FIVE BASIC TYPES OF THEISTIC WORLDS IN THE RELIGIONS OF MAN

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Any attempt to gain insight into the reasons for the multiplicity and variety of the religions that exist among the human beings who populate the earth confronts the confusing question of finding a basis for a classification of these religions.

In the scientific literature on religion we find, in addition to those works that merely describe the contents of various religious systems, foremost works of psychological interpretation of many phases of religion and religious life. Although the latter have in recent decades grown to large proportions, they have, in the face of the large variety of contradictory psychological concepts, lefts us more confused than enlightened about man's relation to the theistic systems he has created and their meaning for him. Realization of this fact started this writer, about ten years ago, on a search for a basic aspect that might lead to an understanding of what might be called "types" of religion, which, he believed, should be seen at least as much sociologically as psychologically. We shall, therefore, in this treatise, bypass most of the confusing area of merely psychological interpretation, except to quote one clear-sighted scholar who in concise form has said all that it seems to this writer needs to be said in introducing the psychological point of view. Jane E. Harrison (43) wrote: "What man thinks about the 'theistic beyond' results in his theology or mythology; what he does in working out his relationship with the 'beyond' results in the rituals he follows; where his feelings and emotions are involved in his religious life, his fears, hopes and loves, there is created his community life, the actual religious collective body." There is an identity between these three major phases of psychic dynamics and the triad of major sociological aspects valid for practically all religions: the theistic world.
the world of the priesthood, and the communal world of the worshipers (44).

To clear the stage for the presentation of our interpretation we must first emphasize that most theological and psychological studies of religion give major attention to man's relationship to his gods, and only little to the content and functioning of the theistic systems as such. It is, however, in the structuring and functioning of his theistic worlds that man expresses the details of his religious impulses, needs, and desires. This theistic world is the center of man's total religious experience. Centeredness must therefore be considered the basic aspect in the sociology of religion (86).

The concept of centeredness is not new to the wider field of anthropology and the cultural sciences. Gustav Mensching (66) in his concept of "die Lebensmitte," the center of life, applied it in his interpretation of the sociology of religion. By "centeredness" we mean the focal point at which the major activities of a social group or organization are centered and from which they emanate. Surveying a number of religions with regard to this point, we find that all fully developed religions have a centeredness in regard to the three major factors we have enumerated: the theistic world, the priesthood, and the community of worshipers. It should be emphasized that almost all religions have a chief-centeredness in their theistic world toward which the worshiper reaches out for help. There are exceptions, however. Egyptologists (13) (30) point out that the king-priest in ancient Egypt was in the religious sense more important than the gods themselves. In modern times a somewhat similar situation exists in the Roman Catholic form of Christianity, where the ordinary believer is denied the possibility of reaching any self-experience of the theistic world without the mediation of the clergy (92). This makes the clergy the real center of the Roman Catholic religious body. We also know of forms of religion, old and new, in which the center is the community of worshipers. This was true of the old Hinanyana Buddhism (17), and, to cite a modern form, the Society of Friends, the Quakers (15) (55).1)

1) The first to apply, in nuclear form, a typology based on centeredness was Adolf Bastian (8). In a small monograph, Einiges aus Samoa (Something from Samoa) (Berlin, Dümmler, 1889), he wrote: "The essential point here is in the psychological half of man's nature, and since we find his point of view interwoven in all conceptions, reaching far beyond the planetary world, this psychological aspect even became part of the collective thinking of the people...".