
UNIT 4 THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION -II

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Primitive Religious Consciousness
- 4.3 The Experience of the Holy
- 4.4 Critical Remarks
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Further Readings and References
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. In spite of the secularism that has influenced so many, religious thought continues to be vigorous. It gives every sign that it will not cease to be so. Very many thinkers consider man as an unfinished product. As an unfinished product continuously he is going out beyond himself. He is a being who carries within himself some clues to the meaning of transcendence and mystery. Here we will study about the primitive religious consciousness as found in the theory of Robert Ranulph Marett and the description of the experience of holy found in the thought of Schleiermacher and Otto. And finally, a critical evaluation of their thinking.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of philosophy of Marett;
- to have an understanding of the phenomenological description of human beings' experience of holy according to the thought of Schleiermacher;
- to have an understanding of the theory of numinous feeling and its relation of the experience of holy.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The group of thinkers that we are going to see in this unit try to explore and describe the main features of the religious consciousness as found in the experience of the religious persons. It may look to be similar to the psychologies of religion we have already seen in the previous unit but it differs itself from them in leaving aside their naturalistic presuppositions and in interesting itself more in the description of religious attitudes than in the genesis of religious belief. This approach is differentiated by its contemplative attitude from the pragmatic and activist account of religion.

We shall begin by examining the description of the primitive religious consciousness as explained by R.R. Marett and then we shall turn to Rudolf Otto's classic exposition of man's experience of holy.

4.2 THE PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

Robert Ranulph Marett (1866 – 1943), an English anthropologist gives a new direction to the study of primitive religion. He declared his opposition to naturalism and speculative idealism. Hence what he offers us is neither naturalistic nor metaphysical explanation of the origin of religion. He tries not so much to explain but to describe. He concentrated his attention on the psychological analysis of rudimentary religion. His aim is to translate a type of religious experience remote from our own into such terms of our consciousness.

The idea of Mana is the central theme of his description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. What do we mean by Mana? To explain the meaning of this word Marett obtains the help of an English Missionary, Bishop R.H. Codrington and he describes Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner.

He next searches into the mentality of the people among whom Mana is found. What lies behind mana is not so much an idea but an emotional attitude. It is true that such an attitude contains elements which may become eventually conceptualized. "Savage religion" is not always so much rationalized but always danced out. It develops under conditions which favour emotional and motor processes and the process of making it into ideas remains relatively in absence. It is on this point that Marett takes the issue with primitive animism. According to him the problems with some of the religious philosophers are, that they when interpreting primitive religion, give too much emphasis to the intellectual matter. They treat primitive religion as if it were primarily a matter of belief. They set out to examine the intellectual side of primitive religion. But the belief aspect of the primitive religion is very closely associated with powerful affective states. This may be because there is a phase in which feeling predominates over thought or thought and reflection have not yet emerged from feeling.

Marett thinks that of all English words "awe" is the one that expresses the fundamental religious feelings most nearly. What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love.

Mana is in itself non-moral but it can act for good and evil. It is a kind of undifferentiated magico-religious matrix, from which both religion and magic take their rise. The religious development takes place in the moralizing and spiritualizing of the primitive experience which already contains in itself the seeds of more refined feelings, reverence, love, humility and the like. It also includes the possibility for intellectual development through reflection. Religion is a permanent possibility of the human spirit. The religion in all its variations will retain as its basic structure something similar to that attitude of awe.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What does Marett mean by Mana?

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2) What constitutes the core of primitive religious consciousness?

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4.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY

In this section we are going to deal with thought of Rudolf Otto (1869 – 1937) who gives a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, himself praised Otto for applying phenomenological method in the analysis of the religious consciousness. He was a great admirer of Schleiermacher (1768 –1834) for the rediscovery of religion.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher and the Theory of Consciousness

He is considered as the greatest theologian/philosopher of the nineteenth century and found the essence of religion in a sense and taste for the infinite or in the feeling of the absolute dependence. The words like feeling, sense, and taste should not be understood in the sense of a just a blind stirring. But it is an emotionally coloured attitude or state of mind which carries in itself some kind of implicit understanding. He makes a distinction between doctrine and religion. Doctrine is not the same as the religion. Through the doctrine what is implicit in the religious affections is made explicit through reflection. His theory is often called as the theory of consciousness.

