RELIGION AND SOCIETY: A COMPARISON OF SELECTED WORKS OF EMILE DURKHEIM AND MAX WEBER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Mary Ann Barnhart, B. A.
Denton, Texas

May, 1976

Barnhart, Mary Ann, Religion and Society: A Comparison of Selected Works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Master of Arts (Sociology), May, 1976, 159 pp., bibliography, 106 titles.

The problem of this research was to compare the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber concerning the relationship between society and religion. The primary sources for the study were The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life by Durkheim and The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and The Sociology of Religion by Weber. An effort was made to establish similarities and differences in the views of the two theorists concerning (1) religious influences on social life and, conversely, (2) social influences on religion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sociology of religion is an academic discipline in which the relationships between religion and society are studied scientifically. Based on the assumption that religion is an integral part of social life, research in this field is designed to investigate the various ways that religious beliefs, practices, and institutions influence and are influenced by social structures and social processes.

Historical Development of the Discipline

European Beginnings

With roots in the French Revolution and the Protestant Reformation, the sociology of religion took form in the work of such early European sociologists as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel. The development of the social sciences in general and the sociology of religion in particular was a part of the process of secularization.[1] Positivism, promoted by Auguste Comte in France, taught that the primitive imagination of religion and the abstractions of philosophy were no longer credible in light of the emerging scientific study of social life. The age-old questions with which philosophy had struggled were thought to be resolved or dissolved by science, the only instrument leading to positive

[1] Norman Birnbaum and Gertrud Lenzer, editors, Sociology and Religion (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 5.

knowledge. Supernatural explanations were being replaced with the view that all social phenomena were man-made.[2]

Herbert Spencer, E. B. Tylor, Werner Sombart, Ernst Troeltsch, and Auguste Comte are among the scholars who worked diligently with problems in religion. The separation of education from the institutional church provided a new way to study religion. The founding fathers of sociology were confronted with societies in rapid social change. The relationship of religion to all areas was being called into question.

Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), influenced by the events of their time, were compelled to look at religion. Each made a decided step away from positivist thought by giving to religion a unique and indispensable role in all forms of social organization. Contrary to much of the thinking about religion in their time, both men believed that religion was one of the real forces shaping modern society. Although different in orientation, each developed systematic theory for the sociological study of religion. They summed up and embodied in their writings the conflicting interpretations of society and religion that had preoccupied most social theorists for a century.[3] During the period between 1895 and 1920, Weber and Durkheim became the actual founders of the discipline of the sociology of religion. Max Weber coined the term "Religionssoziologie."[4]

---

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Max Weber, "Translator's Preface," The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston, 1963), p. x.

Development in the United States

In spite of claims by social scientists that religion would not survive the scientific age, the sociology of religion took hold in the United States largely because of two factors. In the first place, religion was a significant influence in the social life of the nation.[5] Many of the "founding fathers" of American sociology were either Protestant clergymen or sons of Protestant clergymen.[6] The sociology of religion, largely oriented toward social problems and religious institutions, was taught as Christian sociology in American seminaries before sociology was offered in the curriculum of secular arts and science colleges. Except for the notable efforts of H. Paul Douglass and Edmund de S. Brunner,[7] little methodological work was produced prior to the 1940s.

The second factor which influenced the development of the sociology of religion in the United States was the translation into English of the theoretical work on religion by Durkheim and Weber. Talcott Parsons has been particularly instrumental in bringing to the attention of the American scientific community the ideas of European sociologists on the subject of religion.[8] Interested especially in Weber and Durkheim, he translated into

---

[5]David Moberg, "Some Trends in the Sociology of Religion in the USA," Social Compass, XIII (1966), 239, and William M. Newman, editor, The Social Meanings of Religion (Chicago, 1974), p. 5.

[6]Ibid.

[7]H. Paul Douglass and Edmund de S. Brunner, The Protestant Church as a Social Institution (New York, 1935).

[8]Talcott Parsons, "The Theoretical Development of the Sociology of Religion," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (April, 1944).

English The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism[9] by Weber and has provided a detailed summary of The Sociology of Religion, also by Weber. As recently as 1973, Parsons completed his second major study of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life[10] by Durkheim.

Since the appearance in English of these works, sociological research on religion has flourished in the United States. A major study of Gerhard Lenski in 1961 produced empirical evidence that religion is a sociological variable as significant as that of social class.[11] Empirical work progresses consistently now, and textbooks are available for courses in the sociology of religion in colleges and universities.

Research institutes and scholarly periodicals devoted to the advancement of the sociology of religion have emerged not only in such Western European countries as Germany, France, Norway, Holland, and Switzerland, but also in the United States. The American groups and their respective journals are: The Religious Research Association, Review of Religious Research; The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion; and The Association for the Sociology of Religion, Sociological Analysis.

In spite of opposition from some areas of sociology, and without government funding, these organizations continue to produce empirical data and to exchange theoretical interests. The discipline is coming into its

---

[9]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958).

[10]Parsons, "Durkheim on Religion Revisited: Another Look at The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," Beyond the Classics, edited by Charles Glock and Phillip Hammond (New York, 1973), pp. 156-180.

[11]Gerhard Lenski, The Religious Factor (New York, 1961).

own. Some researchers say that it is now time to put aside any concern for the survival of the discipline.[12] The present need is to develop a solid theoretical framework for empirical research.

Contributions of Emile Durkheim to the Sociology of Religion

Overview and Biography

David Emile Durkheim made religion a central concentration of study for at least fifteen years. Mastering the data of ethnography, he became better acquainted with Australian tribal life than with life in his own native France.[13] Durkheim published numerous articles on religion in L'Année sociologique, which he founded in 1898, taught lecture courses in the sociology of religion, and encouraged others to publish in the field. The scientific study of religion was the leitmotif of his sociology.[14] His last book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,[15] is a milestone in the scientific understanding of religious culture.[16]

Durkheim was born at Epinal in the eastern French province of Lorraine on April 15, 1858. The progeny of three generations of rabbis, he attended

---

[12]Charles Buehler, Garry Hesser and Andrew Weigert, "A Study of Articles on Religion in Major Sociology Journals: Some Preliminary Findings," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, XI (June, 1972), 170.

[13]Robert N. Bellah, "Durkheim and History," American Sociological Review, XXIV (August, 1959), 457.

[14]Edward Tiryakian, "Introduction to a Biographical Focus on Emile Durkheim," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, III (April, 1964), 247.

[15]Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London, 1915).

[16]Robert Nisbet, The Sociology of Emile Durkheim (New York, 1974), p. 166.

rabbinical school and seemed destined for the rabbinate. However, his conviction that a tight group can be repressive of individuality led him to break with his religious heritage in pursuit of wider academic knowledge. A serious student involving himself in arguments and discussions with fellow students and later with colleagues, he did not stand on the sidelines of intellectual issues but worked for the integration of knowledge. When he began to study and teach religion, for example, he wrote: "That course of 1895 marked a dividing line in the development of my thought, to such an extent that all my previous researches had to be taken up afresh in order to be made to harmonize with these new insights."[17]

Devoted to the quest for truth, he also was concerned throughout his life with the problem of morality. It was his hope that through the efforts of science, humanity would be enlightened and enriched. During the fifteen years that he was professor at Lycée de Troyes in Bordeaux, he published The Division of Labor in Society, The Rules of Sociological Method, and Suicide and came to feel that sociology was "in fashion" in the academic world.[18] From 1902 to 1917 he was professor in the Science of Education at the Sorbonne in Paris.

His son, André, became his most esteemed student and later his colleague in research. Tragically, André, as well as many of Durkheim's students and colleagues, was killed in active duty in World War I. Though he still worked

---

[17]Steven Lukes, Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work (New York, 1972), p. 237, citing an article written by Durkheim in 1907, "Lettres au Directeur de la Revue Néo-scolastique," RNS, xiv, pp. 606-607.

[18]Lewis A. Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought (New York, 1971), p. 146.

vigorously both academically and politically, the last year of his life was marked by grief and imperfect health.

Methodology

Concerned with establishing sociology as a science equal to the natural sciences, Durkheim adhered to a general methodology when dealing with a new subject: (1) he carefully defined the area to be studied; (2) he presented former opinions and eliminated the ones that seemed incompatible with the data; and (3) he formulated a detailed sociological account of the phenomenon in question.

Contending that much of the study regarding religion had proceeded on vague definitions and weak methodological comparisons,[19] he presented a careful definition of religion as a system of interrelated parts. In attempting to include all cultures in his purview, he did not make the belief in the supernatural or in divinities a defining characteristic of religion. What is found everywhere, he believed, was a division of the world into two categories: the sacred and the profane. These categories vary with the society in question, and the objects or beings maintain their sacred quality, not in their intrinsic nature, but through the awe and respectful attitude of the believers. The rites and activity of the group generate and maintain the beliefs. The community which shares these beliefs and rites is designated by the term "Church." "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say,

---

[19]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 23.

things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."[20]

For an explication of the definition he needed an experiment. Because it was in the nature of his method to look at structures in their earliest forms, he looked for an elementary religion to study. Australian totemism was the simplest expression of the tie between religion and social organization that he could find. In describing Australian society and religion he wrote: "they represent two successive moments of a single evolution, so their homogeneousness is still great enough to permit comparisons."[21]

Contrary to early twentieth-century opinions on totemism, Durkheim found the activity of participants in totemism to be of a religious nature. He selected as data for his study the extensive ethnographic records on the Australian aborigines. Although he never set foot on Australian soil, he immersed himself in the social life of the aborigines, making precise analyses of all practices and behaviors. It was here that behavior could be observed without the "luxuriant vegetation" of theologies or the multiplicity of groups and interactions that obscure essential motiviations.[22] He assumed that by observing the relations in this most primitive religion, he would find the essential elements common to all religions.[23]

Perspective

Durkheim's classic work, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, is a summary of his thinking on religion. In it he recorded his observations

---

[20] Ibid., p. 47. Durkheim's italics.

[21] Ibid., p. 96.

[22] Ibid., p. 5.

[23] Ibid., p. 8.

of the totemic religion and his general theory of the social meaning of religion.

The clan had regular cultic activity for celebrating and rejoicing or for expressing sorrow. Men became revitalized in the activity of the cult.[24] The totemic emblem (an animal or plant by which the group identified itself) provided an ever-present symbol of the cultic activity when the group was dispersed in search for food. In marking their dwellings or their bodies with the totemic emblem, the members of the clan internalized the force that they experienced in their group association.[25] The moral force that dominates and sustains religious man was found in the coming together of people.

There were no evidences of belief in supernatural beings in the religion Durkheim studied. All that was needed to give meaning and direction to the existence of the participants came from the force of society. He concluded that the source of religion was not in dreams, illusions, or supernatural beings, but in society. According to Durkheim, "a society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds, merely by the power it has over them."[26]

In his religious belief and practice, the primitive expressed all that he experienced in social life. There was cultic activity for expressing both joy and sorrow. Indeed, all the social institutions have been born in religion. Durkheim said, "It is obviously necessary that the

---

[24] Ibid., pp. 401, 408.

[25] Ibid., p. 209.

[26] Ibid., p. 206.

religious life be the eminent form and, as it were, the concentrated expression of the whole collective life."[27] Durkheim found a variety and richness in primitive religion not encountered anywhere else. This religion had elements of recreation, esthetics, and was even the source of science and philosophy. Everything came from the force to which Comte had refused to grant objective value.[28] "Religious forces are real," wrote Durkheim, "howsoever imperfect the symbols may be, by the aid of which they are thought of."[29]

For Durkheim, collective social life was the primary reality, and his theory of religion and knowledge showed that even the categories of human thought are not inherent in the individual, but are formed and shaped in the womb of society. The individual experiences social life not only as awesome, but compelling. Durkheim's functionalist hypothesis concerning the role of religion in the maintenance of social solidarity remains central to anthropological work, and it is a major theoretical formulation for the sociology of religion.[30]

Religion as a part of the collective conscience provides social cohesion and social control. The idea of the collective conscience was formulated by Durkheim before he embarked on the sociology of religion. It is a concept that appears in all of his major works. The collective conscience, formed out of the association of groupings of individuals,

---

[27] Ibid., p. 419.

[28] Ibid., p. 204.

[29] Ibid.

[30] For a careful analysis of this "enduring legacy" see Whitney Pope, "Durkheim as a Functionalist," The Sociological Quarterly, XVI (Summer 1975), 361-379.

provided in organic, differentiated society a moral unity comparable to that known in the primitive world. Society is the "consciousness of the consciousnesses"[31] and thus is "the most powerful combination of physical and moral forces of which nature offers us an example."[32]

Durkheim believed that he had accounted scientifically for the collective origin of religion. Behind former misconceptions about the role of religion in society stands a profound religious reality that can be discovered and observed. Religion as an objective or public reality can survive the tests of science and experience, and can become an even greater service to man. To make religion self-conscious of itself would not eliminate it but transform it.[33]

Contributions of Max Weber to the Sociology of Religion

Overview and Biography

To persons acquainted with the social sciences, the name of Max Weber arouses a sense of awe. Acclaimed as the "towering figure" in modern sociology,[34] he is without question the outstanding German figure in the rise of the sociology of religion.[35] A scholar of unsurpassed stature, he had at his command a wide range of knowledge in such areas as economics, politics, religion and esthetics. Three major interests dominated his prolific work: (1) the methodology of the social sciences,

---

[31] Ibid., p. 444.

[32] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 446. [33] Ibid., p. 430.

[34] Arthur Mitzman, The Iron Cage, An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber (New York, 1969), p. v.

[35] Max Weber, "Translator's Preface," The Sociology of Religion, p. x.

(2) the sociology of religion, and (3) the study of the progressive rationalization of life as the overriding trend of Western civilization. Beginning with an examination of the relation between the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, he pursued the relationship between religious beliefs and economic and social conditions in a comparative analysis of the great religions of the world.

Born in Erfurt in Thuringia, April 21, 1864, Max Weber moved with his family to Berlin in 1869. He grew up under the influence of an authoritarian father who was a leader in the affairs of the National Liberal party. Political notables were regular visitors in the Weber home. His mother was sternly religious and strongly humanitarian. Developing intellectual interests at an early age, he began the study of law at 17. In 1894 he accepted a full professorship at Freiburg.

Weber experienced considerable tension because of strained relations between his parents. Following the death of his father, he experienced a nervous collapse. Unable for many months to meet the regular responsibilities of a professorship, he travelled in Italy, Corsica, and Switzerland. He absorbed himself in a vast collection of literature. In 1904 Weber assumed with Werner Sombart the editorship of Archiv fur Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, the leading social science journal in Germany. In 1908 he helped to organize the German Sociological Association. His works include studies in philosophy, history, economics, and sociology. A committed nationalist throughout his life, he served as a Prussian officer but notably was not respectful of the Kaiser.

Although describing himself as religiously "unmusical," he spent a major part of his scholarly career in concentrated and passionate investigations of religious orientations. His publication of Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism) in Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik in 1904-1905 jolted the intellectual world.[36] Its appearance immediately drew scholars from sociology, history, theology, and economy into a debate that has remained alive to the present day. This publication marked the beginning of his study of the great religions of the world. In 1918 he lectured at the University of Vienna on the sociology of the world religions and on politics. Shortly after his death in 1920 his monographs and studies in the sociology of religion were collected in Gesammelte Aufsätze sur Religionssoziologie (Collected Works in the Sociology of Religion), a three-volume work.[37] A large number of his works on religion are included in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Economy and Society).[38] Many of these studies now appear in English translation.

Methodology

Previous sociological research had followed an historical comparative approach. Weber refined the method of the social sciences by his typologies and by his skill in isolating variables to see how one factor influences

---

[36]Robert Green, Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics (Boston, 1959), p. vii.

[37]Weber, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Tübingen, Germany, 1920-21).

[38]Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Tübingen, Germany, 1922).

or is influenced by others. For this reason, R. H. Tawney could say that the method in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was as important as its conclusions.[39]

From his studies of economics and history, Weber observed a tendency in Western societies to systematize their activities into rigid forms of organization and rules. Rationality appeared increasingly to be the mode of cognition and evaluation in twentieth century Western societies.[40] Eastern societies developed differently. In the caste system, for instance, individual artisans were appreciated and recognized for their personal development in a craft. In the West, there was a definite trend toward mass production and bureaucratization of business and industry.

Seeing many interacting factors operating in both Eastern and Western cultures, Weber could not regard any one factor as predominate. He was impressed with the influence of religious behavior on all activities of life. He thought that it was not really possible to study the religious behavior of men without at the same time studying their economic, political, and moral behavior.[41] However, in order to learn as much as possible about the influence of religion, he decided to focus on features of

---

[39]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 1(b).

[40]Raymond Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought II, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber, translated by Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (Garden City, 1970), p. 300; and Dennis Wrong, editor, Max Weber (New York, 1970), p. 29.

[41]Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought II, p. 296; Julien Freund, The Sociology of Max Weber, translated by Mary Ilford (New York, 1968), p. 176.

religion that are important for economic ethics and on their relationship to economic rationalism. Specifically, he decided to "underscore those features in the total picture of religion which have been decisive for the fashioning of the practical way of life, as well as those that distinguish one religion from another."[42]

Weber had extensive knowledge of the various groups that he studied. He acquired detailed information concerning the material conditions, political systems, factors of climate and geography, and the religious institutions of various cultures of the world. His knowledge of several languages was an important aid in his study.

For sources of data, Weber selected the documents of five world religions: Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Christianity. He acquainted himself also with Judaism after having done a specialized study of the Old Testament. For purposes of drawing basic distinctions between Eastern and Western cultures, he placed religions in two basic categories: (1) religions of adaptation and (2) religions of conviction. Religions of adaptation (Confucianism, for example), as religions of order and sacred law, were usually accepting of their world and did not wish to be saved from it. By contrast, the believers in the religions of conviction were intent on seeking some type of salvation because they found the world around them to be unsupportive and often even threatening. When they regarded other people as part of the threatening environment, then they themselves became a threat to their neighbors and even a focus

---

[42]Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, edited and translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), p. 294.

of tension and conflict among and within themselves. Often their religious conflicts spilled over into such areas as economics, politics, art, and learning.

In order to compare religions efficiently, Weber set up several concepts in the form of "ideal types" or typologies: prophet, priest, sorcerer, mysticism, ascetism, and Protestantism. By using such ideal types, his study was not restricted to religion in a specific time and place. He was able to compare the prophet Muhammad, founder of the Muslim religion, with the prophet Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church. Or, he was able to look at the mystagogues in a number of societies and to draw out similarities and differences among the mystagogues in their peculiar social settings. With this procedure, he observed the conditions under which new religions were likely to arise. Situations in which systems of religious ethics developed also became visible.

Although Weber dealt with complex institutions and sociocultural arrangements, his primary unit of analysis was the individual actor.[43] It is the individual actor who is placed in conflict with norms and values. Actors make decisions and actors make up the institutions and groups that are observed to be in interaction.

Perspective

Religion as an inseparable aspect of social action.--Weber saw religious behavior as a significant and inseparable aspect of social

---

[43]Don Martindale, The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory (Boston, 1960), p. 385; Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought, p. 218.

behavior. In his work, human beings are purposive creatures with goals and imperatives that give meaning to their behavior. The striving and struggling to realize these goals or to embody these imperatives is a major portion of human conduct or human action.[44] It is not surprising, therefore, that Weber found it necessary to immerse himself in the literature of those religious believers who face death, suffering, and the like. Only until the sociologist knows what the believers themselves think about their own periods of helplessness will he be able to understand their religious behavior as meaningful action. Only until the sociologist understands what work and the pursuit of profit means to the Protestant will he understand the "strange" blending of economic and religious behavior among Protestants. The strangeness of the behavior is demystified only when the connection between faith and profit is seen "inside" the subjective experience of the Protestant believer. The failure to go "inside" the belief system of the Protestant in order to do sociological inquiry may be compared to the failure of a biochemist to use the microscope to look "inside" his special unit of analysis.

Weber did not spend time working out a definition of religion.[45] He was interested in finding the meaning of particular religions for the believers. Existence of divine beings was not a question for sociological analysis, but the fact that men believed in divine beings and regulated their behavior accordingly was essential to sociological explanation.

---

[44]Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought II, pp. 222, 238; Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought, pp. 218-219.

[45]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 1.

For Weber, whether Luther "really" encountered God or whether the Protestant Reformation was in fact divinely caused and directed, was irrelevant. What was important was that Luther believed that there was a God who was providentially leading him to oppose some of the practices of the pope in Rome. Weber's view was that sociologists and historians will never understand profoundly the Protestant Reformation until they understand what the Christian doctrines and ideas meant to Luther himself and to other figures of the Reformation.

The nature of the influence of religious ethics.--The role of religious ethics in motivating and directing practical conduct was a steady and central theme in the work of Weber. He concluded that religions of conviction which develop an organized priesthood and a rationalized ethical system influence practical conduct significantly and for a long duration. Ethical systems set religious institutions in tension with other realms of activity; the demands and values of religion may conflict with other realms of the society. His observation that "asceticism descended like a frost on the life of 'Merrie old England'"[46] is descriptive of the effect of the Puritan movement on the esthetic and recreational life of persons in the community.

The relationship between religion and social class.--Weber believed that certain types of religion are associated with certain social classes. He characterized at one point the class types who were the primary carriers

---

[46]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 168.

or propagators of the various religions.[47] While peasants tend to adhere to magical religion, the middle classes express religion in a variety of ways. A rational system of ethics is most likely to appear within the middle classes. For Max Weber, "even the most profound difference between East and West is, below all the differences of faith, primarily a question of classes."[48]

Prophetic breakthrough.--Weber analyzed conditions under which a prophetic breakthrough might occur. Established religion might be challenged with the appearance of a prophet or charismatic leader announcing a new doctrine or a needed reform in current doctrine. Peasants, characterized by traditional or magical religion, are not likely to be attentive to a new message unless they are under some kind of pressure from an adjoining community. Ethical prophecy, in which the prophet is defined as an "instrument" with a special message, is more likely to effect changes than exemplary prophecy, in which the prophet is defined as a "vessel."

Religion as the quest for cosmic meaning.--The variety of social conditions demonstrated to Weber that religion meets certain human and social needs. He made clear in the beginning of The Sociology of Religion that the conditions and effects of religion are observed in everyday purposive conduct and that religious behavior "follows rules of experience."[49] When a god or a form of religion no longer meets the needs of experience, a new

---

[47]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 132.

[48]Carlo Antoni, "Religious Outlooks and Classes," Max Weber, edited by Dennis Wrong, p. 138.

[49]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 1.

form may be instituted. The way gods are represented depends upon the particular community. In the military minded religion of Islam, the god was a lord of unlimited power, and the teachings were not directed toward conversion, but toward purposes of war and promoting the superiority of Islam.[50]

Weber assumed an ineradical demand for theodicy.[51] Not only is the practical existence of man related to his religion, but the metaphysical needs of the human mind are prompted by "an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position toward it."[52] The worldview that men accept in their religion influences their behavior in relationship to all areas of activity. Those who are dissatisfied with their lot in this life could be happier if their religion promised something better in the next life.

While Marx and others predicted that religion would soon wither away, Weber slowly articulated his thesis that religion, far from being a mere epiphenomenon, was in fact a significant ingredient of social interaction.

Durkheimian and Weberian Traditions in the Sociology of Religion

More than any other thinkers, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber set the stage for the development of the sociology of religion. Their landmark studies, formulated around the turn of the century, established sociological

---

[50] Ibid., pp. 262-263.

[51] Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," p. 275.

