The Anthropocentric Definition: Religion--An Expression of Human Need

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"God is dead . . . and we have killed him. How shall we . . . comfort ourselves?"

Nietzsche, The Madman

IN MY previous essay[1] I pointed out that when one tries to define religion theocentrically, as a function of divine activity, as something God has done and/or is doing for man, many religions are excluded from consideration. Also, and perhaps equally defective, a theocentric approach to an understanding of religion entangles one in the problem of deciding what kind of God (whose God-idea) is to stand as the descriptive/explanatory principle; to say nothing of the bristle of problems involved in trying to make sense out of anybody's idea of God.

The anthropocentric approach to an understanding of religion is a better option. This approach makes it possible to deal with all religions because it deals not with what a particularized God is doing in a specific religion, but with what men in all religions are doing for themselves as they behave in ways called "religious." At the same time this anthropocentric approach makes accommodations for the God-word no matter what descriptions and particularizations have been given to it. God-talk is simply a part of the talking which is done when people are doing religion. This is so, of course, because the anthropocentric analysis looks at the phenomenon of man doing religion, and god-talk is a part of that doing.

A Special Kind of Animal

To decide what man is doing when he is doing religion, we need first to look at the man who is doing it. What is there about him which makes him the only animal who does religion? The only religious animal? To answer this question is roughly the same as answering the question, Why is man the only animal who does philosophy? or science? or retail merchandizing? or any of the thousands of enterprises that man has developed and uses. I answer such queries generally by saying that man is an animal with a special kind of mind. He reasons, he thinks, he remembers, he writes books, he plans ahead; and, for our purpose here (for the purpose of answering why he is the religious animal), I shall direct our attention especially to the obvious fact that man possesses a self-disturbing kind of mind: a mind which tells him **that** he is and **where** he is. And to know that he is and where he is, is disturbing because it informs him accurately that **he** is living in a **self** defeating world. The self (**i.e.,** the person) is disturbed because once he is old enough to have much sense, he gets the sense of the true situation into which he has been born: he is involved, even trapped, in a world, in a human/environmental condition, which sooner or later defeats and annihilates all selfhood. Put simply, this is to say that nobody ever gets out of life alive, and nobody ever get out of life even a small part of what he wants.

Man's special kind of mind, as we shall observe, is the kind of mind which permits him to imagine situations which do

[1] *The Iliff Review,* Winter 1970.

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not exist, or do not yet exist. This capacity forces man, unlike other animals, to live knowing, among other things, that he will die and that things are not as good as they "should" be, or perhaps even could be. Man, as man, is doomed to dissatisfaction. He thinks, and thinking is bad for "happiness", or if not happiness, bad for tranquility. Man thinks not necessarily because he wants to think, but because he has to think. And he has to think if he wants to survive because he is the animal most deficient in "DNA knowledge." He is the one whose adequate survival instincts have been replaced with that less sure but far more potent survival tool the human brain.

The Nonprogrammed Animal

To say that man is the animal who is deficient in DNA knowledge is to say that he is the nonprogramed animal: the one whose life and meaning depend not on simple maturity, but upon instructed maturity. He cannot just grow up and be "a man"—**homo sapiens.** He must grow up instructed—educated. The Existentialist philosophers were keenly perceptive when (according to Sartre's account)[2] they observed that man is the only animal whose existence preceeds his essence. The essential nature of other animals is instructed, programed—built into the genetic structure. Man's is not. A duck is always a duck. He is born that way. He can never be anything but a duck, and exactly **that** kind of duck. All the instructions, even the migratory route, are put down in the beginning of his time. But this is not the case with men. At birth (even at conception) a man's existence is laid down; the instructed part of him—his body—begins, but not his manness, not his humanity, not his mind, not his language, not his attitudes, not his loves and antipathies, not his sadness and not his religion. All this, and all else that makes him a person, a personality, a **human** being, is yet to be learned, yet to be created.

Man is different because of the absence of instructed regulations in his genetic equipment. As Erich Fromm puts it:

> The first element which differentiates human from animal existence is a negative one: the relative absence in man of instinctive regulation in the process of adaptation to the surrounding world . . .
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> The less complete and fixed the instinctual equipment of animals, the more developed is the brain and therefore the ability to learn. The emergence of man can be defined as occurring at the point in the process of evolution where instinctive adaptation has reached its minimum.[3]

But this deficiency in programing is far from tragic, for it is the deficiency out of which burgeons man's self-consciousness, his memory, his foresight, his language, his reason, and his imagination. Or as Fromm put it:

> He emerges with new qualities which differentiate him from the animal: his awareness of himself as a separate entity, his ability to remember the past, to visualize the future, and to denote objects and acts by symbols; his reason to conceive and understand the world; and his imagination through which he reaches far beyond the range of his senses.[4]

All that constitutes man's created humanness is important to his doing religion, but we need see only two of his especially human qualities for our purpose here. They are his self-consciousness and his imagination.

