CHAPTER TWO

RELIGION: A CRITICAL SURVEY

Article - I

Origin and Development of Religion

1. Introduction

What is religion? What contribution can religion make to human welfare today? Is religion a means of escapism from the harsh realities of life? These and many other similar questions are being asked by a number of people today. The gap between the teachings of religions and the practices of their followers is so great, that many people question the very credibility of religion. Religion itself is a very vague concept that demands much clarification. Today, as we are living in an age marked by religious indifferentism and antagonism on the one side, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism on the other, it is relevant, nay, even necessary to have a proper and healthy understanding of religion. Therefore, an attempt is made in this chapter to examine the origin and development, fundamental elements, and the very goal of religions.

A perusal of the history of mankind will reveal the pivotal role played by religion. Religion always existed in every society, from the most primitive to the most modern. Religion is not only universal, but also it is necessary; it is also the distinguishing characteristic of man from the animal world. Religiosity is one of the things that

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distinguishes man from the other animals. The study of man cannot be complete unless it includes the study of his religion, for it is a very important and outstanding feature of human life. The religious faith and practices are intimately connected with human nature and life in general. However unrefined a religion might have been in its origin, and however gross the superstitions with which it has often been associated, its omnipresence and centrality in the history of humanity are facts to be reckoned with. The religious perceptions and sensitivity helped man a lot to keep alive and hopeful in his hazardous journey through history. In many cases the bonds of religion have proved stronger than the bonds of race or climate or even descent. Swami Vivekananda says, "it is a well known fact that persons worshipping the same God, believing in the same religion, have stood by each other, with greater strength and constancy, than people of merely the same descent or even brothers."

But many people question the necessity of religion today, because they think that even without religion, we can have a meaningful life. Nevertheless, down through the centuries, human beings have shown a strong religious instinct. Many predictions about the obsoleteness of religion seem to be incorrect.

The prediction of the 19th century Philosophers of the Positivistic School that modern science will replace religion and the scientific man will outgrow his 'religious' needs has been proved to be false today by all empirical evidences. On

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the contrary, what we see today is surprisingly a renaissance
and missionary revival in all the major world religions.\(^6\)

Man, has a natural feeling of awe and fear at the sight of what
seems to be infinite and uncontrollable. This seems to direct his mind
towards the idea of a power much higher and more potent than he is.
Every religion has its origin in a profound mystical experience. Each
founder of religion speaks of a realm of mystery that lies beyond
human reasoning. The reality they point to, remains in a ‘cloud of
unknowing’. The reason is that “no one has ever seen God.”\(^7\) This
mystical experience is a personal one. Therefore, when the pioneers of
these religious movements encounter the divine and the human, they
communicate this experience often in a feeble manner to their
disciples and followers.\(^8\) Many tried to understand this mystical
experience and formed many theories regarding the origin of religion.
It is said that to understand a thing in a better way, one must study
its origins. Hence, it is necessary to have some idea regarding the
origin and development of religions.

2. Various Theories on the Origin of Religions

In order to understand the origin of religions, various schools of
thought have put forward different theories. All of them contain many
elements of truth. If these theories can help us to trace the origin and
development of religions from their beginnings to their present forms,
we will be able to understand the importance of religion in human life.

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\(^7\) Gospel According to John 1:18.

\(^8\) Joseph Pathrapankal: ‘The Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount: Its relevance for and
Hence, it is proper to look into some of the theories regarding the origin of religions.

a) Anthropological Theories of Religion

Anthropology is the science of man, which deals specially with the beginning, development, customs, and beliefs of mankind. The earliest archaeological findings of religion are derived from Neanderthal burials. The fact that Neanderthals buried their dead and put objects in their graves point towards some kind of their belief in life after death. However, we do not have sufficient evidences and details of their religion. Nevertheless, there are several theories put forward on the origin of religions. Out of the many theories, a few of the important ones are discussed below.

i) Animism

This is said to be the first theory on the origin of religions and is based on the study of the mind and habits of the savage. It first appeared in Edward Burnett Tylor’s monumental volumes Primitive Culture and he is said to be the founder of the anthropology of religion. According to Tylor, religion originated when people attempted to understand conditions and events that could not be explained by daily experiences. He believed that our ancestors were particularly intrigued with death, dreaming and trance. In his dreams, he dreamt that his body remained in one place and his self wandered about and did various things. Also in his dreams he saw other

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persons whose bodies were not in the places where they should have been. From this, he deduced that there must exist within himself two beings. The being that is active during the day, is the body; and the other, active during sleep and trance, is the soul. They are intimately related to each other. When the soul permanently leaves the body, the human being dies. The Latin word for soul is *anima* and the theory coined from this belief is called 'animism'.

According to the primitive man, death is a prolonged sleep in which the body finally disintegrates. From this he concluded that the soul become free from the bondages of the body and remained as disembodied spirit. These spirits are endowed with the capabilities of either helping or harming the human beings and other creatures. In order to conciliate and appease these spirits, there arose offerings, prayers, sacrifices and other religious rituals. Tylor thinks that religion evolved through the various stages of animism, pantheism, polytheism and finally to monotheism. According to him religion was invented to explain things people did not understand and thought that it would decline, as science would offer better explanations. It seems that to a certain extent this explanation is right, but it has not taken the other functions of religions into consideration. In brief, animism is the attribution of the soul to the natural objects and that the soul is the vital principle.

It is generally recognized that the animistic belief is universal at a certain phase of human culture and civilization. As a theory it is not

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12 Conrad Phillip Kottak, op. cit., p.414.
13 Kingsley Davis, op.cit., p.511.
sound and satisfactory, for it is not clear how the spirits animate the objects of nature. Further, we do not find a satisfactory explanation as to how they evoke religious sentiments and feelings. As it is not a treatise on philosophy of religion, we do not require going deeper into the subject. However, one cannot deny the fact it is a rudimentary form of religion and that they had some clear idea about the soul as a disembodied spirit, which could exist even after the disintegration of the body. This is indeed central to any religion of modern times and therefore animism could be considered as a form of religion.

ii) Animatism

There is another theory regarding the origin of religion. The primitives saw the supernatural as a domain of impersonal power or force. It influenced them under certain conditions, and they believed that they could control it. This view of the supernatural is called animatism. This impersonal force that exists in the universe and could reside in people, animals, plants and objects was called mana. It is an all-pervading invisible power or influence that operates in unintelligible ways or appears in natural objects of striking character. It is similar to our notion of luck. People attributed success to the possession of mana, which individuals could acquire in different ways and they believed that rulers and nobles had more mana than ordinary people. As per this theory, contact between the chief and the commoner was dangerous because mana could work like an electric shock. Ordinary people could not bear as much sacred

15 D.Miall Edwards: op.cit, p. 45.
current as royal people, and hence there arose rites to purify the exposed individuals out of necessity.\textsuperscript{16}

Anthropological theories show that religious instinct is innate in man. It unites the different dimensions of his existence like body, soul, activities and the concept of life after death. These dimensions are common to religious people. Religion had its origin in the attempt of man to establish a relationship between him and certain spirits. The primitive man’s instinctive tendencies were not simply left behind but rather sublimated as he became civilized. The primitive man still lives in all of us. This does not mean that there has been no development. There has been development as well as continuity. Anthropologists study religion as a behavioural pattern related to supernatural beings, which are personal spirits and impersonal forces.

