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STUDYING RELIGION:

A methodological introduction to science of religion

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Contents

Preface

This general introduction to the methodology of science of religion is something of a programmatic statement, trying to lure students and others interested to the threshold of actually investigating religion and *doing* science of religion.

It forms part of a wider project, *Southern African Studies in Religion*, aimed at investigating religion in Southern Africa in a science of religion perspective, which has been launched under the auspices of the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa. To the Director, Prof. W.S. Vorster and his staff, especially Mrs S. Winckler, I wish to express my appreciation for their invaluable assistance in making this publication possible.

The methodological position taken, is inspired particularly by the phenomenological tradition – at the same time bearing in mind the present task (so I believe) of trying to integrate as far as possible the various religio-scientific approaches to religion into a comprehensive enterprise. For this reason the themes dealt with receive expository rather than argumentative or polemical treatment. It is not a 'technical' book, abounding in references and other asides in footnotes. The ideal has been to attain a clear and concise survey of an overall approach. This limited perspective imposes other self-limitations. The practical procedures and techniques to be used in investigations of religion fall outside its purview. In other respects, too, it touches on matters that cannot be dealt with adequately within its framework, especially the problem of a theory of religion and the problem of speaking about the truth quality of religions.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Referring to the study of new religions, Arnold van Gennep once advocated the following approach: 'Ladies and gentlemen, the general ideas that I would like you to take home with you from this lecture, possibly a bit too specialist here and there, are few and simple. In the first place, you should no longer think that the *science* of religion is only *history* of religion, and that it is by definition only concerned with dead facts and things of the past. There are, at this very moment, religions springing up and religious sytems being born, not only in the United States, in Russia, in Asia, and in Africa, but sometimes before your own eyes ..... We have to stand at their cradles and to notice even their incomplete development; to be able to do that, we have to observe all the details of their environments with a tireless and sympatheticcuriosity, and to sharpen our direct vision' (Waardenburg 1973:300).

Without restricting the attention of science of religion to new religions, the aim of this book is to unfold a general strategy which takes Van Gennep's advice to heart. It wishes to answer, in a basic way, the questions of the why and the how of his invitation to 'sharpen our direct vision'. It is inspired by the belief that our world offers the student of religion unequalled opportunities to exercise his 'tireless and sympathetic curiosity'.

Today, even more than in 1910 when Van Gennep delivered his talk, we stand at the cradles of new developments. The 'facts' are obvious. Southern Africa in some respects displays characteristics typical of Western countries. One of these is the attraction of Asian religions to many people. The diagnosis of Luckmann (1963) that the West may be experiencing the birth of a new, non-Christian religiosity may be applicable to some extent, as well as the view of Burke (1974:114) that the effective religion of at least the educated West now wears more of a resemblance to early Buddhism, and in some respects to Confucianism, than it does to Christianity: a pre-occupation with the problem of suffering, and the attainment of happiness, with the achievement of harmony in social relationships, and an agnosticism about higher metaphysics.

In terms of a wide-open concept of religion, we may recognize new developments in all sorts of movements. Whether these movements should be called secular alternatives to religion, surrogates, analogues, quasi-religions or para-religions, does not need to be solved now. Thus Martin (1978) has reasons for calling the attitudes of the student movement with its longing for totality and immediacy of experience a form of religiosity. The drug culture includes those who use drugs in order to attain an experience which is called religious by the initiated. LSD was said (by Timothy Francis Leary) to establish contact with the same religious reality within ourselves as the one spoken of by religious mystics in the East and the West - LSD is a sacrament, and the use of it a ritual. Esoteric doctrines, magical arts, occult practices and secret societies, witchcraft and Satanism, magic and astrology, even though branded as heresies, superstitions and delusions by leaders of recognized religious groups, surface from their underground level in Western civilization and flourish 'on the margin of the visible' society (Tiryakian 1974).Political ideologies with religious functions (such as nationalism, Nazism and Maoism), science and psychoanalysis have all been studied as religious ware on the market of modern legitimation systems.

The great religious traditions of mankind are facing up to the challenges of modernization. The so-called primitive religions in their pure, pre-modern forms seem to be doomed. The universal religions (especially Christianity, Islam and Buddhism) and the many smaller religions (such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Jainism) have to come to terms with the process of modernization. Each of them has to avoid the extremes of petrification in a dead world of the past on the one hand, and on the other of fading away in the new world. Some are more successful than others in tapping the resources of their respective traditions in order to revitalize themselves and to assert their religious significance to their own adherents and to modern man on a global scale. The changes in Hinduism; the flowering of Zen Buddhism and Yoga in the West; the awakening of social and political awareness amongst Buddhists in the East; religious repression in Communist China and religious vitality in the U.S.S.R.; the expansion of Islam amongst the peoples of Africa; the new self-confidence of Roman Catholic Christianity; the development of African Christian theology; the resurgence of the charismatic movement in evangelical Christianity - these are examples of developments within the great religions.

Of course these statements are too general. Segments of these giant traditions show a multitude of textures, depending on the particular situations in which they occur. The challenge is to be aware of the details of each case and of the parallel developments in the many cases. Each religious tradition may be seen as a dynamic whole in itself, and yet the patterns of interaction between them, and between each and its environment, should not be overlooked. Each is contaminated and compromised by contact with other forces. Even in relations of militant exclusion parallels may be discovered (for instance between Maoism and the moralistic social concern of ancient Confucianism). Subtle forms of borrowing and blending (for instance between traditional African religions and Christianity) defy easy generalizations, and shifting alliances (for instance between some forms of Christian theology and some forms of Marxism, or between nationalism and Islam) cannot easily be pinned down with rough terms such as 'syncretism'. It takes sensitivity and trained skill to detect the lines of contact and to follow religious developments.

The invitation extended by Van Gennep and the 'facts' referred to above point to the need for *method* and reflection about method *(methodology).* How can we come to grips with living religion in all its rich diversity? What does studying religion really entail? Of course method is merely a crutch, helping one along on the way to knowledge. It is not the destination. Yet, to be self-consciously and self-critically aware of one's active search for knowledge is preferable to a mere groping around, which results in a haphazard collection of impressions. Even a seemingly obvious statement, for example that 'religions are changing in modern society', is in fact problematic, and raises acute questions. To what extent, and how, can such a statement be checked out empirically? How can we do justice to the peculiarities of each changing religious complex as well as to general features that are common to all changing religious complexes? Speaking of religion and its changes also implies that we bring a cross-section of religion (religion *today)* in relation to religion as a long historical development - how should we achieve such a synthesis of perspectives? To what extent is it possible to study religion objectively? Speaking of religion begs questions concerning definition: what 'is' 'religion'? Which phenomena does the concept include? Should we try to abstract an essential core of religion? What is a definition? The statement 'religions are changing' presupposes answers to these questions. Also, what do we wish to achieve by studying religion? Do we wish to judge the merits of the different religions? Do we perhaps wish to contribute to a better understanding between religions, or do programmes such as these fall outside the scope of the discipline? Do we wish to study religions as understood subjectively by their adherents, or as objective thing-like entities? Should we strive only after an adequate description of religious phenomena, or should we also aim at the forming of explanatory theories concerning religion? What would each of these tasks imply, and how would they relate to each other? These are some of the questions that have to be answered if we wish to do more than merely utter platitudes that might, or might not, be true, and if we wish to take part in actual research in this field. In this book we shall touch on some of these matters.

Within the relatively new discipline which pays specialized attention to the character of science *(metascience,* sometimes also called *philosophy of science)* we may distinguish the following aspects (cf Sauter 1973): (a) *theory of theory construction* which centres in the question: which criteria must scientific theories comply with in

order to be accepted as good?; (b) *methodology,* which centres in the question: how do scientists proceed in finding truth, and how should they proceed?; (c) *ethics of science,* which centres in the question: what role do the values of scientists play in their scientific work, and what role should they play?; and (d) *pragmatology,* which centres in the question: what role does science play in society at large, and what role should it play?

The terms 'philosophy of science' and 'metascience' refer to the most basic questions that can be raised in connection with the scientific pursuit of truth, to the character of science 'in principle'. Our interest in this introduction lies in the middle range, between the fundamental thinking about science on the one hand, and the specialized procedures and techniques applied in science of religion on the other - we certainly are in need of practical tools, adapted to the needs and purposes of this discipline, but that is not our concern here. When I speak of 'methodology', I shall include the aspects referred to as the ethics of science and pragmatology, and I shall also touch on some facets of theory construction.

CHAPTER 2

Science of Religion

2.1 GROWTH AND REORIENTATION

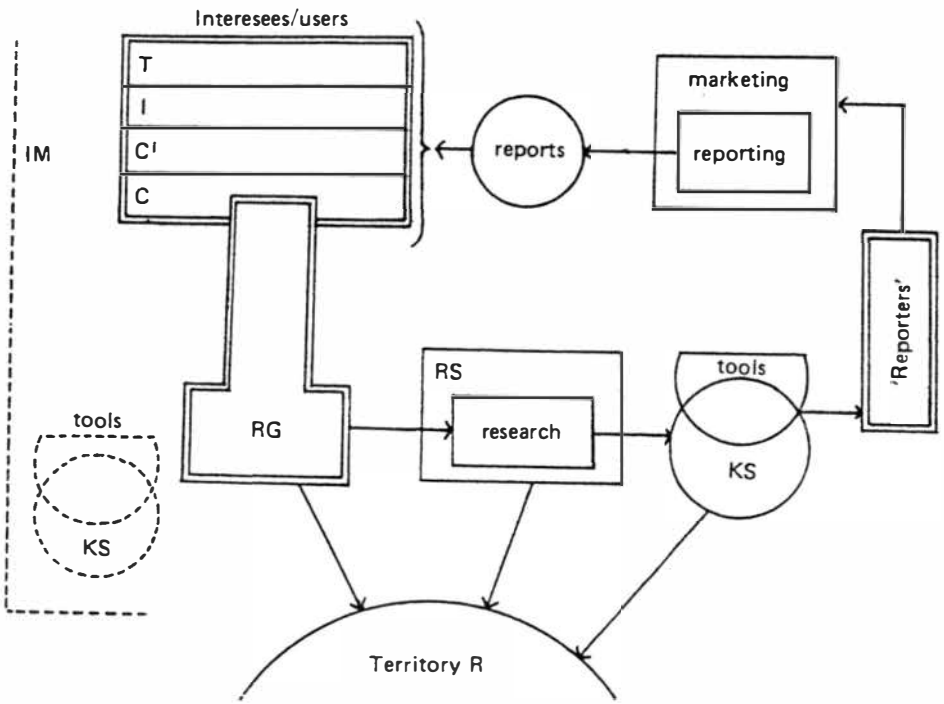
Although science of religion can look back on a long and impressive tradition, it is at present passing through extremely swift rapids in the course of its development. Suddenly, since the sixties, it has become fashionable again to speak about religion and to study religion. Prior to this new interest, religion was for a long time discredited in many circles. It was also thought to be passing away silently. At that time the study of religion appeared to be a somewhat antiquarian pursuit. Today it is a flourishing field, with departments emerging and growing at many universities. The International Association for the History of Religions held its XIVth International Congress in Winnipeg, Canada, during August 1980. The Association for the History of Religion (Southern Africa) is affiliated to this body. A number of international periodicals deal with the study of religion, and in South Africa the journal *Religion in Southern Africa* is edited by the Association for the History of Religion.

The sudden revival of interest in religion seems to have caught the practitioners of the field unawares. At present many of them are seriously searching for a new, commonly accepted, integrated and methodologically up-to-date frame of reference for doing science of religion, which has not yet acquired a firm research consensus. In the influential terminology of Kuhn (1975) it is still in search of an integrated *paradigm* (or disciplinary matrix), that is, a constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community of scientists; also,

there is a lack of paradigms in the sense of generally accepted, exemplary models of dealing with the puzzles of the science. The achievements of Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade and the other giants of the field are rightly held in high esteem. But the conviction is none the less expressed in many quarters that we need a unified methodological vision that can give direction and coherence to the vast amount of work done. Smart (1973:4), referring to the flourishing branches of the field, states: 'There is, in fact, no dearth of scientific-seeming inquiries into religion. Nevertheless, an overall strategy of a science of religion is desirable, and has not yet been fully worked out.' Some go even further and, referring to the pervading sense of uncertainty, even crisis, ask: 'Is a science of religion possible?' (Penner and Yonan 1972; Wiebe 1978). Some argue pessimistically that the study of religion is 'faced ..... with an invasive relativism and a phenomenal insecurity' and that there 'might be good logical reasons why it is impossible to proceed, but there are also good logical reasons why we must proceed' (Heelas 1978:1, 12). Others argue more optimistically that the apparent failure of nerve is merely the prelude to fresh enterprises and 'that something new and constructive is happening' (Sharpe 1971:1).

2.2 MODEL OF A SCIENTIFIC ENTERPRISE

At this stage the model of a scientific enterprise worked out by Gerard Radnitzky will suit our purpose. In its simplest form this model is presented as follows (Radnitzky 1973:1):



In this figure R refers to the *territory* or sector of reality covered by a science – in our case, religion. RG refers to the *research group* (with the individual researcher as limiting instance). IM refers to the *intellectual milieu* in which the research group operates. The intellectual milieu supplies intellectual resources (tools), for example scientific ideals, and knowledge systems concerning aspects of reality. The practising students of religion voluntarily or involuntarily draw on these background resources. RS refers to the *research strategy* adopted by the research group, which steers every piece of actual *research.* The research results in KS, that is, a *knowledge system* – in our case, concerning religion. The *results* are *reported* to the *interessees/users,* whom Radnitzky subdivides as follows: C refers to *colleagues* working within the same discipline, some of whom may coincide with RG. C^1 refers to *other scientists,* working in other disciplines, making professional use of the results. I refers to *intellectuals* generally, who may use the results for improving that part of the world-picture that corresponds with R – thus, for example, the work done by scientists of religion is probably destined to become, to some extent, part of the general educated opinion concerning religion, and to flow into the wider intellectual milieu. T refers to those who are concerned with the *technologies* that can be based on the knowledge systems produced (this, so far, does not apply to the study of religion!). The arrows indicate the directions of influence; for example, the study of religion inevitably will influence its 'object' (religion). If we use the model sketched above, the search for the character of science of religion gains perspective.

The *territory (field of interest,* sometimes called the *object)* of science of religion has not yet been outlined to everyone's satisfaction. This problem is closely linked to the problem of the definition of religion, to which we shall return later.

Practising scientists of religion generally accept that the terrain of their work should be distinguished from that of theology. What 'theology' is, is of course a moot point amongst theologians themselves, and certainly scientists of religion cannot fix the object of theology. We may, however, distinguish between a narrower and a wider conception of theology.

Taken in a *wider* sense, theology could partly coincide with science of religion. In this book, however, I shall use the word in a *narrower* sense, to refer to the *committed exposition of one particular faith.* This may be the faith of Muslims, Christians, Hindus or any other religion. Science of religion, interested in all religious phenomena, thus has a far wider field of interest. To indicate another aspect of the difference between science of religion and theology, we may use another spatial analogy, that of high and low. Theology treats of the divine, ultimate, sacred, or transcendent reality; the world of human affairs is dealt with under the aspect of eternity. Science of religion deliberately lowers its scope. It limits its interest to religion as a human experience, to the human side of human religiosity. The problem of wide and narrow nevertheless returns, although in a different form. The question now is: how far does religion extend? Do the boundaries of religion coincide with the boundaries of human life as such, and to what extent is it present in, with and under all the manifestations of the human spirit?

Does science of religion have its 'own' *research strategy?* If by this is meant a unique scientific method, a positive answer would go too far. The practitioners of the field

would, generally speaking, not contend that they use some special method. They would claim that their studying of religion stands in the same broad scientific tradition as other disciplines. It is, however, true that it might develop a certain approach and style of its own, as distinct from neighbouring enterprises. Practitioners of this discipline usually distinguish its method from that of theology, in that they take theology to be a normative discipline, deliberately advocating true religion, whereas science of religion describes, understands and explains religious phenomena. But there are those who wish to extend the interest of science of religion to include the religious evaluating of religious positions.

An interesting aspect of the process of reorientation going on in the field is that the different sub-schools are drawing on different *resources from the wider intellectual field.* For example, those who countenance the phenomenological approach, work in the spirit of the classical humanistic (German: 'Geisteswissenschaftliche'; Afrikaans: 'geesteswetenskaplike') approach, while others try to benefit from another philosophical tradition, the logical empirical one. There are also those who find their inspiration in critical rationalism, while an interest in critical theory is not entirely lacking. These matters will receive more attention in chapter 3. The important point is that the general effort to establish the character of this scientific enterprise cannot be isolated from the wider intellectual processes going on in the world.

At present the most vulnerable side of science of religion is probably its *knowledge system.* Nobody can doubt that excellent descriptions are given by researchers who associate themselves with the field, but when it comes to the forming of explanatory theories, it is generally agreed that much work lies ahead. This aspect falls outside the scope of this introduction, and will only receive indirect attention.

The aspects of *reporting, marketing* and *interessees/users* refer partly to the effects of studies of religion, ultimately on society at large (pragmatology). The assumption is that science is influenced by, and in turn influences, the society of which it is a part, and that it should be aware of its role and place. This surely demands the attention of students of religion.

Where does the undergraduate student, formally enrolled at a university, fit into this schema? Naturally he or she belongs to the category of interessees/users. To a large extent undergraduate study consists of the reception of the more or less accepted 'results' of a science, which are reported to the student by the lecturer. But, on the other hand, I believe that the beginner student should be drawn into the ranks of the *research group* itself, the sooner the better. As a matter of fact, one reason for writing this introduction to methodology is the belief that from the very beginning the teaching-learning process in science of religion should be directed at the actual discovery of religious reality out there in life. Studying religion implies more than the reading of authoritative books; it also implies being trained as a practising researcher taking part actively in the search of the wider community of students of religion.

2.3 CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF SCIENCE OF RELIGION

It is time to clarify what the term 'science of religion' will mean in the pages that follow. This might be a good point to start to find a way in the forest we have so

bravely entered. In circumscribing 'science of religion' I should like to align myself as far as possible with the ways in which this term is actually used, but in view of the inconsistency in actual usage, a somewhat abrupt specification of the use of the term in the chapters that follow, is inevitable. The uncertainty concerning the name of this enterprise reflects the uncertainty concerning its inner structure and coherence. It has been called science(s) of religion(s), comparative (study of) religion(s), history of religions, religion, religious studies and religiology (cf Pummer 1972:102ff), all more or less the equivalents of the German name Religionswissenschaft (Afrikaans: godsdienswetenskap). Wiebe (1978) goes so far as to deny that there is such a science or discipline; at the most he would speak of a 'field of studies'.

Science of religion is traditionally taken to include the two subdivisions *history of religions* and *phenomenology of religion.* 'History' does not refer to mere chronology, but to the rich concrete existences of religions in their actual contexts. Phenomenology of religion focuses on the structural similarities spanning the particularities. For example: history of religions would study Islam in its historical development, or (on a smaller scale) the religious behaviour of one particular group; phenomenology of religion would study prayer as a typical religious expression occurring in many religions in comparable fashion, or the structure of ritual as a religious universal. History of religions would study the different religions (big or small, universal, national, local and even individual), each in its historical context, and together in their historical interactions; phenomenology of religion would examine cross-religious phenomena. In fact brilliant work has been done in each of these schools; both have been in existence for a long time; and many very capable people insist that they are and should remain two separate sub-subjects. And yet such a strong subdivision is not really satisfactory. It would be good to insist that science of religion is one coherent body, culminating in a systematic theory of religion. The distinctions sometimes made and used as bases for a distinction of two separate bodies of knowledge (eg historical vs structural, diachronic vs synchronic, particular vs general), refer to different aspects of *one and the same enterprise,* the production and improvement of knowledge concerning religion. These sets of distinctions interpenetrate one another to such an extent that they cannot be isolated and institutionalized in two separate sub-disciplines. If we wish to study contemporary religious developments, we need to see the full richness and variety of observable phenomena in the past and in the present *and* we need a systematic frame of reference; and we need both at the same time. We need a store of concrete observations and we need an abstract frame of reference (theory). In each instance of actual research, the one necessarily implies the other.

Science of religion is the centre of its own universe, surrounded by a company of other disciplines which also attend to religion. This of course does not imply that science of religion is the most recent queen of sciences. A series of diagrams could be drawn, in each of which another subject could be placed in the centre. Some overlap between science of religion and these other subjects is inevitable and in any event a good thing. Thus science of religion and sociology have an area of overlap, where sociology concentrates on religion as a social phenomenon (thus becoming the sub-discipline sociology of religion) and where science of religion looks at the social dimension of religion. The same applies when philosophers look particularly at religion (thus becoming philosophy of religion) and when scientists of religion

think about the reflexive implications of their work or construct fundamental theories of religion. In a comparable way, science of religion shares borders with a number of other disciplines, such as anthropology, history, theology, Biblical studies, Islamic studies, geography and languages (eg classical European languages, Semitic languages and African languages). In line with one trend of thinking, I propose that the name 'science of religion' be reserved for the tightly-knot concentration on *religion as human phenomenon* (as distinct from theology), and on *religion as religion* (as distinct from for instance sociology, which examines it as a social phenomenon, and psychology, which examines it as a psychological phenomenon). There is an area of overlap between, say, sociology of religion and science of religion, but there is a difference in perspective: sociology of religion studies society, and sees religion under the aspect of society; science of religion studies religion, and deals with the social dimension of human life under the aspect of religion, not society. The primary category and basic referent of sociology is society; the primary category and basic referent of science of religion is religion itself. This does not imply that religion exists apart from society and the person, but religion is such an important dimension of men's lives that it deserves pertinent attention.

