The Development of Sociology of Religion

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INTEREST in religion appears to be on the increase among sociologists and other students of human behavior. Not only is it recognized that in order to understand religion in its myriad forms one must understand the persons, societies, and cultures in which it is expressed. As J. Milton Yinger points out, "the student of society must be a student of religion. . . . Beliefs, rituals, group structures, are enormously various, but no society lacks them. To neglect the study of religion is to miss one of the most fruitful ways of studying the life of man.[1]

I

What is true of the origins and development of sociology as a general field of inquiry is true in a special sense for the application of its data, methods, hypotheses, and principles to the objective study of religious behavior. Some years ago, Robert M. MacIver pointed out that at least three intellectual changes of the greatest importance had to take place before sociology could develop. The birth of sociology "required a naturalistic as opposed to a theological conception of human society; a clear distinction between state and society, and a scientific, or positive, interest in the forms and processes of social relationships, as contrasted with legalistic or normative interest in the right ordering of the relationships."[2]

The intellectual and emotional difficulties of achieving this perspective are especially great in the study of religion. Kingsley Davis has suggested that the objective study of religion is beset by potential errors from two opposite sides. There are, he says,

> two chief sources of error, first an emotional and second a rational bias. The emotional bias springs from the fact that religion by its very nature involves ultimate values, making it almost impossible to view with a disinterested attitude. . . . Even when the scholar's purpose is genuinely scientific, even when he avoids either debunking or justifying religion, he nevertheless tends to fall into another error—a rationalistic approach. He tends to assume that his fellows, in their religious behavior, are trying to fit means to ends in the same logical manner that he as a scientist would employ. This rationalistic explanation works fairly well with reference to technological and economic behavior . . . but with respect to religion, which involves transcendental ends, strong sentiments, and symbolic instruments, it is fallacious. It attributes the existence of religion simply to ignorance and error, and assumes that when these are eliminated there will emerge the completely rational (i.e., completely non-religious) man. It thus views religion as a mere epiphenomenon, an accident.[3]

J. Milton Yinger makes a similar point in stating the objections sometimes raised to the scientific study of religion. "It is the conviction of many thoughtful men that the objective study of religion is at best impossible and at worst dangerous. How is it possible, they may ask, to 'see' a stained-glass window from the outside? Its whole meaning is apparent only as the light shines through, just as the true meaning of religion is visible only to one

[1] *Religion, Society, and the Individual* (New York, Macmillan, 1957), xi.

[2] *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* XIV, 233.

[3] *Human Society* (New York, Macmillan, 1950), 509.

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on the inside . . . (I)s not the weakening of faith disastrous?"[4] This question cannot simply be shrugged aside. There is an element of value commitment involved when one asserts that the scientific study of anything is bound to yield benefits to men. And it is an unproved assumption that knowledge is always better than ignorance. Yet acceptance of the assumption is not only desirable but essential in the sociology of religion.

II

Once having accepted this orientation to the subject, one can proceed to the task of discovering what may be known about it. No attempt can be made within the confines of this paper to trace in any detail the development of the sociology of religion. Our approach will be to focus upon certain high points in this development. To begin with, the sociology of **religion** emerged within the field of the science of religion in much the same way that sociology became a recognized discipline in the behavioral sciences. In the early days of sociology certain pioneer thinkers began to recognize that many problems with which they wanted to deal simply could not be solved with the methods of traditional historiography and classical philosophy. While it does not seem so now, the fact is that the discovery of the concepts of **society** and **culture** was revolutionary.[5] Much remains to be done in sharpening these tools—so as to derive from them meaningful and testable hypotheses concerning human behavior—but at least what we now take as commonplace was at one time only dimly perceived.[6]

The same kind of situation exists in the development of the sociology of religion. Paul Radin has stated a relevant point in his classic **Primitive Religion.** "My predecessors, who insisted upon emphasizing what they termed the psychological side of religion . . . have been playing what might be called a form of intellectual golf, using conceptual pellets to which they have given such names as supernatural power, awe-inspiring, mystical thrill. . . . Their method has led to the treatment of religion as if it were completely divorced both from life and from the vicissitudes of the economic order in which each religion is so intimately embedded, and it has contributed, in no small degree, toward making the study of religion an artificial and subjective contemplation of verbalized facts and hypostasized events."[7] Radin has stressed the economic order, and the sociologist would want to use the more inclusive concept of the socio-cultural order, to avoid the exclusion of social facts and situations other than the economic, which also influence the milieu within which religious behavior is observable.