[52] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 117.

study of religion as an academic enterprise, and their theories have provided a continuing influence on the development of the discipline. Today, sociological knowledge of religion is organized largely in terms of Durkeimian and Weberian perspectives or traditions.[53] Roland Robertson recently concluded from his analysis of sociological literature on religion that all contemporary research on the sociology of religion can be identified under these two perspectives.[54]

The Durkeimian and Weberian traditions in the sociology of religion have remained relatively separate and distinct.[55] Although many scholars recognize the need to synthesize divergent theories, that is, to bridge theoretical gaps between major perspectives where it is possible to do so, little effort has been made in this direction in the sociology of religion.

---

[53]Werner Stark, Types of Religious Culture, Volume V of The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom, 5 volumes (New York, 1966), p. 434; Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion: A Sociological View (New York, 1971), pp. 60-61; Newman, editor, The Social Meanings of Religion, pp. 73, 98, 102.

[54]Roland Robertson, The Sociological Interpretation of Religion (New York, 1970), p. 7.

[55]Lukes, Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work, p. 397; Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, "Two Sociological Traditions," Scholarship and Partisanship (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 282-298; Andrew Greeley, Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion (New York, 1972), pp. 83, 126; Lawrence W. Sherman, "Uses of the Masters," The American Sociologist, IX (November, 1974), 179.

CHAPTER II

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is to compare the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber concerning the relationship between society and religion. Using selected works of the two theorists, an effort will be made to establish similarities and differences in their views of (1) the influences of religion on social life and, conversely, (2) the influences of social life on religion.

Significance of the Problem

Emile Durkheim and Max Weber are major figures in the history of sociology. Their important works, formulated around the turn of the century, provided a basis for the development of sociological theory and method. Each of them felt that religion is an integral part of human society and that sociological analysis must take into account religious beliefs, practices, and institutions.[1] Their landmark studies of religion provided the theoretical structure for what has come to be known as the sociology of religion. For several decades, the Durkheimian

---

[1] Raymond Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought II, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber, translated by Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (Garden City, 1970), pp. 2-6; Norman Birnbaum and Gertrud Lenzer, editors, Sociology and Religion (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 15; William M. Newman, editor, "Introduction," The Social Meanings of Religion An Integrated Anthology (Chicago, 1974), p. 5; Robert Nisbet, The Sociology of Emile Durkheim (New York, 1974), pp. 156, 158.

and Weberian perspectives have been the major traditions in the sociology of religion.[2]

The perspectives of Durkheim and Weber developed as relatively separate and distinct traditions in the sociology of religion and continue that way even today.[3] A number of scholars in the field recognize the need to synthesize divergent theories, to bridge theoretical gaps between major perspectives where it is possible to do so.[4] Some of them contend that there is a need for a theoretical paradigm with which to organize research and analysis in the field. However, hardly any efforts have been made to synthesize the major sociological theories of religion. In fact, little effort has been made even to compare systematically the major sociological theories of religion.

This study is a modest step in the direction of bringing together relatively separate and divergent sociological theories of religion. It is not an effort to develop a new theory of religion. It is not an attempt

---

[2]Roland Robertson, The Sociological Interpretation of Religion (New York, 1970), p. 12; Thomas F. O'Dea, Sociology and the Study of Religion (New York, 1970), pp. 202, 204; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge," The Social Meanings of Religion, edited by William M. Newman (Chicago, 1974), p. 102.

[3]Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, "Two Sociological Traditions," Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber (Berkeley, 1971), p. 297; Whitney Pope, Jere Cohen, and Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Thesis," American Sociological Review, XL (August, 1975), 417, 424; Lawrence W. Sherman, "Uses of the Masters," The American Sociologist, IX (November, 1974), 177-178.

[4]George Ritzer, "Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science," American Sociologist, X (August, 1975), 165; Charles Y. Glock and Phillip E. Hammond, editors, "Epilogue," Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion (New York, 1973), p. 411; Andrew M. Greeley, Unsecular Man (New York, 1972), p. 127.

to synthesize the works of Durkheim and Weber on religion. It should not be viewed as an exhaustive analysis of their extensive writings on the subject. It is a comparison, an attempt to establish similarities and differences, of selected aspects of their major works on religion. It is presented on the assumption that meaningful synthetic work can take place in the sociology of religion only after the views of Durkheim and Weber have been compared, after the points of similarity and dissimilarity in their works have been delineated.

Research Data and Strategy

The primary sources on which this comparative study is based are The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life[5] by Durkheim and The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism[6] and The Sociology of Religion[7] by Weber.

The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life is the classic work by Durkheim on religion. It is a detailed description and analysis of the clan system and of totemism in certain Australian tribes. It contains his general theory of religion, derived from his study of Australian totemism. He selected the simplest, most primitive expression of religion available for his case study on the assumption that one can grasp the essence of a phenomenon by observing its most elementary forms. For him,

---

[5]Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London, 1915).

[6]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958).

[7]Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston, 1963).

totemism revealed the essence of religion and provided the basis for a general theory of religion. The study was based entirely on ethnographic and secondary sources; Durkheim did not travel to Australia to collect data.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was the first major work by Weber on the sociology of religion. Published originally as two essays, it was the point of departure for his extensive work on religion. Widely recognized as a classic in recent Western intellectual history, the book may be viewed as an introduction to Weber's sociology of religion. It contains an analysis of the social psychological conditions which made possible the development of capitalist civilization. Weber analyzed the connections between the spread of Calvinism and a new attitude toward the pursuit of wealth in post-Reformation Europe and England, an attitude which permitted, encouraged, even sanctified the human quest for prosperity. His conclusion about the complex relationships between religion and economy led him to conduct his comparative studies of religion and provided the foundation for what developed as his sociology of religion. After Weber's work on religion, the question of whether religion influences social life became much less important than the question of how religion influences social life and in turn is influenced by it.

The Sociology of Religion was published originally as a chapter in Weber's systematization of the social sciences, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.[8] Of monograph length, it was his final formulation of his sociology of religion. It must be seen as the culmination of his work on religion,

---

[8]Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Tübingen, Germany, 1922).

starting with The Protestant Ethic and continuing through the several comparative studies on world religions. It also must be viewed as an integral part of his systematic analysis of the major areas of social life: economic, political, religious, and esthetic. The book contains Weber's discussion of his concepts and ideas on the sociology of religion. It is an overview, a recapitulation written toward the end of his life, of all that had gone before in his study of religion. With The Protestant Ethic, it is the best general introduction to his sociology of religion.

Using these three classic works as the data for this research, the ideas of Durkheim and Weber concerning (1) the social foundations of religious life and (2) the religious foundations of human society will be compared. Concerning the social foundations of religious life, the objective will be to specify and to explain similarities and differences in their views of the social influences on religious belief, religious practice, and religious organization. Concerning the religious foundations of human society, the objective will be to specify and to explain similarities and differences in their understanding of the influences of religious practice and religious belief on social life and the influences of religion on social change.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION

Overview

The idea that religious belief and behavior are shaped by social contingencies is very old. The ancient Greeks conceived of the gods as something of a powerful social environment both to themselves as divine beings and to human mortals. But what is striking and profound in Max Weber and Emile Durkheim is the claim that the relationships and connections between the religious life and the observable ingredients of its social context can be studied systematically. Such systematic study includes not only descriptions but hypotheses and far-reaching theories. Religion is no longer something simply to be witnessed to; it may also be analyzed and examined comparatively against a complex background of social forces, activities, institutions, mores, beliefs, personal functionaries, and other threads composing the social nexus.

Emile Durkheim and the Social Foundations of Religion

Religion as Eminently Social

The intricate and fundamental interdependence between society and religion is an ever-present theme in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. As a vital and dynamic element of social life, religion is portrayed as a necessary condition of any and every society, but is nonetheless contingent on social life.

> It is obviously necessary that the religious life be the eminent form and, as it were, the concentrated expression of the whole collective life. If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion.[1]

Durkheim stated his general assumption in the early part of the book:

> The general conclusion of the book which the reader has before him is that religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups.[2]

The Significance of Social Assembly to the Religious Life

According to Durkheim, the group experience in which people are assembled close together in intense relations--dynamic interaction--is the condition in which the religious life is grounded. In these moments of intense social relations, society is more real--more living and active--than in profane times. Durkheim argued at length that religion is always an interplay of social facts and that social facts themselves vary with the conditions of a wider social system.[3] This entails that no religion

---

[1] Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London, 1915), p. 419.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] Durkheim was doing his research and writing in religion at the turn of the present century, which was a period that produced perhaps the most brilliant and creative writers on the theme of religious development. In Germany, Hermann Gunkel published in 1901 his famous study of the Book of Genesis as a collection of sagas. Less than a decade after Durkheim published The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life in 1912 the biblical scholars known as "form-critics" began to publish works which focused on the Sitzen in Leben, the situation in life, of the synoptic Gospels. These scholars stressed that the Christian Gospel was "the work of the Church composed of communities. . . . The needs of the community determined the choice of the material eventually written down and its form." (A. H. McNeile, An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, 2nd

can be understood in detachment from its particular social system or community setting.[4] Durkheim's sociological analysis contained what very soon after him came to be known as "demythologizing." However, it is of crucial importance to understand that instead of discarding myths and mythologies as useless husk and superstition, he demanded that they be decoded and interpreted as profound portrayals of the social origins and developments of religious faith.

This point is too critical to pass over without further clarification. Like some of the philosophers of the nineteenth century, Durkheim regarded theological accounts and religious stories to be waking dreams or myths. But his special contribution lay in his sustained argument that the creator of these dreams or myths is the human community itself rather than isolated individuals each in his private experience. The religious "representations" (to use Durkheim's favorite word) not only are social in origin, but reflect and mirror man himself in his most intensified collective life. Religious myths and stories are therefore to be taken as revelations of a sacred being--as believers have always insisted. But now Durkheim would show that this sacred being is none other than the abiding community itself, whose existence transcends each individual, nourishes him, gives him sacred commandments, and raises him to a status that he lacks within himself alone. In short, Durkheim's point was that it is the clan, the social group, that literally provides the individual with both life and meaning.

---

edition [Oxford, 1953], p. 47. The second edition revisions were made by C. S. C. Williams.) Durkheim was among the earliest of those interested in especially the elementary social "forms of religious development. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the study of religion lay in his attempt to formulate and explicate a general theory of religion as an emergent quality of human social existence.

[4]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 94.

Moreover, unlike Freud, Durkheim did not regard religious representations to be manifestations and symptoms of human pathology. To the contrary, they were the means whereby the society lifted itself out of the meager and bare state of nature and made itself a human reality. They were the means by which the human animal transformed itself into a more secure and effective thrust against the contingencies of nature. The religious representations had "the effect of reassuring men in their struggle with things: they [taught] that faith is, of itself, able 'to move mountains' that is to say, to dominate the forces of nature."[5]

But this promethean process could not have come about except as individuals came together as a social force. The very language itself, a mighty tool of human consciousness, is social through and through. According to Durkheim, the ideas of religion emerged, not by men's reflections on nature, but as the gathered community assembled itself together with greater intensity to strengthen itself and to represent itself as a totem-god in the world. The idea of a powerful, sustaining, nourishing god is, for Durkheim, nothing other than a society of human beings representing itself to itself.[6]

Durkheim's point was that societies did indeed project exaggerated representations of themselves, but without such exaggerations the fearful human species likely would never have cut for itself a place in nature. By associating together in clans and tribes, preliterate men learned that they could build up their courage and strengthen themselves to face life's threats and trials. They learned that only in numbers was greater security

---

[5] Ibid., p. 86.

[6] Ibid., pp. 86, 206.

possible. Together they were a mighty force, participants of a totem-god. Therefore, to hold themselves together through a sacred cult became a moral imperative, that is, a necessity of survival and zestful existence. The cult became the special means whereby the community raised itself into intensified interactions which vitalized the individual believers emotionally and empowered them in a way in which they could never empower and encourage themselves separately.[7] "So their first effect," wrote Durkheim, "was to bring individuals together, to multiply the relations between them and to make them more intimate with one another. By this very fact, the content of their consciousness is changed."[8] Through the development of the cult, the feeble human animal has been able to make itself human by taking the bold and daring step of representing itself in social groups in the form of totems and gods.

A cult, Durkheim explained, is a system of rites, festivals and ceremonies which reappear periodically among a people. It is the means by which the group gives itself rejuvenation, cohesion, and prolonged mutual aid. The daily struggles of man, the social animal, to maintain himself materially tend to arouse antagonisms between individuals. Scattered here and there in their search for food or game, preliterate men became doubly lost if they were without a totem community in which to find their human identity. According to Durkheim, "the individual gets from society the best part of himself. . . ."[9] In fact, without social existence, men would at best "drop to the rank of animals."[10] Human consciousness, Durkheim

---

[7] Ibid., p. 444.

[8] Ibid., p. 348.

[9] Ibid., p. 347.

[10] Ibid., p. 347.

insisted, is impossible to attain apart from participation in the group. "Really and truly human thought is not a primitive fact; it is the product of history. . . ."[11]

The cultic activities, therefore, are not to be thought of as "mere delirium," for they are the energizing of a social animal struggling to come to terms with its own social realization. Durkheim insisted that this social background is not incidental to the religions of man, but is absolutely essential to it, so much so that social and religious existence are inconceivable apart from one another. "It is in these effervescent social environments . . . that the religious idea seems to be born."[12]

When the group is assembled, the social relations have an effect of "superexcitation" on the members. All of the participants gain new strength and energy, but they are unable to locate precisely the source of this strength. In their awareness of the reservoir of anonymous and diffused forces, participants eventually create mythical or supernatural beings. Individuals are so intensely aroused that they imagine there is a power superior to them. And, of course, there is such a power--society itself. The group selects a way of expressing their dependency on the force or the being which they think must be the agent of the power they feel. Durkheim concluded, "A society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds, merely by the power that it has over them; for to its members it is what a god is to his worshippers."[13] The large variety of divinities, with their distinctive traits and attributes,

---

[11] Ibid., p. 445.

[12] Ibid., p. 218.

[13] Ibid., p. 206.

reflects profoundly the large variety of human communities, with their special social settings, that have spread over the earth through the centuries.

Selection of the Sacred: A Communal Activity

There is nothing intrinsic in any object or being to give it sacred or holy qualities. Religious thought and imagination set apart otherwise very ordinary things to receive the awe and reverent attitude of believers. It is religious experience--religious group experience--that consecrates people and things. Durkheim contended, then, that it is society that creates the sacred. "In addition to men, society also consecrates things, especially ideas. If a belief is unanimously shared by a people, then, . . . it is forbidden to touch it, that is to say, to deny it or to contest it."[14] Durkheim observed that "in the society of the present day just as much as in the past, we see society constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones."[15]

He concluded that the sacred is an immutable category. The objects selected as sacred may vary from generation to generation or from group to group, but the fact that there is a distinction between the sacred and the profane is a human absolute. This fundamental distinction is generated in man's social experience. Durkheim considered the involvement with the sacred to be the core of religion:

> The division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs,

---

[14] Ibid., p. 213.

[15] Ibid., p. 212.

> myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things.[16]

The sacred as the core of religion is contingent on the social context. "The circle of sacred objects cannot be determined, then, once for all. Its extent varies infinitely according to the different religions."[17] It is in communal activity only that the distinction between the sacred and profane is drawn. Societies come together to create and redefine what is sacred. "There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality."[18] Durkheim regarded the problem of turmoil in European society to be based on the threat of encroaching secularism. Because "the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born,"[19] it is the task of society to reassemble and create new ones.[20]

The Moral Pressure of Society

Society exercises a moral pressure over its members to put their sentiments in harmony. In his example of the totemic society, Durkheim showed that it is the group that reflects the circumstances through which its members pass.[21] The clan, for example, pressures its members into mourning. "Mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings but a

---

[16] Ibid., p. 37.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 427.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 428.

[21] Ibid., p. 399.

duty imposed by the group."[22] Weeping is forced upon them by custom. There are social penalties for not taking part in the rites even if such participation means personal injury. In one community, a son-in-law, failing to perform appropriate funeral rites for his father-in-law, may have his wife taken away from him. The individual member of society is made to feel that he is breaking the bonds uniting him to the group if he does not participate in its joys and sorrows.[23]

A Christian or a Jew is duty bound to commemorate the Passion or the fall of Jerusalem even though his individual feelings may not be at all in touch with the event being celebrated. Other events that evoke sorrowing and lamenting in the totemic society are the loss of the churinga ("an eminently sacred thing"), insufficient harvest, drought or famine. Durkheim indicated that there are many more ceremonies of joy and exaltation than ceremonies of sorrow. Ceremonies may be of many different kinds, but the pressure is always strong and compelling, so that members will not easily reject the expectations of the group.

> But as a matter of fact, the empire which it holds over consciences is due much less to the physical supremacy of which it has the privilege than to the moral authority with which it is invested. If we yield to its orders, it is not merely because it is strong enough to triumph over our resistance; it is primarily because it is the object of venerable respect.[24]

Belief and Expression: The Work of the Community

The social community provides the basis for instruction regarding what to believe and what to feel. "In a word it is the church of which

---

[22] Ibid., p. 397.

[23] Ibid., p. 400.

[24] Ibid., p. 207.

he is a member which teaches the individual what these personal gods are, what their function is, how he should enter into relations with them and how he should honour them."[25]

There is an intense intellectual activity stimulated and strengthened by the interrelations of group life. Collective representations are the work of the community, not expressions of individual notions and sensations. The nature of a concept, then,

> since it bears the mark of no particular mind, . . . was elaborated by a unique intelligence, where all others meet each other, and after a fashion, come to nourish themselves. If it has more stability than sensations or images, it is because the collective representations are more stable than the individual ones. . . .[26]

Whatever religious beliefs, ideas, or feelings individual consciousnesses may carry, they are all formed and nurtured in the cult. Ideas can never find meaning apart from a community base.

> The cult is not simply a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly translated; it is a collection of the means by which this is created and recreated periodically. Whether it consists in material acts or mental operations, it is always this which is efficacious.[27]

It is only within the nurture of his particular group that the individual can receive his religious knowledge and the directions for ritual expression. It is not because of inferior intelligence that the primitive has what may appear to be a limited view of the world. His knowledge develops only with the development of his society. He does not lack

---

[25] Ibid., p. 46.

[26] Ibid., p. 434. Italics added.

[27] Ibid., p. 417.

aptitude for abstracting and generalizing; "before all, it is the nature of the social environment which has imposed this particularism."[28]

Religion, then, is inseparable from the church or community. "The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group, which makes profession of adhering to them and of practicing the rites connected with them."[29] Only in shared belief and shared experience is the religious life made possible.

Max Weber and the Social Foundations of Religion

The Complex Process of Recognizing Social Causes

In reading with a view toward determining when in The Sociology of Religion Max Weber speaks of religion as cause and when he speaks of it as effect of social realities, the reader will gradually be forced to the following conclusion: religion and social organization (which includes such realities as economics, law, and politics) are thoroughly interactive with one another, so much so that any attempt to treat only one as the cause (or effect) is to engage in artificial abstraction. It is, in essence, to freeze the dynamic interplay of forces, as if stopping a play in process in order to analyze its interrelationships.

Deliberately ignoring the quest for the so-called "essence" of religion, Weber moved directly to study systematically the social and cultural manifestations of religion. Hence, in a pluralistic society, one religion may be studied as a social force acting on another religion. For example, it is often the case that within a given religious community,

---

[28] Ibid., p. 196.

[29] Ibid., p. 43.

the laity is a powerful social force acting upon the priesthood. This is not, however, to say that religious phenomena are nothing but social realities, for Weber spoke also of "the subjective experiences, ideas, and purposes of the individuals concerned--in short from the viewpoint of the religious behavior's 'meaning' (Sinn)."[30]

The Impact of Social Structure on Religious Leaders

The complexity of the influence of social structure on religion can be seen in the emergence of Christianity. According to Weber, the messianic expectations of Jesus' time doubtless contributed to his regarding himself as their fulfillment. That is, without the intensified and strengthened social patterns, cues, and signals centered around the messianic theme, Jesus might have remained nothing more than a carpenter. Weber wrote that "belief in salvation through abundant grace accumulated by a hero's or incarnate god's achievement was aided by the evolution of soteriological myths, above all myths of the struggling or suffering god. . . ."[31]

There is another important way in which social causes may have operated on Jesus. Had he (through causes which cannot be explored here) come to believe himself to be the promised Messiah, he likely would have gone unnoticed, lost in a cloud of obscurity, if a strong favorable social setting had not been ready for him. In short, without a favorable social

---

[30]Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston, 1963), p. 1. Italics added.

[31]Ibid., p. 184. Italics added.

environment, Jesus as a significant person probably would have been eliminated by the procession of other historical events. The New Testament insisted that God elected Jesus, but Weber suggested that a favorable social community selected him and gave him immortality. According to Weber, Jesus indeed was born in the fullness of time, that is, in the right social context at the right historical moment. Weber expressed this point candidly: "The visions of the resurrection [of Jesus], doubtless under the influence of the widely diffused soteriological myths [of his time], generated a tremendous growth in pneumatic manifestations of charisma. . . ."[32] In other passages, Weber stressed the profound influence of the charismatic individual on his group. But the other side of the coin is the view that the charismatic individual was himself shaped by a criss-cross of powerful social forces. When Weber spoke of the way great numbers of people received for their own benefit the "savior's achievements,"[33] he presupposed that these people had developed already a need for such vicarious achievement. Such was a part of "the evolution of soteriological myths."[34]

The Group Basis of Religion

Weber was concerned to show that the basis of religion is not in the supernatural, although much of religious behavior is to be understood according to the way particular groups interpret the meaning of the supernatural. He was also concerned to deal with the question of

---

[32] Ibid., pp. 273-274.

[33] Ibid., p. 183.

[34] Ibid., p. 184.

whether the development and perpetuation of religion is or is not an individual matter. Insisting that it is important to understand what religion means to the individual believer, Weber nevertheless argued in his beginning study in the sociology of religion that the source of religion is in the group.

> In order that a manner of life so well adapted to the peculiarities of capitalism could be selected at all, i.e. should come to dominate others, it had to originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone, but as a way of life common to whole groups of men.[35]

If people feel that their lives are woefully inadequate and that their own labors cannot gain for them salvation,[36] they arrive first at this conclusion because their social group convinces them both of the need for salvation and of the necessity of finding it outside their own labors.[37]

Religion itself is a group experience, and a part of the study of religious evolution is a study of the forces in the environment of a religion that in various ways either support the religion, do not support it, or in some cases even destroy it.[38]

Differentiated Society and the Development of Religion

Focusing on the five great world religions and their paths of development, Weber of necessity had to view societies at different stages of development. He was concerned specifically with the development of society,

---

[35]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958), p. 55.

[36]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 183.

[37]Ibid., p. 194.

[38]Ibid., p. 208.

especially as the various spheres of social behavior become distinct from one another and therefore exist in tension with religion. Political and economic pressures on religious belief and practice have been crucial throughout the history of religion.

> The general schema according to which religion customarily solves the problem of the tension between religious ethics and the non-ethical or unethical requirements of life in the political and economic structures of power within the world is to relativize and differentiate ethics into an organic ethic of vocation and a contrasting ascetic ethic.[39]

Weber pointed out also the strong polarity between the sphere of art and religion. He noted that religion and art originally were related intimately. Religion has long been a source of artistic expression as evidenced by idols and icons of every variety and from musical form.[40] "But the more art becomes an autonomous sphere, which happens as a result of lay education, the more art tends to acquire its own set of constitutive values, which are quite different from those obtaining in the religious and ethical domain."[41]

Religious believers involved in activity in both the esthetic realm and the religious realm exert pressure on religion to incorporate so-called secular musical or artistic forms within religion. The church (often represented by the priesthood) can maintain its membership and perhaps gain other members by compromising its views in order to fulfill the esthetic attitude of the members. The conflict between the esthetic and religio-ethical norms reaches its climax in authentic asceticism "which

---

[39] Ibid., p. 232.

[40] Ibid., p. 242.