Self-Consciousness and Imagination

To say that man is self-conscious is to say that he sees **himself.** He sees himself as involved in a past, a present, and a future. Largely through the mechan-

[2] *Existentialism,* trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York: Philosophical Library, 1947.

[3] *Man For Himself,* New York Rinehart and Co., 1947, p. 39.

[4] *Ibid.*

isms of speech and play,[5] made possible by a distinctive physiological and neurological inheritance, Mr. Jones knows himself to be Mr. Jones. He is an object to himself. He is at the same time to himself both an object and a subject. He may not see himself exactly as others see him, but he definitely "sees" himself. He "sees" himself in his own immediate awareness, and he "sees" himself in his imagination. That is to say, he is a **self** conscious being, and a being who sees **himself** as here and now (acting in the present), and sees **himself** there and then (acting in the past), and sees **himself** where he yet may be (acting in the future).

Perhaps other animals have some degree of self-consciousness and imagine themselves in other places doing other things, but if they do they do not do so very effectively because generation after generation they go on living in the same old way. If things are imagined differently, changing modes of operation and ways of life occur, but nonhuman animals rarely change their modes and ways. Apparently other animals live in the immediate world, with some memory of the past, but with little thought about or imagination of themselves living (and dying) in the future. In this, of course, man is really different from other animals. He is extremely aware of the future—tomorrow, next month, next year, retirement, eternity. Indeed, he often seems to be doing more of his living (or trying to) in the future than in the present. Man, especially modern man, endlessly worries and wants for tomorrow. He looks at his immediate world and imagines how it could be different; how, in fact, it will be different tomorrow.

Because man possesses the power of self-consciousness and imagination, he wants for himself what is not, and is afraid for himself of what is not. He lives positively and negatively not only in his actual world, but in his "wished-for" world and in his "afraid-of" world. Positively he imagines what is not and desires it, sometimes passionately, Negatively he imagines what is not and fears it, sometimes desperately. This puts him in the condition of estrangement. Wherever he is (indeed, in the world itself) he feels as if he does not belong. He is constantly aware that things are not to his liking. They never quite measure up to his expectations. And they never could because that is the character of the expectations of a self-conscious imaginative human being.

New Worlds

Because man knows that things are not to his heart's desire, he moves one way and another to make them more to his heart's desire. He creates new worlds for himself. Motivated by a self-disturbing mind and a self-defeating world he goes to work imaginatively and the results are: central plumbing, $E=MC^2$, the Categorical Imperative, the Law of Parsimony, the Republican Party and the Roman Papacy. This is just another way of saying that all human enterprises of significance (such as science, philosophy, politics, religion) arise in human need (in man's awareness of the natural inadequacies in himself and his world), and work to accomplish human welfare (things closer to his heart's desire). Because the world does not measure up to man's wants and expectations, and because he has the kind of mind to know this, he tries to reform the world with his technology and science, to make it reasonable (less mysterious and terrifying) with his philosophy and theology, and to relate to it or transcend it with his religious commitments, devotions and beliefs.

Religion, so regarded, is the way one believes and behaves in his effort to overcome and transcend the existential predicament: **i.e.,** the human condition of man.

[5] First observed by George Herbert Mead as the mechanisms in the creation of human mind.

The Human Condition

Special attention should be given to the phrase "the human condition of man" for it lies at the base of man's religious motivations. It is the condition of man as man to feel estranged from his world and in disharmony with his own life. He is a part of nature and at the same time divorced from nature. And this, as we observed, occurs because man unlike other animals, knows his destiny in nature. Man is caught in an impossible split: he is both subject to nature and transcendent to it. Possessing a body that "wants" to stay alive, he posseses at the same time a mind that informs him that the body's wish is doomed. As an innocent part of nature, his heart beats away as if it would never stop; but he knows better. Unlike other animals who find their fulfillment in simply repeating the patterns of their species, man cannot be so fulfilled. Evicted from innocence, from instinctive almost thoughtless existence even as he experienced it prenatally, man is doomed to work forever at a problem he cannot possibly solve. As Fromm puts it, "Having lost paradise, the unity with nature, he has become the eternal wanderer (Odysseus, Oedipus, Abraham, Faust)"[6] driven on and on searching for an answer to the existential dichotomy of birth and death; and driven by his awareness of the annihilation of human potentialities which the too short span of life between birth and death necessitates. The condition of man: he is condemned to live an imperative journey, endlessly searching to restore a unity between himself and the rest of nature which was irreparably ruptured on the day of his birth. In an attempt to repair this rupture, Fromm tells us that man first constructs