From a different perspective, and in terms applicable to a problem at a somewhat lower level of abstraction, H. Richard Niebuhr has stated an impetus for the sociology of religion. "The effort to distinguish churches primarily by reference to their doctrine . . . appeared to be a procedure so artificial and fruitless that . . . (one) is com-

[4] *Op. cit.,* 3.

[5] Albion Small, one of the early pioneers of American sociology, who has written with significant insight on the question of the emergence of sociology as a specific field within the social sciences, suggests that "The most complete understanding of the American sociological movement . . . requires correlation of that movement with the whole modern development of social science in the largest sense. . . . The movement . . . at once takes on significance . . . when it appears as an inevitable phase of that expansion of DEMAND FOR OBJECTIVITY in social science which found voice in Adam Smith and which became the beginning of a program in the methodology projected by Eichhorn, and Savigny, and Niebuhr, and Ranke." ("Fifty Years of Sociology in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology,* XXI (1916), 748.

[6] On the concept of culture, see Kroeber, A. & Kluckhohm, C., "Culture: A Critical Review," *Papers of the Peabody Museum,* Harvard University, XLVII (1952), No. 1.

[7] New York, Dover Publications, 1957, v, vii.

pelled to turn from theology to history, sociology, and ethics for a more satisfactory account of denominational differences."[8] Theology and religious belief, while they cannot be interpreted entirely from an economic or political point of view, certainly cannot be dissociated from these and other social circumstances which condition and influence them. Religion, to be sure, may supply the energy, the goal, and the motivation for religious movements, but "social factors no less decidedly supply the occasion, and determine the form the religious dynamic will take."[9] Niebuhr later had some second thoughts on the question of sociological determinism. Yet these thoughts were in the interest of avoiding rigid socio-cultural determinism, and were not interpreted by Niebuhr himself as vitiating his initial sociological perspective.[10]

III

The sociologist of religion must acknowledge his debt to the pioneering work of certain scholars in other fields. Especially to be noted here is the contribution of anthropologists, biblical scholars, historians, classicists, and philosophers. Among early anthropologists, the work of Edward B. Tylor,[11] Sir James Frazer,[12] R. R. Marett,[13] and Wilhelm Schmidt[14] is notable. The classicists, Gilbert Murray,[15] Jane Harrison,[16] and Francis Cornford[17] have contributed analyses of various religions which are still profitable to read. Among Biblical scholars whose work made use of sociological perspectives the names of Louis Wallis,[18] W. Robertson-Smith,[19] and Shirley Jackson Case,[20] come immediately to mind. Earlier philosophers whose work has reflected certain concerns germane to the issues in which the sociologist is interested would include William James,[21] Edward Scribner Ames,[22] John Dewey,[23] and Henri Bergson.[24] The outstanding historian whose work has been important for the sociology of religion is, of course, Ernst Troeltsch.[25] No attempt is made here to be inclusive, and contributions of others would need to be noted in any full account.

We may set a somewhat arbitrary date for the beginnings of the sociology of religion at the middle of the nineteenth century. Talcott Parsons, in tracing the high points in the theoretical development of the sociology of religion,[26] has made the point that, beginning about 1850, thinking about religion in human societies tended to fall into one of two major categories. The first of these, the doctrinal interpreta-

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[8] *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, Henry Holt, 1929), vii.

[9] *Op. cit.*, 27.

[10] In his *The Kingdom of God in America,* Niebuhr says that "Though the sociological approach helped to explain why the religious stream flowed in these particular channels, it did not acount for the force of the stream itself." (Chicago, Willett & Clark, 1937), vii.

