have their focal point in the phenomenon of evil, it transpires
on further analysis that the entire enterprise was initiated by
a fundamental perception of implausibility in the confused
competition amongst frontier religions. The second perspective
on evil follows from this historical question and concerns the
actual doctrine of evil. There can be no doubt that as far as
Mormonism is concerned the doctrine of priesthood is central to
the understanding of any major doctrine and religious rite. This
is true even in the way Mormons interpret history, including

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1.   Ling, Trevor.   1973:64 ff.
2.   Matthew, Caps.15, 16.

their own history. Briefly, this may be described as the history of priesthood, for shortly after the time of Christ this priesthood,which had been possessed even by Adam and other major old testament figures, was removed from the earth, and was not restored until the time of Joseph Smith.

The speific identity of the Mormon church arises from the belief that it alone possesses the priesthood, and that it is only through the power of this priesthood that final salvation may be attained. So strong is this sense of identity that the notion of salvation is, itself, not thought of apart from community membership. Whilst the notion of individuality is emphasized as the basis for self-development, achievement and progress, it nevertheless occupies a secondary position in the overall scheme of salvation, and this is why genealogical work, family gatherings and the like are important to Mormons. Salvation is understood as a corporate activity, and the rituals performed by the Melchizedek priests in the temples is of fundamental importance to the creation of an integrated and saved community. Personal endeavour is important for it may influence the salvation of another soul insofar as the vicarious rites performed for the dead, and these include ordinations and marriages as well as baptisms, enable the departed to enter the various states of salvation obtaining in the eternal world. Priesthood itself is better understood as an ontological attribute of persons than as a description of institutional office. It is, in fact, a divine attribute.Priesthood

is 'the eternal power and authority of Deity by which all things exist, by which they are created, governed and controlled'.[1] Mormonism knows of no essential difference between god and men. Indeed all men are gods in embryo and only await a sufficient amount of experince before they attain to divine functions. Because of this it is not thought inappropriate that human action should result in the salvation of souls. The power of priesthood is thus the central phenomenon of Mormon religion for it determines the scheme of salvation.

For Mormon theology evil is less the presence and influence of malevolence than it is the absence of good. Sloth, idleness and similar inattentions to duty are the problems to which Mormon teaching directs itself. Smith rejected the emphasis on personal salvation of a private kind. For him, every man's merit must be fully appreciated and a suitable reward accorded. He developed an idea of heaven which made this possible, for in its tripartite structure all could receive their due reward. Sociologically speaking one could say that this was an example of a millenarian sect which appears to hold a universalist doctrine of salvation but which made possible an exclusivist attitude to outsiders by positing that complete salvation- which it calls exaltation- came only to those married Mormon Melchizedeks who had fully responded to the Mormon message and participated in the correct rites.

Just as ritual action works against sloth, so the acquisition of knowledge militates againts ignorance and, 'it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance'.[2] Salvation is essentially a

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1.   McConkie, B.   1961.

2.   Doctrine and Covenants.   131:6.

process and not a state. It involves the eternal group which includes parents and children who remain together forever, as long as they have undergone the proper rites, and who are in an ever increasing condition of learning and development. The entire scheme of reality is subsumed within the meaning of the priesthood, and that priesthood only makes sense within the actual community of Saints, and especially in its temple ritual.

What this brief discussion has made clear is that the notion of evil, understood in terms of implausibility, is a factor which relates not only to the internal value system of this religion, but also to the historical context of its emergence. It has also demonstrated the fact that the notion of salvation cannot be divorced from that of identity. It is the Mormon group as such, which is the context within which salvation may be found. All this makes clear the further point that the notion of evil cannot be discussed simply as a philosophical problem, or as a question of theology, but it necessitates a discussion of the nature of the community within which the idea has been generated. To have argued that the perception of evil and the adoption of salvific responses cannot be dissociated from the process of identity and community membership, whether ethnic or institutional, is to have made preparation for the Conclusion of this study in which the general paradigm of meaning is considered in terms of its hermeneutical and philosophical status.

