\\ FAITH AND REASON:

SOME ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN AWAY RELIGION //

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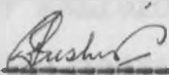
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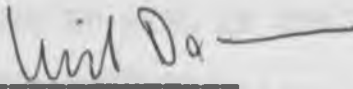This thesis is my original work and has not been
presented for a degree in any other University.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination
with my approval as University Supervisor

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SUMMARY

A topic that has long interested and puzzled the philosophers of religion is that of the relationship between reason and faith. It is with this puzzling and yet interesting question that this thesis concerns itself.

With a subject that has been turned on and off, in and out over the ages, it is not unusual to find that whatever is to be said has been said before in one way or another. It is possible however, to say the same thing in different ways. Our present thesis has set out to do just that. It is intended to make a new approach to an old question. The answer to which we finally arrive may not itself be a "novel answer" but the path that leads to this answer may differ significantly from the usual approaches. How well our thesis fails or succeeds in accomplishing this task however, is a judgement that only the reader can make.

Our approach has been to take a few of the more popular theories which were intended to "disprove" religion. These theories dismiss religion on the grounds that it is unintelligible - incompatible with reason. While we do not want to sound apologetic, we objectively examine the

arguments presented in these theories with the hope
of finding for ourselves whether or not such
reasoning offers conclusive evidence against the
compatibility of reason and religious faith.

Familiarity with the topics that form the
chapters of our thesis would suggest nothing extra-
ordinary in our treatment of the subject. Indeed,
most of our chapters have been the subject of
complete texts and huge volumes by different
scholars. There are many detailed books on Faith
and Reason (Chapter 1), Sigmund Freud's Psycho-
analytic theory of Religion (Chapter II), Karl
Marx's Socio-economic theory of religion (Chapter
III) and the Problem of Evil in World Religions
(Chapter V). There have also been many books written
on African Traditional Religions. But as far as we
are aware, there have not been any books that deal
with the Rationality of African Traditional Religions
(Chapter IV). In this respect, and as far as we
consider the rationality of faith with particular
reference to African Traditional Religions we may
be allowed to claim "originality" in approach.
Indeed, the second part of Chapter IV deals with
what is a relatively new concern among the scholars
of African traditional religions - the means of

interpretation. Though a good section of the
chapter is given to the 'symbolist' versus
"intellectualist" debate, the conclusions and opinions
that we finally arrive at are our own and Robin Horton
and John Beattie are only "midwives" who assist us
in delivering these conclusions and opinions.

A special word about Chapter V - The Problem
of Evil in World Religions. All the other chapters,
with the exception of the Chapter I and Conclusion
deal with a specific theory of religion - Freud's
psychological theory, Marx's sociological theory, and
Horton's scientific theory. Chapter V however, deals
not with one theory but with many. We felt it
necessary to include this chapter on evil because
most of the world religions acknowledge the importance
of providing an intelligible answer to the important
question of the existence of evil in the world. We
also felt that the attempt by these world religions
to provide an "intelligible" answer to the problem
of evil is among other things a partial answer to the
allegation that faith and reason are incommensurable.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this introduction is to pose
the question to which the remainder of this thesis
is an attempt to provide an answer.

The question of the nature of religious
faith and its relationship with reason is not a
new one. Many books have been written on this
subject but as yet the question remains without an
agreed solution. The absence of an agreed solution
may suggest that the subject is unimportant and so
not worth of serious attention. Nothing could be
more misleading. We have only to observe that the
list of agreed answers to philosophical questions is
surprisingly short and that the adoption of this policy
would put to an end some of the most important
philosophical inquiries. Indeed, it appears that the
more important the question is, the more divergent
the answers are bound to be.

The relationship between faith and reason is
one that interests both the believer and the non-
believer. For the believer the inquiry is an act of
'fides quarens intelectum' only in this case it is
faith seeking to understand itself. The believer
wants to assure himself and others that his belief
is not an arbitrary and emotional outburst but one

that is well weighed and honourably embraced. He
wants to show that his faith finds support in reason.

The agnostic is interested in the inquiry for
quite a different reason. His inquiry is hypothetical.
'If' there is a God, how is he known to men? He is
concerned about the epistemological character of
man's cognition or delusion, apprehension or
misapprehension of God. The object of the agnostic
is the manner and structure of the religious
person's supposed awareness of the divine.

The philosophical atheist enquires into the
nature of religious faith with the intention of
showing that religion is nothing but an illusion.
Thus, what constitutes a conviction for the theist
and an hypothesis for the agnostic is only a
delusion for the atheist.

But the faith-reason relationship is a very
wide area of study, one that could be approached
from many different angles. For the purposes of
the present exercise we propose to examine a few
theories which have at one time or another been
employed to explain away religion. By doing this
we shall be narrowing down our area of study to
exclude the theist and the agnostic while we
concentrate on the inquiry into faith-reason relation-
ship as seen by the atheists.

From what has been said above about the
atheist's interest in the inquiry under consideration
it is obvious that the theories treated in the
following chapters regard religion with scorn.
Their central claim is the incompatibility of reason
and faith. They variously regard religion as
illusion, fantasy, foolery and irrationalism. Each
of the theories treated below is an attempt to
discount by means of reason, what their authors
considered to be evasion, mystification and sophistry,
in the name of religion.

Our purpose in this thesis will be to find
out if religious faith can be understood by use of
reason in the way that scientific propositions are
understood. Following from our findings on this
question we will then concern ourselves with the
means of translation and interpretation of religion.

We make no claim to solve the age-old problem
of the relationship between faith and reason in this
limited paper. The most we can say is that it
attempts on impartial investigation and appraisal
of the selected theories as they relate to the
question of relationship between faith and reason.

Chapter I is a general survey of the alleged
relationship. Its task is to show the connection

(if any) between faith (believing) and the activities
of thinking and knowing. It examines some anti-
intellactual definitions of religion with the aim of
demonstrating the indispensability of reason in
religion.

Chapter II deals with Sigmund Freud's psycho-
analytic theory of religion. His theory of religion
as an illusion, an imaginary creation of the mind
is here examined in the light of what we know of
religion as a phenomenon and in the light of our
knowledge of Freud's psycho-analysis.

The socio-economic theory of Karl Marx is
treated next. The view of religion as a symptom
of man's alienation is itself due to the inadequacies
of the earthly conditions of life. The desire for
a better life, for more equality and justice give
birth to the hallucination of a heavenly realm where
earthly anguish comes to an end. In this dream-pipe
of heaven religion is born. Chapter III is an
evaluation of this critique.

Chapter IV on African traditional religions
presents peculiar problems of limitations. First,
the vast continent of African with its great variety
and multiplicity of people, has not one central
tradition but many. In recent years attempts have
been made to treat African traditional

religions as one unity. It is debatable if there is
such a thing as 'African religion'. Many scholars would
argue that we can only talk of African religions but
not of African religion. The authors who have treated
African religions as one phenomenon which only
differs in details from place to place have paid the
price of making general propositions about religion
in Africa. This approach leaves little room for
treatment in depth of the individual religious systems
of the different peoples. The writers are necessarily
forced to select only what they consider key beliefs
shared by most African peoples. Such studies can
only yield partial knowledge of African religions as
many differences and exceptions remain unobserved.

The second limitation is that our subject of
study is lacking in written documents. This lack
makes it difficult to interpret with certainty the
religious beliefs of the African peoples.

In religions like Christianity, Islam,
Judaism or even the religions of India and China
the question of interpretation is comparatively
easier and more certain. In these religions we find
not only a systematized doctrine but also hints as
to how the adherents of these religions understood
and interpreted their faith. We are here able to
discern religion from within. But this situation

is not true of African religions. On the African
scene we are necessarily detached from our subjects
of study. We can only approach African religions
from without. Even those scholars of African origin
who attempt to make a study of the religion of their
ancestors soon find that this religion is just as
foreign to them as it is to foreigners from other
continents. In a sense they are alienated from the
religions of their own people. This lack of intimacy
with African religions is perhaps responsible for
the great variety of interpretations given to these
religions. In Chapter IV we shall be concerned
with some of these interpretations.

The existence of evil in the world is often
cited as one factor that counts against the
intelligibility of religious faith. Chapter V is an
exploration of the way in which the world religions
have responded to this problem.

Finally in Chapter VI we attempt to bring out
some of the more important conclusions that we have
come by in the course of the entire exercise.

CHAPTER I

FAITH AND REASON

Basically, the Philosophy of Religion enables man to achieve two main objectives. Firstly, it helps him to clear his mind as to what religious belief is. It helps him to understand what religion is all about. Secondly, the philosophy of religion helps man to form an evaluation in accordance with the intellectual respectability of religious beliefs. It enables him to form his own judgement on the issues raised in religious beliefs.

The objectives of the philosophy of religion thus stated rest on the assumption that religion does have an element of intellectuality. But this does not imply that intellect constitutes the whole of religion. It may well be that religion contains as well non-intellectual elements. The philosopher of religion then is taken to task to show whether there is any relationship between the beliefs held in religion and reason. Does religion involve the activity of thinking and knowing? Does intellect play any part in the formulation and upholding of religious beliefs? These are the questions which must be answered before any attempt is made to assess the role of reason in religious claims.

To attempt an answer to these questions we may

assume at the outset that the essence of religion
is anything else than reason. If we can show this
assumption to be erroneous we will have shown the
need for the intellectual element in religion. This
approach is similar to the elimination method in
Geometry. By systematically eliminating those
possibilities which are not essential to the concept
we might finally arrive at one possibility which is
essential, indispensable. This essential and
indispensable possibility constitutes the essence of
the concept in question.

We cannot here hope to do any more than examine
a few views which claim religious beliefs as inde-
pendent of intellect. We shall examine only three
such anti-intellectual theories of religion.

The first view is that religion consists of
the performance of ritual acts and that whatever else
there may be in religion is secondary and irrelevant.
This theory springs from what has come to be called
'primitive religion'. One school of thought in
anthropology suggests that in the religions of the
"lower cultures" it is the practice, not the creed
that is worth of any study. It is generally claimed
that the 'primitive' societies lack the power of self-
analysis and self-expression. This renders 'primitive'
man incapable of systematically formulating and

expressing his creed.[1] Indeed, owing to his lack of
imagination and expression, the 'savage' is said to
have no creed whatsoever. Whereas his rituals are
pregnant with symbolic meaning, his creed (when
finally persuaded or pressed to express it) is at
best incoherent and misleading.

What is of importance in "primitive religion",
the anthropologists tell us, is the fact that the
'savage' offers libation to his ancestors, offers
sacrifices to keep the spirits happy, and consults
the oracle to find out his destiny. Of course, when
the savage is persuaded to explain his behaviour he
does come out with a sort of explanation. But these
explanations, the anthropologists tell us, are only
excuses made up much later to explain why the
savage behaves as he does. This explanatory story
is the germ which develops into creed. Creed in any
religion then is not an integral part of that
religion but only a later justification of ritual.

Anyone who is familiar with the traditional
religions of Africa would readily agree that in these
religions ritual plays a much more important role
than does doctrine. Nowhere in Africa does one come
across such a well ordered creed as that which is
taught in Christian Catechism. The Niceene and the

Apostle's Creeds have nothing to compare with in
African Religions. Nor is there in African traditio-
nal religions anything comparable to the sacred
scriptures or the Holy Bible. It seems true to say
that the adherents of African faiths lay much more
emphasis on ritual than they do on doctrine. The
practical aspect of religion has predominance over the
theory. But even with these observations, few would
concur with the anthropologists that therefore creed
is non-existent in primitive religions.

The explanation advanced by the anthropologists
is not without its own difficulties. In the first
place, it is unsafe to suggest that the religion
of the 'savage' is essentially the same as, or only
an undeveloped form of the religion of the "higher
cultures". There is simply no proof to support this.
Even if, for the more purpose of argument, we agree
that there is no creed or that creed is not an
essential part of primitive religion, we could not
with justification conclude that creed is not an
integral part of religion as such. It does not foll-
ow that what is true of primitive religion is aut-
amatically true of the more developed religions.

Secondly, even if the account of religion
given in this view were correct we would still be
justified in seeking the real reason why the savage

so devotedly clings to his rituals. What is the real
reason why the primitive man offers libation to
the dead? Why does the savage so meticulously
perform the final rites for his departed relatives?
Why is it that in some societies a dead man is
buried along with his possessions? It will not do
for the anthropologist to tell us that there is no
particular reason why the savage practices his
rituals.

In most of the so-called primitive societies
ritual is seen as a means, not an end in itself. It
is not a source of pleasure but often times a very
unpleasant necessity. And yet there must be some
reason for having confidence in these rituals.

Among the African peoples it is extremely
important to observe the final rites of a dead
relative. It is believed that if the living fail to
carry out the proper burial and mourning, the dead
person will haunt the living and could cause them
much suffering or even death. Similarly, many
Africans believe in the importance of the cleansing
rituals as means of averting evil consequences of
actions done. Surely, these are reasons for
observing ritual. We may not feel that they are good
reasons but we must accept them as reasons. There
must be some reason, no matter how vague, for every

ritual action, as these actions are not an end in
themselves.

The anthropologist may be justified in refusing
to take the various myths offered by the primitive
people as the real reason for ritual. There are
thousands of these myths which purport to explain
events. Most of these myths cannot be taken serious-
ly. They do not constitute a sound scientific
explanation of ritual. But where the anthropologist
may go wrong is in doubting the possibility of a
true and adequate account. Furthermore we may do
well to remember here that the issue at stake is
not whether the doctrines of African faiths are
scientifically sound but whether in fact these
faiths have any doctrines at all.

Indeed, it seems that the primitive man not
only has a creed or a doctrine, but that in fact
this creed is the foundation of his ritual. He
performs his rituals so that the rain may fall, so
that he may avert evil and disease, and to restrain
the spirits which surround him from turning against
him. He performs these actions because he has faith
in them. He believes, indeed knows, that certain
actions induce some power to make rain, to avert
disease and to restrain the wrath of the spirits.
(This last clause is not to be understood as implying

that there is a power greater than the spirits, for
in some societies the spirits themselves are the
power that man tries to calm with his rituals).

It is not the case then as the anthropologists
may put it that ritual produces creed, but that
creed preceeds ritual. This is true not only of
primitive religions but of all religions. It is
always the creed that impels one to ritual. Ritual
would be meaningless unless it was based on a belief -
the belief that some power can be dealt with by
performing certain actions.[2]

Another anti-intellectual view of religion
claims that religion is exclusively a matter of
conduct and that any doctrine which is not immediately
related to conduct is not an integral part of religion.

True, religion has a great deal in common with
morality. Indeed, one's conduct may be greatly
shaped or influenced by his religious convictions.
It is even plausible to admit that no part of
religion is irrelevant to conduct. But this admission
does not equate religion with morality. Every
conduct, every behaviour (moral) is a result of the
realization of some truth. Morality presupposes
knowledge and freedom. The question, "What is right
for me to do?" "How ought I to behave in such and
such a situation?" Can only be adequately answered

if we are aware of the problem, we know possible
alternatives and their consequences, and we are free
to choose and act on any of these alternatives. But
this awareness is knowledge. We cannot then have
morality divorced from reason.

Even if we agree with the proponents of the view
of religion as morality we must nevertheless point
out that morality itself has to do with intellect.
In that case religion (which is here equated with
morality) cannot be independent of reason.

But our everyday experiences do not support
this purely moral view of religion. If a man living
in a Christian society rejects Christianity, on
this view, he denies Christian morality since
Christianity is nothing more than Christian morality.
But this is not true in experience. A one-time
Christian may reject Christianity and still maintain
his morality. But what has this man rejected? If
his conduct remains the same he has not rejected
Christian morality. It may be said that the man has
rejected Christianity only by name while remaining
a Christian at Heart. This answer can be dangerous.
It aims at reducing every virtous atheist into a
hypocrite. To avoid this, the upholder of religion
as morality may say that the man in question has
rejected not real Christianity but only false

Christianity. This is tantamount to saying that the
man rejects the intellectual system annexed to relig-
ion. This argument would betray his cause for the
intellectual aspect is precisely what is in question.

This theory differs from the first in that it
acknowledges that there is such a thing as creed.
Creed may among other things form a basis for morality.
But the very fact that morality is assisted by creed
means that it is founded on intellect. The act of
judging something as right or wrong presupposes
knowledge of certain facts and this judgement is
itself the function of the intellect. Not many
people would argue that non-religious moral teaching
(if there is such a thing) is religion, but few
would deny that it is morality. And yet this is what
this view seems to advocate, namely, that religion
is synonymous with morality.

Some believers propose to save faith from the
intricate intellectual problems by claiming that
religion belongs to the realm of feeling and so is
not subject to intellectual scrutiny. That religion
involves feelings cannot be denied. Religion does
involve emotion[3] but this does not render it unin-
telligible or anti-intellectual. Christianity
involves love - love of God and neighbour. Love is
a feeling, but it is not on that account unintelligi-
ble. Christian love implies knowledge - knowledge of

God and His Divine Will. Love may be an emotion but
emotion does not stand alone in isolation from the
other faculties of the mind. It includes both
thinking and willing. One reason why an infant does
not have emotions is that it has not yet developed
its powers of thought. It is yet to learn to think,
will and respond to stimuli. Emotions just like
morality, have their foundations in intellect.

The three theories just examined fail through
their denial of the necessity of doctrine in religion.
It is true that ritual, morality and feeling are
elements of religion. But it is not true that these
are the sole constituents of religion either jointly
or severally. In all these theories we have found
out that one thing they have in common is their
intellectual foundation. Ritual, conduct and feeling
have all got their roots in reason. While this does
not entitle us to conclude that creed is the essential
factor of religion, it does at least point to that
direction. Generally, religion cannot exist without
some belief as to the nature of God. In some
religions e.g. Buddhism, there is not a clear
concept of God or his nature. Every religion, however,
claims to present as true and intellectually sound
a doctrine which may rightly be described as that
religion's theory of God. This belief is not some-

thing distinct or extra to religion itself. It is not the sole constituent of religion either. It is simply one aspect or element of religion but a vital and indispensable one. Our examination of the three theories above may not be conclusive evidence to show reason is an indispensable element in religion. But when these theories are taken along with a multitude of other theories of similar nature we can justifiably claim this role for reason.

But the fact that reason is an important element of religious claims does not in itself mean that therefore the philosophy of religion is capable of meeting the objectives that we stated at the opening of this chapter. To show that philosophy can and does achieve these objectives we would have to answer certain question such as the possibility of religous claims being altogether beyond the scope of human knowledge. We would have to consider the possibility of religious knowledge being attainable by intuition and not by rational insight. Then again we would have to define the role of divine revelation and show where reason does come in.

These are not novel questions. Over the ages the same questions have been asked and different answers have been offered. It is not our intention here to reproduce the various answers given to these

questions. It is important to note, however, that
in attempting to answer these questions we are
really and actively "philosophising" about religion.
In a sense we are already engaged in the aims of
the philosophy of religion. We are trying to
understand religion, its nature, origin, its claims.
We are at the same time forming judgement (evalu-
ating) on what we thereby understand.

In the chapters that follow we shall examine
the efforts of some noteworthy individuals to come
to grips with the phenomenon of religion. Sigmund
Freud's psycho-analytic theory of religion, Karl
Marx's economic theory and Robin Horton's scientific
theory are all frantic attempts to explain away
religion. Freud and Marx deal with religion as an
universal phenomenon whereas Horton deals with the
narrower field of African traditional religions.

FOOTNOTES:

1. I use this term here in a rather rudimentary
    sense to indicate any theory of the nature of
    the power which governs and controls the
    world.