A human person is composed of mind and body and individuated by time and space. But according to him the person as the subject of the activities of thinking/ knowing and of willing/doing is more than a being composed of mind and body. A person is differentiated from others by nature and history. He inwardly differentiates himself and acknowledges such an inward differentiation in all other human beings. That by virtue of which the human person makes this inward differentiation is the particular property of the person. It is this property in each man that equips him with a life unity, an inalienable identity. He describes this property as the peculiar organization that reason assumes for itself in each man. But the life unity, or identity, of the individual person can never come to direct and full expression either in thinking/ knowing or in willing/doing, although it accompanies and informs each of these rational activities. The self-consciousness that this sense of identity requires is a self-consciousness to be distinguished from the forms of self-consciousness in which the subject is responding to or acting upon external objects. He appropriates the word feeling for this form of self-consciousness. The content of which is the given identity and unity of the self. Feeling, thinking, and doing make up the three forms of consciousness that constitute the self-consciousness which distinguishes persons. Every person must be seen as a participant in the life of society in both his practical and theoretical functions but at the same time he is also one whose particular property is wholly original. A person in whom feeling of self-consciousness remains latent, personal identity is deficient and personal consciousness is confused or immature. Such a person fails to contribute to the common or highest good. He is a person in the formal sense but is destitute of spiritual life. For him religion is the most highly and fully developed mode of the feeling form of self-consciousness.

For him religion is a determination of feeling. It is a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. To understand his point of view, we need to distinguish the following elements.

- 1) The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. In describing this feeling as one of being absolutely dependent he was calling attention to the fact that the identity, or life unity of the individual is an endowment which cannot be derived from any of the intellectual or volitional relations in which the self stands to other persons and forces either alone or together. In this sense the individual is utterly dependent for the particular constitution of his existence on a “power” that cannot be fully explained conceptually. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency.
- 2) The feeling of being absolutely dependent or God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.

- 3) The original meaning of the word “God” is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal self-consciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the source of religion according to the philosophy of Schleiermacher?

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Rudolf Otto and the Experience of Holy

Otto in his book The Idea of Holy gives a classical exposition of the experience of Holy. In this exposition he makes use of the phenomenological method which is developed by Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Husserl praises Otto for having made a masterly phenomenological analysis of the religious consciousness. Though he and Husserl were colleagues at Gottingen, Otto seems to have worked independently, and makes no explicit reference to Husserl’s method. Hence Otto is in his own right a religious thinker of first-class importance and he is stated to the most illuminating religious thinker of modern times.

Religious Feeling and Religious Knowledge

His most significant contribution is to be found in his discussion of religious feeling and religious knowledge. He discusses the relation of religion to a naturalism which demands that everything be explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws. But when explained on the basis of mathematical-mechanical laws the beyond, purpose and mystery which are essential to religion will be excluded. Religion makes certain claims such as that the world is conditioned and dependent, that there is a providence, that there is a side other than which appears to us. These claims are proposed not as poetry or mystical statements but as truths. At the same time these cannot be justified by, or derived from a consideration of nature in any straightforward sense. What is the reason can do is just to show that science does not conflict with these claims. The reason faces the inability to consider the truth value of the religious claims. The reason may point out hints in nature which suggest that these claims are true. But reason cannot justify them. These truths differ in kind from those of science and common sense and have their own grounds such as heart and conscience, feeling and intuition. It is possible to make, on the one hand, correlations between various feelings, and religious claims on the other. Corresponding to the claim that the

world is conditioned and dependent there is the feeling of the dependence and conditionality of all things. The claim that there is a providence, or teleological order, in things implies that certain value judgments are true and these value judgments rest on feeling and intuition. Corresponding to the claim that there is a beyond is piety, that is, a feeling and intuition, which is bound up with our experience of the beautiful and the mysterious, that there is a reality behind appearances.