[41] Ibid., p. 243.

views any surrender to esthetic values as a serious breach in the rational systematization of the conduct of life."[42] It appears that because of Weber's focus on religion's increasingly rational influence upon conduct, he tended to see the esthetic realm as losing its influence on religion.[43]

Social Forces and the Protestant Ethic

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber attempted to show that Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist and Puritan forms, played a major role in the emergence of a rational, efficiency-oriented capitalist culture. He was concerned with showing that although Protestantism provided a particular psychology for establishing new forms of economic activity, there were powerful stirrings in social organization occurring at the same time--namely, the development of a diversified middle class with new ways of looking at the world.[44] As is often the case in Weber's analysis, his accounts contain several layers and backgrounds. In his further study of the affinity between ascetic Protestantism and capitalism, he explicated the tendency of the middle class to accept both rational, ethical religion and rational, productive economic activity.[45] He argued further that while other countries had an economic base similar to that of precapitalist Europe, they did not develop a uniform ethic in regard to economic activity. It is true that other religions did not support capitalism as Protestantism did, but strong factors in the social organization operated against any changes in the economic system.

---

[42] Ibid. [43] Ibid., p. 245.

[44] Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 24, 25, 177.

[45] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, pp. 92-94.

> Above all, there evolved no "capitalist spirit," in the sense that is distinctive of ascetic Protestantism. But to assume that the Hindu, Chinese, or Muslim merchant, trader, artisan, or coolie was animated by a weaker "acquisitive drive" than the ascetic Protestant is to fly in the face of the facts.[46]

He contended that these groups were not lacking in ability or will to develop capitalism. Rather, they were bound by rigid tradition in their social network. The "Protestant stress upon the methodically rationalized fulfillment of one's vocational responsibility was diametrically opposite to Hinduism's strongly traditionalistic concept of vocations."[47]

The Social Foundations of Religious Belief

Social Organization and Sacred Scripture

Both Durkheim and Weber held that it is necessary to be acquainted with the ideas of a religion in order to understand the religion. Durkheim stated that "since it is impossible to understand anything about a religion while unacquainted with the ideas upon which it rests, we must seek to become acquainted with these latter first of all."[48] Weber, delving into the texts of the great religions of the world, focused especially on their teachings regarding salvation and their metaphysical views of the world.

Durkheim and Weber understood the development of religious beliefs to be a social process. According to Durkheim, "religious faith has its origin in society."[49] However, he said that it was not his purpose "to retrace all the speculations into which the religious thought, even of the

---

[46] Ibid., p. 269.

[47] Ibid., p. 270.

[48] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 101.

[49] Ibid., p. 431.

Australians alone, has run. The things we wish to reach are the elementary notions at the basis of the religion."[50] For "the reality which religious thought expresses is society."[51] Realizing that there were sacred beliefs that became a part of oral tradition passed on from generation to generation,[52] Durkheim argued that these beliefs were the products of the particular groups from which they came. From Durkheim's theory, one might predict that if the sacred traditions of the religions of the world were transcribed and codified, they would exhibit rich diversity in form and content because of the rich diversity of their social origins. The research of Weber showed that this was in fact the case.

But why should the sacred scriptures have become so radically different from one another in so many ways? For Weber, the answer was plain. Behind them had been economic, linguistic, ideological, class, political, and other socio-cultural forces and conditions that helped to color, shape, and give rise to their bewildering diversity. The assumption of the existence of a religious a priori category internal to human beings everywhere could not in itself even begin to account for the fact that sacred scriptures contain ethical imperatives, ritual prescriptions, theological categories, and a variety of basic doctrines that simply cannot be made to harmonize with one another. If Weber's study of the major sacred scriptures of the world revealed anything, it revealed clearly that the sacred scriptures were not all "saying the same thing." The radical diversity among them was not merely an incidental phenomenon. This is not to deny similarities among

---

[50] Ibid., p. 101.

[51] Ibid., p. 431.

[52] Ibid., p. 212.

scriptures, for that would be too drastic an hypothesis. But Weber's research made it abundantly clear that there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences among the sacred scriptures. His research made it quite difficult even to formulate an intelligible hypothesis that accounts for this great diversity without appealing to sociocultural forces as determining preconditions.

In fact, Weber even pointed to changes that have come about within the development of the sacred writings themselves.[53] This introduced the question of the closing of the canon of scripture. Weber directed attention to the emerging "apostolic prophecies" in the first century A.D., a phenomenon which, combined with political disasters connected with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and the destruction of the theocratic state, forced the Jewish synod of Jamnia to close the canon of Hebrew scripture. The Christian canon had to be formalized and closed in order to prevent the Christian movement of the time from being overpowered by a class of intellectuals whose Gnostic leanings were clearly in conflict with the Christian movement.[54]

Once sacred scriptures are developed, there is always the tendency that a social class whom Weber called "intellectuals" will mold and rework the scriptures according to the interests of the class.[55] This must not, however, be understood to be a strictly economic interpretation of the rise and development of religious scripture; in Weber's way of thinking, intellectuals have as much interest in nonmaterialistic salvation as any other class.[56] Indeed, Weber went so far as to say that "all the great

---

[53]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, pp. 68, 119.

[54]Ibid., p. 68. [55]Ibid., pp. 118-121. [56]Ibid., p. 117.

religious doctrines of Asia are creations of intellectuals."[57] "In the religions of Egypt, in Zoroastrianism, in some phases of ancient Christianity, and in Brahmanism during the age of the Vedas . . . the priesthood succeeded in largely monopolizing the development of religious metaphysics and ethics."[58] This might have been the case in Judaism, had there not been another powerful class--lay prophets--which strongly reduced the impact of the priesthood. In Islam the priesthood was challenged by a class of Sufi speculators.[59]

Durkheim pictured the preliterate religious cult and community as capable of modifying its sacred content if new situations and conditions of a social and physical nature require such.[60] In his study of developed and complex religions, Weber showed that at least the developed religions with sacred scriptures did not just modify. He attempted to show how the changes came about, or what the social tensions and conflicts were that made change and revision more likely and possible. Durkheim was not basically concerned with class conflict; Weber saw it as a basic fact and impact on even the formation, systematization, interpretation, and application of the sacred scriptures.[61]

New social forces and pressure did not cease to emerge and have their impact just because a canon of scripture had been closed. Hence, priests were often found to be challenged by prophets in virtue of their own prophetic charisma.[62] It must not be supposed that priests were mere systematizers of the sacred traditions; they also interpreted the sacred tradition.[63]

---

[57] Ibid., p. 120. [58] Ibid., pp. 118-119. [59] Ibid., p. 119.

[60] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 101.

[61] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, pp. 192-193; 207-208.

[62] Ibid., p. 46. [63] Ibid., p. 67.

Weber argued not that the sacred scriptures ceased to be sacred, but that social forces--sometimes very powerful forces--required the keepers of the scriptures to interpret the scriptures in such a way as to use their awesome power to deal with newly emerging problems. For example, if the apostle Paul, trained as a rabbi, selected the Hebrew Bible as his normative scripture in order to do battle against the powerful Gnostic intellectuals, he also used his rabbinic training to engage in a dialectic in such a way as to shake the very foundations of the Hebrew tradition in which he grew up, shaking it so profoundly as to create what appeared to be either a radical break with the tradition or a breakthrough within the tradition.[64]

In some ways, the apostle Paul seems to belong to Weber's class of nonsacerdotal philosophers who, while growing up with the sacred scripture, nevertheless became experts in the scripture and its special problems.[65] From a Jewish point of view of the time, Paul stepped out of his tradition and turned upon it. Of the intellectual class, he was alienated from his tradition, but he sought to demonstrate that his challenge to the tradition was a fulfillment of it. This sort of struggle between the intellectual (alienated from his religious roots yet nourished by them) and the tradition itself was for Weber "one of the very important components of religious evolution."[66] It is a significant point that, on the one hand, each side professed devotion to the same sacred scripture, while on the other hand, each regarded the other as unfaithful to the same scripture. The point is significant because the mere existence of two (or more) sides reveals that

---

[64] Ibid., pp. 259-260.

[65] Ibid., p. 59.

[66] Ibid.

social changes are going on and that they demand that the sacred scriptures be interpreted relevant to the changes. The scriptures themselves cannot just stand. They are made by social change to speak to various issues and problems. Weber, a careful student of the development of the beliefs of all the major religions, stated:

> It is evident that the positive, substantive injunctions of the prophetic ethic and the casuistical transformation thereof by the priests ultimately derived their material from problems which the folkways, conventions, and factual needs of the laity brought to the priests for disposition in their pastoral office.[67]

From Weber's study of the intellectual class, one may conclude that its members may be the creators of many scriptures, the interpreters, and sometimes even the agents of doubt that the conventional interpretations (or even the scriptures themselves) are worthy of acceptance. Weber regarded the marriage between sacred scriptures and the intellectual class as a precarious but fruitful union.

Both Durkheim and Weber felt that religious beliefs have profound influence on social life, and they recognized the development of the beliefs to be a social process. Durkheim stressed that beliefs and values are the work of the community. Noting that "the sanctity of a thing is due to the collective sentiment of which it is the object,"[68] he argued that gospels and scriptures are themselves subject to change because of changing social forces and circumstances. This does not mean that scriptures or gospels are mere epiphenomenon, but neither does it mean that scriptures

---

[67] Ibid., p. 77. Italics added.

[68] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 413.

or gospels exert their influence without also being shaped by their social milieu.

Durkheim even predicted that society would create new moral ideas and formulae.[69] "There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of creating new ones."[70]

Durkheim focused on the categories of the understanding and their ultimate connection with the social organization in which they are formed and expressed. He contended that even the categories were the work of the group. "Not only is it society which has founded them, but their contents are the different aspects of the social being."[71] By contrast, Weber, without delving into a society's basic underlying concepts, traced out the complexity of religious belief systems and the political, economic, and other social factors involved in shaping these beliefs.

The Impact of Social Forces on the Concept of God

Weber and Durkheim noted that the gods were not represented in human form originally. Weber stated bluntly that "the scope of the Roman numina is incomparably more fixed and unequivocal than that of the Hellenistic gods."[72] He even suggested that religious "representations" (Weber's word, in this case) tend to reflect the general structure and culture of their region.[73] Similarly, Durkheim argued that the roots of religion are more fundamental than belief in personal gods. There was, he argued, a

---

[69] Ibid., p. 428. [70] Ibid. [71] Ibid., p. 440.

[72] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 11.

[73] Ibid.

reservoir of anonymous and diffuse forces which constituted the original foundation of religious forces.[74] It was when "the tribe acquired a livelier sentiment of itself" that it tended to incarnate its sentiment into some personage who became its symbol. "In order to account for the bonds uniting them to one another, . . . men imagined that they were descended from a single father, to whom they owe their existence, though he owed his to no one. The god of the initiation was predestined to this role, for . . . the object of the initiation is to make or manufacture men."[75]

Both Weber and Durkheim illustrated throughout their works that the forms of the gods vary with the nature and structure of the society or group in question. In the development of anthropomorphism Durkheim mentioned that the gods took the form of personages within the experience of the tribe. Myths and legends were created about god, pictured as a great hunter, a powerful magician, or the founder of the tribe.[76]

Weber and Durkheim agreed that abstract conceptions of god can only become secure through the continuing activity of a cult.[77] Holding that sacred beings exist only when represented in the mind of the community,[78] Durkheim indicated that without the continuing activity of the cult the gods would die.[79] He explicated that gods die if the cult or society is not actively engaged in remaking and regenerating them.

---

[74]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 295.

[75]Ibid., p. 293.

[76]Ibid., p. 290.

[77]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 10.

[78]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 345.

[79]Ibid., p. 344.

Weber dealt dramatically with the development of the gods in the developing religions. The very notion of a god who is so transcendent that he creates out of nothing was not itself created out of nothing. Weber wrote:

> The regulation of the Nile was the source of the Egyptian monarch's strength. In the desert and semiarid regions of the Near East this control of irrigation waters was indeed one source of the conception of a god who had created the earth and man out of nothing and not merely fashioned them, as was believed elsewhere. A raparian economy of this kind actually did produce a harvest out of nothing, from the desert sands.[80]

Weber noted that the Mesopotamian monarch invented--created--laws, a legislative fiat of rationalization never before achieved in the world. Weber concluded that it was therefore only natural that there should arise in the Near East the concept of the ordering of the world as the legislation of "a freely acting transcendental and personal god" not unlike the Mesopotamian monarch.[81]

Located--and sometimes trapped--between the two empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the ancestors of Jesus were in a unique position for developing a doctrine of a heavenly king of their own who is mightier than those earthly monarchs to either the east or the southwest. Weber did not think it an accident that the weaker peoples, caught in "the pressure of the relatively contiguous great centers of rigid social organization," would develop the concept of a superior heavenly king who in turn controls the affairs of all nations.[82]

---

[80]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 57. Italics added.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid., p. 58.

> Hebrew prophecy was completely oriented to a relationship with the great political powers of the time, the great kings, who as the rods of God's wrath first destroy Israel and then, as a result of divine intervention, permit Israelites to return from the Exile to their own land.[83]

Weber contended that the notion of a god who gives forth doctrines and commands has social, historical, and political roots. Indeed, "the personal, transcendental and ethical god is a Near-Eastern concept. It corresponds so closely to that of an all-powerful mundane king with his rational bureaucratic regime that a causal connection can scarcely be overlooked."[84]

Weber contended that ethical demands were made upon the gods by men primarily because of some distinctive developments in social organizations--e.g., increasing claims for orderly legislation; increasing knowledge of an external, enduring, and orderly cosmos; an increasing need for the regulation of human relationships; and the need for assurance in the reliability of the spoken word.[85] "What is basically involved in these four developments is the increased importance of an ethical attachment of individuals to a cosmos of obligations, making it possible to calculate what the conduct of a given person may be."[86] God became a cosmic and moral authority.

Of course, there were reasons why a certain concept of God might crystalize. It became a stabilizing factor. Yet hardships suffered in the world of economic and social reality create enormous pressure on the theology of a transcendental unitary God who is universal. How is such

---

[83] Ibid., p. 58.

[84] Ibid., p. 56. Italics added.

[85] Ibid., p. 36.

[86] Ibid.

a God to be "reconciled with the imperfections of the world that he has created and rules over"?[87] In his sociological inquiry, Weber found that theodicy questions were formulated somewhat differently according to the classes to which writers and spokesmen belonged. Durkheim's emphasis on preliterate society led him not to stress the role of class distinction in the formulation of theological questions and conclusions.

Durkheim advanced the thesis that the view of the god of a particular society reveals or reflects the style of life of that society. For example, "the great god is the synthesis of all the totems and consequently the personification of the tribal unity."[88] Because of "a continual exchange of ideas from tribe to tribe," an international mythology becomes possible. He concluded that "the internationalism of the totems opened the way for that of the great god."[89] Durkheim even went so far as to claim that the relationship of the Warramunga to their gigantic snake totem Wallunqua was "identical with that which the members of other totems believe that they sustain with the founders of their respective clans."[90] The point here is that such a colossal snake was required to represent the very large number of clans composing the phratry. The phratry was to them very large, and the snake totem reflected their portrayal of themselves as a large body.[91]

---

[87] Ibid., p. 138f. Italics added.

[88] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 294.

[89] Ibid., p. 295.

[90] Ibid., p. 376.

[91] Ibid., p. 376f.

The Social Foundations of Religious Practice

Economic Behavior and Religious Practice

Weber was particularly interested in the interrelationship of religion and economy. In The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism he set out to study the connection between "the spirit of modern economic life" and the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism.[92] It was his plan to study all of the most important religions and their relations to economic life. "Religious or magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct, particularly since even the ends of the religious and magical actions are predominantly economic."[93] Because people are always involved in earning a living, their economic and religious behavior cannot be separated completely. Weber argued that neither religion nor the economy can be interpreted as the predominantly causal factor in the development of social life.

> For those to whom no causal explanation is adequate without an economic (or materialistic as it is unfortunately still called) interpretation, it may be remarked that I consider the influence of economic development on the fate of religious ideas to be very important and shall later attempt to show how in our case the process of mutual adaptation of the two took place. On the other hand, those religious ideas themselves simply cannot be deduced from economic circumstances. They are in themselves, that is beyond doubt, the most powerful plastic elements of national character, and contain a law of development and a compelling force entirely their own.[94]

In Weber's view, men are involved in economics both at the personal level and the institutional level. In the development of Western culture,

---

[92]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 27. Italics added.

[93]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 1.

[94]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 277-278; 84. Italics added.

he saw economic conditions to be foundational to the explanation of the genetic peculiarity of Occidental rationalism, as opposed to the traditional patterns of Eastern culture. According to Weber, "every such attempt at explanation must, recognizing the fundamental importance of the economic factor, above all take account of the economic conditions."[95]

Throughout The Sociology of Religion, he cited situations in which the development or direction of a religion is modified or greatly altered because of economic conditions. In some cases, the wealthy may use their religion to affirm their right to their wealth--to assure themselves that their wealthy position is a moral one. In other cases, the religious life and economic life exist in tension and in conflict of interest. For example, an economic life that demands a great deal of time and energy is not agreeable with a religion of contemplation or one that requires a life style of time-consuming rituals. Especially evident in the study of religion is the opposition between the unworldly or other-worldly principle of love and the modern rationalization of economic life based on calculative business and labor opportunities. Puritan ethics overcame this contradiction by dispensing with the universal principle of love and turning economic behavior itself into a service of God.

The social organization that Weber pictured in The Protestant Ethic sounds much like the social organization Durkheim spoke of throughout The Elementary Forms. It is a social organization that is demanding and binding on the individual. The society of Durkheim is the "given" into which an individual is born; it requires his compliance. Durkheim explained:

---

[95]Ibid., p. 26.

> It requires that, forgetful of our own interests, we make ourselves its servitors, and it submits us to every sort of inconvenience, privation and sacrifice, without which social life would be impossible. It is because of this that at every instant we are obliged to submit ourselves to rules of conduct and of thought which we have neither made nor desired, and which are sometimes even contrary to our most fundamental inclinations and instincts.[96]

Weber's view of modern capitalistic culture was described as follows:

> The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalistic rules of action. The manufacturer who in the long run acts counter to these norms, will just as inevitably be eliminated from the economic scene as the worker who cannot or will not adapt himself to them will be thrown into the streets without a job.[97]

Whereas Durkheim's individuals must accept the social order so that they may be human, Weber's social order has the added requirement that men be economically productive as well, even if in so doing they cease to be humane. The Protestant ethic, by carrying asceticism out of monastic cells into everyday life, began to dominate worldly morality. It did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order.[98] "This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force."[99] The Puritan apparently wanted to work in his calling, but we are forced to do so.

---

[96] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 207.

[97] Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 54-55.

[98] Ibid., p. 181.

[99] Ibid.

It was impossible for Weber to think of social organization apart from economic organization. Man's behavior essentially involves his efforts to reconcile his mode of earning a living with other aspects of his life--his dreams, hopes, and social relationships. The nature of the social structure in light of its economic framework has crucial implications for religious development.

Durkheim did not wrestle with this profound connection between religion and economics. In the society which he studied, the subsistence activity and the significant religious experience were distinctly separate spheres. He described the experiences of a native in a ceremony of the Warramunga.

> How could such experiences as these . . . fail to leave in him the conviction that there really exist two heterogeneous and mutually incomparable worlds? One is that where his daily life drags wearily along; but he cannot penetrate into the other without at once entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of frenzy. The first is the profane world, the second, that of sacred things.[100]

For Durkheim, the principle incentive to primitive economic activity is a matter of private interest and not necessarily a concern of the social structure. "On feast days . . . these [economic] preoccupations are necessarily eclipsed; being essentially profane."[101] Only in coming together as a cult do human beings develop a concern that everyone be provided for in abundant harvests and sufficient rainfall. But there is no planned economic system. At this primitive societal level, commerce

---

[100]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 218.

[101]Ibid., p. 348.

is very rudimentary, and the clan system is supported sufficiently through mutual loans and treaties.[102]

Durkheim recognized that in advanced societies the realms of the religious and social life and the realm of lay and profane occupations become blurred. Men become less aware that they participate in a double existence.[103] Durkheim simply did not make an attempt to explicate the pervasiveness of economic influence on religion. He pointed out that

> only one form of social activity has not yet been expressly attached to religion: that is economic activity. . . . It is seen that the ideas of economic value and religious value are not without connection. But the question of the nature of these connections has not yet been studied.[104]

It would appear that Weber considered it necessary to illuminate the nature of these connections.

Social Class: The Selection and Shaping of Religious Practice

Durkheim contended that it is the religious group of which an individual is a member that teaches him what to believe and how he should respond to life situations.[105] The group decides what is moral and what the members can do to enhance or vary their lives. Weber also recognized that the religious community trains individuals in what they are to believe and how they view the world. Unlike Durkheim, Weber dealt with complex societies and showed how group experiences and perspectives come into conflict. He particularly dealt with the outlook of social classes and their influence on religious belief and practice.

---

[102] Ibid., p. 426.

[103] Ibid., p. 219.

[104] Ibid., p. 419.

[105] Ibid., p. 46.

As a careful student of stratification systems, Weber developed particular insights into the way in which societies are structured so that the life chances of some groups are distinctly limited, while other groups may be particularly endowed with opportunities of both wealth and position. He analyzed the intricate patterns in which social classes use religion for their own interests. For example, "classes with high social and economic privilege will scarcely be prone to evolve the idea of salvation. Rather, they assign to religion the primary function of legitimizing their own life pattern and situation in the world."[106] One of the most noteworthy conclusions drawn by Weber is that the peasant class and the warrior nobles seem especially indisposed to embrace what Weber referred to as a rational or rationalized religion, with its emphasis on system, standardization, disenchantment, demystification, efficiency of means to designated ends, and the elimination of magic.[107]

It would be impossible within the limits of this paper to treat every socioeconomic class that Weber discussed. The point here is that the various classes tend to accept certain beliefs and practices in religion and to reject others. For example, Weber showed that a religion risks being changed considerably by those classes who are let into its membership. If the dispossessed are given relatively free entrance, they may seriously disturb the structure and direction of the newly embraced religion. Oriental Christians under the Umayyads "streamed into the privileged religion

---

[106]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 107.

[107]Ibid., pp. 82, 85.

of Islam in such numbers that the political authorities had to make conversion difficult for them in the interests of the privileged classes. . . ."[108]

Paradoxically, this change in the Muslim religion was required in order to prevent an even greater change from coming about. In the above case, the privileged social, political, and economic position of one class stood in danger of being swept away by a tide of new converts. To protect their own vested interests, those in positions of privilege simply made expedient revisions in the religion.

In some cases religious belief and behavior are used boldly by economic interests. "The needs of economic life make themselves manifest through a reinterpretation of the sacred commandments or through a by-passing of the sacred commandments."[109] On the other side of the fence, those who are denied positions of privilege in society may, under certain conditions, project into their theological and religious beliefs their own class ambitions and vengeance. A deeper inquiry into the disprivileged class will prove fruitful.

Ressentiment in Religion--Its Social Class Setting

In studying the influence of the pariah classes on religious belief and practice, Weber could not overlook the factor of what he called Jewish ressentiment, which is described as "the need for revenge," "retribution," "vengeance," and "compensation."[110] In its more creative form, this need becomes sublimated as a desire for redemption and justice.[111] Whether for revenge or for wholesale redemption, ressentiment was seen by Weber as an

---

[108] Ibid., p. 109.

[109] Ibid., p. 208.

[110] Ibid., pp. 111-113.