Between science of religion and its neighbours are no tightly-closed gates. Cross-fertilization between the various disciplines is vital. The era of increasing specialization in which we live leads easily to a babylonian confusion of scientific tongues. It is the task of science of religion to learn from the other disciplines, and to integrate as far as possible their contributions to the understanding of religion into its own theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 3

Metascientific Positions in the Twentieth Century

Science plays an important yet ambiguous role in modern society. Its achievements are beyond doubt. But there are grounds for thinking that it has become a mere instrument of technology which does not contribute anything to the burning questions of man concerning the meaning of life. In this vein Husserl (1962) spoke of the crisis of the European sciences, and saw in it an expression of the radical crisis in European civilization as such. As science restricts itself to mere facts, a deluge of scepticism threatens. The question 'what is the true character of science?' is essentially linked with the questions 'what is the true nature of man?' and 'what is the true nature of the world?' As the traditional religious answers to these last questions are eroded, science is often looked upon by many as redeemer, but can science achieve that much? What contribution can science make? Questions such as these have become crucial. Therefore, it would seem important to have a general knowledge of the wider metascientific discussions concerning the character of science. Scientific methods ultimately rest on philosophical grounds. In this chapter a minimum background will be given, and some of the most important positions will be drawn by way of typified simplifications.

3.1 LOGICAL EMPIRICISM

The phenomenal success of modern natural science (especially physics) is the fertile soil in which logical empiricism was able to develop. Logical empiricism developed the practice of physical science into an ideal for all science. Applied to the human

sciences, this school is often referred to as 'positivism'. This ideal of science rests on two pillars, the one being *logic*, the other the principle of *empiricism*. The principle of logic implies that scientific statements ought to be free of all contradiction, precise and clear. The principle of empiricism implies that, in order to qualify as scientific, concepts and the statements linking the concepts ought to pass the test of empirical observation. Sense-perception, in combination with logic, is the ultimate criterion for all meaningful knowledge. (This theme has a number of variants. One of the most important influences in this trend of thinking was the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.)

The criterion of sensory verification tends to imply a virulent *reductionism*. By this is meant that the acceptance of physics as the ideal for all science, leads to a *methodological monism* (there is only one method, the one exemplified by physics). Other sides of this reductionism are the *ontological monism* (there is only one world, the world of sensory experience), and *epistemological monism* (there is only one sort of valid knowledge, the knowledge which can be referred back to sensory perception). People who accept this idea of science as being applicable to the study of man, also get into the bargain an *anthropological reductionism:* man, in order to become the 'object' of science, has to be reduced to a mere part of nature. His qualities have to be measured and formalized in quantitative (numerical, mathematical) terms. What cannot be thus measured and formalized, is left out of account. For the purposes of science, man is reduced to his external behaviour, which is seen as determined by external stimuli. The realm of human freedom and responsibility, and the realization of values (including religion), is either found to be unfit for scientific study, or it is translated into the deterministic terms of cause and effect. The goal of this type of study of man is the formulation of generalizations on a par with the laws of nature, with a view to the prediction of his behaviour or outcomes of his behaviour, and eventually to the control of human behaviour.

In this scheme the scientist is taken to work in a neutral fashion. The ideal is that he should register, independent of any prejudging values, the 'objective' 'facts'. In short, 'positivism' is a shorthand term for the type of methodology which views science as a carbon copy of reality, ignoring the contribution of the knowing scientist as a human being. Positivistic science would typically demonstrate a less than lukewarm attitude regarding religion and the science of religion. In effect it could express an anti-religious bias. It will also be clear that scientists of religion will not enthusiastically accept this package deal with all the possible implications mentioned. If we understand by methodology the far-reaching reflection on how the researcher should go about his business (including more than the insistence on logical rigour and the refinement of procedures and techniques) positivism has an inadequate methodology.

On the other hand logical empiricism has contributed much to methodology. The insistence that concepts should be unambiguous and that argumentation should be logically correct ought to be taken to heart. In this vein Hubbeling (1973) argues that science of religion should submit itself to the strictness of classical logic. Logical empiricism also contributed a great deal to the refinement of techniques of observation in the sciences which study man. Science of religion ought to pay more attention than it actually does to the *formalization* of its procedures and its findings. Here one can think of the importance of rigorous, consistent and generally acceptable

classification schemes. More use could be made of techniques such as sampling, standardized interviewing and the use of questionnaires, the use of scales of measurement which allow us to quantify findings and to relate qualities by measuring them on a scale, the graphic representation of results in tables and diagrams, and the statistical manipulation of findings. As such, *counting* (and the operations derived from it) does not necessarily imply reductionism in any of the forms mentioned above. On the other hand, the mere use of such techniques will not guarantee that the findings are adequate. Such techniques may, or may not, be useful, depending on the specific aim of a research project. There is also no reason to object against generalizations concerning things religious. For certain levels of interest and for certain aspects of religion this quanitifying-generalizing perspective yields valuable results. Traditional science of religion admittedly is still onesidedly philological-hermeneutical (cf par 5) in its outlook.

3.2 CRITICAL RATIONALISM

Critical rationalism is primarily associated with the name of the Austrian born British philosopher, Karl Popper (1972; 1973; 1974), and also with philosophers such as Hans Albert, J Agassi and W Bartley. It has developed from logical empiricism, and there are some similarities between the two, such as the insistence that there is only one scientific method, whether we study nature or man. But critical rationalism has strong accents of its own.

It emphasizes the role of *theory*. In science we do not start with an empty mind; we always start with preconceived ideas. Generally speaking, before we can even start looking for something, we need at least some idea of what we are looking for. The manner in which we describe the things out there, and even the manner in which we perceive them, is to a large extent influenced by the perspective from which we look at them. Our initial expectation is then either corroborated or annulled when we meet with reality. Tradition plays an important part in the formation of our preconceived anticipations. The formation of knowledge in general, as well as scientific knowledge, thus proceeds by way of trial and error (or, as Popper also formulates it, by way of conjectures and refutations). First comes the initial expectation (hypothesis). This is then checked against the reality. It is exposed to being proved wrong (falsified). In fact, falsification is the whole point of the scientific exercise. Science – and this is the essential difference between science and non-science – consists of statements that are capable of being proved wrong.

Another way of characterizing critical rationalism is to say that it is anti-authoritarian and anti-dogmatic. A dogmatic attitude is one which is determined to be proved right and to be accepted; the critical (scientific) attitude is determined to be tested as severely as possible. It applauds whenever it becomes a stepping stone to further knowledge, but this means that its conclusions are destined to be left behind. In the first instance therefore, science is not a body of knowledge; it is rather the search for knowledge, the process of growth of knowledge. Of course it is also a body of knowledge, but this body is conceived differently: it is not a body of absolute certainties, but only a provisional landmark on the neverending journey to truth. It only approximates truth, and is always open to improvement, which can only be achieved by severe testing. Critical rationalism compares the human mind to a searchlight which probes the unknown, rather than to a bucket which is only a receptacle.

For critical rationalism the dividing line between science and non-science is the principle of falsification. This does not mean that statements which are not open to falsification are false, but rather that they are not scientific statements. Critical rationalism thus leaves open the possibility that religious faith may be meaningful and true, but it insists that this realm (of faith and the acceptance of ultimate values) should not be confused with the realm of critical thinking. There is a sharp distinction between the realm of facts and the realm of values, the realm of rationality and the realm of decisions. Thus, science cannot set the goals for life, nor the values we should adhere to. It cannot prescribe our life decisions for us. Nevertheless values (and here we may also read religion) can become the object of scientific scrutiny.

At this point it is worth bearing in mind that there is some difference in accent between Popper and some of his followers such as Albert and Bartley, who go further in their efforts to push back the realm of mere decision as far as possible. For example, we may study scientifically the possible practical outcomes of our value decisions in life, and in this way science would influence the actual decisions we make. Furthermore we may, nay should, look critically at the final values themselves. Values are not immune to rational criticism; they too have the status of hypotheses, and must be critically examined.

It is clear that critical rationalism would stimulate discussion concerning the merit of various religious positions. This line has indeed been taken up by some, for example Barnhart (1977) and Pannenberg (1976), but since these are clearly philosophical and theological questions, we shall not go into the matter any further here.

Like positivism, critical rationalism emphasizes that the scientific enterprise should proceed in an objective way. But, unlike positivism, by objectivity it does not mean the exclusion of the scientist; rather, it means the exposure of propositions to public critical testing by means of a forum, consisting of other scientists. This is an adequate check against the bias of the individual researcher. Of course the personal values of the researcher should be kept at bay, but since they are points of departure they cannot be eliminated absolutely. Science is always value-impregnated. But values should never be used as arguments in scientific debate. The scientific forum should see to that.

Critical rationalism has an important moral dimension. Its basic principle is criticism – in science, and also in public affairs. Popper therefore pleaded for what he called the open society. This type of society corresponds to open, critical thinking. It is a society in which all standpoints are given the chance to be exposed to refutation. It is the opposite of the closed society, which corresponds to closed, dogmatic, absolutist, authoritarian thinking. The latter type of thinking, in its political form, devises absolute blueprints, which are pushed through whatever the cost. Critical rationalism is presented as the enemy of totalitarianism and oppression. Although values and decisions are not founded in science, science can contribute indirectly to a better quality of life. Just as science is the steady growth of knowledge, so in public life the good society is not enforced by total solutions, but is gradually brought about by the process of piecemeal engineering.

3.3 CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory stems from a different intellectual tradition than that of logical empiricism and critical rationalism. Whereas the latter two are associated especially with the empiricist tradition of British philosophy, the former is associated primarily with the German tradition. Specifically, critical theory is an extension of the Marxian tradition, which in one way or another appeals to Karl Marx as key philosophical witness. In the thirties critical theory developed as a specific school at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno as leading figures. After the Second World War it was further developed by the next generation, amongst whom Jürgen Habermas (cf 1973; 1978) deserves special attention. At present it is a very influential school. In the sixties it clashed with critical rationalism, led by Karl Popper. This confrontation is known as 'the positivist dispute in German sociology' (Adorno 1975), but it played an extremely important role in stimulating metascientifical discussions on a broad front. 'Critical theory' will be used here for a strongly typified simplification of the thinking of Habermas.

Critical theory is a comprehensive philosophy with wide-ranging ramifications. Its cornerstone is the ideal of free human beings truly communicating with others without any domination. This presupposes the basic article of faith that man is free, and that he should be able to give expression to his potentialities. A second form of action – distinct from communication – is work, by which man adapts to his environment and controls it by technical means.

Measuring reality against the ideal, critical theory's verdict is pessimistic. Modern society is the technocratic mass society in which work (technical manipulation) is inexorably expanding at the expense of free communication between human beings. This is the case in the capitalist West as well as in the communist bureaucracies of the East. Traditional systems of legitimation are eroded and eventually supplanted by the technocratic ideology which justifies the mass society and thus succeeds in keeping the individual captive within its confines. Man becomes a manipulated part of a closed social system from which there is no escape to freedom. Whereas critical rationalism is guardedly optimistic as regards the gradual improvement of existing Western society, critical theory is extremely pessimistic. Cultural values shrivel; manipulative power lurks behind a front of technical expertise and efficiency; everything is treated within the framework of an instrumentalistic and rationalistic means-ends-schema. Critical rationalism rejects this criticism as being too total and inevitably leading to totalitarian solutions.

Another key element in critical theory is the idea that action is steered by practical *interests* (interests: not quite instinctual needs, but basic orientations which form the basis of all the activities of the human mind). We may distinguish two kinds of interest, each of which corresponds to one of the two types of action mentioned above. Firstly, there is the technical interest, i.e. the interest the human race has in subduing its environment in order to survive; this interest stimulates technical action (work), and the sort of knowledge which has to do with the manipulation of things. Secondly, there is the interest the human race has in communication and understanding between its members; this interest stimulates communicative action and the

sort of knowledge which has to do with understanding between people. Both these interests are embraced by a third, the emancipatory interest, i.e. the striving of mankind to attain its true freedom.

In opposition to positivism, knowledge is here not reduced to scientific knowledge, taken as an extension of physical science. Also, critical theory does not accept the split between the worlds of fact and value, because then, it is thought, the realm of fact will fall prey to technocratic manipulation and the realm of value will fall prey to blind decisionism. Neither does it endorse the spurious positivistic split between science and life, justified by the norm of value-freeness. Science, like all knowledge, is steered by interests that are deeply rooted in human life itself; all theoretical activity is ultimately linked to man's practical activities in relating to his environment and to his fellow human beings. Therefore, science is responsible for furthering the life of mankind and leading mankind on the way to freedom. In fact, science does play a role in society for better or for worse – whether it knows it or not, whether it wants to or not. If science refuses to become relevant in an emancipatory sense, it becomes the ideological justification of the technocratic society. Positivistic science has in fact become this. Science has the responsibility of unmasking the exploitation of man, and in the process it has to analyse and criticize mercilessly its own role in society. This unmasking activity is called 'the criticism of ideology'.

For critical theory, science can of course not be value-free. The demand to be value-free in effect keeps the world of things (in which man himself becomes a thing) intact from the challenge of the values which might expose the captivity of man. It is important that the scientist should explicitly declare the values that lead his research. Science should commit itself to the freeing of man from the fetters of the past and of nature. If it does not, it plays its part in keeping things as they are.

It is clear that we are here mvoing in a world which is far removed from positivism. Also, this school breathes a different atmosphere than that of critical rationalism. It might nonetheless be possible to bring critical theory and critical rationalism together in some way. Although critical theory is of great import in the social sciences today, it has so far had remarkably little impact in science of religion. One of the few scientists of religion to take up the gauntlet is K Rudolph (1978).

3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY

The great master of phenomenology is the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Phenomenology is not a method of empirical scientific investigation, but a philosophy of human consciousness, more fundamental than the empirical sciences can be. Yet it has proved to have important implications for the way in which science is done. Its fruitfulness for the human sciences has been realized anew since the sixties. It converged with and strengthened various anti-positivistic tendencies in the human sciences, and in the opinion of many provided these sciences with a strong foundation. When I here refer to 'phenomenology' I do not think of the philosophy proper in its radical and critical sense. A profile of Husserl's philosophy – especially the philosophical position he occupied towards the end of his life (cf Husserl 1962) – will be applied to the methodology of science. In this way a number of key concepts have been taken from their original philosophical context and carried over into the

world of empirical research. I shall present a foreshortened portrayal of these concepts, in the perspective of science of religion.

3.4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.4.1.1 'To the things themselves'

The best entrance into phenomenology would be to contrast it with positivism. Phenomenology does not doubt the achievements of modern natural science. However, this success has been bought at a high price: science has lost its vital contact with the world as it is experienced in everyday life. The theories of natural science can be compared to an artificial garment, consisting of abstract symbols, which has been drawn over nature. But nature itself, as a pre-scientific field of experience, has been lost sight of, and the garment is mistakenly believed to be reality itself. Science, by losing contact with the primary world of experience which is in fact its true matrix, also has nothing to offer man in regard to his actual life and the vexing questions concerning the meaning of life. Life and its fullness has been reduced to mere 'facts'. The real world is stretched and shrunk to fit on to the bed of mathematical formulas. As far as man is concerned, the problem is compounded when the sciences of man merely copy the ways of natural science, as positivism does.

The urge of phenomenology is to re-establish contact with the raw material of life itself. It is the effort to rediscover and re-experience life itself directly underneath the layer of secondary scientific constructions. It wants to learn again how to see clearly and how to describe accurately what we see, before we start explaining scientifically. It is the attitude of disciplined wonder. It wants to return *'to the things themselves',* as the phenomenological battle-cry runs. This does not imply that phenomenology is against science. On the contrary, it wants to be a proto-science, that is, a discipline of the mind coming before science, giving a framework for the sciences themselves. It wants to overcome the irrelevance of positivistic science by showing up the richness of the world which lies smothered underneath abstractions. The ideal is that science itself should profit from rediscovering the soil in which it grows.

3.4.1.2 Intentionality

This of course applies especially to the sciences that study man – since one of the most offensive effects of positivistic science is that man is reduced to mere externality; what cannot be caught in the mathematized sieve of natural science and pseudo-natural human science, is ignored or even denied. Man is reduced to the status of the other objects in nature, determined by causes, not motivated by reasons. This procedure misses the true humanity of man, that is, his subjectivity. It leaves out of account the subtle ways in which the living human being experiences his own life, his own body, his physical environment, his social relations and so on. To bring the point home with reference to the study of religion: one may count many things in connection with man's religion (for example, how often people pray), but that does not necessarily mean that one has penetrated to the core of people's own experience of prayer in their real existence (for example, how they live through their contact with the divine; or the modes and nuances of their certainty that they indeed are in contact with the divine). In the phenomenological perspective, what we want to see clearly and describe adequately is *how people themselves experience their own world.*

Phenomenology refers to this aspect as *intentionality*. As the word suggests, the basic idea is that every mental activity of man is directed to (intended towards) the world out there; also, that the world out there is the world-as-it-is-experienced-by-man. The bond between man and the world cannot be disjoined. I am I-in-the-world, and the world is the world-for-me. I do not create the world, and yet it is my world, or rather, our world, because I do not live it alone. In this sense the world is in the eye of the beholder. Phenomenology focuses on things as they appear in human consciousness. The word 'phenomenon' (literally 'that which appears') refers to that something as it appears in human experience. The slogan 'to the things themselves' therefore means 'to the things as experienced things in human consciousness', to things as constituted by the human mind. For example, my seeing of the pencil in my hand is in fact a very complex issue, involving many mental acts. The perspective from which I look, my past experience and other aspects go into seeing the pencil. Husserl and his philosophical followers paid detailed attention to such matters. If we carry this approach over to the study of religion, we could say that the phenomenologist of religion would focus, not on God in Himself, but on God-as-X-sees-Him, or God-as-group-Y-experiences-Him; on a particular ritual as the adherents of the religion define it; on the meaning Muslims attach to the shahadah; or on the shades of subjective meaning discernible in the Hindu's worship of Devi.

3.4.1.3 Epoche

Because phenomenology insists on penetrating to the core of things, it refuses to take anything for granted. The observer therefore suspends all his previous assumptions concerning the phenomenon in question. In phenomenological language this is called *epoche*. In order to concentrate better on the human consciousness of something, he even suspends his belief that that something itself is real. He sticks to the experience-of-, and whether the experience corresponds to an objective reality outside of the experience-of- or not, is 'put between brackets' as the phenomenological phrase goes (left out of account). The phenomenologist looks at the world of madness and the world of normality with equal attention, because to the people living in them, both are equally real. As he describes a religion he neither doubts nor endorses its truth value; the question itself is put on ice, the better to see, with untrammelled vision, the modes of certainty or doubt of the adherents themselves. In order to achieve as direct an exploration and description of a religious phenomenon as possible, he has to approach it as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions in the form of pre-conceived ideas or pre-judgements. Conscious as it is of the workings of human perceiving, including the perceiving of the phenomenologist himself, phenomenology would of course not demand that the researcher should simply black out his own input in perceiving a phenomenon. This would be impossible. To suspend our previous assumptions is not the same as to deny them. Rather, we suspend them if we become radically conscious of them and if we consciously declare these points of departure. By sorting them out, they can be disciplined. If I look at the world everything may seem to be very depressing; if I then remember that I woke up this morning with a headache, I will bear in mind that I am looking at the world with a clouded vision and that the clouds up there are not really the grey monsters they seemed to be a moment ago. By checking on his own assumptions the phenomenologist wants to allow the phenomenon to stand out sharply. A student of religion will inevitably bring along with him a set of background assumptions; the more he is conscious of these, the more he will be able to keep his own preferences from distorting his observation of something.

3.4.1.4 Essences

Another way of saying that phenomenology is driving at the heart of things, is to remind ourselves of its insistence to look for the *'essences'* of things. For example, probing the phenomenon of prayer, the phenomenologist is looking for the essential character of prayer, that without which prayer would no longer be prayer. He eliminates the contingent elements that distinguish this prayer from that one. Again, he probes for the essential structure of all prayer in as far as prayer is a human act.

3.4.2 PHENOMENOLOGY IN SCIENCE OF RELIGION

Although the term 'phenomenology of religion' is quite old (it was used in 1887 in a science of religion handbook by P D Chantepie de la Saussaye), it really came to the fore in the twentieth century as the result of the work of men like Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto, Brede Kristensen and Gerardus van der Leeuw. In the recent past probably the best known representative of phenomenology of religion is Mircea Eliade.

In science of religion the word 'phenomenology' is used in two distinct senses. Firstly, it is used to denote that branch of science of religion which systematizes and classifies religious phenomena. In this sense, the words 'phenomenon' and 'phenomenology' do not necessarily carry the full meaning outlined in section 3.4.1. Some researchers, especially in Scandinavia, Italy, Holland and Germany have insisted that phenomenology of religion should be organized as an *independent sub-discipline* within science of religion, alongside history of religions. In principle this is the equivalent of the older term 'comparative religion', but stripped of the latter's evolutionistic perspective. At present Bleeker (1959; 1971; 1972) is representative of the desire to maintain it as an independent branch. As said in chapter 2, strong arguments can be advanced against this position. The systematic element should not be isolated in a separate sub-division. Those who wish to do so, often wish to sever all links with phenomenology in the philosophical sense as well. This also goes too far. The activity of collecting and classifying is, however, linked with the general phenomenological idea of finding the essences of phenomena.

Secondly, it is used in a wider sense to denote the method, which in broad terms is associated with the philosophical method worked out by Husserl and his followers, as sketched in the previous subsection.

At present there is a sharp division of opinion in science of religion concerning this methodological orientation. On the one hand it is sharply criticized for being merely intuitionistic, for not having any method at all, or for misusing the name phenomenology (cf inter alia Van Baaren and Drijvers 1973; Oosterbaan 1959; Stephenson 1976). The critics of traditional phenomenology of religion rightly point to some of its methodological deficiencies. The heritage of Husserl, still much in evidence in Van der Leeuw's work, gradually diminished, and terms such as essence, epoche and intentionality are sometimes used without any vital link with their origin. As was said above, one should distinguish between phenomenology in its full philosophical form and phenomenology as applied to empirical research in science. On the other hand, maintaining contact with its philosophical origin should re-invigorate the method. The work of Waardenburg (1978), Smart (1973; 1973a; 1977), Pye (1972) and Allen (1978) points in this direction.

Happily for science of religion, it has valuable allies in some developments in the social sciences. Since the sixties phenomenology has started to make renewed inroads in the methodology of the social sciences as a result of the work of Schutz (1973), Merleau-Ponty (1973), Spiegelberg (1971; 1975), Berger and Luckmann (1975), Tiryakian (1973; 1973a) and others. At the moment it seems opportune for scientists of religion to take stock of its phenomenological heritage and to develop its promises. This effort should, however, take into account the wider metascientific discussions and the various efforts made in the human sciences to stimulate rapprochement between the different schools, where possible. For instance, the relationship between phenomenology and positivism received valuable attention from Luckmann (1973); that between critical theory and critical rationalism, from Radnitzky (1973); and that between phenomenology and critical theory (or rather, Marxian thought generally) by Smart (1976), Paci (1972) and Dallmayr (1973). Science of religion should not select phenomenology or any other approach as the be-all and end-all of philosophy and methodology.