However when applied to religion there is an ambiguity with regard to the full meaning and sense of feeling and intuition. In the beginning stages of his philosophical thinking Otto talks of them at least in three ways. He sometimes talks of them as if they were feelings in a straightforward sense. At other times he talks of them as if they were half-formulated judgments which carry with them an inescapable sense of conviction and still other times he talks of them as if they were cognitive experiences in somewhat the same way that visual experiences are cognitive.

But later on the notion of religious feelings and intuitions receive a more complete treatment. We have an immediate knowledge of reality, the noumenal world which shows itself in feelings of truth. These feelings can be brought to full consciousness as ideas. An idea is a concept which can be applied to reality. When temporally schematized the categories of theoretical reason can be applied to appearances and can also, when schematized by the principle of completeness be applied to reality itself. A category thus schematized is an idea. These ideas are essentially negative. They exclude certain characteristics such as temporality, contingency from reality. He very clearly makes a distinction between the feeling of beauty and of the sublime on the one hand and religious feeling on the other hand and all the three of these feelings either directly or indirectly disclose the reality.

Religious Feeling and the Feeling of the Sublime

In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

His attempt to conceptualize and describe the various feelings must be clearly distinguished from his theory about numinous. According to him numinous feelings are, first of all, unique and it cannot be analyzed as a complex of non-numinous feeling such as love, fear, horror, a feeling of sublimity, and so on. Secondly the capacity for numinous feeling is unexplainable. Although the capacity may appear in the world only when certain conditions are fulfilled, the conditions do not constitute an adequate explanation of the capacity in question. Thirdly numinous feelings are also cognitive. The feelings are the source of the concept of the numinous – the concept of something which is both a value and an objective reality. It is cognitive in the sense that they are like visual experiences.

They have immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self i.e., the numinous quality or object, which is an object of numinous feelings in somewhat the same way that visible objects and qualities might be said to be the object of visual experiences.

However the relation between these two is not clear. There could be two interpretations. In the first interpretation it is claimed that numinous feelings disclose the numinous object. The encounter with the numinous object through numinous experiences gives rise to the concept of the numinous in much the same way that encounters with objects and qualities through visual experiences are thought to give rise to the concepts of those objects and qualities. The concept of the numinous is both a priori and a posteriori. It is a posteriori since it is not derived from the experience of an object or quality and it is a priori because it is not derived from any sense experience. The feeling is the source of the concept only in the sense that it discloses the object of the concept. It is the encounter with the object that produces the concept of the object. According to the second interpretation the feeling gives rise to both the concept and the disclosure of the numinous object. However it is not the encounter with the numinous which gives rise to the concept of the numinous rather it is feeling that furnishes the concept. The feeling which furnishes the concept also discloses the object to which the concept applies. Now the problem is how are these two functions of numinous feelings related, since neither the concept nor the object is given in isolation. The two are given together although one is not derived from the other.

In both these interpretations he claims that feeling puts us in contact with, discloses, something outside of ourselves. Feeling becomes like visual and auditory experiences. It has an objective referent whether this is structured by an a priori concept or whether it simply gives rise to a concept. The object of numinous feeling, according to him, is numen. Numen is both value and object and can be only indirectly characterized. For example the encounter with the numen evokes religious dread. This is analogous to fear. So it is the property of the numen which arouses religious dread. However, we can schematize the numen by means of such rational concepts as goodness, completeness, necessity and substantiality. It means that concepts of this kind can be predicated of the numen.

The Category of the Holy

When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. His analysis of the structure of the religious consciousness is based on a clarification of the key-word of all religions namely 'Holy'. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.

From this preliminary examination we can say religion is compounded of rational and non-rational elements. We think of God in terms of goodness, personality, purpose, and so on. These ideas are applied to God analogically. They are rational characteristics in the sense that we have definite concepts of them. This rational

side of religion is something that cannot be dispensed with in religion. But sometimes it neglects the deeper non-rational core of religion. God is not exhausted in his rational attributes. He is the holy God and the adjective points to his deeper, inconceivable, super rational nature. Otto wishes to stress this non-rational side of religion since traditional philosophy and theology has lost sight of it and has given an excessively intellectualistic interpretation.