\textbf{b) Sociological Theories of Religion}

Sociological theories of religion help us to analyze the relationship between the society and religion and give us the insight into the role that religion plays in people’s lives. They do not seek to verify or disclaim individual faiths or to make value judgments about religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{17} A few of the important theories are given below.

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\textsuperscript{16} Conrad Phillip Kottak, op.cit.p.414.
\textsuperscript{17} James M. Henslin: Sociology - A down-to-earth Approach. Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1995, p.490.
\end{flushleft}
Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was the pioneer in the sociology of religion. In 1912 this French Sociologist, published a very important work entitled *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, in which he tried to identify the origin and the elements common to all religions. Durkheim argues that religion originated in the gathering of the totemic clan. Ordinarily, the members of the clan lived apart. Whenever they gathered, their sheer contact with one another created an extra-ordinary feeling of energy and power. They felt infused, uplifted, and powerful. Knowing that individually they lacked this power, they ascribed it not to themselves but to something external. They attributed it to the totemic emblem and they took it as the object of worship. Since the supernatural power that they ascribed to the totemic emblem was in fact their own collective power, the true origin of religion was their own mutual experience of themselves among themselves.  

Through his survey of religions, Durkheim seems to hold that there is no identical belief or practice. However he did find that all religions, regardless of their name or teaching, separate the sacred from the profane. By sacred, Durkheim referred to those aspects of life, which inspire awe, reverence, deep respect, and even fear. By profane, he meant those aspects of life that were not concerned with

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20 Emile Durkheim, op. cit., p.408.
religion or religious purposes but were parts of the ordinary aspects of worldly life. He also found that all religions develop a community around their practices and beliefs. Thus according to Durkheim, a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, which unite into one single moral community called a church, and all those who adhere to them. Throughout human history, the distinction between the profane and the sacred has been central to all religions. In brief, religion is a system of beliefs and practices acknowledging the Sacred.

Since religion deals with ideas that transcend experiences, neither sense nor science can establish religious truths. Religion is a matter of faith; matters of faith vary greatly. It all depends on how we interpret it. According to Durkheim we understand profane things in terms of their utility. What is defined as sacred, however, is separated from everyday life and denotes as “set apart and forbidden”, so that it evokes a reverence. Emile Durkheim recognized that it is the society, not the individual that distinguishes between sacred and profane things. There is nothing in an object that makes it intrinsically sacred. And this sacred is attributed or imparted through rituals and so accepted by the society.

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21 Ibid, p.491.
23 Ibid
ii. **Karl Marx**

Half a century before Durkheim, Karl Marx also portrayed religion as a reflection of society. When Durkheim emphasized the positive functions of religion, Marx stressed its dysfunctions. According to him, all religions reflect the fact that human lives are controlled by external powers over which they have no control. They are influenced by the external forces that control their daily life, where the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.\(^{24}\) Marx made a contrast between primitive religions and modern religions. According to him it was the power of nature that controlled man in the primitive society, whereas in the modern world it is the forces of social system, which exercise this external dominance.

In the beginning of history it was the forces of nature which were first so reflected and which in the course of further evolution underwent the most manifold and varied personifications among the various peoples....But it is not long before, side by side with the forces of nature, social forces begin to be active - forces which confront man as equally alien and at first equally inexplicable, dominating him with the same apparent natural necessity as the forces of nature themselves. The fantastic figures, which at first only reflected the mysterious forces of nature, at this point acquire social attributes, become representatives of the forces of history.\(^{25}\)

According to Marx, man projects his own perfection into the supernatural and calls the sum of these qualities as ‘God’, and thus he is alienated. It is the economic and social forces that drive human


\(^{25}\) Ibid.
beings to create this illusion of God. Man needs to be emancipated from the underlying causes of alienation found in the economic order. For, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their beings, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." Accordingly, Marx sees the criticism of religion only as a preliminary step to the criticism of society, and criticism of society goes hand in hand with the revolutionary political action, which not only changes society but also destroys the basis of religion.

The fundamental principle of Marx's critique of religion is that man makes religion and religion does not make man. Religion is described as the 'moral sanction', the 'solemn completion', and the 'universal ground for consolation and justification' for this world. Hence, according to Marx, religion has become an integral part of this distorted world. So much so, religion has become necessary for the consolation of human beings in this world. Therefore Marx says: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people."

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29 Ibid.
It is a complete distortion if this oft-quoted passage is taken as some sort of atheism or as rejection of religion, it becomes a distortion of this theory. Here religion is described as the expression of this world’s distress, as the “sigh of the oppressed creature”. However, at the same time religion is also a protest against this distress. But such protest, according to Marx, remains vain and ineffective because it diverts attention from this world and focuses hope on the next.31 By diverting their eyes to future happiness in a coming world, religion takes their eyes off from their sufferings in this world, thereby greatly reducing the possibility of rebelling against their oppressors.32 When Durkheim saw religion as beneficial to all segments of society by promoting social commitment, Marx held the view that religion serves the interests of the ruling elite at the expense of the masses.33

Any theory can be understood in its essence when we understand the concrete situation in which it originated. The crucial point and the very essence of Marx’s critique of religion are not its denial of God, but the affirmation and acknowledgment of human autonomy. He wanted to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved and abandoned.

iii) Max Weber (1864 – 1920)

Karl Marx inspired Max Weber’s interest in religion to some degree. Like Marx, Weber devoted much of his intellectual life to investigating the history of capitalism. He credited Marx for