2. I am aware of certain arguments which claim
    priority for ritual but on the whole these
    arguments are for the most part contradictory.

3. 'Emotion will here refer to the positive
    conviction which is accompanied by the
    inability to prove or explain the conviction.

CHAPTER II

SIGMUND FREUD'S PSYCHO-ANALYTIC THEORY

OF RELIGION

> "that our researches may lead
> to a result that reduces
> religion to a state of neurosis
> of mankind and explains its
> grandiose powers in the same way
> as we should a neurotic obsession
> in our own individual patients"
>
> (Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism
> translated by Katherine Jones,
> Hogarth Press, London, 1939, p. 91).

Sigmund Freud approaches the religious phenomenon from the point of view of psycho-analysis. For him, all aspects of adult life can be traced back all the way to the initial situation in the history of mankind. Culture, morals, religion and social organisation have their origin in totemism. Religion itself can be traced back to the infantile experiences of man.

According to Gorgio Zunini,[1] Freud was greatly influenced by Darwin's theory and Atkinson's idea, both of which he adopted. Darwin had earlier claimed that primitive man lived in small hordes, each of which was subject to the tyranny of the eldest male member. Atkinson's idea was that this patriarchal regime ended in the revolt of the sons who killed and ate their father. Freud accepts both these

theories. He then proceeds to incorporate Robertson
Smith's totem theory. The brothers, having killed
their father, renounced the women on whose account
they had eliminated the father. Exogamy was imposed
and families re-arranged along matriarchal lines.
To the sons however, the idea of the father did not
die out. He was still a forceful object of
jealousy and fear. The sons were jealous of their
dead father for having possessed their mother.
They were at the same time afraid of him whom they
had innocently killed. Eventually, they chose an
animal to represent their dead father. The animal
was their totem - their protecting spirit, which must
be treated with full reverence and respect. No one
was allowed to kill it. But once every year one of
these animals was slain and eaten in common in a
ritual attended by all. This ritual was a comme-
moration of the liberation from paternal tyranny
and the beginning of a new moral and social order.
Here, in the earliest developments of totemism,
says Freud, is where we must turn if we would
understand the origins of religion.

Religion for Freud is more than an error. It
is an illusion. Unlike error it cannot be shown
to be false by use of reason. By its nature an
illusion is an intense desire for something. Man so

intensively desires an object that he lives as if he
already possessed the object of his desire. This is
illusion and it can neither be proved nor disproved.
For Freud, the personal God is no more than a mag-
nified earthly father. The roots of such beliefs
lie in the Oedipal complex. To understand religion
then, it is necessary to trace back the infantile
behaviour of the individual, regardless of his position
in time or space. It is the Oedipal situation in
which all infants necessarily find themselves as a
consequence of being born and being unable to
realise their instinctual drives in relation to the
parent of the opposite sex that is largely responsible
for religion.

In the earliest stages of life the child is
totally dependent on the mother for all his needs.
The mother feeds him when he is hungry or thirsty.
She attends him when he is in discomfort, clothes
him, and offers him her warmth and love. He is so
entirely dependent on his mother for the satisfaction
of his every need. This dependence gradually
develops into a most intimate relationship between
mother and son. The child learns his basic emotions
in this relationship. He begins to love, hate, fear
and feel anxious depending very much on the way the
mother treats him. He also learns to respond to

intimacy, insecurity and love. This early experience
of complete dependence is, Freud tells us, crucial
to his theory of religion.

As he grows older, the child extends his
dependence to the father. He relies upon his father
for the provision of need and protection from danger.
But even at this stage in life the child entertains
sexual desires directed towards his mother. Con-
sequently, he comes to regard his father as a rival
who stands between the child and his heart's desire.
This realization develops into ambivalent feelings
in the boy. On the one hand, he murderously hates
his father. On the other hand, he loves his father
because he (the father) cares for him. The father
is at once the object of admiration and love, of
jealousy and hate.

In the course of time the child makes another
crucial discovery. He learns that contrary to his
earlier impressions, his father is subjected to grave
limitations. The father is not all-powerful or even
all-good. The child learns that his father is some-
times helpless in face of problems and difficulties.
He learns that his father is at times afraid of
forces that he cannot control. Above all, he learns
that his father has no power over death. He realises
that one day the father will die and leave him

defenceless and helpless.

With this discovery, another critical stage is reached. The new knowledge is completely incompatible with the knowledge hitherto attained. It produces in the child emotions which are wholly unacceptable. And since this knowledge is so unagreeable and unacceptable the child tends to push it into the background. But he cannot forget it completely. The emotions thus produced do not disappear. They linger in the back of the child's mind. In Freud's language, the unacceptable knowledge has been "repressed". This is really a consequence of defence mechanism. The new knowledge, if given free play, would tend to cause some conflict. The undesireable knowledge is forced into the unconscious. As long as the child is not actively conscious of the new knowledge the conflict is comfortably evaded.

All that has been said so far occurs in the family context. It is the family context that offers resolution to the conflict. (Ironically, it is also the family context that gives rise to this conflict.[1]) The family context offers the opportunity for the "ego" (the self or 'I' concerned with self preservation) to organize and channel the drives of the "id" (the store-house of the instincts entirely in the unconscious which contains all that is inherited).

It is also in the family context that the 'super-ego'
(the conscience or "inner-voice" which acts as the
judge instructing the individual of right and wrong)
is formed. The family context then presents a
"modus vivendi" in what is rapidly learnt to be a
dangerous environment.

But the family context is a micro-universe.
The universe in which the adult man finds himself,
though in many respects similar to a family, is
radically different from it. The universe, unlike
the family is not a caring environment. It is utterly
indifferent to human feelings. It is impersonal and
knows no sympathy. It is capable of causing
disastrous destructions through its unpredictable
and uncontrollable events - earthquakes, floods,
droughts, and epidemics. Man is aware of all these
evils and indifferences which make the universe
faceless, unbearable. But instead of accepting this
universe as it is, he attempts to make it personal
or at least caring and purposeful. He creates in his
imagination, a father-figure which he projects into
the universe. He continually lives "as if" that
illusory creature really cares. All this is done,
willingly or otherwise, for the purpose of resolving
conflict. But this is all done at a price. The
drives of the 'id' have to be repressed. In the

family context, an accommodation had to be found for
the father on whom the child depends but of whom he
is jealous. In the universe, the price paid for
creating and embracing religion is neurosis - a
result of the conflict between the 'ego' and the 'id'.
The world that religion offers (a world of meaning,
care and purpose), requires the repression of bitter
reality - that the universe is cruel and purposeless.
Further, it requires an imaginary creation - a
father who corresponds to the earliest-learnt source
of care and purpose. Religion therefore, is a
universal neurosis. It is the consequence of living
"as - if" that wishful thinking were in reality true.
This wishful thinking continually hinders one from
developing into full maturity. As long as man clings
to religion he is still a helpless child depending
for all his needs on an imaginary father who is free
from all earthly limitations. For God is nothing
but the "sublimated physical father of human beings".

It has been noted that man's belief in God
results from his projection of the father-figure onto
the cosmic screen. Man stands in need of a father
who is free of all earthly limitations. Such a
father is readily provided by man's own imaginations.
Man, contrary to popular belief, is the creator. He
creates a God and cherishes his belief in this creature

- God. Thus man clings to religion for all his
practical needs. But what exactly is the role of
religion in man's life?

Religion offers an alternative to neurosis,
explains the intricate riddle of life, consoles and
relieves man from his fear of natural forces,
reconciles him to his miseries and enables him to
amend for the sufferings and privations that the
communal life of culture (the organised society) has
imposed upon him. Neurosis is a psychic disturbance
which often results from inner conflicts in childhood.
It is the result of the ego being unable to cope with
the outer world in the face of the demands of the inner,
instinctual drives. It is with this disturbance that
Freud compares religion.

In Civilization and its Discontents he has the
following to say about religion:

> "It's technique consists in depressing
> the value of life and distorting the
> picture of the real world in a delusional
> manner - which presupposes an
> intimidation of the intelligence. At this
> price, by forcibly fixing them in a state
> of physical infantilism and drawing them
> into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds
> in sparing many people an individual
> neurosis. But hardly anything more"[2]

The religious believer then, is a neurotic.
Obsessional neurosis is characterised by anti-social
and primitive tendencies, highly developed defence
mechanisms, lack of overt but presence of underlying

anxiety, and an awareness of one's compulsions and
obsessions as one's own with an accompanying sense
that they are somehow foreign to his own being.
Freud would have us believe that the religious
believer bears the same characteristics. Mortifica-
tion, penance, sacrifice and selflessness which are
all too common in most religions are characteristic
of the neurotic's primitive tendencies. They add
up to some kind of mild asceticism. The act of
projection and the deliberate transfer of responsi-
bility to an imaginary deity is a sure sign of
defence mechanism. It is like blaming someone else
for the fault that is truly one's own. Below the
apparently contented and amicable face of a believer
lies a whole world of conflict, anxiety and nervous-
ness. The whole doctrine of religion and the
dogmas is at once personal and yet beyond the
believer. God is so far out of reach and yet so
near. In a word, the believer is really an obsess-
ional neurotic.

In The Future of an Illusion Freud defines
religion as:-

> "that system of doctrines and pledges
> which on the one hand explains the
> riddle of the world to him with an enviable
> completeness, and on the other, assures
> him that a solicitous providence is watching
> over him and will make up for him in a
> future existence for any shortcomings in
> this life. The ordinary man cannot

> imagine this Providence in any other
> form than that of a greatly exalted
> father, for only such a one could understand
> the needs of the sons of men, or be
> softened by their prayers and placated
> by the signs of their remorse"[3]

Once man is prepared to regard the universe as
controlled and governed by gods it ceases to be
impersonal and hostile. He develops high hopes of
pleasing or ingratiating the gods. In his endavour
to please, man tends to apply his "modus vivendi"
to the universe. He applies to nature those patterns
which have already been successful in the family
context and in his social interactions. Thus he is
enabled to face the most hostile forces of nature.
Terror, pain, suffering, uncertainty, and death all
become torelable. The "ego - id" conflict is played
down and the believer lives in apparent calm and
harmony. This is how religion replaces the individu-
al's neurosis.

But religion is more than just a neurosis. A
more fundamental role of religion is its explanatory
function. In <u>Civilization and its Discontents</u>,Freud
quotes Goethe the poet, concerning the relationship
between religion and science.

> "He who possesses science and art
> also has religion but he who
> possesses neither of these two,
> let him have religion!"[4]

For Freud, the roles of religion, science and arts are

interchangeable. He does not, of course, equate
religion with science and arts which he calls "the
highest achievements of mankind", but he sees their
interchangea-bility in that both of them attempt to
offer a solution to the riddle of life.

> "The question of the purpose of human
> life has been raised countless times;
> it has never yet received a
> satisfactory answer and perhaps does
> not admit of one. Some of those who
> have asked it have added that if it
> should turn out that life has no
> purpose, it would lose all value for them.
> But this threat offers nothing. It looks,
> on the contrary, as though one had a
> right to dismiss the question, for it
> seems to derive from human presumptousness,
> many other manifestations of which are
> already familiar to us. Nobody talks
> about the purpose of the life of animals,
> unless perhaps it may be supposed to lie
> in being of service to man. But this
> view is not tenable either, for there
> are many animals of which man can make
> nothing, except to describe, classify
> and study them; and inumerable species of
> animals have escaped even this use, since
> they existed and became extinct before
> man set eyes on them. Once again only
> religion can answer the question of
> the purpose of life. One can hardly
> be wrong in concluding that the idea
> of life having a purpose stands and fails
> with the religious system"[5]

Religion may be compared to tinted spectacles. A man
in dark spectacles sees everything around him as dark.
When once man embraces religion he sees the universe
in a new light. In nature he sees design - the trade-
mark of a wise designer. Nature ceases to be a
to be a meaningless, purposeless, haphazard and

uncaring conglameration of objects. It becomes a
clear-pointer to some divine who is not insensitive
to human pleas. Man begins to see society as the
setting of the gods and natural environment as the
medium of interaction, between gods and men.
Eventually, man realises that in the place of a host
of gods he could create a single god with all the
combined attributes and powers of the host.
Monotheism, gradually grows from polytheism.
Consequently, man, who is only a child at heart,
gains a father who is omnipotent, omniscient, and
benevolent. With this provision the individual's
security is guaranteed. The believer lives in the
full awareness of a Divine who protects and provides
him with unparalleled security.

The functions of religion (as Freud saw them)
are beautifully summed up by J. C. Flugel, in his
recapitulation of Freud's theory.

> "The advantage that religion shares
> with all animistic beliefs in that
> we can deal with the forces of Nature
> as we can with people; we can bribe,
> flatter, implore, cojole, or perhaps
> even threaten them. At the stages of
> religion proper i.e. when spirits
> become exalted into gods, we can
> (as we have seen) enjoy a continuation
> of the protection and guidance that
> was given to us by our parents in our
> infancy. We need not feel that we are
> weak and helpless puppets of Chance or
> Destiny, forlorn orphans in a vast
> and heedless universe; on the contrary,

we can enjoy the sense of playing
an important part in a scheme of
things run by an omnipotent Creator
who watches over us lovingly as we
play the role that he has alloted
to us. Our puny efforts acquire
dignity and meaning as part of a
Higher Purpose. The seeming hard-
ships and injustices of life lose
their sting when we believe that they
only appear to us in this light
because of the shortness of our vision
or at least that divine justice will
recompense us amply for the sufferings
we have endured. When belief in
personal immortality is added to our
belief in God, the ever-present threat
of death loses horror when confronted
with the prospect of an eternity of
bliss. Finally, our intellectual
curiousity is gratified by an
explanation of the origin, nature and
purposes of the universe so far as our
limited intellects are capable of
grasping problems of this magnitude ---"[6]

Religion then is of tremendous use to the
individual. It comfortably and conveniently
reconciles men to their miseries. Men learn to
accept and live with all kinds of frustrations,
humiliations, poverty and a multitude of otherwise
unbearable miseries. They learn to live in hope -
hope of compensation in another world. Religion
provides a boundless fountain of hope and optimism
in life. And above all, it promises continuation -
after life.

Freud is well aware of all these advantages of
religion but he makes no pretence about his disregard
for religion.

"The whole thing is so patently
infantile, so foreign to reality,
that to anyone with a friendly
attitude to humanity it is painful
to think that the majority of mortals
will never be able to rise above this
view of life. It is still more
humiliating to discover how large a
number of people living today, who
cannot but see that this religion
is not tenable, nevertheless try
to defend it piece by piece in a
series of pitiful rearguard
action."7

Freud is convinced of the danger posed on
mankind by religion. It is the greatest enemy of man
and truth. Man must constantly be on his guard
against all sorts of illusions especially the illusion
of religion. He must continuously wage war against
escapism. He must learn to face himself as he is
and to live in his world, no matter how cruel and
heartless it may be. The religious man is a neurotic
and like all neurotics he stands in dire need of a
cure. The cure that Freud recommends is psychoanalysis.
Man must be re-educated. In this re-education,
science and rationality, not religion, must be brought
to the fore. Man must be made aware that religion is
only an illusion, a projection based on fear and
frustration. When man sees religion as it really is
then religion will automatically lose all its magic.
Religion, if Freud is to be believed, has no future.
Psychoanalysis will eventually succeed in eradicating

it from society. There is no need for organised or
forceful campaigns against religion for it is on its
way to its grave - of a natural death.

Setting aside the truth value of his theory,
Freud may be shown to be a victim of methodology. His
knowledge of religion is in the main drawn from his
clinical experience. From his analysis of men who
are mentally unbalanced he proceeds to describe and
analyse their religion. The objection to this
approach is that the patient is already so mentally
sick that his religion cannot be taken to exhibit
anything but the religion of a mad man. The religion
of these patients cannot be taken as a valid model
for generalised statements of religion "per se".
What Freud says about religion may in fact be true.
But if it turns out to be true it can only be a coin-
cidence. The truth of religion is a question which
requires massive evidence. Unfortunately, Freud is
a long way from providing the required evidence. A
balanced view of religion (not a prejudiced stand or
the religion of insane individuals) must take into
account a lot more than Freud's own limited case
material. Instead of utilising the anthropological
evidence as serious data Freud treats it as a source
from which to derive stories to illustrate his theory.
Further, it is <u>unscientific</u> for one to presuppose

(as Freud does) the falsity of what one is supposed
to investigate. The bias so created at the beginning
must innevitably interfere with the findings.

> "Psychoanalytic theory remains a
> clinical theory, and its extension
> to explain non-pathological experience,
> is rendered dangerous by the fact that
> all evidence is drawn from patients
> whose experiences are pathological."[8]

Methodological error notwithstanding, the theory
itself is incomplete. It accounts for the religious-
ness of individual people. What it fails to do is
show how this leads to the development of religious
institutions. How is the religiousness of individu-
als related to the growth of religious institutions
in society?

In his explanation of religious rights and
practices, Freud employs the story of the primal
horde. This story, like the creation story in
Genesis, is subject to a variety of interpretations.
It may be understood as a myth whose purpose is to
illuminate our understanding of the origin of religi-
on by means of an allegory. It may alternatively
be interpreted as an imaginative reconstruction of
actual events. This reconstruction is purportedly
supported by anthropological material and by in-
ferences drawn from clinical experience. The bulk of
evidence, however, shows that Freud meant the story
to be given a historical interpretation. Earnest

Jones, his English biographer, seems to support

this interpretation when he writes:-

> "About these happenings there can
> be little doubt; fathers, gods,
> and kings have been slain
> innumerable times in the tragic
> history of mankind."[9]

But a historical interpretation of this story poses

certain problems for the theory of religion. On

the whole it has the unfortunate consequence of

rendering Freud's theory even more incredible. The

theory is seen as contradicting most of what is

known to be the case in history. If the story of the

primal horde were a historical fact it would be

expected that most simple societies would have

totemism as their form of religion. There would be

many well-known examples of such societies where the

ceremonial slaying and eating of the totem was pract-

ised. We would expect pre-totemic societies to be

devoid of any sort of religion, morals and organisa-

tion. These societies would be characterised by

cannibalism and group marriage or even public promis-

cuity. But anthropological evidence does not con-

firm any of these expectations. The Freudian theory,

especially the bit about the Oedipal complex is

difficult to accept. There is no evidence in its

support. And if this complex is unacceptable it would

be difficult to accommodate Freud's claim that the

growth of religious institutions is to be explained
by reference to the Oedipal situation. Thus, an
unbridgeable gap is left between the religion of
the individual and the origin of religions institut-
ions.

It may also be noted that Freud incorporates
in his theory much of what are in fact his own
personal problems. His troubled and anxious relation-
ship with his family, with Judaism, and with religion
in general unconsciously came to the fore in his theory
of religion.

But if this theory is incredible it is
equally irrefutable. No scholar has so far con-
clusively disapproved Freud's theory. This may be
attributed to the fact that Freud's theory of
religion is _unscientific_. Bowker makes an interesting
remark in this connection:

> "The basic defect of Freud's theory of
> religion is not that it cannot possibly
> be right, but that it cannot possibly
> be wrong: all evidence that superficially
> appears to contradict the theory, is
> converted to become evidence _for_ the
> theory, because it can be regarded
> as evidence of repression or of defence
> against the true nature of what is
> going on"10

True, the theory is built on inadequate anthropolo-
gical evidence. It is also true that evidence for
some situations points in other directions. But
for Sigmund Freud, all this simply means that in

those particular situations the Oedipal complex is
being solved totemically, even though certain
surviving totemic practices do not make it manifest.
What really happens is that the layers of defence
and repression are built as a way of handling the
basic Oedipal guilt. Whether or not the actual
slaying of the father did ever take place in the
fashion of Freud's description is immaterial. He
is convinced that he has identified the origin of
religion in the history of human race.

