

## RELIGIOUS PERSONALITY

'RELIGION is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach, something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.'<sup>1</sup>

### DIFFICULTY OF THE PROBLEM:

The extensive literature on both religion and personality suggest that it is extremely difficult if not humanly impossible to come to any definite definition of either of them. Moreover, because 'the frontier between psychology and the life of the spirit is hard to define',<sup>2</sup> any definition of a religious personality is likely to come under the scrutiny of both the religious person and the psychologist. To avoid most of the misunderstanding, I think that it is necessary to keep in mind that both religion and personality are mental constructs to define certain human behaviours. Mental constructs are created to facilitate understanding but the opposite may also happen. The history of both the words personality and especially religion points it out. Religion had been used to label human behaviour ranging from specific mystic behaviour to great atrocities and wars. Then, since one is confronted with so much misunderstanding, one has to verify the statements by re-examining human behaviour whenever this is possible. However, this sounds hard because 'strictly speaking, there are no religious data, ready to take, just as little as there are any sexual data. Rather all data – events, processes, actions, objects, and object relations – may have either or both a religious and a sexual significance for the patient, or for the examiner, or for both. An excellent demonstration of such

<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York, Macmillan, 1925 as quoted in Peter a Bertocci, *Religion as Creative insecurity*, New York, Association Press, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons*, London, SCM Press Ltd. 1968, p. 111

polydimensionality of meanings is given in Erickson's masterful *YOUNG MAN LUTHER*.<sup>3</sup> Hence, because of all this, the verification of the religious statements is extremely difficult.

The preceding paragraph leads to another extremely important problem, i.e. that of methodology. It is the duty of the psychologist to be scientific both in methods and language. In certain areas one can adopt scientific procedures more than in others. In the study of religion, the scientific procedures are very restricted still for different reasons. One of those reasons is because human behaviour cannot be manipulated because of ethical rules. Moreover, to make things worse, certain mysteriousness has been imposed on behaviour considered to be religious that scientific approach had to be excluded. Hence, one has to expect a lot of speculations in the psychology of religion with which this paper is involved.<sup>4</sup>

Another problem involved with methodology is the choice of a criterium to assess human behaviour as religious. Should it be an external or internal or both. If external, should it be affiliation to a church, attendance to church service or any other social activity. If one admits that the criterium should be internal, then the criterium itself would be an enigma as the behaviour to be studied. There has been no way to answer such questions so far. However, when a person is involved in the study of religion and goes on through the descriptions of other people, i.e. personal documentations, one can easily find out what they are talking about. Then, he can match his personal experience and try to establish some common behaviour and then make some plausible reason for it.

#### CRITERIA:

Despite of the said difficulties, Dr. Streng<sup>5</sup> came out with four criteria by which a person is considered to be religious. These criteria are; (1) personally apprehending the Holy, (2) establishing the sacred through myth and sacrament, (3) living in harmony with eternal law as

<sup>3</sup>Paul W. Pruyser, *Dynamic Psychology of Religion*, New York Harper and Row, 1968, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Houston Clark, *The Psychology of Religion*, New York, Macmillan, 1968 pp. 29-52.

<sup>5</sup>Frederich J. Streng, *Understanding Religious Man*, Belmont, California, Dickenson Publishing Company, 1969, 47-80.

preserved by seers and the learned tradition and (4) attaining freedom through spiritual insight. Here I add another after Otto<sup>6</sup> namely, the category of value. Dr. Streng relied heavily on Otto's book *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY*. It seems to me that what Dr. Pruyser said about Otto could be applied to Dr. Streng, namely 'the emphasis is not on individual differences, although striking differences are portrayed, but on the "common good" of religion, on the generalities that govern religious experience'.<sup>7</sup> These criteria should not be considered to be independent of one another, they are ways of looking at certain human behaviour. One may be more conspicuous than another at certain times and stages in one's life.

#### PERSONAL APPREHENSION OF THE HOLY:

When a person approaches life as isolated events or even try to isolate parts of an already isolated event, he may get the feeling that he is the master of that particular situation. However, when one sees all beings and events as all belonging to and participating from the same existence, then he feels that he is overwhelmed. Then, instead of considering himself as the master of the situation, he considers himself as one of the many things in the world around him yet in an integrated whole.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he sees that his existence and of others is dependent on someone or something else. This feeling is labelled by Otto as 'creature feeling'.<sup>9</sup> It seems to me that Maslow gives the same description when he speaks of the peak experience, 'he can then more readily look upon nature as if it were there in itself and for itself, and not simply as if it were human playground put there for human purposes'.<sup>10</sup> However, one must not misinterpret this feeling and extend it to mean the real existence of some objective being. Otto criticized Schleiermacher for jumping into such a conclusion. The feeling involves both the condition of the person as well as the object of man's apprehension

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, 50-59.

