Ways of Being Religious

readings for a new approach to religion

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Introduction: What Is "Religion"?

Definitions Determine Our Course

An African proverb, from the Ganda tribe in central Uganda, states, "He who never visits thinks his mother is the only cook." As with most proverbs, its meaning is larger than the explicit subjects referred to—in this case food and visiting. It suggests that a person is much the poorer for not having had exposure to and acquaintance with the ways of other people.

This book is an attempt to encourage and to make it possible for students to visit (literally, "to go see") some of the religious expressions of mankind. All of us have had some acquaintance with religious people, just as we have tasted our mother's food. But do we really understand very well what it means to be religious? The "Father of the Scientific Study of Religion," Max Mueller, once said: "He who knows one religion understands none." That is perhaps too extreme a statement as it stands, and yet it says about the study of religion what the African proverb says about the knowledge of life in general—that we sacrifice much if we confine ourselves to the familiar.

If a visit is to be fruitful, the "traveler" must do more than just move from place to place. He must respond to what he sees. But what is it that shapes the way we respond to new experiences? Our perception of things

is often colored by our previous attitudes toward them. In this case, what do you, the reader, expect from an exposure to various expressions of religion? What sorts of things do you expect to see? How do you think you will respond to them? If you were asked to define, to illustrate, or to characterize religious behavior, how would you do so? The answers to these questions, of course, reflect your *pre*-conceptions. To become conscious of your preconceptions, ask yourself the following four questions.

Does your definition* reduce *religion to what you happen to be acquainted with by accident of birth and socialization? Perhaps that goes without saying. It may be true of anyone's "off-the-cuff" definition of religion. However, we ask this question to encourage you to consider whether your definition has sufficient *scope*. Is it the broad enough to include the religious activities of human beings throughout the world? In surveying university students we have commonly gotten responses to the question, "What is religion?" as follows: "Being Christian, I would define it [religion] as personal relationship with Christ." "Religion [is]: God, Christ, and Holy Ghost and their meaning to each individual." Other students think of worship rather than belief. In this vein, one edition of Webster's dictionary, in the first of its definitions, describes religion as "the service and adoration of God or a god as expressed in forms of worship." If we were to accept any of the above definitions, many people in the world would be excluded—people who regard some of their most important activities as religious, but who do not focus upon a deity. That is to say, not all religions are theistic. It remains to be seen, of course, whether and to what extent this is true. But let us all be warned of taking our habits or our dictionary as the sole resource for defining religion. In some areas, the main lines of significant understanding are already well established. Therefore we have no serious quarrel with Webster's definition of food as "nutritive material taken into an organism for growth, work, or repair and for maintaining the vital processes." But in religion, interpretive concepts are more problematical. Therefore we are suspicious of the adequacy of the dictionary's definition of religion.

Another common way to define religion is to regard it as "morality plus stories," or "morality plus emotion." These are ways of asserting that religion has to do mainly with ethics, or that its myths merely support the particular ethical views of a people. There are, of course, persons for whom religion has been reduced to ethics, as when Thomas Paine stated (in *The Rights of Man*): "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." But we should be cautious in assuming that this testimony would do for all religious people.

A final example of a definition of religion that begins with personal experience is one that claims: "Religion is a feeling of security"; or, as one student put it: "Religion is an aid in coping with that part of life

which man does not understand, or in some cases a philosophy of life enabling man to live more deeply." In locating the basis of religion in man's need for a sense of security, this approach suggests that the deepest study of religion is through psychology. It has been dramatically expressed by the psychiatrist and writer C. G. Jung when he wrote: "Religion is a relationship to the highest or strongest value. . . the value by which you are possessed unconsciously. That psychological fact which is the greatest power in your system is the god, since it is always the overwhelming psychic factor which is called god" (*Psychology and Religion,* p. 98). Although this understanding of religion expresses a very important point, many theologians and religious philosophers point out that an interpretation that reduces all of religious experience to psychological, biological, or social factors omits the central reality exposed in that experience—the Sacred or Ultimate Reality. Thus, a student of religion should keep open the question of whether a familiar interpretation of religious life that fits into a conventional, social science perspective of man is adequate for interpreting the data.

Does your definition reflect a* bias *on your part—positive or negative—toward religion as a whole, or toward a particular religion? There are many examples of biased definitions that could be cited. Some equate religion with superstition, thus reflecting a negative evaluation. One man defined religion as "the sum of the scruples which impede the free exercise of the human faculties." Another hostile view of religion is to see religion as a device of priests to keep the masses in subjection and themselves in comfort. Similarly, Karl Marx, while not actually attempting to define religion, called it "the opiate of the people," again reflecting a bias against (all) religion.

Still others, in defining religion, are stating their concept of *true* religion as opposed to what they regard as false or pagan faiths. Henry Fielding, in his novel *Tom Jones,* has the provincial parson Mr. Thwackum saying, "When I mention religion I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England." Some Christians assume that their personal conviction comprises a definition of religion, so that religion is regarded as "the worship of God through His Son Jesus Christ," or "a personal relationship with Christ." A Muslim can point out that the essence of religion is to make peace with God through complete submission to God's will, a submission that he will insist is brought to fulfillment in Islam. (In Arabic the word "Islam" means "submission," "peace," "safety," and "salvation.")