[11] *Primitive Culture,* 2 vols. (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920).

[12] *The Golden Bough,* 1 vol. ed. (New York, Macmillan, 1935).

[13] *The Threshold of Religion* (London, Metheun Co., 1909).

[14] *Origin and Growth of Religion* (London, Metheun Co., 1931), trans. Rose.

[15] *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1925).

[16] *Ancient Art and Ritual* (New York, Holt, 1913).

[17] *From Religion to Philosophy* (New York, Holt, 1913).

[18] *God and the Social Process* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1935).

[19] *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (Edinburgh, Black, 1894).

[20] *The Social Origins of Christianity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1923).

[21] *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, Longmans, Green Co., 1903).

[22] *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (New York, Houghton-Mifflin, 1910).

[23] *A Common Faith* (New Haven, Yale, 1934).

[24] *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York, Holt, 1935), trans. Audra & Brereton.

[25] *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (London, Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1931), trans. Olive Wyon.

[26] "The Theoretical Development of the Sociology of Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* V (1944), 176-190.

tions of various religious groups, may in the present context be ignored, since it was a normative and apologetic category. The second was, broadly speaking, positivistic, and within this context the conclusion was usually drawn that religion was a matter of superstition, not seriously to be considered in attempting to find the dynamics of human behavior.

Yet the careful observer could hardly have failed to recognize that religious behavior was remarkably continuing, and at a rate hardly giving any signs of its imminent demise. When the great germinal idea of evolution burst across the intellectual scene, forcing students in practically every field to re-orient, reconsider, and revamp their approaches, this idea eventually led the positivistic scientists—in interpreting religion—in one of two directions. Within the context of positivism, religious phenomena could be viewed as manifestations of underlying biological or psychological factors not within reach of rational control.[27] Or, in what proved to be the more crucial approach, religion could be interpreted rationalistically, that is, in the light of the assumption that the human being is primarily rational, acting reasonably in the light of his available knowledge, or lack of it.[28] From this point of view, a basic assumption is that the only critical standards to which religious ideas can be referred are those of empirical validity.

Historically, what apparently happened was not that this rationalistic positivism was directly attacked as being an inadequate description of religious behavior, as for instance from the point of view of some anti-intellectualist psychology, but rather that, from within the positivistic frame of reference, certain crucial refinements in the theory were made. These refinements may be traced briefly in the work of Pareo, Malinowski, Durkheim, and Weber.[29]

IV

Pareto began with a positivistic point of view, taking as his starting point the cognitive patterns through which the individual is oriented to his environment, and judging these patterns by the standards of empirical scientific validity. But beyond this point, he made a decisive break with the positivistic perspective. He distinguished not one, but two, types of deviance from strict conformity with the canons of logico-empirical science. One of these was the kind of deviance which is attributable to ignorance or fear, the kind relied upon by Tylor and Spencer, and in American sociology by Sumner, to "explain" religious belief. Pareto found it necessary to indicate a second type of deviance from the logico-empirical method, which might be referred to as "theories which surpass experience," that is, which are incapable of being tested by scientific procedures. Theories concerning the existence and nature of God, or the nature of the divine, would fall into this category.

Pareto at this point penetrated the rationalistic bias of early positivism. He showed that the attempt to deal with religious phenomena as though the men who used religious ideas and beliefs were simply drawing logical conclusions from available knowledge was not adequate. There are not just two types of dealings with the environment; there are actually three. There is the approach designated by the term logico-empirical; the approach made necessary by ignorance and error; and finally an ap-

[27] In American sociology, attempts in this direction were made by Lester F. Ward, who viewed religion as the "social instinct" of the race.

[28] The American version of this, following E. B. Tylor and Herbert Spencer, was that of William G. Sumner. See the writer's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Theory of Religion in American Sociology" (Yale University Library, 1952).