31 Paulose Mar Paulose, op.cit, p.80.
32 James M. Henslin: op. cit, p.497.
highlighting the role of economics in history. But Marx believed that all history could be explained as class struggle on the basis of economics, while Weber argued economics as only one of the many factors influencing the course of history.\(^3\) Marx held the view that religion is an obstacle to social change, whereas Weber argued that religion could also be an agent of social change. In his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,\(^5\) Max Weber holds that the Protestant belief was one of the many factors that contributed to the rise of capitalism. Although he disagreed with Marx's economic determinism, he did not disprove the role of economics in history. The aim of this book was to show that history could not be reduced to one-factor explanations and that religion could be an agent of social change.\(^6\)

From the above perspective, religion could be understood and interpreted as instrumental to reveal human problems and also to find solutions from the sociological perspective. The Sociologists recognize that religion is central to every culture and they seek to understand how religious beliefs and practices guide human societies. Whatever be their personal religious beliefs, sociologists agree that religion is a major social institution that must be understood in the context of the society. According to them religion promotes social cohesion by uniting members of a society through shared symbols, values and norms.

\(^3\) Ibid., p.444.
\(^6\) Michael S. Bassis, Richard J. Gelles, and Ann Levine, op. cit., p.446.
c) Psychological Theories of Religion

Religion is not a major area of interest in psychology. Many textbooks of psychology do not devote much attention to religious issues. In some cases, the attitude is one of suspicion and even of hostility. Nevertheless, the contribution of many psychologists about religion and its role in human life cannot be ignored. Some of them are indeed very important and worth studying. Most psychological theories emphasize emotional aspects of religion. The main proponents of these theories are William James, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow, Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson etc. The following are some of the salient features of their theories.

i) William James (1842 – 1910)

His book The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1902)\(^{37}\) is considered by many to be the classic work in the field, not only because it was one of the first studies on religious experience by a psychologist, but also because of his approach. This book provided an early impetus for the psychology of religion. According to him there is possibility of both a healthy as well as sick form of religion. He thinks that there is something in human consciousness different from particular sensations. He distinguished between institutional religion and personal religion. Institutional religion refers to the religious group or organization, which plays an important part in a society’s culture. Personal religion, in which the individual has a mystical experience, can be experienced regardless of

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the culture. He was mainly interested in understanding personal religious experiences. Religious consciousness originates in the individual through a mystical experience. It can be transmitted and developed with the help of worship, prayer, meditation and the like with the help of institutional religion.

**ii) Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939)**

Freud’s critique of religion is well known to academic community. It is important to understand his position correctly, since it is often misunderstood. He laid the foundation of psychoanalysis and he has tremendous influence on modern society. Our understanding about the unconscious mind, childhood, parenthood etc comes mainly from the Freudian literature. In his writings, he tries to explain how we are influenced by the past events and by things outside our conscious mind. According to Freud, people experience conflicts between what they desire to do (represented by our *Id*) and the social control over our desires (represented by the *Superego*). These conflicts are resolved, to a greater or lesser degree, by the *Ego*.

Freud thinks that religion springs from the unresolved Oedipus complex - the boy’s sexual love for the mother and simultaneous fear and hate for the father. As a result, in the unconscious realm of the boy’s mind ‘the feared father becomes the feared God.’ It is the guilt-feeling of the people who cannot accept their desires and hatred that lead them to postulate and to fear a god. Freud viewed religion as originating in the child’s relationship to the father; hence in many

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38 Similarly, the girl’s sexual love for the father and simultaneous fear and hate of the mother is called ‘Electra-complex’.
cultures God is viewed as a Heavenly Father. In this way, religion reflects the attempt to fulfil our wishes, and thus it remains an illusion.39

According to Freud, the faith in God and religion need not always be wrong. If at all it is illusory, all illusions need not always be false. He thinks that religious doctrines can be illusions, because there is no proof for them and that they seem to contradict our scientific knowledge. Further, it is felt that their authenticity cannot be proved. Freud’s approach to religion is called “ontogenetic theory of religion”, which refers to the development of the individual. Regarding the origin of religion in the society, he accepted the patricide theory of some anthropologists, without proving or disproving it (how the sons kill their tyrannical father and later, obsessed by regret, worship him). This is what he termed as the ‘phylogenetic theory of religion’, which speaks about the racial development. Freud does not subscribe to atheism, nor disprove the teachings of religion. He does not even say that religious ideas are wrong. He called them illusions because he believed that they were the fruits of human wishes rather than of rational inquiry. He considered religious practices as neurotic. He saw religious ritual as something similar to the obsessional neurotic behaviour of patients (who did things for no apparent reason). Freud often describes the religious beliefs and practices as expressions of illusions and neurosis. Freud’s views on religion seem to have considerably influenced our society.

According to Freud, religion tries to fulfil our wishes and thus it remains as an illusion. The desire for security and companionship is fulfilled through religion. He attributed undue importance to sexuality over spirituality in one’s psychological development. As Freud was a product of modernism, which was mainly influenced by scientism, his approach was not holistic to the reality. The modernists believed that reality is only materialistic and physical and consequently many of them believed in scientism and rejected the metaphysical realities. Scientism shows that the methods used in studying natural sciences could be employed in investigating all the aspects of human behaviour, philosophy and reality in general. This does not appear to be tenable, precisely because reality cannot be restricted to the physical realm alone. One must keep in mind that absence of knowledge about certain realities should not be equated with the knowledge of their absence. In other words, because we do not know certain realities, it does not necessarily mean that they do not exist. Hence it will not be true / proper for a scientist to deny the metaphysical and supernatural realities, just because they are not known to him.

iii) Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937)

He was an Austrian psychiatrist who parted ways with Freud. Adler emphasized the role of goals and motivation in his famous book *Individual Psychology*. One of his most famous ideas is that we try to compensate for our inferiorities through religion. Lack of power often lies at the root of an inferiority feeling. Our belief in God shows our tendency to strive for perfection and superiority. In many religions,
God is considered to be perfect and omnipotent, and desires His people to be perfect. If we want to achieve perfection, we must satisfy His desires.