Therefore the student interested in reflecting on religious experience that includes more than a single institutional or cultural expression should remember the distinction between descriptive (neutral) and evaluative definitions. A descriptive definition attempts to be as inclusive as possible

about a class of items, such as religious forms. An evaluative definition, on the other hand, reflects one's own criteria for truth or falsity, for reality or illusion. In "visiting" religious people, we suggest that you delay making an evaluation until you have understood why their expressions and processes have profound meaning for them—however strange those expressions may seem to you. In the final analysis, each person must evaluate different religious alternatives; but one of our goals in bringing together the material in this volume is to provide you with a variety of options—a variety that is reduced if you limit religion to any single historical expression.

Obviously, the believer who advocates one religion to the exclusion of all others differs sharply from one who rejects all. Nevertheless, if either accepts his own convictions about what is best or worst in religion as a description of what religion in fact is everywhere and for everyone, he exhibits a common indifference to unfamiliar, and therefore potentially surprising, religious patterns. As a believer (or skeptic), you have a right to declare your own understanding of what is most important, most real, in religion. This declaration is, in fact, essential, for it guides you in your quest for whatever is most real in life. As a student, on the other hand, you have an obligation to carry your studies as far as necessary to include all relevant data. In this role, your obligation is not only to your own perception of value but also to a common world of understanding in which men of many religious persuasions can converse with each other. "But," you might ask, "what am I to do if I am both a student and a believer (or skeptic)?" This is an important question, and we shall attempt to deal with it later. For the moment, simply keep in mind the difference between the roles of student and of advocate.

Does your definition* limit *religion to what it* has *been in the past, and nothing else, or does your definition make it possible to speak of emerging forms of religion? In asking this question, we should observe two striking facts of the history of religion: there was a time when some present religions did not exist, and some of the religions which once emerged no longer exist (for example, the Egyptian and Babylonian religions). Human history, then, has witnessed the emergence and abandonment of several religions.

Even religious traditions that have maintained a sense of continuity over vast stretches of time (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, for example) have undergone important changes. Is it really as obvious as we tend to think that they are essentially the same now as they were at their origins? Do the terms naming these traditions even today point to a single entity, however complex? You are familiar with at least some instances of religious warfare *within* the Christian tradition. Roman Catholics have persecuted and killed Lutherans; Lutherans have persecuted and killed Calvinists; Calvinists, Anglicans; Anglicans, Quakers; and most have returned the act with interest. Are all of these groups expressions of "the

one true church"? Are some more Christian than others? Is there only one form of Christianity? Are new movements violations of the tradition? Or is the one who speaks to his own time the one who is most faithful to the genius of his tradition? These questions can be asked of all religious traditions. All have experienced change and diversity. Furthermore, it seems likely that this will continue, and that new religious traditions will emerge. Therefore, the conventions of the past cannot be regarded as the limits of future religious forms.

In part because history has witnessed the emergence and internal changes of many religions, anthropologists and cultural historians commonly suggest that religion (and human culture in general) has attained only its adolescence. Likewise, philosophers and religious thinkers in both East and West point to the anxiety and tensions today that are expressed in political, social, economic, and intellectual upheaval. They raise a question of whether or not man's moral, psychic, and evaluative resources can catch up with his self-destructive potential seen in technologically advanced weapons and psychological-chemical techniques for social control. The most hopeful of these philosophers perceive the present turmoil as a lack of "maturity" in human consciousness, and express the hope that it is not too late (quite) to change the direction of man from self-destruction to self-fulfillment.

From this perspective most of mankind's experience is still in the future. The history of religious life to the present is only a beginning. But the basis of these projections is the recognition that man's survival requires him to recognize religious dynamics and processes for evaluations as major forces in human life. Should not a definition of religion aid us in looking at contemporary phenomena to see if any new ways of being religious are emerging? At least it should not inhibit persons with an interest in this matter, and we think an introduction to religion should encourage such reflection.

***Does your definition have sufficient* precision?** Are there any limits to the scope of religion, or are the limits so vague that they fail to mark out an object of study? In a nattempt to be as broadminded as possible, many definitions are like a student's statement that religion is "the means man has of coping with his world." Or they are similar to the claim that religion is "believing in a way of life which involves understanding and caring for others," or "religion is love." Such definitions tell us a good deal, but without some qualification they might refer to many other expressions of human life than specifically religious ones. In order to find a focus and a set of limitations at the outer circumference of that focus, we need to designate what are those essential elements of religion that will expose the *religious* meaning of the evidence we look at.

Guidelines for a Venture

When one has "visited" (seen) a wide range of religious life, from all parts of the world and throughout human history, it becomes apparent that religion is a way of life that involves many processes—all of which, in different ways, are directed to a common end. The goal is to reach a state of being that is conceived to be the highest possible state or condition. Religion is the general term for the various ways by which people seek to become changed into that highest state. We understand *religion as a means toward ultimate transformation.* By this we are not claiming that every activity you think of as religious will in fact transform you ultimately. It might, but that is not our point. We mean that *any* reasonably specific means that *any* person adopts with the serious hope and intention of moving toward ultimate transformation should be termed "religious." We think it possible to speak of all religious activity (Eastern and Western, past, present, and emerging) without reducing religion to what is merely familiar to us and without putting a value judgment on one or more religions. Later on, we will outline our selection of the "means" which constitute the primary subject matter of the following chapters. As you might imagine, it is this selection that gives each chapter its distinctive character and the whole book its range. But before we get to that issue, we need to take a more detailed look at the definition we have just proposed. Let us take each key term or phrase and reflect on its meaning:

1. Religion as a means toward *ULTIMATE* transformation
2. Religion as a means *TOWARD* ultimate *TRANSFORMATION*
3. Religion as a *MEANS* toward ultimate transformation

Religion as a Means toward ULTIMATE Transformation

The term "ultimate" points to what a religious person holds to be "real," to what has such significance that people define their lives on its terms. Whatever is "ultimate" is that without which life would be meaningless and dead because of such common human experiences as physical death, unfulfilled hopes, and the discomfort derived from a sense of not belonging. In this context, the "ultimate" is a power or force in man's life that is recognized by the religious person to undergird, to condition, to encompass life. This appears in the form of words, actions, social relations, and states of consciousness; and its distinguishing mark is that it is so real that one recognizes its power to have been effective before as well as after one has become conscious of it. This is recognized as the reality that (who) estab-

lishes a whole and integrated person who then exists in a mutually beneficial relation with other people and with nature. In traditional religious expressions, the ultimate character of what is experienced as fully real is expressed by such terms as God, the Holy One, *Dharma, Nirvana, Sattva, Tao, Kami* as well as the general concepts "sacred" or "divine" or "transcendent." In conventional English speech the term "ultimate" is synonymous with "complete," "final," "comprehensive," "total," "absolute," "most," "maximum," "supreme."

Religion as a Means
TOWARD Ultimate TRANSFORMATION

The term "transformation" implies that human life necessarily presents all of us a comprehensive task. This task may be variously conceived; one may speak of it as the quest for salvation, enlightenment, perfection, fulfillment, or joy, but the distinctively religious claim is that it cannot be escaped. In using the phrase "toward...transformation," then, we refer not only to "conversion experiences" especially prominent in prophetic (Western) religious traditions but also to significant changes that may happen either suddenly or slowly, individually or communally, in people's lives. Put more vividly, the claim is that one is threatened by illusion, but that he can move toward truth; by death, but that he can move toward life; by chaos, but that he can move toward meaning; by self-destruction, but that he can move toward an abundant life. These are, no doubt, concerns of the nonreligious man as well. But the nonreligious man fails (or refuses) to acknowledge the fundamental and comprehensive character of these tasks. He thinks of his humanity simply as given; the religious man insists that authentic humanity, although conditioned, must nevertheless be attained, released, or granted. Put more strongly, in the eyes of the religious man, one who fails to undertake this fundamental and comprehensive task is not merely threatened, inconvenienced, or condemned—he is, as yet, only potentially human. Some religious communities even say that he is subhuman.

How does one study the process of "ultimate transformation"? In one sense, the activity designated by this term seems beyond empirical study, for it takes place within or through activities that have a variety of other, less comprehensive or incisive meanings. On the other hand, it encompasses so much—the totality of the religious man's life—that we scarcely know where to begin. It seems that our attempt to focus study on the intention of the religious man has netted us little, for we now confront the same problem that has always faced students of religion who go beyond confessional or doctrinal boundaries. Let us call this problem the *paradox of too little and too much.*

On the one hand, the activities or features of the religious object or aim are notoriously difficult to describe. Deities are not commonly available for public inspection. The insights of mystics seem always to confound language. And the harmonies of universal order and obligation that some men proclaim seem quite unconvincing to others. On the other hand, if we move from the religious object or aim to the behavior of believers, we are inundated by a veritable sea of claims and activities, many of them mutually incompatible. Students of religion have often felt as defeated by the seeming chaos of human religiousness as by the elusiveness of their intended object. The seeming paradox of too little and too much is fundamental to the study of religion. And a viable program for that study must find some way to order and interpret the data without sacrificing either the peculiar nature of the religious "object" or the immense variety of religious behavior.

To deal with these issues, we need a transcultural terminology by means of which we can perceive religion to be a distinctive impulse of the human being as such. Being religious is in some way prior to being American or Egyptian or Chinese. This does not mean that all religions are "really" alike. Far from it. It does mean, however, that the most important religious difference between a classical Confucian and a Southern Baptist does not lie only in the difference between Chinese and American culture. Rather, we should look for ways of describing this difference that cannot be stated and verified simply on the basis of history, language, or attitudes peculiar to each culture.

To anticipate our argument a bit, we can illustrate this point briefly as follows. The key difference between a Confucian and a Baptist does not lie in their derivation from different founders—important as this may be. It does not lie even in the difference between their beliefs—important as this certainly is. The most important *religious* difference between them is that the Confucian develops his understanding of life primarily by stressing the importance of obedience to a set of ethical norms, whereas the Baptist develops his primarily through the worship of a sacred figure perceived in a certain way. The difference between ethics and worship as activities central to one's life is not primarily a difference between Chinese and Western (or American) cultures. It is a distinction that applies *within* as well as between the two cultures. Therefore, in selecting this as the key distinction, we are not imposing the categories of one culture or one religion on another. We are using terms that express possibilities of human existence as such. In this way we can indicate significant differences between religious activities without violating the integrity of that common world of understanding which is the student's primary duty to preserve. The terms by which we order the material bring into focus those "means" through which we understand the religious life of man.