[111] Ibid., p. 110.

outgrowth of a certain class situation. "Ressentiment is a concomitant of that particular religious ethic of the disprivileged which . . . teaches that the unequal distribution of mundane goods is caused by sinfulness and the illegality of the privileged. . . ."[112]

The key to understanding ressentiment is found in the notion of unjustified distribution of goods. The Jewish religion in particular, Weber contended, has been prone to ressentiment. This is in contrast to the Hindu religion, in which the drastic inequalities of life have been regarded neither as unjustified nor as the product of illegality on the part of the privileged. "Even the most despised of Hindu castes, not excluding that of thieves, regards its own enterprise as ordained by particular gods or by a specific volition of a god, assigned to its members as their special mission in life. . . ."[113]

But the devout Jewish believer could not resign himself to such a fate, for he did not perceive the cosmos in the way that the Hindu did. Given the Judaic view of God and the world, the social conditions which forced Jews to become a pariah community became for them also an intolerable curse.

Whereas the Hindu caste member nourished his feelings of worth by his "technically expert execution" of his assigned vocation,[114] the devout Jew found his disprivileged social position to be a threat to both his "self-respect and a sense of personal worth."[115] It was not open to the Jew living in the ghetto to find in his occupation either "the tangible

---

[112] Ibid., p. 110.

[113] Ibid., p. 42.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., p. 114.

proof of God's personal favor" or "self-fulfillment (Bewaehrung) in a calling (Beruf) pleasing to god, in the sense of inner-worldly asceticism (innerweltliche Askese) . . . ."[116]

Weber regarded monotheism, with its systematized ethics, to be usually more rationalized than polytheism. But this rational religion proved to the Jew to be also a profound burden both intellectually and in terms of social position and esteem. How could his religion be squared with the hard realities of empirical existence?[117]

Weber seemed to be saying that the devout Jew's own collective need for revenge helped shape his concept of the nature of Yahweh.

> In no other religion in the world do we find a universal deity possessing the unparalleled desire for vengeance manifested by Yahweh. . . . Thus, the Jewish religion became notably a religion of retribution. The virtues enjoined by God are practiced for the sake of the hoped for compensation. Moreover, this was originally a collective hope that the people as a whole would live to see the day of restoration, and that only in this way would the individual be able to regain his own worth.[118]

At least up until the time of the destruction of the temple by Hadrian, the Jews did not in theory "reject the state and its coercion but, on the contrary, expected in the Messiah their own masterful political ruler. . . ."[119] The hope of the Messiah was a combination of two major ingredients--the Jewish disprivileged social status and the refusal to accept such status as right and fitting.

Yet why would an ethical and powerful deity such as Yahweh permit his people to suffer such humiliations? The Book of Job, providing no theological answer to the plight of unjustified suffering, left submission

---

[116] Ibid., p. 114.

[117] Ibid., p. 141.

[118] Ibid., p. 112. Italics added.

[119] Ibid., p. 228.

as the only practical answer. But the Jews simply could not accept this as the final word. Weber even stated that "the unshakable strength of the doctrine of collective compensation in the Jewish religion" made it practically impossible for the Jews to understand what the author of Job was saying.[120]

Here is a clear example of how one aspect of a religion may function as a social force which, as in this case, impedes another aspect of the same religion. The Book of Job offered no hope of an eschatological Messiah who would usher in a new day of retribution and compensation. But despite Job, the pious Jew still hoped for the new day, when God would "transform the social structure of the world" and create a "messianic realm for those who had remained faithful to his law."[121] Despite the passing of generations that had not seen the promised Messiah, the pious Jew refused to resign to his class, as the pious Hindu had done. Nor could he go the way of the ultimate ethic of world-rejection, as expressed in authentic ancient Buddhism.[122] Committed to a rationalized ethic under monotheism, and unable to give up the "thirst for life" as the Buddhist claimed to have done, the faithful Jew could respond only out of both his tradition and his social situation.

According to Weber, this fateful combination moved the pious Jew steadily toward the direction of the eschatological Messiah.[123] Had the social status of Jewish people been significantly different, the intense and sustained doctrine of the Messiah of retribution very likely would

---

[120] Ibid., p. 112.

[121] Ibid., p. 256.

[122] Ibid., p. 266.

[123] Ibid., pp. 109, 256.

not have developed as a part of Jewish theology, ritual, and behavior. Indeed, if Weber's analysis is correct, Judaism as a religion would seem to be bound up profoundly with the pariah status of the Jew. This raises the searching question as to whether in overcoming the pariah status, the Jews also forsake their Judaism.[124]

The Social Foundations of Religious Organization

The Two Approaches of Weber and Durkheim on Religious Institutions and Religious Roles

In the works of Weber on which this study is based, it is easy to find references to institutional forms of religion. The nature of Weber's study presupposed complex religious communities concerned with the problems of financing, caring for the members of the community, and providing instruction for the laymen. A search through The Elementary Forms, however, does not provide any material for comparing Durkheim with Weber on religious organizations in the sense that Weber viewed them. Durkheim did not make a study of distinct religious communities that are set off from other areas of the social structure. This is not so surprising inasmuch as Durkheim had no place for religious institutional structures in his mechanical model of primitive society. Looking to the future, he planned to provide moral education through the occupational or corporate guild, and the public schools. Nor is it surprising that he did not discuss the roles of religious functionaries such as priest and prophet. What is surprising is that he did not discuss

---

[124]Clearly Weber's way of executing the sociological study of religion was itself a social force affecting the particular religion he happened to be examining. Perhaps sociologists of knowledge will eventually study the impact which the sociology of religion has on its subject matter.

functionaries of primitive religion such as the shaman. He did not concern himself with the molding and shaping of religious roles in either the organic or the mechanical society. Predominantly concerned with the consistent functioning of the social structure, he examined carefully the ways in which individuals were tied to the group and to their god.[125]

Even though Durkheim did not examine specifically the roles of religious specialists, he contended that society demands individual asceticism.[126] That is, in order to maintain a moral society, asceticism must be exaggerated in the lives of some of the members. "It is necessary that an elite put the end too high, if the crowd is not to put it too low. It is necessary that some exaggerate, if the average is to remain at a fitting level."[127] Durkheim chose not to develop further this interesting claim.

In contrast, Weber, who made a detailed study of asceticism in the salvation religions, pointed to ascetic aristocrats and their fruitless efforts to raise the religious endowment of the average person. It was Weber's contention that an aristocratic group of ascetics tends to become an exclusive organization. Such a group operates on the principle of the social class system.[128] He concluded that "a religiously specialized group might be able to master the world, but it still could not raise the religious endowment of the average person to its own level of virtuosity."[129] Durkheim's point was that society could not afford to have everyone living

---

[125]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 226.

[126]Ibid., p. 316. [127]Ibid.

[128]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 166.

[129]Ibid., pp. 166-167.

at this exaggerated level. The ascetic elite serve only to raise the average to a higher mark, not to raise it to the very highest mark.

Pointing to some of the factors leading to the development of religious communities or congregations according to social strata, Weber observed that the peasants are not likely to form clearly defined religious congregations. Their activity is tied to nature, and they secure the services of magicians when the need arises. They have not been the carriers of any sort of religion other than their original magic.[130] The warrior class also is not inclined to block off any organizational structure inasmuch as in leading a life of chance and adventure they do not need anything beyond certain ceremonial rites or protection against evil magic. However, it is notable that early Christianity and religion in the middle ages were urban developments. "It is highly unlikely that an organized congregational religion, such as early Christianity could have developed as it did apart from the community life of a city (notably in the sense found in the Occident.)"[131] Organizational aspects of city life provided the framework for the organization of Christianity into institutional structure.

A student of complex social structures, Weber held persistently to the idea that Western social organization in particular was developing in an institutionalized order with strong tendencies to concentrate on order for its own sake rather than for the sake of persons who are living in the society. He saw religious institutions becoming rationalized also.

---

[130] Ibid., p. 82.

[131] Ibid., p. 84.

By contrast, Durkheim studied a preliterate, simple social organization and derived from his research a general theory about the relationship of social organization and religion. With a strong desire for social reform he projected an ideal relationship between social organization and religion.

Weber and Durkheim held that advanced religions are highly structured with prescribed roles and duties.[132] But they held different views of the organizational structure of primitive religion. Max Weber was not a careful student of ethnography and probably for that reason tended to overlook the subtle and intricate ties and connections holding together primitive groups. For him, such groups were held together very loosely by sporadic magical practices and the tie of brotherly love, which he tended to romanticize.[133] It appears that, for Weber, preliterate religious life was organizationally about the same as what he thought he had found to be true of peasant religious life and its sporadic magical practices. It is fair to say that Weber simply was not as versed as Durkheim in primitive or preliterate religious life. It is not surprising, therefore, that he would overlook powerful organizational structures that may not have appeared on the surface.

Durkheim made it brilliantly clear that totemic religious groups are highly structured. Their religious life is characterized by order, pattern, and regularity. He pointed out that the rhythm of the religious life follows the rhythm of the social life.[134] "The essential constituent of the cult is

---

[132]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 5.

[133]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 211.

[134]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 349.

the cycle of feasts which return regularly at determined epochs."[135] He indicated that this phenomenon is still evident in advanced religions. "Many Christian celebrations are founded, with no break of continuity, on the pastoral and agrarian feasts of the ancient Hebrews, although in themselves they are neither pastoral nor agrarian."[136]

According to Durkheim's studies in ethnography, primitive rites may vary from group to group; but everywhere the rites are made up of the same essential elements.[137] Religious objects are kept in designated locations or sanctuaries; the mythical history of the group is reviewed in prescribed ways. All of the actions and interactions are laid out in precision according to tribal tradition. It is distinctly a system of fixed rites and duties.[138] Even violence and conflict are socially ordered. "However great the violence of these manifestations may be, they are strictly regulated by etiquette."[139] The character of the Australian classification system of social organization is to divide between phratries things that are in contrast with one another. If the sun is assigned to one phratry, the moon and stars are assigned to the opposite side. "If one is disposed to peace, the other is disposed to war."[140] This serves as organized rivalry and hostility between the phratries. "This opposition of things has extended itself to persons; the logical contrast has begotten a sort of social conflict."[141] In this structure, husband and wife (who must be of different phratries) do not hesitate to betray each other.[142]

---

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p. 350.

[137] Ibid., p. 388.

[138] Ibid., pp. 396, 404.

[139] Ibid., p. 391.

[140] Ibid., p. 146.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., p. 146.

Just as hostility and conflict are socially ordered, emotional excitement, play and recreation are socially ordered as well. Even the apparent spontaneous psychological reactions are structured. Spontaneity does not come by hazard or happy chance.[143] In Durkheim's description of the Australian social and religious life, the central theme is order and regularity.

If Weber did not make an ordered society or social structure the primary object of his study, he nonetheless recognized that social order is a principal concern of society and the "developed" religions. He emphasized and returned to the themes of cosmic order, moral order, social order, and world order. In religious organization the priesthood is the agent of cosmic order as it is translated into human normative order.

> Above all, it is the aforementioned relationship of the rational regularity of the stars in their heavenly courses, as regulated by divine order, to the inviolable sacred social order in terrestrial affairs, that makes the universal gods the responsible guardians of both these phenomena. Upon these gods depend both rational economic practice and the secure, regulated hegemony of sacred norms in the social community. The priests are the primary protagonists and representatives of these sacred norms.[144]

For Weber, order appeared to be the more usual condition of the social environment--breakthrough is the unusual. Even if the prophet is the agent of breakthrough, he may be seen by a sociologist as conditioned by the social order of which he is a part. Given the social and political structures of Egypt, for example, the ethical prophet and monotheist of the type found among the Hebrews did not have a chance to survive in the Egyptian social context. In fact, even when the monarch Ikhnaton himself threw his

---

[143] Ibid., p. 381.

[144] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 22.

entire weight behind astral monotheism, he encountered fierce and hostile social structures. The priests with their powerful vested interests overcame the new religious offshoot as a vine overcomes and strangles a new and tender seedling.[145] The Hebrew story states that Moses' monotheism survived only in a new land of promise, for the chances of monotheism and its accompanying prophets had very little promise in Egypt.

Order and structure in Durkheim's society is maintained without apparent discontinuity. Effervescence and periods of renewal are a regular part of religious organization and reside in the nature of the social organization itself.

> But since a social interest of the greatest importance is at stake, society cannot allow things to follow their own course at the whim of circumstances; it intervenes actively in such a way as to regulate their march in conformity with its needs. So it demands that this ceremony, which it cannot do without, be repeated every time that it is necessary, and consequently, that the movements, a condition of its success, be executed regularly: it imposes them as an obligation.[146]

For Durkheim, religion is the society in its mode of coming together, assembling together, to experience ecstasy, renewal, and reinforcement. In a thriving society, the act of coming together is itself routinized or regularized.[147]

The Priesthood and Social Forces

In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim studied a cult without a priesthood. His focus was on groups of individuals who

---

[145] Ibid., p. 58.

[146] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 367.

[147] Ibid., pp. 417, 427.

were involved as equal participants in the rites.[148] They apparently had no problems in understanding or accepting the beliefs of the group, inasmuch as every mind was "drawn into the same eddy."[149] Durkheim described impersonal moral forces as the product of cooperation, for inasmuch as they are "the work of all, they are not the possession of anybody in particular."[150]

Speaking out of his comprehensive view of religious development, Weber wrote that "there can be no priesthood without a cult, although there may well be a cult without a specialized priesthood."[151] The priesthood is a development that occurs when a religion forms a system of metaphysical views and religious ethics requiring regular interpretation and instruction for the members of the cult. Weber emphasized the fact that "the rationalization of religious life was fragmentary or entirely missing whenever the priesthood failed to achieve independent class status."[152]

Weber's emphasis on the role of religious specialists is an important aspect of his sociology of religion. With the emergence of religious specialists, stratification systems developed not only in religious organizations but in entire societies. Divine wisdom or charisma became the exclusive property of special groups and thus these groups became more powerful than those not so endowed.

Weber made a thorough study of the priesthood and pictured its role as follows:

---

[148] Ibid., p. 367. [149] Ibid., p. 6. [150] Ibid., p. 365.

[151] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 30.

[152] Ibid.

> The crucial feature of the priesthood is the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups.[153]

Depending on the social conditions and the religion, the priests may hold an honored status or have a major influence on the group they serve. On the other hand they may be controlled by those they are serving.

The Hindu priesthood or the Brahmins held a significant position in terms of religious practice. Their rank was connected to the dominant cultural value of the society--the assurance of a favorable destiny for each individual in future lives by means of an extremely complicated religious ritual. Their religion assigned to them the right to perform the most important and sacred portions of the ritual. Because of the nature of the social structure, the other castes could not in any way contest the position of the priests.

> Any possible improvement in one's chances in subsequent incarnations depended on the faithful execution in the present lifetime of the vocation assigned him by virtue of his caste status. . . . Any effort to intrude into the sphere of activities appropriate to other higher castes, was expected to result in evil magic and entailed the likelihood of unfavorable incarnation hereafter.[154]

Priests in other class systems, medieval Europe, for example, have been highly influenced by the folkways, conventions, and factual needs of the laity. Therefore the priesthood "in order to aggrandize its status and income had to conform with traditional views of the laity in formulating patterns of doctrine and behavior."[155] The laity often did not

---

[153] Ibid., p. 30.

[154] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[155] Ibid., p. 77.

have the chance in the development of religion to understand fully the meaning of the teachings. They frequently asked for a return to their comfortable forms of magical religion. "With the exception of Judaism and Protestantism, all religions and religious ethics have had to reintroduce cults of saints, heroes or functional gods in order to accommodate themselves to the needs of the masses."[156] Weber noted, for example, "as the Egyptian priesthood pressed towards greater power, the animistic cult of animals was increasingly pushed into the center of religious interest."[157]

The teaching of the religion required by the priesthood was directed toward the replacement of secret lore and magical practices with scripturally established tradition. It was recognized that the priesthood had better chances of influencing the conduct of the private lives of the laity when it was skillful enough to combine "ethical casuistry with a rationalized system of ecclesiastical penances."[158] It has often been the case that the traditionalism of the laity would greatly hinder the development of doctrine by drawing the priest's attention more exclusively to the forms and practices of the religion.

The priest may encounter another obstacle in the form of lay intellectualism. Weber indicated that proletarian intellectualism is often more important to the development of religion than philosophical intellectualism. A pure philosophical intellectualism confines itself to the socially privileged who are aware of no economic deprivation and bear no resentment

---

[156] Ibid., p. 103.

[157] Ibid., p. 77.

[158] Ibid., p. 76.

of the priesthood itself. The proletarian intellectuals, on the other hand, are found in groups of varied social positions. They may present a challenge to the priesthood because of their possession of various kinds of knowledge. Some of those among the intellectuals are not bound by social conventions and are, therefore, quite capable of an original attitude toward the meaning of the cosmos. Not predominantly concerned with the problems of subsistence, they are capable of intense ethical and religious emotion.[159]

The middle classes, Weber observed, are less given to magic and more inclined toward rationalism. Their pressure on the priests is of quite a different nature than that of the lower classes. Their awareness of economic and social realities may lead them to pressure the church (through the priest) to bring the religious teachings or dogma and the demands of everyday living into harmony.

Weber acknowledged that these factors outside the priesthood operate in much the same manner the world over. What he thought most significant for religious evolution is the fact of vested interests. The priesthood is a powerful influence in the development and survival of a religion, but through its connection with economics and politics in the social organization, it often stands in a vulnerable position.

The Prophet and the Selective Social Environment

In this section the prophet and his revelation will be viewed as a religious phenomenon that is selected by the social environment. If one

---

[159] Ibid., p. 126.

were to grant as true the prophet's claim that he receives his revelation from a divine source, the sociological fact would still remain that without a favorable social setting the prophetic message would die. Prophetic seed falling on rocky social soil takes root with great difficulty.

In the time of Muhammad, prophets were plentiful throughout much of the Saudi Arabian peninsula. Very few prophets could write; still fewer could produce a large collection of religious literature. As Weber indicated, the semi-literate Muhammad increased considerably the chances of his becoming a powerful and influential prophet when he produced written documents in a social setting (1) which already held in high esteem a holy book but (2) which was not saturated with holy books.[160] If there was already a measure of social respect for prophets, how much more respect would come to the prophet who could present his revelations in script. Once the book came into existence and was accepted by some influential persons, it took on an objective reality equal to the other few but powerfully influential scriptures that were already in existence. Given the social status ascribed to a written revelation, the Quran of Muhammad could compete with the Hebrew and Christian sacred scriptures once it gained a foothold, especially if it was represented as their fulfillment.

Weber concluded that prophets tend not to be honored in the kind of social setting in which magical beliefs are predominant. Or, looked at from a different angle, peasants tend to be more magical in their beliefs and tend also to be less receptive of prophets. But when the peasant moves into an urban environment, his magical framework is pressured by

---

[160] Ibid., p. 69.

economic circumstances to give way to a more rationalized framework.[161] Weber suggested that "the magical charisma of every specialized art" that is familiar to the peasantry becomes in the hands of urban artisans a rationalized craft.[162] In short, the magical charisma, no longer useful in practical life, is branded as a sign of pariah status in the new cities.

In losing this magical charisma, the new city dwellers become prone to embrace either secularism or a prophetic religion of some kind. Furthermore, according to Weber,

> wherever the attachment to purely magical or ritualistic views has been broken by prophets or reformers, there has frequently been a tendency for artisans, craftsmen and middle-class people to incline toward a rather primitively rationalistic ethical and religious view of life.[163]

It is important to see here that the middle-class itself may be viewed as a complex of social conditions that more readily support or "select" the prophet and reject the magician. However, Weber added that the "mere existence of an artisan and middle-class people" is not a sufficient condition guaranteeing the emergence of an ethical religion.[164] A strong contributory factor such as middle-class status cannot be turned into an iron-clad, isolated base that is itself oblivious to other social conditions and forces.

Nevertheless, Weber insisted that there is a strong mutual support between the middle-class and prophetic rational ethical religion. He pointed out "how much the missionizing effort of earliest Christianity

---

[161] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[162] Ibid., p. 98.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid., p. 99.

counted upon the aspiring, unfree middle-class group which followed an economically rational pattern of life."[165]

Weber seemed to be suggesting the provocative idea that, without the middle class to carry it, Christianity either would not have taken root or would have been a greatly different religion from what it was. Indeed, he pointed out that "the lowest stratum of the slave class was not the bearer of any congregational religion, or for that matter a fertile soil for any sort of religious mission."[166]

Weber appeared, in addition, to be making a crucial distinction between the origin of a prophetic religion and its acceptance and spread. The prophet's charisma "is not confined to membership in any particular class; and furthermore, it is normally associated with a certain minimum of intellectual cultivation."[167] That is why a prophetic revelation may even come through a prophet belonging to a socially privileged group.[168] But the revelation likely will not survive within, or be accepted by, the privileged group.[169] In order to thrive, it will have to go down the social ladder to find a more receptive social setting. Weber spoke of what we may call the tax or toll that a religious revelation must pay in order to thrive within the receptive class:

> We have already seen that one form of the adaptation of religion to the needs of the masses is the transformation of cultic religion into wizardry. A second typical form of adaptation is the shift into savior religion. . . . The transfer of salvation doctrines to the masses practically always results in the emergence of a savior, or at least in an increase of emphasis upon the concept of a savior.[170]

---

[165] Ibid., pp. 99-100. [166] Ibid., p. 100. [167] Ibid., p. 101.
[168] Ibid. [169] Ibid., p. 90. [170] Ibid., p. 102.

It is not always clear what Weber meant by a distinctively religious need, but what is clear and crucial here is that the need takes on a different character according to social class. For example, in the middle and lower bourgeois class, the need for heroic myths yields to the need for sentimental legend and edification. "This," Weber observed, "corresponds to the peaceableness and the greater emphasis upon domestic and family life of the middle classes."[171]

In contrast to this middle class, sentimental legend is the religion of an impersonal and ethical cosmic order transcending even the personal deity. But this religion is by and large not the religion of the masses or of the middle class, but of certain intellectuals.[172] The apostle Paul said that the revelation of Christ came in "the fullness of time." Weber was saying, in effect, that it survived and spread to a large extent because there was a middle class "ready" to receive the message and to rationalize it so that it became a kind of standard product to be carried throughout the Roman Empire.

Weber pointed out that because people want to believe things about the prophet and his power "it does not matter that the prophet attempts to deny such imputed powers, for after his death this development proceeds without and beyond him."[173] Needless to say, many years of scholarship have been invested in determining which of the accounts or teachings of great prophets were the most important or the most accurate. Weber concluded that "the

---

[171] Ibid., p. 103.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid., p. 77.

needs of the laity will at least insure that the form of the prophet's teaching which is most appropriate for them will survive by a process of selection."[174]

---

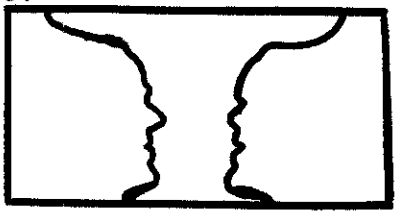
[174] Ibid., p. 79. Italics added.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN SOCIETY

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to compare Max Weber and Emile Durkheim on the question of religion as a necessary precondition of human social existence. Doubtless one reason why these two remarkable sociologists of religion have not been compared extensively on their views of the interrelationship between religion and social life is that they write from different purposes and viewpoints.[1] The researcher is tempted to use the analogy of the Gestalt figure which looks like two faces and a goblet. Weber sees the two faces, while Durkheim sees the goblet; but neither can see as the other sees.



This analogy may be misleading, however, for there are significant ways in which each sociologist with his unique perspective showed religion to be fundamental to the development and shaping of human society. The systematic study of religion as foundational to social existence is no less

---

[1] Reinhard Bendix and Guenther Roth, "Two Sociological Traditions," Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber (Berkeley, 1971), chapter XV; Whitney Pope, Jere Cohen, Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Thesis," American Sociological Review, XL (August, 1975), 417.

important than the study of social organization and structure as an objective force shaping and conditioning the direction and content of the religious dimension of human life.