Freud's frustration theory is itself the source
of frustration for other scholars. It is impossible
to falsify it. Those anthropologists who fail to
see Freud's point must be seen to fail in recognising
and resolving their own Oedipal situation. But
if a theory cannot be falsified, if it cannot be
tested, it is at the best improbable, and at the
worst, for all practical purposes worthless.

The situation is indeed so irritating that it
leads such psychologists as Max Hammerton to
sincerely wish that Freud had never been born. He
sums up his criticism in Listener:[11]

> "I consider first, that the whole corpus
> of Freudian doctrine, considered as a
> system, stands not upon one grain of
> scientific foundation; second, that there
> isn't a scrap of positive evidence that
> psychoanalysis has ever cured anyone of

anything. —— Whatever behaviour a
person exhibits, there is a Freudian
mechanism to account for it afterwards.
They sedulously avoid making
predictions which can be put to test:
Freud himself called upon his
disciples not to "delude themselves"
into thinking they could do so."

What about the universality which Freud claims

for totemism? History seems to contradict this

claim. Schmidt points out that the three great

ruling races, namely, the Indo-Europeans, Hamito-

Semites, and the Ural-Altaics, had originally no

totemism. They only acquired it much later from

their extensive travels and then only in a distorted

form.[12]

To stress the implausibility of the Freudian

theory he goes on to say:-

"The picture which we thus get of the
earliest men is certainly way differant
from that which Freud constructs in his
theory. To bring such men into
connection with modern sex-ridden
neurotics, as he would have us do, and
from this connection to deduce the
alleged fact that all thought and
feelings, especially subliminal, is
founded on and saturated with sex,
must remain lost labour. Thus,
Freud's hypothesis lose its last
shadown of hope ever to corraborate
or establish any single part of itself,
for every part collapses in ruin."[13]

Perhaps more than anything else Freud's over-

confidence in rationality and science has contributed

to his failure. He is convinced that any and all

the problems of mankind can be solved by science.
Unfortunately, men are discovering everyday that
science is not the answer to all our needs and
problems. One of the wide areas where science is
at a loss is in the field of man's spiritual needs.
There have been thousands of theories aimed at
discrediting religion. The problem with these
advocates of abolition is that they offer nothing
much in the way of substitute. Often, their denial
of religion only serves to affirm it. No one
expresses this better than Zunin.

> "—— the strange thing is that the
> psychologist who has dismissed God
> as an illusion prepares for himself
> and finds himself face to face with
> another god, no less mysterious and
> dangerous than the one he has driven
> away. He is face to face with the
> god of human reason. In Freud himself
> we find an attachment, which has all the
> appearance of a religious belief. There
> is just one difference - in place of God
> there is man, self-sufficient and alone,
> not real man but symbolic man into whom
> men's desires are projected.
>
> It is significant even from the
> psychological point of view, that we
> cannot create a void where God should
> be, and that when we believe we have
> eliminated him we have merely set
> another in his place. How many
> divinities have succeeded each
> other in the course of history!
> Leaving alone the divinities of
> the various religions, we have
> only to think of some of the
> ideologies: "matter", the "spirit",
> reason, society, the state"[14]

About the inadequacy of science to satisfy
every need of man he writes:

"In face of a science which professes
to take the place of religion and
thereby runs the risk of being a
false science and a wretched religion we
we may well find ourselves inclined
to return to the old-fashioned idea
of religion overtaking science
precisely in its most appropriate
function, which is the search
for truth and reverence for what
transcends human capacity ——
it (science) cannot introduce
eternal man, the man of all
centuries, into the mystery -
today more profound than ever - of the
world around him and of his own inner life,
unless a spell-bound admiration, a
"pietas" that bows its head before a
great invisible power. A religion
which sees man against the background of
a great and mysterious   Absolute and
a science which bides its time
respectifully and vigilantly while
endavouring to approach this Absolute,
can and must co-exist if man is really
to understand himself and his place in
the world."[15]

Ironically, depth-psychology instead of killing

religion, seems to be indirectly reinforcing it.

It does this by demonstrating the fundamental nature

and infantile origin of the needs underlying religion.

It draws attention to the value of the emotional

satisfaction which is extremely important from the

point of view of mental and social hygiene.

Psychoanalysis endows religious belief with a signi-

ficance far greater than we should be inclined to

accord it from the stand-point of physical science.

In _Moses and Monotheism._ Freud expresses his

hope that his researches might lead "to a result

that reduces religion to the state of a neurosis
of mankind and explains its grandiose
powers in the same way as we would a neurotic
obsession in our own individual patients."[16]
But the ability of psychoanalysis to explain even
neurosis of the individual has come under attack:

> "—— it may be asserted with some
> confidence that the expectations that
> depth-psychology would disaprove of
> gods and demons for us has been
> gravely disappointed. The gods are
> dead indeed ——. But although they
> are dead, they will not lie down.
> And it is depth-psychology itself
> which is expressing them again in
> all their potency - indeed in all
> their naked primitiveness and
> explosiveness as inescapable
> factors in the fashioning of human
> health and happiness, misery and
> destiny. Paradoxically, in the
> very fact of treating them as
> "projections" or contents of the
> unconscious, it has revealed their
> ineluctable and all-pervasive
> power. Scientifically labelled and filed,
> the gods all the more persistently go
> a-begging for our attention, and that with
> a claim more imperious, than such as can
> be heard in logical "arguments for
> the existence of God."[17]

So far, the reader may get the impression that
Freud's contribution is minimal and, in the main,
negative. This is not true. Freud has also made
some lasting contributions to our understanding of
religion. His theory gives a deeper insight into
the present state of religion especially in the
Western World. Religion is fast withering away in the

West.   A reading of Freud would suggest that this
may be due to the fact that men have over-intelle-
ctualised religion. It has been uprooted from its
lowly origins in mental, instinctive human needs and
experience and turned into an academic occupation.
It has been submitted, even by Freud himself, to the
norms of science and rationality. The consequence
is that religion, which does not readily respond to
these investagions is rashly judged to be meaningless
and irrelevant to healthy human experience. Freud's
theory then serves as a clear indication of the danger
of over-intellectualising religion.

Nor can we easily ignore the idea of the
unconscious in religion. Prior to Freud's theory,
scholars had assumed that religion was wholly a
rational affair. The rationalistic theories had
sought to reveal the origins of religion in the
rational thought of the individual. Freud's theory,
on the other hand, was quite the opposite. He
supposes religion to provide a radical alternative
to scientific thought. This alternative is readily
accepted because scientific truth is so bitter. By
this approach, Freud so decisively cut away from
the rationalistic theories that it is difficult
to make a come-back to them. For Freud, anything
short of realisable ideal of complete consciousness
is abnormal and pathological. Theology itself is not

opposed to this. Religion in the sense of creeds
and external cults arises from man's relative
unconsciousness, from his incomprehension and
disharmony with the creative mind behind the universe,
and from man's relative unconsciousness, and from
his own inner conflicts and divisions. Such
religion, in Christian theology, is the result of
man's fall from original innocence and integrity,
his remoteness from Divine Vision. Freud's idea
of the unconsciousness then was not without some
truth. It is true that religion depends partly on
the unconscious. Freud's mistake was in thinking
that religion, like neurosis can be psycho-analysed
away. Our contention is that Freud over-stressed
the idea of unconsciousness. In our judgement
neither extreme (rationalism or psycho-analysis) is
satisfactory. The truth seems to lie in the middle
course.

Finally, the theory warns against the danger
of "blind" religiousness. Alongside of its benefic-
ent function, religion in its more crude forms can
exercise a more severe crippling and inhibiting
effect upon the human mind by fostering irrational
anxiety and guilt, and by hampering the true play
of intellects. The theory seems to imply that reli-
gion must not be given full play of emotions. It is
necessary to submit our beliefs and practices to

rational test occasionally so as to rule out the
danger of irrational anxiety. Thus, though his
theory is a "frustration theory" it has some valuable
contributions for religion at large.

When all is said, we must accept Sigmund
Freud as one of the greatest psychologists that ever
lived. It is interesting that he did not succeed
in explaining away religion altogether. We suggest
two major reasons for this failure. First, like
Marx and Horton, Freud takes the claims and beliefs
of religion too literally. In particular, he fails
to acknowledge the symbolic dimension of the religi-
ous phenomenon. As a consequence he takes religion
at its face value and it is this he subjects to his
psycho-analytic tests. The result is not surprising
in the least. A necessary condition for a meaningful
criticism of any subject is that the critic should
adequately understand his subject. Possession of
incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of the subject,
more likely than not, produces an ineffective
criticism.

Secondly, Freud does not approach the question
objectively. As we have pointed out earlier Freud
starts his inquiry with a strong bias against
religion. His theory is a justification of what he
already believes, and not (as it should be) an

objective and critical scrutiny of facts leading to
a logical conclusion. In as far as he is subjective
and not objective, Freud is also unscientific in his
approach. These two factors, more than anything
else seem responsible for Freud's failure to explain
away religion.

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                    Horace Liveright, Inc., New York,
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5.   Ibid. p. 23-21.

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7. Freud, S;   Civilization and Its Discontents,
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12. Schmidt, W;   The Origin and Growth of Religion,
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13.   Ibid p. 115.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Zunini, G; <u>Man and His Religion</u>, Chapman,
       London, 1969, p. 13.

2. Freud, S; <u>Civilization and Its Discontents</u>,
       Norton, New York, 1962, p. 31-2.

3. Freud, S; <u>The Future of An Illusion</u>,
       Hovace Liveright, Co., New York,
       1928, p.21.

4. Freud, S; <u>Civilization and Its Discontents</u>.
       p. 21.

5.   Ibid. p. 22-23.

6 Flugel, J. C; <u>Man, Morals and Society</u>, Penguin
       1955, p. 326

7. Freud, S; <u>Civilization and Its Discontents</u>,
       p. 21.

8. Tower R; <u>Homo Religious, Sociological</u>
       <u>Problems in the Study of</u>
       <u>Religion</u>, Constable, London,
       1970, p.30

9.   Ibid, p. 28.

10. Bowker, J; <u>The Sense of God</u>, Oxford 1973,
       p. 121-2.

11.   Cited in <u>The Sense of God</u>, p.112

12. Schmidt, W; <u>The Origin and Growth of Religion</u>,
       Cooper, New York, 1971, p.113-4.

13.   Ibid p. 115.

14. Zunini, G;   **Man and His Religion.** p.321.

15.   Ibid. p. 289.

16. Freud S;   **Moses and Monotheism.** (trans-
                    lated by Katherine Jones,)
                    Hogarth Press, London, 1939,
                    p. 91.

17. White Victor;   <u>God and the Unconscious,</u>Fontana.
                    London, 1952, p.46

CHAPTER III

KARL MARX'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC THEORY
OF RELIGION

Karl Marx's critique of religion was greatly
influenced by both Ludwig Feuerbach and Hegel. In
his exposition of the critique of religion he adopts
Hegel's dialectical method. We shall here only
briefly outline this method.

Hegel's task was to discover the method by
which the categories deduce themselves. The method
which he discovered consists of thesis, antithesis,
and sythensis. A simple way of explaining Hegel's
dialectical method is to give a concrete example of
it, and then state the general logical principles
involved.

As a starting point we may think of the notion
of pure being. We think of pure being as abstracted
from all specific determinations whatever. If we
take a concrete object, say a table, we can form an
abstract idea from it by thinking only of its
"isness", it's being, what it shares with all other
objects in the world. In this process we shall be
forced to think of the table without its square-
ness, brownness, hardness, or even its very table-
hood. We shall in this way end up with a pure

vacuum. This emptiness, this vacuum, is not anything. It is the absence of everything. It is nothing. Being, then, is the same as nothing. The pure concept of being does <u>contain</u> the idea of nothing.

Now, to show that one category contains another category is to deduce the second category from the first. What we have just done above is deduce the category nothing from the category being.

Since being and nothing are identical one passes into another. Being passes into nothing and nothing in turn passes into being. We have in this change a <u>passage</u> of nothing and being into each other. This <u>passage</u> is the category of becoming.

In this example we have a clear picture of the method by which the categories deduce themselves. In the example, we started with being. From this we deduced nothing. From the relationship between the categories of being and nothing we further deduced the category of becoming.

Being, nothing, becoming, is the first Hegelan "triad". Throughout his system Hegel employs this tripple rhythm. His first category (the thesis) is always an affirmative category - being, for example. The second category (the antithesis) is always the negative, or opposite of the first - (e.g. nothing). It denies what the

thesis affirms. But it is important to note that
antithesis is not brought in from an external
source. It is shown to spring from the thesis in
which it is contained. But the thesis and the
antithesis stand in confrontation and contradiction
of each other. This contradiction is resolved by
the sythensis. But the sythensis is not an end in
itself. It posits itself as a new assertion, as
an affirmative category which becomes the thesis
of a new triad. The sythensis of one triad is
therefore at the same time the thesis of a higher
triad.

By this method Hegel hoped to reach a category
which does not give rise to any contradiction. This
way he envisaged a means of passing from the first
reason of the world to the world itself, the spheres
of nature and spirits.

The importance of this method is that it
offers a possible solution to the problem of getting
out of each category what is not in it. This
presented a major difficulty for Spinoza who
having posited an infinite substance, found it
utterly impossible to deduce the finite from the in-
finite. The objection was that such a practice
would be an infringement of the law of identity
according to which not A cannot issue out of A, or

the finite out of the infinite.

This then, was the method which Karl Marx adopted and used in his critique of religion.

Ludwig Feuerbach was an enthusiastic disciple of Hegel at the University of Berlin. In his later years, however, he developed his own philosophy which was quite a marked departure from Hegel's theology and philosophy. By taking as his main thesis that religion is a worship of man and not of God, Feuerbach advanced an anti-theological explanation of religion.

The basis of religion is the essential difference between man and beast. Why is it that man has a religion but the beast does not have? It is, in Feuerbach's answer, because man is conscious of himself as pertaining to a species. He is conscious of himself as a "species-being" ("Gattungswesen"). It is the analysis of man as species-being that is the key to the analysis of religion. The brute is not conscious of itself as belonging to any species. It cannot therefore have a religion. Man, by thinking about his species, transcends his own individuality. The beast is limited to its individuality. Once man has overcome his individual limitations he begins to attain a consciousness of the infinite. Now, the conscious-

ness of the infinite is generally considered as
religion. This, according to Feuerbach is true.
But it is only true if the consciousness of the
infinite is seen as man's own consciousness of
himself - of his own infinite nature.

Religion is a dream. It is man's pipe-dream
which reflects his situation while at the same time
providing a fantasy gratification for man's wishes
to overcome his situation. In The Essence of
Christianity, Feuerbach regards both feelings and
religion as dreams:

> "Feeling is a dream with the eyes
> open; religion the dream of waking
> consciousness; dreaming is the key to
> the mysteries of religion"[1]

But why, and how does religion come to be?
It all arises from man's consciousness of his
helplessness and dependence.

Man is well aware of his dependence on nature
and on other men. This helplessness and dependence
cause him much concern. He wants to overcome them
and be self-reliant. The only way for him to
overcome these defects is by appealing to his
imagination. Consequently, he ends up projecting
into 'heaven' what he finds on earth. What eventual-
ly comes to be known as religion is really nothing
more than the realizations of man's heart-a fulfil-

ment of his wishes.[2]

Religion is therefore a projection. But it is
not just an haphazard projection. It is a projection
based on moral judgement. Man sees as divine or
godly, only what he loves, praises or desires. What
he blames or detests he passes for evil and ungodly.
From the comparison of particular imperfect individu-
als, man arrives at the notion of a most perfect
deity. The perfection of God is, to put it crudely,
the sum total of the desireable qualities in human
beings. From particular admirable men the idea of
human perfection is conceived. This conception is
then projected outside the world of man and ascribed
to an imaginary being.

But religion is not just a question of moral
considerations. It is principally and practically
a form of compensation. The heaven of religion
provides the needs of the earthly man. What man
cannot find on earth he must seek in heaven. In
religion all his frustrations are compensated for:

"The more empty life is, the fuller,
the more concrete is God. The
improverishing of the real world and
the enriching of God is one act.
Only the poor man has a rich God.
God springs out of feeling of a want;
what man is in need of ... that is
God"[3]

In the same way the sexual frustration of the
chaste monk finds compensation in the most sensual

Heavenly Virgin:

> "The monks made a vow of chastity
> to God; they mortified the sexual
> passion in themselves, but
> therefore they had in heaven, in
> the Virgin Mary, the image of
> woman - an image of love. They
> could the more easily dispense
> with real woman in proportion
> as an ideal woman was an
> object of love to them."[4]

For Feuerbach, the man who believes in the

traditional god is an enstranged man. He is

alienated from himself. But to understand what

Feuerbach means by alienation of man from himself,

it is necessary to dwell to some length on man's

nature. Individual man, it is to be remembered, is

limited. But man as a species, the all-man, is

unlimited. He is in fact infinite. The infinity

of the human species is characterised by reason,

will and love. By recognising these (reason, love

and will) as infinite, man recognises an object of

absolute worth. But as Feuerbach clearly states

"The absolute to man is his own nature."[5] So in

recognising the absolute, the infinite, he is only

recognising himself as absolute and infinite.

But man is slow to acknowledge this. He does

not directly attain the knowledge of infinity.

Instead, he attributes his own individual limitations

to the human species. The human species therefore

takes on a false character of finitude. The infinite

perfection of man (which rightly belongs to the
species) is then attributed to an external object -
God. So God, and not man is seen as infinite
knowledge, will and love. Religion then, is man's
earliest and indirect form of self knowledge. What
man is really contemplating in religion is his own
nature, not God.

The alienation into which man finds himself
consists in ascribing to God man's perfection. By
ascribing his perfect qualities to God man impoveri-
shes his own nature. He ascribes to himself only
the inferior qualities which he could not accord
to God. His nature is seen as imperfect, incidental
and merely individual. God becomes man's antithesis.

> "Religion is the disuniting of man from
> himself; he sets God before him as
> the antithesis of himself. God is
> not what man is - man is not what
> God is. God is the infinite, man the
> finite being; God is perfect, man is
> imperfect; God eternal, man temporal;
> God Almighty, man weak, God holy, man
> sinful. God and man are extremes;
> God is the absolutely positive, the sum
> of all realities; man the absolutely
> negative, comprehending all negations"[6]

In this alienation an error is committed. The
attributes of man are ascribed to divinity. This
leads man to thinking that divinity is external to
him. In reality, however, both the attributes
and the subject (God) are human. The progressive

development of religion testifies to the identity
of the subject and object - God and man.