Much of Adler’s writing is devoted to social movements. He is interested mostly in the idea of God as a motivator, and not in the question of whether or not God exists. What is important is that God (or the idea of God) motivates people to act, and that those actions do have real impact upon us and on others. Our view of God is important because it activates and controls our actions. Religion is important because it exerts great influence on the social aspect of our life, and is important as a powerful social movement itself. Compared to science, religion is more powerful because it motivates people more effectively. According to Adler, religion seems to play a dominant role in motivating people with better vision, mission and action. This appears to be true, as the sensitivity of religion has grown so high to the extent of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. What we require is a balanced outlook and equanimity in religious matters.

iv) **Carl Gustav Jung (1875 - 1961)**

Although a follower of Freud in the beginning, Jung left the Freudian school of thought when Freud attributed undue importance to sexuality over spirituality. Jung was concerned with the interplay between conscious and unconscious forces. He proposed two kinds of unconsciousness; namely personal and collective. Personal unconscious includes those things about ourselves that we would like to forget. The collective unconscious refers to events that we all share, by virtue of having a common heritage, belonging to human species.
He was fascinated by non-western views, and sought to find some common ground between East and West.

Jung is well known for his study of archetypes and the impact of religion on the individual’s life. Jung does not seem to be interested in arguing out or in rejecting the truth-claims of religious doctrines. What matters for him is the psychological impact of the religious belief in a person’s life. According to him nobody knows the ultimate reality. We must, therefore, accept it as we experience them. And if such an experience helps to make one’s life better, more beautiful, more perfect and more satisfactory to oneself and to others, one may consider it as grace of God.40 He gave much importance to the experience of the individual. He viewed religion positively and according to him religion helps people to resolve their inner conflicts and attain maturity. For Jung religion is more an instrument or medium for the transformation of the personal life. Hence for him, religion is more ethical than dogmatic and ritualistic.

v) Gordon Allport (1897-1967)

In his classic book, ‘The Individual and His Religion- A Psychological Interpretation’, Allport illustrates how people may use religion in different ways. He makes a distinction between mature and immature religions. Mature religion promotes dynamism, open-mindedness, and altruism. In contrast, immature religion is self-serving, closed and unkind. Allport looked at the positive and negative impact of religion on its followers. Positively they are forgiving,

generous, kind, humble, open etc. Negatively, people are cruel, intolerant, narrow-minded self-righteous and the like. Hence, there are different types of people in religion. Those who take it seriously see in it a motivational source and perform well; the doubters see it as a sign of immaturity and weakness. As a psychologist, Allport is more interested in the psychological aspect of religion than in its truth claims.

Allport is neither against religion nor for religion. He held that the search for an adequate belief system must go on. Yet, "as a science, psychology can neither prove nor disprove religion's claims to truth. It can, however, help explain why these claims are so many and so diverse... The final truths of religion are unknown, but a psychology that impedes the understanding of religious potentialities of man scarcely deserves to be called the logos of the human psyche at all."41 Regarding the origins of religion, Allport believed that there could be numerous interpretations and no uniformity could be expected.42 According to him religion can be helpful or detrimental to man's integral growth. It influences his life. He does not approve of all things manifested as religiosity.

vi) Abraham Maslow (1908 – 1970)

According to Maslow religion provides people with a transcendental understanding of the world.43 "What makes someone

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psychologically healthy' was the question that guided Maslow's work. To this end, he developed a hierarchy of needs, ranging from lower level physiological needs, through love and belonging, to self-actualization. Self-actualized people are those who have reached their potential for self-development. From being a militant atheist, Maslow became more and more attuned to the mystical dimension of life. Maslow claimed that mystics are more likely to be self-actualized than other people. Mystics also are more likely to have had "peak experiences", experiences in which the person feels a sense of ecstasy and oneness with the universe. Although his hierarchy of needs sounds appealing, many find it difficult to support his theory. Nevertheless, his work led to research on religion, peak experiences and the links between self-actualization and piety. The self-actualization theory of Maslow was more in the line of the personality-development in its fullest expression. But when we come to the end of this thought development, he seems to identify the religious experience and self-actualization which leads to the transformation of the self.


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Erik H. Erikson (1902 – 1994)

Though Erikson's direct or central interest is not religion, his study on Luther reveals a stand quite different from Freud's. Unlike Freud, Erikson takes Luther's stand seriously. He believes that religion need not be regression; instead it can promote creativity. Religious counsellors and spiritual guides have extensively used Erikson's theory of life stages. From his study of life stages and of

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Luther and of Mahatma Gandhi, Erikson comes to the conclusion that is very different from that of Freud. Religion, according to him can be distorted to pathological uses, or be a vital force for maturity and social support. Religion helps the person to have a fuller development at different stages. He believes that psychologically, religion is a good medium for the transformation of the person.

According to Erich Fromm the important thing is to express all the love that we are capable of. The mentally healthy person is the one who lives his life by love, reason, and faith. Even when he speaks of the love of God, Fromm says that he does not mean this in a theistic sense, but rather as an ultimate concern. According to him there exists no spiritual realm outside man or transcending him. Erich Fromm holds a healthy idea of religion, which has to be lived in love, reason and faith. For him, the very creation and all beings are manifestations of God himself.

When religion, mankind’s oldest and probably the deepest concern, is willing to face the challenges and insights of one of the most influential academic fields today, the results expected can be rich and controversial, deep and provocative. When Psychology and religion meet, there is always an understandable excitement in the air, since both fields touch us at our deepest core. Serious research shows that neither field has anything to fear from the other, but only from

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misconstructions of each other’s nature and purpose.\textsuperscript{48} All psychological theories of religion agree on one thing: whatever be its origins or purpose, whatever be its beliefs or rituals, religion can serve to satisfy psychological needs common to all people.

All these theories point to the fact that man is religious by nature. This religious nature seeks its fulfilment in proper and peaceful relationships. If we understand religion as relation with oneself, with others and with the Divine, this becomes all the more true.

3. \textbf{Essential Elements of Religion}

In general, religions have their starting point in some mystical or religious experience of God or something supernatural. When the pioneers of these religions encountered the Divine, they communicated this experience to their immediate disciples and followers. Since this experience is very much personal and ineffable, it cannot be adequately communicated. Thus in every religion there is some mystical dimension, which is to be experienced by the individual. In religions, scholars have identified some elements as essential. Here an attempt is made to understand these elements of religion, namely, creed, cult and code of conduct.