> an all-inclusive mental picture of the world which serves as a frame of reference from which he can derive an answer to the question of where he stands and what he ought to do. But such thought systems are not sufficient. If man were only a disembodied intellect his aim would be achieved by a comprehensive thought-system, but since he is an entity endowed with a body as well as a mind he has to react to the dichotomy of his existence not only in thinking but also in the process of living, in his feelings and actions. He has to strive for the experience of unity and oneness in all spheres of his being in order to find a new equilibrium. Hence any satisfying system of orientation implies not only intellectual elements but elements of feeling and sense to be realized in action in all fields of human endeavor. Devotion to an aim, or an idea, or a power transcending man such as God, is an expression of this need for completness in the process of living.[7]

Doing Religion

Fromm goes on to point out that these systems of orientation (the world-views constructed) vary widely depending upon the culture in which they happen; but they are nevertheless all concerned to do the same thing: to give man a framework of meaning in which to find his own personal meaning. They are, in fact, reinterpretations of the world so that its bleakness may be mitigated, or perhaps even denied; **e.g.**, this is only an illusory world (Maya); search behind for the real world. Or this is only a preliminary world, a testing place for eternity; beyond is Heaven or, if you don't watch out, Hell. And Fromm would like to call such orientation systems "religions" or "religious systems", he gets hung-up on the old peg of the theocentric definition. Because some of these systems are not theistic, Fromm backs off and says, "For lack of a better word I therefore call such systems 'frames of orientation and devotion'."[8] It is the intention of this essay not to back off, because constructing such frames of orientation and devotion is

[6] *Man for Himself*, p. 41.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 46f.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

exactly what men do when they do religion—whether or not they do it with the idea of a theistic type of God.

Functional Definition

Dr. William Henry Bernhardt has summarized this sort of functional definition with nice precision.

> Religious behavior is a complex form of individual and group behavior whereby persons are prepared intellectually and emotionally to meet the non-manipulable aspects of existence positively by means of a reinterpretation of the total situation and with the use of various techniques.[9]

This definition tells what sort of enterprise religion is when observed anthropocentrically. It is what persons do to prepare themselves for, and to live in terms of, situations not subject to objective control (at the time), and to do so with sustaining morale. There are five essential parts to Bernhardt's definition: persons are (1) prepared intellectually and emotionally, to meet (2) non-manipulable aspects, (3) positively by means of (4) reinterpretation, and use of (5) various techniques. The first three we should look at more closely as parts of an anthropocentric definition of religion. The last two are concerned primarily with the methodology of religion, or as Bernhardt calls it, the reinterpretation and the technique phases of religion.

I. Intellectually and Emotionally

In one place (the last statement in his work on the analysis and/or philosophy of religion), Dr. Bernhardt calls religion " . . . a form of aesthetico-noetic behavior . . ." This is to say that it is both an intellectual and an emotional preparation—a form of total behavior.

Edna St. Vincent Millay once said, "Not Truth, but Faith it is/That keeps the world alive." The poem goes on to argue that birds fly because they have "unconscious faith," and fishes swim, and the world follows its orderly way because all things basically give themselves in trust. They believe. And this believing is more than just an intellectual nod. It is a complete persuasion. "I not only know this is so (noesis), but I feel it to the very marrow of my bones (aesthesis)."

Religious faith is an attitude, an emotional commitment, a tenacious conviction, but at the same time it is not just a matter of passion. It is passion surrounding a proposition, or a whole system of propositions; it is also an affair of knowledge, of intellect, of truth, of noesis. It is to certain truths that the believer is tenaciously loyal and passionately committed. And these truths instruct religious behavior. Each believer has a "conscience" to behave in accordance with his beliefs, and he feels guilty when he fails to do so.

Religion is concerned with "the facts" as is science and philosophy. But religion is concerned also to establish the whole person in dynamic, successful, saving relation to God; **i.e.**, to the power or powers believed to determine life and destiny. In keen awareness of fundamental frustration, man turns not just his hands and head to the solution of basic human needs, but his heart as well. And in this fact, that the heart is involved, religion, at least theoretically, differs sharply from both science and philosophy. Religion is an engagement with life—an existential involvement; science and philosophy try not to be. Science and philosophy are "objective" in their approach to scientific and philosophical truth and to the welfare of man. The scientist and philosopher try to remove themselves (their prejudices, passions, biases) from their experiments

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[9] This statement first appeared in Dr. Bernhardt's fine monograph *THE ANALYSIS OF RELIGION*, p. 119. Happily that work has now been republished by the Criterion Press under the title *A FUNCTIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION*. In this publication the quote is on page 157.

and critcial examinations.[10] Presumably all is cold and calculated and cautiously reasonable. But religion is not like this. Rather it is willfully emotional and personal. It is concerned not only to know "the truth" but in the very act of knowing to be engaged totally, committed completely, and saved utterly. In practical application science asks, Does it work? philosophy asks, Does it make sense? religion asks, Does it save? me? now?

The sort of intellectual and emotional involvement suggested in these last few paragraphs is what Bernhardt means by "prepared emotionally and intellectually," and it is what we shall mean when we say that religion is a form of metapsychology. But first we shall look at Bernhardt's term "non-manipulable."