> "So long as man is in a mere state
> of nature, so long is his God a mere
> nature God - a personification of
> some natural force. When man
> inhabits houses, he also encloses
> his Gods in temples. The temple
> is only the manifestation of the
> value which man attaches to beautiful
> buildings. Temples in honour of
> religion are in truth temples in honour
> of architecture ——"

The challenge for man then is to eradicate his
alienation, to end the false antithesis and come to
know himself as he is - infinite. This task must be
practically executed. It cannot be solved by Hegel's
philosophy of the Spirit. It must be done in a
manner which will truly reconcile man to himself.
Hegel proposed an idealistic solution to the problem
of alienation. What is needed, Feuerbach thinks,
is a concrete and empirical solution which will
eradicate this unfortunate problem once and for all.
For Feuerbach, Hegel had only succeeded in turning
the truth upside-down. What is now required is a
radical reversal of Hegel's misleading philosophy:

> "Why then dost thou alienate man's
> consciousness from him, and make it
> the self-consciousness of a being
> distinct from man, of that which
> is an object to him? Why dost thou
> vindicate existence to God, to man
> only consciousness of that existence?
> God has his consciousness in man,
> and man his being in God? Man's
> knowledge of God is God's knowledge

of himself? What a divorcing
and contradiction! The true
statement is this; man's
knowledge of God is man's
knowledge of himself, of his
own nature. Only the unity of
being and consciousness is truth."[8]

In religion, man gets to understand, not God
but his inner self. His ideals of human excellence
find expression in the notion of God as the object
of religious consciousness. The history of religion
is the history of man and its apex (Christianity)
is the final disclosure of the true fundamental
conception of man.

Monotheism, especially Christian monotheism,
succeeds in portraying the truth to man. In judaism
truth is presented only partially. Human nature is
portrayed only in a narrow, national, egoistic form.
Jehovah represents the national consciousness of the
Israelites. He is the symbol of man not as universal
but as national. In Christian monotheism, however,
the complete truth is revealed to us. The Christian
God is man - man stripped of his individual limita-
tions, man as a species - being, on expression of
the truly human.

The Christian religion then is the highest
form of religion. It is practical and revolutionary.
It attempts to overcome the bitter reality and estab-
lish satisfaction for man. But it is unfortunate

that religion chooses for its method, fantasy. Why must religion resort to a dream-world? The reason is that men are not yet ready or powerful enough or even knowledgeable enough to pursue their goal (that of overcoming the ills of the world) in reality. When man becomes powerful and knowledgeable enough, religion will wither away and die. Religion is useful only as long as men have not achieved a high degree of knowledge and power.

One of Hegel's criticisms against religion was that the truth is expressed in a sensous form. This amounts to a criticism of the anthropomorphic nature of religion. For Feuerbach on the other hand, religion is not only anthropomorphic but must be so if it is to be of any meaning or relevance to man. God must be a human God if he is to be of any relevance to the consciousness of human beings. God must share a common nature with man.

> "In religion man seeks contentment;
> religion is his highest Good. But how could
> he find consolation and peace in God if
> God were an essentially different being?
> How can I share the peace of a being if
> I am not of the same nature with him?
> If his nature is different from mine,
> his peace is essentially different -
> it is no peace for me. How then can
> I become a partaker of his nature?
> But how can I become a partaker
> of his nature if I am really of a
> different nature?"[9]

Finally, it must be pointed out that, for Feuerbach it was not necessary for man to give up his faith in the existence of an eternally present Divinity. All that was needed is that man should give up his faith in a transcedent God and in a beyond. After all the error that men so frequently commit is not one of believing in a Divinity but of putting their trust in a transcedent God. The true atheist in Feuerbach's own words is "one who denies the predicates of the divine being —— not the one to whom the subjects of these predicates is nothing."

KARL MARX:

We have already seen that for Feuerbach the traditional religious man is an alienated man. Belief in God is only man's attempt to abstract the finest qualities of human nature and to project these qualities to an imaginary perfection of being, which man calls God. Qualities which belong to human beings are in this way transferred to a divine power or powers. The religious man (in the traditional sense) is thus a man truly alienated from himself. His belief in a perfect God provides man compensation for his miseries.

Beyond this, Feuerbach does not go. He does not get to the root of the problem of alienation. He does not explain for instance, why it was ever necessary for man to indulge in the pipe-dream of religion. He explains religion as a projection of human needs, desires and hopes but does not concern himself with the more fundamental question of the conditions for those desires, needs and hopes which give rise to the phantastic construction of religion.

Karl Marx does not fail to pay due credit to Feuerbach for his limited achievement in referring religion back to its secular source. Marx however, is quick to point out Feuerbach's shortcoming.

> "He overlooks the fact that after
> this work is completed the chief
> thing still remains to be done.
> For the fact that the secular
> foundation detaches itself from itself
> in the clouds as an independent
> realm is really only to be explained
> by the self-cleavage and self-
> contradictoriness of the secular
> basis. The latter must itself,
> therefore, first be understood
> in its contradiction, and then
> revolutionised in practice by
> the removal of the contradiction."[10]

For Marx, the conditions which necessitate the phenomenon of religion are no other than the socio-historical conditions of life. The inadequacies of the earthly conditions of life is the germ of desire for a better life, for the hallucination of a heavenly realm where the earthly anguish comes to an

end. Religion can be abolished only by altering the underlying conditions of life.

Whereas for Feuerbach religion was only an "objectification", for Marx it is more than mere objectification. It is more importantly, a "reification" - a self-estragement.. Marx, not contented with Feuerbach's anthropological explanation of religion, sought in socio-economic fields those factors that make religion an apparent necessity.

Religion is, in Marx's view a symptom, a sign of a disease. Society (particularly the 19th Century German Society) was a sick organism. The malady is man's alienation from his true nature. The economic life of man and the distortions caused by his economic conditions are the cause of this disease. Religion, is not itself the disease but only the outward symptom of a fatal infirmity. In the same way that a Tuberclosis victim would be known by his hard coughing and his blood-stained mucus, so would a sick society display the relevant symptom of its disease. This symptom is most clearly seen in religion. Since religion is a sign of disease it should be opposed. But just as one would achieve little by fighting the hard cough of the Tuberclosis victim, so too would it be a relatively futile effort to wage a direct war on religion which is only a

symptom. The struggle against religion 'per se'
is both futile and misplaced. It is useless because
there is no way of abolishing religion while the
world remains perverted. As long as the socio-
economic conditions of life remain the same religion
must necessarily persist. The fight against religion
is misplaced in that the real enemy is not religion
but the perverted social order. It would be more
rewarding to fight the real enemy (the socio-economic
conditions). If this is effectively done, religion
which symbolises this situation will certainly die
away.

> "The struggle against religion is
> indirectly the struggle against that
> world whose aroma is religion."[11]

Since religion is only an 'aroma' of a
decaying world it is only right that man should
concern himself with reforming that world other
than indulge in a relatively unimportant struggle
against religion.

> "The abolition of religion as the
> illusory happiness of the people
> is a demand for their true happiness.
> The call to abandon illusions about
> their conditions is the call to
> abandon a condition which requires
> illusions. Thus the critique of religion
> is the critique in embryo of the vale
> of tears of which religion is the halo."[12]

This mention of the critique of religion brings
us to a general consideration of Marx's critique of

religion. Marx's critique has a two-fold purpose.
First, it attempts to reveal the depth of human
alienation embodied in the mystifications of ideology.

Secondly, as a continuation and conclusion of
the first role, the critique is aimed at establishing
and clarifying man's true goal and the means to the
accomplishment of that goal. His critique is based
on the recognition that "man makes religion; religion
does not make man."[13] Man must be brought into
awareness that religion is essentially an expression
of, and a protest against the inhumanity of society.

> "This state, this society, produces
> religion which is an inverted world -
> consciousness, because they are an
> inverted --- It is the fantastic
> realization of the human being because
> the human being has attained no reality."[14]

If man is to be persuaded to let go his
illusory representation of himself and his condition
and if he is to come to grips with his true origin
and goal then the critique of "irreligious criticism"
must be employed for this persuasion. The sole
justification of religious criticism is that it:

> "disillusions man so that he will
> think, act and fashion his reality as
> a man who has lost his illusion and
> regained his reason; so that he will
> revolve around himself as his own
> true sun. Religion is only the
> illusory sun about which man revolves
> as long as he does not revolve around
> himself."[15]

Just as it has a twofold purpose, Marx's criticism of religion also moves in two levels. The first level is the unmaking of religion. This move was "in the main" completed by Marx's predecessors, especially Bruno, Bauer, and Feuerbach. It is to these men that Marx refers in his opening sentence to 'A Contribution To Hegel's Philosophy of Right'. "For Germany, the critique of religion is essentially completed; ——"[16] According to the unmaking of religion by Marx's predecessors religion is "true" if only in a special sense of that term. Religion adequately expresses and indeed reflects a wrong world. It is a perfect reflection of a miserable and wretched world. It portrays man as an imperfect being, one who stands in need of compensation for his wretchedness. Now, if religion in portraying man as miserable and wretched portrays what is true it may be said to be true in this limited sense.

But Marx did not believe that the criticism of religion, even in Germany, was complete. Hence his second level of the critique. If religion was 'true' in the sense referred to above then it must be falsified. BUt as pointed out earlier Marx did not believe that religion could be falsified by struggling directly against it. The only way to abolish religion is by changing the secular world so that it ceases to

produce the pathological secretion — religion.
Hence the need for a practical revolution. This
way alone can the critique of heaven be transformed
into the critique of the earth."[17]

Mention has already been made of the role of
alienation in Marx's criticism of religion. But as
the concept of alienation is a crucial factor in
Marx's critique we cannot fully comprehend his
religious criticism without examining this concept.
Alienation is crucial for Marx's criticism of religi-
on since only on estranged person seeks his
redemption in an imaginary heaven. The religious
super-structure is only the alienated conditions of
life put the right side up. The causes of religion
are therefore identical with those of alienation.
If we know the causes of the one we shall automati-
cally know the causes of the other. It is to the
details of the concept of alienation that we must
now turn. Marx distinguishes between four kinds of
alienation. The first of these is the alienation of
man from his product. In the capitalistic relations
of production, Marx affirms, the worker's product
is turned against him.

The products of his work belong to the capi-
talist not to the worker. The harder the worker
works and the more he produces, the more the wealth

of the capitalist increases. But the capitalist,
instead of using his wealth to uplift the living
conditions of his worker, does just the opposite.
He proceeds to buy labour-saving machines thereby
devaluing the worker's labour. The worker, who is
dependent for all his livelihood on his own labour,
thus becomes poorer and poorer in the same propor-
tion that his master (the capitalist) becomes wealth-
ier and wealthier. The poor man's labour produces
magnificent palaces for the rich and poor shanties
for himself. The irony of the situation is that
whereas the worker has to work to survive, he ends
up only making his already desparate condition
worse.

Then there is the alienation between the worker
and the process of production. The work in which the
worker engages is not part of his nature. It is
external to him. There is no self-fulfilment in the
worker's activity. Instead of developing his
physical and mental energy (which is what work
is supposed to do) it only exhausts him bodily and
debases him mentally. As a result the worker
becomes burdened with a feeling of misery. He is
never at home in his work and longs for leisure.
The work that he does is not something that he
chooses to do. He only works because he is forced to

by circumstances. Indeed, he is under no deception
that while he works he does not own himself but is
owned by another.

Once he is thus alienated from his product
and from the very process of production man becomes
further alienated from his own essence. The charact-
eristic of the human species is to act freely and
consciously. But as we have seen above the worker
is no longer free to choose. He has either to work
or die of starvation. His activity becomes a mere
means of survival. It is lacking in both freedom
and consciousness.

It is lacking in freedom because as we have
said he does not choose to work. It also lacks in
consciousness since his work becomes mechanical
and stupifying. His whole life is thus reduced to
forced labour, and to the beastly functions of
eating and drinking. His whole essence is trans-
formed into a means of sustaining his physical
existence. He is no better than a beast.

Finally, and as a consequence of the fore-
going aspects of alienation, man is enstranged from
man. The product of labour has turned into a
weapon with which the capitalist shamelessly oppre-
sses the worker. Labour is a strange opposing power
in the hands of the capitalist. The opposition which

the capitalist wages is itself a dividing factor
between the rich and the poor. Men, instead of
belonging to one and the same social class are
thus enstranged one from the other, thus making his
alienation total.

But what, one might ask, is the role of
religion in all this? Marx would answer that the
role of religion is that of class ideology. It
turns the thoughts of the oppressed from reality
which is alienated, to an imaginary heaven. It is
"the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a
heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.
It is the opium of the people."[18]

And now, what must we do to be saved? The
answer to this question would be that man must set
himself free of all alienation. But the way to
overcome alienation is not by sitting back in
detached thought as Hegel had done before. The
process of liberation must be by revolution - active
revolution. It must be by the historical formation
of a vast part of humanity devoid of all human
dignity - the proletariat.

> "Where then is the positive
> possibility of German
> emancipation? Our answer: in
> the formation of a class with radical
> chains, a class in civil society that
> is not of civil society, a class that
> the dissolution of all classes, a
> sphere of society having universal

character because of its universal
suffering ---; a sphere in short,
that is the complete loss of humanity
and can only redeem itself through
the total redemption of humanity.
This dissolution of society existing   19
as a particular class is the proletariat."

This new class will be responsible for a new
society. When the proletariat come to power capital-
ism will fade out. But the death of capitalism also
means the end of religion. In the new society the
talk of religion will be meaningless and irrelevant.
Reference to God will be obsolete and superflous.

We are now in a position to look back at
Marx's systematic critique which proceeds in three
distinguishable stages. In the first stage, Marx
follows Feuerbach, Man is the author of religion.
Religion is the objectification of man's earthly
needs. In the second stage, Marx goes beyond
Feuerbach. The causes of this illusory practice are
to be found in the inadequacies of socio-economic
factor of life. It is of utmost importance to
discover and expose these conditions. Finally, in
his last stage, Marx calls for action. Man must
engage in active fight against these conditions.
Hence the need for revolution.

Let us point out here too that for Marx there
are no half-measures. There never could be such
thing as aunthentic religion. The critique of religi-

on must be radical and complete. It must bring man
to finally rotate around himself and no longer around
an illusory sun.[20]

What immediately strikes the reader about
Marx's critique is his apparent contradiction or
tension in his concept of religion. On the one hand,
religion is only a symbol of man's needs and desires
caused by the alienated secular basis. Accordingly,
it is not necessary to attack religion as it will
automatically disappear when the secular basis is
revolutionised. But on the other hand, Marx does
admit that religion is capable of confirming the
existing social order, that it has a real function
as a class ideology. According to this latter
conception Marx should have waged a direct war on
religion. This would have abolished the intoxicating
power which if unchecked could easily perpetuate the
existing perversion in the world. But Marx, though
holding both these conceptions seems to have laid
more emphasis on the former.

It is true that religion is more often associat-
ed with entire societies other than with individual
persons. This, however, is not sufficient argument
to lead to the view of religion as a superstructure
of society. Religion is the expression of relation-
ship between individual man and God, - Creature and

Creator. It expresses a God-man relationship and not
a God-man-society relationship as Marx implies.
Of course, many religions advocate the love of
neighbour but this love is really only an outward
manifestation of the more intimate God-man relation-
ship. Religion happens to flourish in society, but
society is not in our opinion, an essential require-
ment for religion.

It is of course true that throughout history
there have been actual instances in which a religion
became subservient to a ruling class. This however,
is to be attributed to the unfortunate prepoderance
of politics and not religion. Least of all to
Christianity which clearly teaches men to "render
to Ceasar what is Ceasar's and to God what is God's".

Karl Marx does raise some very interesting
points about the origin and nature of religion. He
however does not succeed in convincing us about the
uselessness and futility of religion. There could
be some truth in his Theory but it is difficult
to believe that Karl Marx has dealt a death-blow to
religion. There is no denying for instance that
there is some connection between a peoples' religion
and their socio-economic status. However, Karl Marx,
like Sigmund Freud over-plays this point. If what
Karl Marx says were true we would expect that religi-

on would be the monopoly of the very poor. Faith
would be the only way out for the vast majority of
mankind who live under very oppressive social and
economic conditions. The poorest nations of the
world would also be the most religious. On the other
hand no person of a sound economic and social
standing would have any inclination towards religion.
But we know that some of the most dedicated religi-
ous people are men and women whose status both
economic and social is the object of envy for the
vast majority of people. This then does not seem
to very well match Karl Marx's explanation. It
casts doubts on Marx's theory and the seriousness
with which it should be viewed.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Ludwig Feuerbach: The Essence of Christian-
                      ity. Harper & Row, New
                      York, 1957, p. 141.

2.   This is particularly true
                      of Christianity of which
                      Feuerbach writes, "The
                      fundamental dogmas of
                      Christianity are realized
                      wishes of the heart."
                      (Essence of Christianity,
                      p.140). But it is true of
                      the other religions as well.

3.   Essence of Christianity,
                      p. 73.

4.   Ibid p. 26.

5.   Ibid p. 5.

6.   Ibid p. 33.

7.   Ibid p. 20.

8.   Ibid p. 230.

9.   Ibid p. 45.

10. Karl Marx and Engels, German Ideology. Lawrence
                      and Whishort, London, 1970.

11. Karl Marx,   The Critique of Hegel's
                      Philosophy of Right.

(ed. Joseph O'Malley,
Cambridge University
Press, 1970, p. 131.

12.   Ibid p.131.

13   Ibid p. 131.

14.   Ibid p. 131.

15.   Ibid p. 132.

16.   Ibid p. 131.

17.   Ibid p. 131.

18.   Ibid p. 131.

19.   Ibid p. 141-2.

20.   Ibid p. 132.

CHAPTER IV

THE RATIONALITY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL
RELIGIONS:

1=   AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IS RELIGION:

SOME INTERPRETATIONS:

Some of the earliest interpretations of African religions were offered by the early 19th Century Anthropologists. In the main, these anthropologists, Emile - Durkheim, Branislav Malinowski, Sigmund Freud, Sir James Frazer and Taylor were either atheists or agnostics. Their interests in studying the religions of what they termed "primitive societies" was often aroused by the belief that "primitive religion" provides a deadly weapon, which could be employed with devastating effect on Christianity.

For Durkheim there is nothing divine about religion. The object and source of all religion is not God but Society. The fundamental categories of thought and science are of a religious origin. The primary object of religion is society itself which created religion and rituals as a means of main-taining and rejuvenating itself symbolically or spiritually. God, religion, and worship are nothing but the symbol and emblem of society because "the idea of society is the soul of religion".[1]

Malinowski refutes the view associated with
E. Taylor that 'primitive' man is a "ratiocinating
philosopher". For him magic and religion arise from
man's inability to control the universe by reason
and empirical skills. They both afford an escape
from this human impotence. But whereas magic is
the concern of a few experts, religion is "an affair
of all"[2]. Magic may be good or bad but religion is
essentially good and moral and has to do with the
irremediable happenings.

Sir James Frazer advanced the belief that
religion evolved from magic. Man was supposed to
pass through three stages of development - magic,
religion and science. In the elementary stage of
magic man believes that personal and impersonal
powers are responsible for the events of life. His
response to the world is consequently, irrational
and superstitious. Magical ritual becomes for him,
a sort of pseudoscience by which he tries to
influence and manipulate nature in accordance with
the laws of contagion and similarity.

But man soon discovers that his magical rites
do not always yield the desired results. He then
begins to approach the personal powers by invocations
and offerings. In this transition man abandons the
realm of magic and enters into that of religion.

Sigmund Freud's interpretation of religion as an illusion, has already been treated in an earlier chapter and we need not recount it here.