[29] Our indebtedness to Parsons' acount is obvious.

proach to which neither the term scientific nor un-scientific is applicable. Perhaps this might be called a- or non-scientific, indicating that its characteristic beliefs and ideas are not susceptible of empirical test.[30]

V

Malinowski too began at the point of establishing intellectual continuity with the classical positivistic approach.[31] His initial frame of reference was man's adaptation to situations by the use of reason and technique. But he went on to point out situations in which rational knowledge and techniques could not provide adequate adjustments. Non-literate peoples, Malinowski found, possess a large body of sound empirical knowledge, and they act rationally in terms of that knowledge. Alongside of this, however, and not confused with it, was a system of magical beliefs and practices, concerned with the possible intervention of supra-empirical forces or factors. Here the practices associated with the beliefs were not rational techniques but rituals specifically oriented to the non-empirical world.[32]

In the instance of magic, Malinowski found that the orientation was directed toward the achievement of practical, empirical goals, for example a good crop or a large catch of fish. But it has been insufficiently noticed that he also recognized a category of situations and actions which was analogous to that of magic in other respects but which was not aimed at the achievement of a practical goal. The prototype of such a situation is the case of death. In such an event there appears to be no clearly observable or manifest function of the beliefs and rituals, but there are certainly covert or latent functions. These functions cluster about enabling the group to handle the potentially explosive and disruptive emotions often connected with death of a member. The question of whether the beliefs and rituals actually accomplish this is a matter for empirical test. It is worth noting that A. R. Radcliffe-Brown takes the exactly opposite view that quite often belief and ritual serve not to diminish but to increase anxieties and tensions.[33] This may reflect the fact that these two anthropologists studied different non-literate peoples, and it is possible that both are actually describing realities.

VI

A fundamental conclusion to be drawn from the work of Malinowski is that ritual and belief, whether magical or religious, cannot be treated simply as primitive and erroneous forms of rational techniques or knowledge. They are actually qualitatively distinct, and perform quite different functions. One of the contributions of Durkheim was at the point of suggesting more specifically where the differences lie. Durkheim made special note of the attitudes which people display toward supra-empirical entities, and ritual observances and objects. Eventually this led to his famous distinction between the sacred and the profane.

The sacred was always dissociated clearly from any utilitarian context, and was to be regarded with an attitude of respect and awe. Perhaps the most important idea found in Durkheim's work is his observation that the entities, rituals, and objects regarded as sacred are not so intrinsically. The source of sacredness lies, he says, not in the object itself, but rather in the

[30] Pareto makes these distinctions clearly in *The Mind and Society,* trans. Bongiorno and Livingston (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1935), I, Nos. 13-16, 42-49, 68-73; pp. 8-14, 23-26, 32-38.

[31] For a brief account of Malinowski's approach, see *Magic, Science and Religion* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1948).

[32] For a critique of Malinowski's view, see Nadel, S. F., in *Man and Culture,* ed. R. Firth (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 189-208; Hsu, F. L. K., *Religion, Science & Human Crisis* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

[33] Cf. his *Taboo* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1939), 39-40.

attitude taken toward it. Sacred objects and entities are actually symbols, and for Durkheim the problem was to locate the referents for these symbols. His solution to this problem was that the referent for the symbols is the society itself.[34]

Durkheim seems to have made a fundamental epistemological error, and Kingsley Davis suggests that what is more probable is that these symbols actually have no (empirical) referents. Yet Durkheim is on the track of something important when he implies that ritual and belief are important ways of expressing and reinforcing the sentiments and values essential to the maintenance of society. The relation of belief and ritual to the values which integrate a group or society is a still insufficiently explored area of concern in the sociology of religion. It is significant that the recent UNESCO report on **Sociology in the United States of America** states that "The paucity of research on religion and values reflects the general lack of value research among American sociologists."[35]

VII

The importance of the contribution of Max Weber to sociology would be difficult to overestimate. Certainly he did much to suggest germinal ideas which have proved useful in the sociology of religion.[36] Of major importance was his emphasis upon the problem of meaning. He insisted that there is a fundamental distinction between the significance of problems of empirical action and the problem of meaning. For him, too, the type case here was that of death, especially premature death. The **how** of the matter can be empirically determined, as any pathologist can tell us. But the question of **why** is a different matter. Weber's view was that situations in which there is a discrepancy between interests and expectations and what actually happens are endemic in human experience. He attempted to show that in no society do individuals simply stand there and "take it." Rather they attempt to build structures of meaning which will enable them to assign some kind of acceptable meaning to that which in any event must be.