3.5 THE HERMENEUTICAL SCHOOL

The word 'hermeneutic' ('hermeneutical', etc) derives from a Greek word which means 'to interpret'. In its modern use it goes back to the 16th century, when the great texts from the Christian and European classical (Graeco-Roman) antiquity were in a sense rediscovered and re-interpreted. In the following centuries the word came to be used for the understanding and application of legal and religious texts from the past. Given the time and place of this activity (Christian Europe, before the meeting with other religions really took place) the hermeneutical interest was restricted to Christian religious texts only, that is the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers.

In the 19th century hermeneutics received new impetus when European man discovered the yawning gap between him and his ancestors, including religious ancestors (the people who lived in Biblical times); a gap which was very real, in spite of the cultural heritage spanning the ages. Especially in Germany, the 19th century saw an impressive line of scholars who worked on the problem of how we are to understand the past. Among these the names of G W F Hegel, (1770-1831), F D E Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) deserve special attention. Even today the term hermeneutics is associated particularly with the understanding of the past and of literary texts; the typical hermeneutical disciplines are history and those that try to disclose the meaning a classical text might have for us today. A prime example is the interpretation of great religious texts. The word should, however, not be restricted to texts only; it also applies to the understanding of works of art, of music, and so on. And it should not be restricted to the understanding of the meaning of something in the past; it also refers to the understanding of contemporary things. In a general sense, its meaning was given to it by Schleiermacher, who understood by it *the interpretation of all forms of human expression.* The art of understanding is also wider than the forms of understanding practised in the sciences. In fact, one of the aims of modern hermeneutical thinking is to show that modern science is one of the avenues towards the discovery of the meaning of things, but not the only one.

From the remarks above it must be clear that hermeneutical thinking is rooted in the experience of the *strangeness* of some cultural products, whether they are far removed from us today in time, or whether they are expressed by people who belong to a different culture from our own. It must also be clear why this school of thinking would be of special relevance to science of religion. In the 20th century hermeneutics was further developed by philosophers like Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (born 1900). When I condense hermeneutical thinking in the following pages, I shall do so mainly by simplifying the thinking of Gadamer (1972).

Like some of the other schools mentioned, the hermeneutical school is anti-positivist in its bias. Over against the technological mentality of positivism, with its intention to master the world, hermeneutical thinking is filled with respect for the claims of cultural tradition. One of the criticisms levelled against it by opponents, is that it is inherently uncritical and conservative and that it submits too meekly to the claims of tradition. To hermeneutical thinking the researcher, trying to come to terms with the past, is not a supreme subject, mastering a dead object, lying there. That which he interprets, has a dynamic vitality of its own. It reaches out and challenges the interpreter. The whole hermeneutical undertaking is seen as an extension of *communication between people,* in which they both *speak,* and both listen to each other. And even when the people themselves cannot be present, perhaps because they are long dead, they nevertheless 'speak' via the cultural products they left behind. What we understand, is the human world, and this understanding (as well as this world) is distorted if it is made to look like the explanation and analysis of non-human things. Whatever we wish to understand, should be recognized as objectivations of the human spirit. In this sense the past 'speaks' to us.

This implies that when we understand something from the past, we do not merely *reconstruct* it as it once was, because this would be tantamount to regarding it as dead. In understanding, the dynamic past and the actual present are *integrated.* To understand, is not to re-produce or restore something which is dead. It is to experience the spark of meaning when the two worlds meet. I understand something (say the Avesta) when communication, analogous to my meeting with another actually present person, takes place. I do not move back into a dead past; I experience a live relationship with an articulate other. It is the meaningful communication between two partners, of which I am one, the text the other. To do science of religion in this spirit, is to respect the dignity of whatever I am trying to understand, and to allow it to speak for itself. I become an attentive, humble listener to the human spirit reaching out to me across the barriers of time and cultural differences.

It is not a one-way communication, neither from me to the other (the 'object'- that would be positivism), nor from the other to me. In order to grasp something, I reach out towards it from where I am. Understanding is a circular process embracing both me and the other. If I blot out myself, communication ceases and becomes impossible. In all understanding there is an element of creativity. I am influenced by the other, and the other is influenced by me. It is I, with all my presuppositions, in the context of my life, against the backdrop of my own historical past, who understand. It is I, from my perspective, who reach out. Of course my tentative pre-understanding will be rectified when I make contact with the other, but without such a

pre-understanding (prejudice) I shall not come to an understanding at all. It is I (in the case of the author of this book) who, from the vantage point of a particular kind of Christian experience, venture into discovering the meaning of strange religious experiences – be they the experience of early Muslim religion or of my next-door neighbour.

Hermeneutical thinking cuts two ways. In allowing me, the interpreter, to declare myself, it rules out uncritical dogmatism (dogmatism: when that which I interpret, completely overrules me and becomes as unassailable as a tidal wave). It also rules out the uncritical self-assertion of the interpreter (when I simply stamp my understanding on to that which I interpret). Hermeneutics, as defined, is a typically modern endeavour. It is a rigorous intellectual discipline, and it may be called reflexive or critical. In itself, it is the result of a disturbed historical heritage, and as such it cannot recapture the pre-hermeneutic, 'primitive' experience of the sacred. It is critical thinking about such experience. As such, it demythologizes. Yet it holds out a promise. Like phenomenology, it is an effort to regain the vital contact with the well of primitive human experience, although it can never return to primitive naïvety. It is not destructive. On the contrary, it wants to hear clearly, or at least as clearly as possible, what was said and heard in a world to which the interpreter is a stranger.

When people talk, they normally talk about something. Hermeneutical thinking emphasizes that when I understand, I do not merely enter into the other person, but into that which he is talking about. In reading the Avesta, I am not merely interested in the subjective states of mind I might encounter there; I am interested in its message, that which it speaks about. If I study Taoism, I should allow myself to be drawn into the world of Taoism to such an extent that I get involved with its message. This means that I am inevitably drawn into thinking about the truth claims of Taoism. Ultimately, understanding has to do with the truth, and science of religion leads to philosophical and theological questions. In the words of Ricoeur (1969:354), referring to the hermeneutics of religious symbolism, the final stage of hermeneutics is reached when the interpreter moves beyond the 'curious but not concerned' understanding, and enters 'into a passionate, though critical, relation with the truthvalue of each symbol'. According to Wach (1898-1955), who took much pains to elaborate the hermeneutical approach, science of religion, understood as a hermeneutical discipline, 'in its true intention does not dissolve values but seeks for values. The sense for the numinous is not extinguished by it, but on the contrary, is awakened, strengthened, shaped, and enriched by it' (Wach, 1975:127).

It should cause no surprise that hermeneutics has penetrated deeply into the methodological thinking of science of religion, and that, in the eyes of many, it is the methodology of science of religion. If taken in a wide sense, the vast majority if not all of the great students of religion saw their enterprise as being hermeneutical in one way or another. Obviously hermeneutical thinking comes from the same general philosophical background as phenomenology. The two are so closely related that merging could easily occur, and in fact this has often happened. Also, a synthesis with critical theory is thinkable. One could for instance think of the accent which both place on the committedness of the researcher in terms of values and historical

standpoint, and on their shared purpose of salvaging meaning for modern man from the onslaught of modernization. It is further removed from critical rationalism, but even here somebody who does not belong exclusively to any of the schools, may see points of possible convergence. Hermeneutics is furthest removed from positivism. To each, the other is almost a swear-word. Yet we should remind ourselves once more that the rejection of positivist reductionist anthropology, epistemology and ontology does not necessarily lead to the rejection of all formalization and counting operations. On the other hand, the criticism raised that hermeneutics is subjectivistic and that it is based only on the intuition of the interpreter, is much too sweeping. No doubt hermeneutics sometimes is just that, but this need not be the case.

For a scientist of religion it is possible to align himself to one or other of the schools mentioned. Working within one tradition, which is accepted as a regulating frame of reference, will have its advantages. This one perspective will be truly tried, and the work of the student of religion will fit into an existing system of meaning, gaining much from the common perspective, and hopefully enriching it. Another possibility is to travel with lighter luggage and to move more freely among the various positions, learning and using whatever seems to be helpful and valuable. The danger here could be a superficial eclecticism. But surely we are not condemned either to be enclosed within only one frame or to flit from one position to another. The important thing is to appreciate the wealth of more traditions than one, to respect the unique contributions of each and to be on the lookout for possible points of convergence which might help one to do one's own particular job better.

CHAPTER 4

Roots of Religio-Scientific Inquiry

4.1 FUNDAMENTAL SCIENCE OF RELIGION

The 'facts' concerning religion are only really intelligible within a theoretical framework of some sort. Such frameworks vary in *scope:* there are micro-theories, which account for a limited range of phenomena (for example, a theory accounting for Islam in one Black community), and there are macro-theories, which account for a wide range of phenomena (for example, theories of secularization as an epochal development). Theories also vary in *level:* some remain quite close to the directly observable aspects of religion and may be compounded with the description of such things. Other theories abstract quite drastically from direct observations.

Let us now distinguish two major levels of inquiry in science of religion. The first, lying closest to the surface, consists of the actual understanding of specific religious phenomena. The style in which this research will be conducted, rests on a deeper level of inquiry. I shall call this second dimension *fundamental science of religion.* Its task is to construct a *fundamental theory* of religion and of the science of religion. The terms 'fundamental science of religion' and 'fundamental theory of religion' are intended to convey the idea that this level of inquiry is not extraneous to science of religion, and not far removed from the actual business of the practising empirical scientist; in fact, that it is the foundational aspect of science of religion. Its task is to bring to light the deeplying principles operative in religion and in the scientific study of religion.

Our analysis of any religious phenomenon will be closely linked to our basic conception of religion and of the science of religion. Wittingly or unwittingly, every scientist of religion in fact has some such basic orientation. It may be well thought out or not, he may be consciously aware of it or not, but it is there, in however rudimentary a form. Even the denial of this fact is itself a position which will give a certain flavour and colour to his empirical analysis. Man's religion and his science are two aspects of his total existence as man; so our theories of religion and the science of religion will necessarily be dependent on a comprehensive, fundamental theory of man, of wide-ranging scope and penetrating level. At its most radical and general level this may be called the domain of philosophical anthropology. It would include accounting for man's experience as it becomes manifest in his art, work, science, religion, social relations and so on. All these aspects have given rise to branches of philosophy which deal with the special questions relating to these dimensions of man's life. Such a general and radical picture of man and his activities is of course a transdisciplinary affair. In the following pages, however, we shall not move far away from our immediate concerns, which are religion and its science. Religion is a complex province of meaning in the human universe. So is science. But in the end both rest on basic ways of man's being in the world. In this chapter we shall look at some of the features of this being in the world.

The two levels of science of religion (the empirical and the fundamental) need and complement each other. As a screw is driven forward by a spiral movement, so the understanding of religion is furthered by a spiral movement in which empirical research is pushed forward by fundamental theory, and in its turn it stimulates fundamental theory which once more influences the empirical work, and so on. Some scientists of religion will naturally concentrate on the construction of fundamental theory, others more on the growth of our empirical knowledge. The important point to bear in mind is that both are necessary. If it is not informed by the facts, fundamental theory will be mere speculation or analysis of empty concepts; and if it is not situated in a panoramic frame of reference, empirical research will be the mere collection of unintegrated data. Each has its own dignity. In this joint project fundamental theory provides the necessary comprehensive and foundational framework. (Perhaps it ought to be said that the term 'empirical', if taken to refer to experience generally, of course also applies to fundamental theory. Fundamental theory too reflects on human experience. But in the present context 'empirical' is used as a shorthand term to refer to the level where we study the manifest religious phenomena, as distinct from the deeper levels.)

As said before, the field in which science of religion in South Africa should concentrate its energies and where it could make its own contribution, is empirical research. In view of this (not in spite of it), the scientist of religion should be aware of the relevance of fundamental theory.

In this chapter I shall sketch concisely some of the main features of man who utters, and hearkens to, meaning (including religious meaning), as a first step in what I have called fundamental theory of religion. This sketch stands in the broadly conceived phenomenological tradition, including the names of Max Weber, Alfred Schutz, M Merleau-Ponty and H Richard Niebuhr, who represented this general approach in various ways. The whole chapter may be seen as an elaboration of the phenomenological idea of 'intentionality', introduced in the previous chapter.

If each of us were to look closely at our experience of the world, we should find that we are constrained by the world, and that we act upon the world. How can these two sides of my being in the world be described?

4.2 BEING DETERMINED

There is a world out there, beyond me. I am also part of it and it controls me. I am 'me', an object and product of the forces of nature and society.

4.2.1 NATURAL REALITY

This statement is true, on the most elementary level, of nature, by which is meant that large world of events and agencies that we modern men regard as sub-human in character. Together with all the other physical objects, I am embedded in space and time, as an It amongst Its. As far as my senses stretch, and much further, is a world of objects which has an enormous time-span behind it and ahead of it which far exceeds my short life. I am part of this world. It surrounds me, and I bend to the physical forces that operate there. My body involuntarily reacts to the forces of nature within it and beyond it, for instance when I feel pain, am cold, get hungry or blush. Also, my psyche is deeply rooted in the world of physical nature. In my conscious life I am only dimly aware, if at all, of the powers of matter and life that bind me with rocks, water, plants and animals. Yet I am rooted in this deep soil. I am governed by physical and physiological regularities. My reactions, which on this level are out of my conscious control, can be understood by locating them on the field of natural forces.

4.2.2 SOCIOCULTURAL REALITY

Other people are of extreme importance in my life. You might be continually present in my life as a major force even though I might not be consciously aware of your significance. You might also be one of the individuals of lesser significance who act upon me and trigger off unreflective reactions. In increasing impersonality, you become a third person and confront me as such, as he or she. You exert influence on me in the plural, as one of several social groups of varying significance. You become they, those who act upon me in increasing degrees of anonymity and impersonality. Other people form me through the processes of socialization, be they alive or members of a past generation. Even though they might exist in a far away part of the world, they nevertheless are there, co-present with me and in co-presence with all the others shaping me and my world. In the last resort, there is the sum-total of all the other people, which we may call society, which transcends and controls me through its institutions such as language, family, education and religion. Without society, I would not be. I am part of a historically given world which is my social environment, my socio-historical milieu, and it is not of my own making. My behaviour is effected by psychological and socio-historial pressures which operate in conjunction with the natural forces. On this level my conduct is involuntary, passive, affective and unreflective, and it can be understood by retrospectively uncovering its compulsion by factors in my personal past experiences and socio-historical environment.

To the domain of objective structures which are prior to me and which nevertheless enter into me and lay their claims on me by becoming part of me, belongs the objectified world of human culture, including items such as the language in terms of which I come to self-awareness, the system of morality prevalent in the group into which I am born, a centuries-old ritual or myth, a holy book, an idea of God, and so forth. Patterns of conduct, speaking, believing, thinking or feeling can hover over me (if they evoke reactions of fear) or embrace me (if they evoke reactions of glad submission) as mighty, unchallengeable entities without which I cannot imagine my being, or they can become part of my constitution to such an extent that I cannot distinguish them from myself.

4.2.3 THE UNDERSTANDING OF OBJECTIVE PATTERNS

Since this is part of my experience of my position in the world, it can become the focus of attention. Special attention may be directed at these objective preconditions of my conduct, which are then not mere background, mere external circumstances or mere material for my conduct, but effective antecedents. In this perspective my conduct may be explained and understood as a determined factor in the system of nature, a system of society or a system of culture. My reactions to these preconditions are in a sense extensions of them. For reasons of space we have only dealt with me, in the first person singular; but it should be kept in mind that the argument of course equally applies to us, to you, him, her and them; in short, to people generally.

A theory of religion and the science of religion could hinge on this facet of man's life. *Causal, functional and structural* explanations of various kinds operate on this level. In this perspective, explanation and understanding might for example be interested in the structure of these physical, physiological, psychological, socio-historical or religious preconditions; in the nature and the degree of strength of its effective impact on people's conduct; in the relation between sets of structures; in the formal patterns of people's conduct and the degree of its being affected by these preconditions.

Let us apply the argument to a few examples in the field of religion. It is, for example, possible to concentrate on and to analyse the objective structure of a ritual, a myth, a moral code, a theology, a pattern of symbols or a sacred text. It is possible to investigate the processes of religious socialization, for example the constraining influence of various religious groups on the conduct of their adherents. Or one could focus on the external patterns of religious behaviour, abstracting from the personal intentions and motivations of the people themselves. One could investigate the interrelations between sets of factors, for example the influence of social factors on a religious sytem, or the dependence of a religion as a transpersonal system on ecological factors (say climate, or the kind of technology used in a society). Many valuable investigations have been made in this vein. It is a valid and fruitful methodological perspective. But we should bear in mind that it is a relative and limited perspective. If isolated and totalized, man becomes nothing but the product of objective forces, and these objective conditions become completely depersonalized. The methodological perspective then becomes a worldview. Terms such as moralism, dogmatism, traditionalism, psychologism, sociologism, historicism,

positivism, determinism, objectivism and fatalism all indicate aspects of such a totalized and exclusive emphasis. The relative value of such investigations can be duly appreciated only if we couple this kind of understanding with the second perspective, which focuses on the experience we may call human action.

4.3 ACTING

The term action, which will serve as the basis of this section, was given wide currency by Weber (1972), and was further developed by Schutz (1973), although neither of these authors defined it in a way that was fully adequate for a theory of religion. Apart from this term and some of the others mentioned, for example freedom and responsibility – Niebuhr (1963) developed the latter concept as a useful basis for a theory of religion – there are also others, such as praxis, projectivity and existence which all point to this same quality of man's life, and which are all used in the broad tradition which puts this quality at the centre of its attention.

Part of my experience is also that I act upon the world. This is not an absolutely original self-expression. I do not start from nothing. Yet, in my feeling, touching, seeing, listening, thinking, working, loving, believing and all my other activities, I am the source of something new. In my activities I express my own unique manner of being human towards nature and society. I express my very personal attitude, which is not reducible to nature and society, and not wholly explicable in terms of natural and social forces. The manner in which I am I, and whatever I do, is pervaded by a subtle personal quality, by a style which differs from somebody else's. Each one of us is an 'I', a responsible person, a free agent producing things and meanings. An action, inspired by my own manner of realizing my freedom, may be overt (like speaking) or covert (like thinking), and it may be an act of commission (like deliberately speaking) or omission (like refraining from speaking). In other words, an action (or an act, if we refer to an accomplished action) is any activity of mine, in as far as this activity is taken to be imbued with my subjective meaning.

4.3.1 ACTING UPON THE WORLD

The first field aimed at in my actions is nature, outside of me and within me. I can reach out and handle things, adapt myself to my physical environment, transform it to some extent, and produce things, to mention a few examples of this capacity of man, which in modern society has reached such stupendous proportions.

I also act upon the socio-cultural world. I can stand before you and direct myself at you, thereby revealing myself to you as a source of meaning. You, as another I, can do the same. We then encounter each other as persons, that is, as centres of action and meaning. In this case we might speak of inter-action. The other to whom I express myself is not only an individual other I (you). It could also be you in the plural. The inter-action can also occur indirectly, between me and him, her or them. Not only an individual person, but also a group, consisting of two or more persons, may be an acting unit.

In this line of thinking even the very anonymous, impersonal social forces which constrain people have their origin in personal ways of being in the world, like the fossils of once-living beings, and understanding means to make contact with the forgotten personal impetus. My present, individual character may seem to be fixed, but nevertheless it is the result of many previous decisions and actions, and it has its roots in a very basic and decisive attitude towards the world, which is uniquely mine.

When we interact with one another, we jointly establish patterns of interaction, and to the extent that these become routine, they take on a transpersonal character. We do not have to start all over again each time, because a habit has been formed. When we meet today for the first time, both of us would be uncertain in our behaviour towards one another, by tomorrow we would be more at ease, and in twenty years' time a set pattern of typical expectations will have grown, but they remain the by-product of our interaction. However old and mighty, complex and wide-ranging such patterns of behaviour (institutions) might be and however strongly they might regulate our behaviour, they nevertheless are secreted by persons' interaction.

From this point of view society is made up of acting persons and groups who subjectively intend meaning and respond to subjectively intended meaning, and culture is the objectified product or sedimentation of our actions. Thus, the domain of objective structures over against me (including such items as language, a system of morality, a centuries old ritual or myth, a holy book or an idea of God), which from one perspective determines and controls me, is from this second perspective person-made and, what is more, appropriated by me in my own manner as a responsible person. Even if we cannot pinpoint the creation of a cultural item in time, it nevertheless is a creation of men, and it is nevertheless I who today attach a certain meaning to the myth, who act out the ritual in my way, who read the holy book differently from the way you do.

My acting upon the world (the natural world and the world of objectified sociocultural products) shows a remarkable triadic structure. It implies an interacting. Strictly speaking, I never act alone. Wittingly or unwittingly, I simultaneously deal with the world and with other persons, be they alive together with me as my contemporaries who share the same responsibility in the same world, be they my predecessors who acted and responded in perhaps exemplary ways in terms of a comparable world, or be they my successors who will one day respond to my actions today in their world, which will be the product of our actions today.

4.3.2 ACTING IN AND VIA THE WORLD

Our interaction meshes with the world, which is always present as third partner in our dealings with other persons. As my acting upon the world implies interacting with other persons, so does my interacting with other persons imply the world. In this subsection we shall once more pay attention to the indissoluble triadic pattern involved in action.

You and I might explicitly refer to elements of our common world, for example when we talk about something, say the weather or about Buddhism in South Africa. But in any event, a common world is always at least implicitly presupposed as a

frame of reference. Without bodies and things and cultural objects no interaction would be possible. Without night and day, summer and winter, the moon and the earth, birth and death, colours and sounds we would not encounter each other. To fail to appreciate this, and to imagine that 'pure' persons could meet, would be the mistake of an abstract personalism. This world of reference may be quite small, consisting of the immediate natural and sociocultural environment surrounding us, the everyday world of family, city, work, friends and so on. But, inevitably, the circle expands before our gaze. There is always a beyond, and in the end our encounter is surrounded by an all-inclusive horizon, consisting of the universal physical nature and universal society (mankind), and the history of mankind's dealings with itself and with nature. This is the scene of our actions, on which and with reference to which we interact. When we interpret each other's actions (and of course interpretation itself is a most important element of interaction), we locate it on this map. In encountering you, I am referred to your world, and you to mine, and to a large extent the success of our interacting will depend on the extent to which we share the same world. Every action stands out in relief on this surface.