But the problem is if the numinous core of religion is inconceivable, how can we talk about it or explain it? According to him although it is inconceivable, it is somehow within our grasp. We apprehend it in feeling, in the *sensus numinus* and by feeling. The feeling is not mere an emotion but an affective state of mind which involves some kind of valuation and pre-conceptual cognition. The most valuable contribution of Otto consists of his careful analysis of the feeling-states which constitute the numinous experience. There is on the one side what is called ‘creature-feeling’ that is the feeling of nothingness of finite being. On the other side is the feeling of the presence of an overwhelming Being that is the numinous Being which strikes dumb with amazement. It is summarized in the expression “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” *Mysterium* points to what is called the ‘wholly other’ character of the numinous Being, which, as *supra rational*, utterly transcends the grasp of conceptual thought. The element of *tremendum* points to the awe or even the dread experience in face of the majesty, overpoweringness and dynamic energy of the numinous presence. The element of *fascinans* points to the captivating attraction of the numinous Being, evoking rapture and love.

The feeling revealed in the analysis of the numinous experience, while analogous to natural feelings, have a unique quality. The *sensus numinis* is something *sui generis*. It cannot be compounded out of merely natural feelings. It cannot even be regarded as evolved from natural feelings. For Otto it is connected with faculty of divination that is a faculty of genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearance.

These speculations prepare the way for Otto’s assertion that the holy is an *a priori* category. Its non-rational or numinous element is said to arise from the deepest foundation of cognitive apprehension that the soul possesses. The idea of a non-rational category may surprise us. Whatever we may think of the more speculative elements in Otto’s thought we must acknowledge that in his analysis of the numinous he has led us into the innermost sanctuary of religion and has described it with extraordinary power.

Check Your Progress III
Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit
1) What is the difference between religious feelings and the feeling of the sublime?
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2) Explain about the category of Holy?

4.4 CRITICAL REMARKS

A descriptive approach to religion seems to have much to acclaim it. It plainly places before us what the basic elements in religious experience are, without distorting the picture by introducing doubtful speculations about the possible genesis or ultimate significance of such experience. One can aim at presenting the essence of the phenomenon which appears in the religious consciousness. These thinkers whom we have seen seem to get the essence of the phenomenon, that which is genuinely religion. These thinkers have penetrated to the affective states of mind which lie at the heart of religion which are so often overlooked both in intellectualist accounts and in pragmatic accounts. The intellectualist accounts understand religion as a kind of world-view and pragmatic accounts tries to assimilate religion to morality.

An accurate description of the typical experiences of the religious person would seem to provide at least a firm starting-point for an investigation into religion. But the question is, is it enough? Do we need something more? The answer to this question depends on whether or not the religious experience can be regarded as sui generis, qualitatively unique and irreducible. Some thinkers take this view but Marett is more cautious. He suggests that the awe which he considers basic to religion may be compounded of natural feelings like fear, love, reverence and the like.

Otto and other thinkers think that it is important to maintain the unique quality of the religious experience. But when they try to do this by talking of a faculty of divination or of the theomorphic structure in man, they seem to have left the relatively firm ground of description and receded into a more speculative realm. For example Otto adopts Kantian terminology and speaks of the numinous as an a priori category which undergoes schematization into the idea of the holy.

However accurate the descriptions of religious experience that are offered to us may be, it seems that they cannot establish the validity of such experience. Yet on the other hand a clear description of religious experience must be the first step towards its assessment. Perhaps there is no way at all in which the validity of religious experience can be established. One can only be pointed to the kind of experience which Otto and the others describe and be left to decide about it in the light of the most honest discrimination of one's experience that can be made.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Human not only lives but seeks power for one's life. Religion arises at the point where human's own power is met by another power, such as the mana of primitive

religion. It is a strange, wholly other power extends into life. The phenomenology cannot grasp this power in itself but only in the appearance in which it is experienced. It is possible to describe the types of religion in which man is encountered by this wholly other power. Though an unprejudiced or neutral attitude is the ideal, very often it is found as some thing impossible. Religions cannot be laid out on the table and examined like so many natural objects.