\textbf{a) Creed}

Creed is the deposit of faith/articles of faith professed by the followers of a particular religion. Creed is a profession of faith, put in

precise form, endowed with authority, and intended for general use in religious rites. A creed summarizes the essential beliefs of a particular religion. Thus in Hinduism the Prastāna Traya, namely, Brahmastūtra, Vedopaniṣad and Bhagavad Gītā which promotes the bhakti, jñāna and karma mārgas, is the basic creed. In Christianity there is the Apostle’s Creed, which begins with ‘I believe’. In Islam the creed is recited in a twofold witness: La ilaha illa Allah Muhammadu Rasool Allah (There is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God). Buddhism’s triple refuge is a profession of faith: Buddhām saranam gachami, Dhammam saranam gachami, Sangham saranam gachami (I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Doctrine, I take refuge in the Community of believers). As time passed by and as the original experience declined, there came a need to codify the essentials of faith based on the foundational experience. And accordingly, some people took upon themselves the duty to codify the doctrinal dimension of religion. Thus the doctrinal dimension came into existence.

The Creed has different functions to play. Firstly, it acts as the basis for membership in a religious community or constitutes one of the elements of religious distinctiveness; secondly it acts as a test of orthodoxy in formal dealings. In doctrines or theological statements, beliefs and religious experiences are systematized and put into a form in which their purity can be preserved and their meanings transmitted.

to the community of believers. Doctrines, therefore, tend to arise after the events they enshrine, and to represent ordered reflections upon the mysterious and largely inaccessible phenomena. Various doctrinal statements are found among all the great religions, although the ways they are arrived at and the importance attached to them, may differ between various religious traditions.

Doctrinal statements are also to be found in abundance among the great religions of the East. Here the word ‘theology’ is not always appropriate, since all religions do not agree on the existence of Theos or God. One has to admit the fact that the formulation of doctrinal standards by official bodies in religions cannot ensure similarities of beliefs among their members. Believers may profess the same creeds and doctrinal statements with sincerity and yet differ widely in the ways in which they understand and interpret those same beliefs. Though it is not possible to have identical beliefs (creed) either among religions, or among the individuals of the same religions, it is necessary that there should be a system of beliefs (creed) for any religion. Thus such a creed helps a particular group of faithful people to be united.

b) Cult (Rituals)

A religion, worth its name, needs to express itself through rituals. A rite is an action that transcends its visible performance and connects us with the Divine, cosmos and other beings in different ways. The original mystical experience cannot be transmitted as such to the followers, since this experience is something personal and

ineffable. Worship enables the followers of a religion to have a share in the original mystical experience through rituals and symbols. Though rituals and symbols are man-made, they have a power to inspire the devotees towards a personal experience of God. These symbols are different depending on the culture and social set up in which they originated. The existence of different religious rituals can be traced back to their origins in history. The ‘Great bath’ at Mohanjo Daro in the Indus valley may be of one such example. The ‘Great bath’ at Mohanjo Daro in the Indus valley may be of one such example. Cult in the practical sense can be described as the intervention of the religion for the proper guidance of the individual for his righteous development. This can be seen in all religions in different ways and times. For example, in the Catholic Church there are seven sacraments (purifying ceremonies); in Hinduism we see eighteen sañskāras (purifying ceremonies) and in Islam, we can see these rituals in one form or other in its Five Pillars, especially in the prayers (Namaz) and pilgrimage (Hajj). Hence, cult is an important and essential part of any religion; but it need not be uniform in nature.

c) **Code of Conduct**

Religion is not merely a creed or performance of some rituals; rather it should guide the people towards a right conduct. It must, therefore, encompass every field of human life like politics, economics, science, technology etc. Hence Gandhiji rightly said, “Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.” The moral codes of religion often have a lot to do with

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social behaviour of persons and in that respect religion plays a very important role as a form of social control. But the ethical precepts of religions relate also to personal conduct and to matters that are regarded as important for self-control and thus for spiritual development. Families of religions often seem very similar in their moral codes.

All religions have their ethical prescriptions, and most of them claim that they are based upon revelation. But practice and theory often do not converge. The general acceptance of moral codes by believers appears to be an indication of the ideals they hold, but of course it may not be possible for all the believers to put all the precepts into practice. The main objective of every religion is salvation, and in the last analysis, this salvation, depends not merely on the doctrine, or on the rituals, but mostly on the conduct. Moksha, mukti or heaven is attained through one’s code of conduct. The Hindus consider that varṇāśrama dharma as the means to overcome the karma rebirth cycle and to attain mukti. The Jñāna, Bhakti, and Karma mārgas facilitate the implementation of varṇāśrama dharma. Here the means suggested for the realization of the Self are values put forward by the dhamasastras. The Christians are asked to observe the Ten Commandments to attain salvation. Of these ten, the first three commandments refer to man’s relationship with God and the next seven straighten the relationship with himself and others. The last judgment, according to Christianity, is based on one’s proper relationship with others. In Islam, the Five Pillars are the means to reach heaven. The faith in God (Shahāda), the prayers (Salat), the

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55 Ibid. p.10.
fasting (*Sawm*), the alms giving (*Zakkat*) and the pilgrimage (*Hajj*) are the Five Pillars and they manifest man’s relation with God and his fellow brethren. Thus a smooth relationship leads to the salvation of the self. Here one must note that the creed and cult are not irrelevant, but they should lead one to the code of conduct and good life. Therefore Mahatma Gandhi called his religion ‘Ethical Religion’, giving importance to the code of conduct, the practical aspect of religion. In creed and cult, various religions differ, but on the essentials of the code of conduct, most religions agree, for the basic principle of the code conduct is ‘do good and avoid evil’.

4. **Supplementary Elements of Religion**

Besides the essential elements of creed, cult and code of conduct, there are some supplementary elements found in almost all religions. The important ones are myths and mythology through which the religious mysteries are unveiled.

a) **Myth**

‘Myth’ is a word capable of a variety of interpretations. For some people, this word is used as a kind of fairy tale. For others, this is a story which belongs to the ancient past and which emerged from a mode of thinking and understanding out grown by modern scientific man. It is important to note that this is not the way this word is used in religious discourse. A myth is a story that encapsulates something believed to be true by a large group of people bound

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together in a common belief or commitment (a nation or the followers of a particular religion). The myths are essential vehicles for communicating the faith of religious traditions. The creation story found in the Bible is an example of this. Through this it teaches that everything is created by God and thus the absolute power of the transcendent God is emphasized.