Sooner or later in the process of reference I might experience the awesome dimension of religious reality, invading the everyday world from beyond. This boundary of our world, and the reality lying beyond it, is the ultimate possible horizon lying around our action.

4.3.2.1 Signs and symbols

The action perspective could be clarified further by applying it to signs, which play such an important part in everyday interaction, and symbols, which are of extreme importance in religion.

Interaction between people is only possible via our bodies and the *signs* on our bodies, or produced by our bodies. Knowledge of somebody else's mind is possible only through the intermediary of his body and events or objects in the external world which convey his meaning. In interpreting you I am wholly dependent on external signs. For example, the shrugging of your shoulders, together with other states and movements of your body such as a reddening of your face, might indicate that you are angry. Or, I stare in amazement at the raised arms of a figurine, crudely carved on a stone slab dating from the Upper Palaeolithic era (50/30 000 – 10 000 B.C.), and in this gesture I think that I recognize an act of religious adoration. This I discern via another sign, the carving itself, which is a faint disclosure of Ice Age man's way of being human in the world, as an artist and as a religious being. Signs such as these make possible a slight acquaintance with those long-dead predecessors of mine. You articulate who you are by the sounds you make (speech, singing), by the characters you write down (books, including holy books), by the objects you leave behind (utensils, instruments of torture, monuments, religious objects), by the elements of nature you infuse with meaning (trees, rocks), and so on. You make yourself known – intentionally or unintentionally – to me, the interpreter, via signs. What the signs reveal, is what you purposively intend, or what you express, or what you identify yourself with, but in all this, you reveal who you are, in your fashion of giving content to your freedom and responsibility in the world.

We may distinguish at least two sides to the meaning of any sign. First, your side, that is, the side of the person who via the sign interacts with me. Second, my side, that is, the side of the person who interacts with you via your sign. After all, in our interaction my interpretation is as much an action as your expression via the sign. My interpretation, as well as your anticipation of my interpretation, are two moves in the same process of interaction. We shall return to the difference in mode between these two sides in the next subsection.

Your subjective meaning could of course become objectified, that is, it could take on a quasi-independent character. But, in the focus on action, what I am after as interpreter, is to defreeze the product, and to decipher it as a secondary form of your action.

By *symbol,* in this context, we may understand an event or object within the reality of our everyday life (again, on our bodies, produced by our bodies or infused with meaning via our bodies) representing religious reality which transcends the everyday world. A symbol is a sign with an extra dimension, in that it implies a universe of meaning other than the everyday one (Schutz). Apart from religion, it is important in contexts of meaning such as art and science as well. For example, water plays a manifold symbolic role in many religions. Immersion into water, burial libations and ritual washing of newborn babies (to mention a few examples) are on the one hand acts in the ordinary world, but on the other hand they represent the religious washing away of sin and other religious realities. In symbolism the sphere of everyday things (water) and the sphere of religious things (for example purification) are intimately associated. A symbol is saturated with its religious referent. Funeral libations do abolish the sufferings of the dead. The bread is the body of Christ. Our concern is with the religious meaning of a symbol. What do we think of when we speak of the meaning of a symbol in terms of personal action? As is the case with signs, there is the meaning that you attach to the symbol, you who act out the ritual, who invest the snake with religious reference, who express your religious attitude through the medium of water; and there is the meaning I discover in your acting out of the ritual. Of course, the more successful our interaction is, the more we may speak of the same meaning. But still the two sides, the giving and the taking, may be distinguished.

Again, even when symbols take on a quasi-independent character, they remain rooted in a personal context. They are, as it were, your symbols.

Yet there is something more to a symbol. It is permeated with the religious reality it refers to, and when it faces you, you experience yourself as the receiver of a meaning which reaches out to you from beyond the everyday world, and which radically transcends yourself. You do not only *express* meaning; you are *impressed* by meaning. But even this receiving is your action, and I could try to understand the mode of your reception of religious transcendence as an indication of your manner of being human.

4.3.3 EXPRESSION AND BEING IMPRESSED

Action, as we saw above, displays two sides. To summarize, we may call the one expression; the other, being impressed. This rough distinction may be referred to by a variety of other terms, and it emerges in many settings of life. I am free, that is, I take initiative in my dealings with others and the world generally; and I am responsible ('respond-able'), that is, I re-spond to the initiative of others and to the world generally. To some extent I can change the world of things and cultural objects; and I appropriate this world, and by my definition of it the environment becomes my situation. In acting, I have my with-a-view-to-reasons, that is, I make plans, project myself into the future and act accordingly; and I have my because-reasons, that is, I take into account existing states of affairs. I produce things and meanings; and I receive things and meanings. I create meaning; and I interpret meaning. I command and lead; and I obey and follow. I work; and I enjoy. I realize my intentions by converting possibilities into facts; and I realize that my deeds have unintended consequences that I can imagine but not control. I talk; and I listen.

All this, of course, is very general. Yet, it points to a wide field of empirical investigation, not only in ordinary life, but also in religion, which is rooted in ordinary life and yet transcends it. In religion action probably takes on a peculiar style in which a being impressed of a certain sort gains preponderance. In this sense Schleiermacher (to mention one possibility) defined religion as the feeling of absolute dependence. At this stage we merely note that both dimensions occur in religion. I beseech God; and I experience his presence. I pray for the forgiveness of my sins; and I am cleansed of my sins. I construct or reject an idea of God; and I bow to a traditional idea of God as true, or suffer terrible anxiety because it has lost its meaning for me. So we could go on, but this ought to remind us of a world of discovery, where the actions of each specific person and group will have its own shades of meaning. In this line of argument, religio-scientific explanation may be called *'responsive explanation',* in so far as its main concern is the character of religion as a kind of response to the world and, in and beyond the world, to religious reality.

4.3.4 THE UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONAL AND SITUATIONAL CASES AND PATTERNS

Theories of religion can be devised that hinge on the idea of action. In this perspective, the heart of explanation is the explication of the human meaning of things. What is understood, is this meaning, not necessarily as a consciously meant meaning, but at least recognizable to a person if reconstructed for him by an interpreter. Personal explanation is the heart of the wider situational explanation.

We have come across five factors which the interpreter has to take into account: (a) the religious person or group of interacting persons, existing in many degrees of nearness and farness to the interpreter; (b) the signs revealing the mind of the religious person or group in words, ceremonies, documents and so on; (c) symbols, that is, signals in as far as they reveal an experience of religious reality, for example when the words become invocations, the ceremonies sacred rituals and the documents vehicles of divine revelation; (d) the world in which the religious person or group is situated; (e) the religious reality itself, referred to by the symbol, articulated in the world, experienced by the religious person, as known or unknown to the interpreter.

Each of these could become a relatively independent theme of investigation. But in the end each is significant, relative to the others and together with them illuminating the style of being a religious man in the world. The more fully all five are known to the interpreter and the more significant the relations between them are for him, the more satisfied will he be that he understands. To the extent that one or more of them are unknown to the interpreter, understanding becomes more difficult and less rich.

The *subjective meaning* meant by the religious persons or groups who interact via a multitude of *signs* in all the various ways described (and more), is the core around which this kind of understanding turns. Of course the patterns of coherence of the signs as such (the syntactic dimension) may receive attention, but it will be subordinated to the human uses and the human meaning intended via the signs (the pragmatic and semantic dimensions). Hopefully enough has been said to show that it does not necessarily amount to personalistic subjectivism. The different factors are interrelated. Understanding is more than the mere reconstruction of what religious man consciously intends. If he does his work well, the scientist of religion understands the religious meaning of persons and their actions better than the persons themselves in as far as he relates them to all the factors implied, which the religious person does not consciously do unless he has achieved a high degree of reflexiveness. The scientist of religion uncovers the various relations, thereby working towards an integral understanding of a religious phenomenon.

The *world* could become a relatively independent theme of investigation. If the world is left out of account, the result will be personalism; if it receives isolated and exclusive attention, the result will be determinism. Although a boundary can be drawn between the deterministic and the action perspectives, the reality itself shows an area of ambiguity between being determined and acting. Here the unconscious plays its part. To the extent that one's being determined by natural and sociocultural forces is consciously realized and interpreted, it takes on the character of action as we described it. For example, the physical disturbances of this particular body become my illness, interpreted by me, responded to by me and thus it becomes the medium of my meaning.

A religion is situated in a world. The determinism-perspective might be interested in a religion as a result (dependent variable) of the environment (independent variable). A personalistic perspective would look at the religion removed from its context. This too would not be adequate – the interpreter could, to mention one possibility, tumble into the pitfall of rationalism, taking at its face-value the meaning people offer when asked about their religion and mistaking this for the whole truth about their religion. The action perspective would be interested in the variegated ways, ranging from unconscious to highly reflexive, in which the adherents of a religion respond to their environment. The historical-critical procedure in the interpretation of religious documents finds its place in an approach such as this. Even people's being determined by their environment may be taken up in an action framework: the ways in which people are determined (that is, allow themselves to be determined) can be interpreted as indicative of how they orientate themselves in the world. Therefore the understanding of objective patterns (including, for example, structural interpretations of religious documents – cf par 4.2.3) could be *taken up* in an action-framework.

Suppose we wish to study the religion of some group. It would then be important to know that this group consists of poor people. Knowledge of their poverty as an objective state of affairs, and of the objective correlation between their poverty and their religion, would contribute much to an understanding of their religious response to their poverty. In trying to understand the religion of Neanderthal men, knowledge of their living conditions, for example that they hunted the cave bear at great peril to themselves, is valuable. Somehow their religion was linked with cave bears, as the religion of any group in Johannesburg is linked with its socio-economic position.

Symbols could also become a relatively independent source of interest. For example, the logic of water symbolism as a universal, cross-religious phenomenon could be brought to light, as has been done by Mircea Eliade. But again, such an analysis should not be isolated. It has to be kept in touch with the persons who believe in the symbol, in their respective particular historical worlds, with reference to the religious reality as understood by them. Nevertheless, in the action-framework, an analysis of the structure of symbols generally could shed light on particular textures of religious meaning. And in any event knowledge of a symbol is invaluable in the understanding of a religion. To what religious world might the bear skulls, arranged with such special care by Neanderthal men in their caves, point? We can only conjecture, but at least this meagre evidence, together with the little knowledge that we do have of their life, offers a faint glimpse into a strange world of awe.

The *religious reality* itself is the ultimate referent of a religion. The field of action is bounded by this reality. Whether a theory of religion as action could be the baseline for theology, is another question. In science of religion we are concerned with the religious search of man and his religious response to the ultimate mystery, not the mystery itself. But this boundary joins as well. I should not dogmatically want to rule it out of bounds for a student of religion, dwelling on the meeting between people and the transcending religious reality, to speak to some extent of the religious reality itself. But then he would be moving beyond the limits of the idea of action as drawn here, and the limits of science of religion as drawn in chapter 2.

4.3.5 UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLANATION

'Understanding' may simply be taken to mean satisfactory knowledge. This would of course imply more than a feeling of satisfaction sometimes felt by an individual ('Oh, now I see!'). In the study of religion, as in science generally, knowledge is expected to be satisfactory and convincing to the forum of students as well – but we shall return to this in chapter 6. It is important in the present context that we do not follow the usage, widespread in some circles, of contrasting 'understanding' with 'explanation'. According to that view (called the deductive-nomological or DN model of understanding, and at present associated particularly with C G Hempel and P Oppenheim) explanation is taken to be the subsumption of a particular case under a general law (cf Hempel 1966:51). It obviously rules out the possibility of science of religion ever 'really' explaining anything. In that school of thinking the term 'understanding' (or the German equivalent 'Verstehen') is usually used in a depreciatory way, as meaning mere intuition: a vague and non-rigorous ('soft') sense of sympathetic acquaintance, perhaps useful in the early stages of an investigation, but not yet

'explanation'. We have to add, however, that some advocates of 'Verstehen' have accepted the dichotomy and sometimes contribute to the notion of understanding as being only intuition.

An important trend in contemporary methodology, however, does not accept such a dichotomy between understanding and explaining and a corresponding dichotomy between the human sciences and natural sciences. Following this trend (and linking up more with the everyday usage of these terms) we may see understanding and explanation as presenting two stages in the same process: when our understanding of something is lacking or has become shaky, we are in need of an explanation as a means towards 'making sense' of the puzzle, that is, towards understanding (cf Pannenberg 1976:135ff). A successful explanation is one that allows us to understand; a sound understanding is one that, for the present, is not in need of explanation.

CHAPTER 5

Self-awareness

5.1 OBJECTIVITY IN THE HEART OF SUBJECTIVITY

The previous chapter concentrated on what is usually called the object of a field of studies, and argued that in the science of religion, as in some other fields, the object should be understood as subjective; in the centre of our attention stand religious human beings. Even when we look at religious things, we only temporarily abstract from the persons. This chapter, as well as the following one, will have a closer look at the *how* of this study.

An obvious word, corresponding to the word 'object', and referring to the style in which investigations of religion should be conducted, is of course 'objectivity'. A number of other words convey more or less the same idea, that of doing justice to the object of one's investigation. We could say that the researcher of religion is striving after the truth; after valid, reliable or adequate knowledge; after realism, rationality or fidelity in regard to his or her knowledge of religion. All these terms suggest that the ideal is to attain sound knowledge, which is true to its object, able to stand the test of rigorous criteria, and which lies beyond ignorance or mere impressions. Continuing a central idea of the previous chapter, 'responsibility' appears as a particularly apt word to carry the meaning intended here. It suggests the idea of a task – one to be done well, not in a slipshod way. Furthermore, this task can only be carried out in full awareness of the *response*-able situation in which we find

ourselves, interacting with religious people. Valid knowledge can only be obtained if we keep in mind that a person, working in the fellowship of other investigators, meets other persons, who are religious. The ideal of objectivity is not reached by trying to cancel out our being persons, but by taking this seriously. Objectivity is to be established in the heart of subjectivity.

This reciprocity is a special form of what De Groot (1969) has described as the empirical cycle underlying all science as well as everyday knowing, in fact, all experience. Even in our everyday lives we do not gain experience and knowledge by being passive, but by actively approaching the world, by having our initial grasp of the world changed by contact with it, and by constantly improving our grasp of it by adapted, improved efforts. So the process goes on, in a spiral-shaped development. In science this cycle takes on the form of a highly conscious, systematic and controlled search. Science is the systematic, deliberate attack on the unknown, and allows itself to be tested and enriched by the resistance of the field it explores. It starts with tentative ideas of what it will find, it allows these ideas to undergo rigorous tests, and it ends, not with absolute knowledge, but with a better approximation of the truth than it began with, and a new round begins. The various words used to indicate elements of the scientific process, such as observation, concept-formation, hypothesis, experiment and theory all have to be understood in this context. Science moves between two poles: the investigating researcher, who actively forms his or her ideas; and the investigated object, which corroborates or annuls these ideas, or gives rise to unexpected ones. Both are equally important. It is clear that this reciprocity becomes extremely complex when persons study other persons.

Before we turn to the public character of objectivity (in the next chapter), the importance of the individual student doing his own particular work well, needs emphasizing. The notes each of us submits to the scrutiny of others have to be as good as we can make them. Let us call this intra-subjective validity, in distinction from inter-subjective validity. What else can the individual do but try to make his reports as reliable as possible – and then allow the comparison with those of others? This implies a disciplined awareness of his own stance, his own input into the generation of knowledge. There is much to the following remark by Spiegelberg (1975:78): 'There is then no escape from subjectivity. The only cure for subjectivistic subjectivity is more and better subjectivity, more discriminating subjectivity, and more selfcritical subjectivity, which will show the very limits of subjectivity'. In this section I shall abstract – artificially – from those aspects of the individual investigator's approach which are really public, even when he works alone; from his individual compliance with the generally-accepted rules of inter-subjective validity in his field of study. Let us try to describe at least some of the typical processes going on in the mind of the individual student when he studies religion.

5.2 THE IMPORT OF THE PERSONAL SITUATION

Science is fiction, in the sense that it is constructive, imaginative work. The great scientist is as original as the great artist. It would therefore be of value to examine more closely some of the personal and situational sides of this process of construction, which will undoubtedly influence the operations of the researcher of religion.

Not many workers in the area of religion see the necessity of doing this. If asked how they came to their interesting conclusions, they might think it enough simply to refer to some publicly accepted procedures, such as exegetical rules for reading ancient texts (when dealing with such religions), or interviewing (when dealing with contemporary religious phenomena). The reports, based on such overt procedures, however, are only the tips which show themselves on the surface. Hidden from sight is a vast bulk of what went on in the process of discovery, without the researcher necessarily being conscious of this at all. As we shall see, there is a wide range of factors, for example value presuppositions, which influence an investigator, albeit unconsciously.

In studying people, especially an aspect of their lives as elusive and sensitive as their religion, a large part of the personality of the observer is engaged. Sometimes scientists of human phenomena might in passing admit that such personal factors 'of course play a role' in their investigations. But they might hasten to add that these are negligible, or irrelevant or innocuous (since they are presumably automatically cancelled out by the public discussion); or that it is in any case impossible to investigate them; or that they can be unnerved by mere decision; or that the blunt, hasty and superficial admission of one's prejudices, before hurrying on to the real stuff, is enough to exorcise or allay them; sometimes bias (that is, adherence to values of such a kind and in such a way that it interferes with objectivity) is even flaunted.

The position I shall take is that an important element of objectivity is to recognise these hidden facets, so intimately related to one's own person, and thereby to discipline them. When we get to know them, their role is changed. Here I can do no more than sketch some of the typical patterns to be found in this regard.

5.2.1 GENERAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND

First, there are the typical assumptions each of us has as a member of the general culture to which we belong. We share some general experience of life with certain other people. Each of us has an unquestioned framework which gives stability and order to our lives. We hold certain things to be obvious and normal, and these are the familiar points of reference in our ordinary lives. We never doubt them, in fact seldom consciously think about them. In this world we are at home. The point is that this taken for granted milieu of ours underlies our science. All of us live, most of the time, in terms of such an everyday stock of knowledge. In a way, science disentangles itself – with difficulty, and fortunately never completely – from this nexus; and it is constantly infiltrated by it. The meanings of this area of our experience are the source of our scientific constructs. When we move into a strange religion, we carry these well-known truths with us. They pattern our observing and understanding. Without them we would not be able to gain new knowledge. They are indispensable; but they have to be transcended. I become aware of them as mine in the confrontation with strange forms of human life. They are ambivalent: they are the wall against which I can haul myself up in order to see beyond; but they are also to some extent part of the wall between me and those other people beyond my everyday world.

5.2.2 RELIGIOUS MILIEU

The religious milieu into which one was born has the same ambivalent character. Being a member of a religion has enormous advantages in studying it, since the participant can draw on a vast store of insider knowledge. This level of belonging to a religion should be distinguished from the level of being existentially committed (being personally religious). Via self-observation a Hindu is able to make a better depth-probe of Hinduism than an non-Hindu would be capable of, simply by virtue of his or her insider knowledge, which is available as an instrument for measuring the validity of observations. The world of Hinduism is then not merely looked at from without, but explored from within. We should not, however, be lured into imagining that having this insider knowledge is a sufficient condition for studying the religion of a group adequately. Familiarity is not the same thing as theoretical knowledge, which is what we are after in science of religion. Being an insider as such does not guarantee validity. This kind of knowledge (which is usually unreflective) has to be transposed into theoretical (reflective) knowledge.

The first is an extremely valuable asset, but it has to be changed into the second; and the second is, as we have seen, partly an extension of the first, but also partly at odds with it. There is nothing that has to be dealt with as circumspectly as things that are all too well known. They can easily become a quagmire.

In these first two sub-sections we have moved on a plane where self-observation could be said to be the required posture. We shall now move closer to the personal core of the student of religion and those dimensions in regard to which one should rather speak of intro-spection. Here we can distinguish between intra-scientific values and the extra-scientific personal values of the investigator.

5.2.3 INTRA-SCIENTIFIC VALUES

It is sometimes mistakenly thought that science is, or rather should be, value-free. A long debate has been raging over this question, into which we shall not enter (cf however, the pertinent remarks in chapter 3). Suffice it to say that the so-called value-freeness of science is itself a valuational postulate. In the terminology used earlier on: scientific objectivity is an aspect of human responsibility. It is a virtue. The unsatisfactory term value-freeness refers to the professional ethos of a scientist. It implies a moral attitude towards oneself and the objects of one's investigation. This attitude infuses the whole process of investigation, from the problems selected to the results obtained. Kaplan (1964:380) admirably formulated the scientific ethos as follows: 'Thus, the scientific habit of mind is one dominated by the reality principle, by the determination to live in the world as it is and not as we might fantasy it. For the scientist, ignorance is never bliss. A robust sense of reality, in William James's phrase, is above all a willingness to face life with open eyes, whatever may confront our sight. The scientist is humble before the facts, submitting his will to their decision, and accepting their judgment whatever it might be. This humility of his is counterpoised by integrity and honesty, by the courage of his convictions, and – if I may paraphrase – by firmness in the truth as God gives him to see the truth, and not as it is given him by tradition, by the Academy, or by the powers that be. And there is a certain distinctive scientific temper, marked by

judiciousness and caution, care and conscientiousness. How far all this view is from the model – or rather, the myth – of science as the work of a disembodied, unfeeling intellect! Surely these attributes of the scientist are all virtues, in the scientist's judgment, as well as in our own; and surely the possession of these virtues is a value to which the scientist has wholeheartedly committed himself.' The attitude of disinterestedness is thus a far cry from anaemic intellectualism and crippled humanity. On the contrary, it is carried by a high regard for the dignity of man, who is here regarded as not necessarily the victim and captive of his own personal circumstances. Zijderveld summed up this stance in the phrase 'intellectual asceticism'. To illustrate the meaning of the phrase he tells the story (1974:222) of the Spanish poet and scholar Fray Luis de Léon (1527-1591) who returned to Salamanca after being held captive by the Inquisition for five years, to resume his lecturing. His audience expected an emotional outpouring or a denunciation of the Inquisition. Instead, he started by saying: 'As we said yesterday .....', picking up the thread of his lecture where it was interrupted five years before. This I regard as noble.