4.6 KEY WORDS

- Matrix** : A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained.
- Taboo** : A prohibition, especially in Polynesia and other South Pacific islands, excluding something from use, approach, or mention because of its sacred and inviolable nature.
- Phenomenology** : It is a philosophical approach concentrating on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience. It is the description or study of appearances. This term was introduced by Lambert in 1764. It is philosophical method restricted to the careful analysis of the intellectual processes which we are introspectively aware of. Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty are some the important philosophers who used this method in their philosophy.
- Sui Generis** : is a Latin expression, literally meaning of its own kind/genus or unique in its characteristics. The expression is often used in analytic philosophy to indicate an idea, an entity, or a reality which cannot be included in a wider concept.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) The idea of Mana is the central theme of Marett's description. This word takes its origin in the Pacific region. But the idea for which it stands is said to be wide spread among primitive peoples. Generally this word has come to be applied to a certain type of religious experience. Mana as a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil. It is a kind of occult power. This occult force is supposed to attach to a wide range of natural objects and persons. To this force is attributed the success in war, prosperity in agriculture, powers in hunting etc. Mana negatively seen is taboo. That which possesses mana is taboo. This means mana is not to be lightly approached or else its power break forth in a harmful and destructive manner.
- 2) What constitutes the core of the primitive religious consciousness is nothing other than awe. He describes awe as human being's reaction to the hidden mysterious forces of its environment. It cannot be merely interpreted as fear of the unknown. It is much more than fear. Viewing from this point we can say that religion does not originate just in fear of the unknown. The essential constituents of awe are wonder, admiration, respect, even love

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) Religion is a determination of feeling, a feeling of being absolutely dependent. This feeling is one and the same thing with consciousness of being in relation with God. The original meaning of the word "God" is not a concept of perfect being but the felt relation of absolute dependence. Therefore religion arises not in ideas, in willing, but in the immediate consciousness of an immediate existence-relationship. Religion is more than a determination of feeling. It is the name given to the personal self-consciousness in which the feeling of absolute dependence and consciousness of the world coexist and must achieve a living, stable order. The feeling of being absolutely dependent is also the feeling of identity through which the individual is conscious of his inner uniqueness. The feeling of absolute dependence is not because of any felt deficiency. The feeling of being absolutely dependent or God consciousness, as he calls it, is discernible only because self-consciousness also involves thinking and willing, which are forms of rational relation between the person and his world, forms involving consciousness of relative dependence and relative freedom. He distinguishes the feeling of being absolutely dependent from the feeling of relative dependence. In the latter a person stands in the relations of community and reciprocity with nature and society while in the former there is no reciprocity present. Therefore there can be no consciousness of being in relation to God apart from consciousness of being in relation to the world.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) In his book *The Idea of Holy* he tries to make a clear distinction between numinous or religious feeling and the feeling of the sublime. Numinous feelings have two primary aspects (i) a feeling of religious dread (ii) a feeling of religious fascination. The closest analogue to religious dread or awe is the feeling of uncanniness – the feeling one has when the hair on the back

of one's neck rises, the shudder or terror on hearing a ghost story, the dread of haunted places. The feeling of fascination by, attraction to, and prizing of the object which arouses the feeling in question creates both the desire to approach the object and the feeling that one possesses no value when considered in relation to the fascinating and prized object.

- 2) When the concept of the numinous and the schematizing concepts are brought together we have the complex category of the holy itself. The word holy can have varied forms of characteristics. One of the characteristics can be that it is rational in its nature in the sense that it can be thought conceptually. Thus for example by holiness we can mean moral goodness and it is possible to have some kind of understanding of what goodness is. But the rational characteristics do not explain completely the meaning of the word holy. For Otto the rational meaning is only derivative. In its fundamental sense the word holy stands for a non-rational character. By it we mean that it is something which cannot be thought conceptually.