Emile Durkheim and the Religious Foundations of Human Society

Religion as a Social Force

One of Durkheim's most profound contributions to the study of the relationship between religion and social forces was that the very concept of force itself is of religious origin,[2] and that it is in understanding religious forces that we are able better to understand other social realities themselves. In his analysis of the wakan, mana, or the totemic principle to which the primitives attribute the cause of their social experiences, he developed the theory that all the forces in the universe have been conceived on the model of religious forces.[3] Based on the idea of the dynamism of causality, Durkheim gave illustrious meaning to the idea of force throughout his writings. In this way he showed that religion, far from being a mere epiphenomenon, is a necessary condition of any and every society. That is, without religion as causal base, the other elements, which together with religion are called society, would not hold together as a surviving whole. Religion is so powerful a system of causal forces that no human social unit could maintain itself without it.

---

[2]Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London, 1915), p. 204.

[3]Ibid., p. 361.

Such was Durkheim's reply both to those who fear that sociological analysis will destroy all religion and to those who believed that they could foresee the time when religious beliefs and practices will no longer be a part of human life.

Whereas Weber explored in depth the hypothesis that ascetic Protestantism was a major condition supporting the spread, selection, and survival of modern capitalism, Durkheim for at least fifteen years of his scholarly life focused his study on a primitive (i.e., preliterate) religion of Australia. But Durkheim was equal to Weber in establishing in his own relentless way the thesis that religion is a crucial foundation of social life.

Religion as the Means by Which Society Recreates and Reaffirms Itself

According to Durkheim, a society, in order to maintain itself, must project an image of itself to itself. Durkheim used the analogy of the physical life and its need for food to explain the indispensability of the collective representations in maintaining the structure of the society. He explained that the collective beliefs and sentiments which the cult awakens and maintains are not vain images corresponding to nothing in reality.[4] "They are as necessary for the well working of our moral life as our food is for the maintenance of our physical life, for it is through them that the group affirms and maintains itself."[5] Because it is a central representation of society, religion expresses everything inherent in social life,

---

[4] Ibid., p. 382.

[5] Ibid.

both as it is and as it should be. Therefore, everything from the most vulgar to the most ideal is to be found in religion. For Durkheim, idealization is not man's empty wishes and illusions, but an essential ingredient of the processes of social life.

The totem represents all the attributes of the society--its moral system, its cosmology, and its history. When the clan is assembled for rites of initiation, mourning, or celebration, its members experience through drama and personal acts of discipline the intensity and meaning of their social life. The totemic emblem is omnipresent, lying all about them--imprinted on the rocks, trees, designated meeting places, and their own bodies. It keeps alive (in the mental and psychic life during the periods when the clan members are dispersed) all of the sensations and impulses experienced in the intense relations of religious ceremonies.

The Collective Conscience as Creator of a Powerful Moral System

According to Durkheim, "the religious force which animates the clan particularizes itself by incarnating itself in particular consciousnesses."[6] Furthermore, "the representations of the totem are more actively powerful than the totem itself."[7] Using the analogy of the effects of electric shock to speak of religious force, Durkheim illustrated that the collective conscience is a compelling power internalized within each individual. He pointed out that he was not being metaphorical when speaking of the principles of force or power.

---

[6]Ibid., p. 424.

[7]Ibid., p. 133.

> In one sense, they are even material forces which mechanically engender physical effects. Does an individual come in contact with them without having taken proper precautions? He receives a shock which might be compared to the effect of an electric discharge.[8]

Individuals are literally moved by the effervescence of the ceremonies to respond readily and enthusiastically to each other. Their intense association creates a sort of electricity, "transporting them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation."[9] It is in these moments that "every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each re-echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others."[10]

A profound moral system, Durkheim held, is not only a compelling force, but a sustaining force as well. Because he is in moral harmony with his comrades, the believer has more confidence, courage, and boldness in action; this confidence becomes a perpetual sustenance for his moral nature.[11] Durkheim contended that "the real function of religion is to make us act, to aid us to live."[12]

Religion Binding Together the Members of a Society and their Moral Obligations

The cultic activity serves to create and reaffirm the system of ideas and beliefs that strengthens the bonds attaching the believers to their god or society. "Everything leads back to this same idea; before all, rites

---

[8] Ibid., p. 190.

[9] Ibid., p. 215.

[10] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[11] Ibid., p. 211.

[12] Ibid., p. 416.

are the means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically."[13] Durkheim noted that the rites or ritual practices are entwined with the beliefs in such a way as to provide consensus, inspiration, and creativity for society. He noted further how the practices of the cult are laid out in careful detail. They are "something more than movements without importance and gestures without efficacy."[14] They may be dramatic in form or very crude, but no matter how crude or how elaborate, they function the same everywhere. They express the same confidence and veneration "wholly comparable to that expressed by the worshippers in the most idealistic religions when, being assembled, they proclaim themselves the children of the almighty God."[15]

For Durkheim, then, religion was to be seen in its integrative role, holding together the members of societies and helping to secure the expectations created by their own history. Religion enables the society to reach consensus on essential values. By the constraining power of the sacred, common values become secured against private whim and interest. Durkheim's emphasis was clearly on social structure and its stability.

In The Elementary Forms, Durkheim focused sharply on what he took to be religion in its pure and uncluttered form. It is religion containing no more than the principal and indispensable elements present in every religion. "All is reduced to that which is indispensable, to that without which there could be no religion. But that which is indispensable is also that which is essential, that is to say, that which we must know before all

---

[13] Ibid., p. 387.

[14] Ibid., p. 225.

[15] Ibid., p. 387.

else."[16] This is religion as it exists in the stage of totemism in which every member of the society shares the religion of the total group. Religion in this case is an aspect of the total activity of the group but not a separate institution.

Max Weber and the Religious Foundations of Human Society

Religious Behavior as a Part of Social Action

Weber indicated from the outset of The Sociology of Religion that he was approaching the study of religious behavior from the standpoint of (1) its (subjective) meaning to the believers and (2) its consequences in their "everyday purposive conduct."[17] Subjective understanding involves "getting inside" the problems and concerns of the movements, groups, or individuals under study and looking at those problems in the way that the believers themselves view them. Weber was not looking for the "common foundations" of religious life but was studying religious behavior as a particular type of social action. As a social action theorist, he saw the social creature as an individual engaged in economic, religious, family, political, and esthetic activity.

Religion Providing Answers to Problems of Meaning

Viewing religion as a means of providing answers and solutions to problems of meaning, Weber insisted that man's practical existence and

---

[16] Ibid., p. 6.

[17] Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff (Boston, 1963), p. 1.

even his cognitive processes were colored by the religious dimension of his life. He explained that the disprivileged seek salvation because of their wishes to accept their practical existence more agreeably. The middle classes seek a religion acceptable to their rational, systematic mode of living. There is also another ever present factor to be considered.

> This additional factor is intellectualism as such, more particularly the metaphysical needs of the human mind as it is driven to reflect on ethical and religious questions, driven not by material need but by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take up a position toward it.[18]

Because the belief-system is a crucial aspect of the social reality of any people, the failure of any study to take into account this part is to leave an account or explanation filled with telling gaps.

For example, Weber looked upon Christianity as a solution to problems which, for Paul and people like him, were far from being merely economic problems. In their special social setting, these people were suffering the threats of demonism, the torments of guilt-ridden conscience, the "enslavement of astrological determinism," and the threat of permanent death.[19] In order to meet the problems prevalent in the social world of Paul, "the savior must fight with . . . evil demons."[20]

Without denying that Paul's conversion was "a vision, in the sense of hallucinatory perception," Weber wanted his readers to understand that Paul's "conversion was also recognition of the profounder inner relationship between the personal fate of the founder of Christianity and the

---

[18] Ibid., p. 117. Italics added.

[19] Ibid., p. 184.

[20] Ibid.

cultic ideologies of the general oriental savior doctrines and conceptions of salvation (with which Paul was well acquainted), in which latter no place was provided for the promises of Jewish prophecy."[21] In many ways Paul represented a coming together of two powerful cultural fronts--the Jewish tradition and the popular expectation of the oriental or pagan savior. In the charismatic personality of Paul these two forces united many of their elements, while casting off still other elements, thus producing a new social environment out of two old ones that had begun undergoing serious internal breakdowns. According to Weber, much of the behavior--including the style and mode of the behavior--of a given unit of people will appear to be irrational and random until its meaning is perceived within the ultimate metaphysical basis or the metaphysical conception.[22] For some groups, mystical knowledge provides "not new knowledge of any facts or doctrines, but rather the perception of an overall meaning in the world."[23] The point here is that the religious perspective of the believer and his world has helped to determine profoundly the range of options open to his behavior. Indeed, even nonbelievers participate in this perspective more than they sometimes realize.

Weber's broad interest in the rationalization process in the Occident (in particular) directed him toward the study of this process in religion itself. This need to conceive the world as a meaningful cosmos was interpreted by Weber to be a part of the rationalistic process.[24] The practical effect of the believer's preoccupation with endowing his life with a

---

[21] Ibid., p. 130. Italics added.

[22] Ibid., p. 185.

[23] Ibid., p. 170.

[24] Ibid., p. 124.

pervasive meaning had profound and lasting effects on Occidental culture because, for one thing, it suppressed belief in magic. As the "disenchantment" effect materialized, a new vacuum appeared with a new need or "demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful."[25]

Religious Ideas as Forces

It was Weber's contention that religion will provide various believing groups with varying worldviews and that the consequences of these worldviews on the surrounding social environment will take incredibly diverse directions. Having no wish to establish a doctrine of religious causality as a substitute for the doctrine of economic causality, Weber did wish to establish, however, that religious interpretations of the world have played a significant role in the economic uniqueness of Western civilization.

It was Weber's position that belief systems have detectable consequences in human social structures and organizations. For example, he attempted to learn why it was that Protestants of a certain kind were strongly inclined to become associated with capitalistic enterprises, whereas Catholics were not so inclined despite the fact that their social conditions seemed very nearly the same as those of the Protestants. In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Weber advanced and defended the thesis that the unique religious belief system of especially ascetic Protestantism made the major striking difference. It served as a strong and persisting

---

[25] Ibid., p. 125.

contributory factor in the movement toward economic rationalism, as exemplified in especially the vigorous new-style capitalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Western world. In Weber's own words, "Thus, the principal explanation of this difference [in Western economic life] must be sought in the permanent intrinsic character of their religious beliefs, and not only in their temporary external historico-political situations."[26]

Varieties of Religious Practice

In his survey of the various religions, Weber focused on the way in which religion as the pursuit of salvation became primarily in the West an ethical, methodical plan of life. He divided religions generally into two major categories--religions of adaptation and religions of conviction. Religions of adaptation are characterized by contemplation and the attempt to gain unity with the divine. Religions of conviction lead to salvation through a very special patterning of life. Religious practice in this latter case is not characterized by ritual and magical acts, but by a systematic regulation of life in subordination to the religious end.[27] This ascetic attitude regards salvation as a divine gift to human instruments whose active, ethical behavior is divinely directed. In this way, Weber traced the vocational asceticism of the modern world to spiritual roots. The fact that people felt it their duty to labor selflessly, methodically, and conscientiously in their callings in the world without involvement in personal pleasures and sensuous indulgences could only

---

[26]Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958), p. 40.

[27]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 162.

occur with the theological promise of divine reward and sanction.[28] He pointed to the uniqueness of ascetic Protestantism:

> But an unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism alone. Furthermore, only in the Protestant ethic of vocation does the world, despite all its creaturely imperfections, possess unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfills his duties by rational behavior according to the will of an absolutely transcendental god.[29]

Weber studied religion in its developed complexity. The "luxuriant vegetation" that Durkheim found obscurant to his purposes, Weber found to be his source of rich and fruitful investigation. He delved into the history of the five world religions--Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. As each of these religions twisted and flowed through centuries, it left great deposits, as it were, on the banks of its social environment. Weber believed that the procession of a historically significant religion can be fruitfully explored to a considerable extent, though not exclusively, in the behavior and experience of outstanding functionaries such as priests and prophets. Yet there were important surging lay movements which Weber insisted on studying lest the account be seriously distorted. He examined situations in which the same religion might be shared by all the members of a society. In other cases, the religion might be a separate institution within a society. In still other cases, the religion might be only one of many within the same society. For Weber, a religion might well encounter value differences with other religions, as well as with classes or castes. A careful study of his work makes us keenly

---

[28]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 115, 119, 124.

[29]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 182.

aware also of the fact that when spheres of social activity, namely, law, art, politics, economics, and education come into their own, they may exist in tension with religious faith and practice.

The Influence of Religious Practice on Social Life

Rites and Ritual

Durkheim said, "The rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups."[30] He emphasized the effervescent ceremonies of the society in which the group becomes conscious of itself. It makes no difference if the occasion for the gathering is sad or happy; the power over the group is the same. "By the mere fact that they are a collective, they raise the vital tone."[31] The rites that take place under these conditions fulfill one and all the same function. "The same results are obtained by fasts, abstinences and self-mutilations as by communions, oblations and commemorations."[32] The whole purpose is to provide stimulation and assurance for the living community. Ideally it raises men above their lower natures.

In contrast, Weber did not see this consistency of response to ceremonials or rituals. For him, ritualistic salvation, especially when it limits the layman to a spectator role, such as listening to a mass or witnessing a mystic play, "has only a negligible effect on behavior once

---

[30] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 10.

[31] Ibid., p. 408.

[32] Ibid., p. 414.

the ceremony is over."[33] The conditions that bring about an intensified religious mood--orgiastic states or the arousal of ecstasy--may be very transitory in nature and leave but few positive traces on everyday behavior.[34] "The meager influence [that] such experiences frequently have upon everyday ethical living may be compared to the insignificant influence of a beautiful and inspiring play upon the theater public which has witnessed it."[35]

Weber, looking at religious motivations and their impact on social organization, could find no consistent set of consequences brought about by religious gatherings and assemblies. The psychological conditions of ritualism could not be said to contribute strongly to rational, moral activity.[36] Weber did not agree that the primitive ceremonies accomplish what Durkheim said they accomplish. In discussing the ceremonies of initiation (similar to the ones Durkheim played up with such pageantry), he noted that "the reception of youth into the religious brotherhood of the phratry and their equipment with the paraphernalia of war, or the decoration of youth with the insignia of manhood in China and India," did not produce enduring effects for the religious life.[37] "All these ceremonies were originally associated with activities which produced or symbolized ecstasy, and the only purpose of the associated training regimens is the testing or arousing of the capacity for ecstasy."[38]

---

[33] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 152.

[34] Ibid., p. 158.

[35] Ibid., p. 152.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 157.

[38] Ibid.

One is now in position to look with better perspective at Durkheim's treatment of the influence of rites and rituals on social life. If Weber tended to regard what he called "cultic performance" as largely irrelevant to ethical religion and social achievements (good works),[39] Durkheim, by contrast, tended to see the rites and rituals of the cult as an essential ingredient of any moral and stable society.[40] By participating in cultic rites and rituals, the believer could gain confidence to pursue his social duties and obligations.[41]

In this connection it is imperative to understand that in The Elementary Forms, beliefs and rites are regarded as at most distinguishable from one another, but never separable. Indeed, the rites compose a part of the belief. To disbelieve in their efficacy is to manifest ambivalence in sharing in their benefits, and this causes an upheaval in one's own being and movement in the community. After all, it is to some extent through the rites and rituals that the individual literally establishes himself as a social reality.

> If the intermittent failures of the Intichiuma do not shake the confidence of the Australian in his rite, it is because he holds with all the strength of his soul to these practices in which he periodically recreates himself; he could not deny their principle without causing an upheaval of his own being, which resists.[42]

It is in the ceremonies that the disposition toward faith is created--faith that makes proofs or careful defense of belief unnecessary.

---

[39] Ibid., p. 154.

[40] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 416.

[41] Ibid., p. 414.

[42] Ibid., p. 36.

Durkheim pointed out that preachers devote much more time to "reawakening the sentiment of the moral comfort" than in establishing the truth of propositions.[43] The religious ceremonies give the individual strength and confidence. His social nature is strengthened to do what is expected of him. He is inspired to fulfill his duties to the society at whatever the cost.

> After we have acquitted ourselves of our ritual duties, we enter into the profane life with increased courage and ardour, not only because we come into relations with a superior source of energy, but also because our forces have been reinvigorated by living, for a few moments, in a life that is less strained, and freer and easier.[44]

Thus is the strength for action, this "impulse toward believing,"[45] that Durkheim proclaimed as "something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself."[46]

Durkheim concluded that this faith is what has been observed everywhere throughout history and will outlast all symbolism, religious formulae (doctrine), even the speculative function of science. "In so far as religion is action, and in so far as it is a means of making men live, science could not take its place, for even if this expresses life, it does not create it."[47]

Social Consequences of the Quest for Salvation

According to Max Weber, men search for salvation or a continuing state of grace. From the earliest times when small groups broke away from the

---

[43] Ibid., p. 360.
[44] Ibid., p. 382.
[45] Ibid., p. 360.
[46] Ibid., p. 427.
[47] Ibid., p. 430.

primordial bands, men have sought to find their place in the world. "The ultimate question of all metaphysics has always been something like this: if the world as a whole and life in particular were to have a meaning, what might it be, and how would the world have to look in order to correspond to it?"[48]

The attainment of salvation may demand discipline and self-denial, or even the shifting of great systems of energy. If the quest involves an other-worldly salvation, it may require the believers to give up certain pleasures and activities that would distract them from their major objectives.[49] If the social order itself is considered undesirable, the believer may work reluctantly in the world even though he is opposed to its social institutions, for his hope is in the next world.[50] Or he may accept the social order as his responsibility to reform. Weber pointed to a distinct difference between Eastern and Western culture regarding salvation and its social consequences. "The decisive historical difference between the predominantly oriental and Asiatic types of salvation religion and those found primarily in the Occident is that the former usually culminate in contemplation and the latter in asceticism."[51]

In the religions of the Occident, the concept of an absolutely omnipotent god blocked the path of mystical contemplation as a means of achieving a state of grace. Salvation could be accomplished and maintained only by some sort of active conduct within the world.[52] The practical social

---

[48]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 59.

[49]Ibid., p. 168.

[50]Ibid., p. 166.

[51]Ibid., p. 177.

[52]Ibid., p. 178.

consequence was that different versions of salvation tended to reinforce different kinds of social organizations and structures. For example, in the case of the mystic who possesses a subjectively appropriate state of salvation, Weber said that

> the result of this subjective condition may be antinomianism. His salvation manifests itself not in any sort of activity but in a subjective condition and its idiosyncratic quality. He feels himself no longer bound by any rule of conduct; regardless of his behavior, he is certain of salvation.[53]

According to Weber, the typical mystic is never a man of conspicuous social activity, nor is he inclined toward rational transformation.[54] If mysticism is ever instrumental in creating communities, it is through a psychological effect--a mystical feeling of love--and this is a development contrary to logic.

On the other hand, the ascetic is characterized by rational action, action which is integrated in terms of meaning, end and means, and which is governed by principles and rules.[55] He may reject the esthetic and epicurean satisfactions of the world, "but at the same time he affirms individual rational activity within the institutional framework of the world, affirming it to be his responsibility as well as his means for securing certification of his state of grace."[56] To the ascetic Protestant, the world becomes the object through which he fulfills his duties to God by carrying out his vocation.[57]

---

[53] Ibid., p. 174. Italics added.

[54] Ibid., p. 176.

[55] Ibid., p. 174.

[56] Ibid., p. 173.

[57] Ibid., p. 182.

Weber contended that the search for salvation indicates that there is a universal need to find one's place in the world. He felt that one needs reassurance that his place in the world, whether privileged or disprivileged, is legitimate in comparison to his fellows.[58] He agreed with Durkheim that all forms of religion serve to provide this assurance and confidence. However, in his treatment of a class-divided society, Weber dwelled on what Durkheim did not, namely, the thesis that this assurance or self-esteem is realized in different ways according to the various classes. For those of the privileged classes, the self-esteem gained through religion is the assurance of their "underived, ultimate, and qualitatively distinctive being."[59] Those of the underprivileged classes gain their sense of worth through the promise of what they may eventually become.[60]

On the surface at least, Durkheim showed no interest in the concept of salvation. The word does not even appear in the index to The Elementary Forms. We might question whether any profound treatment of religion could be carried out if it fails to delve deeply into the theme of salvation. Fortunately, a careful study of The Elementary Forms reveals that Durkheim did not ignore this theme at all. What is peculiar to his sociological study is the way that he interpreted salvation as a human religious phenomenon.

Students of religion generally agree that the fundamental concern of salvation in any religion is to be saved or rescued from some state, condition, or place and to be delivered to a more favorable state, condition, or place. This may be called the need or problem inherent in the very

---

[58] Ibid., p. 107. [59] Ibid., p. 106. [60] Ibid.

concept of salvation. Durkheim spoke of "the miseries of the world," "evil," and the "condition as a mere man." These are what the believer hopes to be delivered or saved from. If the believer has "communicated with his god," Durkheim wrote, it is "as though he were raised above the miseries of the world, because he is raised above his condition as a mere man; he believes he is saved from evil, under whatever form he may conceive this evil."[61]

Durkheim showed no strong interest in the details of various salvation schemes. He took for granted that they would be at least as diverse as the numerous versions of evil that men have conceived and experienced.

> Howsoever complex the outward manifestations of the religious life may be, at bottom it is one and simple. It responds everywhere to one and the same need. . . . In all its forms, its object is to raise man above himself and to make him lead a life superior to that which he would lead, if he followed only his own individual whims: beliefs express this life in representations; rites organize it and regulate its working.[62]

What Durkheim found to be common to various salvation myths and procedures was the need of any society to make salvation a possibility. He saw salvation schemes as the idealized social mechanism whereby a society strengthened and motivated its members to face the contingencies and hardships of existence. The faithful who believed they had attained a measure of salvation gained for themselves a very practical advantage in the world, namely, strength--"either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them."[63]

---

[61] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 417.

[62] Ibid., p. 414.

[63] Ibid., p. 416.

Whereas Weber wished to show how a particular view of salvation exerts a particular impact on a given social and economic setting, Durkheim wished to show how religion in general exerts an influence on society in general. What religion does, Durkheim insisted, is to make the participants strong in their confrontation with life and to unite them in their moral and practical endeavors sufficiently to make life for them worthwhile. Indeed, the element of strength is to a large extent a function of the unity or integration which wells up as the cult practices its religious rites and rituals.

In short, Durkheim, declining to discuss the bewilderingly diverse schemes of salvation that human societies had embraced, insisted that he had detected in them all a common function so steady in its trend as to render the diversity hardly more than accidental and incidental phenomena. Durkheim contended that religious believers feel that the real function of religion is not to make them think or enrich their knowledge. It makes them act and aids them in living.[64]

For Durkheim, religion is to society what blood is to the body. The blood spreads throughout every part of the body but is not a separate organ of its own. The life of the flesh is the blood, and the saving life of the society is its religion. Such is Durkheim's social version of salvation. Those special ceremonial and ritual occasions by which the society becomes the sacred cult may be compared to a blood transfusion bringing new power to the entire body. Religion, Durkheim argued, cannot

---

[64] Ibid.

be religion if it becomes a purely self-serving institution. Its uniqueness lies in its way of serving the social and moral interests.[65] Hence, unlike Weber, Durkheim tended not to look upon religious ecstasy as an end in itself. True, ecstasy may not have served the cause of what Weber called "rationalization," but Durkheim saw ecstasy and religious excitement as capable of serving the more basic need of human societies to generate viable values and to inspire men to commit themselves to them.[66] He seemed never to doubt that the "principal object [of religions] is to act on moral life."[67]

Durkheim did not emphasize the prophetic and radical impact of religion on society, but rather stressed again and again its rejuvenating and supportive function. Intensely concerned that his readers understand that the social body could not long remain alive without some religion, he failed to emphasize what Weber did not fail to emphasize, namely, the power of religion to change radically some of the basic fundamental currents of a society.