Weber's studies of Protestantism, Judaism, and the religions of China are classics, and have now been translated into English. Perhaps no thesis in the history of thought has called forth more critiques and discussions than Weber's development of the relations between "the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism." While many scholars have been dissatisfied with both Weber's methods and his conclusions, it cannot be denied that he opened up avenues of exploring the relations between religion and society which are still being followed out today. A recent study has attempted to test Weber's fundamental approach by applying it to the interpretation of the relation between religion and economic developments in Japan.[37]

This brief indication of contributions made by certain germinal minds in the sociology of religion by no means does justice to the subject. Yet it points to the direction in which some fundamental work, particularly with reference to attempts to determine what the sociological functions and disfunctions of religion in human societies may be, is moving. There is also the suggestion that religion, far from being merely a cultural survival, is possibly essential to society. Yet this is simply to entertain the possibility that some fruitful hypotheses for further testing may lie at the point of recognizing the importance of religion in society.

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[34] For Durkheim's view, see his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* trans. Swain (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1947).

[35] 1956, 86.

[36] Cf. his *Gesammelte Aufsatze sur Religionssoziologie,* 3 vols., (Tubingen, J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1920-21).

[37] Bellah, R., *Tokugawa Religion* (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1957).

VIII

From the modification of positivism to the current situation in the sociology of religion is a large step, and much important material will have to be omitted. Yet it is perhaps not too much of an intellectual leap to indicate that the present concerns of the sociology of religion could not have been possible without the steps taken by Pareto, Malinowski, Durkheim, and Weber. What this earlier work did essentially was to reopen the question of the relations between religion and society. The linkage between this earlier work and that of the contemporary functional sociologists is very clear. This may be seen especially in the work of Kingsley Davis,[38] William J. Goode,[39] Robert K. Merton,[40] and Talcott Parsons.[41]

Functional sociology is a highly controversial approach in present-day sociology. Yet it is the approach in terms of which the most significant work in the sociology of religion has been done.[42] A basic element in the functional sociologist's treatment of religion is the rejection, or at least the drastic modification, of earlier evolutionism, insofar as evolutionism stresses the search for origins. This search has been rejected because it is not possible to obtain any empirical information concerning the origins of religion. A different question is now put. The sociologist now asks, not what was the origin of this behavior, but what function or functions does it perform?

The concept of function is subject to certain misunderstandings, since it has a number of common-sense meanings. Merton has pointed out that function has been used to refer to at least five different things. Popular usage calls a public gathering or festive occasion a "function". The term is often used to refer to an occupation, or to activities assigned to a person who occupies a particular social status, such as a political office. For purposes of sociological analysis, these uses of the concept of function are either irrelevant or not very helpful.

Two other uses of the concept are immediately relevant to the concerns of the sociology of religion. One of these is the use made of the concept in mathematics. Here function refers to "a variable considered in relation to one or more other variables in terms of which it may be expressed or on the value of which its own value depends."[43] Thus, the anthropologist, Alexander Lesser, asserts, "A genuinely functional relation is one which is established between two or more terms or variables such that it can be asserted that under certain defined conditions (which form one term of the relation) certain determined expressions of those conditions (which is the other term of the relation) are observed."[44] This is the understanding of the concept of function employed by William H. Bernhardt. "The principle upon which the Method of Functional Analysis rests may be stated as follows: In a more or less orderly world, changes which occur concomitantly may be presumed to be related causally or determinately, i.e., functionally."[45]

The fifth use of the concept of function is, however, the one which is cru-

[38] *Human Society* (New York, Macmillan, 1950). Cf. also his "The Myth of Functional Analysis," *American Sociological Review*, XXIV, (1959), 757-772.