II. Non-manipulable

When Bernhardt speaks of the "non-manipulable aspects of existence" he is referring to the sorts of circumstances which evoke religious responses, and in terms of which religious rationalizations and practices are invented and developed. In a religious context "non-manipulable" refers to aspects of life which are not only beyond direct human manipulation, but which are also of critical importance to man, and are somehow precariously situated. He is referring to situations in which basic human values are threatened: values that affect the life and the essential life-styles of the persons involved.

There are, of course, many circumstances in human life which are non-manipulable but not regarded as religiously significant. The phases of the moon, the rising and falling of the tides, the progression of our galaxy towards Andromeda, are all aspects of existence which man cannot manipulate, but they are not non-manipulable aspects to which religious responses are directed. This means, simply, that they are not situations of critical value that need some kind of religious attention in order that the life and style of human existence can continue and/or be improved. But there are also many circumstances in human life which are non-manipulable **and** religiously significant. Death, for example, and in some cultures hunger and disease are situations which are both beyond man's technical (direct) control and are of critical importance to man's existence. These are the sorts of "non-manipulables" that Bernhardt mean when he refers to the non-manipulable aspects to which people respond with complex forms of individual and group behavior.

There are roughly two kinds of non-manipulables,[11] and roughly two ways

[10] This pretense of objectivity is increasingly suspect even in science. Writing of this in the Foreword to his *The Phenomenon of Man,* Pere Teilhard says: "In its early, naive stage, science, perhaps inevitably, would imagine that we could observe things in themselves, as they would behave in our absence. Instinctively physicists and naturalists went to work as though they could look down from a great height upon a world which their consciousness could penetrate without being submitted to it or changing it. They are now beginning to realize that even the most objective of their observations are steeped in the conventions they adopt at the outset and by forms or habits of thought developed in the course of their research; so that, when they reach the end of their analysis they cannot tell with any certainty whether the structure they have made is the sense of the matter they are studying, or the reflection of their own thought. And at the same time they realize that because of the return shock of their discoveries, they are committed body and soul to the network of relationships they thought to cast upon things from the outside: in fact they are caught in their own net." (p. 32)

[11] Manipulable is, of course, an adjective. It means a something that has as a characteristic the capacity to be manipulated. (The Latin base is *manipularis* which refers to a soldier, who, of course, can be ordered about; *i.e.,* manipulated.) There is no noun form of manipulable; that is, no term that identifies manipulable as a classification of certain kinds of things—as beauty is a noun designating the class of beautiful things. There is, however, in talking about Bernhardt's non-manipulable aspects of existence, some convenience in treating this adjective as if it were a noun. We shall do this. We shall speak of non-manipulables as things which cannot be altered changed, ordered about by man.

of dealing with them. There are, first, the non-manipulables **of ignorance,** and, second, there are the non-manipulables **of condition.** The first kind are those non-manipulables which designate situations which at the moment cannot be manipulated simply because one does not know how to manipulate them. As long as a person or a society does not know how to control directly, technologically, some part of their environment, that part of the enviroment is non-manipulable, and if it is of critical value to them, it must be dealt with religiously.

The second kind of non-manipulable is that kind which seems to be bound not in man's ignorance (of control), but in his condition of being (in his ontology). Apparently, as an example, no amount of "know-how" will ever change the basic self-disturbing character of human consciousness and human imagination (as we noted earlier in this essay). Man as man lives in the condition of estrangement. He cannot be truly reconciled to the world in which he finds himself. He will always wish for it better, and expect it worse. To the degree that there are in the nature of things permanent non-manipulable aspects in human existence, there are non-manipulables of condition rather than non-manipulables of ignorance. The difference is that one type is manipulable at least in principle, while the other type is not. We can perhaps clarify this with a few examples.

First, as examples of the non-manipulable of ignorance we can list many. Famine is a real threat to the lives of people in certain parts of the world; yet a threat which has been ended in other parts of the world, and which could be ended (is theoretically manipulable) for people everywhere. Death by certain diseases. Death itself we shall list as non-manipulable of condition, but dying from certain diseases is no longer necessary. Like famine, such diseases as diphtheria, scarlet fever, small pox, poliomylitis can be controlled, even though in the past they were non-manipulable and in certain places they remain so today. Certain heart ailments and cancer are also non-manipulables of ignorance. They cannot be controlled right now, but we fully expect they soon will be. In the meantime persons afflicted with these maladies, especially those declared to be terminal, will have to make "religious adjustments." Certain kinds of ignorance are non-manipulables of ignorance. In many situations where life and life-styles are threatened, we simply do not know enough to know what should be done, or how to inform and persuade people to do it even if we did know. This non-manipulable of ignorance gives rise to a swarm of other non-manipulables; **e.g.,** war, militarism, racial prejudice and conflict, human depravations, crimes, broken homes, broken persons — problems which are all theoretically solvable, but not immediately or practically so. In all such problems, religion is found to be vitally concerned and remains concerned until the non-manipulable becomes manipulable and, with this, science and technology replaces religion.