Conclusion

The central concern of this study has been the problem

of method, and in particular the idea that a general paradigm

of meaning now seems to characterize much of the work carried

out in religious studies. An attempt has been made to make this

paradigm more explicit and to show how it can be utilized in

the analysing the key notions of evil and salvation. We have

argued that man is essentially a meaning constructing creature

and that evil is to be understood as the evaluation he makes of

those elements in life which frustrate his construction of

fully satisfactory systems of meaning, while salvation is a

level of sufficiency of plausibility of such systems which

gives full weight to the problem of evil. So while the

argument has focused upon structures of negativity the

final comment offered here emphasizes that while religious

systems are those in which man evaluates himself as beset by

evil they nevertheless include the positive dimension of

attempting to explain and cope with evil.[1]

Despite the fact that negative structures are apprehended

as restraints upon the task of constructing a flawless system

of meaning man incorporates these very difficulties into

overarching sets of significance because he is not only a

'fundamentally semantic creature' but is also a moral one.[2] Two

points follow from this. Firstly, the fact that man does possess

this drive for meaning which involves a moral evaluation of

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1.   We have already considered Bowker's similar argument on
      religions as route finding activities focused upon the
      intransigent aspects of reality. Cf. Brian Hebblethwaite 1976:9.

2.   Crick, Malcolm.   1976:3.

things means that it is particularly appropriate that theologians

should discuss the case of meaning, order, creation, and salvation.[1]

But secondly, this evaluation should be seen as a development of

the relations existing both within man as a biological organism,

and between him and his environment. It is here that the general

paradigm of meaning can be of specific use, especially as it is

related to the notion of General Systems Theory developed by

Ludwig Von Bertalanffy.[2] Bertalanffy's approach substitutes a

'perspectivist' outlook for those of a reductionist nature.

Phenomena are viewed as 'systems of elements in mutual interaction',

rather than as isolable units acting in one way causality. The very

name General Systems Theory indicates the notion that all levels of

reality - inorganic, organic, social, psychological,intellectual,

and religious - may be viewed as interacting with each other in a

homeostatic way to maintain various states in equilibrium. This

theory can be seen as a quest for a new unity between diverse

branches of knowledge on the basis of the presumed 'structural

uniformities of the different levels of reality', and of the

interaction of those levels with each other. This dynamic view

of phenomena replaces the more static models, be they evolutionist

or functionalist, which operated on the notion of a simple cause and

effect mechanism. Bertalanffy refers to this new perspective in

terms of a revolution of thought, and as a new paradigm in Thomas

Kuhn's sense of the word.

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1.   According to Augustine order, along with mode and form
      constituted the meaning of good. Cf. Thomas Aquinas,Summa
      Theologia. 1a. 103-109. So too with Calvin for whom the
      restoration of order through the church is a restoration
      of the imago Dei. Cf. B.C.Milner, 1970:195.

2.   Bertalanffy, Ludwig Von.   197

This recognition has been echoed both in anthropology and theology though only to a limited extent. Malcolm Crick has carefully documented a change from a functionalist consensus in anthropology to what he calls the semantic anthropological style of investigation.[1] Basso and Selby, referring to the American situation, feel unable to identify any 'unified official paradigm of meaning', but express their opinion that 'if we were to wait until a qualitative mathematics is devised for the full and proper axiomatization of a general theory of meaning a great deal of necessary work would not get done'.[2] In theology the notion of a system of the sciences was one of Paul Tillich's early concerns and one of the contributory factors entering into his development of a system of theology. In a more directly apposite way John Bowker's Wilde Lectures presuppose the applicability of this systems approach to theological issues and offer a persuasive example of how to carry out such a programme.[3] This perspective views reality in terms of organization rather than chaos. Man is viewed as an active personality system always in dynamic interaction with other systems, be they biological or social, rather than as some kind of robot which acts only when acted upon by some external cause. Abner Cohen's discussion of personality and self-hood as open systems is one good example of this suggested perspective.[4] This 'organismic' revolution has resulted from developments

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1.   Crick, Malcolm.   1976:2.