Religion as a MEANS toward Ultimate Transformation

What is meant by "means"? In our study of religious data, we have found several sets of activities that are uncommonly effective in ordering the raw data of life into recognizable, intelligible, transcultural religious patterns. We call these sets "means." And we have based each of the following chapters on a particular "means." Thus, we seek to explore the ways of being religious, the means people have used and are using to achieve ultimate transformation. It is self-evident that no single university course could be exhaustive in its coverage of religious materials. We are therefore selective. Because our concern is with the dynamics of religious transformation rather than with a survey of interesting and strange religious activities and ideas, we have focused upon prominent or dominant cultural alternatives that could be relevant to contemporary man. We have also attempted to provide both geographical and historical diversity. Therefore, we have identified eight possible "ways of being religious": four representing the great religious traditions of the East and West and four representing a more contemporary and humanistic orientation. In each case we have tried to capture the "way" by a sentence-title:

A. Traditional (Western and Eastern) Ways:
   1. Rebirth Through Personal Encounter with the Holy
   2. Creation of Community Through Myth and Ritual
   3. Living Harmoniously Through Conformity with the Cosmic Law
   4. Spiritual Freedom Through Discipline (Mysticism)

B. Contemporary, Humanistic Ways:
   5. Attaining an Integrated Self Through Creative Interaction
   6. Achievement of Human Rights Through Political and Economic Action
   7. Conquest of Life's Inadequacies Through Technocracy
   8. Enjoyment of the Full Life Through Sensuous Experiences

We wish to make clear that we do not feel these eight ways exhaust the processes (ways, means) for being religious. At best, we would like to indicate that there are a number of religious processes, and that the differences are important for understanding both the different forms of religion and the nature of the ultimate claims made by various people. We think this constitutes a new and valuable approach to the study of religion.

The first means we call "rebirth through personal encounter with the Holy." One who seeks through prayer or meditation to receive some word, some vision, some experience of the Divine Presence is pursuing this path. Naturally, it matters a great deal both to him and to the observer whether or not he is praying to Krishna, to Allah, to the "Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ," or to Apollo. But if the one thing that matters to him more than anything else is that he should have some form of direct encounter with his deity, then he is engaged in the same *type* of religious activity as are those who worship different deities (or spirits) in this way. Do not mistake us. We are not saying that they are engaged in the same religion—only in the same *type* of religious activity. Within the same religion, one will usually find several major types of religious activity, to one degree or another.

The remaining means we will state somewhat more briefly. The second means we call "creation of community through myth and ritual." It differs from the first in its appearance primarily in being public and traditional rather than private and spontaneous. In this means, rites, symbols, and stories are held to have unique power to establish one's world. The third way we call "living harmoniously through conformity to cosmic law." This places a heavy emphasis on religious ethics. Note, however, that this way has no monopoly on ethics. Every type has an ethic. But only the third views obedience to law in everyday life as the primary expression of religious life. The fourth way we call "spiritual freedom through discipline." It features psychophysical techniques of meditation leading to liberation from illusion and anxiety. This way is sometimes referred to as mysticism. In each of these traditional types we present examples from as wide a geographical and chronological range as space allows.

The last four means perhaps require a word of special explanation. We refer to them as nontraditional means toward ultimate transformation. To some readers the term "nontraditional" may not seem strong enough. To them, these means may not seem religious at all. And they may be particularly upset by the insistence on the part of some advocates for these nontraditional means that they deny all transcendent claims. If this bothers you, let us say that we appreciate your concern at this point. We certainly do not mean to say that simply anything at all is religious. Nor are we fond of intellectual fads. But we do want to insist that virtually any act at all *can* be religious. And in a period as unstable, as searching, as changing as ours, we want to be open to any developing pattern of activity whose spokesmen promise to inform and nurture new, distinctive patterns of the religious life.

The key issue is this: Can there be a process of life transformation that can claim ultimacy without also claiming (or implying) contact with some transcendent agency, order, or state? Can one become "new" or perfect without moving outside or beyond the programs, techniques, beliefs, or states that have a meaning entirely within the daily round of affairs that are or reasonably might be familiar to all of us? It seems that at least some people think this is possible. They profess no belief in a divine being or beings. They anticipate no rewards or punishments beyond this life.

They claim no revelations and they offer no way "out" of the normal round of human affairs. And yet they appear to be confident that some program, policy, or technique which avoids all these sacred claims will fulfill not only their lives but also the lives of others. They may even be willing to die (or kill) for them. Shall we say without further investigation that these people are all frauds, quacks, or incompetents? You may, for instance, believe that they are. But do you *know* that they are? Apart from this, however, can these be called "religious" matters? That is indeed the question. If religion is to be understood as a means of ultimate transformation and if the term "ultimate transformation" is to have significant empirical meaning, then these programs for which so much has been hoped, risked, and achieved must be included. Therefore in full knowledge of the uncertain and intellectually risky character of this undertaking, we propose the four following nontraditional means toward ultimate transformation (numbered five through eight).

"The topic for today is: What is reality?"

By Henry Martin, from *Saturday Review,* May 29, 1971. Copyright 1971 by Saturday Review, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Saturday Review, Inc.