But there are certain kinds of non-manipulables which are not now and never will be rendered technologically manipulable. These we are calling non-manipulables **of condition,** of which the following are some examples: fate, death, emptiness, meaninglessness, guilt, condemnation, "ignorance." Professor Paul Tillich, in his insightful little book **The Courage To Be,** has keenly observed that man as man is in the condition of anxiety (**angst**). Man as man is forever confronted with a threat to his life (fate/death), a threat to his spiritual significance (emptiness/meaninglessness), and a threat to his integrity (guilt/condemnation). According to Tillich's position, religion has abiding responsibility in the existential fact of living and dying, in the psychological experience of mean-

ingful/meaningless existence, and in the moral and spiritual experiences of failure/condemnation and guilt/forgiveness. These conditions are permanently a part of the nature of man. They will never be overcome. One cannot get rid of them. One can only learn to live with them. Religion is concerned to live with them well.

These non-manipulables of condition threaten man's being. They threaten him with nonbeing. Nonbeing here means the denial or loss of those conditions which are essential to genuine human life — such things as life itself, a sense of personal worth, and an awareness of moral integrity. Fate and death, Tillich argues, threaten the ontic self. Emptiness and meaninglessness threaten the spiritual self. Guilt and condemnation threaten the moral self. It is the condition of man to be born at a moment in time, at a place on earth, and possessing certain genetic equipment. His life is thus set in a matrix of limitations. A part of those limitations is an appointment with death. Too late sometimes, too early sometimes, but die he does. And death, unrelieved by religious answers, is a hard-faced annihilation. But death is not the only non-manipulable of devastating portent. Living is sometimes worse: loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness. The critical problem may not be how to die but how to live — Thoreau's problem of quiet desperation — or even screaming desperation. Those who live past the tender years may find that the basic tragedy of life (the hopeless anxiety) is not death but disillusionment. It comes with the inevitable discovery that life is not lived out in terms of one's youthful dreams and ambitions. For many sensitive people the major tragedy comes in the lost beauty of life, the lost ecstacy of living, in the dulling of expectancy by the hard facts of mundane existence, in the gradual loss of youthful ideals before the calculating motion of the years. The real frustration is not that life must end but that it must be lived in little ways.

The religious question in life and death is not whether to make "a quietus" with the "bare bodkin," but to decide whether life is indeed shattered by slings and arrows, and by the grunt and sweat of weariness; by the cowardly conscience, sicklied with pale thought and terrified of dreamful sleeps or if it need be. Religion, as Tillich sees it, is an admission of the worst and a stance of courage in spite of it. Life is threatened with debilitating reality and devastated with existential anxiety, and religion is what concerns a man ultimately and properly, and accomplishes in him the courage to be. In saying these sorts of things Tillich proposes what Bernhardt proposes: the condition of man estranges him from his world and himself; religion permits him to live his estrangement well.

To the several examples of non-manipulables of condition taken from Paul Tillich's examinations in depth psychology, I shall add one more. It is the condition of ignorance, but not the same kind of ignorance considered in the discussion above on the non-manipulables of ignorance.[12] Here the reference is to the ontological character of ignorance; to ignorance as a part of the being of human society. The sad fact is that vast numbers of people always have been ill-informed and ignorant and have acted in stupid ways, and they always will. The structure of social life is simply too complicated to be understood adequately by the masses of people who inhabit the earth. And even if the

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[12] Dr. Bernhardt used to remark occasionally, as some one complained about the obstuseness of some congregation or community, that to such people and circumstances one must make religious adjustment because ignorance was a non-manipulable. In rereading Bernhardt's account of ignorance in the *Analysis* and *Functional Philosophy*, I can see that he would place ignorance under my category "of ignorance"; *i.e.*, something to be eliminated by science and education. I am less optimistic. Ignorance, I fear, is one of the ontological dimensions of social animals.

masses of mankind had the reasoning power to understand all they would need to understand, there is no evidence that they would choose to act reasonably. To be sure, men do make rational choices part of the time, but more of the time, and often in the critical issues of life they choose wilfully, passionately, irrationally. How else are we to account for the mob's concurrence in the crucifixion of Jesus, the lynching of Negroes in Alabama, the Mafia in Chicago and Miami, the war in Vietnam, the enormous overkill of modern nuclear armaments, slums and poverty surrounded by affluence, the censorship of "dirty words" by the Post Office Department, the Communist Conspiracy of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the John Birch Society, the American Legion, and the vast numbers of people living in McLuhan's "Bonanza Land." The cutting edge of each day, each year, each generation is always running ahead of the institutions, customs, convictions, education, and morality which determine and govern the life of each day, each year, each generation. There is little reason to believe that the masses of mankind will ever be an **avant garde:** that their education will ever match the complexities of their times; that enough of them will at any time be wise enough and cool-headed enough to allay the enormous social ills which endlessly spawn in the muck of ignorance. Like death, this crushing non-manipulable seems destined to continue to the end of man's time.