2.   Basso, K.H. and H.A. Selby. 1976:9.

3.   Heywood Thomas, John. In R.W.A. McKinney, 1978:78.

4.   Cohen, Abner. In Ioan Lewis, 1977:117.

in the behavioural and biological sciences and in one sense it is possible to say that just as the nineteenth century understanding of religion was deeply influenced by evolutionary thought, so in the twentieth century it has become possible to borrow an organic model and to apply it to religious studies.

The change that this paradigm makes possible is well illustrated in the case of one anthropological writer who re-evaluated his ethnographic work under its influence.[1] In 1958 Gregory Bateson added an epilogue to his important study of the Iatmul tribe of New Guinea first published in 1936. He speaks of the general change which had emerged in theoretical perspectives after the second world war, and in particular of the contribution made by cybernetic theory to the interpretation of human behaviour. His summary of the transformation is of interest not only because it pinpoints the actual ideas involved, but inasmuch as it implicitly demonstrates the radical difference between this view and that of evolutionism. 'The ideas themselves', he says, 'are extremely simple. All that is required is that we ask not about the characteristics of lineal chains of cause and effect but about the characteristics of systems in which the chains of cause and effect are circular or more complex than circular'.[2] It is found that such a system has properties totally different from anything which can occur in lineal chains. The notion of self-corrective causal circuits thus replaces that of purpose and adaptation which involved an insupportable teleological factor.

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1.   Bateson, Gregory.   1958. Bateson reinterpreted his notion of schismogenesis by identifying the schismogenic unit as a 'two-person sub-system', p.297.

2.   Ibid., p.288.

If we are to formulate a general paradigm of meaning which is applicable to religious studies it is necessary to relate what we have already said to the notion of man as a symbolic animal. Several important concepts are involved in this correlation of ideas about meaning systems and symbolic systems. The first question which must be posed is precisely what is being corrected or maintained by the various systems in which man is involved ? While it is easy to see that the homeostatic systems of animal bodies serve, for example, to maintain a constant blood temperature as the creature enters into innumerable relations with various environments, and while it is possible to talk of other physical systems maintaining energy levels, it might seem that no single answer can be provided to identify the state sought by human life systems. Yet it is perfectly possible to suggest that 'meaning' is just that condition with which man in his multiplex involvement in systems is concerned.

So the general paradigm of meaning, when interpreted in association with General Systems Theory gives some foundation to the increasingly voiced opinion that man and meaning are inextricably associated concepts. From the perspective of the history of religions for example Werblowsky has said that 'the notion of man as a builder of systems of meanings is a commonplace of philosophical as well as of social and cultural anthropology', and similarly Zijderveld has said that 'one of the essential insights gained from philosophical anthropology is

the fact that man bestows meaning upon his environment'.[1]
Throughout the earlier chapters we have sought to show just
how this notion of meaning is developed and maintained among
various religious groups, and how it is a term that must be
sufficiently broad as to encompass the whole of human life.
The notion of pragmatic plausibility was introduced in order
'to explore the nexus which binds together the cognitive and
affectual meaning of symbols', or at least of religious action.[2]
Unfortunately it has been largely beyond the scope of this thesis
to discuss psychological dimensions of human meaning systems, though
the chapter on identity and mission suggests the importance of
psychological schemes. Nevertheless it is certainly not proposed
to eliminate psychological factors simply to follow a certain
anthropological orthodoxy. On the contrary, if the notion of
general systems is accepted then psychological systems gain a
new significance. One way that this new significance can be
appreciated is in the field of symbolism, since symbolic
processes and meaning processes are inextricably associated.
Symbols must now, in conclusion, be considered as they constitute
a major mode of religious plausibility generation, and therefore
of salvation.

It is important and instructive to observe that the term
'symbolism', like 'meaning' and 'salvation', is vague. Crick has

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1   Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi.   1976:108.
        Zijderveld, A.C.   1970:36
        Cf. Roland Robertson,   1978:84.

