Religious Behavior-A Review Article

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DR. Whitley begins with an indication of his intellectual stance. First, taking as his starting point the commonplace that sociologists are fond of discovering, with much intellectual stress and strain, what everybody else already knows, he notes that this seems to be one way to escape taking what the sociologist has to say into account. However, while the basic characteristics of social behavior are well known, they should be considered commonplace or not according to the manner in which they are systematically related. Thus, it is the task of the sociology of religion to make the obvious more obvious by indicating the innerconnection of social facts. Secondly, he indicates his basic agreement with those social scientists who urge that a completely value free science is probably impossible, and that perhaps the best protection against bias is the recognition that value premises influence all thought. Finally, he uses Marvin Bressler's distinction of three styles of sociological work — the pure scientists, the actionists and the significance seekers — in order to indicate his basic stance as a significance seeker.

At the close of his second chapter, which deals with the requirements for greater adequacy in sociological theory, and the program and problems of method of a functional approach to sociology, Dr. Whitley provides his own description of the basic character of his work. It can be understood in two ways. First, it is a series of reports on some of the work being done in sociology of religion. In another sense, it is a dialogue between religionists and sociologists about a selected group of significant problems. Chapters three, four and five are primarily dialogical in character. Chapters six and seven are basically reports.

The third chapter deals with a general view of the church. Dr. Whitley suggests that it is not too far wrong to say that in discussing the church the religionists are Docetists and the sociologists are Arians. Dr. Whitley's basic position is summed up in the following quote:

> What needs to be held in tension here is, on the one hand, a **sociologism** which, in the tradition of Marx and Feuerbach, sees the values and behaviors represented in the life of the church as mere reflections of socio-economic factors, and on the other hand, **theologism** which, in docetic fashion, sees these values and behaviors exclusively as manifestations of the numenous, the Holy Other, the objective spirit which transcends the socio-cultural context entirely. [1]

Actually, of course, Dr. Whitley does not seek to hold these two in tension so much as to seek a view which transcends the necessity of choosing either. But as Dr. Whitley suggests, he tilts toward the Arian side and speaks of the other in moral and teleological terms as what the church ". . . potentially can be, and what in the light of its own self-understanding it is in process of becoming." [2] It is this discussion which sets the stage for the dialogue to be developed in the next two chapters.

The first of these chapters deals with the so-called religious revival of the 1950's. This chapter is viewed by Dr. Whitley as a partial test of the functionalist's view that religion functions to support societal cohesion. It is constituted by a report of some of the work of contemporary religionists, in-

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cluding Will Herberg, Martin Marty, Roy Eckhardt, Father Murray, and Curt and Gladys Lang. The critique of these religionists contends that the so-called revival ". . . made God into a tribal diety, who sustains and supports the American way of life. This tribal diety is not the living God of Judeo-Christian faith. He is not really an objective reality at all, but a symbol of what decent, respectable, right-thinking Americans want." [3] Then the work of some sociologists with regard to the so-called revival is reviewed. These include Seymour Lipsett, Charles Glock, Talcott Parsons, and W. Lloyd Warner. The response of these sociologists is twofold. First, some question whether there was anything that could properly be called a religious revival in the 1950's; for continuity rather than change is held to be the more impressive characteristic. Secondly, they argue that such "secularization" as has been criticized by the religionists is a development of religion, rather than a falling away from it. That is, given the conditions of American society, the presence of different religious groups has generated the emergence of a religion which will function to integrate the society.

At this point, Dr. Whitley reviews William Kolb's suggestion of a dilemma for functional analysis. Kolb insists on the necessity of belief in the "ontic status of values" as a condition for the cohesive function of religion. In other words, social cohesion may be the latent function of religion, but can it become the manifest function?

As a sociologist, Dr. Whitley does not seek to answer this question, but he does consider some of its ramifications for a functional approach to sociology and indicate certain metaphysical and ethical overtones. In my judgment, these questions are provocative and fruitful. Indeed, I would like to press them further.

Can one of the functions (in the sense of **effects**) of religion become its function (in the sense of its purpose or "manifest destiny")? Such a question has two sides. First, if function is taken to mean actual effects, then to say that something is a "functional requisite" for society and that at least a "functional substitute" or "alternative" for it is required for social cohesion seems to be tautologous. That is, it says no more than that in order for society to exist something must be present that has the actual effect of holding it together. Furthermore, if it is not religious beliefs but the collective behavior of the group which has the cohesive effects, as Durkheim maintains, then you have the statement that collective behavior strengthens social cohesiveness. It would not seem to matter what was done or believed, so long as it was done or believed **together.** However, referring back to the difference between association and community, unless it is common beliefs, symbols, rituals and aims which bring groups together, then it would not be the case that religion had the effect of social cohesion, but rather that natural social cohesive forces brought religious groups together. Surely both these factors interact. But can they do so if the beliefs, symbols, rituals, and aims have lost all independent power and are accepted with the avowed purpose of social cohesiveness. Can men accept religion because it functions, or has the effect, of social cohesiveness; or will it only "work" in this manner if it is practiced on other grounds.

The other side of the coin may be understood by approaching the matter from a theological and ethical perspective. Even if celebration of "the American Dream" serves to function for social cohesion better than the Judeo-Christian tradition, does it constitute an adequate faith? Or is such a process a matter of transforming a relative good into a god created in our image? The vital question from this perspective is not whether religion functions or works,

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but the clear conception of what it ought to function **for**, and work **toward**. Is religion to be chosen and commended to others primarily because it is functional for social and psychological integration, equilibrium, and stability? Then apparently there are other forms of anthropomorphism than "the old man in the sky" type of theology. For this is clearly the Feuerbachian view that theology is really anthropology, since no intelligent man uses a greater good primarily as a means to a lesser good.