Metatechnological and Metapsychological

We have identified two sorts of non-manipulables — one of ignorance and one of condition. We shall now observe two ways of responding to non-manipuable: (1) the metatechnological way and (2) the metapsychological way.

Dr. Bernhardt coined the term "metatechnology" to designate any attempt to introduce (use) extranatural or supernatural power in the solution of natural problems. In this kind of maneuvering one attempts to manipulate the non-maunpulable by evoking or petitioning non-natural assistance. One tries to go beyond (meta) technology. What man cannot do for himself he attempts to get "the powers" or "the power" to do for him.

The second sort of response to non-manipulables we shall call "metapsychological." Here the attempt is not to change the particular natural situation (environment) which is non-manipulable, but to effect an inner, subjective change in the person. Here, to a non-manipulable situation, one tries to go beyond (meta) the normal psychological reaction and establish a courage-to-be-in-spite-of morale. In "metapsych" one turns to religion to find wisdom and courage in order to take whatever happens that cannot be changed and to do so with dignity, even serenity.

The following words, from the **Book of Common Prayer,** seem to reflect the metatechnological type of response: "In Thy good time . . . restore him to health, and enable him to lead his life to Thy glory . . ."; and these following words from a common prayer[13] seem to reflect the metapsychological type: "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." The prayer attributed to Jesus in Gethsemane seems to combine metatech and metapsych in about equal parts. "O, my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me," sounds like "metatech," while "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" is clearly "metapsych."

"Metatech" and/or "Metapsych" Distinguished

The question of how technology and metatechnology and metapsychology relate to each other should be examined.

[13] This is a prayer commonly used by members of Alcoholics Anonymous, and also attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr.

The late Professor Malinowski, in his studies of the Melanesian people of the Trobriand Islands, observed that they clearly distinguish between technology and what we are calling metatechnology. For example, he describes the Trobrianders in their fishing exploints. They venture out beyond the safe reef-protected lagoons of their islands into the deep Pacific in search of fish. They do this in out-rigger, dugout canoes. With long established technologies, the boat craftsmen build fine, seaworthy canoes. They do this in a straight-forward technological fashion. As craftsmen they use technological skill, not magic or metatechnology. But a good sailing craft is not the last word in deep-sea fishing. One needs not only a good boat to ride the waves, but a lucky boat to get get through or to avoid storms. The sea is big and dangerous, and fish are where you find them, if you do. There is something more than craftsmanship and smart fishing involved; something vague and mysterious and often extremely dangerous. There is something called luck or mana power, and it takes special handling to deal with it. Consequently, along side of their technology, the Trobrianders use metatech to deal with the mysterious aspects of sailing and fishing — those espects which are not directly manipulable with technology.

> Canoe building has a long list of spells, to be recited at various stages of the work, at the felling of the trees, at the scooping out of the dugout; and towards the end, at the painting, lashing together and launching.[14]

Malinowski reports the same kind of technology / metatechnology in their farming enterprises. They use farming techniques (rotation, cultivation, etc.), but because a crop failure means hunger and perhaps starvation, they also employ metatech to attempt to deal with those aspects of farming which seem to need something more than ordinary know-how. Also, Malinowski reports that the Trobrianders use metatech in sickness. They are devoid of modern medical ideas and practices. They do have some natural remedies for minor afflictions. But all serious illness is truly non-manipulable for them, and to these serious non-manipulable aspects of their existence, they respond religiously. In this case metatechnologically. In short, one way or another they "pray" for help — recite spells, make magic, dance, sing, implore, placate, sacrifice — and die.

But what changes — things or people? We are observing here that the Trobrianders are, in their religious (or metatechnological) activities trying to reach beyond their own puny powers to powers they believe to be tremendously more effective — magic, or spirits, or, if you will, the gods. It is relatively obvious what the native thinks he is getting. He expects through his religion to get extranatural or supernatural assistance in the face of non-manipulable espects in his existence. He believes he is getting control in those areas of his existence which are precarious and in which important values are threatened. He uses his religion to restore or preserve or promote values (vital ones) which he believes are in danger.

But what he is getting at, seen from our sophisticated posture, seems to be something else altogether. We do not accept the notion that his religious gyrations (his metatech) gets him a sure harvest, or a safe and successful fishing voyage, or a cure for his diseases. Yet we recognize that he gets something practically as good. In his belief of the efficacy of his religion he gets an inner surety, a psychological security which enables him to live with human dignity, and even joy, in the face of potential famine, drowning, and tropical diseases.

[14] Malinowski, *Magic Science and Religion*, Beacon Press, 1949, pp. 165-166.

If the environment is not changed, at least he is.