The first of these (and the fifth in our overall scheme) focuses on "attaining an integrated self through creative interaction." It features the possibilities that certain sorts of direct, personal encounter provide for healing sick lives and enriching or gracing our day-to-day existence. The sixth way emphasizes "achievement of human rights through political and eco-

nomic action." It differs from the previous way primarily in its more systematic, more coercive, more public character. The seventh way promises "conquest of life's inadequacies through technocracy." Of all the four nontraditional means, it is perhaps the most opposed to the traditional meanings of religion because it eliminates all forms of submission or passivity. We call the last way "enjoyment of full life through sensuous experiences." In this means, attention is drawn toward the transforming power of art, body awareness, and the use of psychedelic drugs.

Let us caution you against certain hasty generalizations that might be drawn from this eight-fold typology. The first is that any single "way of being religious" should not be identified with any single religious tradition. A particular "way" finds expression in various religions, and a variety of ways is found in every religion. This, of course, would not preclude a judgment that a particular tradition has been generally dominated by one or two ways, or that during a certain period of its history some ways have dominated others. The second is that although we have tried to include a wide variety of material from different religious traditions, the particular selections chosen are not intended to provide a representation of the total breadth of options within any given religious tradition. The selections have been chosen to expose as clearly as possible the common characteristics of a particular way. This remark leads to the final caution, which is that just as religious traditions are often a combination of different ways, so many particular religious expressions are combinations of them. Thus you should not be frustrated in finding religious expressions in your everyday experience that cannot be pigeon-holed neatly into one or another type. The purpose of describing types is not to reduce the wide variety of data into abstract (perfect) ideas; rather it is to understand better the variety by allowing for significant differences not only in form but also in the processes or mechanisms of being religious.

The Reality of the Religious Life

Thus far we have defined the field of study and indicated the framework through which we will select and order the data. One might say that this definition and framework constitute the "soul" and the "skeleton" respectively of the religious life. We want you now to consider the dynamics, the active process, the spiritual metabolism that expresses the "soul" and animates the "skeleton." In this activity lies the reality of the religious life. Apart from this reality, the framework we have laid out would be dead and irrelevant. What cannot be lived need not be studied. Therefore we now hope to show how the guidelines of thought sketched out above can lead you to appreciate and to understand the reality of the religious life.

First we will state how this approach to studying religion requires one to treat the variety of experessions as significant in their own right. Then we will consider various risks and benefits that might befall a student who embarks on a study so conceived.

Understanding the Believer's World

How does the adoption of a particular religious "means" affect one's perception of and response to the basic problems of and resources for full, human life? We are aware of the variety of answers proposed to the question of life's meaning. What may be less obvious is that people differ as much regarding formulation of the problems to be faced as they do in their understanding of the resources available for their solution. Is the problem man's indifference to God's presence (as suggested in the first means)? His hostility to divine revelations (second means)? His breech of natural law (third means)? His illusions regarding meaning in an indifferent world (fourth means)? His unresponsiveness to people around him (fifth means)? His failure to use the resources of technology (seventh means)? In any case we can see how the adoption of a particular means shapes one's understanding of where the "real" issues are. Furthermore, notice the ways in which a particular means shapes one's behavior, both as an individual and as a member of society. Is one's religious activity continuous or occasional, private or public, organized or spontaneous, democratic or hierarchical, authoritarian or free? These are the alternatives that shape the appearance of the religious life. Taken together with the believer's own understanding of what the issues are, they describe religious structures of the believer's journey toward ultimate transformation.

If one is to take the believer's world seriously, he must accept the reality of that world in the terms provided by him. One must, at least provisionally, grant to that world the independence the believer claims for it. Consider it, perhaps, a loan of imaginative capital which you extend to him. If he fails to return the loan with interest, then you can cross him off your list as a bad risk. But to withold from the first the credit he claims as his due is to prejudge the issue. To put this differently, he cannot show you his accomplishments if you insist on receiving reports only from his competitors. At least consider the possibility that the religious world has within its own domain the resources for understanding religious belief and behavior that are most appropriate for them and most illuminating when applied to them. An approach that denied this from the first would necessarily fail to recognize and to appreciate either a potentially real independence of religious life or a significant autonomy to the several different religious means (ways, structures, types).

Taken on its own terms, the religious world arises as a response to

a need peculiar to itself. This need or drive cannot be reduced to one that belongs to another realm of life. It is not a disguised form of some other activity. As a religious being, one seeks not sex, security, or social identity, but a means that provides ultimate transformation. His basic drive is simply an "appetite" for fulfilling and meaningful activity, or most generally, for a high quality of life. When this drive is directed toward ultimacy, completeness, or perfection, it appears as religious activity. In the grip of this appetite human beings raise questions about the ultimate character, origin, and authority of truth, duty, and meaning. Through imagination, symbolism, and certain states of consciousness they step beyond the simple factuality of their lives. They conceive what they might have been but were not; what they might be but are not. Thus, while man is admittedly both physically and socially conditioned, his capacity to reflect on his existence provides him with a leverage on fate that denies final determinism. From the possibility of reflection arises the reality of freedom. In this freedom from impersonal determination, man discovers and exercises his religious drive.