The theme of one's role as a scientist is of course much wider than that of the scientific values only. Comparable to one's everyday milieu and religious milieu, one's scientific milieu could become a topic of investigation. This would include dealing with the academic school in which one might stand, with one's general theoretical and methodological orientation, and so on. In the next chapter this theme will be taken up again.

5.2.4 INTERESTS AND IDEOLOGIES

Science is not self-sufficient, except in those instances where it takes on religious overtones. Usually it is done in the service of other, wider dimensions of life. Different people come to it with different motives and purposes. For these extra-scientific motivational forces the word *'interests'* is nowadays often used. Stripped of its Marxist overtones, it may be used in the present context to cover the various needs that could impel people to do their science – and to do it the way they do it. One person might be attracted by the possibility of obtaining power; another might be drawn by the hope of enhancing his prestige; a third might view it as a means towards some religious end, for example to find a deeper level of religious experience, or to find confirmation of his belief that all religion is opium of or for the people; a fourth might be driven by an urge to widen the arc of his cultural experience; a fifth might envisage the possibility of improving the lot of mankind or of a section of it; a sixth might hope to escape from the technological mentality, or to become more efficient in technological society; and so on.

In concrete cases, these interests are probably as multifarious in their shades of nuance as the number of individuals interested in religion. Consciously or unconsciously, and very subtly, they influence the way in which investigations are conducted, the way in which conclusions are drawn, and the way in which results are reported and used.

A related word, often used, is *'ideology'*. It is also often misused, being bandied as a term of abuse by opposing parties – each usually disparaging the other's views as ideological. When used in a more neutral, descriptive way, it is sometimes understood in a wide sense, to refer to a society's general interpretation of reality, consisting of a description of reality and values applying to life. This wide definition is probably not sharp enough, and it merges too much with the general concept 'culture'. A more stringent definition would give us a more useful tool. Here I understand by 'ideology' a pattern of ideas and values which reflects the interests of a society or a section of a society, and which tends to be justificatory or apologetic, thereby mobilizing the society or a section of it with a view to the attainment of some (especially economical and political) public goal. Ideologies include capitalism, communism, nationalism and other systems. Ideologies are based on interests, but they go further. An interest may be an individual or a social affair; an ideology is by definition a social affair. An individual can naturally share in a socially-accepted ideology, but one would hardly speak of a particular individual's own idiosyncratic legitimizing construction as his ideology. Nevertheless, an individual can of course be inspired by a more widely accepted ideology. Interests may be compared to raw material, which is then taken up and refined via a conscious intellectual process. Ideologies are rooted in interests, and further these interests. Interests themselves rest in basic layers of our lives; ideologies are man-made constructions, thought up by intellectuals. Interestingly enough, ideologies tend to obfuscate their characteristics of being intellectual constructions, reflecting interests, and mobilizing groups. They tend to become absolute systems of legitimation – without being in need of legitimation themselves. The result is that an ideology can easily insinuate itself into the individual's mind and insidiously become an uncritically accepted guiding frame of reference.

The student of religion is by no means immune from this possibility.

5.2.5 PERSONAL RELIGION

One's personal religion must be distinguished from one's religious milieu. Into the second I am born; the first is my personal commitment. The second is the soil in which I exist; the first is the root of my existence. The second belongs to my appropriated world; the first belongs to my core as a human being. I experience the second as penultimacy; the first as ultimacy. The second lies around the first. My religious milieu could become the focal point of my deepest commitment. For example, it is possible for a Christian to transfer unreserved commitment to God, from God to empirical Christianity. Then the religious milieu becomes, as it were, God to him, and in analysing his attitude towards his religious environment we are in fact analysing his deepest commitment, that is, his personal religion. Also, religious milieu and personal religion are here somewhat forcefully distinguished for analytical purposes. In reality, they blend.

The question now is: what is the relationship between the personal religion of the student of religion and his scientific study? More specifically, what is the import of personal religion on the study of religion? To fully answer this question, we would need an embracing background theory on a grand scale, in which religion and science are related. We could then, to mention a few examples, draw on the theories of Weber (who believed that modern societies are progressively demystified and ratio-

nalised), Habermas (1978), Berger (1969; 1973), Luckmann (1963; 1972), Eliade (eg 1974); Luhmann (1977), and Hofmeyr (1979). We would then be able to trace the complicated story of their original intimacy (historically, modern science has religious roots), their progressive drifting apart as society became more specialised, and also of the countertendency, as science sometimes tends to take over a religious role and religion sometimes dons scientific respectability. But this would lead us too far. For our present purposes, I shall only outline how these two movements of the human mind meet in the study of religion.

The great phenomenologist of religion Van der Leeuw said that the study of religion is possible only by beginning from one's own attitude to life. Faith and intellectual suspense (epoche) do not exlude each other. 'Understanding, in fact, itself presupposes intellectual restraint. But this is never the attitude of the coldblooded spectator: it is, on the contrary, the loving gaze of the lover on the beloved object' (1964:684). Ratschow sees the basis for the very possibility of science of religion in the fact that the researcher of religion must be a human being who has been encountered and arrested by 'his' God; the personal religion of the student of religion is the prime condition, without which the student will miss the essence of his object of investigation (1973: 353). Pyle (1979:209) on the other hand believes that the investigator of religion need not himself be religious. But, he adds, his exercise becomes futile if he holds religion to be nonsensical, meaningless or inconceivable. Berger's remarks on the method of ethics is applicable to the method of science of religion. He holds fast to the difference between intellectual selfdiscipline and utopian imagination (in our present context, one could substitute 'personal religion' for the last). 'While these are two distinct movements of the human mind, they are by no means contradictory and can be undertaken, albeit with tensions, by the same individual. I think we badly need individuals who are capable of both movements and who can bear the tension this entails' (1974a: 258).

It would be unrealistic to deny that a student's personal religion would influence his study of religion. It would also be foolish to deny the value of this springboard. One's own religious experience is a mine, richer and deeper than mere insider knowledge about one's religious milieu. Somebody who is completely a-religious or anti-religious would probably be able to make only superficial statements about strongly convinced religion, just as somebody who is colour-blind will hardly appreciate fully paintings of Van Gogh. Conversely, a strongly convinced believer will have difficulty in understanding the atheist or the agnostic, who are to be taken as seriously by science of religion as the believer. We all start somewhere; and the richer our own experience, the richer will the yield of understanding be of familiar as well as strange forms of experience. Von Harnack was patently wrong in claiming that anyone who knows one religion (Christianity) knows all religions. Max Müller was more correct in declaring that he who knows only one, knows none; but we have to add: he who knows one, at least has a starting point to learn something about other religions as well.

On the other hand, it would be just as short-sighted to insist that only a believer can understand a religion. Some important distinctions have to be made in this regard.

First, there is a difference between science and religion. Science is at the same time less, and more, than religion. It is less, in that it cannot pretend to reproduce the fulness of religious experience; and it is more, in that it asks questions not asked by faith and gives answers not given by faith. Of course only a believer could give an account of the almost inaccessible recesses of highly personal religious motivations, but he would not necessarily be able to give a theoretical explanation of those motivations or of the situational patterns in which his religion occurs. To science and religion are attached two different styles of engagement; science is the purposive search for approximate knowledge; religion is essentially response to an ultimate meaning. Science, by its nature, suspends absolute commitment to religious values, perhaps only for a short while, but nonetheless does so; religion suspends doubt. Of course they are related at least by virtue of the fact that they both arise from the one, whole human being who is hopefully not schizophrenic; but the whole man does not exercise all his capacities all the time. They are alternates, rather than alternatives. This is not to deny that to move from the one kind of engagement to the other may be difficult and may stretch the mental capacities of the individual who at times does one or the other. It is also not to deny that one's religion will influence one's science of religion. But the vital point to keep in mind is that the study of religion is not coterminous with religious confession, and that science of religion is not a parliament of religions. To borrow N Smart's (1973) terms: the study of religion is distinct from the expression of religion. There is no reason to attach a sui generis character to science of religion. It is 'only' science (like sociology, psychology and the rest) but as such, it has a dignity of its own.

Second, we have to distinguish between various levels and degrees of understanding. An absolute insistence that only a truly convinced believer can study religion, would lead to solipsism because the umbrella terms we usually employ, such as 'Hinduism', 'Judaism', 'Buddhism' and 'Christianity', are found to be quite gross when we start to analyse the empirical worlds to which they vaguely refer. Even within each 'religion' there are many (often conflicting) views, and if we use an even finer sieve, each convinced adherent would have his or her very own personal religion. If held consistently, the insistence that a religion is accessible only to those who completely share in it, makes all study of religion impossible.

It seems to rest on the confusion of science and religion, and on the assumption that understanding is a matter of everything or nothing. But in the study of religion Christianity is not a closed book to all but convinced Christians, religious scepticism to all but sceptics, or Hinduism to all but Hindus. In chapter 6 I shall take this theme up once more. At this stage we note that understanding is a matter of various degrees and levels of depth. Sometimes, in the study of a particular case, we would try to get as near to the core of a person's self-understanding as possible, but this case cannot be restricted to only myself, and even a little knowledge of others is better than nothing. Like all science, the study of religion wants to be publicly shared; it is not esoteric. Its purpose is not to isolate people in exclusive and inaccessible castles of meaning, but to widen the field of public discourse about religion as much as possible. The difficulties are enormous, but not more insurmountable than is the case in other sciences of man.

5.3 REFLEXIVENESS

5.3.1 INCREASED SELF-AWARENESS

A useful term for the kind of activity where the investigator investigates himself as investigator, is *reflexiveness.* This self-analysis may be distinguished from two other types of knowing activity. The first of these is *unreflectiveness,* which refers to our normal everyday way of dealing with the world, where we take things for granted. A second type is *reflectiveness.* The knower experiences a distance between himself and the normal things. They become problematic. This may be the beginning of the *scientific (theoretical)* kind of knowing, which refers to the way of dealing with the world (in our case, with religion), as we partly describe it in this introduction. The concept reflexiveness is at home in the phenomenological tradition. It has to do with the kind of investigation where the knower turns back on himself in his act of knowing. It is thus a special form, an expansion, a radicalizing of reflectiveness. The student of religion here heeds himself. He follows, as it were, in his own tracks, made as he moves around in his world as an everyday man, a religious man, or as a student of religion.

The background assumptions mostly enter into the study of religion without our being conscious of their import, and they can remain undetected and unarticulated. But once a researcher becomes conscious of them, his intellectual conscience will not easily allow him to turn a blind eye to their existence. He then realises that they (with the exception of intra-scientific values) introduce bias. They can easily change from innocence into pseudo-innocence.

Hiding them is not the answer. At least we have to make them explicit to ourselves. To recognise the inevitability of such conditioning is the first step to overcome its possible deterministic character. Captivity within an ideology is avoided by taking one's situation into full, explicit and critical account, thereby changing one's automatic conditioning into a conscious conditioning and thus changing the nature of the conditioning itself. By becoming radically conscious of my points of departure, my perspectives and my dogmatic presuppositions I begin to take responsibility for them. Increased self-awareness amounts to the expansion of the boundaries of one's responsibility. It may not be easy to do this. It may be disquieting, and it is naturally not possible for an individual to examine himself definitively. In this respect criticism by others is necessary. Through the debunking confrontation of enemies and the co-operation of friends I discover myself. The individual may fear that this self-analysis may lead to paralysis, or that he will be embarking on a never-ending journey leading him away from his real task, which would be to direct himself to his object. But this is of course precisely where the rub is: he has to direct *himself.* The temporary alienation from myself in this process of clarification undermines the dogmatic arrogance of naive realism. A spiral of reflexiveness is part of the study of religion: in discovering other persons, I discover myself, and in discovering myself the possibility is created of moving beyond the boundaries of my own situation and of making creative use of my own background in order to discover other persons. Self-knowledge and the knowledge of others hang together.

Reflexiveness amounts to the personal and situational understanding (cf chapter 4), by the student of religion, of himself; to his being willing, and able, to give an account of his own personal stance (including his personal religious, ideological and scientific commitment) and his own locality in the world (including his general cultural background and his religious milieu), which are part of the *perspective* in which he will inevitably approach the religions of his study.

5.3.2 IS PERSONAL RELIGION CHANGED IN THE PROCESS?

Even though science of religion cannot propound values, it will nevertheless indirectly affect the values of those who take part in it. According to some it will open the floodgates of relativism and scepticism; according to others it will have a therapeutic value for those who study it, the scalpel itself even becoming a sacramental instrument (Goodenough 1959:95). Note that the reflexive effect of science of religion is of course an important theme of investigation for science of religion. In that case, it has to be dealt with as an empirical question. Instead of sweeping statements about the compatibility or otherwise of deep religious commitment and deep scientific commitment we would *find out* how they mix in specific cases. The status of the remarks made here, is simply that of general, brief and preliminary comments. The remarks would apply partly even to a positivistic study of religion. But we are really focusing on a science of religion which is self-critically aware of the constructive quality of its search for truth about religion. It may be said of this kind of study that it could set men free from reified, absolutized religion, that is, from religion which has been allowed to become hardened into a chunk of thing-like solidity, forgetting that religion itself is the deposit in the field of human experience of a mystery lying radically beyond the religion itself. Faith is discovered as a human answer, essentially pointing beyond itself. This science of religion, by uncovering the personal and situational quality of religion, and in the process allowing the revealing of the only too human quality of the human side of religion, can re-awaken men's receptivity for the mystery itself. It could make the student more conscious of his own religion or lack of it, its strengths and its weaknesses, its shades of joy and doubt. One's perception of one's own view of life could gain in vividness and precision, and through this process of self-discovery the person would mature.

5.3.3 'HOW CLEAR IS THIS TO ME?'

In sub-section 5.3.1 especially one facet of reflexiveness received attention, namely the analysis by the student of religion of *himself* as the one who knows. The reason for this kind of activity is not narcissistic absorption in one's own act of knowing. It is rather thereby truly to get to know *the other*, clearing the view as far as possible by removing, or correcting, or at least allowing for distortions by myself, in order to allow the other human being to show himself to me. I want to perceive the other as plainly as possible. I scale the wall of my own personal situation in order to look over it into that of the people in whom I am interested. An important facet of reflexiveness is therefore the analysis by the student of religion of *how he perceives the other person.*

Naturally the investigator will play according to the rules of the particular scientific game in which he takes part. He will exegete ancient texts according to the rules laid

down by the forum of exegetes, interview according to the rules of interviewing, and so on. But there still remains the grey area where irrational forces play around the formal rules when human beings meet other human beings. Here the person who studies others has to decide whether he truly sees what he thinks he sees. How obvious is it to me that St Paul advocated this or that form of government? How obvious is it to me that group X believes this or that, or that these are their motives? How clear is it that religion is losing ground, or gaining ground? Reflexiveness in this regard means to be wide awake as to *how* something appears to me. Exactly how manifest is this or that to me? Along which steps did my mind move in coming to believe this or that? There are degrees of evidence, the impact of first impressions, and so on. These aspects typically belong to the phenomenological field of interest (cf the treatment 'constitutive phenomenology' and 'phenomenology of appearances' receive in this school).

There is a danger of believing that because science of religion does not deal in hard data (facts and figures) quite as impressively as the natural sciences, it is therefore subjectivistic. After all, it is not possible to check on everything, so why not record the first impressions that come to mind? It is possible to 'get an impression' and to 'come to a conclusion' the way a sparrow builds her nest: selected bits and pieces and definitely some technique go into it, but the sparrow would not be able to tell us how or why she weaves as she does. Some see the interpreter of religion almost as a conjurer: suddenly (but from where and how? – his movements are so quick!) the white doves appear. The moral of these similes from the circus and from nature is of course to admonish ourselves to be honest and to take care about what we see. True, nobody would be dishonest or careless on purpose when reading a religious document, or voluntarily entertain self-deceptions about what he sees, but it could still be helpful to underline the importance of the discipline of the mind this chapter has been dealing with. Once more, a first step here is to acquire the ability to describe to myself (and to others who perhaps do not see what I see nearly as clearly as I do) how I see what I see, and how I came to see it the way I do. Reflexiveness implies the adoption of an attitude of questioning self-criticism concerning one's coming to hold certain thoughts to be true. It implies the willingness to look again, and the exploration of other possibilities beyond the first obvious one. In short, it is the scientific habit of mind rigorously at work.

CHAPTER 6

The Social Dimension of Adequacy

6.1 THE ENCOUNTER WITH RELIGIOUS PERSONS

6.1.1 THE PROBLEM, THE POSSIBILITY AND THE NEED

To follow the maxim 'know thyself' (described in the previous chapter) is necessary – but it is not sufficient to guarantee that my knowledge of somebody else's religion may be called true. The real purpose is of course to 'know the other' (so that, eventually, we, humanity, may know ourselves). In the previous chapter we were concerned with the clarification of my conception of the other's religion; but we need to know whether my conception truly corresponds to the other's religion. True, I have to be aware of my side of the wall between us; but my purpose is to scale it, to get to know the other side, your side, of it. What is more, my assumption (some would call it presumption) as a student of religion is not only to see you, the other, from my point of view, but to discover how you, from your point of view, see yourself and your world. Before considering some of the questions raised by this assumption, let us accept as a general conviction that objectivity in science of religion is indeed partly a quality of the relationship between the student and the people studied; and that this implies as a general research-guiding rule: *find out how the persons you are studying experience themselves and their situations.*

In varying ways W C Smith and W B Kristensen expressed this idea by arguing that 'no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers' (Smith 1959:42); and: 'Every religion ought to be understood from its own standpoint, for that is how it is understood by its own adherents ..... They (ie historians and phenomenologists of religion) must investigate what religious value the believers (Greeks, Babylonians, Egyptians, etc) attached to their faith, what religion meant for them ..... For the historian only one evaluation is possible: "the believers were completely right" ' (Kristensen 1969:41, 48, 49).

To discover somebody else's world from within, however, is much easier said than done. Philosophically, the question how to escape from solipsism and how to found the possibility of knowing the mind of another person, seems to present such an awesome task that firstrate philosophers have staggered under it; and under the impression of the practical difficulties involved, some excellent scholars in religion have backed away from it, satisfying themselves within the externally observable aspects. Wach referred to the problem as to whether participation in another's religion might be a condition for understanding it, as the central methodological problem of science of religion (Wach 1923:35). Indeed, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the gap between him or her who understands and those who are to be understood, even when they share the same general cultural and religious milieu. What superficially could appear like mere shades of nuances within the same religious milieu (for example, 'Judaism' or 'Protestantism') may be found to be vastly different things when a finer sieve is used in order to catch the subtler qualities of existential religious commitment. This problem is of course enormously compounded when the contact is sought across the barriers of different historical and cultural worlds. Here the interpreter indeed finds himself separated from the objects of his curiosity by a nasty broad ditch, to use the famous words of the German philosopher Lessing (1729-1781). The demand to see the religion of the ancient Egyptians or any other religion as the adherents themselves saw it in the past, or may see it today, may indeed seem to be naive or presumptuous.

Yet this line of argument contains an important element of truth. It reflects the awareness that religio-scientific concepts and theories have to be kept in close touch with the human reality they purport to deal with adequately. It expresses the desire to honour the integrity of the religious phenomena we study, by trying to meet the religious people on their own ground and on their own terms, and by not forcing the phenomena into the moulds of our own minds. There is no need to argue that since it is impossible to reach the deepest recesses of a person's inner life, we might as well give up the entire effort to see the world of another as it were through his eyes. In our everyday lives we simply assume that mutual understanding is possible, at least to the extent of meeting the practical necessities of our life together with other people. We assume that, however imperfectly, our points of view can coincide, or converge, and that I can put myself in your place and you can put yourself in mine. At least we assume that by mutual effort our perspectives can be brought close enough to one another to make communication possible. This assumption is developed in the kind of approach suggested by Smith and Kristensen. Let us try to describe more precisely what this approach may imply, while keeping in mind that the other's, the believer's, verdict may not be accepted as the only or the highest criterion of validity in studying his religion. Nevertheless, as one amongst other factors, it deserves our close attention.

6.1.2 OUR COMMON HUMANITY

Religious people and those who study them are, before anything else, members of the human race. Our common humanity is the basis on which the project of a science of religion becomes possible. Science of religion does not need as a basis the idea of some universal religion, with the implication that deep down all religions are the same. Neither does it presuppose sympathy in the full sense of hearts beating together in close fellowship, such as is for example expressed by the word 'love' (agape) in the Christian church. But it does presuppose that all human beings share the same human nature, that they have the same longings and fears, and that their religions (as humanly constituted systems of meaning) often show parallels and similarities, making it possible for members of one religion (or perhaps no official religion) to sound the depths of strange religions in some measure. This is why industrial man can be moved by a rock painting of a stone-age San artist. He discovers himself, in his search for meaning, in those strange figures in the faded colours.

The embracing of mankind has implications for the way in which the student will associate with his 'objects'. In this respect, science of religion is the living out of a social ethic of 'Mitmenschlichkeit' (co-humanity), lying beyond positivistic-neutral description. It respects the human dignity of the other, however much he might differ from me. It does not stem from an attitude of aggressive debunking or condemnation, striking at the wrongs in any religion. Neither is it a sentimental plea for understanding or forgiveness, or an ecumenical religious undertaking. Its service to mankind in our pluralistic world is to introduce people to each other under the aspect of religion, and this implies that each be allowed to present himself.

6.1.3 KINDS AND LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING OTHER PERSONS

Before we go further, let us retrace our steps and return to what has been said so far about understanding. On pp27-28 and pp32-35 the 'object' of understanding was dealt with (patterns of objective religious things, as well as particular cases and general patterns of personal religion and religious contexts). We declined to accept a dichotomy between 'understanding' and 'explanation', and decided to mean by understanding simply satisfactory knowledge in a wide sense, and by explanation the means of restoring or achieving disturbed or lacking understanding. The relationship between theoretical (scientific) understanding and religious commitment was touched on, and we saw that although they are not mutually exclusive, they nevertheless are two distinct movements of the mind (pp41-43). It was suggested that understanding is not a matter of everything or nothing, but of levels and degrees (p43). A few related words were introduced (pp44-45): unreflectiveness (things are perfectly obvious; in other words, there is an unproblematic, naive understanding, and no explanation is asked for); reflectiveness (things become problematic, and explanation is sought); the theoretical (scientific) form of reflectiveness (reflective understanding and explanation take on a unique texture); and reflexiveness (a special form of reflectiveness; the self-understanding or self-explanation of the knower, to himself or to others).