2.   Lewis, Ioan.   1977:2.

referred both to Chomsky who said that meaning was a 'catch-all

term for those aspects of language which linguists knew very

little about', and to Max Black's notion of the 'extraordinary

shiftiness of the word meaning'.[1] Similarly Dan Sperber thinks

it 'impossible to circumscribe the notion of meaning in such a

way that it may still apply to the relationship between symbols

and their interpretation'.[2] Despite the fact that Sperber is

using the word 'meaning' in a more technical sense here he

highlights an important point which concerns the actual process

of meaning construction as it affects symbolism.As far as he is

concerned the word should only be used to refer to 'intuitively

perceived relations between signs- that is to say in particular

those of paraphrase and analyticity'.[3] He disagrees with Lévi-

Strauss's procedure of treating myths, as well as social institutions

such as kinship, as semiological systems in any strict sense. Myths

are not signs, the symbols of which myths are composed are not

'paired with their interpretations in a code structure; their

interpretations are not meanings'.[4] Myths function more for

individuals than for groups, they are open to idiosyncratic

understanding. Nevertheless there is a sense in which the

understanding of myths and symbols can be seen as meaningful,

namely, that symbolism is the product of a cognitive process

which incorporates within itself a tacit knowledge of how to

interpret a phenomenon, in the way that, for example, analytic

statements in ordinary usage are accepted as being self-evidently

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1.   Crick, Malcolm.   1976:11.

2.   Sperber, Dan.   1975:13.

3.   Ibid, p.10.

4.   Ibid, p.85.

true. So it is that 'without explicit instruction all humans learn to treat symbolically information that defies direct conceptual treatment'.[1]

In saying this Sperber is suggesting that there is an inherent drive to meaning by mechanisms present in the human process of perception such that factors not capable of resolution by ordinary means are relegated to a category of their own. While symbolic categorization does admit of idiosyncratic understanding it also serves to unite members of a group inasmuch as all share the tendency to engage in focalization and evocation- the two functions of symbolization according to Sperber- on the underlying assumption that sense can be made of factors which do not succumb to immediate linguistic explanation.

The embarrassment which some have shown over this fact that 'the term meaning has various meanings' can be dispelled by the paradigm of meaning inasmuch as man can be placed in a class of his own as a meaning constructing animal.[2] In general terms it is possible to describe the activity of these class members as creating and maintaining an ordered and integrated life. This is to describe the form of their activity rather than any particular content. As Gregory Bateson has argued, anthropologists 'deal with meta relationships between messages' and not simply with ethnographic descriptions.[3] In his analysis of the Iatmul evidence

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1.   Ibid, p.148.

2.   Barnhardt, J.E.   1977:159.

3.   Bateson, Gregory.   1958:293.

he was helped by making the simple assertion, taken from
Russell's Theory of Types, that a class cannot be a member
of itself. This also applies to phenomenological analysis
and can be applied to the notion of meaning. The evidence
presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis shows how
various groups set about constructing plausible universes
of meaning despite the fact that the actual ideas used in these
constructions vary to a marked extent. The human class is thus
one of meaning construction, and in this process man resembles
very many other classes of phenomena which manifest a system of
order rather than one of chaos. Because man is a self-conscious
and intelligent being the nature of the order he maintains can
be described as meaning, and because he is a moral creature
this meaning state can be designated as salvific. This salvation
signifies a state of integrity in which aspects of the environ-
ment are held by the intentional attitude of man. Meaning in the
class of human subjects would thus correspond to the temperature
level maintained by a vascular system, but it need not be defined
in terms of any of the functions of its sub-systems.

The question which this then raises concerns the relation
between this class, governed by the general paradigm of meaning-
which describes its modus operandi - and the phenomenon of
religious systems. In other words it is the question of the
relation between meaning and salvation. One possible solution
to this problem emerges from Hans Mol's notion that man invests
with a sense of the sacred whatever serves to confer identity
upon him. In this sense it is possible to regard primitive religions,
which emphasize their present world of experience, as salvation

religions, and in fact that has been suggested earlier in this study when it was argued that no essential difference could be established between the so called primitive and world religions. Salvation is then seen as a way of describing a quality of plausibility conferred by the individual's social group.