An altogether different interpretation is offered by a group of scholars whom we may conveniently call the Christian apologists. Among these scholars are E. Evans, - Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt, and Geoffrey Parrinder. The works of these scholars are specifically addressed to their unbelieving counterparts of the western world. They make use of the African deities to prove to the sceptical western scholars that the God of Christianity does indeed exist and that he is known to the African peoples. This was the principle objective of the Christian apologists. But the western attitude towards the Africans and their religion had to change drastically before this message could be heeded. The apologists thus set out in the first place to refute the then popular notion of African religions as "magic","pre-animism", "animism", "fetishism", "witchcraft" or "totemism". These they said, were only conjectures of the mind.[3]

Godfrey Lienhardt blames the distortion of the African religions on the method and findings of the 19th Century anthropologists;

> "The scholars who claimed to understand
> 'primitive mentality' knew nothing
> of the languages in which it was
> expressed, and had no intimate experience
> of the actual social and physical
> conditions of the peoples whose beliefs
> they confidently interpreted.
> Consequently much of their interpretation
> was the result of simple introspection,
> of supposing themselves in foreign
> circumstances and imagining how
> they themselves would then think and
> react"[4]

Evans-Pritchard himself describes the religious

thought of the Nuer as "remarkably sensitive,

refined and intelligent."[5]

For him and for the other apologist, the

evolutionary, sociological and psychological theories

of "primitive" religion were both inadequate and

unreliable. The 19th Century anthropologists had

only suceeded in producing "a priori assumptions

posited on the facts rather than scientific conclusi-

ons derived from them."[6]

These theories distorted the facts and

degraded religion. What was now required was a

fresh start which would restore religion to its

former dignity. In the case of Nuer religion we find

an example of that dignity which brings the African

religions remarkably close to the Christian faith.

> "We can say that these characteristics,
> both negative and positive, of Nuer
> religion indicate a distinctive kind
> of piety which is dominated by a strong
> sense of dependence on God and confidence

in him —— it is an intimate personal
relationship between man and God ——.
In sacrifice and prayer alike —— what is
said and what is done, the emphasis is
a complete surrender to God's will?[7]

The views of the anthropologists had obscured
and marred the dignity of the traditional religions.
The apologists now wished to show that these theories
were based on assumptions for which no evidence was,
or could be adduced. The conclusions thus reached
were no more than hallucinations of the "if I were
a horse type". The anthropologists erred when they
attempted to interpret the thought of the "primitive"
peoples in terms of their own psychology which had
been moulded by a set of institutions very different
from those of the so-called savages. In thus
translating the conceptions of the simpler peoples
into their own, the anthropologists erroneously
transplanted their own thoughts into those of the
people they were trying to understand.

Modern scholars of African traditional religi-
ons no longer ascribe to the findings of the
anthropologists. The old theories have in the main
been discarded and fresh research initiated.

The missionaries, notably Placide Tempels,
Edwin Smith, and John Taylor also refute the anthro-
pologists theories. They however go beyond the
apologists by making up for what damage the earlier

theories had done to the African religions. The
missionaries were principally concerned with the
conversion of Africans for Christ. They adopted
a positive approach towards this end by assuring the
Africans that they were not mere 'savage pagans'
but that they were indeed very religious and moral.

It was in this vein that Placide Tempels
finds among the Bantu a highly systematized philosop-
hy which only needed Christianity to bring it to
its "consumation".

> "We arrive therefore, at the unheard of
> conclusion that Bantu paganism, the
> ancient wisdom of the Bantu, reaches
> out from the depths of its Bantu soul
> towards the very soul of Christian
> spirituality. It is in Christianity alone
> that the Bantu will find relief for their
> secular yearning and a complete
> satisfaction of their deepest aspirations.
> — Christianity — is the only possible
> consumation of the Bantu ideal".[8]

John Taylor displays the same high regard for
the African religions. The primal vision, he
affirms, is very clear about the Kingdom of God.
It is "a community of the living and the dead that
is purified of all destructive antagonisms."[9]

But Taylor, like Tempels, is quick to point
out that African religions are not self-sufficient.
They need Christianity to bring them to their
fulfilment. The Christian gospel, he writes, meets
the ultimate point of need in the African world view

by bringing together two factors which African
thought has never considered in the same framework
of reference, namely God and the destructive
antagonism of sin.[10]

The twofold task of these missionaries was to
restore the dignity and establish the good image of
traditional religions while at the same time
stressing the need for these religions to be purified
and fulfilled by Christianity.

A different interpretation of African
traditional religions is offered by the African
nationalists. In this group fall the views of Jomo
Kenyatta, Leopold Senghor, K.A. Busia and John Mbiti.
Their main thesis is that the African is as civilized
as his western counterpart and that his religion is
as developed and purified as the Christian religion.
Some of them even argue that Christianity has nothing
to offer that the African religions do not already
possess. To enforce their argument these writers
deliberately dwell on the great similarities
between their own religions and Christianity.

Kenyatta in writing about the religion of the
Gikuyu gives such parallels:

> "The Gikuyu believes in one God, Ngai, the
> creator of all things —— He has no father,
> mother or companions of any kind —— He
> loves or hates people according to their
> behaviour. The creator God lives in the
> sky"[11]
> (Emphasis Mine).

What a coincidence between the Gikuyu God and
the God of Christianity! Nor can the Christians
gain say the Gikuyu religion on the grounds that it
does not have organized churches. Kenyatta makes it
clear enough that religion is not an affair for the
individual. Religion is an affair which involves a
whole people. God is not interested in the affairs
of one man but those of society at large. Kenyatta
might just as well have told us that the Gikuyu God
is only present where two or more are gathered in
his name.

As regards the places of worship, Ngai has no
need for "temples made with hands". The Gikuyu
worships under huge 'mugumo' trees which "are
regarded in the same manner as most Christians
regard churches - as the 'House of God.'"[12]

The Gikuyu religion rests on the belief in
one, supreme being, one High God, Ngai and it is in
no respect inferior to the white man's religion.
According to Kenyatta, the western world owes a
great debt to Africa, for it was Africa that
spread the good news of the gospel to Europe and
not vice-versa.[13]

Professor John Mbiti adopts a similar view
about African religions. He strongly refutes the
association of African religions with animism,

fetishism, superstition and magic. The building of shrines and the offering of libation to the departed relatives, Mbiti argues, does not consitute worship. African religions are not ancestor worship. The Africans know a High God and He alone is the object of worship. The ancestors and spirits may occupy a prominent place in the African world-view but they never can replace the Supreme God.

Concerning animism, Mbiti points out that the acknowledgement of spirit does not constitute animism. The existence of spirits has to be seen in the Context of the African view of the world in which God is supreme, and He has under him spirits and men.

> "To say that there are spirits in the
> world does not mean that people's
> religion is only about these spirits.
> Christianity and Islam also
> acknowledge the existence of
> spirits, but neither of them is animism."[14]

Throughout his works Mbiti tries to demonstrate the intimacy and similarity between African religions and Christianity. Okot p'Bitek observes that Mbiti's books are intended to show the world not only that "African peoples are not religiously illiterate" but also that the African deities are but local names of the One God who is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, transcendent and eternal"[15]

Mbiti's attitude is largely due to his training as
a Christian and pastor. His attempts to Christiani-
ze the African deities is due to the fact that he
sees traditional religions in Christian eyes. He
observes African phenomenon with spectacles
borrowed from a different cultural experience and
analyses the African experience with rhetoric
borrowed from a different cultural universe. As
Professor Ali Mazrui points out in the epilogue to
Okot p'Bitek's African Religions in Western
Scholarship, Mbiti has succumbed to the temptation
of seeing the divine will of God operating in
Africa even prior to the advent of the missionaries.
Mazrui points out an interesting case where Mbiti
thus gives in. In writing about the Kikuyu
ceremony of chasing away demons, Mbiti notes that
mothers shave their children's hair in the form of
a cross which is designed to protect these children
against evil spirits. Mazrui remarks:

> "John S. Mbiti, Professor of Religious
> Studies at Makerere University, has
> speculated whether the sign of the
> cross in the fight against evil
> forces among the Kikuyu owed its
> existence to a previous coming of
> Christianity to this part of
> equatorial Africa - a previous
> contact with the religion of Jesus,
> whose only legacy was that of the
> sign of the cross."[16]

Mbiti does not on this particular occasion positively attribute the sign of the cross to previous contact with Christianity but the very fact that he even entertains this speculation is in itself quite interesting.

The protest of the African nationalists and what they are up against may perhaps be summed up in the words of Kenyatta.

> "In the early days of European colonisation,
> many white men, especially missionaries,
> landed in Africa with preconceived ideas
> of what they would find there and how
> they would deal with the situation.
> As far as religion was concerned the
> African was considered as a clean state
> on which anything could be written ——.
> The Europeans based their assumption
> on the conviction that everything
> that the African did was evil. The
> missionaries endavoured to rescue
> the deplored souls of the African from
> the "eternal fire"; they set to uproot
> the African body and soul, from his old
> customs and beliefs, put him in a class
> by himself, with all his tribal
> traditions shattered and his institutions
> trampled upon. The African —— was
> expected to follow the white man's
> religion without questioning whether it was
> suited for his conditions of life or not"[17]

Considering that this paper is written at the University of Nairobi, we may be allowed at this juncture to consider very briefly some of the views of the members of this institution.

Dr. Henry Odera Oruka of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies believes that the African Traditional Religion can be shown to be

autonomous and worthy of respect in its own right.
He subscribes to the view that African Traditional
Religion generates a form of religious life that
deserves to be regarded as different from and
independent of such religions as Christianity or
Islam.

In his paper "The Idea of High God in Africa"[18]
Dr. Oruka attempts to establish the relationship
between the God of African Traditional Religion and
the God of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other
religions. He very ably argues that a necessary
condition for the autonomy and originality of African
Traditional Religion is that its concept of God
should be logically distinct from the concept of God
in say Christianity or Islam. Should the concept of
God in African Traditional Religion be shown to be
"logically identical" with or the same as Christian
concept of God, then one of the two religions would
seem to stem from the other. Dr. Oruka's main
objective then is to lay logical grounds for
believing that the concepts of God in African
Traditional Religion and in Christianity are or are
not identical. He warns against the tendency which
is common-place among African Christian Scholars.
These Scholars, he says, perturbed by the thought in
African Traditional Religion of a God who is not all-

good seek to escape embarassment by readily
identifying the God of African Religions with the God
of Christianity as one and the same Deity, albeit
variously manifested. Oruka is well aware of the
dangers of such identification. He writes:

> "But identification of Ga (God
> according to African Traditional
> Religion) with the Gc (God according to the
> Christian religion) does a great damage
> to the purity and seriousness of ATR
> (African Traditional Religion); African
> Traditional Religion may be regarded as
> the Christians regard Judaism - as a lower,
> unpurified or "unfulfilled" form of
> Christianity - as something which comes
> or should come to an end with the rise
> of Christianity. This is usually the
> view of those Christian missionaries
> who have seen some goodness in the
> traditional African culture and made
> a study of African Religions."[19]

Another view is that of Jesse N. Mugambi who
concerns himself with the search for the fundamental
concept underlying African traditional religions. In
a paper entitled "The African Experience of God"[20],
Mugambi opens fire on both Fr. Tempel's concept of
the Vital-force and John Mbiti's concept of time.
Mugambi refutes both concepts and suggests relation
as the concern that has much more fundamental
influence on the African experience of God than
either Tempel's Vital-Force or Mbiti's time.
Relation, not time or the mystical Vital-force, is
all important in Africa.

"---- the African religious and
philosophical heritage is characteristically
based on physical experiential perception,
rather than on mystical contemplation.
While the Graeco-Roman religious and
philosophical tradition gives a primary
position to such metaphysical questions
as the nature of God, Man and the Universe,
and expresses doubts as to the existence
of these three, Africans acknowledge what
they experience and the complicated
problems posed in that experience lead
them to ask such questions as what they
may do to remain in good, healthy or
prosperous relationship with the powers
which they experience in their
environment. The African Experience of
God is directly involved in the concern
rather than in the concepts such as
being, vital-force, Universal force, or
the concept of time. Relation is in deed,
thought and expression, a fundamental
concern of African peoples in their
religion, philosophy and social organisation."[21]

It is this relation and not the 'vital-force' or
'time' that leads to a clear understanding and correct
interpretation of African Traditional Religion.

Okot p'Bitek, of the Department of Sociology
deserves a brief mention. In his book, African
Religions in Western Scholarship[22] he categorically
denounces the findings of Western Scholars in
African religions. These scholars, he says, have
never been interested in African religions "per se".
Their works have all been part and parcel of some
controversy or debate in the Western World.[23]

p'Bitek is of the opinion that only African
scholars can restore to African Traditional Religions

the dignity that was denied them by the early

missionaries, travellers, explorers and anthropolo-

gists. To attain this aim the African scholars must

start by "de-hellenizing" the African deities.

> "The first duty of an African scholar
> is to remove these rusty Greek
> metaphysical dressings as quickly
> as possible, before African deities
> suffocate and die inside them in the
> same manner as the Christian God had
> perished. Because, now, when
> Christian theologians try to break
> open the Hellenic Coffin in which
> the Christian God was imprisoned,
> he is no longer to be seen."[24]

Citing John S. Mbiti as an example p'Bitek

warns against the pitfall of subjectivity. Mbiti

is subjective in his approach due to his training

as a Christian theologian and a priest. He is

pro-christianity and this is readily seen in his

works which are more Christian than African. It is

with such scholars as John Mbiti in mind that

Okot p'Bitek sounds the warning:

> "Students who desire to understand
> African religions as they are must
> reject this approach entirely.
> The protests by Evans-Pritchard,
> Godfrey Lienhardt and Mbiti against
> the non-Christian interpretation of
> religion are against the subjective
> approach of those scholars. We must
> reject all forms of subjectivity
> whether the subjectivity arises from
> anti-Christian or from pro-Christian
> prejudices."[25]

Other pitfalls against which African scholars must guard include the Christian assumption of "other-worldliness" of the Christian faith. Okot p'Bitek argues that there is no concept of heaven in African religious thought. The idea of reward or punishment in another life is alien to African thought. The African knows no world other than the material one. African thought is characterised by "this-worldliness".

Like Dr. Oruka, Okot p'Bitek warns against the identification of the Christian deity with African gods. In particular African scholars must be on their guard against the idea of African High Gods. "The aim of the study of African religions should be to understand the religious beliefs and practices of African peoples, rather than to discover the Christian God in Africa."[26]

But while a great many scholars acknowledge African religions as genuine and authentic there is another group albeit in the minority, for whom the so-called African religions are more readily identified with Western science than with religion. The most outspoken proponent of this view has been Robin Horton and we would do well now to turn our attention to him and those he represents.

II.   AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IS SCIENCE

Robin Horton's avowed concern is the quest
for an area of Western discourse which can provide
adequate translation instruments for the African
ideas. He rejects the popular view that the area
associated with symbolism and art is the one likely
to prove most useful in the interpretation of African
thought. He further rejects the view advocated by
E. Evans-Pritchard, E. Idowu, and P. Winch that the
most appropriate area for such interpretation is
the religious. He maintains that his own "intelle-
ctualist" approach which is associated with the
sciences is the only area of Western discourse
which enables us to make any sense of traditional
African thought.

His "intellectualist" approach, Horton claims,
provides adequate and coherent answers to the
central questions of African thought whereas, the
answers given by the "symbolist" approach are
mistaken and incoherent. Horton formulates his
"intellectualist" approach in refutation of the
"symbolist" approach as stated by John Beattie.

Horton's starting point is his discussion of
the similarities and differences between Western
science and traditional African thought.[27] The
similarities that Horton observes between African

traditional thought and science lead him to reject
the view that the two systems are essentially
different modes of thought. Horton's argument is not
that traditional thought is a 'proto-science' but
that both science and African traditional religions
have the same goals. They are both concerned about
explaining, predicting and controlling natural
phenomena. In that the two systems have similar
functions, Horton concludes, they are basically
similar.

> "I am not claiming traditional
> thought as a variety of scientific
> thought. I want to point out that it
> is not only where scientific method
> is in use that we find theories which
> both aim at grasping causal
> connexions --- it is because traditional
> religious beliefs demonstrate the
> truth of this that it seems apt to
> extend to them the label 'empirical'"[28]

The similarity between modern sciences and
African traditional thought, which is central to
Horton's claims, seems to arise from his conviction
that there is a close analogy between the spiritual
beings of traditional thought and the theoretical
entities of Western science. Horton compares the
beings of African religion (gods, spirits, ancestors)
to the atoms and molecules of Western science:

> "Like atoms, molecules, and waves,
> then, the gods serve to introduce
> unity into diversity, simplicity
> into complexity, order into disorder,
> regularity into anomaly."[29]

Both the spiritual beings and the theoretical
entities provide an important link which common
sense is incapable of achieving. Because of the
striking similarity between the 'theoretical
constructs' Horton concludes that the best means of
understanding African thought is to apply to it the
same criterion as is used in the scientific thought.

John Beattle, on the other hand, holds that
traditional African thought is radically different
from all scientific thought although it is not
incommensurable with modern scientific thought.

> "—— the mystical representations
> of the world expressed in traditional
> African (and other) religion make more
> sense when they are regarded as the
> product of symbolic thinking rather
> than as something like scientific
> models"[30]

Here, it may be relevant to find out what
Beattle means by symbolism. In his book, Other
Cultures.[31] Beattie gives a clear distinction
between signals and symbols. Symbols, he says, do
not just refer to some event or to a concrete entity.

Sociologically, the most important thing about
symbols is that "they provide people with a means
of representing, abstract ideas, often ideas of
great practical importance to themselves indirectly,
ideas which it would be difficult or even impossible

for them to represent to themselves directly"(p.70).

For this reason, symbolism is essentially
expressive i.e. it says something valuable, something
of great importance, something which it is impossible
or impracticable to say directly.

It is with this in mind that we must proceed
to translate African traditional thought. As we
have already seen, Beattie is convinced that only
the 'symbolist' approach can yield any worthwhile
results in our study of African religions.

Here then are two approaches which are
diametrically opposed to each other with the
proponent of each theory claiming superiority over
his opponent. Yet, in spite of their different
answers both Horton and Beattie agree on a list of
important questions posed by the phenomenon of
African religious thought. This list provides a
good starting-point for our comparative study of
the two approaches. We shall treat these questions
in the order in which Horton gives them.[32]   By this
cross-reference it is hoped that the strengths and
weaknesses of each theory can be shown and a
plausible choice reached.

-       Why are statements about spiritual
        beings most characteristically
        produced in answer to the question

"why did X occur?"

This question may be expressed in another way.
Why is it that the African religious beliefs seem
(appear) to have a predominantly explanatory role?

For Robin Horton these beliefs do not only
appear to have explanatory functions. They in fact,
are explanatory in essence. The nature of African
religious beliefs is such that they have for their
main objective, the explanation of the African
world-view. Unlike the religions of the Western
culture (for example Christianity), African religions
display a peculiar interest in explaining the
features of the 'space-time world'. It is for this
reason that Horton labels African religions as
"empirical thought".[33] His simple answer to the
question of the explanatory role of traditional
religious beliefs, he argues, is straightforward
and does not raise the irritating question of the
nature that Beattie's "symbolist" approach would
necessitate, namely, "why, if African religious
beliefs are really just symbolic statements about
aspects of everyday life, do they appear tricked out
in all the trappings of explanatory systems?"[34]

For Beattie, the "why" question, concerned as
it is, with death, disease, drought, accidents,
cannot be answered in terms of the available

"empirically-grounded techniques". They can only be
coped with in terms of expressive symbolism. For
him, the fact that belief in spiritual beings who
are thought of as <u>agents</u> has survived for such a
long period is a confirmation of their symbolic
element.