Myths play an important role in every religion, even in those religious traditions that claim to be a directly revealed religion. The western world, perhaps because of the dramatic impact of empirical science and scientific method, has become suspicious of what is not literally true, or what cannot be analyzed in an empirical way. So myths tend to be misunderstood and hastily discarded. In traditions that originate in the East, on the other hand, the place of myths appears to be more readily accepted. Many stories of Indian tradition are myths. But through these stories, the religious faith is strongly imparted to the community. The functions performed by the myths are many and varied. They can act with a cohesive power for a particular culture or society as well as for the individual believer. Their representation in rituals offers a meaning to life and a framework for a way of living. The stories and their associated rituals stimulate the imagination and evoke an emotional response. Certainly myths can convey religious ideas analogically. Despite the western

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58 The Encyclopedia of World Faiths, op.cit, p.9.
60 The Encyclopedia of World Faiths, op.cit, p.9.
tendency to demythologize, myths are not to be set aside lightly, as they are powerful means of communicating divine mysteries.

b) Mythology

Mythology is the scientific and historical study of myths. It is the special thought-form, perspective and language of myth. The term mythology is used in two distinct ways. It is not only the study of myth, but also the body of myths in a particular religious tradition. Every society has developed its own myths, which play an important role in the society’s religious life. This religious significance has always separated myths from folk tales and legends. People may narrate folk tales and legends for amusements, without believing them. But they usually consider myths as sacred and purposive. Through mythology, we learn how different societies have answered to the basic questions of life. We also understand better the feelings and values that bind the members of society into one group. Mythology helps people to express their different feelings through art, architecture, literature, music, paintings, sculpture etc.

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61 Rudolf Bultmann, a German theologian, has coined the term ‘demythologization’. In the strict sense of the word, demythologizing efforts have been limited to theological discussions in 20th century Christianity. Demythologization is a conscious effort people make to purify a religious tradition of its mythological elements. Positively, we may say that it is an attempt to make revelation relevant for modern man. Negatively, demythologizing tends to minimize or eliminate the objective reality of the saving events by God. There is also a difficulty in distinguishing myths from events, especially those beyond the range of normal occurrence. Hence, the demythologization process may end up with disastrous results because it will give simplistic interpretations to many vital issues of religion.


c) Mystery

Mystery has been thought of as that element of doctrinal propositions that is not fully comprehensible to reason. Some examples are Trinity, Vedic Triad, Avatārs etc. In a way, religion is man's response to the divine or supernatural mystery. The natural response to mystery is awe. Mysteries are to be distinguished from problems. A problem can be solved, but a mystery cannot be solved; they need to be accepted, believed in and meditated upon. The Advaita tradition of Hinduism holds that the Reality is one and only one. In the end, there is no knowing, only awareness of, and joy of being - Saccidānanda.65 Every religion has its origin in some mystical experience. The founders of religions speak of a realm of mystery that lies beyond the reach of human grasp and reasoning. The Divine Reality, they point to, remains in a 'cloud of unknowing', for "no one has ever seen God."66 For a true mystic this Reality is the direct experience of the presence of God in and around them. The mystic realizes God as the raison d'être of his being. He passes out of all that is merely phenomenal, out of all lower forms of reality, and becomes one with the Being. Meditation and reflection on mysteries will help one to transcend the superfluous particularities. Thus it will enable us to come to a common ground. Every religion has some / many elements of mystery.

5. **Definition of Religion**

From what has been discussed above, a working definition for religion can be given. Etymological uncertainty about this word contributes to the various definitions of religion. For many people, religion is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practices and worship that centers on Supernatural Reality or Deity. For some others, religion involves a number of gods or deities. Some people have a religion in which no God is involved. There are also people who practise their own religious beliefs in their own personal way, largely independent of organized religion. But generally people who follow some religion believe in a divine power, which is the source of this world and of our lives.

There are numerous definitions of religion given by thinkers according to their own conceptions. As a matter of fact the forms in which religion expresses itself vary so much that it is difficult to agree upon one definition. In the World Conference on Religion held in Cochin in 1981, the delegates could not come to an agreement on a definition of religion, except that religion is "first and foremost what truly religious people say and do and are." Further, there are a lot of differences among religious doctrines, practices and priorities. What is important to one religion is sometimes considered as absurd to another, namely, the cow worship and cow slaughter, and some turning to the East and others turning to the West for worship etc.

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On analyzing certain words relating to religion etymologically, we can arrive at a meaning of religion signified by them. Among them the most commonly referred Latin words are *refigere*, *reeligere*, *relegere* etc. In order to understand the meaning of the word ‘religion’ in a better way, an analysis of these three Latin words is necessary. The word *refigere*, means to retie or rebind. Man, who happened to cut himself away from God, is helped through religion to retie or relate with God and thus to attain the purpose of creation, i.e., salvation or self-realization. It is a resetting to smoothen the relation with God and our fellow brethren. The second word is *reeligere*, which means re-choosing. Man, who chose against God, is helped through religion to re-choose God for his eternal salvation. The third word is ‘*relegere*’. It means to re-read. As we went wrong in the first reading, we want to read the Reality in the right way. Hence religion is a correction of mistake committed in reading the Reality. Literally speaking, religion is a principle of unification and harmonization. “Any discipline which binds us all together in a wholesome way is religion.” What distinguishes religion from everything else is its concern with the human life and existence in all its totality and wholesomeness.

The corresponding Vedic word for religion is *dharma*. It is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘*dhru*’, which means to ‘sustain,

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support, uphold’ etc. Dharma has a wide range of meanings: it is the essential foundation of something or of things in general, and thus signifies ‘truth’; it is that which is established customary, proper and therefore means ‘traditional’ or ‘ceremonial’; it is one’s duty, responsibility, imperative and thereby ‘moral obligation’; it is that which is right, virtuous, meritorious and accordingly ‘ethical’; and it is that which is required, or permitted through religious authority, and thus legal.\textsuperscript{73} Jaimini, the reputed founder of the $\textit{Purva-mim\dot{a}\dot{s}a-darsana}$ defines dharma as “the conduct in conformity with a Vedic injunction”.\textsuperscript{74} Therefore, whatever is prescribed by or laid down in the Veda is dharma; and whatever is prohibited by the Veda is adharma or sinful. The Veda in its entirety is the root or source of dharma and it is the authority on moral matters.\textsuperscript{75} It is stated that dharma is the basis of human life. It is by following dharma that one attains the ultimate aim of life, i.e., moksha. According to S. Radhakrishnan, dharma is that which holds a thing and binds it together. Every form of life, every group of men has its dharma, which is the law of its being.\textsuperscript{76}

Some regard religion as belief in the immortality of the soul, while others define religion as belief in God or some supernatural power. Even the adherents of the same religion differ in their ways of practising it. It is very difficult to define or describe religion, because it is a growing, dynamic thing, personal and broad in scope. Hence, a


\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Purva Mimamsa-sutra}, 1.2.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Manu Smriti} 2.6; 2.12.