Yet in the "Conclusion" to The Elementary Forms Durkheim finally did write eloquently, though briefly, of the role of religion in generating the sacred "ideal" in the community.[68] He even spoke, again briefly, of transforming the environment, and indicated that the religious pitch of intensity is the society acting as its own creator through its own projected ideal. According to Durkheim, "a society can neither create itself nor recreate itself without at the same time creating an ideal."[69]

---

[65] Ibid., p. 316. [66] Ibid., p. 418.

[67] Ibid., p. 420. [68] Ibid., p. 422. [69] Ibid.

The point is that the ideal is not a mere idea.[70] The picture which Durkheim wanted to leave was that of a society which can reform and transform itself only by a moral vision that is "something more than mere epiphenomenon."[71] This process of projecting the vision is a major religious function. That is why in the "Conclusion" Durkheim could not imagine a healthy society continuing without a vital religion. Those who would dispose of all religion were, in Durkheim's mind, bent on nothing less than social suicide. The religious faculty of collective idealizing "is not a sort of luxury which man could exist without, but a condition of his very existence."[72] It is safe to say that the "Conclusion" of The Elementary Forms contains a thinly disguised plea of a new vision of salvation for modern civilization. Durkheim's passionate hope was that the god-society would produce once again its own vision or ideal and thus save itself from disappearing.[73]

Sacrifice and Communal Feasting

Both Durkheim and Weber gave considerable attention to the practice of sacrifice among various groups. According to one theory existing in the time of these two sociologists, sacrifice began as the practice of presenting an offering of some kind of food to the god or gods. It was considered to be an obligatory act and a magical means of appeasing or coercing the gods. Both Weber and Durkheim in their study of this practice recognized another highly significant aspect of the act of sacrifice. They

---

[70] Ibid., p. 416f.

[71] Ibid., p. 423.

[72] Ibid., p. 423.

[73] Ibid., p. 430.

understood it as an act of communion between the worshipper and his god.[74] Weber, observing sacrifice to be one of the two characteristic elements of "divine worship," contended that the sacrifice was as essential to the god as it was to the worshipper. Weber wrote, "The pervasive and central theme is: do ut des. This aspect clings to the routine and the mass religious behavior of all peoples at all times and in all religions."[75] And, in a very similar passage, Durkheim also contended that sacrifice as an essential element of religion is a mutual exchange of services between the worshippers and their god.

> The rule do ut des, by which the principle of sacrifice has sometimes been defined, is not a late invention of utilitarian theorists: it only expresses in an explicit way the very mechanism of the sacrificial system and, more generally of the whole positive cult.[76]

Durkheim and Weber also agreed that the practice of sacrifice or communal feasting was strengthening to the community of believers. Durkheim vividly described the feastdays and emphasized that the feasts function as a powerful cohesive activity for the community. It is on these feast days that the thoughts of all "are centered upon their common beliefs, their common traditions, the memory of their great ancestors, and the collective ideal of which they are the incarnation."[77] For Durkheim, communion is an act of celebration. Weber also recognized that the practice of sacrifice was reinforcing to the community.

---

[74] Ibid., p. 336.

[75] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 27.

[76] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 347.

[77] Ibid., p. 348.

> But another motive for sacrifice may be of greater importance, and it is probably older too: the sacrifice, especially of animals, is intended as a communio, a ceremony of eating together which serves to produce a fraternal community between the sacrificers and the god.[78]

It is significant that Weber saw another function of the communal feast--a function that Durkheim did not emphasize. Weber recognized the communal feast to be a means of bridging political and ethnic differences. He pointed out that "the first great turning point in the history of Christianity was the communal feast arranged at Antioch between Peter and the uncircumcised proselytes, to which Paul, in his polemic against Peter, attributed such decisive importance."[79]

Symbolism

Durkheim, viewing symbolism as a vital and essential ingredient of the religious and social life, observed it to be the means of insuring identity in the groups he studied. The clan of the Australian aborigines was not defined by territory, by the chiefs, or by kinship.[80] It was defined only by the collective emblem. Durkheim described this unity as unique in that all the parts of the totemic system vibrate sympathetically. By showing how the clan was dependent on its symbolism, he illustrated that "social life in all its aspects and in every period of its history is made possible by a vast symbolism."[81]

Symbolism is necessary for keeping the reality of religion in the minds of the believers when they cannot be in direct contact with their

---

[78]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 26.

[79]Ibid., p. 41.

[80]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 233.

[81]Ibid., p. 231.

object of worship or veneration. In totemism, Durkheim showed symbolism to be something like a powerful communication system. It keeps alive in the minds of the believers,while they are dispersed,all that they experience when the group is assembled. It serves to keep before the group the societal values and reminds them of their common obligations. He saw symbolism as the only tangible means of representing the religion. In Durkheim's view, men have never made even a slightly distinct representation of the moral conscience of society except by the aid of religious symbols.[82]

Weber recognized with Durkheim that symbolism is highly significant in providing for groups, in tangible form, an attachment to the spirits, gods, or ideologies which, being intangible, lack consistent meaning in the group's practical existence. "More and more, things and events assumed significances other than the real potencies that actually or presumably inhered in them, and efforts were made to achieve real effects by means of various symbolically significant actions."[83] Symbols in the religions of the masses keep the believers in touch with their faith when they are removed from the immediate totemic and cultic experience.

Weber did not agree that symbolism produces social unity first and foremost. Though symbolism may indeed serve as a point of reference for keeping believers in communication on their central values and beliefs, the consequences may be uncertain. He made a very strong case for the view that disunity of groups can be brought about by the use of symbols. "The question whether a cross should be made with two or three bars was a basic

---

[82] Ibid., p. 211.

[83] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 7.

reason for the schism of the Russian church as late as the seventeenth century."[84] The prospect of altering the symbolism was more threatening to the believers than altering the doctrine in many cases. Just as children request the same bedtime story again and again, religionists like to have their sacred words and symbols as a predictable part of their support system.

The Influence of Religious Belief on Social Life

Beliefs as Sociocultural Objects

With the emergence of the complexity and elaboration of symbols comes the human ability to transform subjective beliefs into social or cultural objects. The advantage of this movement from the subjective to the objective, from the private to the public, is that beliefs and expectations may be formulated in a language and thus made into a portable social reality. And what is portable can be transportable--from individual to individual within the group, and from group to group. Myths have been studied from various perspectives by sociologists and other social scientists, but the perspective of this chapter is that myths are a form of collective beliefs, as over against the purely private expectations of individuals.

When one clan borrows or absorbs the myth of another, it acquires certain beliefs and expectations of the other group. This suggests that the myth serves as a kind of scanning device by which certain aspects of the environment are "looked for," "anticipated," or "selected." It follows, therefore, that those who share the common myth-belief will tend either

---

[84] Ibid., p. 8.

to filter out entirely a vast array of phenomena or to relegate them to the shadowy side of reality. Or, to be more exact, this process of selection and filtering is one aspect of the practice of embracing a myth-belief. It was only natural, therefore, that Durkheim should think of myths and beliefs as effective means of creating and sustaining the identity, unity, and integration of a group. In one sense, for a group to embrace a myth _is_ to unite itself together. In another sense, the act of doing this becomes a means for securing additional unity with the group. Hence, the myth-belief is both an ingredient of the community and a condition of it--like the cement that holds together the brick construction and yet is an essential part of the construction itself.

In a brilliant discussion of the "categories," which are normally treated by philosophers, Durkheim advanced the radical argument that the categories are "social affairs and the product of collective thought." In saying this, he knew full well that he was going against the entrenched and influential Kantian tradition which treated space, time, and the "categories of the understanding" as _pure_ forms or _pure_ concepts. But according to Durkheim's analysis, even the category of space is "of social origin." "There are societies in Australia and North American whose space is conceived in the form of an immense circle, because the camp has a circular form; and this spatial circle is divided up exactly like the tribal circle, and is in its image."[85] This means that space, far from being a pure a priori universal, is a polymorphous concept, for "the divisions of space vary with different societies, which is proof that they

---

[85]Durkheim, _The Elementary Forms_, p. 11.

are not founded exclusively on the congenital nature of man."[86] "As for the category of time, it is a veritable social institution."[87]

As if his theory of the collective or social origin of such categories as space, time, and causality were not sufficiently radical, Durkheim advanced and argued for the even more radical position that "the categories are of religious origin."[88] It is somewhat humorous to discover that standing in the midst of his arguments advanced for this radical thesis is Durkheim's warning against making radical statements on the subject. The theory of the religious and social origin of the categories was so obvious to him that any other position seemed radical by comparison. We need only to conclude here that the Kantian tradition and Durkheim's position on the categories are radically opposed to one another.

The above paragraphs of this section should throw light on Durkheim's tendency to believe that when myths were transported or absorbed from one people to another, a religious conversion was taking place, for the religion of a people was already built into its myths, categories, and even its language. The above paragraphs should also make it clear that for Durkheim it was quite difficult to draw a hard and fast line between the community's practices and its beliefs. Indeed, beliefs must be seen as practices of a special and irreducible kind. The "beliefs and rites which compose the totemic religion" are "two elements of the religious life [that] are too closely connected with each other to allow of any radical separation."[89]

---

[86] Ibid., p. 11.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., p. 10.

[89] Ibid., p. 101.

Durkheim stated that if "the cult is derived from the beliefs," the cult in turn "reacts upon them." If "the myth is frequently modeled after the rite in order to account for it, especially when its sense is no longer apparent," then "the beliefs . . . are clearly manifested only through the rites which express them."[90]

Durkheim insisted that a religion's intellectual concepts are not mere ornaments. Without its elementary intellectual concepts, no religion could be maintained.[91] This is another way of saying that religion contains in its most elementary forms the intellectual dimension. At this crucial point there seems to be no fundamental difference between Weber's view of religion and Durkheim's. Weber spoke of the "inner compulsion to understand the world."[92] It is not clear whether this was, for Weber, to be regarded as a psychological or biological or social compulsion. For Durkheim, this intellectual aspect of religion is clearly an analytic necessity, that is, it is a part of the very definition and structure of religion at its most primitive level, to say nothing of its advanced levels.

But this analytic necessity can be translated back into sociocultural terms. Durkheim was saying that a central religious rite needs (demands, requires, or finds it necessary) to have an explanation of itself. The rite serves the totem, to which the clan is tied and with which it is identified. The place and status of individuals of the clan are nothing except in their relationship to the totem, with its kinship "map," and its

---

[90] Ibid., p. 101.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 117.

directions for ceremonial behavior.[93] Intellectual beliefs collected around the totemic theme contain both instructions in what to do and information by which believers are able to orient themselves, locate their position, and thus find themselves. In short, the totemic faith tells believers who they are, what their identity is, and with what values they are to be identified.

In bearing the name of the totem, believers themselves are named.[94] The totem is not merely a name, but in addition is an "emblem," a "coat-of-arms," "the badge of the group."[95] In short, to borrow a Weberian term, the "meaning" of the believers' lives cannot be found apart from their connection with the totem.[96]

But Durkheim held that essential to the whole totemic social system is a body of beliefs. To become identified with the totem, therefore, is to become identified to some degree with the beliefs that belong to it. The totemic decorations and beliefs are essential ingredients of the cultic liturgy.[97] To be sure, beliefs may vary in complexity and elaboration from one clan to another, but all clans have central cultic beliefs as a necessary part of their religion. Therefore, believers cannot shed these beliefs without losing their identity and membership as believers in the community. To disbelieve is to be lost, that is, to become a wanderer outside the totemic scheme of things.

---

[93]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 102.

[94]Ibid., pp. 102, 108. [95]Ibid., p. 113.

[96]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 117.

[97]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 119.

The physical instruments--e.g., the churinga or the bull-roarers--which are so important in the ritual and liturgy would lack their powerful effect on the members of the cult unless the members shared certain central beliefs about the instruments. "The sacred character in the churinga is so great that it communicates itself to the locality where they are stored. . . . everything nearby participates in this same nature and is therefore withdrawn from profane touch."[98] But without belief in the sacred character of the instrument, its impact would be of little consequence.

In his chapter entitled "Totemic Beliefs," Durkheim took a rather curious and ingenious position about religious beliefs. They are absolutely essential to the sacred instruments; for if this were not the case, believers would say simply that "in themselves, the churinga are objects of wood and stone like all others."[99] What is needed is that the totemic mark be engraved upon them and that the cult's "conceptions" and "myths" accompany the mark as it is presented before the people.[100] But the curious part of Durkheim's view comes in the claim that what the conceptions and myths are is basically unimportant, that is, it is relative.[101] Objects and the explanation of their function, power, origin, and place in the totemic scheme are absolutely essential to the ongoing of the cult's religion. But they vary significantly from group to group, so much so that it would be a mistake to think that a religion must have certain beliefs in order to be maintained.

---

[98] Ibid., p. 120.

[99] Ibid., p. 122.

[100] Ibid., p. 122.

[101] Ibid., p. 123.

Durkheim was saying that people, in order to serve as a viable social reality, simply must have religious beliefs and representations. The content of the beliefs is entirely relative, and the flexibility of beliefs belonging to the totemic system is remarkable. It is as if the totemic liturgy, while unable to move without fuel, nevertheless adapts to many kinds of fuel. Durkheim views totemic representations as having a reality of their own, for in one place he treats them as a kind of autonomous cultural reality. "The representations of the totem are therefore more actively powerful than the totem itself."[102] This is but a short step from saying that what people believe about a totem is more important than the totem itself.

One is now in better position to appreciate how through its "representations" the totem can be transported from individual to individual within the community and from group to group. Durkheim held that the carrying of totemic representations from clan to clan tended to generate identity between groups. Indeed, he pictured the various totems of a tribe as complementary pieces of an overall picture.

> They mutually imply each other, they are only the parts of a single whole, the elements of a single religion. The men of one clan never regard the beliefs of neighboring clans with indifference, skepticism or hostility which one religion ordinarily inspired for another which is foreign to it; they partake of the beliefs themselves.[103]

Unlike Durkheim, Weber stressed the fact that an independent and professionally trained priesthood was required for the "rationalization of

---

[102] Ibid., p. 133.

[103] Ibid., p. 155.

metaphysical views and a specifically religious ethic."[104] Sometimes Weber seems to have regarded magic and the rationalization of religious life as opposites, which would suggest that religion requires the professional priesthood to lift it out of magic.[105] Durkheim analyzed differently the relationship between magic and religion. For him, religion by its very nature finds magic to be repugnant and profane. "Magic takes a sort of professional pleasure in profaning holy things; in its rites, it performs the contrary of the religious ceremony. . . . there is something thoroughly anit-religious in the doings of the magician."[106]

But granted that a religion must have beliefs, what is the line of demarcation between magical beliefs and religious beliefs? Durkheim seemed to be saying that we shall know their difference by their social consequences. Durkheim wrote, "There is no Church of magic." There are no lasting bonds between the individuals themselves, nothing that unites them together as a moral community, nothing that identifies them as brothers or fellow members of something more than themselves. The magician has only a clientele.[107]

"Religion, on the other hand, is inseparable from the idea of a Church. . . .A Church is not a fraternity of priests; it is a moral community formed by all the believers in a single faith, laymen as well as priests. But magic lacks any such community."[108] Therefore, where there are beliefs that form no effective part of this moral community, they are not to be classified as religious. The religious belief is known by its consequences. For

---

[104]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 30.

[105]Ibid., p. 30.

[106]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 43.

[107]Ibid., p. 44.

[108]Ibid., p. 45. Italics added.

Durkheim, the beliefs of a religion, far from being extraneous, are necessary if a religion is to be so much as defined. Durkheim defined religion as follows: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to it."[109] While he did not say explicitly that religion, because it must have beliefs in order to survive, simply produces priests as the instruments of the beliefs and not the other way around, Durkheim, nevertheless did imply this conclusion in a variety of ways. Priests and prophets have always claimed to be instruments of God, which in Durkheim's framework means nothing less than instruments of the sacred community itself.[110]

Max Weber understood that religious beliefs and representations may help unite a people together. But he, more than Durkheim, spelled out some of the disruptive effects of religious beliefs on society. This difference between these two sociologists of religion can be partially accounted for. As noted earlier in this section, beliefs can become public when they are formulated into elaborate symbols. With the coming of a written language, the beliefs can be set down and analyzed as cultural objects on their own right. They can be compared and contrasted with beliefs of other religious groups. Weber devoted many years to the study of sacred scriptures and their evolved "systematically rationalized dogmatics," whereas Durkheim chose to throw much of his effort in the study of the religion of preliterate peoples.

---

[109] Ibid., p. 47.

[110] Ibid., pp. 86, 206.

Something profound happens to religious beliefs when they are set down and explicated on material to be read. They become more or less fixed as they are inscribed, spelled out, and encased in a sacred book. Toleration that holds between cult and cult, a tolerance that Durkheim spoke of, begins, in the course of years, to give way to the centralized orthodoxy of normative scripture.

Weber, noting that the professional priesthood was in charge of the sacred scriptures, implied sometimes that the priests usually created the scriptures or at least contributed significantly to their formulation.[111] At the same time, he pointed out, significantly, that "there can be no priesthood without the cult, although there may well be a cult without a specialized priesthood."[112] This point seems to be in keeping with Durkheim's insistence that the cult is the primary reality, but it leaves in questionable status Weber's point that a specialized priesthood is required for the emergence of sacred scripture.[113]

This conflict can be resolved. Durkheim, we recall, was talking primarily of preliterate religion in its elementary form. Scriptures as codified documents could not, therefore, exist for preliterates. It follows that as written languages developed, religious beliefs came to be set down in documents. A cult in need of maintaining its unity against other religions and beliefs would profit from an evolved centralized written tradition. But once it began evolving, the codification process required some more or less specialized members to attend to it. Such an evolution

---

[111] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 29.

[112] Ibid., p. 30.

[113] Ibid.

came about only through many centuries. Weber indicated that this process was "set in motion by the existence of the vested interests of a priesthood in a cult."[114] But this seems to portray the priesthood as a force growing up outside the cult, whereas from Durkheim's perspective the priesthood emerged within the cult, as a development which the cult itself took.

Weber's overall view has provided an answer to the difficulty, an answer that fits nicely with Durkheim's general conceptual scheme. Granted, as Weber did grant, that the cult existed before the professional priesthood, the fact remains that the cult in certain developed stages usually requires a professional priesthood or the equivalent to maintain itself at this stage. This is another way of saying that the cult creates beliefs as sociocultural objects; and as the cult-created objects took on a more or less autonomous life of their own, they produced a feedback on the cult itself. Weber saw in Christian theology the most elaborate development of this process. "Only among the Christians did there develop a comprehensive, binding and systematically rationalized dogmatics of a theological type. . . ."[115] The term "rationalized" includes, among other things, a reference to the tendency of religious beliefs to formalize and develop a measure of autonomy. To be sure, as the autonomy increased, it required a more professional class to cope with its own special problems and resolutions. Weber was eager to point out that where the professional priests failed to enjoy a measure of political autonomy ("independent class status")

---

[114] Ibid., p. 31.

[115] Ibid., p. 73.

themselves, "the full development of both metaphysical rationalization and a religious ethic" failed to come about.[116]

One of the most intriguing of the many insights of Weber is the one having to do with the rise of "nonsacerdotal philosophy." What is still more intriguing is that the insight fits with Durkheim's scheme, although Durkheim failed to pursue this particular insight. According to Weber, the religious question par excellence is a metaphysical question: "If the world as a whole and life in particular were to have a meaning, what might it be, and how would the world have to look in order to correspond to it?"[117] Inside of the circle of religion the question was born. But, said Weber, the question broke out of the circle by reading for answers what could not be obtained from within. ". . . nonsacerdotal philosophy was bound to take issue with the antecedent thought of the religious functionaries; and the struggle between them provided one of the very important components of religious evolution."[118] Here we find a striking exemplification of Weber's social interactionism. The cult gave birth to the "ultimate question" of "meaning" and to a long tradition that formulated religious answers to it. But the tradition itself developed its own problems demanding new answers. Those problems must be seen as a part of the relatively autonomous social reality of the belief system that any developed religion is likely to produce. No adequate understanding of religious development is possible unless the scholar can understand the belief system on its own terms and in light of its own questions and problems.

---

[116] Ibid., pp. 30, 73.

[117] Ibid., p. 59.

[118] Ibid., p. 59.

Whereas Durkheim saw the unifying role of belief among preliterate cults and clans, Weber saw how formulated and codified scriptures, with the propensity toward an abstract orthodoxy, could produce dissensions and strife. Indeed, Durkheim wrote in one passage as if he believed that religion "normally" created skepticism and hostility toward those other religions it came into contact with if those other religions were unfamiliar and strange to it.[119] Because Weber wrote of many religions, most of which proved to be strange to each other when their paths crossed, he quite naturally saw conflict and contradiction among religious beliefs, even though they might share certain common psychological motivations. He saw how such beliefs could indeed help serve to integrate and move the believers into moral action, and he saw also how the same beliefs could cut a group off from communication with other groups. That is in part why Durkheim said of the study of religious mythology (which is a mixture of belief and art) that it "constitutes a very difficult problem which must be treated by itself, for itself and with a method peculiar to itself."[120] Durkheim warned against the easy assumptions of "the foreign point of view" in trying to understand the mythology of another people.

It is of profound significance that Weber seemed to have been one of those who understood so well this very point. For he insisted on the importance of a special method, and he himself researched with extraordinary energy the mythologies and belief systems of some of the major literate religions of the world.

---

[119]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 155.

[120]Ibid., p. 101.

Weber even spoke of a kind of amity-enmity complex in religion--of the "contradiction within the priestly preaching, between brotherliness toward fellow religionists and the glorification of war against outsiders. . . ."[121] Even though he could offer no simple rule for determining the weight of belief in shaping the social behavior of a religious body, Weber did point out how the Pennsylvania Quaker's belief in nonviolence effected a two-generation success, "in contrast to all neighboring colonies, in existing side by side with the Indians, and indeed prospering, without recourse to violence." But he also showed how the American War of Independence "made a fiction of pacifism."[122] His purpose was not to assert that beliefs are mere shadows of more fundamental realities, nor to deny that religious beliefs could affect political, economic, and legal institutions, but rather to say, quite simply, that religious beliefs and ideas can have profound social consequences only in a reasonably favorable historical setting. This point was made in the last paragraph of the main text of The Protestant Ethic:

> The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve. But it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history.[123]

The Sacred and Profane

Durkheim wrote at length on the exclusion of the profane from the sacred; Weber simply presupposed the exclusion and did not treat the matter

---

[121]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 224.

[122]Ibid., p. 228.

[123]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 183.

as a theoretical issue. It is a basic and crucial assumption, however, on which he carried out his comparative analysis. As an historian, he set out to discover, and not merely to deduce, the foci and developing patterns of influence of sacredness among the great religions of the world. Here it is possible to see once again Weber's disposition to remain alert to social complexity and conflict. As a social theorist he was prepared to acknowledge that anything may become sacred or profane to a particular group.

A very clear example of this was his treatment of sexuality. "Sexual intoxication is a typical component of the orgy, which is the communal religious behavior of the laity at a primitive level."[124] In the development of the various religions, however, sexual intoxication may be a part of the ritual and focus of one religion, while in another it may be judged as irrational behavior undermining self-control and methodical planning of life.[125]

As an historian and sociologist of religion, Weber was concerned to locate and trace actual developments of sweeping shifts in the designations of what is sacred. One of his major contributions to a number of fields dealing with the study of civilizations has been that of explicating a theory to account for the fact that in Europe a certain dimension of social life that had for centuries been more profane than sacred, seemed suddenly to become baptized as sacred and holy. Because of this profound

---

[124]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 236.