> "If the belief on them was based
> on anything approximating to
> 'science' it would be incredible
> that such a belief should have
> survived at all."[35]

By denying symbolism to the spiritual beings
of African religious beliefs Horton is in effect
asserting that these beings have no more significa-
nce than simply being objects of imagination. He
is in effect denying that the gods, spirits, and
ancestors represent abstract notions of great value
to those who believe in them. In holding this view
Horton seems to suggest that African traditional
religions differ significantly from other religions.
Indeed, he all but says that what we call religion
in Africa is in fact not religion at all. It is not
science either although it is more akin to the latter
than to the former.

If this interpretation of Horton's views is
correct, it is clear that his "intellectualist"
approach cannot provide us with what we set out to
look for - an adequate tool of translation. It is

by his affirmation of what Horton denies that Beattie
seems to provide a much more useful tool unto this
end. Beattie's answer seems to score on Horton's on
this count.

-     Why is it that the African

      religious beliefs enter into

      daily life at the point where

      belief couched in everyday

      material-object language as

      well as the techniques

      associated with them reach

      limits of their competence?

        Horton thinks that this must necessarily be
so since the religious beliefs of African peoples
provide a species of theoretical explanation. The
main point of all theoretical thinking, he says, is
that it supplements the limited causal vision of
common sense, material-object thinking by postulating
a whole range of additional causal sequences which
the latter could never have envisaged. It is only
when we accept spiritual beings of traditional
religious beliefs as theoretical entities that we
begin to understand why they are employed to explain
events beyond the material-object realm.

Beattie's answer to this question is the same
as the one he has given earlier. These beliefs
enter at this point because they are essentially
symbolic. Because everyday language cannot cope
with certain important aspects of life, men employ
expressive symbolism to say what was otherwise not
possible to say.

We may here notice that both Horton and Beattie
acknowledge a link. The way they interpret this
link, however is very much determined by their
different premises. Horton, starting with his
analogy of theoretical models sees the religious
beliefs as linking the everyday material-object-
thinking to the refined level of scientific thought.
Beattie, on the other hand, perceives the link as
enabling man to express himself where it would have
been otherwise impossible to do so.

- Why are the beings, of African religous
    thought defined as inaccessible to ordinary,
    everyday observation?

In his criticism of Beattie's answer to this
question, Horton seems to misunderstand the former's
answer rather seriously. He reports that Beattie
denies the existence of spiritual beings.[36]
But in fact, Beattie does not deny the
existence of spiritual beings. What he does deny

is the existence of gods or spirits in the same mode
as observable reality. He says:

> "Gods and other non-human spiritual
> beings could not be thought of by
> everybody as observable like people
> and the other occupants of the
> phenomenal world for the very good
> reason that, unlike observable reality,
> they do not except in peoples minds –
> exist".[37]

It is questionable if, as his criticism of
Beattie seems to imply here, Horton really believes
that spiritual beings share the same observable
existence with material beings. Beattie affirms that
these beings do exist in the mind of the believer.
His clear argument is that the beings of traditional
religion (as indeed the spiritual beings of all
religions) are "beings of the mind" without a
corresponding "actual existence" in the observable
world. But to argue that spiritual beings are
"beings of the mind" is not to say that such beings
do not exist. They do exist in the mind, and that
is not the same as saying they are non-beings.
Because they are "beings of the mind" without
foundation in re they lack corresponding reality in
the world of physical objects. This is why they are
conceived of as "immaterial" and "unobservable".[38]

Horton's answer to this question is that
spiritual beings, by virtue of their being theoretical
entities, must not be available to the same acts of

observation as register the events that they are
invoked to explain, "for if they were so available
they would merely have rejoined the inventory of
phenomena to be explained"[39].

Here again Horton is being loyal to his
"theoretical entities". But though he argues that
his approach scores over Beattie's, one is inclined
to think that the latter, if properly understood, is
much more plausible.

-       Why is it that the entities postulated
        by African religious thought are defined
        predominantly in personal terms whilst
        those postulated by modern western thought
        are defined predominantly in impersonal
        terms?

To this question, Horton gives his most
controversial answer. He agrees that Western science
talks exclusively in terms of non-personal entities
and forces. He also agrees that the traditional
thought is dominated by reference to persons or
quasi-persons and their activities. He claims,
however, that the difference between the two modes
of thought is only underlined superficial and not fundamental.

In his various articles, especially in "African
Traditional Thought and Western Science, Part II,"

Horton goes into some depth to explain the origin of this superficial difference between Western science and traditional thought. He offers a 'historical' explanation of how traditional thought came to acquire a "personal idiom" while modern science acquired a "non-personal" one. The entire purpose of theory-building is to disclose order and regularity underlying disorder and irregularity. Members of any culture, Horton claims, in building their theories, draw heavily from the areas of their experience which they associate with order and regularity. It so happens that for the Africans, the area most strongly associated with orderliness is that of their social organization. This forms the basic source of inspiration. Consequently their theories are bound to assume a personalized character.

In the Western cultures, with the advent of "complex rapidly changing industrial societies"[40], personal relationships were very much in flux. For these cultures, the behaviour of inanimate things provided more regularity, order and predictability than did their social organization. Consequently, the members of the Western cultures constructed their theories along the "non-personal idiom". This is briefly why the traditional

religious thought has a personal frame of reference and modern science a non-personal or inanimate one.

The problem with Horton's 'historical' explanation, as Vernom Pratt points out is that it is not historically true. Long before industrialization science had been slowly but steadily developing its inanimate mode of explanation.

> "— it can hardly be denied that science, with its characteristically non-personal idiom (as Horton puts it), already had a history of spectacular success by the advent of industrial society, and to suggest that the founding fathers of science were searching for a paradigm of reliability in such a society is to suggest on impossibility"[41]

We need not be too concerned about the historicity of the origins of the personal and non-personal "idioms". What is of more importance to our present study is Horton's claim that the difference between the two frames of reference, whatever their origin, "is more than anything else a difference in the idiom of the explanatory quest."[42]

When explanations differ only in idiom they are basically the same but expressed in different terms. To argue that modern science and African traditional thought differ only in idiom is to say that they are essentially the same only they are couched in different verbal expressions. To admit this is to equalise African thought and science.

This is what Horton seems to do in spite of his protestations against this accusation.

It is generally agreed that the behaviour of inanimate things is more predictable than that of human beings. Choice and freedom are normally associated with persons but not with inanimate objects. Persons and agents are thought to make decisions and may be blamed or praised, punished or rewarded for their actions. The fact that a person or agent may decide to do this action or that, his freedom to choose makes it difficult to predict with certainty what this person or agent will choose to do.

Inanimate objects, on the other hand, are normally bound by the laws of nature. A ball thrown into the air cannot choose to remain hanging in the air or to keep pushing up indefinitely. It's behaviour is determined by the laws of gravitation. No matter how high it is thrown (unless it is forced out of space altogether), it will eventually have to fall towards the centre of the earth. In this sense the behaviour of inanimate objects is more predictable than that of persons and agents.

Now, the beings of traditional religious thought are agents who can be provoked into anger by the unbecoming conduct of human beings or

placated by sacrifice. In as much as these beings are conceived of as human or quasi-human, they are more unpredictable than inanimate beings.

The point that we are trying to bring out here is that there is more than a mere "difference of idiom" between traditional thought and western science. Their apparent similarity lead Horton to minimise what is in fact a fundamental difference between the two systems.

John Beattie, too has a completely different answer to make to this question. He seems to suggest that African traditional thought falls short of the scientific standards of the Western world.

In cultures where a depersonalized, "scientific" view of the world has not yet taken hold, effects not obviously caused by people are often attributed to non-empirical agents which are in some respects "people like".

Beattie does not expound on this answer but there is the possibility that he sees African traditional thought as belonging to the earliest stages towards what in the west has reached full development - modern science. The assertion that the scientific view of the world "has not yet" taken hold, suggests that it might one day "take hold" in African thought.

But does Beattie believe that the traditional
African left to himself without the influence of
modern science, would eventually develop an auto-
nomous system of thought much like the Western
system of thought? This of course, may be mere
speculation but it is a view which is shared by
many, including the writer of this paper.

It might have taken a long time for tradition-
al thought to develop into anything akin to Western
science but given the equality of intellectual
potential of all human races there is no good
reason to think that the African would not eventually
develop such a system. Robin Horton comes very
close to this affirmation but he errs in supposing
that traditional thought expressed in African
cultures is a characteristic peculiar to the African
peoples.

-      Given the manner in which new beliefs
         arise in African religious systems,
         which is the more appropriate
         characterisation of Such beliefs,
         the "symbolist" or the "intellectualist"?

Both Horton and Beattie agree that new beliefs
in African religious systems tend to arise as the
result of 'dreams', 'visions', 'inspiration',

'intuition' or 'imagination'. They also agree
that the use of analogy is vital to the origin and
development of these beliefs. But this is as far as
their agreement goes. From this Beattie concludes
that there is nothing in the pre-scientific repre-
sentations of the spirit world, which are arrived
at "by any process remotely like those by which
scientific models are arrived at, i.e. the critical
formulation of hypothesis and their rigorous
testing against experience".

This strong rejection of any similarity
between the two systems of thought borders on
contradiction. If one accepts that new beliefs
arise from imagination, inspiration, intuition
or dreams, he must also acknowledge a degree of
similarity (no matter how slight) between these
beliefs and science. 'Imagination', 'intuition' and
'inspiration' are in a sense, cognitive activities
and far from being incompatible with reason, they
provide the basis for science.

Horton's answer to this question is more
objective than that given by Beattie. He recognises
the similarities that exist between the "ideational
innovations" of African religious beliefs and the
sciences.

-       What is the difference between those
        explanations which are, or may be, put
        to the test of experience and those which
        are not, in the same society?

For Beattie, those explanations which are
straightfowardly explanatory in nature are subject
to the test of experience. Explanations of this
nature are normally of the impersonal scientific
kind. The personal, religious kind of explanations,
although they _appear_ straightfoward are essentially
symbolic and are not testable by experience.

Horton, true to his theoretical models,
rejects Beattie's explanation and contends that the
reason why religious beliefs are not testable by
experience is that they are theoretical statements.
To this reply an objection may be made. Why are
the statements propounded within the institutional
framework of modern science more responsive to the
test of experience than the gods and spirits of
traditional thought, though the two systems are
theoretical in nature?

It may also be argued that the history of
religion has shown that there can be no meaningful
interaction between religious explanations and
experience on the material-object-thinking level.
This accounts partly for the failure of rational

theories treated in this study all failed because
they took religion and religious faith too literay.
Because they failed to attack religion at its roots
(the symbolic aspects) these theories failed to
come into grips with this world phenomenon.

-       Traditional African religions include

        not only systems of belief explaining

        events in the world, but also systems of

        action aimed at controlling the course

        of events. This granted, which is the

        more fruitful approach to these religions,

        the "symbolist" or the "intellectualist"?

        As we have already seen, each proponent claims
superiority for his approach. How then shall we
decide on the most fruitful approach for the
traditional religious thought?

        Horton's article "African Traditional thought
and Western, Thought, Part II", may prove useful
at this juncture. In this article Horton presents
some very important differences between traditional
thought and Western Science. The key difference
between the two systems, he tells us, is the lack
in the traditional cultures of the awareness of
alternatives;

> "—— in traditional cultures there
> is no developed awareness of
> alternatives to the established
> body of theoretical tenets;
> whereas in scientifically oriented
> cultures, such an awareness is highly
> developed. It is this difference
> we refer to when we say that
> traditional cultures are 'closed'
> and scientifically oriented
> cultures 'open'"[43]

This basic difference between the "open" and "closed" societies, says Horton, has two important consequences. First, it is responsible in the "closed" culture, for an absolute acceptance of the established theoretical tenets. It leaves no room for critical appraisal with the possibility of abandoning them. In that they are absolute and unquestionable, these tenets become "sacred". Secondly, any attempt to question or change the established tenets is seen as a "threat of chaos, of cosmic abyss, and therefore evokes intense anxiety"[44].

The difference between the "open" and "closed" cultures leads to other related differences. Horton deals with some of the more important of these differences. Among them are:

(a)   Magical versus non-magical attitude to words.

(b)   Ideas-bound-to-occasions versus ideas-bound-to-ideas.

(c)   Unreflective versus reflective thinking.

(d)   Mixed versus segregated motives.

(e)   Divination versus diagnosis.

(f)   Absence versus Presence of Experimental
       Method.

(g)   Coincidence, Chance, Probability.

(h)   Confession of Ignorance.

(i)   Protective versus destructive attitude to
       the category - system.

(j)   The passage of time - good or bad?

We shall here examine only a few of these
differences.

The traditional thinker has a tendency to see
an intimate link between words and things. For him
this tendency has overwhelming power. Since he
cannot conceive of any alternatives to his éstablish-
ed system of concepts and words, this appears to him
an absolute link between actions and words. This
conviction gives birth to magic.

By contrast, the "open" culture with its
multitude of possible alternatives to choose from
soon finds out that magic is intolerable. The
members of such a society begin to think that words
vary independently of reality.

The difference involved here is a very real
one and one fails to understand how Horton, with the
full knowledge of such a fundamental difference

between the 'open' and 'closed' systems of thought
can still claim that they differ only in idiom?

Horton goes on to point out that in the
'closed' culture ideas are bound to occasions and
not to other ideas. This explains why there are no
doctrines in traditional thought. Ideas cannot, in
the African traditional thought, contradict reality.
They are strongly bound to what is real. In the
Western science, on the other hand, ideas may
readily be contrasted with reality. This Horton
says, is due to the fact that in this culture ideas
are independent of reality. They are bound to other
ideas not to occasions.

Traditional thought also differs from modern
science in its lack of reflection. Despite its
penetrating speculations it tends to get on with
the work of explanation, without pausing to reflect
the rules or methods upon which it is founded.

> "—— There is a sense in which
> traditional thought includes among
> its accomplishments neither logic
> —— nor philosophy —— The traditional
> thinker because he is unable to
> imagine possible alternatives to
> his established theories and
> classification, can never start to
> formulate generalized norms of
> reasoning and knowing. For only
> where there are alternatives can there
> be choice, and only where there is
> choice can there be norms governing it"[45].

We could go right down Horton's long list of

important differences but already one thing is
clear. The differences that are listed are by no
means trivial. Horton's comparison shows very
clearly that the difference between the 'personal'
explanations of traditional thought and the 'imper-
sonal' explanations of science is more than one of
idiom.

One aspect of Horton's argument requires
further attention - that of "thinking models".
Both "atoms" and "spirits" may be seen as "thinking
models" in a field of knowledge where man has NO
direct access to reality. They are "signals" and
"symbols". As long as one knows this they are
"scientific" but as soon as one thinks "atoms" or
"spirits" as realities they become sources of
SUPERSTITION. This idea is very well expressed in
Professor J. G. Donder's inaugural lecture at the
University of Nairobi. In this lecture entitled
"Don't Fence Us In: The Liberating role of Philo-
sophy" Professor Donders poses a question which is
very similar to Horton's question of "atoms" and
"spirits". Why did the urban Greeks who started the
atomic theory not take 'persons' or 'spirits' as
their model as their rural predecessors had done?
Professor Donders cites the answer given to this
question by Robin Horton. Then commenting on the

"spirits" and "atoms" models, he says:

> "They are both 'myths', or
> 'stories', they both function
> as explanations, they are both
> man-made items, they are both
> fruitful and they are both
> harmful if misinterpreted.
> They are misinterpreted at the
> moment that one starts to
> overlook the fact that 'atoms'
> and 'spirits' are only 'stories'
> or 'myths'.
> They become harmful at the
> moment that those atoms or
> spirits are considered as
> true and real ——"46

As we have seen above, Horton believes that traditional religious thought is primarily concerned with explanation, a task which it shares with science. He also admits that traditional thought is not as successful in its task as science is. There is no reason why Horton does not go even further and assert that one of the things which retard or hinder the progress of traditional thought is its personal framework of reference.

What about the similarity which Horton claims between religion and traditional thought? What importance do we attach to this similarity? To this answer Mr. Vernon Pratt offers a satisfactory answer.

Horton, he says, tells us nothing that we did not know. In stating that traditional religious thought is like science, Horton is only stating a

truism, "since with one or two dubious exceptions any pair of things are alike in some respects (and different in others). ―― What Horton must be interested in, then, is showing that science and traditional religious thought are importantly or essentially similar to each other."[47]

Having examined and compared the 'symbolist' with the 'intellectualist' approach we are now in a position to suggest a useful means of translating traditional religions. It appears that Horton is right in thinking that we can find in African cultures an element of scientific thought. Beattie is also right in thinking that the traditional religions are not scientific explanations but symbolic presentations comparable to the religions of the Western World. The one mistake that the two scholars make, however, is in assuming that the two elements are distinguishable and independent of each other. There is not in the African culture a clear - cut division between religion and 'science', between the sacred and the secular.

This fact is very well expressed by John Mbiti when he says that the religion of the Africans "permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy to isolate it".[48] This important observation cannot be stressed enough.

We suggest that it is because both Beattie and Horton
overlook this fact that they are unable to strike
a compromise. For both thinkers it is an "all-or-
nothing". Traditional religious beliefs are either
symbolic or they are scientific. For them there is
no middle course.

Our suggestion is that the traditional
religions will be best understood if we avoid the
sort of 'compartmentalization' which both Horton
and Beattie have so far promoted. We must not
succumb to the temptation of treating religion
as if it were an independent compartment of life which
we can take in isolation for the purpose of analysis.
We must rather treat it as part and parcel of the
entire life of a people. With this conviction we
shall discover that these beliefs contain not just
one but both of the aspects that Beattie and Horton
affirm in turns. Although traditional religions
may share certain similarities with science, they,
nevertheless, have their symbolic aspects. We
shall also discover that no matter how similar these
religions may be to arts they at the same time have
scientific aspects. Considering that science and
art do not occur as different activities in the
traditional society it would be misleading to impose
and use these criteria in the African traditional

thought.

The exclusive use of the 'symbolist' or the 'intellectualist' method as the only tool of translation and interpretation of African traditional religions is bound to lead to misunderstanding. When Horton starts off armed with his 'intellectualist' approach he is being 'unscientific' in that he proceeds along a biased path. The same holds true for Beattie with his 'symbolist' approach.

We have in this chapter dealt exclusively with the faith-reason problem in the context of indigenous African religions. But as we pointed out in the introduction, the problem of faith and reason is not peculiar to any one religion or continent. It applies equally to all religions and in all places. In the next chapter we propose to treat one aspect which is not itself a theory in any strict sense of the word. This aspect is what has come to be known as the problem of evil. Evil, itself a universal phenomenon presents a greater challenge to all religions than many people are willing to accept. We cannot of course enter into details of how each and every religion of the world tries to explain the existence of evil but we can and shall attempt a rather broad survey of the situation.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER V

EXPLANATIONS OF EVIL IN

WORLD RELIGIONS

- Defining the Problem

- Non-Theistic Explanations

- Dualistic Explanations

- Theistic Explanations

- African Traditional Religions.

1. <u>Defining the Problem</u>:

In discussing the problem of evil it is
necessary to distinguish clearly between physical
and mental suffering on the one hand and human
wickedness on the other. These two aspects are
distinct one from the other and yet related to each
other. Usually human wickedness causes mental or
physical suffering. But it is not the case that all
suffering is caused by human wickedness. Senility,
death, epidemics, droughts, earth-quakes, famine and
floods are all examples of suffering in the world
which can not be attributed to human wickedness.
The biblical stories of Noah and the Ark and the
dramatic pestilences of Pharaoh's Egypt would seem
to suggest that natural phenomena such as floods and
epidemics result from man's wickedness. Generally
however, the view that there exists a causal
relationship between natural calamities and human
wickedness is hard to sustain. Human wickedness,
of course, does produce suffering but it is suffering
of a different type from that of natural catastrophe.
Human wickedness in the form of oppression (political,
economic and social), torture, ruthless aggression,
cruelty, and extreme egotism is responsible for
causing great mental and physical suffering in the
world.