Dr. Bernhardt's functionalism, for example, is much deeper than this. It insists in effect that man can find himself only by losing his narrower self. He is not to use religion for his own narrow concerns but to accept and identify himself with the dynamic determiner of his and all destinies. It would seem to be precisely his view that the reinterpretive phase is required to make religion believable in order that it may function. He sees his task as a philosopher of religion precisely as that of providing a philosophical orientation within which a religious response of courage, confidence and hope may take place. While one might argue whether such a task is to be understood as faith seeking understanding or reason seeking to provide a foundation for faith, there is no doubt in my mind that both faith and reason are involved in the task. Of course, from an objective philosophical and/or sociological investigation of religion, there can be no doubt that religion has integrative effects. But whether one is dealing with a philosophy of life or a theology or an ethic, these matters are treated from an internal decision-makers point of view and one must guard against the danger of mistaking a latent function of religion for his major positive purpose.

What ought religion to function for and work toward? At least this much is certain. No amount of empirical research can answer such questions. Nor is the essentially conservative response that the cohesion, integration and equilibrium of **this** particular society or individual is the ultimate test of the relevance or functionality of religion to be taken as either the "scientific" or the only plausible theologico-ethical response. In any case, like an economy, societies and individuals can find an equilibrium and balance at various levels. While I do not wish to hazard a judgment, each of us modern scientific men might ask if we have much to boast about with respect to the level at which the equilibrium has been maintained in our societal and personal lives. One might also ask if petty lives are not partially the result of worshipping little gods.

Chapter 5 treats the question of suburbia and the "Babylonian" captivity of the church. After distinguishing the suburb as a place from suburbia as a way of life, Dr. Whitley develops his own critique of the myth of suburbia. This myth is designated as the belief that suburbs are homogeneous, are overwhelmingly middle class and that they foster social conformity. Dr. Whitley acknowledges that this image of suburbia is partially true. But he argues that it is not the whole truth. The same is argued with respect to the image of the suburban church, namely, that it is alienated from both the people and the problems of the central city, that it is in captivity to middle class attitudes and values — best exemplified in its feverish organizational activity — and that it supports the complacency and conformity of its members.

Dr. Whitley argues that at least some of the things associated with the organization of the suburban church represent the desire for self-maintenance. "Perhaps some other kind of church could survive and prosper in suburbia, but this is only problematical." [4] Perhaps it is a function of my docetism, but I wonder if the church needs to make survival and prosperity so central as aims, given the present situation.

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Is it possible for an **institution** to survive and store up treasures — only to lose its own soul? Secondly, the image, Dr. Whitley argues, tends to minimize the genuine religious searching which goes on amidst all the buzzing activity. But then he quotes Bennett Berger with approval when he says that there is no basis for interpreting a "mild and polite" approach to religion as fraudulent unless franciscan burlap or fire and brimstone evangelism is identified as genuine religion. Since there are contradictories to a "mild and polite" approach to religion which might more plausibly be held as prerequisites to genuine religious searching, this statement does not appear to me to be very forceful.

Thirdly, Dr. Whitley challenges Gibson Winter's picture of the pre-suburban protestant church as a somewhat romantic idealization of the past. Fourthly, drawing on the distinction between communities and associations —where an association emerges as a means for collective effort toward some specific ends, and community emerges from the natural attraction of like-minded persons whose social relationships are intrinsic to the purpose which brings them together — Dr. Whitley argues that the religious group is not only an association for worship but also contains many sub-communities. It is these latter that foster the characteristics which are being attacked, and Dr. Whitley argues that it is perhaps somewhat naive to expect church and subcommunity to be too different from each other.

Finally, Dr. Whitley suggests that a sense of history is needed and that suburbia is but a new form of the continuing problem which the church has always faced in its encounter with societies and cultures. He quotes from several sources which suggest that many of today's suburbanites apparently moved to the suburbs from small towns like Middletown, or from the Inner City, and brought many of their attitudes with them. Dr. Whitley does not suggest that all this minimizes the extent to which the contemporary suburban church confronts Protestantism with serious problems. Indeed, the problems may be more serious than the critics of the suburban church would have us believe. Perhaps the real target of the critics "... is the social scheme as a whole, not its results in the church."

Dr. Whitley's latter arguments seem to me to carry far more weight than the first two. I do not think there is much difference between us. Rather, he wishes to undercut cynicism and disillusionment by providing some degree of understanding and acceptance of finitude. That is his function. Perhaps mine, as an ethicist, is to maintain enough tension to insure that acceptance of finitude does not become sloth and laziness.

In his final two chapters, Dr. Whitley turns to the application of some contemporary work in sociology to two significant problems in the contemporary church. The first is the application of sociological work on the nature of bureaucracy to the organizational aspects of the church. The last chapter is an application of role theory to the question who and what is a minister. These last two chapters may, indeed, be the most important in the book with regard to one of Dr. Whitley's aims. Namely, the aim to demonstrate the enlightenment that can be obtained from current work in sociology in understanding the church and its ministry. Many a minister and his wife could be saved from frustration and disillusionment, and made more responsive to their church and more effective in their task with the aid of such understanding.

The book is of special value as a supplementary reading book for courses in sociology of religion and/or as reading material for ministers and laymen in the church. Not only is it a good report of much current work going on in sociology, but its practical and earthly character commends it to those who are

not especially trained in sociological theory and technique. It was not intended as a book for scholars or as a book which would contain Dr. Whitley's *solutions* for many of the problems raised. Rather it is intended to open up some vital questions in the minds of the reader, to report to him some of the work that is currently being done in sociology on these questions, and to indicate both the possibility and the desirability of a continuing dialogue between religionists and sociologists. As I have tried to indicate in this review, it does a very commendable job on all three counts.