[125]Ibid., p. 238.

shift in European civilization, the elect of God could now carry out their high calling and thus demonstrate for all to see that they had indeed been selected by divine grace.

It was not the concern of Durkheim to trace down major shifts and changes in the distribution of sacredness. Rather he proposed to show why this ubiquitous distinction is necessary to any and every form of vital social existence. He emphasized that the sacred is both constraining and contagious. Regarding the constraining power of the sacred, Durkheim noted that in the most intense periods of the cultic experience "every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all minds. . . ."[126] At such a sacred time, "we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces."[127]

Regarding the contagious quality of the sacred, Durkheim explained that "the sanctity of the churinga is so great that its action is even felt at a distance."[128] Yet the sacred character is obviously not in the object itself but in the association of ideas that are shaped and aroused in intensified collective life.[129]

> It is not because the totemic animal has a certain aspect or property that it inspires religious sentiments; these result from causes wholly foreign to the nature of the object upon which they fix themselves. What constitutes them are the impressions of comfort and dependence which the action of the society provokes in the mind.[130]

The constraining and contagious power of the sacred is equally observed in both totemic and advanced religions, according to Durkheim.

---

[126]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 215.

[127]Ibid., p. 209.

[128]Ibid., p. 318.

[129]Ibid., p. 321.

[130]Ibid., p. 323.

In some religions the sacred and profane are localized in different parts of the physical universe, while in others the sacred may be put into an ideal or transcendental world.[131] "The circle of sacred objects cannot be determined, then, once for all. Its extent varies infinitely, according to the different religions."[132]

Weber recognized the constraining power of the sacred. He wrote, "To the natural uncertainties and resistances of every innovator, religion thus adds powerful impediments of its own. The sacred is the uniquely unalterable."[133] Durkheim made the very same point when he wrote, "If a belief is unanimously shared by a people, . . . it is forbidden to touch it, that is to say, to deny it or to contest it."[134]

On the other hand, Weber explicated the complex ways in which a sacred belief or commandment may be challenged or replaced by a changing social environment. For example, the belief in brotherly love as a sacred and unalterable element of religion (a pervasive sacred element of the religions that Weber studied) was replaced in an environment of trade and rational business enterprise. Likewise, Durkheim foresaw that traditional or Christian religions which had given science a profane character[135] would have to change or be replaced by a religion more in line with rules of general experience.

Both Durkheim and Weber held that what is sacred varies with the society or group in question; what does not vary is that this dichotomy exists everywhere. Durkheim emphasized the fact that the system of

---

[131] Ibid., p. 39. [132] Ibid., p. 37.

[133] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 9.

[134] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 213. [135] Ibid., p. 39.

beliefs and practices concerning sacred things unites the believers into a moral community. Weber did not disagree with this view, but he looked more specifically at the ways in which a religion may through its ethic or worldview place its adherents in tension with the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

The Religious Ethic

To illustrate the tension created by religion, Weber divided religions into two major categories. Religions of adaptation were those which more or less accepted the general worldview of their surrounding environments. Religions of conviction, however, were more often involved in the objective to change the world. Consequently, they caused disruption, even revolution. Weber explained,

> those cases in which a religious ethic simply appropriates the general virtues of life within the world require no exposition here. These general virtues naturally include relationships within the family, truthfulness, reliability, and respect for another person's life and property, including his wife. But the accentuation of the various virtues is characteristically different in different religions.[136]

Weber developed his idea by showing the very basis of the amity-enmity complex to be in the content of the religious ethic itself. He saw that beyond the magical prescriptions concerning familial piety there are two simple motives conditioning all everyday behavior that reached beyond the limits of the family--"just retaliation against offenders and fraternal assistance to friendly neighbors."[137] Weber explained that in Chinese, Vedic, Zoroastrian, and preexile Jewish ethics there was no question but

---

[136]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 210. Italics added.

[137]Ibid., p. 211.

that an enemy must be compensated evil for evil. This conviction was the foundation for the entire social order of these societies.[138]

In some religions, the amity-enmity complex infected even the deity, so that vengeance becomes God's sacred duty to himself if not to his beloved. Weber wrote, "The postexile Jews added another proviso, which Christianity retained, that vengeance is the proper prerogative of God, who will the more certainly execute it the more man refrains from doing so himself."[139] Durkheim was certainly aware of hostilities between especially the developed religions. But he sometimes glossed over the ease with which religions develop vengeance and hostility. He wrote,

> All religions even the crudest, are in a sense spiritualistic; for the powers they put in play are before all spiritual, and also their principal object is to act upon the moral life. Thus it is seen that whatever has been done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain; for it is necessarily the society that did it, and it is humanity that has reaped the fruits.[140]

Granted that most religious beliefs and ideas tend to reinforce the moral life of the group, one must consider the destructive power of religious ideas when they confront contrary religious ideas and convictions in other groups. Unlike Weber, Durkheim failed to appreciate fully the moral entropy of religious beliefs.

Weber had a remarkable appreciation of the widespread diversity of religious ideas and interests among groups. He certainly did not resist the conclusion that religious beliefs may serve society in an integrative and cohesive role. While religion does indeed powerfully bind together its

---

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 420.

own group of worshippers, nevertheless if the religion is not shared by all the members of a society, it may be a divisive, disruptive, or destructive force. Religion has divided families, societies, even nations. "Jewish retention of circumcision and of the Sabbath taboo was intended, . . . to effect separation from other nations."[141] Brotherly love, often a foundational component of ethical religion, formulated a strong expectation system among certain classes or for brothers in the faith, but only so long as they were "in the faith." Weber pointed out that "even in early Christianity . . . brotherly love in its fullest extent was enjoined only within the circle of fellow believers, and not beyond."[142] He further explained that for Christian sects as late as the Quaker community, charitable assistance was regarded in a somewhat religious utilitarian sense as "a sort of religious insurance, and was one of the most important factors in the maintenance of the religious community and in missionary enterprises."[143] This is to say that the belief in reward in the next life affected the practice of charity in the present life. When charitable assistance was not extended to those of other faiths, other classes or other nations, dissension and conflict often resulted.

In Weber's work, religion appears as an ineradicable force shaping the course of social evolution, but it does not treat everyone kindly in its path. Indeed, in many cases theological systems of belief have evolved to offer comfort and inspiration to those who would deal less than justly with their neighbors or enemies. Weber noted that in Hebrew thought the

---

[141]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 71.

[142]Ibid., p. 211. [143]Ibid., p. 213. Italics added.

right to wholesale retribution is bestowed upon Yahweh. "In no other religion in the world," he contended, "do we find a universal deity possessing the unparalleled desire for vengeance manifested by Yahweh."[144] The objective at this point of study is not to determine whether there is or is not such a Yahweh of vengeance, but to emphasize that many people held to the belief that there was such a Yahweh. And Weber insisted that it was not a belief that was held lightly or taken up in vain.

Belief in the Supernatural: Its Influence in Social Control

Durkheim consistently emphasized that societies are held together by coercion. Society is a powerful, constraining force pressuring individuals to fulfill their social obligations. Individuals comply with the demands of society because the consequences of not doing so would be too great. Durkheim recognized the fear of god to be a significant mechanism for holding groups together. In advanced stages of societal development, the god becomes a symbol of power far removed from subjects who are totally dependent upon him. Societies become "those huge Leviathans which overwhelm a man by the enormity of their power and place him under a severe discipline."[145] Durkheim advanced the hypothesis that the fear of god is a part of the development of religious evolution. He contended that "the terrible and jealous gods appear but slowly in the religious evolution."[146] As religious forces become individualized and take on anthropomorphic conceptions, the believers conceive them to be moral persons who become angry

---

[144] Ibid., p. 112.

[145] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 224.

[146] Ibid.

when their requirements are not met. The believer imposes privations upon himself out of fear of malevolence of sacred beings. "To appease their hatred or anger, he complies with their exigencies; he beats himself in order that he may not be beaten by them."[147]

Seeing the fear of god as a strong motivation for moral and social control, Weber also held that the fear of the consequences tends to restrain the believer from breaking the norms. Religion places sanctity upon the normative system of the society, making any transgression a serious offense. Weber traced this phenomenon through the course of religious development:

> Whenever the belief in spirits became rationalized into belief in gods, that is, whenever the coercion of spirits gave way to the coercion or worship of the gods who are served by the cult, the magical ethic of the spirit belief underwent a transformation too. This reorientation developed through the notion that whoever flouted divinely appointed norms would be overtaken by the ethical displeasure of the god who had these norms under his special care.[148]

Salvation religions often presupposed from the start that there are problems of divine law to be dealt with. According to Weber,

> a salvation religion generally begins by assigning inviolable sanctity to its traditional religious conventions, since all the followers of a particular god are interested in avoiding the wrath of the deity, and hence in punishing any transgression of the norms enjoined by him.[149]

Weber explained that once an injunction rises from the circle of alterable conventions into the status of divine commandment, it becomes eternally valid, like the arrangements of the cosmos. It is susceptible of interpretation but cannot be altered unless a new commandment is revealed by

---

[147] Ibid., p. 406.

[148] Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 43. [149] Ibid., p. 207.

god himself.[150] The Hebrew prophets described by Weber communicated more clearly with the Israelites by appealing to the notion of god's wrath than by explicating the laws of Moses. Weber explained that "the Israelite prophets were concerned with social and other types of injustice as a violation of the Mosaic code primarily in order to explain god's wrath, and not in order to institute a program of social reform."[151] God's wrath had become a more present reality to them than any mere language of reform.

Durkheim and Weber regarded the fear of god or gods to be a powerful motivation in the course of religious evolution for keeping individuals bound together within a tight normative system. What other responses with implications for social control did Durkheim and Weber observe in the course of religious evolution?

Durkheim saw that individuals have responded to their god or gods in fear and subjection, but they have responded in attitudes of gratitude and respect, as well. He was insistent that at the root of totemism there are sentiments of happy confidence rather than of terror and compression.[152] "The primitive," he wrote, "does not regard his gods as foreigners, enemies or thoroughly and necessarily malevolent beings whose favours he must acquire at any price; quite on the contrary, they are rather friends, kindred or natural protectors for him."[153] In contrast to certain developed theistic and monistic religions, the power of the cult is not something

---

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., p. 51.

[152] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 224.

[153] Ibid.

soaring high above the primitive. "Perhaps," Durkheim wrote, "the deity has never been nearer to men than at this period of history, when it is present in the things filling their immediate environment and is, in part, imminent in himself."[154]

Durkheim made a special request that his social realism not be characterized solely by notions of pressure, constraints, and coercion.[155] He indicated that the collective life of the cult affords ideas which are both very opposite to that of coercion and no less real.[156] He wished to show that society in its innumerable gifts to us is also good and gracious.[157] He contended that "the environment in which we live seems to us to be peopled with forces that are at once imperious and helpful, august and gracious, and with which we have relations."[158] Individuals respond out of their great feelings of respect and gratitude. They carry out their social obligations even at personal sacrifice in order to maintain the structure that makes them human. It is religion that impresses this reality upon them. In the periodic ceremonies, individuals review their history and are reminded of what their society (god) provides for them.

Weber also saw that though men may respond to their deities out of fear and subjection they may also respond out of respect and assurance that their god loves and cares for them. He noted that "the emotional content of religions of faith may be deepened whenever the followers of these

---

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[156] Ibid., p. 209.

[157] Ibid., p. 212.

[158] Ibid.

religions substitute the view that they are children of god for the ascetic view that they are merely his instruments."[159] Religions have taught that god may be an angry god demanding obedience and submission. They have also taught that he may be concerned and loving. The component of love as expressed toward god or one's fellow creatures is an expression of the religious force holding groups together. According to Weber, "the core of the mystical concept of the oriental Christian church was a firm conviction that Christian brotherly love, when sufficiently strong and pure, must necessarily lead to unity in all things, even in dogmatic beliefs."[160] The Eastern church gave up the belief in infallible authority in matters of doctrine because it was believed that men who practiced the Joannine idea of love would think alike and "act in a solidary fashion which is pleasing to God."[161]

Durkheim and Weber agreed that societies may be held together out of the fear of god's wrath. On the other hand, societies may obey the deity out of love and gratitude. Durkheim concluded that belief in transcendent beings is no longer necessary or advisable. It was clear to him that the force upon which individuals depend is society itself. Belief in a personified, supernatural power can be translated easily into the recognition of the continuous moral being or resource on whom we depend--society.[162]

---

[159]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 200.

[160]Ibid., p. 176. [161]Ibid.

[162]Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, pp. 206, 348.

The Influence of Religion on Social Change

Durkheim and Weber on Social Change: Two Approaches

Durkheim was aware that religious belief and practice have produced violent disruptions in social life. He pointed out that the Crusaders were convinced that God was directing them to conquer the Holy Land, and Joan of Arc marched into battle in obedience to celestial voices. In these times of change men engage in unusual behavior. Durkheim explained that these "changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different, . . . the most mediocre and inoffensive bourgeois become either a hero or a butcher."[163] Durkheim was not primarily interested in unusual circumstances, however, but in the consistent, strengthening action of society. His more general focus remained on social solidarity and the conservative role of religion in stabilizing human societies. He emphasized that "it is not only in exceptional circumstances that this stimulating action of society makes itself felt; there is not, so to speak, a moment in our lives when some current of energy does not come to us from without."[164] He did not study social groups from the viewpoint of conflict and struggle. He was interested in explaining the role of religion in developing the moral power and strength of society. He recognized that diverse groups interact in a variety of ways with one another, but focused on groups as a source of moral support rather than as a source of conflict.

From the outset of his study, Weber attempted to show that religion plays a significant role in changes in social structure. He demonstrated

---

[163] *Ibid.*, p. 211. [164] *Ibid.*

that religious belief is an important contributing factor to social developments rather than a mere reflection of economic situations.[165] He focused on groups in conflict and was concerned with the courses of change that religion brings about, changes by which former expectation systems are altered drastically or even replaced by different expectation systems involving whole groups of men. The most visible example that he explored in depth is the revolutionary change realized in the development of the Protestant Ethic.

The Protestant Ethic

Before ascetic Protestantism came on the scene, no Christian, wrote Weber, could have gone into a business career without being regarded as lax in his ethical thinking.[166] What was so radical in ascetic Protestantism is that the special halo that was placed on the ascetic monastic life came to be placed on the ascetic seeker of profit. To be directly engaged in profit making and production--whether one is worker or owner of the business--was to be engaged in the special call of God for a special work. Self-denial was retained by ascetic Protestantism, and the "call" was emphasized as a part of every Christian's experience. Only (1) the place where one serves God and (2) the serving activity were changed from what they had been for Medieval Christianity. The new place of service was in the world, not in a monastery. The new activity was that of making pens, keeping books, selling cloth, and doing the thousands of other things that

---

[165]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 55.

[166]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 220.

constituted the business life in which profit was pursued as a sign of divine election. Weber summarized his thesis:

> The inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism first produced a capitalistic state, although unintentionally, for it opened the way to a career in business, especially for the most devout and ethically rigorous people. Above all, Protestantism interpreted success in business as the fruit of a rational mode of life.[167]

Because it provided a way by which every Protestant could serve his God, capitalism was required to have a rationalized style worthy of God. Because the charging of interest was clearly beneficial to capitalistic progress, ascetic Protestantism declared in the name of the divine calling the sanctions against usury to be null and void. Indeed, even lending money to the poor was regarded as not instrumental to the development of capitalism. Because business and potential business men needed the money to start new enterprises and to expand their markets, lending money to them was judged to be more in keeping with the service of God.[168] Weber contended that Calvinism destroyed the traditional forms of charity because of the belief that God had good reason for distributing the world's goods unequally. Calvinism, therefore,

> never ceased to stress the notion that a man proved himself exclusively in his vocational work. Consequently, begging was explicitly stigmatized as a violation of the injunction to love one's neighbor, in this case the person from whom the beggar solicits.[169]

Thus a former system of expectations binding together members of the social structure in mutual obligations was not only changed but overturned and replaced by a new system of expectations.

---

[167] Ibid. [168] Ibid. [169] Ibid., p. 221.

Religious Functionaries and the Charismatic Leader

In the society which Durkheim studied most thoroughly, the religious thought and activity were distributed evenly among the members. All of the members of the society experienced religion in the same way. If there were functionaries in this society, they merely expressed the beliefs of the whole group. In Durkheim's view, functionaries were not a necessary ingredient to each and every religion. In his lengthy analysis of primitive religion he gave no significance to religious personalities such as shamans, magicians, or sorcerers. He did entertain the possibility that "even in the most crudely organized societies, there are generally certain men whom the importance of their social position points out to exercise a directing influence over the religious life (for example, the chiefs of the local groups of certain Australian societies)."[170] But he was quick to conclude that this "attribution of functions is still very uncertain."[171]

For Weber, functionaries were an integral part of religious evolution. He assumed that they were necessary in the development of the religions themselves. When analyzed as a part of the religion, they may be observed to have influence on the sociocultural situations of which they are a part. Weber analyzed the roles of priests, magicians, mystagogues, sorcerers, and shamans. Because of his particular study of the charismatic leader, that role will be examined here.

Religious motivations do not necessarily exert profound impact on ethical behavior, but the hope of salvation may very well "have the most

---

[170] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 44.

[171] Ibid.

far-reaching consequences for the conduct of life. . . ."[172] If he has some significant bearing on the believers' concept of salvation, the religious charismatic leader may influence considerably the social and moral behavior of believers and the behavior of individuals and groups who form the social environment of the believers.

Charismatic leaders are regarded as possessors of a special gift which has come upon them as a kind of infusion or is a natural endowment which they choose to activate.[173] For Weber, the best exemplifications of religious charismatics are the prophets, who may be divided into two classes--the "ethical" prophets who are the instruments for proclaiming a divine message and imperative, and the "exemplary" prophets who in their own lives demonstrate to others the way to religious salvation.[174] The exemplary prophets were more likely to be found in China and India, whereas the ethical type was confined to the Near East. Zoroaster and Muhammad were "ethical" prophets. In China, there simply was no ethical prophecy to challenge the "ethics of class that exercised the greatest influence in the society."[175] Weber believed that Hebrew prophecy in particular challenged the repression which one class placed on another. "An explanation for Hebrew prophecy's unique concern for social reform is to be sought in religious grounds,"[176] namely, the conviction that there is a transcendent moral God. Believing "that they did not receive their mission from any human agency," the ethical prophets saw themselves as spokesmen of a being

---

[172]Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 150.

[173]Ibid., p. 2.

[174]Ibid., p. 55.

[175]Ibid., p. 56.

[176]Ibid., p. 50.

who transcends purely class interests.[177] In fact, Weber conjectured that it was "the prophet Moses' great achievement to find a compromise solution of, or prophylactic for, these [Hebrew] class conflicts . . . and to organize the Israelite confederacy by means of an integral national god."[178] Believing himself to have been "called" personally by his god, each "ethical" prophet seemed to enjoy a certain independence from the conflicting parties of those to whom he spoke. At least this is how Weber portrayed him.[179] No one paid for the prophet's services, which distinguished him from the priest.[180]

Weber said that the ethical prophet exerted influence on the ethical and public behavior of people to change their lives and their social environment. The vision of the prophet was a plan of action to modify the circumstances which appeared to him to be insulting to the deity.[181] Weber insisted that the great historic process in the development of religion, which eliminated magic from the world, began with the Hebrew ethical prophets.[182] In short, they were a major influence bringing about a certain kind of rationalized ethic that incorporated elements of social reform.

Why would Hebrews of different classes consent to listen to what Weber called the ethical prophet, who told them that he had for them a message that might conflict with their own class interests? Why would they think of taking seriously anyone who claimed to speak with authority but who

---

[177] Ibid., p. 56.

[178] Ibid., p. 50.

[179] Ibid., p. 46.

[180] Ibid., p. 48.

[181] Ibid., p. 59.

[182] Ibid., p. 105.

represented no earthly power base, no king, or no nobles? The answer is that the prophet did in fact offer his audience something which they often recognized as answering their personal need. The way this need was answered, however, carried its own special social consequences. It required that its recipients either renew their loyalty to or convert to a particular metaphysical picture, including their place in the picture. Weber seemed to regard as a social psychological given "the metaphysical needs of the human mind as it is driven to reflect on ethical and religious questions, driven not by material need but by an inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and to take a position toward it."[183]

Already Weber had argued that the Hebrew spokesmen developed a view of Yahweh out of their own historical and political experience of being conquered by neighboring powers.[184] Their God was already favorably disposed toward Israel, the underdog, a weak and powerless nation. It remained for the prophets of Israel to extend this line of thinking to those groups and classes within Israel who were the underdogs. If Yahweh cared for the powerless nation, then doubtless he cared for the very weak within the nation. Hence the religious motivation for social reform and change!

The point here is that religious "meaning" in Weber's sociology of religion must be seen as something far more than epiphenomenal display. Metaphysics has special social and behavioral consequences. That is, not just any social effects can be said to "follow" from a given metaphysical belief scheme. Granted that the belief scheme that a people have adopted

---

[183] Ibid., p. 117.

[184] Ibid., pp. 48, 51, 58.

may have arisen out of its own unique historical conditions, nevertheless once the scheme has come into being in the lives of the believing participants, it is no longer mere effect. It now takes on an effective role. Weber explained:

> To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. . . . Yet it always denotes . . . an effort to systematize all the manifestations of life; that is, to organize practical behavior into a direction of life. . . . Moreover, it always contains the important religious conception of the world as a cosmos which is challenged to produce a "meaningful" ordered totality.[185]

The Impact of Religion on Society in the Future

Both Durkheim and Weber were dissatisfied with religion as it currently existed in relationship to human society. Durkheim stated boldly, "We desire another which is more practicable."[186] Traditional religion (e.g., Christianity) could not be reconciled with human social needs. Its teachings had resulted in too many injustices in the social order.

> We can no longer impassionate ourselves for the principles in the name of which Christianity recommended to masters that they treat their slaves humanely, and, on the other hand, the idea which it has formed of human equality and fraternity seems to us today to leave too large a place for unjust inequalities. Its pity for the outcast seems to us too Platonic.[187]

At the turn of this century, Weber concluded that the religion of ascetic Protestantism had directed the course of human society to an iron cage of capitalistic organization. Emerging from monastic cells into

---

[185] Ibid., p. 59. Italics added.

[186] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 427.

[187] Ibid.

everyday life, asceticism began to dominate worldly morality. It was an obvious influence in building the modern economic order.

> This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force.[188]

In his attempt to avoid making value judgment upon this "last stage of cultural development," he suggested a further stage of analysis, which would involve the study of two possible modes of rationalism and their possible influence on social organization. "The next task would be . . . to show the significance of ascetic rationalism, for the content of practical social ethics, thus for the types of organization and the functions of social groups from the conventicle to the State."[189]

Weber felt that the study of ascetic rationalism should be related also to a study of humanistic rationalism. It is possible that ascetic rationalism, which has left its religious end to become a means in itself, may find a new religious control, namely, humanistic rationalism. This humanistic rationalism would be characterized by the esthetic and literary qualities of life and would be supportive of the pursuit of knowledge, science, art, music, and letters for their own sake.

Both Durkheim and Weber, opposed to ascetic rationalism, were committed to humanistic rationalism. Both men were concerned that religion in its relationship with social organization provide for man a supportive

---

[188]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 181.

[189]Ibid., p. 182.

and creative environment. They recognized and attempted to illustrate that man is much more than the economic animal. Durkheim was convinced that this human complexity is very intricate:

> Real man is of a time and a place, he has a family, a city, a nation, a religious and political faith, and all these factors, and many others besides, mingle and combine in a thousand ways, interacting with one another in such a way that it is impossible to say at first glance where one begins and the other ends. Only after long and laborious analyses, as yet scarcely begun, will it one day be possible to estimate the part played by each.[190]

At this point Durkheim is very close to Weber who contended that because religious behavior is only one aspect of social behavior, it therefore must be studied in relationship to other commitments and areas of living.