If one looks at his own tradition and its metatechnological elements, he is, perhaps, not so sure that only metapsychological adjustments are made. For example, if we ask, Does prayer change **things?**, we find many voices arguing on both sides of this question. As an illustration, we find Dr. Bernhardt arguing against the legitimacy of metatechnology in the modern world. In his words:

> Historically . . . . religious behavior was essentially metatechnological. Persons sought for supernatural or magical aid in their attempts to conserve their values. Present day information leads one to believe that all such metatechnological activities were futile so far as an objective results were concerned . . . At the same time, religious behavior continued despite its metatechnological impotence because it served man in other ways. It had subjective success which more than compensated for its objective failures . . . Religious behavior, in other words, aided individuals to make subjective adjustments to situations not subject to objective control at the time, and to do so without loss of morale.[15]

One might suspect that Dr. Bernhardt writes the "minority opinion" in this case. Prayer for health, for rain, for the security and preserving of tangible, physical values is still widely practiced and ardently defended. It is yet something people do when they are doing religion. And it is justified usually on two types of arguments: (1) it is reasonable, and (2) it works.

In defense of the reasonableness of prayer Professor Peter Bertocci writes:

> If God is a Person whose very essence consists in his concern for increase in value, we may expect him to take advantage of every opportunity to cooperate with finite creators of value, or persons . . . To suppose that a Universe-Maker and Sustainer, to suppose that a Creator-Father would be indifferent to concerns of his creatures is simply unreasonable . . . .
>
> The laws of nature, life, and mind . . . express God's interest in the stability of communal existence. God cares for men in and through these "impersonal" laws.
>
> But is this all? Does this exhaust God's concern for the individual? If so, God is not as provident as a good and intelligent community of persons . . . .
>
> God governs our human lives through the minimum laws of physical, biological, and mental nature. There are some things which . . . are done for us, whether we know about them or enjoy them or not. Were the laws of physics, the reflexes of the body, or the associative and logical capacities of the mind to vary with individual preference, there could be no established, dependable order in the world. The impersonality of these laws reflects, therefore, not lack of divine concern for men but the most intelligent kind of purpose if there is to be any corporate life and existence . . . .
>
> Beyond this common minimum, however, there is every reason to suppose that God would make every effort to enter into fellowship with his creatures and to encourage the fruition of the very best in their **individual** lives. God's **general providence**, accordingly, is the foundation of his **special providence** for individual persons.[16]

Within, but not in conflict with the laws necessary for an orderly nature and a communal life, there is no reason, argues Bertocci, why God cannot or would not respond to human invitation and initiate or preserve the existence of some prayed for essential, legitimate value. Extranatural intervention in and around the basic laws of nature do not necessarily mitigate those laws, any more than the laws of electronics are damaged or violated by bending them to usefulness in a light bulb or a trans-

[15] *Analysis of Religion*, p. 119.

[16] *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1951; pp. 474-76.

istor rather than let them continue in their madcap way as lightning-bolts.

Bertocci is really a rather cautious protagonist for metatechnology. Much more inclusive and passionate arguments are available for those who wish to believe that miracles really happen. But the important grounds for holding a belief in metatechnology, for believing that prayer changes things, for believing in miracles, is not an argument at all. It is an experience. If you want to know "the truth," ask the man who has had one; ask the man who prayed for rain and got it; ask the man who was healed by faith; ask the man who "felt" the power of God invade his being. For such a person there is no arguing; there is only affirmation.

The question of whether or not prayer changes **things; i.e.,** whether metatechnology (in any of its forms) evokes actual changes in the external environment, may be moot. But is is also popular — witness the recent metatechnological efforts on behalf of the three men in the crippled Apollo 13. And this sort of thing, Elton Trueblood states, is not to be dismissed lightly. He writes:

> If a miracle is impossible, the ancient Israelites were wrong in their belief that God led them out of Egypt. They were merely lucky. The people of England prayed jointly during the battle of Dunkirk, but the safe arrival in England of so many survivors of that battle may have been merely coincidence in the weather, which would have been the same if the people had not prayed. In short, if the conception of natural law which science seems to require [which Dr. Bernhardt affirms] is the true conception, then the experience of so many who feel the guiding hand of God in the events of their own lives is sheer self-delusion. Whatever the answer to this difficulty may be, it is one that cannot be neglected or answered lightly.[17]

Metatech is practiced extensively in religion. It is one of the sorts of things people do when they are doing religion. But whether it is effective in modifying the non-manipulable aspects of existence is today questioneed in many quarters. But that metatech (prayer, etc.) changes people (i.e., effects metapsych) is not so questioned. It is a demonstrable fact. The man who believes that his boat sails with supernatural luck sails with confidence, conviction, "peace of mind," and probably even with more skill. He is not incapacitated with execessive fear. The same kind of surety enjoyed by the primitive man is shared by his more sophisticated and civilized brother. Courage, someone once said, is fear that prayed, and for the millions who know from experience what this means, nothing more need be said.