The interpreter's problem is to order the human expressions of this drive without distorting or overlooking their freedom, distinctiveness, and irreducible variety. It is obvious, from this point of view, that those who reduce religious life to social, psychological, or biochemical functions fail to understand its distinctive character. It may be less obvious, but still true, that those who conceive all religious thought and behavior as expressions of a single religious essence also fail to understand it. In the readings that follow, many social scientists commit the former error, and many advocates and their interpreters in Chapters I through IV commit the latter. Therefore, as you study the material that follows, we caution you to consider each religious expression with this question in mind: "What are the ways or means by which man's religious capacities are being expressed here?" This question will help you to understand both the distinctive character and the manifold expressions of religious life.

For instance, some religious expressions assume that the center of religious life lies in the performance of some ritual (for example, sacrament, sacrifice) or in the acknowledgment of some conception of deity (for example, creeds). Even religious traditions that promote different rituals or espouse different creeds have in common the convictions that the correct ritual or belief is primary to the religious life. Yet others whose intention is to realize the ultimate in a personal, inner way maintain that an individual will not realize the fullness of being until he breaks the bonds of all rituals and symbols by transcending them in an altered state of consciousness (as in Yoga or Zen). Both of these groups are religious. And yet the dispute between them is fundamental. One cannot set out to resolve the differences between them by imposing the basic attitudes of one on the other. If one

focuses his attention either on the innate power of some symbols and rituals to structure the devotee's cosmos or on the power of transconventional states of awareness to free one from illusion, he destroys the basic structure of the alternate process of ultimate transformation.

Therefore we stress the *means* of utlimate transformation to expose the elements of a given "way" and to indicate how it is that there are basic differences as well as similarities among religious expressions. By locating the differences and similarities within the processes or mechanisms of acquiring religious values, you can wrestle directly with the issues involved in making ultimate decisions. From this encounter with the basic issues, you can become self-conscious that you are yourselves participating in processes of decision in your own "religious" or "antireligious" stances. This awareness can also grow as you become acquainted with options for making ultimate decisions which your culture or sub-culture group has not previously made available.

The Power of the Religious World: Risks and Benefits of Study

We have asked you to enter into the believer's world and to take it seriously. Before you do, you should realize that you may run some risks on this course. If you take this world seriously, you should be aware that the believer always approaches religious knowledge with care. In his view sacred truth is power; it is not to be profaned by irreverent or casual study. One who appreciates this point of view and yet continues his study will be aware of the risks he runs. "How absurd," you might say. "Are you going to warn us about walking under ladders and in front of black cats, too?" Nevertheless, our warning is serious. You cannot control this data without being changed by your response to it. Already, in response to our warning, you are "engaged" with a statement that may offend you. If you allow your irritation to fix the meaning of "religion," the response you intended as a shield may well function simply as a mist. For example, if you say, "Religion is just a bunch of rituals people go through because they are supposed to," you will never perceive the symbolic power believers have found in ritual; you will not be able to grasp the informing and transforming power imparted to common acts (for example eating and drinking) when they are incorporated into ritual. To put this most generally, to evade the warning is to miss the power, and to miss the power is to misapprehend the dynamics of the religious life. This limitation of your vision is damaging enough to you as a student. But it is even more damaging in that it may blind you to the reality of your own ritual acts, the repetitious patterns that structure you life at unconscious levels. Such deception can prevent you from realizing new and creative relationships with other people because it

conceals from you the very possibility of their existence. Thus, one risk of our confrontation with the religious claim is that we may close off avenues leading toward a fuller humanity. Thoughtlessly accepting the familiar as the limit of the real, we often fail to grasp new possibilities of life.

The study of religion is dangerous, secondly, because you will be exposed to theories and practices that can destroy long-standing values which have provided comfort. Insight into human religious capacity might change your whole perspective on what is to be valued in the world. To probe into the possibilities of different levels of consciousness may call into question criteria of truth that previously provided an orientation and meaning. To listen to another person express deeply felt religious convictions that are based on quite different revelations or authorities than your own might lead you to convert to his position or perhaps to doubt that there is *any* profound meaning in life. The study of different ways of being religious may be painful, then, because one is thereby confronted with the strange, the different, with the not-self. This requires stretching mental and emotional capacities and sometimes tearing attitudinal and social fabrics.

This is the risk we take when we engage other persons seriously, especially in the domain of values and religious consciousness. For to engage another person at this level is to deal with those things he regards as most important—as ultimate. We can easily recognize that some words and phrases in religious discussion evoke strong feelings for some and uncanny discomfort for others: "God is love." "I take refuge in the Buddha." "God is the one god." "You are that [Atman]." For the adherent of any one of these phrases, the phrase is significant because it is part of him. If the student of religion denies the power of such a phrase in moulding the self-identity of the adherent, he will miss a major part of the reality expressed by a religious person. In a serious engagement with another person, we ask ourselves if we have been false to ourselves; we ask such questions as: How do I know what is right? What difference does it make? Do I really have a choice? What are the likely results of avoiding all dependence on authority, observation, and reasoning? The ideas, descriptions, and assertions you will be reading in this volume have been important for those who affirm them. Therefore you should be sensitive to the importance of the data you are about to engage. As you read the material try not only to enter into the thought patterns and emotional tone of the material, but from time to time ask yourself what you are feeling in response to the images you are constructing.