\textsuperscript{76} S. Radhakrishnan: \textit{The Hindu View of Life}, op.cit, p.78.
perfect definition of religion, which is acceptable for all, cannot be expected. However, a definition for religion by going through the root meanings of the word ‘religion’ can be arrived at. From the above analysis it can be concluded that religion is for establishing a proper relationship with oneself, with others and with the entire universe and with the Divine. Therefore a meaningful definition of religion can be arrived at as the proper and peaceful relationship with oneself, with others, with the entire universe and with the Divine.

6. Conclusion

The different theories on the origin and development of religion show that religious instinct is innate in man. Religion has its origin in the attempt of early man to establish a relationship between him and certain power that is beyond him. The early man’s instinctive tendencies were not simply left behind but rather sublimated as he became civilized. So there has been development as well as continuity. Among the various elements of religion, the code of conduct of all religions is a unifying factor. The basic principle of the code of conduct is ‘do good and avoid evil’. All religions agree on this fact. This can be realized through one’s proper and peaceful relationship with oneself, with others, with the world and with the Divine. Religion is a major social institution that must be understood in the context of the society, and it promotes social cohesion by uniting members of a society. This shows that the primary duty of religion is that of union and integration, not of division and disintegration.

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1. Introduction

As religious nature is innate in man, it is only proper to understand the goal of religion. Since the duty of religions should primarily be that of union and integration, not of division and disintegration, it should help us to unite us to the source of our being. It should enable us to discover the truth about life and the world. It seems that it is the absence of true meaning and goal of religion, which is one of the causes for the problems created in the name of religion. The foremost role of religion is to remind man of his spiritual vocation and to enable him to achieve the inner integration. This is possible through a proper and peaceful relationship.

2. Establishment of Relationships

Man, from the womb to the tomb, is a social being and dependent on others. He has both vertical and horizontal relationships. Relatedness is built into the very nature of man. A human being cannot be defined purely in terms of an individual. He is an individual who needs others. Therefore, if we are not properly related to others, we are failing to supply a need that is built into our very nature. In its essence, religion is the proper and peaceful relationship which a human being tries to establish with oneself, others, nature and God. Here we examine some of the aspects of these relationships.

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a) **Man and God**

Most world religions are centred on a Divine Reality often called 'God'. But in some religions, there is no reference to a sacred reality as such. But here also the inspiration comes from a supernatural reality, though one has to work hard for self-actualization.\(^8^0\) In man there is a quest for self-transcendence. Transcendence implies the power of overcoming one's finiteness. Man, in so far he is a created being, the power to perfect his being is limited. In the spiritual realm, the process of man's self-perfection has no conceivable limits. There is no conceivable limit to his quest for truth, goodness, beauty, bliss etc., except when it reaches the Ultimate Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Bliss. Thus he is truly able to reflect on his creator.\(^8^1\) Religion is not merely a sentimental relation with God. It also means the response to the call of God. It is essentially a yearning for God, which is satisfied only in communion with Him. This relationship is often termed as the vertical relation of man with God.

b) **Man and Himself**

In order to establish a proper and peaceful relationship with God and the entire cosmos, one needs to be at peace with oneself. One has to know himself properly, which can be termed as understanding of the self-image. Good self-image is called self-esteem. For this, one has to accept oneself as one is and what one has. Self-esteem is often misunderstood by many as pride. Pride is the attitude of one who thinks that one is better than others and looks down on others. But

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\(^8^0\) Augustine Perumalil: op.cit, p.270.
\(^8^1\) Ibid, p.277.
one must love and accept oneself, and then only one can love and accept others also. Through this the process of transformation takes place. This relationship is salutary and profoundly useful to us in our process of inner growth. Religion helps to get a right and proper self-understanding and promote a healthy horizontal relationship with himself and with others.

c) Man and Man

We know very little about the mystery of God, but we know much about the misery of man. Man is moved when he sees people in distress. He sees God in them and also Himself in them. Love indeed demands sacrifice, which is giving up of oneself for the welfare of others. Religions teach their followers to recognize God's presence everywhere, especially in our fellow brethren and serve them. If one really loves God, he cannot but love and serve his fellow human beings. For him service to a fellow human being is as important as service to God. In other words, it is said that manava seva is mādhava seva (service to human being is the service to God Himself). Hence true religion should always help people to live selflessly for others. The ways to salvation largely depend on the proper and peaceful relationship with others.

d) Man and Nature

Since religion is a proper and peaceful relationship with all, it should help to establish a proper relationship with nature also. This relationship is often denoted today by the term 'eco-spirituality'. It

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takes into account the presence of God within each living creature and all material reality. According to Brennan, “Nature is in a way a sanctuary, where we have access to the power of the creator’s beauty and power”. God is both transcendent and immanent. The eco-spirituality takes into account both the transcendence and immanence of God. All of nature reflects the glory of its Creator. Nature will help us to find all things in God and God in all things. It is high time that we changed the human perspective from the anthropocentric to a cosmic vision. Raimond Panikkar calls for a cosmotheandric intuition in our relation with the cosmos. So it becomes an experience of the cosmos within ourselves, united with an experience of God.

The whole of nature reflects the glory of its creator God. The earth is a creative blessing from God entrusted to mankind. It follows that we are expected to exercise our stewardship of the earth with great care and sense of responsibility. When the proper relationship is not observed, God given nature is destroyed in the name of human progress and development, which will in turn bring about an ecological crisis. Ecological crisis may be understood as the alienation and estrangement of man from nature. The solution lies in proper relationship that will bring about a change of attitude towards nature,

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life styles and livelihood patterns. This is possible through a cosmic vision with a strong concern for the well being of the entire creation.\(^{85}\)

3. Religion and Morality

The word 'morality' comes from the Latin word 'mores', which means manner or custom. As the custom changes morality will also change. Oxford English Dictionary speaks of 'moral' as pertaining to character and concerned with virtue and rules of right conduct. Another word used to denote morality is 'ethics'. This word comes from the Greek word 'ethicos', which primarily refers to character or manner. But it seems that there is a subtle distinction between the two words. Morality tries to focus on human actions and practices, whereas ethics is primarily concerned with study and reflection on morality.\(^{86}\) However, both of them refer to human actions and practices with regard to their merits and demerits. Right relationship is established through right thought, word and deed. And this is the quintessence of morality.