[39] *Religion Among the Primitives* (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1951).

[40] *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, The Free Press, rev. ed., 1957).

[41] "Religious Perspectives in Sociology and Social Psychology," in *Religious Perspectives in College Teaching* (New York, Ronald Press, 1952).

[42] Cf. the writer's paper, "The Functional Approach: Some Implications for the Study of Religion," *Proceedings, Southwestern Sociological Society*, 1957, 58-64.

[43] Merton, R. K., *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949 ed.), 23.

[44] "Functionalism in Social Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, XXXVII (1935), 392.

[45] *A Functional Philosophy of Religion* (Denver, The Criterion Press, 1958), 34-35.

cial to the functional approach in sociology of religion. This usage, developed by Durkheim, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown, stresses that the function of any social or cultural item refers to its contribution to the maintenance of the society in whose culture it is found. "The function of any recurrent activity . . . is the part which it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of the structural continuity . . . The function of a particular social usage is the contribution it makes to the total social life as the functioning of the total social system."[46]

Admittedly, the function type of question is difficult to answer. Many sociologists are now disillusioned about the potentialities of the functional approach. Yet the careful work of Merton in developing a "Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology," shows the possibilities of this approach. The critic of functionalism in the sociology of religion usually points out that there is great danger of attributing functions to religious behavior which appear, on careful analysis, to be either non-existent or actually dis-functions. Here the functionalist is likely to reply that the persistence of religious behavior, and the fact that no known society has ever been without it, make the hypothesis concerning its functions at least a promising and important one, not to be rejected on some **a priori** grounds.

IX

The evolutionist view of religion tended to be associated with a definition such as that "religion is the belief in, and manipulation of, for human purposes, supernatural beings or entities." Yet if one looks at the beliefs and manipulatory devices in terms of what they apparently did for the people who practiced them, it seems obvious that beliefs in and attitudes toward the supernatural are not the only types of belief and behavior which could get the job done. The sociological and anthropological literature would support the point that the referents for religious beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors are **supra-empirical,** but this is not the same as **supernatural.**

If a formal definition of religion, expressed in functional terms, is desirable, the following represents an effort in that direction. The intellectual clues for this definition are stated most directly in the work of Malinowski, Durkheim, and Fromm. "Religion is any system of beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors (rites and ceremonies) shared by a group, which provides members of the group with a life orientation, defines for them their ultimate concerns, and in terms of which they develop a set of distinctions between the sacred and the profane."

Such a definition is set forth in a spirit of tentativeness. A definition is, after all, an arbitrary drawing of lines among phenomena which often cannot be sharply distinguished. Religion-non-religion is, as Yinger has indicated, really a continuum. There are some behaviors which are marginally religious. The definition does indicate that religion is much more than belief; it is also attitude, emotion, and action. This is to follow a clue provided long ago by Robertson-Smith, who argued that "Religion in primitive times was not a system of belief with practical applications; it was a body of fixed traditional practices. . . . Religious institutions are older than religious theories."[47] The definition also refrains from specifying the kinds of referents for the beliefs and attitudes involved.

The definition does not specify the situation to which religious behavior is addressed. It seems probable that it is most often addressed to those situations which cannot be changed or controlled. Yet this does not say all that needs to be said. Religious behavior has per-

[46] "On the Concept of Function in Social Science," in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London, Cohen & West, 1952), 180-81.

formed a number of functions in various human societies, if function is understood to mean contribution of a social or cultural item to the maintenance of society. Yet in terms of function interpreted as mathematical variable religion appears always to be present and never absent in situations where men confront the givens of their environment. And it tends to vary concomitantly with changes in these givens.

In a recent work, J. Milton Yinger defines the sociology of religion as "the scientific study of the ways in which society, culture, and personality . . . influence religion—influence its origin, its doctrines, its practices, the types of groups which express it, the kinds of leadership . . . And, oppositely, it is the study of the ways in which religion affects society, culture, and personality."[48] If this be taken as the definition of the field, the sociology of religion becomes cognate with other special areas of sociology. The attempt is made to study empirical phenomena from which generalizations concerning the relations of religious to other sorts of human social behavior may be derived.