Besides the risks we have recounted, there are gains to be made in serious encounter with the dynamics of religion. The first is that you will extend your awareness to include options of religious life which you did not perceive before. Likewise, you may see dimensions of familiar religions that previously were hidden or vague. This new capacity will provide you with a more solid basis for making value judgments than before. In addition, you

"Who am I and where am I going?

By Henry Martin, from *Saturday Review,* July 3, 1971. Copyright 1971 by Saturday Review, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Saturday Review, Inc.

may gain a therapeutic recognition that you are not alone in your own spiritual quest and development. Other human beings have confronted life with the question: Why? Others have felt dislocated in a meaningless treadmill, or rejected due to a lack of love, or frustrated from a burdensome ancestral hand. Others have lived in social groups that perceive strangers as enemies, and make war out of fear for themselves. Others have wondered, "What's it all about?" Even those people who have disturbing answers to these questions are responding to a human situation that has some relation to our own. And when we recognize that at least some of the people who at first appeared strange and different are at least as sensitive, perceptive, moral, compassionate, and passionate as we are, we will realize that the rejection of old familiar truths or the desire to investigate new

possibilities with imaginative hopes are not merely reflections of freakish, neurotic, or immoral tendencies; rather, we are exploring varieties of consciousness.

Practical Considerations Governing This Study

Given the above theoretical approach to the field of religion, how does one go about studying it—exactly? Just what materials are we to put in this book, and how are you to study them? These are the questions we shall consider in this fourth and last section of this introduction. Regarding our part of this problem, there are two questions. First, what range of material should we include? The range of religious data is enormous. Should we attempt to sample the whole range? One who says "Yes" to this question, must abandon any attempt to cover social context or historical development. This is an important loss, for the religious life is nothing less than the attempt to meet the actual problems of life encountered under particular circumstances with a means of transforming power. One can understand this attempt only through the study of its full, historical context. Nevertheless, we have chosen to sample the whole range of religious life rather than to study any particular example or set of examples in historical depth. We do this for two reasons: (1) A systematic approach introduces the student more rapidly to an overview of the field; (2) This approach enables a student to examine the dynamics of religion. Such an examination is useful not only for the insight it yields on its own but also for its clarification of the religious options available in any life situation. Therefore we have attempted to include material from as wide a geographical, cultural, and chronological context as space allows.

The second part of our problem concerns the mechanics for the presentation of the believer's case. Should we speak for him, or should we allow him to speak for himself? And in either case should we listen to his critics too? These questions are once again made pressing by the enormity of the field. It would be in one sense most efficient for us to speak for the believer. We have, after all, proposed a systematic framework for the ordering and interpretation of religious data. We could, therefore, in company with other advocates of a systematic approach, write a textbook rather than edit a book of readings, relying on brief quotations and footnotes for illustration and evidence. Nevertheless, we have chosen to set up a dialogue in which believers and their critics speak from their own positions.

If religion is to be an independent field of study, a student must rely upon and check his knowledge against what is commonly referred to as "primary data," or "primary source material." Such data constitute direct expression of the subject under investigation, and are the original data upon which anyone's knowledge of the subject matter rests. In biography a person's letters and diary would be primary material; for example, Joseph Smith's account of the revelation imparted to him. Accounts of his life by second persons, whether sympathetic or not, are secondary material. Likewise, we are treating as primary material data that believers treat as basic to their religious life, such as selections from scriptures and revered texts. In this case the central question is not their historical reliability but their role in the dynamics of religious life. In those cases where accounts of key religious activities are not available from believers themselves, we have accepted firsthand accounts of sympathetic observers; for example, R. Benedict's account of Zuni ceremonies in Chapter II. The selections that meet the above criteria serve to expose the various "ways of being religious" and make up the bulk of the material.

We emphasize this sort of material in the hope that you will become sensitive to the differences of terms and thought patterns that the adherents themselves use. We believe that there is a unique benefit in listening to a spokesman in his or her own words, or in a sympathetic firsthand description that includes a believer's own words; for this material contains important nuances that do not come through a general interpretation. This material should also heighten the character of a dialogue between the spokesmen and you, because the basic material is directly before you without exclusive dependence on another interpreter.

Each chapter also contains secondary materials: sympathetic interpretation or general description of a religious orientation. This material is written by scholars who try to interpret primary material within a given context, which includes not only religious commitment but also cultural history and sociological or psychological study. It is included to expose the implications and presuppositions of the religious life described in the primary materials. Sometimes through different perspectives, each of these interpretations provides insight into, and exposes various dimensions of, the material. The authors of these materials may not be "believers," but have credentials of experience and scholarly acumen for providing us with perspectives about subject matter that may otherwise be more difficult to understand in a short amount of time.

A third type of readings that we feel is important for exposing the procedures and processes of evaluating ultimate choices is the critique or criticism of a "way of being religious." Each chapter's collection of data regarding a way of being religious includes at least two critiques of the

assumptions and claims of the advocates for that particular way. These critiques include criticisms stemming from an alternate "religious" view or from empirical and rational criteria. They are chosen to raise the basic issues of religious conviction. For instance, a common religious issue that is explored in every case is: What are valid criteria for judging truth? But in the first chapter, this question is formulated to focus on the validity of claims regarding personal transcendent awareness of the Holy; in the second, it focuses on the validity of the claims that religious symbols are more than social conventions or neurotic obsessions; in the third, it focuses on the validity of the claim that there is an eternal order of life which prescribes "natural" physical and social limitations on any individual person. Also in the subsequent ways, the dynamics of each way influences the formulation of this issue.