<sup>7</sup> Paul W. Pruyser, op. cit. p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values and Peak-Experiences*, New York, The Viking Press, 1970, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Otto, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being*, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968, second ed. p. 76.

of existence, i.e. the way man conceives the world and himself at the same time. (It is in virtue of this that these criteria can be considered as pointing the individual differences). However, by the fact that the apprehension of existence is not comprehension, the apprehension or the lack of comprehension takes hold of the mind of the person involved with. Such a possession of one's mind becomes another reality to the person. This new reality is different from the reality in the world and the person knows it. He continues to keep a dialectic knowledge of both the real world and the concept of the 'wholly other'. The new reality cannot even be neglected because it generates a dynamic power within the person which involves the whole personality. 'Its nature is such that it grips or stirs the human mind this and that determinate affective state'.<sup>11</sup> A person in such a state of mind, unlike most of the people who see religious behaviour as being different from other behaviour, sees every human action as a result of that state of mind and the whole world as a sacred place where a sacred drama is played constantly. Yet, as Otto says, it is a mistake to assume that such an experience is always nice to have. Sometimes, it creates grisly horror.<sup>12</sup> The tensity of the horror depends on the grasp of the vastness of the 'wholly other' in relation to the smallness of the individual.

Through the relationship of the concept of the 'wholly other' and of himself, man defines himself in terms of worth. A category of value is developed. The highest value is ascribed to the 'wholly other' and sense of unworthiness to himself and the world around him. A moral duty is imposed on the person. Sometimes, the 'wholly other' manage to govern only the respect. In this case, it is not invested with the mighty power which compels though it is acknowledged by the person. Hence, it only attracts the admiration of the person. In either case, the person feels a sense of guilt and then a longing for atonement and the desire for the Summum Bonum (the greatest good). The earnest desire for the greatest good is to transcend the sense of unworthiness conceived by the person.

#### FREEDOM THROUGH SPIRITUAL INSIGHT:

Dr. Streng considers this criterium last. It seems to me that this criterium is intimately related to the first and consequently should be con-

<sup>11</sup>Rudolf Otto, op. cit. p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>idem. p. 13.

sidered immediately after it. The science of the numen (deity) as Dr. Pruyser put it is not separated from the science of homo religiosus (religious man).<sup>13</sup> Lest there will be any confusion it is better to point out that the numen stands for the 'wholly other' invested with deity and that homo religiosus stands for man governed by the concept of the 'wholly other'. When the homo religiosus catches a glimpse of the numen he begins to see his weak spots of his life at the same time. He wants to eliminate them because he thinks that they are preventing him from becoming like the numen. The more a person gets involved with the numen the more he sees himself as something to be perfected. Thus life becomes a challenge of becoming or purifying one's self. The material which man considers during this process are his frustrations, anxieties and especially death.

At this point, one is likely to raise the question how is it possible for a person who feels bound and does not know what freedom is, to seek freedom and becomes free? From clearly points out that 'the beginning of liberation lies in man's capacity to suffer, and he suffers if he is oppressed, physically and spiritually'. The suffering moves him to act against his oppressors, to seek a freedom of which he knows nothing. If a man has lost the capacity to suffer, he also lost the capacity for change'.<sup>14</sup> This idea is certainly hard for 'those who worship the superficial cult of success and obviously do not understand such conclusions'.<sup>15</sup> The ability to suffer creates an interplay between the concepts one has of the numen and homo religiosus. In spite of the fact that evil seems to be part of the world we live in, it continues to be repugnant to human nature. Because of this, the idea of the numen may appear to be of an arbitrary ruler of one's life. Sometimes, one does not begin to question the arbitrations of the numen though they may appear to be whimsical in early life. However, as time passes by and his suffering may perhaps become more tense, man challenges the concept of the numen. Man makes a sort of a covenant, a sort of compromise between the two concepts of the numen and homo religiosus. Each time man makes a compromise, he pushes forth for freedom even from the absolute numen

<sup>13</sup>Paul W. Pruyser, op. cit. p.

<sup>14</sup>Erich Fromm, *You Shall be As Gods*, A radical interpretation of the Old Testament, Greenwich, Conn., Fawcet Publication, 1966, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup>Victor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, New York, Bantam, 1965, p. 85.

itself. He then establish himself as coworker of his personal destiny. However, in spite of all the covenants man may make with the numen, he continues to look at it as the sole creator of the universe in which he lives. Out of such covenants the greatest principle emerge, namely the recognition of the right of all creatures to live or the appreciation of life.<sup>16</sup>

The continuous dialect between the science of the numen and the science of homo religiosus was further developed by Paul Tillich. Tillich speaks of 'ultimate concern' though he never defines it and the search for it as the 'centred act of personality'. These terms have a strong appeal to dynamic psychologist. Thus, 'religion can now be seen as exploratory behaviour, driven, among other things, by man's curiosity and by his perpetual attempts to maximize contact with a maximal environment to the full deployment of his potentialities'.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, the study of religion is being fused with psychiatry.

Now, in view of what has been said about this criterium it could be summed up in a language of the man in the street by saying first in religious terms that man wants to become a saint or second that a person wants to become mature.