One should not claim that a sociology of religion, in the sense of an interrelated system of generalizations, now exists. Yet the model of such a science is well developed, and a promising beginning has been made. The rudiments for this science are clearly available. As Yinger has summarized them, these rudiments include:

> (1) some useful large-scale theoretical propositions; (2) a body of church and general religious history which contains insights which might serve as hypotheses, if they are rephrased; (3) an accumulation of facts, such as data on membership of churches, sources of this membership, denominational differences; (4) ethnological materials which often contain potentially fruitful propositions; (5) some specifically sociological concepts and typologies which have been useful in certain contexts; (6) the rapidly developing general theory of personality, society, and culture, and finally (7) some studies which make extensive use of all the above items . . .[49]

XI

The charter for the sociology of religion in the preparation of ministers for American Protestant churches is provided by Liston Pope, in his now classic study of the church in Gaston County, North Carolina, **Millhands and Preachers.** This passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Despite the years spent in professional preparation, almost none of the mill pastors in Gaston County have had any special training for work in an industrial parish. Under ordinary circumstances they follow conventional, standardized programs in their churches, aping the policies of uptown churches of their denomination. . . . In most instances, their knowledge of economic processes, labor relations, management problems, trade union tactics, and cultural analysis is no more extensive or competent than that of their village parishioners. . . . Though they are acknowledged experts in the field of religion and continually profess to be troubled by the gap between ethical ideals and social practice, they do not possess criteria for judging social possibilities, and thus in effect become instruments of social inertia . . . If theological training invariably produces upper-class tastes and dispositions, it renders its subjects less flexible socially while assuming that it makes them more competent religiously. . . . Though a denomination, a theological seminary, or an individual minister may refuse to reckon openly with social conditions, the religious effort that follows is shaped and modified nevertheless by those conditions.[50]

This charter for sociology of religion in the theological seminary emphasizes a basic assumption—namely, that the

[47] *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London, A. C. Black, 1927), 20.

[48] *Religion, Society, and the Individual,* 20-21.

[49] "The Present Status of the Sociology of Religion," *Journal of Religion,* XXXI (1951).

[50] New Haven, Yale University Press, 1942, 115-16.

task of theological education is at least twofold. It is training in religion, in the cognitive expression of religion in theology, and in the skills and techniques of religious leadership. Yet it should be equally knowledge and skills in understanding and dealing with the sociocultural milieu in which religious behavior finds its institutionalized expression. This is a necessary assumption in theological education, whether or not one holds it to be the proper business of the minister and/or the church to engage in social action on behalf of ethical ideals. The earthly church, whatever else it may be, is a human social institution, which of necessity interacts with, influences, and is influenced by, the other institutions in the society.

The careful, objective, and thorough study of the society, culture, communities, and institutions which provide the milieu within which religious behavior is manifested, and in terms of which the churches must function is an essential ingredient in an adequate understanding of the role of the minister. And this kind of study will make full use of all the data, hypotheses, concepts, and principles which are relevant to understanding the various aspects of human behavior as these have been dealt with by the social scientists. The sociologist of religion looks to studies of social structure, demography, ecology, studies of rural and urban communities, studies of personality, psychology of religion, and the analysis of culture, in order to obtain information which will illumine various aspects of his special concern with religious behavior and its institutional expression.

The sociology of religion, in its current stage of development, shares some of the characteristics which Merton has indicated for sociological theory generally. "The gradual convergence of some streams of theory in social psychology, social anthropology and sociology promises large theoretical gains. Yet . . . one must admit that a large part of what is now called sociological theory consists of general orientations toward data, suggested types of variables which need somehow to be taken into account, rather than clear, verifiable statements of relationships between specified variables."[51] The remedy for this situation, insofar as it exists in the sociology of religion, is a vigorous attempt to formulate the problems of the discipline in such a way that testable hypotheses can be derived from the already promising beginnings.

[51] *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1957, rev. ed.), 9.