Another possible solution accepts the fact that the notion of salvation is held by certain religions to refer not to any sense of ordinary life and to man's security in it but to another order of reality, to some transcendent state of being. This theological perspective cannot be ignored in any phenomenological analysis;nor need it be, for it can be accommodated within a general paradigm of meaning. To what extent the fact of literacy must be borne in mind in this context it is difficult to say, but it seems likely that, as Jack Goody has clearly shown, 'literacy and classroom education brings a shift towards greater abstractness, towards the decontextualization of knowledge'.[1] This means that as ideas of significance and legitimation have been subject to increasing, systematic abstraction, so the notion of salvation - interpreted as a state of ultimate identity and security - has become less associated with the ordinary structures of the life-world. It is precisely this context which allows Peter Berger to view religious ideas as legitimating all other, apparently less significant,values. The reason why this perspective can be accommodated within the general paradigm of meaning is that the notion of salvation can be equated with the basic class of meaningfulness itself.This seems to be the position which Mircea Eliade has recently adopted

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1.   Goody, Jack.   1977:13.

in his magnum opus, <u>A History of Religious Ideas</u>. This begins
with the assertion that 'every rite, every myth, every belief
or divine figure reflects the experience of the sacred and hence
implies the notions of <u>being</u>, of <u>meaning</u>, and of <u>truth</u>'.[1] To
what extent particular degrees of complexity of human organization
restrict the possibility of a satisfactory level of plausibility
generation or not it is difficult to say. Be that as it may, this
thesis has sought to show that irrespective of level of social
complexity, or of complexity of cosmological dualism, the same
general principle obtains between perceived implausibility and the
processes for its resolution.

This study has not adopted any specific theological stance
and is non-confessional. Accordingly it has sought a non-theological
framework by means of which to approach basic issues in religious
studies. A major conclusion is that the notion of salvation is a
qualitative description of a state of being and as such the concept
may be applied to contexts in which the state of plausibility
is of a sufficiently durable kind. This may be the case either in
preliterate groups where such salvation may be more implicit , or
in the world religions where it is more explicit.

The obviously elusive character of the words 'meaning' and
'salvation' in general use can now be seen to be due to the fact
that they are words which describe broad categories or classes of
human thought and action. These classes cannot be fully explained
by means of terms which themselves comprise a sub-class without the
explanation becoming essentially reductionist.

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1.   Eliade, Mircea.   1979:2. Original emphases.

While much has already been said about systems of meaning construction it remains to provide a specific description of their mode of operation and context of functioning. This could be done in two main ways. On the one hand the notion of society could be invoked as the basic context within which meaning is generated; this is the way chosen by Durkheim and Berger. Or, on the other hand, the private self may be identified as the source of all significant thought and reflection, as was done by Descartes and the whole rationalist tradition which, in a sense, culminated in Kant's Copernican revolution. It is precisely this kind of awareness that makes even the most anthropological study of religion subject to philosophical and theological scrutiny. Yet it remains true that the very reason why both these perspectives are inadequate is also the very reason why the paradigm of meaning should be accepted as the basis for understanding human religiosity. The suggestion is that the individual, who will now be called the social-person, is the pivotal point at which numerous systems might be said to converge. The social-person requires an identification of a different order from that given to any single system involved in the interaction. Putting the point crudely, the social-person is more than the sum total of the individual systems contributing to his existence.

To isolate any one sub-system of all those that contribute to the system of man himself is to engage in that kind of reductionism which has been opposed throughout this study. Both Descartes and Durkheim serve as typical exponents of this reductionist