Let us distinguish between three kinds of pre-theoretical understanding, namely existential understanding, insider (participant) understanding, and outsider understanding. The criterion used in distinguishing between the three kinds is the degree of sympathy and intimacy in the relationship between the person who understands and the person(s) understood.

We may speak of *existential understanding* when the relationship is close, for example, in a religious *agape*-relationship. The understander shares in the existential commitment that inspires a group, either by birth and the process of socialization following it, or by becoming an adherent by conversion. Explanation here means to make clear what 'we' intend in our religion, or why 'we' are faithful to this particular commitment. There are degrees of existential understanding. The purest case is the individual's self-understanding. Existential understanding shades off into lesser degrees of being affected by or sharing in a religion, until it merges into insider (participant) understanding.

Insider (participant) understanding occurs when the understander has a sufficient knowledge of the general set-up of a group to get around quite easily, but without necessarily sharing in or being affected by their religious commitment. He may be born into this milieu, or join it (conversion is too strong a word for it), or he may even be able to play the role of a member successfully.

Outsider understanding occurs when the understander does not in any meaningful way share either in 'their' commitments or in 'their' world. This brand of understanding is not difficult to achieve. In fact, it is the kind of stereotyped knowledge most people are satisfied to have of most other people most of the time, but its degree of adequacy is low.

In real life the shifts between existential and insider understanding, and between insider and outsider understanding, are naturally gradual.

In four respects theoretical understanding (that is, religio-scientific understanding in the full sense) is distinct from pre-theoretical understanding:

(a) Theoretical understanding is characterised by the attitude of *intellectual discipline,* suspending (not denying) the natural commitments in life (including the various levels of religious involvement with others) far more rigorously than ordinary understanding.

(b) Theoretical understanding is *systematic:* it is (or strives after) the formulation of a body of logically consistent, interrelated concepts and propositions concerning religion. Such a body is called a theory when it is fully developed, a theoretical framework when it is less developed. The relationship between propositions are not necessarily of a deductive-nomological kind, but may also be in the form of a statement of coherent patterns.

(c) Theoretical understanding is also *systematically constructed.* It is formulated in such a way that hypotheses can be derived from the theory, which can then be tested systematically by empirical checks. This critical falsification leads to the

improvement of the theory. In other words, theoretical understanding is essentially open, dynamic and approximate. In principle it exposes itself to improvement or refutation, that is, it implies seeking for new and better explanations. The aspect of understanding with which we are concerned in this section, is this: how can this systematic, knowledge-generating shuttling back and forth between the student of religion and religious people be achieved?

(d) Theoretical understanding refers to the broader existing stock of knowledge in science of religion, to the *forum* of scholars of religion. It is not a private affair.

To what extent is it necessary for adequate theoretical understanding to be based on previous participant understanding, or even existential understanding? Or is mere outsider understanding sufficient?

It may be argued that in fact all theoretical understanding implicitly relies on participant and even existential understanding of some sort. In the previous chapter I have argued that the student of religion's experience of his own personal religion or lack of it and of his own world (his existential self-understanding and his participant understanding of his own general cultural background and religious milieu) inevitably plays an enormous role in his reconstruction of the religion of others. It seems to me that a good existential understanding, or at least participant understanding, of the other's religion is an ideal worth pursuing, with a view to a theoretical understanding with a reasonable degree of adequacy. This brings us back to the general research-guiding rule: if possible, find out how the persons you are studying experience themselves and their situations.

The implication of all this is that theory has to be grounded in the experience of the people involved (cf Zijderveld 1972). The formation of theoretical understanding may proceed in two directions. First, the pre-theoretical understanding may move via low level theorizing (still staying quite close to the actual experience of the people themselves) towards refinement into more abstract theorizing. Second, one may start with abstract theory in a more speculative fashion, as long as we realise that this abstract understanding also has to pass the test of the experience of the religious people. It is not necessary to close the door to the development of abstract theories in science of religion. On the contrary, they are needed. The insistence on sensitive theories (that is, theories that are sensitive to the actual experience of the believers or members) also does not imply the error of personalism (sometimes also referred to as psychologism), that is, the idea that theoretical understanding explains only the subjective feelings, beliefs, ideas, intentions and so on of religious man. It could, and should, proceed beyond that and construct explanations of broad situational patterns. Nevertheless, it is a wise rule of thumb that all theoretical understanding of religion should in some way make sense to the religious people if made clear to them, although they might not agree with it.

6.1.4 WAYS TO UNDERSTANDING

I may belong to the Jewish religion; how then can I, as a Jewish student of religion, even try to understand the religion of Hindus adequately? Or I may be an agnostic; is there an even remote possibility that I can achieve an understanding of African

religion? In this sub-section we shall look at the more practical aspect of understanding religious experiences in which the student may not share directly.

6.1.4.1 Conversion

The first possibility that comes to mind is naturally the actual conversion of the investigator to another religious commitment. It could create a groundwork for religio-scientific understanding, *if* the convert is able to adopt the theoretical stance in regard to himself and to his newly-acquired faith. But clearly conversion cannot be demanded as a prerequisite for studying another religion. It is not something that can be done, or not, at will, depending on the demands of his particular project.

6.1.4.2 Imaginative re-enactment

A second way is the imaginative re-enactment, by the student, of the existential understanding of the other person. The common humanity shared by both, and the personal existential understanding of the student of his own world, allow him to enter into the skin and mind of the other person – admittedly only in a make-believe fashion, but this is still very useful. Certainly the use of the imagination is not to be frowned upon. It is one of the noblest faculties of the human mind, indispensable not only in art, but also in science. Adopting as much as possible the frame of mind of the other person implies 'thinking away' those aspects which are our own personal peculiarities, and adding those aspects which seem to be peculiar to the other person. By self-critically moving back and forth between myself and the other, I can in some measure succeed in reconstructing the existential understanding of the other person. In this vein Kristensen spoke of the 'imaginative re-experiencing' of a situation strange to us (1969:42), and Allen of 'imaginative participation' (1978:90). At best this way would lead to an 'as if' existential understanding. It remains precarious, and in need of vigorous empirical checks.

6.1.4.3 Becoming a participant

One of the ways to understanding is the immersion of oneself into the setting one is trying to understand by becoming a participant in the everyday lives of other people and their religious settings without necessarily becoming a believer. Living with the people, sharing their lives, learning their history and appreciating their cultural heritage – these are a few obvious aspects to this effort. As an insider one could get to know the whole context of their life and the forces at work in it. In that context, one could interpret the meanings of their gestures, their facial expressions, the tone of their voices, their holy places and times, great events in their past, and so on. The conclusions one comes to on the basis of the observation of these signs in these contexts are not formally 'proved'. Yet this contextual experience is important with a view to making valid observations.

6.1.4.4 Encounter

In the three ways sketched so far, the student of religion still uses his own eyes, as it were. He understands himself, or at most he understands himself as if he were the other, but there still remains a gap between all this and the personal experience of

the other himself, looking with his own eyes at himself and his own world. In order to ensure that our concepts and our theories remain sensitive to concrete religion, it is a matter of the highest priority to have the benefit of the first-hand experience of the others, the adherents, themselves. From the point of view of the student, this road to understanding is indirect, leading via the individual experience of the other person. In this regard the name of Freud has gained new importance. His theory of religion is outdated, but his method of encounter with his patients has in some circles become a model of approach in the sciences dealing with man. The truth about the patient (in our case, about religious man) is not the one-sided achievement of the student; it is the result of the encounter between the student and the person being studied in a process of growth affecting both. Truth is found via dialogue.

It is quite remarkable how many statements are made about religion by people who obviously scorned the courtesy of at least trying to find out whether the adherents would in any way recognise themselves in the picture drawn of them. It should, however, also be emphasised that the opinion of the adherents should not be taken to be the final validation of the student's theoretical understanding. It would be naive to simply question Mr Brown about his religion and then take his verdict as the final word about it, on the assumption that after all it is his religion. There is much more to a religion than meets the eye of the adherents. Conscious intentions are part of much more inclusive patterns, which more often than not are beyond the understanding of the adherents. This is also why the open co-operation of the adherents – however highly this has to be valued – has to be critically evaluated. Human beings are often unconscious of their own motivations. Religion often merges with ideology, and unfortunately – as all religions realise in their anthropologies – human beings sometimes conceal the truth. In fact, science of religion has the effect of leading people towards greater self-awareness, honesty and integrity in their religion.

6.2 THE CONTROLS OF EXPERT OPINION

Religious experience admittedly has ineffable mystical depths that are accessible only to individuals by way of religious intuition, often incommunicable. We now have to see clearly that science of religion is committed to making logically connected propositions *about* religion, propositions which have to be publicly communicable and publicly testable. Although religion may become the object of religio-scientific investigation, and although religious experience (the student's own experience, as well as that of others) has to be given its due as a valuable source and a resource in the science of religion, science of religion is not religion. It has to try and attain the highest possible standards of logical rigour and empirical evidence. Pre-theoretical understanding is valuable, but we still have to make the leap, so to speak, to scientific understanding.

I therefore fully endorse Hubbeling's argument (1973:9-33) in favour of the strict application of the rules of classical logic in science of religion, as opposed to less strict (more permissive) systems of dialectical logic. But why be logical at all? Part of the answer to this question (and this is our present concern) is that this criterion has been accepted since the beginnings of modern science in classical Greece, by those who wished to join the scientific tradition. This leads us to an important di-

mension of adequacy in science of religion: its propositions should conform to the standards of the forum of expert opinion. It is a social enterprise, stretching over many generations, by those who share this passion and who in the course of time have worked out, tried out and refined such methods and procedures as would yield increasingly reliable results and lead to more comprehensive and better explanatory theories. This process goes on.

There is another aspect to this dimension, apart from the formal rules and procedures more or less generally accepted by the forum. Even if we agree that the standards of formalisation should be pushed up as far as possible, there will still remain the quality which may be rendered by the word 'taste'. It does not refer to mere subjectivistic and arbitrary preferences for this or that opinion. In the appreciation of works of art for example formal 'proofs' cannot seriously be demanded. In science of religion we have to honour, even in applying the formal rules, the wise ability of discrimination which is developed by long experience with religious expressions, in the company of those who are acknowledged masters in the field. Science of religion needs exposure of its understanding to the mutual criticism of its practitioners, which is necessary with a view to the cancelling of bias. This responsibility to the scientific community of course presupposes, and implies, freedom of thought and freedom of scientific expression, which allows for innovation and thereby for the improvement of the whole enterprise.

6.3 THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF SCIENCE OF RELIGION

The interpreter of religion is responsible: not only to the fellowship of scientists of religion or to the religious people he encounters, but to society as a whole.

The notion of responsibility (according to the fine analysis by Niebuhr 1963) includes the obvious element of *response* to someone; we had occasion to go into science of religion as a way of responding to religion. It also includes the element of *interpreting* the meanings intended by the other; this too received our attention. Two further elements, to which we shall now turn more specifically, are *solidarity* and *anticipation.*

Solidarity refers to the realization that you and I who respond to each other, are interdependent. Our actions and our mutual responses to our reciprocal actions mesh. A bond is created. Applied to the study of religion, it refers to the realization that the student – or rather, the whole fellowship of students of religion – is part of the society in which this kind of search is done. In a national perspective, science of religion is enmeshed in pluralistic South Africa, which is at present entering into probably the most crucial period of its history. There is no possibility of disentangling itself from this social context. Seen in a wider perspective, it is part of the debate in our world between the many and often conflicting parties, and between the present generations and the many past heritages of mankind.

The word 'anticipation' brings the point of the social responsibility of science of religion home even more strongly. On a personal level, anticipation refers to the realisation that the way I act towards you and respond to your actions, will influence your actions and responses. Accepting responsibility for my actions, I anticipate the

consequences, even the unintended ones, for you as far as possible. When we study a religion, we have to realise that this will affect that religion. There is no possibility of honestly backing out of this responsibility. In this sense, science of religion is not only accountable to the people directly studied, but to the whole of society. The coming of science of religion in the nineteenth century was in a way an effect of the process of modernization; it also was and is today a contributing factor in the formation of our modern world.

It is not the calling of science of religion to be directly either 'prophetic' (reforming) or 'priestly' (protective). It should not strive to debunk any religion or to propagate any religion, to convert anyone or to make an apostate of anyone. Neither does it necessarily lead to any of these consequences. It affects different people in different ways. In some cases it will cause an experience of shock; in others it will lead to an experience of liberation and deepened self-understanding in the encounter with a sympathetic onlooker; in others the sober peeling away of layers of religion will lead to the uncovering of a gem of rare value. Let us realise that we are touching some of the most sensitive tissues in human life which are furthermore exposed to severe pressures in our time. Perhaps the ideal attitude of the student of religion can best be described by saying that it combines humaneness with an unsentimental insight into human realities, aware that religion has sometimes masked very human arrogance and folly. In this irenic-ironic spirit science of religion has its role to play in society.

When it moves on the lower levels of theoretical understanding (that is, when it stays quite close to descriptive accounts of religious expressions of all sorts), it need not get stuck in flat neutralism. There is something like an evocative, creative neutrality which may lead to a deepened self-understanding in the group studied, and which may evoke that particular religious world to outsiders, making it possible for them to enter into that world, perhaps even to understand in a limited but extremely valuable way the personal religion of those other people. In fact, a good criterion of adequacy to apply to an account of a particular religion or a religious phenomenon would be the question to what extent it succeeds in communicating it to outsiders. It calls for a high degree of hermeneutical sensitiveness and clarity in literary presentation, without slackening the standards of soundness. On this level, the study of religion could introduce religious man to his brother. Even on the more abstract levels of its understanding science of religion is nevertheless committed to the benefit of mankind by opening men's eyes to themselves and to others.

CHAPTER 7

The Concept Religion

In this chapter I shall not offer a definition of religion. The purpose is rather to outline the field of dimensions underlying possible and existing definitions.

7.1 CONCEPTUALIZING RELIGION

Burhoe (1974:15) may seem uncomfortably close to the truth in stating 'that the scientific study of religion is today in a more primitive state than was biology two centuries ago. We have not yet had our Darwin; we have hardly had our Linnaeus to sharpen our basic descriptive terms and their classifications; and we have not sufficiently utilized the tested conceptual or symbolic systems of other pertinent disciplines to help structure and order our data'. Yet this is an overstatement. Science of religion has made important contributions to the understanding of religion. The problem of concept formation has so far been dealt with especially in terms of two grand strategies, namely phenomenology and logical empiricism. These metascientific positions have been clarified in chapter 3. We shall now come to their applications in science of religion, in connection with the formation of concepts.

7.1.1 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERITAGE

A search for the *'essence'* of religion is typical of phenomenology of religion. This search, as well as the supposed essence, are often rightly criticized for being a-histo-

rical in character: by means of the 'free variation' of aspects of the phenomena purely in the imagination of the researcher, he is sometimes thought to be able to grasp intuitively a timeless core of religion. Merleau-Ponty (1973:75ff) has, however, emphasized that, just as all empirical study presupposes the construction of essences (interpreted as heuristic concepts) by the researcher, so the essences themselves are founded on the empirical study of factual cases; he speaks of the 'double envelopment', even of the 'fundamental homogeneity' of the 'essential' and 'inductive' aspects of our knowledge. The intuitive search for an *a*-historical essence of religion thus may be transformed into the empirical search for recurrent patterns and for a structural identity *in* the historical course of mankind's religious quest, by means of the empirical investigation of the multifarious observable religious phenomena. This is indispensable with a view to a reliable conceptualization of religion. We have to find out what religion looks like out there in empirical reality. But this cannot be done without the prior construction of concepts that might light up our path of discovery. We need precise and reliable concepts in order to find anything out there. Improvement of our knowledge proceeds in terms of this spiral movement between observation and conceptualization.

Where phenomenology is defined as an *independent subdiscipline,* its task is seen to be 'the systematic study of the forms of religion, that part of religious research which classifies and systematically investigates religious conceptions, rites and myth-traditions from comparative morphological-typological points of view' (Hultkrantz 1970:74f). Once again a tendency to divorce structures of religion from the historical contexts in which they occur, may in some cases be pointed out and rejected. Also, one could criticize the relative lack of formal rigour in most of these classifications, typologies, and so on, in this branch of science of religion. But the programme of identifying the recurrent structures of religious phenomena, seeing the relations between these, and constructing classifications, should be accepted as invaluable with a view to adequate conceptualization. Much of the work done in this respect is indeed of high quality.

The notion of *'intentionality'* is equally pertinent to the task of concept formation. Lately this aspect has been strongly emphasized by J Waardenburg (1978). In regard to the problem of concept-formation in the human sciences generally, pioneering work has been done by the social philosopher A Schutz. He makes the important point that all scientific concepts are 'so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behavior the scientist observes and tries to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of the science' (Schutz 1973:6). This spells the end of a positivistic ideal of objectivity, that is, the fallacy of doing science (including conceptualizing, typologizing, and so on) *as if* the 'objects' with reference to which these operations are performed, belong to the realm of nature only. The *'postulate of adequacy'*, as defined by Schutz, demands that any scientific construct should be understandable to the (religious) actors themselves. Thus religio-scientific concepts should consciously and continuously be kept in touch with religion as experienced by religious people. Although these concepts should be fully recognized as constructs and not merely mirrored images of religious reality, they are nevertheless not the arbitrary creations of the student of religion; they are founded on religious experience itself, being sensitive to which is the hallmark of authentic science of religion.

This would be aligned to a programme of empirical research bent on understanding religious phenomena from within the perspective of religious people. We have to find out how they live through their own religion. The notion of intentionality may, however, not be restricted to the consciously held 'intentions' of religious people; it refers to the many modalities of religious experience, taken in a wide sense, including the unconscious levels.

7.1.2 THE DEMAND FOR LOGICAL PRECISION AND EMPIRICAL RELIABILITY IN LOGICAL EMPIRICISM

Logical empiricism has singularly stressed the demands for *precision* and *reliability* in concepts. Its impact on science of religion is of fairly recent date. Our close neighbours sociology of religion, psychology of religion and anthropology have had longer exposure to these challenges and have incorporated much of this school into their research procedures. In these disciplines we witness a better developed awareness of the insistence on accuracy and controlled empirical reference of concepts. Neuf's criticism (1976) levelled against the existing state of concept formation in traditional science of religion undeniably pinpoints serious shortcomings in much of science of religion. According to Neuf, traditional science of religion (rooted in the hermeneutical and phenomenological thinking associated with Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Husserl) is basically irrationalistic in character; its concepts are vague and are not in any controlled manner subjected to empirical checks; its definitions do not measure up to the formal requirements for definitions; its classificatory concepts are not mutually exclusive; and it completely lacks the notion of quantifiable concepts. His judgment that the problematic of the 'positivism dispute' still has to penetrate science of religion, is true. Conversely, one could point out the lasting contributions of the phenomenological heritage, as I have done; and one could with much merit, as I see it, propose that the practising scientist of religion could indeed integrate elements of different traditions as he goes along, without becoming a 'true believer' in any of these schools, and without falling prey to irrationalism, formalism or positivism.

During the last ten years or so science of religion has in fact furnished evidence of an increasing sensitivity in regard to this neglected side of its work, concurrent with a general new awareness of methodological issues, in the course of what is probably an important shift in the general image of the discipline amongst its practitioners. There is a definite movement to develop its investigative skills on as broad a front as possible.

The new awareness has demonstrated itself in discussions concerning the *definition of religion.* In these discussions especially two areas have received attention: first, the nature of definitions and, closely related to this, the question of the empirical reliability of concepts; and second, the distinction between substantive and functional definitions of religion, and between exclusive and inclusive definitions. To the second we shall return in paragraph 7.1.4.

As far as the first area is concerned, some thoughts were exchanged concerning the question whether definitions are *nominal* or *real;* that is, whether they are relatively arbitrary conventions, or whether they correspond (or rather, should correspond)

to things out there, for example to religion as an entity. The nominalist position maintains that good definitions are more or less *useful* tools; the realist position, that they are more or less *true* propositions. According to nominalism, definitions say something about the usage of *words* (for example the word 'religion'); according to realism, definitions say something about the real properties of *things* (for example the entity religion). According to nominalism, the word 'religion' means that which we agree upon to call religion (we draw the boundaries and give the content to the definition); according to realism, the word 'religion' refers to a given substance (we discover the boundaries of the substance and our word follows these). Whereas the phenomenologists of religion (at least implicitly) favour realism, those who work in the tradition of logical empiricism usually favour nominalism, following the prevailing opinion in contemporary logic (cf Robinson 1950, Brümmer (1975), Machalek 1977, Baird 1971, Penner and Yonan 1972).

For the practising scientist of religion it is not possible or necessary to find a solution to the complex philosophical questions lurking in the background, which have accompanied Western philosophy since an early date. There is no pressing reason why we should not accept the restriction of the term 'definition' to matters pertaining to the meaning of words. A definition is then used as a heuristic tool, somewhat like a sieve or a chisel. We cannot make headway in or even start an investigation without stipulating in advance the range of the terms we intend employing. We have to decide beforehand to exclude some aspects and include others in our working definition, in order to give at least some direction to our search. Such a definition of religion is not a definitive statement about religion; it is merely a working agreement, not yet touching on the qualities of the thing religion. Formulating such a definition of religion, we shoulder the responsibility of attaching a *clear* and *precise* meaning to the term. Defining religion does not thereby necessarily become a matter of arbitrary preference. There may be some very good reasons why a researcher or a group of researchers may decide to use this definition and not that one. Although not arbitrary, such a decision will be pragmatic: it would depend on the purpose of a particular project. The main point is that a definition is somewhat like a leading question, stirring up certain pertinent things.