#### ESTABLISHING THE SACRED THROUGH MYTH AND SACRAMENT:

When a person encounters the numen he tries to define it. However, because the numen defies and definition<sup>18</sup> the person realizes soon that the definition given to the numen is not the right one. In spite of this realization, he continues to define the numen. This process is a consequence of the need in man to encode and represent the things he understands. The encoding and the organization of concepts are found in creedal formulations, doctrines and dogmas. Some hold such formulations made by other people as an absolute word by word others, reject them as myth especially in a scientific age in which we live. Such different approaches come from the misunderstanding of the myth itself.<sup>19</sup> Such a confusion could be avoided if one keeps in mind what Dr. Pruyser says. 'Biology divides reality in its way; theology does it different-

<sup>16</sup> Erich Fromm, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> P.W. Pruyser, op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> E. Fromm, op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> M. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, New York, Harper and Row, 1967, pp. 23-38.

ly, and the myth-forming capacity of man does it still differently. Each discipline has its own practical divisions and coins its own conceptual formulations. The formulae and the references must be taken from the same system'.<sup>20</sup> Myths should be considered and understood as a human expression of his encounter with the numen and thus it expresses the relationship between the eternal and man himself as conceived in time and space. Rollo May considers the making of myth as an integral part of human nature.<sup>21</sup> This idea has been even manifested by Mircea Eliade. Both of them went so far as to say that those who react to some myth are just substituting one for another.

One finds activities in the form of different rituals along with the organization of thought.<sup>22</sup> These rituals may help to imitate the numen.<sup>23</sup> Yet, 'the behaviour may easily slip into identification based on sympathetic magic. If the land is parched, a priestly sprinkling of water drops may compel the rain god to splash more lavishly upon the earth'.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes, these rituals may placate the sense of guilt in a person by thinking that he is placating the numen. However, by such religious rituals one may feel invigorated because he may feel that his well being is increased. Yet, when the same rituals govern the life of the person they suppress, spontaneity and very often cause depression.<sup>25</sup> Then it is likely that the person will try to create new rituals to keep himself stimulated. At this very point one would be inclined to condemn the former rituals. It seems to me that when a person does this he fails to see the value and meaning of rituals in one's life and their relation to the life of the spirit in man. The birth, life and death of every ritualistic behaviour cannot be understood independently from the life of the spirit both in a person or society.

In view of what it has been said, it seems to me that one can conclude by saying that when a person encounter the numen he has to organize his thought and manifest it in some activity.

<sup>20</sup> P. W. Pruyser, op. cit. p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Rollo May, *Will and Love*, London, Fontana, p.

<sup>22</sup> P. W. Pruyser, op. cit. pp. 89, 90, 175.

<sup>23</sup> idem p. 177.

<sup>24</sup> idem p. 177.

<sup>25</sup> idem p. 157, 186, 187.

## TO BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH TRADITION:

Dr. Streng points out that being in accordance with the traditions as preserved by the seers and learned as a sign of religion. This seems to me to be half truth. There are times when the individual under the spirit of the 'wholly other' has to react against such traditions of his society.

Religious community life is the outcome of the experience of the numen. Then, a custom become the crystalised definition of the numen. Then, in the socializing process 'the objective system is transformed into a subjective reality'.<sup>26</sup> But complete identification between the church or society and the sacred cosmos becomes unrealistic. This is because there can be no 'perfect socialization of an individual into the social order'.<sup>27</sup> The more a society or a church gets involved with so many things in order to sanctify them and create a sacred cosmos, it results paradoxically in the lose of the aura of mystery which she claimed to have in the beginning of the process. This could be also seen in the recent politics of our country. The aura of power of our country pushed the nation in extremely dangerous involvement which paradoxically took from her the mystery and power. The same thing is happening in most churches. In such situations, the individual resorts once more for search for meaning of the 'wholly other'. This will be a personal view made in an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with his church or country. Hence, at such a specific time in history, the religion of the individual results in an external reaction to the once established objectification of the 'numen'. This social interaction between society and the individual is rightly named as the invisible religion because it keeps alive the search for the 'wholly other'.

From what has been said, it seems to me that both the criterium of Dr. Streng and the reaction of the individual against his church or society as described by Dr. Luckman can be both considered as good criteria of religiosity in man but at different stages in both the individual and society's development.

After going through these criteria by which a person is considered to be religious or not, the reader is very likely and justly tempted to

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, New York, Macmillan 1970, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> idem p. 79.



raise the question about what makes a person religious. The religious sentiment as Allport points out is a very complex sentiment.<sup>28</sup> It is so complex that he concluded the chapter on the 'origins of the religious quest' by saying 'that there are many varieties of religious experiences as there are religiously inclined mortals upon earth'.<sup>29</sup>

In view of this, I conclude my paper by saying that if the religious sentiment is so unique, any of the said criteria either by itself or with others should be taken with a pinch of salt and be applied with extreme caution in every individual case.

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon W. Allport *The Individual and His Religion*, New York, Macmillan, 1960, pp. 1-28.

<sup>29</sup> *idem* p. 27.