fallacy, a fallacy which is only seen to be such in the light of a general systems theory and the paradigm of meaning. Descartes for example used language as a neutral tool rather than see it as a social phenomenon. Whereas a contemporary phenomenological view regards language as essentially social and as presuming the existence of inter-acting persons, Descartes felt able to utilize it as the means of his private, philosophical meditations. Similarly Durkheim reified the notion of society, rather than that of the self, though not without some acknowledged difficulty, as his notion of man as Homo duplex indicates. His problem lay in relating the individual and social aspects of Homo duplex, a task in which he ultimately failed. Stephen Lukes sees this difficulty as arising from Durkheim's conviction that there was 'an underlying ontological distinction between levels of reality', with individuals constituting one level and society another. Lukes also cites Morris Ginsberg's comment on Durkheim to the effect that the notion of society 'had an intoxicating effect on his mind'.[1] For Durkheim there exists a firm dichotomy between the bodily aspect of persons, which he calls 'the organism', and their social and collective aspect.[2] It is as though this latter dimension has been superimposed upon the biological reality during the process of evolution.

It is when either of these aspects of life is made absolute that a balanced view of man becomes impossible and any hermeneutics unstable. Throughout this study the social-person has been taken as representing the prime locus of 'human-being'. The name has been

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1.   Lukes, Stephen.   1975:417.

2.   Durkheim, É.   1976:16.

adopted for man inasmuch as it emphasizes both his bodily

aspect (along with all the systems involved with that level

of physical organization) and the social dimension of his life.

The one enables reference to be made to the affective dimension

of life while the other makes cognitive reference easy. It is

this social-person which is the locus of the being of man, and

in practical terms it is irreducible either to a notion of pure

self or to that of social role. Partial descriptions of the social-

person as Homo economicus, H. socialis, or H. religiosus, may

serve useful heuristic functions in restricted cases; but they

have 'nothing to do with the essence of man' as Ralph

Dahrendorf says, but only with models of social action.[1] In a

rather similar way Dorothy Emmett has questioned the opposite

tendency to overemphasize the 'romantic notion of the bare

subjective 'I' '.[2]   Again in a similar vein, though within the

context of a theological argument Reinhold Niebuhr asserted that

there was no place for 'individuality in either pure mind or

pure nature'.[3]

It is precisely because the social-person is the irreducible

unit of phenomenological analysis, being the point of convergence

of many systems, that it is appropriate to describe this category

as integrated and intransigent. Integrated inasmuch as it is the

social-person who assimilates environmental systems to his internal

system, and intransigent because no ammount of reductionist

explanation can fully give account of the total entity. It is this

fact of the complex unity of the social-person that makes it

1.   Dahrendorf, Ralph.   1973:88.

2.   Emmett, Dorothy.   1966:178.

3.   Niebuhr, Reinhold.   1941

improper to speak of him as, for example, possessing a body, for that very verb betrays a dualistic, and potentially reductionist, tendency to divide between body and mind. Rather he should be said to be a body. Similarly the social-person is best not referred to as one who holds to or believes in some set of social values viewed as idealized and abstract systems but as one who manifests them. The level of organization attained by the social-person is thus essentially different in kind from the nature of all the sub-systems which contribute to the state of human self-awareness and action.

Two major criticisms could be made of this emphasis upon the notion of social-person. First, it could be said to be a mere expression of an ethnocentric model of the individual. David M. Schneider has, although in a different context, spoken of 'the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background'.[1] This ideal type is, he says, 'however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures'. The reason for adopting the model of social-person is not, however, simply to enshrine one cultural perspective as true and beyond cavil, but to make available a model which can accommodate the actual theoretical perspective which the data demand.

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1. Schneider, D.M. In K.H. Basso and H.A. Kelly, 1976:225.

From the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge it might

also be added that the social groups which have come to see

man as this type of individual have done so for similar reasons

which have led to the more technically elaborate views of

general systems theory. In any case the real reason for adopting

such a model lies, as has already been shown, in the fact that

studies in non-psychological areas first suggested the basic

notion of general systems, while the field of human life has

simply presented itself as another one in which the seminal

concept might be fertile.