Since the study of religion never reaches a stage of finality, its terms should always be treated as open-ended. Our definitions represent, in a preliminary fashion, the results of research thus far attained; they also anticipate new developments. Therefore, the question whether definitions should come at the beginning or the end of a project seems to be a pseudo-problem. They belong at both ends. The insistence on precise definitions should never become finicky. As Kaplan has argued, if definition in the strict, nominal sense (that is, as providing a set of terms synonymous, as a set, with the term defined, so that they are mutually replaceable) is absolutized, the result could easily be a premature closure of meaning, stultifying the growth of our knowledge. For this reason, definition cannot be regarded as the be-all and end-all of concept formation in science of religion. We do not only need precision of meaning, but also *reliability of meaning,* that is, a trustworthy fit of our concepts (and our verbal expressions of these) with empirical religion. What we are concerned with in this chapter, could therefore more rightly be called, by a looser and wider term, the *indication of meaning* of the term religion, rather than its strict definition, which implies a reduction of meaning (Kaplan 1964:73). The protagonists of 'real definition' probably have such an indication of meaning in mind.

In science of religion, the reliability of our concepts has sometimes been referred to in terms of the so-called 'operational definition' (cf Kishimoto 1961), which (in the original content given to it by Bridgman) said that a concept is to be defined in terms of the operations used to measure it. A famous example is that intelligence is what is measured by intelligence tests. One problem here is, however, that the concept religion relates to observable experience only indirectly. There is no reason why we should burden ourselves with this label.

7.1.3 THE CONCEPT RELIGION AS A NEXUS BETWEEN THEORY OF RELIGION AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON RELIGION

In this section, it will be necessary to elaborate on the character of the concept of religion as being a 'construct'. I shall argue that this concept is a difficult but necessary balancing act between abstract theorizing and concrete observation.

7.1.3.1 Religion as a theoretical concept

The word 'religion' is familiar in Western languages. W C Smith (1963) has shown that this word is, however, not of universal occurrence. The mistake we are prone to make, conditioned by our familiarity with the word, is to suppose that there is a direct and immediate correspondence between this conception of ours and an observable entity in the world out there. The first step we have to take therefore, is to cleanse ourselves of the scientific sin of reification, that is, of treating our words and concepts as though they were things themselves. True enough, in science of religion there are what might be called *empirical concepts.* Such concepts are based on relatively simple and direct observations; 'scripture', 'altar', 'amulet' and so on belong to this category. We also have concepts that may be called empirical in a more extended sense, being based on more subtle and indirect observations, the steps linking them with direct observation being more circuitous; 'prayer' is such a concept. We look at a certain facial expression, a certain bodily posture, a certain way of folding the hands; we hear certain words, uttered in a certain way, and we conclude that what we are observing is 'prayer'. To really 'see' a Muslim salat, presupposes a wide background knowledge. The more we know beforehand, the more we see. The same would apply to concepts such as 'church', 'sect', 'taboo', and so on. In fact all our religio-scientific concepts are positioned somewhere on this scale. The point I wish to make now is that 'religion' is a *theoretical concept* in a strong sense of the term. In general it may be said that concepts are the building blocks with which theories are constructed. There is a dialectic between theory and concepts. A good theory (which is what, in the end, a discipline is about) presupposes good concepts, and good (rich and precise) concepts presuppose a good theory. The concept religion is particularly saturated with theoretical meaning. Of course all concepts, even the most empirical ones, have a constructive element, but 'religion' is particularly strongly linked to thought-out theorizing. The content one attaches to the concept will invariably be determined by one's overall theoretical position. In this sense, 'religion' is the sediment of a theory of religion. As such, the concept is open-ended, changing along with the theory.

Seeing religion with the mind's eye (perceiving and conceptualizing it) is like the diagnostic work of a doctor. It is the recognition of a set (pattern, class) of symptoms, thanks to previous experience of one's own and one's colleagues in the field,

which has grown into an interpretative framework. It is not the pouncing on a given substance with definite contours. This does not permit sloppiness in concept formation. But it ought to keep us from panic at the first sight of ambiguity in the concept. As in some other respects, the important thing is to be on the way, even though the end may never be reached. At this stage, theory formation is not a particularly strong point of science of religion. Recently, the problem of a possible non-reductionist theory of religion has been discussed – that is, a theory in which religion is not reduced to other (eg social or psychological) factors, leading to an evaporation of its sui generis character; but it is quite safe to say that a religio-scientific theory of religion is still very much an unfulfilled programme (cf Smart 1978). In any event, a conceptual clarification points to the need for theory formation.

7.1.3.2 Religion as a classificatory concept

For some purposes a *denotation* of the term 'religion' (an indication of its barest primary meaning) may be useful. Most of the hundreds of definitions of religion turned out are thumbnail specifications of this kind. Most of these are notoriously ambiguous, especially when floating around in isolation, separated from an original theoretical context (eg the definition going back to Tillich, of religion as 'ultimate concern').

For our present purpose it would be better to reconstruct a possible *connotation* of the concept (the most important attributes associated with it). This amounts to treating religion as a complex, classificatory concept. Such a treatment would be more fruitful than a core-specification; in fact, a core-specification may be seen as a contraction of the wider specification. By a classificatory concept I mean that when we think of religion, we should think of it in terms of a cluster of properties rather than as one lump. We might visualize a system of pigeon-holes, as it were, each being a discrete category. The term *'category'* could here best retain the meaning (going back to the philosophical notion, variously expressed by, for example, Aristotle and Kant) of a predicate: an attribute which is ascribed to a person, an action, or a thing. It thus refers to the formal aspect of a classification system (to the set of empty pigeon-holes). The material aspect (the groups of persons, actions, or things which are located in each of the pigeon-holes) is best referred to by the term *'class'*. The arrangement in classes is referred to as a *classification (-system),* and the principles which underlie the construction of any classification system are attended to by *taxonomy* (the science of classification). Some of these principles are that the various categories should be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and not vacuous, and that the system as a whole should be parsimonious and fruitful in that it proves itself heuristically valuable.

The value of a classification system is obviously that it creates order and offers a comprehensive framework. In itself it has no explanatory power. Rather, it is a most welcome halfway-house between theory and the empirical multiplicity, and it systematizes and sharpens, and may even generate, sub-concepts.

A special kind of classification is a *typology,* which is an arrangement in types (cf eg Tiryakian 1968; McKinney 1966, 1969). A *type* differs from a class mainly in that it does not consist of a group, but of an individual case, usually artificially

constructed (often called 'ideal', following Max Weber), which may then be used as a bench-mark, with reference to which all real empirical cases may be compared and measured. A class has sharp dividing lines; a type allows for a continuum, and it is therefore better equipped to take into account gradual shifts in the occurrence of things. A type does not pretend to be an exact copy of reality. It is essentially a heuristic tool, which proves its worth especially on the frontiers of empirical research. In this manner 'religion' may be recast as a constructed type. We would then pragmatically condense and combine some features which we would consider of special importance for our purpose at hand, and come up with a standard case of 'religion' which would not occur in pure form anywhere. It would be our instrument for measuring the religious quality in empirical reality, and it would allow us to compare concrete occurrences with each other by comparing them to the type. A famous type of this kind is Weber's 'Protestant ethic' (Weber 1975). The great Dutch scholar Van der Leeuw (1964) did essentially the same thing when he typified Greek religion as the religion of strain and form, Hinduism as the religion of infinity and asceticism, Buddhism as the religion of nothingness and compassion, Judaism as the religion of will and obedience, Islam as the religion of majesty and humility, and Christianity as the religion of love. Recently, the classificatory and typological procedure has been advocated by Hultkrantz (1974), Bianchi (1975) and Smart (1973).

7.1.3.3 Dimensional clarification

As I have previously suggested, the empirical referents of the concept religion have to be spelled out, and the steps by which the concept is eventually empirically anchored via reliable indicators, have to be formalized and standardized as far as possible. Although the concept is not derived directly from empirical observation, we nevertheless ought to indicate its meaning with reference to empirical observation. We have to end up with the construction of research instruments. In the end even we 'Geisteswissenschaftler' have to risk transforming our concept into an index of religion and collect data in terms of it. But before this stage is reached, a *dimensional clarification,* mediating between the concept and the empirical operations, could be of great value. This step consists in reconstructing, as exhaustively as seems necessary, the common set of attributes (categories, dimensions, properties) underlying the various conceptions of religion we find. In the terminology of Lazarsfeld (1972), this operation is called the substruction of an attribute-space. Following his lead, we could surmise that every specific conceptualization of religion amounts to a reduction of such a field of attributes, combining some of the attributes and throwing such a combination (amongst other possible ones) into relief. Any conception of religion is a selection of some such attributes, and the omission of others, sometimes making use of only a small portion from the whole range of possible attributes. If we reconstruct the set of attributes that may possibly be taken into account in forming a concept of religion, and if we refer the many existing definitions, typologies and so on back to this set of attributes, we might be able to critically evaluate the existing conceptions. We would also be better able to relate and compare them to each other. It would furthermore enable us not to be embarrassed too much by the penumbra of vagueness surrounding the concept (which instances belong to the area of religion, and which do not? Where does religion begin and where does it end?), once we see a comprehensive categorical framework. It would allow us to think in terms of a continuum of religious experience, rather than

in the stark terms of an either-or. And it would stimulate the sharpening of various sub-concepts and the relating of these to each other.

In reconstructing the underlying field of dimensions, an invaluable resource would obviously be the heritage of classical specifications of the concept in science of religion. Another would be the empirical studies of religion conducted by the social sciences. One would also draw on one's own religious experience.

7.1.4 'SUBSTANTIVE' OR 'FUNCTIONAL' SPECIFICATION?

Much importance is often attached to the distinction between *substantive* and *functional* specifications of religion. On closer inspection, however, this distinction does not invite a straight-forward choice between two clear alternatives. At least the following aspects of meaning, shading into each other, seem to be associated with the terms.

7.1.4.1 Structure and function

The shortest formulation of the distinction is usually that a substantive specification answers the question: 'what *is* religion?'; and a functional specification the question: 'what does religion *do?*' If the first question is understood as 'what does the structure of religion look like?', these are hardly mutually exclusive perspectives. They seem to presuppose each other – just as in biology, morphology (the study of the form of living organisms) and physiology (the study of the functions of living organisms or their parts) are complementary. An analysis of the structure of religion into its component parts (to which the term substantive would then refer) would seem to be an extremely important task of science of religion. In fact, in this connection one sometimes does come across the phrase *morphology of religion* in the sub-discipline phenomenology of religion (cf Bianchi 1972), although an exact definition of this programme is not given. A *'physiology of religion'* (to coin a name, maintaining for the moment the analogy with biology) would also be an important undertaking, focusing on religious processes, on the dynamics of religious developments, and on the interaction between the constituent components of religion. In so far as substantive specifications sometimes intend to mean that religion has an unchanging, timeless core-'substance', they go too far. In so far as they merely wish to focus on some perennial features of religion as a historical phenomenon, the interest is important, and even calls attention to recurring patterns of religious change and development. Bianchi's plea for a 'historical typology of religion' (Bianchi 1972) obviously has this dimension in mind. There is, however, more to the substantive-functional distinction.

7.1.4.2 Exclusiveness and inclusiveness

The designation 'substantive' is often used to refer to the *believed content* of religion. The leading question is: 'what do people believe?' Sometimes a further restriction is made, when the believed content is narrowed down to the *belief in supernatural beings* ('do people believe in a god or gods?'). Thus, a substantive specification is often narrow (exclusive) in another sense as well: religion is limited to the *traditional theistic religions,* to the exclusion of systems such as Communism, scientism and nationalism. Such phenomena can, by definition, not be caught in the sieve of

science of religion. At most they are referred to by various terms such as 'pseudo-religions', 'quasi-religions', or 'religious surrogates'. The moment we decide to recast the substantive perspective as a structural, morphological perspective, the need to reduce the meaning of the concept religion to the belief in supernatural beings falls away. What people believe is one important component, but it is not the only one and it should not be isolated from, for example, what people *do:* the element of religious behaviour, which we find in religious ritual. A structural view of religion need not be narrow. In fact, a wide system of categories will allow a more exact specification of the degree of religiousness of systems such as Communism and nationalism; it will allow us to move beyond a blunt either-or specification, and also beyond vague qualifications like pseudo- and quasi-; and it will allow us better to conceptualize changes in religious phenomena, by referring as many phenomena as possible to a comprehensive framework of understanding.

It is also possible to define religion with reference to man's existence in the world, taken in a wide sense. This is exactly what some functionalists do, for example Luckmann (1963; 1972). Religion is then seen as a comprehensive category; it is a way (the most comprehensive way) in which mankind constructs a meaningful cosmos for itself. This basic activity can indeed take on many forms, including the belief in supernatural beings, but these forms are all various expressions of mankind's efforts to orientate itself in the world. In this sense, functionalism is the anchoring of belief in gods in the basic fact of being human, searching for meaning. Taken in this sense, functionalism does not in the least stand over against the search for religious structure. Neither does it exclude the attention to belief content, or to belief in gods. Rather, it comprises these.

Sometimes a narrower definition may seem to be more useful with a view to empirical research, as Berger believes (as an empirical sociologist of religion, cf Berger 1969; as a fundamental theorist of religion, his position is close to Luckmann's, cf Berger and Luckmann 1975).

7.1.4.3 An intra-religious and extra-religious point of view

In one of its senses, the plea for a functional definition of religion is especially related to a specific theoretical perspective in sociology (going back particularly to Parsons and, further back, to Durkheim), in anthropology (Malinowski) and in psychology (Freud). According to this view, religion is conceptualized in terms of its function, which is seen as its contribution to the equilibrium of society as a whole, or to the equilibrium of the personality. This is obviously something different from the senses mentioned in the previous two paragraphs, and it seems that here we should exercise care. It is, for example, a moot point whether religion always furthers equilibrium or is always the sacralization of social and personal identity (to refer to Mol's formulation of this theoretical orientation; cf Mol 1976). It is of course, possible, to stipulate that the term religion should refer to such equilibrium-maintaining mechanisms and to them only, and such a theoretical perspective could open up rich insights. This kind of functionalism, however, has its weaknesses. One of these is that functionalism in this sense is usually a grandstand spectator view, taking its stand outside religion as a lived-through human experience. Traditional science of religion has usually worked with an *intra*-religious perspective. In so far

as a preference for substantive definition has this overtone, I regard it as attractive. It may be linked up with the phenomenological insistence on intentionality. We may then of course also seek to discover the interrelations with other aspects of life, such as science, politics, economics, sexuality and art; and of course our conceptualization of religion will also be of the second order, being *about* religion, and not religion itself. But we would keep the bond with experienced religion alive, and would constantly refer back to the question 'what does religion look like from the inside, from the point of view of the religious persons themselves?'

7.1.4.4 Ideological associations

Sometimes the two positions are related to different ideological positions. In this vein Berger (1974:128f) has warned against the 'quasiscientific legitimation of the avoidance of transcendence ..... The functional approach to religion, whatever the original theoretical intentions of its authors, serves to provide quasiscientific legitimations of a secularized world view. It achieves this purpose by an essentially simple cognitive procedure: The specificity of the religious phenomenon is avoided by equating it with other phenomena. The religious phenomenon is "flattened out". Finally, it is no longer perceived'. Dobbelaere and Lauwers (1973) have underscored this, but have added that a functional definition of religion may also imply the labelling of religion as a necessity, as an essential part of any integrated society, as well as an implicit criticism of traditional religion in society as not being integrative. In the same way, one could point out that a substantive definition may also be associated with ideological positions, for example the separation of religion from the world. Although neither of these definitions inherently expresses (or rather, conceals) any particular ideological interest (Mol, for example, uses a functional definition, but this does not conceal his bias in favour of traditional, supernatural religion) we would do well to be self-critically aware of any hidden cargo our concept of religion might carry.

7.2 THE DIMENSIONS OF RELIGION

I shall outline some dimensions of religion against the background of a broad view of religion. Religious experience, understood as one of the ways in which man tries to be at home in the universe, stands alongside other efforts such as science, work and art. This kind of experience implies the following two aspects: (a) the *'objective' dimension:* that with reference to which man responds and orientates himself; and (b) the *'subjective' dimension,* that is, the specific way in which man responds and orientates himself. Both belong together. In the phenomenological perspective, (a) is not seen in separation from (b); it is the 'objective' pole as perceived and experienced by religious man. Neither is (b) seen in isolation from (a), as perceived. We have to hold fast to the correlation between these two aspects.

We shall break down the *objective referent* of faith into the following sub-dimensions:

concern,
the ideal,
the primary source of salvation, and
the notion of transcendence (including the time dimension);

and the *subjective reference* in terms of two major aspects:

the ambivalence of religious experience, which will be differentiated into the following sub-dimensions:

the apposition of religion and irreligion,
activity and passivity regarding religious reality,
the attitude towards the ordinary world, and
the esoteric-exoteric quality of religious experience (including the social dimension);

the totality of religious experience, which will be differentiated into the following sub-dimensions:

religious feeling,
religious willing,
religious knowing,
religious doing, and
religious speaking.

7.2.1 THE OBJECTIVE REFERENT OF FAITH

7.2.1.1 Concern

Religion is rooted in very deep layers of human existence, far below the surface of the consciously experienced world and the consciously experienced inner self, in unconscious life, perhaps even in the physiological make-up of man, compelled as he is by the basic need to find a place in the world. Aspects of this need may become the focal points of special concern. They could be frustrated, and thus become problem areas where particular anxiety is experienced – although they could be singled out for special attention without necessarily being experienced as fraught with disappointment. Religions may to some extent and artificially be distinguished by reconstructing the underlying areas of sensitivity on the following continuum: nature, society, personal needs.

Man is surrounded by *nature,* and bends to the physical forces that operate there. Nature, as the source and framework of life, can be experienced as an awesome power. 'Primitive' religions (the word is used for lack of a better term) are usually religions of societies living close to nature, which obviously are deeply impressed by nature. Here we should of course include the early phases of the universal religions as well. The religions of Eastern Asia (Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism) in their typical forms particularly refer to harmony with nature as a fundamental need.

Man is also surrounded by *society,* and thus society could become the dominant underlying theme of concern. The concern could take on various concrete forms; it could for example centre in the physical or cultural survival of a group when this is experienced as threatened, or in the problem of social justice. The religions originating in the Near East (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam) have in their most typical forms strongly focused on this area of social identity, responsibility

guilt, history, and so on. Marxism also has this orientation.

The accent may be placed on the *personal needs* of the individual as the primary launching platform of religion. (As in the case of the other two, this accent may probably also be theoretically correlated with a certain stage of a given society.) The attention may concentrate on the aspect of the physical life and mortality of the human person, as seen in the Hindu preoccupation with reincarnation and the law of karma, and also in early Buddhism, whose basic interest is reflected in the famous legend relating how Gautama, being robbed of all peace of mind after meeting with a feeble old man, a diseased man and a dead man carried along to the funeral pyre, renounced the world. The attention may concentrate on the psychological feelings of individual guilt and dread, which we find in the early Reformation, with the accompanying need for forgiveness; or on individual experiences of a social nature, for example the feeling of belonging or not belonging, of justice enjoyed or injustice suffered; or it may concentrate on the intellectual aspect of meaning, under the threat of chaos. The main preoccupation of religion, in this respect, concerns the questions of the origin, purpose and destiny of the individual. It is a strong theme in contemporary religiosity, and has always been a strong undercurrent in Christianity.

7.2.1.2 The ideal

Every religion contains a dream, whether it be religion as a universal system encompassing many generations, or a very private vision of life. It is a longing for salvation (soteria, although of course not necessarily to be understood in the Christian sense), a conception of an ideal world, a yearning for a perfectly satisfying state of affairs. The religious aspiration tends towards totality as we mentioned before, but once more religious phenomena may be distinguished according to the relative emphasis they place on focal points of yearning on the following continuum:

The major component of a desirable state of affairs may be perfect harmony with *nature.* Examples would be the religions of Eastern Asia.

The dream could focus on perfect *social harmony* as in the most typical forms of the religions of the Near East, and in Marxism's utopia of a classless society.

The emphasis could fall on the attainment of *personal salvation,* whether in the form of a surcease of pain, or the experience of eternal personal bliss, or something else. Here we may think of forms of Buddhism and Christianity, and even of the enormous importance attached to the self-actualization of the individual as something which is quite typical of many modern people's search for meaning.

7.2.1.3 The primary source of salvation

A third dimension is that religion accepts a primary source of salvation by which man is deeply impressed and to which he responds, regarding himself as dependent on it with a view ot the attainment of the ideal world. The nature of that reality to which the religious experience ultimately refers, may be conceived in various ways.

The source of life may be discovered in the powers of *nature* itself. This is probably the most primitive layer of religious experience. The belief in mana (the indwelling, impersonal, supernatural power in nature), and the veneration of trees, rocks, animals, sun, moon, stars, the sky and the earth itself as the fertile and productive mother have to be seen in this light. Even in cases where a high god is accepted, he might be conceived of in a deistic fashion, the effective religion being orientated towards the powers of nature. This aspect of religion is still discernible as a deep layer even of contemporary modernized man's longing. Zacharias (1980) has postulated that the desire to re-unite with the powers of the Earth is one of the factors underlying the cult of Satanism, which has always been the dark shadow of Christianity. In a different vein, the ancient Chinese evolved the idea of the Tao: the way in which the universe runs, as a way of harmony, integration and cooperation, leading to peace, prosperity and health.

The nature of religious reality may also be conceived in *social* terms. Some African religions have their most central focal point of religious experience in the tribal or family group, even when they do refer to a supreme being, to other divinities and to an impersonal power as well. Other examples would be modern State Shinto in Japan; those forms of modern nationalism in the West in which the nation or people becomes the primary bearer of divine revelation; the attribution of messianic power to the Party in Communism; and the subtle shift of primary religious attention from God to the social carrier of religion (the church), as it sometimes has happened and happens in, for example, forms of Christianity.

Third, the primary source of salvation may be expressed in terms of a *radical monotheism,* as we find it in the belief in God in Christianity, Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism, Yahwe in Judaism, Allah in Islam and 'the True Name' in Sikhism. Here the supreme reality is conceived as a person, analogous to the human person, but radically distinct from the forces of nature and society.