Instances of evil are so common-place around us that it would be superfluous to enter into the defence of the reality of evil in this chapter. And yet there are schools of thought according to which suffering is only an illusion. Such is the view of the contemporary Christian Science. For them evil only exists in the imagination. If we were to accept this view then this chapter would be meaningless as there would be no such thing as the 'problem of evil'. To appreciate the importance of this problem we must see evil for what it really is - dark, ugly, heart-crushing, and yet so real.

The fact of evil and suffering in the world poses certain problems for those who believe in God. In a particular way the phenomenon of evil poses a very real threat to theism especially where God is thought of as almighty and interested in the welfare of man. Traditionally this challenge was construed as a dilemma.

If God is perfectly loving, he must wish to abolish evil.

If God is all-powerful he must be able to abolish evil.

But evil lives on. The existence of evil in the face of an almighty and all-loving father is sometimes said to mean one

of two things:

Either God is not almighty as is so commonly
claimed or else God is not interested in the well-
being of man. This leads to some interesting
conclusions. Some of the more devastating conclus-
ions include:-

    a-   the rejection of an almighty God
    b-   the denial of a loving deity
    c-   the denial altogether of the
          existence of God.

These alternatives comprise without any doubt a
major threat to religion. In the face of this
threat the major religions of the world sought to
find a plausible explanation of the problem of evil
without jeopardising God's attributes or his existe-
nce. The explanations reached by the different
religions are as varied as they are many.

    It is well beyond the scope of this thesis
to treat of all the explanations offered by the
different religions of the world. For our present
purposes it will suffice to treat only a few
representative solutions so far advanced. In this
chapter, Taoism and Buddhism are cited as represent-
ing non-theistic explanations of the problem of
evil and suffering. The Dualistic solution of the
problem is represented by Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism

and Jainism. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are
representative of the theistic attempt to come to
grips with the problem.

Finally, there follows an attempt to state
the general solution of evil in African traditional
religion.

2. Non-theistic Explanations:

Among non-theistic religions which attempt
an explanation of evil are Buddhism and Taoism.
The most notable thing about these religions is
their practical response to the problem. There is
very little concern in either Buddhism or Taoism
for the theoretical question why there exists
suffering in the world. In both cases evil is a
given and the immediate concern is that of devising
means of eliminating evil and suffering in the world.
In neither religion is there a theoretical attempt
of explaining or justifying the presence of suffering.
Even though Buddha advanced a kind of explanation
for all suffering in the world in terms of univer-
sal craving, he was more concerned about bringing
this suffering to an end. In his explanation the
Buddha said nothing about the gods. He recognised
and addressed himself directly to the fact of

suffering, offered a diagnosis of their root cause,
and recommended a way of release. For Buddha and
his later followers, the 'why' question is unimport-
ant.

For Buddha and Buddhism the reality of suffer-
ing is indisputable. The fact of suffering
manifests itself in birth, decay, sickness, and
death. The cause of this suffering is the endless
craving (desire) that leads to birth, the lust that
lingers in life and the great desire to be reborn.
Sorrow, lamentations, anguish, and despair are all
forms of "dukkha" (suffering). So too is contact
with unpleasant factors and failure to achieve what
one desires.

The cause of "dukkha" is "tanka" (selfish
craving or desire). It is the desire for passions,
for existence, and for non-existence that leads to
the innevitable web of rebirths. Abandonment,
forsaking, release, non-attachment is the sole
'noble truth' for the cessation of 'dukkha'.
Escape from 'dukkha' is only possible by elimina-
ting all selfish craving and desire. This calls
for a total rejection of life and existence. The
way to attain non-attachment, or cessation of
existence is by avoiding extremes of over-indulge-
nce and asceticism - by following the Middle Path.

The Middle Path consists of the Noble Eightfold Way.

1. BY RIGHT UNDERSTANDING The Buddhist is led to perceive the Four Noble Truths:
   a) The fact of Suffering.
   b) The cause of Suffering.
   c) The cure of Suffering.
   d) The Noble Eightfold Path.

2. RIGHT INTENTION leads the believer to renounce worldly life, accept the "homeless" state, and follow the Eightfold Path.

3. RIGHT SPEECH helps one to abstain from lies, slander, abuse or idle talk.

4. BY RIGHT CONDUCT the faithful abstains from killing, stealing, adultery, and intoxication.

5. In work one must avoid questionable occupations. Hence the importance of RIGHT OCCUPATION.

6. RIGHT ENDAVOUR urges one to strive only after what is good while avoiding what is evil and wicked.

7. BY RIGHT CONTEMPLATION the Buddhist is able to control his mind in peaceful

contemplation so that no emotion
disturbs his peace.

8.   Finally, by faithfully following the
Eightfold Path the believer becomes
master of his own will. By means of
RIGHT CONCENTRATION one develops his
mind to heights beyond reasoning and on
to NIVARNA - the ultimate peaceful
bliss which is the good of all individuals.

This teaching of the founder of Buddhism forms the
basis of the treatment of suffering in Buddhism.
In later Buddhism the lack of interest in the
'why' question is characterised in Badhisattra
and Mahayana doctrines.

This aspect is also true of Taoism. The
taoists considered the first reality as the
harmony of opposites. All opposites can be brought
back to unity in the Principle of 'Tao'. The purpose
of religious life was to allow a direct apprehension
of the Prime Virtue and identification of the All.
This was achieved through Taoist ecstasy. By
externalising all distinct ideas and concentrating
one's attention upon a single point the Taoist could
successfully cast the external world out of himself.
He would then cast out of himself the notion of any

individual essence and finally cast out of himself
all notion of existence. This way he would gain
enlightment and enjoy direct contemplation of the
Principle, outside time, beyond life, suffering and
death.

In the face of suffering man has only to
yield himself to the harmony of the external
principle to find peace. Just like their favourite
symbol of water which always seeks the lowest level
but can overcome anything, the Taoist must learn
complete submission and quietness because by them
all things can be attained.

We have already mentioned the lack of interest
in the theoretical explanation of evil in these two
religions. Buddhism and Taoism are examples of
how religion can account for suffering without
necessarily dragging God into the question.

It must be observed however that in both
cases the solutions thus advanced have severe
limitations as complete answers to the problem of
evil. Neither Budhism nor Taoism provides a
satisfactory answer to the question of human
wickedness, the ethical demands of inter-personal
and social life, the question of human progress, or
the meaning or purpose of life. By omitting the
preoccupation with the question of God both religions

fail to offer any meaningful explanation of the
problem of mental and physical suffering. No
attempt is made to explain natural suffering.

3. Dualistic Explanations:

One way of explaining the problem of evil is
to see two equally ultimate principles behind both
good and evil. This view is usually referred to
as dualism.

In Zoroastrianism two equal and co-external
principles are recognised. These two principles
are Ahura Mazda (the Holy Spirit or the Wise Lord)
and Angra Mainyu (the Evil Spirit). These two are
responsible for all the good and evil in the world.
The existence of good and evil, light and darkness,
knowledge and ignorance, life and death, sickness
and health, justice and injustice, slavery and
freedom, and all contrary activities which exist and
are observed in all societies are all attributed
to Angra Mainyu and Ahura Mazda.

In this tradition it is impossible that both
good and bad should emanate from the same divinity.
What is perfect and complete cannot produce evil.
If it produces evil, then it is not perfect. If
God is perfect in goodness and knowledge he cannot

be the source of ignorance and evil. If he produces ignorance and evil, then he is not perfect and if he is not perfect he is not worth of adoration as God.

Creation and all good things came from Ahura Mazda whereas all evil came from the uncreated spiritual force (Angra Mainyu) which is forever in opposition to the Wise Lord. The earth is the battlefield of the forces of good and evil. The powers of good and evil fight for the posession of the human soul. Zoroastrianism teaches that ultimately the power of good will claim victory over the power of evil. In the meanwhile, the individual could facilitate Ahura Mazda's victory by choosing the right course of action in life - hence the highly moral character that has always marked Zoroastrianism.

Like Zoroastrianism Manichaeism attempts a dualistic explanation of suffering.

Manichaeism:

Little is known about Mani, the religious teacher and founder of Manichaeism. Even less is known with any certainty about his teachings. Available evidence shows Manichaeism as a highly sophisticated

system of dualism.

Manichaeism had for its central question the riddle of evil. Where does evil come from and what causes man to indulge in evil practices? It was apparent to Mani and his followers that evil could not be a creation of a good principle (God). God, being good could not produce evil. Evil must have another source external to God. Indeed, as evil always occurs against the background of good, it would seem reasonable to assume that it is an invasion of the good by an alien, eternally separate principle of evil.

The world is a result of the 'fusion in conflict' of two opposing principles which are interlocked and intermingled. The universe is one long struggle of the good to disentangle itself from evil. But the same struggle which takes place in the universe is repeated in each individual. The good self is trapped in matter and it needs to be released.

Life is a struggle to liberate the good element from the prison of the body.

Man can help to liberate his 'good self' by recognising the two principles of Good and Evil. And the way to recognise these principles is by pursuing a course of life which will lead to the

separation of good and evil in one's own life and
in the universe. This can be achieved by austere
and rigid asceticism, a ruthless detachment from
matter. In its absurd extremity Manichaeism
forbade a fully professed monk from picking fruit or
any other food because it would contaminate him
and cause suffering to the object from which the
food was taken. He however, could eat of the
fruit if it was picked by some other person.

The extremist was bound to cause more
suffering if he stuck strictly to the teaching of
Mani. But the strength of Manichaeism lies in the
fact that it corresponds to everyday experience.
Life is depicted as a struggle between opposing
forces. It is to this solution to the problem of
evil that Manichaeism owes its appeal.

Jainism:

Jainism like Manichaeism believes in the idea of
the soul trapped in the body. The entanglement of
the soul with matter is what in Jainism is called
'karma'. Every being has a soul or 'jiva'. This
soul is completely enmeshed in matter and it stands
in need of liberation. Man and the higher animals
which are characterised by possession of five senses

belong to the highest category of being. Insects,
bees, and butterflies have four senses. The next
category consists of small insects. The fourth
category consists mainly of worms, leeches and other
creatures which possess only the senses of touch and
smell. The lowest category is that which consists
of objects which are normally referred to as
inaminate. This includes stones, trees, plants
and everything else in the universe. Since every-
thing in the universe has a soul, the entire
universe is said to be 'alive'.

In this universe 'karma' persistently seeks
an entry into the soul and clings to it. Acts of
cruelty and selfishness give karma direct entry
into the 'jiva'. Good actions are neutral and cann-
ot of themselves disentangle the jiva from karma.
It is only acts of suffering voluntarily undertaken
that can liberate the soul from the web of karma.
Until this is done, the jiva is constantly bound
up in re-birth in all objects, even the non-living
things.

The soul then can only be liberated by
avoiding all contact with matter which might cause
injury. Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, taught
that to be freed from sorrow the holy man should
refrain from causing or allowing anyone else to

cause harm to any object. One must not kill any
living thing. The doctrine of non-injury is
perhaps the best known characteristic of Jainism.
The faithful Jain will take the greatest care not to
kill anything, even accidentally. The Jain monk
is an extremist. He carries with him a small brush
with which he clears the ground before him so that
he does not by any chance tread on any unseen
insect and so kill it. He strains all water before
he drinks it for fear of destroying life. He never
lights a fire or a lamp. Doing so would attract
insects to the light thus exposing them to the
risk of death. In addition fire is itself a living
object and putting it off would be to take away life.

The monk practices great austerity in his
own life. He does this to assist in the disenta-
nglement of 'jiva' from matter. The entire universe
is derived from the two eternal, uncreated and
independent categories of 'jiva' and 'ajiva' -
consciousness and unconsciousness. But dualism was
excluded because creation was not traced back to a
conflict between the two co-eternal principles.
Jainism denies that creation is a consequence of
divine will or purpose. The sufficient explanation
is provided by natural law. The very existence of
suffering and evil rules out any well disposed creator.

In this connection Mahapurana iv 16 ff provides a
very interesting reading.

"Some foolish men declare that Creator made the world.
The doctrine that the world was created is ill-
    advised, and should be rejected.
If God created the world, where was he before
    creation?
If you say he was transcendent then, and needed
    no support, where is he now?
How could God have made the world without any raw
    materials?
If you say he made this first, and then the world,
    you are faced with an endless regression.
If God created the world by an act of his own will,
    without any raw material,
Then it is just his will and nothing else - and
    who will believe this silly stuff ---.
God commits great sin in slaying the children whom
    he has himself created.
If you say he slays only to destroy evil beings,
    why did he create such beings in the first
    place?"

4. <u>THEISTIC EXPLANATIONS</u>:

<center>Judaism - Christianity - Islam.</center>

DEVIL AS SOURCE OF EVIL:

Though their explanations of evil differ in
detail, the religions which we will treat in this
section make a similar general approach to the
question of suffering. Judaism, Christianity and
Islam do in varying degrees acknowledge an evil
power besides the good God. They also try to explain
suffering in terms of God's test for faithfulness
and Divine Punishment for Sin. These similarities
and a few differences which exist between the three
religions in the attempt to explain the problem of
suffering will be treated in this section.

In the Old Testament we first encounter the
devil at the Fall of Man. In the Book of Genesis
the problem of evil is raised. The writer empha-
tically affirms that God's entire creation was
good, not evil. Time and again he positively
commends this fact by the words, "And God saw
everything that he had made, and behold, it was
very good". Evil and suffering are attributed not
to God but to the devil who was responsible
for man's fall.

In the Garden of Eden man had lived in comple-
te harmony with his creator. Prior to the Fall, man
knew nothing about suffering, evil, and death. It

was only after yielding to the temptations of
Satan that man was exposed to toil, pain, senility,
death and the wrath of God. Man's gradual alienati-
on from God is highlighted in selfishness, rivalry,
murder, exploitation, drunkenness, and tension -
in complete human wickedness.

The idea of Satan is again seen in the book
of Job where he appears to be charged with the duty
of testing the Servants of God.

Christianity takes up this idea of demonology
in the New Testament. Here Jesus is shown to have
been subjected to temptations by Satan. Later in
his ministry Jesus spends considerable time fight-
ing the powers of Satan by curing the demoniacs.
In the gospel of Saint John the devil is said to
possess a kingdom - the kingdom of darkness. This
kingdom, although in principle overwhelmed by the
death and resurrection of Christ, continues to wage
war against the kingdom of light. Christians
believe that in the end the powers of darkness will
be completely defeated by God.

Construed in this way, Christianity seems to
present a dualism - two opposing principles of good
and evil in co-existence. This idea is ruled out
by the fact that the two are not co-eternal.
Christianity, just like Judaism, treats the devil as

a creature, a fallen angel who has revolted against
God. The devil, now a corrupted being was once
good.

The idea of a fallen angel appears as well
in the theology of Islam. The angel Iblis is said
to have resented the place of Adam in creation.
God allowed him and his subjects to remain in being
as tempters of men. But in Islam the idea of Satan
did not receive the same prominence that it did in
Judaism and Christianity. This is partly because
of the great emphasis that Islam lays on the
omnipotence and sovereignty of Allah.

SUFFERING AS TEST OF FAITHFULNESS:

One of the explanations offered for the
existence of suffering in the world is that God
uses suffering as a test or trial of faith. It is
quite normal in the history of religions to encount-
er the idea that the good man is refined in the
fire of suffering. In Judaism suffering is some-
times seen as a divine instrument of testing man's
faith. This view is beautifully illustrated in
the story of Abraham and his willingness to sacri-
fice his only son, Isaac. It is further illustrated
in the story of Job, the faithful servant whom
God put into test through great suffering.

This view however raises a problem. How can God who is good, use an evil instrument to accomplish a divine purpose? This question was first raised by Habbakuk and Judaism does not offer any satisfactory answer to it.

The Early Christians regarded persecution as a test of faith. The Christian matyrs faced their death heroically convinced that it was the final test of their faith. More important for the Christians is the idea of sharing in Christ's sufferings. The Christians accept their suffering as their 'cross' which the Master urges them to take up and follow him. In suffering the Christian sees not meaningless misery but a test and witness to his faith.

But the idea of suffering as a test of faith acquires a special importance in Islam. The Koran makes this quite explicit:

> Surely we will test you with
> something of fear and of hunger,
> and of loss of wealth and lives
> and produce: yet give good
> tidings to the patient, who
> when calamity afflicts them
> say, 'We belong to God and to
> him we are returning'.[1]

Suffering is thus necessary as part of God's
planning. It helps to create a faithful character
and discriminates the faithful from the insincere
and false. Suffering is the instrument of God in
testing man's perfection. If faithfully observed
it leads to acquittance in the final reckoning of
sins by God. Suffering in a way leads to life. It
is therefore commendable to expose oneself willingly
to suffering in the cause of God. As a trial,
suffering benefits the submissive person by produ-
cing of him a balanced character.

The instrumental theory suggests as well that
man can employ suffering to combat or resist evil.[2]

SUFFERING AS DIVINE PUNISHMENT:

Perhaps the commonest and simplest answer
to the 'why' question of suffering is that suffering
is the just punishment for wickedness. In the
Hebrew Bible this idea is explicitly stated:

> Happy is the virtous man, for
> he will feed on fruit of his
> deeds;
> Woe to the wicked, evil is on
> him, he will be treated as his
> actions deserve"[3].

This explanation springs directly from the
covenants of the people with God. According to
these the Israelites are supposed to be virtuous

and law-abiding. The breach of the covenant calls
for punitive measures from God. But the idea of
suffering as punishment for sin only reaches its
full development in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy
the story of suffering is the story of sin. The
Deuteronomic historian tells the story of the
kings of Israel and Judah in terms of reward and
punishment. In the case of Job his so-called
comforters make a similar inference from suffering
to guilt. But there arose a serious objection to
this view - that it was not strictly true. It is
not always the case that the innocent prosper while
the wicked suffer. It is known that Job was a
virtuous and upright man. Yet God allowed him to
suffer unhold persecutions. Jeremiah, the prophet
of God was exposed to suffering for no obvious
reason. He himself declared his puzzlement.[4] In
reward for his faithfulness to the word of God he
received nothing but suffering and insult. The best
he could do was to advance an apocalyptic explanati-
on - the hope that sometimes in the future a
reconciliation would be reached through a new
covenant, a new creation.

A central notion in Christianity with its
focus on the Cross is that suffering could acquire
redemptive significance. At the level of popular

belief suffering as punishment and evidence of guilt is quite recurrent. Christ himself, however, instructed his disciples not to think that the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell must have been particularly wicked.[5]

Christian faith further regards suffering as a necessary participation in the process of growth. Christ in his human form set the example when he chose to suffer and die on the cross. The Christians, taking their hint from their Master accept suffering as necessary for their spiritual development.

The Koran also offers the explanation of suffering as punishment from God. This idea is particularly well shown in the legendary battles of Uhud and Badr. In the second year of 'Hijra' a small muslin force won a notable victory against a much larger Meccan army. The battle of Badr became for the Muslims a vindication of their faith and trust in God. But in the following year the Meccans decisively defeated the Muslims at Uhud. This defeat was attributed to a few individuals in the Muslim society who had slackened their faith in Allah. Victory was thus seen as reward and defeat as punishment. But though the Koran gives us the impression of suffering as punishment, it also warns

the faithful not to assume that whenever they see
afflictions they also see sin.