The second is more orthodoxly sociological and sees

culture as the central concept to which individual's need to be

related. An interesting example of this view is found in Marshall

Sahlins's recent study and its basic proposition that 'meaning

is the specific property of the anthropological object', and the

anthropological object is culture.[1] He then goes on to say about

culture what we have said here about the social-person, at least

inasmuch as 'the unity of the cultural order is constituted by...

meaning'.[2] Sahlins is aware of an idealist tendency of thought

which can accompany abstract discussions of concepts like culture

and seeks to avoid it. This is another reason why this thesis has

preferred to focus upon the social-person despite the customary

view that social reality, as Durkheim so fundamentally believed,

can be viewed as a higher order reality than the individual. But

it needs to be understood that for the purpose of religious studies

the sociological dimension, whilst of very great importance, as we

have continually emphasized, cannot be the only perspective admitted

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1.   Sahlins, Marshall.   1976:x.

2.   Ibid, p.206.

for analysis. It is the social-person who remains the integrated
and intransigent locus of meaning, and not in any simple sense
as one who straddles the private and public domains as Needham
suggested, but as one apart from whose existence as a synthesizer
of sub-systems there would be no such factors to integrate.

Once this model of man is accepted it becomes possible
to reconsider many problems within religious studies in the hope
of avoiding specific impasses. For example, the question of
world and village religion can be re-examined in terms of the
individual as one who integrates what he is taught of the formal
religious dogma with other local forms of religious thought and
practice, under the influence of particular negative factors and
the overall drive for meaning.[1] This kind of view also provides
a theoretical validation for Cantwell Smith's important suggestion
in the history of religions that religious man should be seen as one
who mediates between an accumulated tradition of a religion and
his own personal faith.[2] Similarly it might help explain why what
might be called the phenomenology of the religious individual has
been so important in the work of men like Rudolph Otto and
Heinrich Heiler, and why some anthropologists such as Stanner and
Evans-Pritchard have felt that even when a full sociological form
of analysis has been offered there remains an area to be explained,
a point at which the services of the theologians have been felt to
be necessary.[3]

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1. Cf. Tambiah, S.J.   1970.
2. Smith, W.C.   1963.
3. Heiler, F.   1932.

The burden of this study, implicit within the discussion of evil and salvation, and explicit in the methodological discussion, is that the phenomenologist should continue with the process of interpretation after the anthropologist has ceased with his, and also that no simple handing over to the confessional theologian should take place. The reason for this being that the general paradigm of meaning implies that theological systems form part of a continuum of meaning with other explanatory schemes. Thus while the mode of argument and the content of doctrine may vary, in form theological systems are essentially different from any other system of meaning. This can clearly be seen in Paul Tillich's definition of religion as 'the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life'.[1] Other theological views of salvation would manifest a similar concern.[2]

The final point of this study may also be associated with Tillich and his decrial of those contemporary thinkers who so emphasize technical reason that they completely avoid the notion of ontological reason. For ontological reason had once embraced both cognitive and affective dimensions of human life, and is just that category which enables the notion of meaning to include the emotional dimension of ritual, symbolism, and myth. It was, said Tillich, those who 'refuse to "understand" anything that transcends technical reason' who had made philosophy completely irrelevant for questions of existential concern.[3] For the

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1. Tillich, Paul. 1963:4

2. Wells, D.F. 1978.

3. Tillich, Paul. 1953. Vol. 1:81.

phenomenologist of religion it is precisely this issue of existential concern which has to be borne in mind when viewing the notion of salvation as used by theologians, for if the notion of salvation is to be understood as part of the explicit reflection of a group then it must be approached in terms of the quality of commitment shown towards the meaning offered by a creed or pattern of life. This notion of commitment, when associated with explanatory systems, may be identified as the determining feature of salvation as a religious phenomenon, and which serves to distinguish between mere explanations and means of salvation.

The theological issues which result from such conclusions are far reaching in their effect; for at one level they offer a basis for discussing the doctrine of man and the issue of natural theology, while they also suggest a fruitful way of approaching Christology in the Christian tradition. All such deliberations presuppose active co-operation between theologians and students of religion. This study has merely sought, as a preliminary step, to ensure that at least there should be no 'silence lying between anthropology and the history of religions'.[1]

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1. Douglas, Mary. 1975:81. Cf. Mary Douglas 1970, where her notion of the symbolic body is directly relevant to the paradigm of meaning and to theology.

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