The critiques provide a radically different perspective for interpreting the assertions and implications of each "way of being religious." They are often threatening in their rejection of the assumptions made by religious advocates; but we agree with M. H. Hartshorne when he suggests a need for a critical assessment of religious claims due to the fact that religion is often identified with uncritical and authoritarian beliefs. He describes the controversial nature of religious commitments:

> In every age religion has had its detractors and critics. We might expect this for at least two reasons. In the first place, religion, like every other human institution, is liable to human vanity, folly, and error. In the second place, we cannot exist as human beings without thinking—and to think is to question, to probe, to criticize. Inevitably religious men have resisted such criticism. We do not welcome doubt, especially where our religious beliefs are in question. Faith in our gods is the foundation of our lives—the source of meaning and value by which we fashion the stuff of our living, the ground we cannot surrender without the loss of our selves. Men are never so defensive as in behalf of their gods; self-criticism is not a virtue of religious men. Our criticism of religion seldom extends to our own gods; our stones crash with shattering force upon the altars of alien deities, but the images that grace our secret shrines are rarely in jeopardy. Indeed, the gods of our own households are so jealously guarded that ordinarily they are hidden even from our own view.[1]

However offensive criticisms may be, we think they should not be neglected in an introduction to religion. By their radically different point of view, they remind us of the important role interpretation plays in understanding religious people. They raise questions and problems of which we might be unaware under the spell of a believer or a sympathetic interpreter. As might be expected, a critique of one way sometimes includes the

assumptions of another way, and the defense of a spokesman is often, in one sense, implicitly a critique of another way. Our concern in presenting these materials is, first, to make as strong a case as possible for a way of being religious by letting the advocates give witness to its power and provide some justification for its validity, and, then, to juxtapose these claims with views whose valuational definitions are radically different—thus involving you in a decision situation yourself.

Regarding the second part of the question raised at the beginning of this section, you might ask: How do I recognize a religious process? What are those elements that form the structure by which one identifies a process? Below are some practical suggestions for locating the elements of a structure.

1. Assume that the religious data that you are observing have meaning for the adherent. Let us assume that (a) there is a "logic" or pattern of meaning in the data rather than mere chaos or meaninglessness, and that (b) meaning is expressed in the configuration or patterning that different elements have, with some elements being more important than others. These more important elements are the determining (pivotal) features in relation to which secondary elements have their significance.
2. Ask a question of the data regarding the "intention" of the activities described or expressed (for example prayer, meditation, a religious vision). This suggests that the religious act or claim is not a dead, static entity, but rather the crystallized form (for example, book of prayer, yogic posture, or narration of a conversion experience) of a process, a dynamic experience that creates a new possibility of existence.
3. Keep in mind some basic religious questions for which the believer is seeking (and finding) an answer in the materials presented: (a) What is the nature of existence (or man)? (b) What is the nature of ultimate reality (truth, or ideal)? (c) How can I know and become that ultimate reality?
4. Look for answers to the above questions in the data by becoming sensitive to the phrase, terms, and arguments that expose the basic elements of the structure—which structure will relegate some concerns to a secondary place and thus provide meaning in terms of the central elements. For example, in both the ways "personal encounter of the Holy" and "freedom through spiritual discipline," there is an emphasis on individual, personal realization of the ultimate. However, in the former there is the experience of God as that which is totally different from man, to which man responds in awe, submission, and faith; man by nature is unable to aid Divine grace in his salvation. In the latter case, however, ultimate reality is thought already to be within man waiting to be uncovered, which man can do by avoiding his own corrupting, limiting action that blinds him to the truth; here the ideal is often termed freedom and enlightenment rather than joyful servitude and

obedience. The differences in the structures of these two processes, then, is seen to rest on the differences of the means or way of becoming properly related to God or realizing the ultimate reality within oneself.

5. Attempt to think with the thoughts and concepts of the advocates, and try to feel their emotional tone. Be sensitive to the danger of imposing the interpretation of your own religious awareness (or lack of it) on the data, since two phenomena may appear to be alike but actually be quite different. In other words, become self-conscious of the position from which you are observing or from which you are beginning to participate.

In sum, we hope that these materials will provide you access to spokesmen, sympathetic interpreters, and critics of various traditional and nontraditional ways of ultimate transformation; that the organization into different ways will expose the basic assumptions and elements of adopting a particular way; and that by "visiting with" both those who affirm and those who reject a particular way, you will have explored, rejected, or affirmed, and even developed your own basic procedures for deciding ultimate issues. By including some examples from traditional and nontraditional religious life we hope to expose contemporary possibilities of religious life. Through a focus on the different processes we can use today, we hope to probe into the assumptions, norms, and the potential for human consciousness and social expression that are at the foundation of religious meaning and joy.

NOTES

1. M. H. Hartshorne, *The Faith to Doubt: A Protestant Response to Criticisms of Religion,* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 1, 2.

* Footnotes at the bottom of the page are the editors' footnotes, and are normally limited to clarifying particular names and terms. The footnotes marked in the text with numbers are provided by the authors of the selections, and are placed at the end of each selection.