Fourth, there are forms of monotheism which are not as radical. Here, the belief in one god may shade off into polytheism. In antiquity, for example, one god was often held in special reverence in small political units (for example city states), but this did not exclude the belief in the existence of other gods as well. And a modern Hindu may be exclusively devoted to Vishnu, and yet acknowledge the existence of other deities as well *(henotheism).*

Fifth, there is *polytheism,* as the worship of many (or at least more than one) gods, to whom personal character is ascribed. In some cases where faith is directed to a number of gods, the line distinguishing it from natural and social religion is quite thin. These gods may be recognizable as thinly veiled personifications of natural forces, as for example in the polytheism of a certain stage of Greek and Indo-Aryan Hindu religion, or the polytheism of the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians. National religions sometimes evolved a pantheon of deities whose religious function it clearly was to bolster the state, as for example in the Roman state cultus. Mahayana Buddhism offers an example of belief in gods who are quite radically distinct from the forces of nature and society; the universe is full of compassionate beings (Buddhas and Bodhisattvas) with vast stores of merits, who could and wanted to aid people in achieving happiness.

Sixth, a speculative position in the history of religions maintains that the ultimate source of life coincides with the whole of reality itself *(pantheism).* Thus the speculative monism of Upanishadic Hinduism holds that all that is, is a manifestation of Brahman, and that the salvation of the human soul (atman) consists of the realization of its identity with Brahman. In Western religious tradition too pantheism is a recurrent theme, to be found in the metaphysics of Stoicism, in the thinking of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), and in that of Spinoza (1632-1677), to mention a few instances.

Seventh, the source of salvation may be found in man himself *(humanism).* To Confucius, while not rejecting the existence of the gods and even carefully adhering to the established religious ceremonies of his time, the ultimate referent was the virtuous human being. The Buddhist, in early Theravada Buddhism, would turn his gaze inward into himself in order to be liberated from suffering. The Buddha's message was strict humanism. By self-discipline, each human being may liberate himself and enter Nirvana. In many circles in the modern West we find a comparable distrust of higher metaphysics, and the insistence that man should turn to his own resources for the remedy of all human ills. One form of this modern humanism is the heavy emphasis on the liberating potential of the science and technology developed by man (scientism).

From the foregoing it will be clear that we are not insisting that the concept religion should be limited to belief in gods; but we do regard as essential a reference to something which is regarded as a primary resource with a view to the attainment of the ideal world.

We now come to another important dimension in the complex of phenomena to which the name 'religion' may be attributed, namely the notion of transcendence.

7.2.1.4 The notion of transcendence (including the time dimension)

The dimension of transcendence has been dealt with from various angles. Those who use a substantive (exclusive) definition, wish to do justice to it by talking of supernatural deities as the referent of faith; some who use a functional (inclusive) definition, by talking of ultimacy. The phenomenological line of thinking – in this respect represented by Schutz (1973), Luckmann (cf 1972) and Berger (cf 1974) – has opened up a promising perspective. According to this perspective, transcendence is in the first place an occurrence of everyday life, as the ordinary experience of passing or being beyond. In this sense, 'transcendence' refers to everything which is more than the immediately given. My memories of my own past and my anticipations of the near future, thus transcend my here and now. Every other being which is not me also transcends me. In a more developed way, the referent of my experience of transcendence could become a separate theme in my consciousness, although still an element of my everyday life.

A next step is reached when another reality or realm of experience ('province of meaning') is constituted, which is distinct from the realm of everyday life. In this respect Schutz speaks of 'multiple realities' apart from everyday life, such as the world of dreams, the world of science – and also the world of religion. One strong

point of an eventual theory of religion in this perspective (envisaged by Berger 1974) would be the recognition that the religious experience of transcendence, although unique, is rooted in everyday life in which we meet with nature and society around us. The world of religion then would refer to the experience of (faith in) a transcendent referent, the key feature of which (keeping to the terminology used so far) could be paraphrased as 'salvation'. In a way, salvation is an element of everyday life as well. Ordinary life has its redeeming sides in the experiences of love and laughter, the grandeur of nature, healing, and so on. In religion this dimension reaches a radical degree of transcendence. The relationship between the transcendent dimension and everyday life is a crucial aspect of religion.

In various ways scientists of religion have pointed out the remarkable relationship between the two. Eliade (cf 1974) speaks of paradox, dialectic and ambivalence: the *sacred* manifesting itself in the *profane* things of life. According to Schmidt (1980:98) all religious expressions are 'double-intentional – that is, they are said or performed in the context of the finite world but ..... intended to point beyond the ordinary to the dimension of sacrality, of infinity, ultimacy and unconditionedness, to a holy that is manifest in and through the finite medium'. Berger (1974:131) finds the fundamental problem of the religious life in the fact that one exists in two realities more or less simultaneously. Mol (1976) distinguishes a *relevance A* (which refers to the necessary *distance* of religious propositions as applied to the human situation) from *relevance B* (which refers to the equally necessary *closeness* of those propositions to the human situation). A striking example of the tension of this border-experience is offered in the theology of the Christian Karl Barth, whose life-work was the effort to emphasize both the radical transcendence of God (in his early phase) and the radical immanence of God (as revealed in the incarnation of Christ, in the later phase of his theology). The religious referent is both beyond and here, hidden and manifest, absent and present, other-wordly and this-wordly. The extreme possibilities are complete transcendence (the link between the two worlds snapping); and complete immanence (the two worlds coinciding). In neither case can we speak of religion.

Defining the relationship, scholars of religion have tended to follow two lines. Firstly, the salvation of the religious realm is seen as compensation for the deprivations and problems suffered in ordinary life (so, for example, Freud). Secondly, salvation may be seen as the fulfilment, deepening, crowning or replication of important features of everyday life, for example a divine order may be discovered beyond the impressive orderliness of nature. A theory of religion which emphasizes only one of these two, would be onesided. Both are possibilities in religious experience. In both instances, religious man hovers on the threshold of two worlds: the ordinary, and the religious (extraordinary to an overwhelming degree, but not necessarily supernatural). Crossing the borderline in one direction or the other, man experiences a typical jolt or shock (Schutz).

Adapting a typology devised by Niebuhr (1956) to compare religious attitudes within Christianity, to religion generally, a scale such as the following might have its uses:

(a) *An antithetical relationship.* The religious reality is irreconcilably opposed to ordinary reality and annuls it. The tension between the two is intolerably high. If we include the time dimension of religion here, we could postulate that this orientation, if it projects the time dimension on a cosmic scale, would think in terms of a golden paradisical era, completely lost, and in terms of a future radically discontinuous with the present. If it limits the time dimension to the small individual scale, it would also stress the antithesis between the ideal future and the present condition of man. Examples would be the Manicheist trend in Christianity, and early Buddhism as a way of personal salvation.

(b) *An identical relationship.* This is the opposite point of view. The religious reality and ordinary reality virtually coincide (but if this happens in an absolute sense, religious experience ceases). The tension between the two is virtually non-existent. Salvation could coincide with what is best in culture or in nature. In a time perspective, a typical expression would be the celebration of the glorious now. Approximations of this position would be forms of nineteenth century 'culture Protestantism' and Taoism. In this respect mysticism and its opposite (a-religion) are related. In a-religious secularism the religious reality is absorbed into the ordinary reality; in mysticism the tendency is to seek for an absorption of everyday reality into religious reality.

(c) *An analogical relationship.* This is one possibility, close to the centre between (a) and (b). Although not identified, the two worlds are united in a harmonious vision. Religious reality may be experienced as an extension, or a second storey on top of the ordinary world. The future may be seen as the fulfilment of the present, which is the result of a quite uninterrupted development from the past, or as the eternal recurrence of the patterns of life. Examples are Thomistic scholasticism in Christianity, and Confucianism (where this world and the one beyond were regarded as peacefully interpenetrative).

(d) *A paradoxical relationship.* This is a more dualistic view than (c), but less so than (a). The tension between the two worlds is high. A fine example of this attitude is Lutheran Christianity, whose founder expressed his faith with the phrase *simul justus et peccator* – religious man belongs to both worlds simultaneously. Eliade's concept of religion stresses this experience, with special reference to primitive religion.

(e) *A critical relationship.* The religious reality is the critical criterion of ordinary reality; it irrupts into this world as a dynamic force bringing about renewal, restoring a golden past or creating an eschatological expectation. Here we could think of some typical forms of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also of modern forms of Buddhism as a social movement, under the exigencies of the process of modernization. We should keep in mind that the major religions (the big '-isms' in our field) are in fact very heterogeneous phenomena, and each by no means offers a single vision of the dimensions mentioned so far.

7.2.2 THE SUBJECTIVE REFERENCE

7.2.2.1 Ambivalence

The central characteristic of religion, as said, is the experience of a transcendent dimension which redeems, fulfils, saves, liberates or cancels (to mention a few of the possible words expressing the relationship) this present everyday world. Religion is response to such a surpassing dimension, and as such it is ambivalent: it is the experience of being 'here', in ordinary life, but simultaneously of somehow being 'there' as well, outside ordinary life, in the presence of or at least on the threshold of or perhaps, in some paradoxical way, partaking in a Beyond, lying deeper or further than the ordinary. This ambivalence seems to be essential to religion. It is not restricted to highly intense states of awareness of such a tension. The religious consciousness may find expression in formalized and routinized actions with a low level of psychic tension, for example in some forms of ritual, whose function it may sometimes even be to reduce a high degree of anxiety. But the underlying border-experience is always there.

7.2.2.1.1 The apposition of religion and irreligion

Faith is essentially at risk. Unbelief is the inevitable shadow of belief, and *irreligion* the apposite of *religion.* They hang together. Irreligion could appear in the form of anti-religion, when the two worlds become irreconcilably opposed in the consciousness of man and the Other one is rejected as irrelevant or as unacceptable for some other reason. It could also appear in the form of a-religion, when the border-experience evaporates; it is only one step from the consciousness that 'religious reality is everywhere' to one that 'religious reality is nowhere'. This apposition is the reason why, in a science of religion perspective, heretics, apostates and unbelievers are as important as saints, prophets and teachers in the history of a religious tradition. For example, the understanding of Christianity and the understanding of its negations such as Satanism and secularism (which can be of the anti-religious or the a-religious variety) hang together.

7.2.2.1.2 Activity and passivity regarding religious reality

Another side of this ambivalence is that religion is, on the one hand, a human expression like so many other kinds of expression, with all the marks of human *activity.* Sometimes religious people show a boundless energy in their striving after what they conceive to be religious ends. To outsiders, saints and prophets often seem to be outrageously presumptuous, and religion seems to be the biggest monument of human ambition and power. On the other hand, faith is a being impressed by a transcending dimension which can be conceived as so overwhelming that the religious person can regard himself as completely *passive,* the helpless receiver of a Power from Beyond. In studying empirical religion, we can follow the many emphases and combinations of activity and passivity reflected in, for example, the ambivalence of superhuman exertion and meek submission in some forms of mysticism (for example in the general trend of mysticism in Western Christianity, where union with God was usually sought via a union of wills, rather than as a union of natures); in the arrogance of countless divinely instituted regimes in the history of man; in

the Buddha's insistence on man's ability in the attainment of Nirvana; and in the dilemma between free will and determinism in Islam and Christianity. Religion has to live with this enduring dilemma.

7.2.2.1.3 The attitude towards the ordinary world

Yet another facet of this mixed character of religion, poised between two worlds, is its attitude towards the everyday world. It can vary from a sad, escaping *pessimism* (cf Jainism and one form of contemporary counter-culture in the West) to joyful, accepting *optimism* (cf Taoism and secularism in one of the senses often attached to this term, namely the religious celebration of modernity), and with many forms in between, for example the aggressive world-transformation found in the traditions inspired by Hebrew religion. The ways in which religious individuals and groups relate to the wider society and culture in which they exist, is indeed an important dimension of religion.

7.2.2.1.4 The esoteric-exoteric quality of religious experience (including the social dimension

Religion hovers between being *esoteric* and being *exoteric.* The concept religion refers to what have been called peak experiences. To the insider, such an experience is unique. The concept also refers to routine experiences. It spans both with difficulty, but it has to do so, since they belong together. W C Smith (1963) recognized this tension, but severed the cord by separating what he called the 'inner faith' from what he called the 'cumulative tradition', and by insisting that *real* religion is the inner faith of the individual, which is strictly incommunicable. Yet even he could not maintain his radical distinction, since the inner faith does become amenable to scientific study. This aspect of religious ambivalence has a special bearing on the *social* character of religion. It is in the nature of experience of transcendence to be arcane, private, individual. On the other hand such experiences will evaporate into thin air unless supported by intersubjective confirmation and even institutional backing. Therefore, it needs to be public and manifest. Religion needs and creates supportive brotherhood. In the long run, the religious elite and the mass of mere followers and sympathizers both play a role in upholding religion. It is possible to locate a given religious experience on a scale ranging between individualistic religion at the one end (which is found in mystical experience), and mass (popular) religion at the other end. Between these two a variety of social forms may be distinguished (for example sect, cult, church and denomination), as has been done by the sociology of religion. The ways in which members participate in such groups, is a further crucial aspect of this dimension of religion.

7.2.2.2 Totality

In this section we shall assume that faith is a total response of the whole person. This action, however, is a complex one, to which a number of aspects may be distinguished: religious *feeling, willing, knowing, doing,* and *speaking.* In concrete cases of religious experience, varying emphasis will be placed on each of these aspects. One type of experience will hinge especially on the element of doing religious things, another on feeling certain emotions, another on knowing certain tenets of belief,

and so on. In the study of religion too, varying importance has been attached to these elements. Wach (1975) for example, has in his theory emphasized the two dimensions of doctrine and cult (in addition to the social dimension). Yinger also (1970:17) finds the ritualistic and belief aspects to be fundamental. Smart (1973, 1976) distinguishes the following six dimensions: the ritual, the mythological, the doctrinal, the ethical, the social and the experiential.

During the last twenty years sociologists of religion have worked hard at the identification of such dimensions and the development of indicators to measure them. Among the outstanding examples is Lenski (1961), who isolated doctrinal orthodoxy and devotionalism. Fukuyama (1961) distinguished the following dimensions, which he saw as alternative ways of being religious: the cognitive, the cultic, the credal, and the devotional. Glock (1959) and Glock and Stark (1965) described five basic dimensions: the ideological, the ritualistic, the experiential, the intellectual, and the consequential. King and Hunt have in a number of publications listed dimensions of religion (cf 1972), in which the following six basic scales repeatedly emerged: credal assent, devotionalism, church attendance, organizational activity, financial support, and orientation to growth and striving. Himmelfarb (1975) reduced the various dimensions to two basic types: behavioural and ideational. Although we have to remember that these sociological analyses were made with reference to Western religious forms only (it is particularly evident in the work of King and Hunt), they are highly important, and should be integrated in a wider religio-scientific approach which tries to cover religion generally. Much work remains to be done in regard to the internal structure of each of such dimensions, as well as to the patterns of interrelation between them (cf Roof 1979). I believe that most of the dimensions mentioned above could be translated into the terms of the simple scheme followed here.

7.2.2.2.1 Religious feeling

The religious experience has an affective dimension. Schleiermacher defined religion as the feeling of absolute dependence. Rudolf Otto also emphasized it: central in all religions he found the apprehension, in dread, of the numinuous; from this arises the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness. The object of religious feeling thus arouses fear and wonder (awe). But the history of religions shows that these are not the only shades of sentiment. There are also, to mention others, the deep emotional attachment to the person of Jesus, expressed in love and trust, as we find it in forms of Christianity, and the tranquil joy in nature, which is the dominant colour of much of the religiosity of Eastern Asia; religion can be a sense of surpassing beauty. We here stand before a field, showing not only an enormous breadth of variety, but also a varying depth of level: religious feelings can be of the most intense experienced by people, as in religious ecstasy; but the humdrum boredom, the *acedia* as temptation of the religious professional as well as the indifference of the masses (if we accept a current diagnosis of contemporary Western society), also belong to the range of emotions to be described.

7.2.2.2.2 Religious willing

The religious experience has a conative dimension, expressed by a whole range of terms such as self-surrender, commitment, the leap of faith, promising, choosing, and conversion. Baetke (1952:149f) finds this aspect to be more important than intellectual notions and feelings, and agrees with Feuerbach in regarding the vital forces motivating man as the ground of religion; religious man wills, wishes, strives after, desires something in religion. This dimension is, however, more marked in some religions than in others, and especially so in the religions of Semitic origin. One is reminded of Van der Leeuw's typification of Judaism as the religion of will and obedience, and of Islam as the religion of majesty and humility (as the very word Islam – 'submission' – suggests). It can gain prominence in other religions as well. In Hinduism, one of the paths leading to salvation is *bhakti yoga,* the path of loving devotion.

7.2.2.2.3 Religious knowing

Religious experience has a cognitive dimension. This is widely recognized as of central importance by theorists of religion (for a recent statement in this regard, cf Wiebe 1979). Examples illustrating the crucial importance of intellectual acceptance and understanding, and the peculiar character of religious knowing, abound. Nicolaus Cusanus (1401-1464), the great religious thinker of the European Renaissance, spoke of the *docta ignorantia:* the conscious, knowing ignorance, the knowing of our not-knowing of God, thereby voicing the inherent paradoxical nature of religion. The Other is simultaneously knowable and unknowable. A constant threat therefore to religious knowledge is the danger of coagulating this flow to a clot of certainties (positivism). In Hinduism one of the paths leading to salvation is the speculative intellect *(jnana yoga).* Let these examples suffice. In contemporary modernizing societies, the relationship between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge has become acute, which opens up a wide field of empirical enquiry as well as theoretical reflection. What counts as proof in different religions? What are the relations between traditional religious worldviews and modern ideologies? To what extent do modern forms of religion tolerate the typical modern reflexive realization that all knowledge, even religious knowledge, is humanly constituted?

It would be a serious mistake to regard the history of religions as a history of ideas, however important ideas (the cognitive dimension) may be in any religion. We have to be on our guard against two potential weaknesses in the study of religion; the first weakness is that the importance of theoretical ideas is overrated. The achievements of the great thinkers of humanity are naturally highpoints in history, but they must not be isolated from the broad pre-theoretical levels of life itself (referred to, for our present purposes, as the affectional, conative and behavioural levels), which are the ground in which the ideas grow. The second weakness is that the great religious thoughts are separated from the general cultural and social situation of a specific time, which is their context. With a view to understanding the doctrines, it is necessary to understand the circumstances, the problem situation with which they are reciprocally connected. To know what a religion teaches, we have to reconstruct the situation to which the teaching refers. (We now touch on the importance of the sociology of knowledge for the understanding of religion. And in passing I should

once more like to point out the possible fruitfulness of the phenomenological notion of the life-world, or everyday life, as the soil in which religion is rooted.)

7.2.2.2.4 Religious doing

Religious experience has a behavioural dimension. Here a distinction between *ritual* and *ethics* seems to be pertinent. I should like to submit that these two be seen as two concentric circles, with ritual as the inner circle. Whatever other attributes may be ascribed to ritual, it is at the very least the acting out of certain acts, a form of doing, intended to commemorate sacred occasions or to invoke a sacred presence. It is related to other forms of human doing which also imply the desire to transcend the immediately given, such as art and play (including play-acting). There is a long tradition in science of religion in which ritual is given the pride of place in religion. In the nineteenth century, William Robertson Smith stated forcefully that ritual was the core of religion – myths were variable, and belief was of much less importance. (We shall not pursue further the question of the importance of ritual, relative to the other elements of religion.)

Ethics may be taken to be the extension of ritual. Man moves further into the world lying around the highly charged ritual situation, carrying with him, extending and applying the basic religious vision, expressed in so concentrated a form in ritual. This is why ritual is a stronger indicator of religion than ethics. Ethics lies further from the heart of religion.

Religious doing, in ritual and in ethics, has an internal as well as an external aspect. A silent prayer is a ritual act as much as an elaborate public occasion, and the inner attitudes of people are an important side of their ethics, just as the institutionalised patterns of behaviour of a society. In many religious individuals and groups we find the primacy of doing, rather than theorizing. In Christianity St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) is a shining example of practical faith. In Islam the ritual and moral duties of prayer, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage are incumbent on all Muslims. In Buddhism, honest speech, good conduct and the proper use of one's time and energy form part of the Eightfold Path. In Hinduism we find *karma yoga:* the way of works, that is, of ritual, especially domestic ritual. In African religions, and also in Jewish religion, being religious is a matter of correct practice rather than correct beliefs.

7.2.2.2.5 Religious speaking

Religious experience has a verbal dimension, which has become the central concern in some theoretical approaches to religion. Although he does not work within the discipline of science of religion, the philosopher Gadamer has indirectly devised a theory of religious communication and experience hinging on language. For Gadamer, language is the most comprehensive theoretical framework. In the philosophy of religion, particularly in the analytical tradition, this dimension has received considerable attention. Religious speaking covers a wide range of phenomena, for example the language of myths, parables, sermons, sacred invocation, prayer, dogma, and theology, as well as the fields of oral revelation and sacred writings. In a religious context, words share in the ambivalence of the religious experience as such.

Speaking is stretched between silence before the ineffable mystery, and the need to communicate with others through the means of the ordinary words of life. It has a character of its own, bordering on and yet distinct from the languages of science and art.

7.3 CONCLUSION

The dimensions mentioned may be regarded as a pattern of 'symptoms' allowing us to identify the manner and degree of religiousness in phenomena we encounter. They may not all be of equal importance, but this would depend on the level of abstraction we are working on, and on the degree of exactitude we wish to achieve in specific instances. They may be condensed and combined in various ways to formulate definitions, types and so on – in short, to formulate criteria for identifying religion. For a fine analysis, all or most of them might be brought to bear on the particular area of investigation. They could of course also be differentiated even further. Too fine a sieve, however, is of doubtful value in research. As regards the objective referent of religion, one could for example pragmatically condense the criteria mentioned to the notion of transcendence. As for the ambivalent nature of religious response, one could condense it to the attitude towards the ordinary world and the social form of a given religious experience. The dimensions mentioned under the heading 'totality' may, depending on the practical purpose we need it for, be condensed to two, namely feeling-plus-willing-plus-doing on the one hand, and knowing on the other hand (as is sometimes done in religious research). If we wish to describe the religion of an individual person, we would naturally want to use a finer instrument than when describing mass movements.

The dimensions mentioned cut across the various religious '-isms'. It is possible, however, to construct a type of each of these, with reference to all or some of these aspects. It ought also to be possible to specify the content of important sub-concepts employed in the study of religion. This has not been attempted in this chapter. In passing, mere reference has been made to concepts such as myth and mysticism. Others, to mention a few examples, would include prophetism, magic, ideology, civil religion and invisible religion.

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