> "There is no blemish in the blind,
> and there is no blemish in the lame,
> and there is no blemish in the sick ——"[6]

FREE WILL AND SUFFERING:

In theistic religions a great deal of suffering
and evil is explained away in terms of free will.
God created human beings with a free will to choose
right or wrong. Moral evil and the suffering that
results from it is to be explained as the misuse
of the freedom thus endowed in human beings.

Judaism makes very little use of the free
will argument in justifying the ways of God to
man. Neither the Hebrew bible nor the rabbis place
any emphasis on the question of free will. And yet
their teachings about divine punishment and divine
forgiveness presuppose a free will.

How could God punish an individual unless
that individual had freely chosen to do the wrong
thing instead of what was right? Morality and
virtue presuppose freedom of choice. Judaism was
conscious of the individual's freedom to obey or to
rebel. It was on the presupposition of this free-
dom that its strong ethical sense rested.

In Christianity, Satan is seen to have fallen out of favour with God because he misused his free will. Adam and Eve brought misery into the world by acting freely in succumbing to Satan's temptations. The role of human freedom after the fall, however, is not unanimously recognised by all Christians. Such Christian thinkers as St. Augustine and John Calvin accept free choice in explaining the possibility of the fall. They argue, however, that after the fall, mankind is rendered hopeless until God intervenes to restore man to freedom. Martin Luther and Erqsmus had fierce controversies over this issue at the period of Reformation.

The answer given by Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period is still highly regarded by most contemporary Christians. His basic solution to the problem of evil is that God:

> "permits certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered; for if all evil were present much good would be absent from the universe"[7]

According to this view, God permits the misuse of freedom. This must be the case because if he were to prevent this misuse there would be no free

personal creatures to learn to love and respond to
their creator. Wickedness then is the perversion
of the will from the creator by means of wrong
choice.

Since the Koran also speaks of suffering as
divine punishment the implication is that God has
given men the freedom to obey or disobey.

But in the Muslim belief the omnipotence
and sovereignty of God leads to determinist and
predestinarian views. This is particularly true of
the traditional Mohammedanism. The Sufi mystics on
the other hand have a more positive doctrine of
free will. The idea of free will however was never
taken very far in Moslem theology.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

5. MYSTICAL POWER AND EVIL:

The problem of evil in the African traditional
thought is almost exclusively explained in terms of
mystical power. Most of the suffering and mis-
fortunes that the African encounters is explained
in terms of witchcraft, taboo, sorcery and evil
spirits.

What Evans-Pritchard says about witchcraft

among the Azande is generally true of most peoples
of Africa. Witchcraft provides a natural philosophy
by which the Azande explain the relation between
men and the unfortunate events that befall them.
Witchcraft permeates the whole life of the Azande,
as Pritchard clearly shows.

> "It (witchcraft) plays its part in
> every activity of Zande life; in
> agricultural, fishing, and hunting
> pursuits; in domestic life of
> homesteads as well as in communal
> life of district and court; ——
> its influence is plainly stamped
> on law and morals, etiquette and
> religion, it is primordial in
> language and technology ——, if
> blight seizes the ground-nut crop
> it is witchcraft; if the ground is
> vainly scoured for game it is
> witchcraft; —— if a wife is sulky and
> irresponsive to her husband it is
> witchcraft, if a prince is cold and
> distant with his subjects it is
> witchcraft; if a magical rite fails
> to achieve its purpose it is witchcraft;
> if in fact any failure or misfortune falls
> upon anyone at any time and in relation
> to any of the manifold activities of his
> life it may be due to witchcraft."[8]

Professor Mbiti makes a similar claim regarding
the power of magic in the beliefs of the African
societies;

> "Every form of pain, misfortune,
> sorrow, or suffering every illness
> and sickness, every death —— every
> failure of the crop in the fields,
> of hunting in the wilderness, or
> fishing in the water; every bad omen

or dream; these and all the
other manifestations of evil
that man experiences are
blamed on somebody in the
corporate society. Natural
explanations may indeed be
found, but mystical
explanations must also be given."[9]

In African Traditional Religions witchcraft
is seen as the major cause of suffering, though it
is not the only one. But in explaining evil in
terms of witchcraft the Africans are not as naive
as to account for the existence of phenomena or
even the action of phenomena in terms of mystical
causation alone. Evans-Pritchard narrates the
story of a boy who while walking in the centre of
a bush path knocked his foot against a small stump
of wood. The boy hurt his toe and in the course of
time the wound grew worse. The boy attributed his
bad luck to witchcraft. In his conversation with
this boy, Evans-Pritchard observed a few important
facts. The boy did not account for the existence
of the stump by reference to witchcraft. He did not
even insinuate that every time anyone knocked his
foot against a stump of wood it was due to witchcr-
aft. He admitted that the cut on his toe was due
to the stump of wood and not to witchcraft. How
then could he claim witchcraft as responsible for
his luck?

For the young boy witchcraft was constituted
in the fact that on this particular occasion he
struck his toe against a stump. Many times he had
walked along similar paths and had not hurt his
toe. Why was it that on this particular occasion,
having exercised his usual care, he had nevertheless
hurt his toe?

Again, in the past, he had other cuts but they
had all healed quite fast. Why in this particular
case did the cut on his toe continue to fester? In
his (the boy's) opinion these peculiar conditions
demand an explanation and the only explanation which
satisfied these questions was witchcraft.

This example reveals an important function of
witchcraft. It explains the particular conditions
in a chain of causation which relate an individual
to natural happenings in such a way that he sustains
injury. Witchcraft explains not "how" things happen,
but "why" they happen as they do. Why did that
stump of wood hurt the toe of the particular boy and
not those of his friends? Why did it hurt his toe
on this particular occasion and not at any other
time? Why was his toe hurt by this particular
stump and not by any other? The answer to these
questions is witchcraft.

Now, of course, we may think that these are
really stupid questions. We may answer that the
answer to these questions is quite obvious. The
only explanation which satisfies the relationship
between these otherwise independently caused facts
is their coincidence in time and space. But in the
African thought this answer is vague and unsatis-
factory. The idea of fate or coincidence is al-
together unacceptable. Nothing is ever left to
coincidence. Every occurrence has a concrete reason
or else it would not happen at all. To frame it in
the Western mode, coincidence was not a sufficient
reason for any occurrence.

In the context of suffering, witchcraft
constituted the only plausible and most satisfactory
explanation. Only the notion of witchcraft satis-
factorily explained the "why" of things in traditi-
onal religions. Natural cause was recognised but
witchcraft provided the ultimate explanation.

Another source of suffering which is much
dreaded in African societies is the practice of
sorcery. Sorcery is the anti-social use of mystical
power where the sorcerer aims at harming innocent
people. Sorcerers tap this power to harm or
destroy their enemies and their property. The
practice of sorcery is a result of man's wickedness.

It is a result of human jealousy, hatred, fear, insecurity, or suspicion. The sorcerer is believed to be responsible for much of the illness, accidents, tragedies, sorrows, unhappy mysteries and dangers that are encountered in daily life. The sorcerer will use his powers to bring about failure in another man's business or undertakings, to corrupt legal procedure, to spoil a man's happiness and to interfere with his family's welfare.

To combat the power of sorcery men normally turn to good magic. Whereas sorcery and magic are used against men who have not broken any law or moral rules, good magic is only effective when directed against those who have committed a crime. It is often employed to combat witohcraft, sorcery and against disease. Good magic is the manipulation of mystical power for the good of society. It is used to bring about success in all fields of social life. The Africans will seek good magic for sexual potency, for success in love affairs, to obtain more wives, for a safe journey, to regain stolen property, for peace, for the health of children, to avenge homicide, adultery, theft, and for protection from all evil.

EVIL AS PUNISHMENT:

Many Africans believe that God is the giver
and upholder of morality. In this light many mis-
fortunes that befall individual persons or society
at large are interpreted as evidence of breach of
morality. But God is not in many societies seen
to operate directly. His punishment is executed
through the spirits and the living—dead and in ta-
boos.

Though God is ultimately the giver of mora-
lity he is not seen as being directly involved in
the day-to-day running of it. It is the ancestors
in particular who are seen as policing the daily
running of society. They are consequently the real
custodians of morality and order in society.

They are directly interested in the affairs
of the family, the traditional ethics and the gene-
al activities of the community. One of the most
important duties of the living is to see that the
burial and mourning ceremonies for the dead are
properly conducted. Failure to observe the final
rites of the dead may lead to revenge in the forms
of sickness and misfortune including frequent and
disturbing appearances of the deceased. Failure to
obey the instructions given by the living-dead

before their death will provoke their anger and call for punishment. So too will the negligence to give food and libation where this is required.

An additional means of reinforcing morality is the taboo. Different societies have different actions which they believe should be refrained from because their performance would cause an undesired event or interfere with a desired event. There are certain misfortunes which are not explained away as being caused by witchcraft. If a man develope leprosy and it is known that he has at some time practiced incest then incest and not witchcraft is said to be the cause of leprosy. Similarly, if a child becomes sick and it is known that its parents have had sexual relations before it was weened, the cause of death is the breach of the taboo and not witchcraft.

In this respect even though punishment comes from without the individual it is clear that the individual is to blame for all his sufferings. The cause of his suffering is not the living dead or the spirits or even God. It is the individual himself who by breaking the moral code of society calls for suffering on his own person.

FOOTNOTES:

1.		Koran, ii, 150 (155f).
2.		Ibid. ix, 13.
3.		Isaiah 3: 10-11.
4.		Jeremiah 20: 7-9.
5.		Luke 13: 4.
6.		Koran: xxiv, 60.
7.	Thomas Aquinas:	Summa Theologica 1a. 22.2
8.	Evans-Pritchard, E.E.	Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1937, p. 64.
9.	John S. Mbiti,	African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, London, 1969, p.209.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the fore-going chapters we have examined some theories which attempt to explain away religion. In the course of doing so we have reached certain conclusions which are pertinent to the present endeavour. We shall now try to state these conclusions and show how they could contribute to our understanding of the riddle of faith-reason relationship.

It seems that the faith-reason problem arises and is escalated by two main factors - (a) misunderstanding of the claims of religion, (b) certain oversight on the part of the critics of religion. These factors become especially misleading when we compare religious claims with those of other social institutions. In our first Chapter, for instance, we intended to show that there is a sense in which religion is comparable to morality and politics. Like them, the claims of religion do admit of rational justification. What we did not mention in that Chapter, however, is the fact that in spite of this similarity there exists a fundamental difference between the adherents of religious beliefs and those of political, moral or scientific theories. The

difference consists in the believers' attitude towards their beliefs.

The adherents of moral, political and scientific theories regard their beliefs as mere tentative hypotheses dependent for their tenability on empirical confirmation. The values of these theories are determined by the test of experience. The good theory is recognised by its results. If a hypothesis works it is upheld; if it fails to yield satisfactory results, it must be discarded and another taken up in the place. In short, these theories are limited by conditions. This however is not the case with faith.

Religious faith is an <u>unconditional commitment</u>. Having faith in God means far more than simply believing certain facts about Him. At the very minimum it includes believing that God will keep his "word" or promises relating to the believer's welfare. Having faith in God means entrusting oneself to Him. Faith in God is an acknowledgement of our <u>need</u> for Him. In faith, the believer acknowledges that God alone has something that the believer desparately needs and without which he is a "lost" man. This "something" is variously referred to as "salvation" or "liberation". In faith, man, unable to save or liberate himself turns towards

God and from Him seeks deliverance, liberation,
salvation. In return, the believer wholly and
unconditionally surrenders himself to his "liberator",
"saviour", "redeemer". The true believer thus clings
to his belief in God no matter what happens to him or
to others. In his adversity, prosperity, happiness
or misery he abides by his faith. This total and
unconditional resignation of the believer to his
God is nowhere better portrayed than in the bible
where Job in the face of all the odds stubbornly
cries out, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust
in him". It is the <u>unconditional Commitment</u> of the
religious person that leads Professor Anthony Flew
to conclude that religious claims assert nothing sin-
ce they are consistent with all possible sets of
conditions.[1]

It may seem strange but the religious believer
is driven by his <u>unconditional commitment</u> to rule
out the posibility that <u>any</u> circumstance might arise
which would compel the individual to give up his
present belief in favour of another. There are of
course some believers who 'lose' faith or are
'converted' to other ideologies. These are not the
sort of persons we have in mind when we speak of
unconditional commitment.

The idea of unconditional commitment does raise

a problem of <u>apparent</u> conflict. Unconditional faith
seems to suggest that faith is, not itself based on
reason, for if it were it would then thrive or die
with reason. If faith were based on reason we would
expect that the believer would cling to his faith
only so long as it conformed to the tenets of reason.
In that case faith would be conditioned by reason.
But the believer will not admit <u>any</u> set of conditions
to gainsay his faith. It is the believer's persist-
ent refusal to accept evidence against his belief
that generates conflict between faith and reason.
This situation is sometimes taken to mean that reason
and faith are mutually incompatible.

In the theories examined in this thesis
"reason" is readily identifiable with that which is
clearly stated, easily recognised, and commonly
accepted. Whatever fails to meet this requirements
falls short of reason. Since religious claims are
neither clearly stated nor easily recognised (at
least according to the sceptics) religion is seen to
be way short of reason.

It seems however, that this kind of attack on
religion is not quite fair. The failure on the part
of the believer to have full and explicit understand-
ing of his rational basis of his belief does not
render that belief unintelligible. No believer can

possibly understand everything about his faith. One
may not always see very clearly what he believes
and his judgements may often be affected by one's
feelings and uncertain purposes. It would be mis-
leading to think of a believer as that person who
is beset with clear, stable and unambigous circum-
stances. On the contrary, the believer is for most
times faced with danger, doubts and frustrations.

The inability to understand everything about
ones faith, to express clearly and easily what one
believes, leads the believer to expressing himself
by reference to his own subjective experiences. He
can only talk of <u>his</u> own convictions. And these
experiences and interpretations differ from religion
to religion and from believer to believer. But what
does the fact that the believer is incapable of
complete verbal expression of his faith mean? For
Freud and Marx this inability is an indication of
the unintelligibility of faith. This may well be.
We wish to point out here though, that this is not
the only implication.

The more likely implication to our mind, is
that the believer's problem in expressing his own
faith clearly and easily is due to the more basic
inability to encompass all aspects of his faith.
This factor, coupled with the essentially non-

empirical and untestable nature of religious claims,
is responsible for the believer's incomplete
expression of faith.

This leads us to another important conside-
ration. In our attempt to understand the believer's
faith we must accept the believers account of his
experience. It is impossible for us to know the
validity of what the believer claims as his experie-
nce. But the fact that we ourselves do not share
the believer's experience does not mean that it is
therefore irrelevant. Our starting point must be
then, the acceptance of the other person's experience.
Once we have accepted this we should then proceed to
find out not whether we are convinced by the other
person's faith, but whether or not his experience
entitles him to claim what he does claim.

The problem for Freud, Marx, Horton and most
of the atheists is not that they fail to understand
the claims of the theists. It is rather that these
atheists refute the believers' claim on the grounds
that the latter's experiences are not convincing
enough for the atheists. But as we have hinted else-
where this sort of reasoning while it may be
excused in the case of individual non-believers,
does not provide us with an impartial criterion

against which to judge religion. Just because an antheist X is not convinced about the claims of a certain religion, it does not follow that that particular religion is false. No more so than if a certain man Y refused to believe in the force of gravity because he was not convinced. The point here is that there is no one criterion by which the truth or falsehood of religion can be established.

If a man came up to you with the information that your mother was dead you may or may not believe him. You may choose not to believe him on the grounds that you are not convinced that your mother could possibly be dead. Sooner or later, however, things happen to convince you that your mother is really dead. In that case you can not reasonaly deny that your mother is really dead. Henceforth, you are convinced of your mother's death. Now, what is it that makes you so convinced of your mother's death? Perhaps it is that someone whom you trust more, (your father, brother, or sister) confirms the earlier report. Perhaps you attend your mother's funeral and see for yourself that she is really dead. Whatever it is that happens leaves you with no doubt at all about the truth of the matter. You are able to verify or falsify the truth of your information because it is "empirically verifiable". But how can

anyone verify or falsify the existence of God? How
can any believer ever convince an atheist about the
validity of religious beliefs? It cannot be by
empirical verification for it is impossible to smell,
see, hear, taste or even feel God. How then can
we show God to really and trully exist? There is
simply no way of doing this. We can only go by the
believer's experience, his "feeling", his conviction.
The believer cannot convincingly demonstrate the
validity of his faith.

But the same can be said of the atheist. The
atheist, taking advantage of the believer's difficult
position, goes to the other extreme to assert that
there is no God and that all religious claims are
meaningless. But how does the atheist himself know
this? How can he demonstrate that faith has no
validity? We have seen Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx
and Robin Horton try to wrestle with this question.
The error committed by these and all atheists who
attempt to disprove religion is that they try to
carry out an impossible mission. This too is the
reason why all of them without exception have up to
date failed to "convince" the believer that his claims
are useless.

We by no means wish to belittle the efforts
of these great men. They were all men of outstand-

ing talents in their special fields but even great
men have their limits. This is what Freud, Marx
and Horton did not see when they set out upon their
ambitious task of disproving religion.

But it is important that it be understood that
the atheist, the believer, and the agnostic are all
right in their own way. The true atheist is the man
who in all sincerity and openness of mind finds
no meaning in God or religion. In as far as he is
convinced that his denial is justified by reason he
can be said to be intellectually honest. He is right
in maintaining his attitude towards religion. But
when once he begins to revel attacks against those
who believe in God then he fails to respect the
intellectual honesty of those others. Let the atheist
deny, the believer accept and the agnostic be. As
long as each is "convinced" with reasons he is right,
for our reasons will not convince anyone unless he
accepts them.

One word about African Traditional Religions.
It is a regretable fact that the study of the
"indigenous religions of the people of African remains
incomplete.   Available literature on African religi-
ons seem to indicate that in the traditional setting
all Africans believed in some deity or other. It is
commonly assumed that the Africans have always

believed in God and that unbelief is a relatively
new phenomenon in African religions. Scholars of
John Mbiti's calibre seem to think that "atheism" and
"agnosticism" are alien to traditional religions.
For these scholars the question of unbelieving
Africans does not arise since all men knew God and
believed in Him from their youth. The sole exception
to this trend of thought is the controversial
Okot p'Bitek who thinks that there were certain
tribes in Africa who did not believe in anything
that could reasonably be termed a god.

We are not of course in a position to give a
final say in this matter. Finality must await
further research into the traditional religions of
the people of this continent. Till then we would
do well to treat the available data with suspicion.
Okot p'Bitek says "African deities were used as
mercenaries in foreign battles, not one of which was
in the interest of African peoples".[2] If this is
true (as indeed seems to be), then it would not be
difficult to see what use the Christian scholars
who made a study of African religions would make of
pure theism in Africa. They would gladly use this
fact as a weapon against the atheists and agnostics
in Europe and other continents. But again nothing

can be said now with any certainty. Further research
into the religions of the indigenous Africans may
well reveal that there was in Africa, as in all
other parts of the world, men who did not believe
in supernatural beings and who regarded believers
in divinities with nothing but scorn. It is possible
that scholars have wittingly or otherwise misled
us regarding the "purity" of theism in African
Traditional Religions.

FOOTNOTES:

1.   See Professor Flew's   Contribution to the
                              Symposium on
                              "Theology and Falsi-
                              cation".

2.   Okot p'Bitek,   African Religions in
                             Western Scholarship.
                             p. 102.

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