Neither Durkheim nor Weber could bring himself to offer the guarantee of a glorious future for even that portion of humanity called "the believers." Weber, with his deep-seated suspicion of the relentless march of rationalization in especially Western civilization, emitted a heavy fog of pessimism.

> No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance.[191]

Durkheim offered the community of humanity a reasonable hope that the

---

[190]Steven Lukes, Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work (New York, 1972), p. 80, citing Durkheim, "Cours de science sociale: lecon d'ouverture'," RIE, XV, 1888, p. 28.

[191]Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 182.

state of "incertitude and confused agitation cannot last forever."[192]

The hours of creative effervescence will come again, but

> as to the question of what symbols this new faith will express itself with, whether they will resemble those of the past or not, and whether or not they will be more adequate for the reality which they seek to translate, that is something which surpasses the human faculty of foresight and which does not appertain to the principal question.[193]

---

[192] Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 427.

[193] Ibid., p. 428.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Emile Durkheim and Max Weber are major figures in the history of sociology. Their important works, formulated around the turn of the century, provided a basis for the development of sociological theory and method. Each of them felt that religion is an integral part of human society and that sociological investigation must include the study of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. Their landmark studies of religion provided the basic theoretical structure for what has come to be known as the sociology of religion. The importance of their contributions to the development of the sociology of religion cannot be overestimated; to this very day, the Durkheimian and Weberian traditions are the major perspectives in the discipline.

Their theories of religion were worked out in the context of their general theoretical and methodological perspectives. The analysis of religion offered by Durkheim was part of his effort to apply the tools of scientific rationalism to all institutions of human society. He was concerned with large-scale issues involving the structure and solidarity of human society. He focused on the integrative role of religion in its relationship to human society. Weber viewed religion from the perspective of social action theory. Observing that religion had played an important role in the development of both Eastern and Western societies, he focused on the complex interaction between religion and such social institutions

as the economy, polity, and stratification, among others. He is generally known for his work on the prophet or charismatic leader and other religious virtuosi.

The perspectives of Durkheim and Weber developed as separate traditions in the sociology of religion and continue as distinct, even divergent, orientations in the field. Although many scholars recognize the need to synthesize divergent theories, to bridge theoretical gaps between major perspectives where it is possible to do so, hardly any work of this kind has been done with the contributions of Durkheim and Weber to the sociology of religion. Surprisingly little effort has been made even to compare the two perspectives systematically.

The purpose of this research was to compare the ideas of Durkheim and Weber on the relationship between religion and society. Using selected works of the two theorists, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life by Durkheim, and The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and The Sociology of Religion by Weber, an effort has been made to establish similarities and differences in their understanding of (1) religious influences on social life and, conversely, (2) social influences on religion. Lacking a solid base in the scholarly literature on which to build, this study has been largely exploratory, and the findings must be regarded as tentative. No effort has been made to synthesize the divergent perspectives of Durkheim and Weber, however important a theoretical task that may be. At this time in the development of the discipline, the points of similarity and difference between their perspectives on religion need to be clarified.

Conclusions

Some of the differences in the theories of religion of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim can be explained by their different views of sociology. A social action theorist, Weber dealt with the meaningful behavior of individual actors as well as with large-scale institutional arrangements and interrelationships; his data included social psychological and cultural dimensions of human experience. A functionalist and a positivist, Durkheim was concerned primarily with the integration and solidarity of social structures. For him, the religious experiences of the individual are hardly more than epiphenomena of the movement of the cult.

Durkheim was intent on getting away from psychological explanations and did not focus on individual impressions and feelings. Weber drew attention to the importance of understanding what religion means to the individual believer. Both theorists show that religion provides an emotional sense of well being to those who practice it. Weber, more particularly, showed that different classes of individuals need different kinds of psychological assurance.

Weber attempted to clarify the relationships between religious and economic behavior. A major objective in his study of religion was to assess "the doctrine of the more naive historical materialism, that such [religious] ideas originate as a reflection or superstructure of economic situations." While he believed that he had established the importance of religion as an element in social life, he argued that neither religion nor the economy can be regarded as the predominate causal force influencing

the development of social life. Socioeconomic conditions may support or hinder particular religious practice; the upsurge and spread of modern capitalism, for example, reinforced and was reinforced by the radical turn in Christianity known as the Protestant Reformation. The socio-economic position of a group may lead to a reinterpretation and modification of putative divine commandments.

In addition to the economy, Weber examined other influences on religion such as politics, intellectualism, and esthetics. He drew careful distinctions between the East and West concerning the influences of rationalization on religion. He explored the tensions between religious beliefs and practices and the various other segments of society.

Durkheim did not explore the relationships between economic and religious behavior. He felt, nonetheless, that social life, particularly in its religious dimensions, is more than a consequence of material influence and emphasized that his theory was not simply a restatement of historical materialism. He did not emphasize the tension between religion and other social institutions, but he did point out a conflict between religion and science. Religion, he contended, had in the past claimed a special kind of knowledge, and science had exposed these claims. Therefore, he held that the faith could no longer provide the "same hegemony as formerly over the system of ideas that we may continue to call religion." In the future, he felt that the cult would be useful and active in establishing faith and confidence, but it would not be able to support speculation contradictory to scientific knowledge.

Durkheim established that religion unites its adherents into a group or a moral community which he called a church. Beliefs and rites unite

the adherents in a common faith. Weber agreed with Durkheim that religious faith and practice can bind individuals firmly together in social relationships. Even in the face of disorganizing influences inside and outside the group, religious communities may become very strong and powerful. Weber examined differentiated societies. According to him, groups may indeed reaffirm themselves periodically, as Durkheim contended, but the process of reaffirmation can have incredible consequences for social life. It can give one group sanction even to declare war on another group. His analysis was in contrast to the idealistic theme of Durkheim that "whatever has been done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain."

Durkheim, however, did not ignore the fact that religious groups may have difficulty in accepting each other. Even though his major focus was on the integrative function of group life, he wrote that a religion normally created skepticism and hostility toward other religions it came into contact with if those other religions were unfamiliar and strange to it. Weber, writing of many religions, observed numerous situations in which religions came into conflict with one another. Religious beliefs could move believers into moral action, but the beliefs could also cut off communication with other groups. Though Durkheim could not devote time to the study of beliefs or myths of even the group he was involved with, he did not take myths lightly. He suggested that they were worthy of study by a special method.

Both Durkheim and Weber wrote that religious belief and practice may be a means of overcoming political and ethnic differences. Durkheim said it is only natural that those inspired by a religion will want to

share it. It was Durkheim's hope that men would be able to hold to common societal values that would overcome some of their hostilities and disagreements. Weber wrote that a prophet was frequently able to bring antagonistic cultures and ideologies together through a revision of a religious doctrine.

Durkheim studied religious rites extensively. He was convinced that rites provide the same kinds of functions for all societies, no matter how crude or how elaborate they may be. Rites awaken and maintain the most essential elements of the collective conscience. Practices of the cult are "something more than movements without importance and gestures without efficacy." Weber illustrated that the objectives of the particular religion determined what rites and ceremonies would be included. Calvinism eliminated ceremonies even in the event of death believing that participation in songs and rituals would permit magic and superstition to creep back into the pursuit of salvation. In those religions that emphasize the subjective mood as the means of attaining salvation, the use of rituals may become the essential feature. Looking for conditions that produce rational, ethical religion and a rational mode of life, Weber showed that some cultic practices have little or no influence on everyday behavior. On the other hand, some cultic practices disturb and upset established behavior patterns.

Weber was not primarily interested in what he called "cultic performance." His study of religious practice focused more on social achievements or a systematic pattern of life as evidence of salvation. Durkheim and Weber agreed that the practice of asceticism was a crucial element in establishing a thriving society.

Both Durkheim and Weber believed that every religion has a cosmology or worldview and that religious beliefs are an important focus for sociological study. Unlike Durkheim, however, who studied only "the elementary notions" of religion, Weber devoted considerable time and effort to the study of the complex relationships between religious beliefs and social structures. He was concerned with the reciprocal influences of specific beliefs and the social and cultural contexts within which they emerge and function. Whereas Durkheim wrote a great deal about the fact that there is a link between variation in the social structure and variation in religious practice and belief, it was Weber who spelled out in detail the intricacies of the interactive relationship.

Durkheim contended that without its elementary intellectual concepts no religion could be maintained. This is another way of saying that religion contains in its most elementary forms the intellectual dimension. At this point there seems to be no fundamental difference between Weber's view of religion and Durkheim's. Weber spoke of the "inner compulsion to understand the world." He carried this theme relentlessly through his study of religion. For Durkheim, this intellectual aspect of religion is clearly an analytic necessity, that is, it is a part of the very definition and structure of religion at its most primitive level, to say nothing of its advanced levels.

While Durkheim and Weber agreed that symbolism is essential to religious life, they did not agree as to whether symbols consistently represent social unity. Durkheim assumed symbolism to be both a cause and an effect of social unity. While symbols admittedly have been a source of security and unity, Weber emphasized that a symbol may signify

unity to one group and dissension or conflict to other groups in a differentiated society.

Both theorists agreed that religion may provide a constraining and conservative influence on social structure; a conception of the cosmos can be supportive of social organization. Hinduism, taught that "any possible improvement in one's chances in subsequent incarnations depends on the faithful execution in the present lifetime of the vocation assigned him by virtue of his caste status." Primitive man complied with the requirements of the group and felt the need to spread his faith because he had internalized the totem. Because god had willed the social order of which he was a part, the Protestant was encouraged not only to make money, but he was duty bound to make use of every capitalistic opportunity.

A contrast between Weber and Durkheim that has been emphasized is that Weber studied religion in its revolutionary role whereas Durkheim studied it in its conservative role. Weber showed that the spirit of capitalism "had to fight its way to supremacy against a whole world of hostile forces." Calvinism abolished the practice of brotherly love, and men were free to pursue their own business interests. This world-view, supported by the doctrine of predestination, overcame the religious constraints against profit making. Weber pointed to numerous situations in which the efforts of the charismatic leader bring about innovations in the social order.

It is true that Durkheim did not emphasize the prophetic and radical impact of religion on society. He stressed again and again the supportive function of religion. Yet he wrote that religion has the role of generating the sacred ideal in the community. He even spoke of transforming the

environment, and indicated that the religious pitch of intensity is the society acting as its own creator through its own projected ideal. According to Durkheim "a society can neither create itself nor recreate itself without at the same time creating an ideal." It reforms or transforms itself by a moral vision which can only come about through ceremonies designed to renew and revitalize the moral life. The religious faculty of collective idealizing was for Durkheim not a sort of luxury which man could exist without, but a condition of his very existence. It is in his study of religion that this other side of Durkheim comes to the forefront. Religion through the collective representations is an innovative influence. It does not merely underwrite the status quo.

Both Durkheim and Weber were interested in the order and organization of religious life. Weber explored the organizational structure of developed religions and gave careful attention to the formation and structure of religious communities. Such communities are permanent organizations with fixed rights and duties, and they are differentiated from other associations or collectivities in the society. The relationship of a particular religious community to the general society and to other religious communities within the society emerged in Weber's analysis of the formation of religious congregations. Durkheim examined the intricate organizational patterns of primitive religion, and one of his major contributions was a careful analysis of the order and structure of totemic religion. His analysis revealed a social organization of specific roles and duties in which the duties were carried out in precise detail.

Consistent with his theoretical perspective, Durkheim made no study of specialized religious roles. He tried to show that collective representations are the work of the community; all believers are involved equally. It is in common experience that the collective conscience is viable. "It is by common action that it [society] takes consciousness of itself and realizes its position; it is before all else an active cooperation." Weber, by contrast, provided a brilliant analysis of the roles of religious functionaries and specialists throughout the history of religion. As interpreters of religious belief and practice, priests in all religions have been crucial figures in determining the direction of religion and society. By challenging laymen and priests to redirect religion, prophets have played the role of change agent. The utility of Weber's social action theory can be seen quite clearly in his treatment of this subject.

Weber's emphasis on the roles of religious specialists is a crucial aspect of his sociology of religion. With the emergence of religious specialists, stratification systems developed not only in religious organizations but in entire societies. Divine wisdom or charisma became the exclusive property of special groups and thus these groups became more powerful than those not so endowed.

Durkheim cannot be classified as a social action theorist. Nevertheless, he believed that human behavior is very complex and that religious faith was one of the many aspects of man to be studied. Weber contended that because religious behavior is only one aspect of social behavior, it therefore must be studied in relationship to other commitments and areas of living.

Weber and Durkheim agreed that various social structures influence man's conception of the deity. They also agreed that "divine" sanction of a normative system provides some assurance that the expectation system will remain stabilized. Neither of them accepted supernaturalism as a viable religious option for the modern, scientific world, however. While Weber did not specifically reject supernaturalism as a religious option for contemporary man, he made it clear that belief in the supernatural is so conditioned and controlled by social forces as to call its validity into question. Durkheim specifically rejected the idea of supernaturalism as a viable option for the modern world. He felt that the concept of a supernatural being is not essential to maintaining a viable moral order because "society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds." It is sufficient, he said, for men to recognize that it is society on which they depend.

Weber explored the diverse salvation schemes of the various religions. Although Durkheim did not become involved in a study of the various paths to salvation, he concluded that "the first article in every creed is the belief in salvation by faith." According to Durkheim, men are in need of being raised above the miseries of the world; they need to be raised above their condition as mere men. Declining to discuss the bewilderingly diverse schemes of salvation that human groups embraced, Durkheim insisted that he had detected in them all a common function so steady in its trend as to render the diversity hardly more than accidental and incidental phenomena.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Aron, Raymond, Main Currents in Sociological Thought II, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber, translated by Richard Howard and Helen Weaver, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, Anchor Books, 1970.

Barnes, Harry E., editor, An Introduction to the History of Sociology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948.

Barnes, Harry E. and Howard Becker, Social Thought from Lore to Science, 3 volumes, New York, Dover Publications, 1961.

Barnes, Harry E., The Twilight of Christianity, New York, Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931.

Bendix, Reinhard, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1970.

Bendix, Reinhard and Guenther Roth, Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber, Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1971.

Berger, Peter L., The Noise of Solemn Assemblies, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1961.

_____, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1967.

_____, The Social Reality of Religion, London, Faber and Faber, 1969.

_____ and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1966.

_____ and Thomas Luckmann, "Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge," The Social Meanings of Religion: An Integrated Anthology, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1974.

Birnbaum, Norman and Gertrud Lenzer, editors, Sociology and Religion, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

Boulard, Fernard, An Introduction to Religious Sociology, Pioneer Work in France, translated by M. J. Jackson, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1960.

Brothers, Joan, Readings in the Sociology of Religion, New York, Pergamon, 1967.

Burrell, Sidney A., editor, The Role of Religion in Modern European History, New York, Macmillan, 1964.

Coser, Lewis A., Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context, edited by Robert K. Merton, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.

Demerath, N. J., Social Class in American Protestantism, Chicago, Rand McNally & Company, 1965.

_____ and Phillip E. Hammond, Religion in Social Context, New York, Random House, 1968.

Douglass, H. Paul and Edmund de S. Brunner, The Protestant Church as a Social Institution, New York, Harper and Row, 1935.

Durkheim, Emile, The Division of Labor in Society, translated by George Simpson, New York, The Free Press, 1947.

_____, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, translated by Joseph Ward Sevain, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1915, 1954.

_____, Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education, edited by Everett K. Wilson, translated by Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer, New York, The Free Press, 1961.

_____, The Rules of Sociological Method, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1950.

_____, Sociology and Philosophy, translated by D. F. Pocock, New York, The Free Press, 1953.

_____, Suicide, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1951.

Eister, Allan W., editor, Changing Perspectives in the Scientific Study of Religion, New York, John Wiley, 1974.

_____, "Religious Institutions in Complex Societies: Difficulties in the Theoretic Specification of Functions," The Social Meanings of Religion: An Integrated Anthology, edited by William M. Newman, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1974.

Freund, Julien, editor, The Sociology of Max Weber, translated by Mary Ilford, New York, Pantheon Books, 1968.

Freud, Sigmund, Totem and Taboo, translated by A. A. Brill, New York, Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918.

Glock, Charles Y., Religion in Sociological Perspective: Essays in the Empirical Study of Religion, Belmont, California, Wadsworth, 1973.

_____ and Phillip E. Hammond, editors, Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion, New York, Harper and Row, 1973.

_____ and Rodney Stark, Religion and Society in Tension, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1965.

Goode, William J., Religion Among the Primitives, New York, The Free Press, 1951.

Greeley, Andrew M., Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion, New York, Schocken Books, 1972.

Green, Robert, Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics, Boston, D. C. Heath Company, 1959.

Hammond, Phillip E. and Benton Johnson, American Mosaic: Social Patterns of Religion in the United States, New York, Random House, 1970.

James, E. O., The Nature and Function of Priesthood: A Comparative and Anthropological Study, New York, Vanguard Press, Inc., 1955.

Knudten, Richard D., editor, The Sociology of Religion, An Anthology, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.

LaCapra, Dominick, Emile Durkheim, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1972.

Lenski, Gerhard, The Religious Factor, New York, Doubleday, 1961.

Lindsay, Thomas N., A History of the Reformation, 2 volumes, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928.

Lukes, Steven, Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work, New York, Harper and Row, 1972.

Luckmann, Thomas, The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society, New York, Macmillan, 1967.

Martin, David, The Religious and the Secular, New York, Shocken Books, 1969.

Martindale, Don, The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1960.

McNeile, A. H., An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, 2nd edition, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953.

Merton, R. K., Social Theory and Social Structure, New York, The Free Press, 1968.

Mitzman, Arthur, The Iron Cage, An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber, New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1969.

Moberg, David, The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.

Nelson, Benjamin, "Weber's Protestant Ethic: Its Origin, Wanderings, and Foreseeable Futures," Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion, edited by Charles Glock and Phillip Hammond, New York, Harper and Row, 1973.

Newman, William M., editor, The Social Meanings of Religion: An Integrated Anthology, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1974.

Nisbet, Robert, The Sociology of Emile Durkheim, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974.

Nottingham, Elizabeth K., Religion: A Sociological View, New York, Random House, 1971.

O'Dea, Thomas F., Sociology and the Study of Religion: Theory, Research, Interpretation, New York, Basic Books, 1970.

Parsons, Talcott, "Durkheim on Religion Revisited: Another Look at The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," Beyond the Classics? edited by Charles Glock and Phillip Hammond, New York, Harper and Row, 1973.

_____, The Structure of Social Action, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1949.

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred R., Religion and Society, London, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1945.

_____, Structure and Function in Primitive Society, New York, The Free Press, 1952.

Robertson, Roland, The Sociological Interpretation of Religion, New York, Schocken Books, 1970.

Schneider, Louis, editor, Religion, Culture and Society, A Reader in the Sociology of Religion, New York, John Wiley, 1964.

Stark, Werner, The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom, 5 volumes, New York, Fordham University Press, 1966.

Swanson, Guy, The Birth of the Gods: The Origin of Primitive Beliefs, Ann Arbor, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1967.

_____, Religion and Regime: A Sociological Account of the Reformation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1967.

Turner, Victor, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Chicago, Aldine, 1969.

Wach, Joachim, Sociology of Religion, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1944.

Wallwork, Ernest E., Durkheim: Morality and Milieu, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1972.

Weber, Max, Ancient Judaism, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale, New York, The Free Press, 1952.

_____, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York, Oxford University Press, 1946.

_____, General Economic History, translated by Frank Knight, New York, Greenberg Publishers, Inc., 1927.

_____, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, translated by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Fince, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1949.

_____, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, 1958.

_____, The Religion of China, translated by Hans H. Gerth, New York, The Free Press, 1951.

_____, The Religion of India, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale, New York, The Free Press, 1958.

_____, The Sociology of Religion, translated by Ephraim Fischoff, Boston, Mass., The Beacon Press, 1963.

_____, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, edited by Talcott Parsons, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947.

Wrong, Dennis, editor, Max Weber, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

Yinger, J. Milton, The Scientific Study of Religion, London, The Macmillan Company, 1970.

Articles

Alpert, Henry, "Emile Durkheim: A Perspective and Appreciation," American Sociological Review, XXIV (August, 1959), 462-465.

Antoni, Carlo, "Religious Outlooks and Classes," Max Weber, edited by Dennis Wrong, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

Bellah, Robert N., "Durkheim and History," American Sociological Review, XXIV (August, 1959), 447-461.

_____, "The Place of Religion in Human Action," The Review of Religion, XXII (1958), 137-154.

_____, "Religious Evolution," American Sociological Review, XXIX (June, 1964), 358-374.

Bendix, Reinhard, "Protestant Ethic-Revisited," Comparative Studies in Society and History, IX (April, 1967), 266-273.

Benton, Johnson, "Max Weber and American Protestantism," Sociological Quarterly, XII (Fall, 1971), 473-485.

Berger, Peter L., "Charisma and Religious Innovation: The Social Location of Israelite Prophecy," American Sociological Review, XXVIII (December, 1963), 940-950.

Birnbaum, Norman, "Conflicting Interpretations of the Rise of Capitalism: Marx and Weber," British Journal of Sociology, IV (1953), 125-141.

Bouma, Gary D., "Assessing the Impact of Religion," Sociological Analysis, XXXI (Winter, 1970), 172-179.

Brown, L. B., "The Structure of Religious Belief," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion," V (Spring, 1966), 259-272.

Buehler, Charles and others, "A Study of Articles on Religion in Major Sociology Journals: Some Preliminary Findings," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, XI (June, 1972), 165-170.

Cohn, Werner, "Is Religion Universal? Problems of Definition," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, XX (Fall, 1962), 25-33.

Greenwald, D. E., "Durkheim on Society, Thought and Ritual," Sociological Analysis XXXIV (Fall, 1973), 157-168.

Kolb, William L., "Values, Positivism, and the Functional Theory of Religion: The Growth of a Moral Dilemma," Social Forces, XXXI (May, 1953), 305-311.

Lenski, Gerhard, "Religion's Impact on Secular Institutions," Review of Religious Research, IV (Fall, 1962), 1-16.

Moberg, David, "Some Trends in the Sociology of Religion in the U.S.A.," Social Compass, XIII (1966), 237-243.

Nelson, Benjamin, "In Defense of Max Weber, Reply to Herbert Luethy," Encounter Magazine, 131 (August, 1964), 94-95.

Parsons, Talcott, "The Theoretical Development of the Sociology of Religion," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (April, 1944), 176-190.

Pope, Whitney, "Classic on Classic: Parson's Interpretation of Durkheim," American Sociological Review, XXXVIII (August, 1973), 399-415.

_____, "Durkheim as a Functionalist," The Sociological Quarterly, XVI (Summer, 1975), 361-379.

_____ and others, "On the Divergence of Weber and Durkheim: A Critique of Parsons' Thesis," American Sociological Review, XL (August, 1975), 417-427.

Ritzer, George, "Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science," American Sociologist, X (August, 1975), 156-167.

Schneider, Louis, "The Sociology of Religion, Some Areas of Theoretical Potential," Sociological Analysis, XXXI (Fall, 1970), 131-144.

Sherman, Lawrence W., "Uses of the Masters," The American Sociologist, IX (November, 1974), 176-181.

Steeman, Theodore M., "Max Weber's Sociology of Religion," Sociological Analysis, XXV (Spring, 1964), 50-58.

Tiryakian, Edward, "Introduction to a Biographical Focus on Emile Durkheim," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, III (April, 1964), 247-254.

_____ and others, "On Durkheim: An Exchange," American Sociological Review, XXV (June, 1960), 406-408.

Yinger, J. Milton, "Present Status of the Sociology of Religion," The Journal of Religion XXXI (July, 1951), 194-210.