A few pages above we referred to the Prayer of Gethsemane as a prayer that seems to have employed both metatech and metapsych in about equal amounts. We now observe that only one of these efforts seems to have paid off. Jesus prayed (1) for the trial to pass him by, or (2) if not pass him by, for the courage to "take it" no matter what is was. The trial did not pass. The prayer did not change things; but if we can trust the accounts of how he behaved during those last hours of his life we may conclude that the prayer changed him. The man who went terrified into the Garden (who fell on his face and sweat blood) became a man who walked with courage, dignity, transcendence up to the top of a hill called The Skull and into the hearts and lives of countless millions ever since.

III. Positively

In closing this essay we should note the important word "positively" as it appears in Bernhardt's definition. Religion does not "prepare persons" by having them commit suicide or cringe whimperingly before the crushing circumstances of life—before the non-manipulables of their existence. But

[17] Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion*, Harper, 1957, p. 210.

religion teaches men to live with courage, no matter what. Rooted in fundamental frustrations, it is nevertheless directed optimistically to transcending those frustration. Religion is not so much a running away as it is a rising above.

> They that wait upon the Lord
> Shall renew their strength.
> They shall mount up with wings as eagles
>
> They shall run and not be weary.
> They shall walk and not faint.

So says the Prophet Isaiah in a voice which is not only authentically religious, but more excitingly so than a prayer for rain. If human need is the root of religion, great expectation is its flower and great aspiration is its fruit.

On all levels of human need, especially under the impact of frustration, religion speaks. When life is trapped in physical needs, when hunger and danger are man's constant companions, his major religious concerns are also concentrated upon the physical and how to manipulate it to his welfare. He will employ all he knows to better his lot—metatechnologically and/or metapsychologically. As soon as one succeeds in securing himself in his survival needs (**i.e.,** reducing the immediate threat to his survival) he will discover other needs that can be as important to him, and just as threatened as are the needs of a threatened survival. No sooner does man secure himself of enough bread than he discovers bread alone is simply not enough. More sophisticated needs (personal, social, intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual) thrust upon him demandingly. And some of them are as important, as disruptive, and as hopelessly beyond his direct manipulation as survival needs ever are. And he will cry out to the gods for the needs of his "spirit" just as ardently as he ever cries out for the needs of his body.

To aspire to these kinds of needs (needs of the spirit) creates a dimension of religiousness which can transcend the desperation in which religion has its roots. The non-manipulable remains, to be sure. The **angst** is still there. The frustration has not ended. The man who, for example, aspires to saintly life may do so out of need just as surely as the frightened man praying for deliverance from impending starvation. The rootage is the same, but the direction of flight is different. This one aspires to; that one flees from. Instead of grovelling before a non-manipulable, one may pray with Augustine, "O Lord, thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee." Rooted in that which is inimical, frustrating, non-manipulable, religion can and does rise into spectacular structures of over-arching values which are in and of themselves not negations, but affirmations. On certain levels religion may be little more than a cowering before terrible circumstances, but on other levels it is a challenge to accomplish the unbelievable (**e.g.,** make disciples of all nations),[18] to achieve the impossible (**e.g.,** and love thy neighbor as thyself.)[19]

In this essay we are affirming Bernhardt's functional definition of religion. He calls religion "a complex form of individual and group behavior wherein persons are prepared intellectually and emotionally to meet the non-manipulable aspects of existence positively . . ." And we are now bearing down heavily upon the last word of Bernhardt's definition — **positively,** saying that the aesthe-noetic preparation which begins in a non-manipulable may rise to levels seemingly far removed from the negations in which it began. The prayer that begins, "Let this cup pass" may end far differently. The ritual which began in slaughter to appease impetuous demons may become an offering of excellence and effort by athletes at Mount Olympus. Religion is not fear only; it

[18] Matthew 28:19 (RSV).
[19] Luke 10:27 (RSV).

is also fear transcended. It is not just fighting tragedy, but may become justice and mercy with muscles. It is characterized by hope quite as much as by despair, by courage quite as much as fear, by laughing quite as much as crying, by living quite as much as dying. Religion not only has a preciseness of need; it also has a scope of aspiration. Alfred North Whitehead, who zeroed in on a narrow target and called religion "what the individual does with his solitariness," just as emphatically reversed the narrowness and opened the scope to an infinite breadth:

> Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.[20]

[20] *Science in The Modern World,* New York: Macmillan, 1926, p. 275.

Conclusion

Religion, we are prosposing in this essay, is the way one believes and behaves in his effort to overcome or transcend (or live courageously in) the predicament of his existence—the human condition as it is for him, and for him in his time and place. Religion is a certain courageousness in dealing with life. Negatively, and perhaps badly said, it is what people do to keep from being scared to death. It is what they invent or discover and do to transform life (or rather their convictions and attitudes towards life) from nonbeing (fate, death, emptiness, etc.) to being (courage, joy, fulfillment, new being, freedom, liberation, Sartori, Moksha). It is something heroic and essential that man does (with whatever help he does or does not get from the gods) for himself.

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