But there are some people who think that there is not much relationship between morality and religion. They claim that one can be moral without being religious and that one can have morally correct convictions without relying on religious conviction.\(^{87}\) But the study of religion will prove that morality is a basis of religion and religion


cannot exist without morality. A religion that fails to embrace and embody moral values lacks credibility. Therefore, according to religious people, any break between religion and morality will be dangerous. Though there may exist some apparent differences regarding the relation between religion and morality, one has to admit the fact that there is always a close relation between religion and morality.

Kitaro Nishida, a Japanese Philosopher argues that those who take morality seriously cannot but feel an intense demand for religion. Essentially and fundamentally, religion is a ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ and consists in raising our consciousness from the human to the divine level. According to Gandhiji as long as the seed of morality is not watered by religion, it cannot sprout. Without water it withers and perishes. And when it is watered by religion, it will not be like the cloud, which is driven out by wind; instead, it stands firm and does what is right and good. According to Paul W. Diener, religion gives morality a transcendent base. The function of religion is not simply to make people morally good, but to provide transcendence and meaning to life. Therefore, William J. Abraham argues that morality is the fruit of religion, but morality is not the only reason for

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88 Ibid.
91 Paul W. Diener, op.cit, p.48.
people to practise religion. And even if the standards of morality may vary, people always want to be moral.

4. **Religion: A Way of Life**

Since morality is an integral part of religion, it should affect every moment and activity of a religious person. Since religion is for establishing a proper and peaceful relationship with oneself, others, the entire universe and with God, it should help the person to live in a holistic way. Religion must percolate into every aspect of one's life. It is not a mere belief system but behaviour pattern; not a blind belief but a strong conviction leading to action. Geshe Damdul Namgyal expresses the idea that the practice of religion should lead to the transformation of life.

.... if one's faith or practice of religion remains only at the intellectual level of knowledge, such as being familiar with certain doctrines without translating them into one's behaviour or conduct, then that is a grave mistake...this could be quite destructive. It could lead to a situation in which the persons, because of having the knowledge of the religious beliefs, could use the religion for the purpose of exploitation and manipulation.

This again points towards the fact that religion should influence every aspect of one's life and its transformation. According to S. Radhakrishnan a true spiritual renewal alone can save the world from

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92 William J. Abraham, op.cit, p.54.
the imminent disaster. Hence the code of conduct is the most important element in religion. Otherwise, religion will remain only on the level of ideas or of knowledge.

5. Religion and Salvation

The foremost role of religion is to remind man of his vocation and to enable him to achieve the inner integration whose outward effect is peace with oneself, other human beings, with the entire cosmos and with God. “The aim of any religion is to save or free man. No matter how we interpret this salvation and liberation, religion is always the means whereby man arrives at his destination.”

Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad presents before us the sincere yearning of a religious man:

“Asato mā Sat gamaya
Tamoṣo mā Jyotir gamaya
Mṛtyor mā Amṛtam gamaya.”

(Lead us from untruth to Truth
Lead us from darkness to Light
Lead us from death to Immortality)

The basic concern of all religions is to reach the ultimate goal of human life, a transition to a better state from the present condition which is generally bound up in sin, ignorance and suffering. Hence the greatest concern of religions is to help man work out his salvation.

96 Bṛhadāranyka. Upaniṣhad 1.3.28.
But there is divergence of views regarding the salvation offered by different religions. There is difference between 'liberative religions' and 'redemptive religions'. Liberation religions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism hold that nothing new can be added to humans in saving them, except the realization of what they actually are. There is nothing real beside Brahman. Therefore, one must realize that one is Brahman. This is self-realization.

Redemptive religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a different story. Man is created by God, and thus he does not have an existence equal to that of God, who is infinite. Thus though man is finite, God so loved man that He created him in his likeness and image, endowed him with intelligence and freedom. Hence he is bound to respond to the call given by God, the Creator. Further, man is invited to grow out of his creaturely condition and attain deeper fellowship with his Maker. He cannot accomplish this with his own natural resources but only through the continued help of God made available through the Scriptures. Again there is divergence among religions in figuring out this fulfilment. Judaism and Islam demand from human beings obedience to the laws of God, and in reward for such obedience, they promise a future happiness in the eternal kingdom. Christianity, on the other hand, introduces the idea of the incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth and the reparation for human sin through his death and resurrection. Liberation or redemption is the ultimate goal of every individual and, religion helps one to attain this goal through proper relationships with oneself, with others, with the entire cosmos and with the Divine.
6. Conclusion

Man is a relational being, who needs others. Therefore a proper and peaceful relationship is to be established with oneself, with others, with nature and with the Divine. Right relationship is established through right thought, word and deed. And this is the quintessence of morality. Thus there is an intimate relation between religion and morality. Since morality is an essential element of religion, it should affect every moment and every activity of a religious person. The goal of religions is to help man work out his salvation or liberation. This is possible through a proper and peaceful relationship.

7. Evaluation

Man cannot lead a meaningful life in this world without proper relationships. According to the degree and quality of these relationships, man will have peace and contentment in this world. The role of religion is to help a person to establish proper and peaceful relationships. The most paradoxical aspect of religion is its strong tendency and tremendous power to do good as well as evil. This is not only just a periodic phenomenon but also a consistent fact in history. Nevertheless, religion has got a tremendous influence in making people do and think good.

Religions should never be understood simply as observances of rituals and practices and advocating certain theories and doctrines about the ultimate realities of life. The concern of all religions should be to cultivate the ethico-spiritual dimensions in man’s life. Today

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religions have to play prophetic roles by promoting altruistic values as against the selfish and egoistic values, by training people in voluntary simplicity as against the consumeristic trend of modern life, and by conscientizing people in such a way as to make them understand the social injustice in all walks of life and stimulate them to establish a just and egalitarian society. The distinguishing function of religion is to give a human being the supreme satisfaction for his life through a vital relationship with what he recognizes as the Supreme power. It is a life of self-realization. All religions require us to look upon life as an opportunity for self-realization. Religion in its true sense is not an opium rather it is one that gives inspiration, healing and meaning to one's life. The code of conduct of various religions will help us to reach a common ground. Gandhiji's approach to religion will help us to understand the common ground of religions in a better way.